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Trust, Power and the New Professionalism: A Case Study of Service User and Carer Involvement in the Selection of Social Work Students

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Contents

Abstract

In June 2002 the Department of Health upgraded social work training in England, resulting in the Diploma in Social Work being replaced by a new undergraduate and masters' level qualification. The requirements outlined for the new degree in social work included the provision that programmes approved to provide the new training had to involve representatives of stakeholders, particularly service users and carers, in the selection of new students (DoH 2002). This thesis investigates the tensions implicit in this policy from the perspective of service users and carers involved in recruitment to one university between 2002 and 2005. To this end, a critical theoretical framework was employed, which recognised the importance of power relationships within the field of study. This framework draws on the work of Bourdieu, Abbott and Foucault, and incorporates feminist and critical theory, in order to conceptualise the issues raised by the study.

The intended outcomes of involvement in recruitment were unclear, in contrast to the case of involvement in social work education and practice. However, the policy of involvement in recruitment exemplified various tensions in service user and carer involvement in general, which the study sought to clarify. Service users were required to operate within a cultural context that they had little part in shaping, and this tended to reinforce the asymmetrical distribution of power which is seen as characterising relationships between professionals and those who use their services. Nonetheless, there were no disagreements reported between service users, carers, agency representatives and academic staff regarding the suitability, or otherwise, of individual candidates. Service users and carers looked for candidates who were trustworthy, anti-discriminatory and could relate to service users and carers – attributes which academic staff also valued.

Despite appearing beneficial to service users and carers and therefore, by default, social work within this University, the policy of involving service users and carers in admissions was not as beneficial as it appeared. It could disadvantage some service users and carers financially. The policy does not specify what service users and carers can contribute to the admissions process, and the policy can be conceptualised as one that assumes social work educators are inept at choosing social work trainees, despite the lack of evidence that this is the case. This can, in turn, be seen as both contributing to a negative discourse regarding social work, and as a means by which a more regulatory role by the State can be justified. This more duty-based role for social work, I have argued, can be at the expense of a more altruistic approach to assisting vulnerable people, which was so valued by participants.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis takes the form of a case study analysing the involvement of service users and carers in the admission of social work students at one university in the north of England. The policy of involving service users and carers in social work admissions is a statutory requirement (GSCC, 2002) and infers dissatisfaction with the prior arrangements, whilst at the same time presuming that stake-holder involvement would enhance the process. Formerly, social work academics, with assistance from their (social work) agency partners, were responsible for admissions and therefore entry into the profession. Consequently, the policy of involvement being studied here can also be located within a more general criticism of social work being made at the time (Butler & Drakeford, 2011). In Chapter Two, all literature concerning service user and carer involvement which informed the study is considered. This includes research into service user and carer involvement, but also includes papers that critically reflect on the ideological origins of the policy. The chapter goes on to consider what issues arise in the literature in respect of capacity, such as funding and availability of service users and carers, regulation, social work professionalism and power, with regard to both the policy and the theoretical overview taken. These issues are dealt with separately in the following two chapters. Trust was an issue that was raised in the course of the research, and so is dealt with in some detail in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six describes the methodological approach which was taken, and describes and justifies the methodological tools employed, in particular the use of qualitative

interviews. The research process is then explained and, in particular, my insider position in relation to the research. Chapter Seven provides an analysis of the data, starting with an analysis of the field, including an analysis of the rhythm and various pressures and power relationships which exist within it, and which are reproduced partly by the language that is used. Using Abbott's theory of linked ecologies and Bourdieu's theory of fields, the chapter then goes on to discuss the data in relationship to social work professionalism. The tensions surrounding trust and risk, as raised by participants, are then discussed. The chapter concludes by discussing whether the policy of involving service users and carers in social work admissions is as beneficial to service users, carers and the social work profession as it appears to be.

1.1. Background

In 2002 I took over the role of admissions tutor for social work at the university where this study took place. This particular role is not the most popular of tasks, partly because a large part of the work takes place over the summer period when, traditionally, research and scholarly activities generally take place. At the time, the policy was new and seemed incongruous, particularly since social work was the only profession where service user and carer involvement in admissions was compulsory; but, since involvement was made a general requirement in the new social work degree, involvement in admissions did not stand out as much as it would have done had it been introduced separately. I supported the policy and was in a good position to study any changes it brought, before, as I anticipated at the time, it was shelved. As will be shown in Chapter Two, I was not alone in my concerns and interest.

Gladstone (2002) argues that policies which include service user involvement are part of a broader backlash, dating back fifty years, against the development of public services, and which, he argues, operates at three different levels. Firstly, the policy can be interpreted as a response to the (assumed) power and privilege of the social work profession, since it clearly implies that social work professionals should not be wholly responsible for choosing prospective members of their profession (Newman et al., 2005). Secondly, it can be interpreted as a response to 'big government'[1] in that, theoretically at least, it devolves power to the less powerful. Lastly, it is in part a critical response to 'corporatism' (Magagna, 1988), by highlighting the need for more 'participatory democracy' (Newman et al., 2005, p.119).

Alcock, et al. argue that service user involvement was the 'third dimension' of the 'New Right' Conservative government's desire to exert greater control on social welfare and other public services through 'new managerialism' during the 1980s and early 1990s (2008, pp.93-94). Their emphasis in regard to public welfare services was, they argue, on controlling 'economy' (inputs such as costs), 'efficiency' (outputs) and 'outcomes' (effectiveness). The New Right was able to incorporate criticisms made of the welfare state at that time and during the previous decade by new social movements, and "incorporate them alongside their own arguments when presenting their case for a greater focus on users as customers" (Alcock, et al., 2008, p.95). The New Right's attempts to privatise welfare and public services more generally, and to bring in a new managerialist approach as well as 'empowering' users as customers, can be seen as part of the process of shifting governance

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[1] Big government is a term which originated in the US during the 1970s, describing the successful local campaigns against income tax demands from central government; see Lo (1984).

arrangements away from public service bureaucracies to markets (Malin et al., 2002; Alcock, et al., 2008).

In summary, a dominant reason for the introduction of service user involvement policies was as a response to the perceived failure of public services, or a right wing backlash against their success. The policy of involving service users and carers in the admission of social workers, as outlined below, may, if one accepts either explanation, be seen as regulatory, and therefore this aspect needed to be considered as part of the study.

Another explanation for the introduction of service users and carers into the process of social work admissions is the increasing significance of consumer empowerment and, in particular, the 'consumer power' introduced into Conservative policy during the 1970s and 1980s, together with the issue of regulation (Stewart, 1995, p.289). In 1995, public accountability was seen to be in crisis; this was firstly due to the increasing centralisation of some local decision-making (in particular the capping of local government expenditure, but also the introduction of the national curriculum), and secondly due to the restructuring of local government and, in particular, the transfer of some local government powers from elected members to appointed boards (Stewart, 1995).

The move towards a managerialist approach to welfare, therefore, can be linked to the move from seeing service users as passive recipients of welfare to active consumers of services, with a corresponding emphasis on freedom of choice. Ferguson & Woodward (2009) argue that this approach is problematic for various reasons. Firstly, it appears to increase choice for service users, but the degree of choice service users actually have when in contact with social services is still very

limited. For example, their particular circumstances will dictate which service is 'offered', and they will have no 'choice' over their allocated social worker if one is indeed allocated. Secondly, it ignores the compulsory nature of much of social services' contact. Thirdly, it ignores the control that policy makers and professionals have over the user involvement agenda. Lastly, by emphasising individual responsibility, it ignores the structural inequality and differing ability of individuals; in short, it ignores the structures of power which exist.

From the 1970s onwards, in the UK, public services were criticised by those from the left of the political spectrum as well as those from the right. New social movements formed in order to raise issues which, until then, had been largely ignored by the traditional left, such as feminist issues (Rowbottom, 1973; Witz, 1992), or issues relating to racism (Williams, 1989; Cowden & Singh, 2007). More particular to social work were the "new discourses around power and professionalism [which] began to filter through to policy and practice" (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009, p.19). These discourses originated in particular from disabled people's groups, for example, the Disability Alliance (http://www.disabilityalliance.org), and the mental health users' movement, such as MIND (www.mind.org.uk) (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). Croft & Beresford (2008) argue that pressure from service users and their organisations was a factor in the growing emphasis on 'user involvement', but argue that in practice it was policy and agency led, rather than responding to the articulated needs of those service user groups. As they put it,

> Service providers are primarily concerned with meeting the political, economic and managerial requirements of their agencies and services. The concerns of service users are at once more personal and broader: they are committed to improving the quality of their lives... (Croft & Beresford, 2008, pp.396-397).

The role which professionals play in the empowerment of service users has been the subject of much debate (McNally, 2000). With the introduction of the new social work degree in 2002, replacing the Diploma in Social Work, qualified social workers were expected to have the necessary skills to empower service users to participate in assessments and decision making, and also to ensure that service users have access to advocacy services if they are unable to represent their own views. The requirement for these skills can be found in the Key Roles of 'Support, Representation and Advocacy' (GSCC, 2008). Both empowerment and advocacy are concerned with power, and the ways in which it is distributed between people, but empowerment and advocacy are also concepts which can be difficult to define (Hennink et al. (2012) and even when there is a shared understanding of what empowerment means, this does not necessarily mean that there is an agreed understanding of whether it has taken place (McNally, 2000).

While some argue that social workers have a crucial role in the empowerment of service users (Parsloe & Stevenson, 1993), others take the view that this perspective is naïve; for real empowerment to occur, users have to seize power for themselves, rather than depend on benign professionals to give away some of their power (Jack, 1997). Some studies conclude that, although workers felt that they empowered users and carers through advocacy and assertiveness training, users reported frustration (Servian, 1996; McNally, 2000). Thus, the present study was partly concerned with assessing the power relationships between the dominant actors.

Criticism of the social work profession over recent years was another possible reason behind the policy of service user and carer involvement in social work education (Cowden & Singh, 2007), as outlined below. During the 1980s, public

sector professions were attacked by the New Right for their lack of accountability (Gladstone, 2002; Malin et al., 2002). Some writers argue that New Right commentators used the language of an apparently radical consumerism to drive through a 'mixed economy of care', using a managerial approach that downgraded the knowledge, skills, discretion and professional autonomy of social workers (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). When the 'New' Labour government came into power in 1997, they continued this trend, exemplified in their policies around devolution and, more specifically, 'empowering communities' (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009).

As a profession, social work seemed ill-equipped to defend itself against the accountability critique. The British Association of Social Workers has never attracted the majority of social workers to its ranks, partly because of its ambivalent stance towards trade unions, and partly because it was perceived by many as being dominated by middle management (Payne & Payne, 2002; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009).

Some argue that these policies reflect more fundamental contradictions in the modern social work task (for example, Donzelot, 1979; Howe, 1996; Parton, 2008). Howe states that,

> The tense but unavoidable relationship in modernity between liberty and discipline, justice and welfare, individualism and collectivism is reflected in social work's perennial struggle to define and understand itself (Howe, 1996, p.96).

Therefore, as social work becomes more concerned with risk assessment and audit-type activities, it has less opportunity to develop relationships with service users. This, in turn, can be seen as producing a vicious circle of discontent, with social

workers publically vilified in the mass media when they appear to get it wrong, followed by the development of policies that seem to increase social distancing between service users and social services, thus accentuating the professional control of social workers (Johnson, 1979). Freidson (2001) takes this point further by arguing for interdependence between the market, bureaucratic organisations and the professions. What is not clear is under what conditions this relationship develops with regard to professionalisation.

For some, the involvement of service users and carers raises issues around the evidence on which social work practice is based (Beresford, 2000; Ward, 2006). Because users of social care services frequently experience discrimination and social exclusion, this does not mean they have no knowledge or experience (they have both in relation to their problem) (Ward, 2006). The difficulty occurs when we have to decide whether they are active partners in the solving of their problems, or whether social workers take the lead. "Unless social work can bring a specific body of expertise to the problems faced by service users, it cannot claim to make any unique contribution to their resolution" (Ward, 2006, p.115).

Beresford & Croft (2001) are clear where this body of expertise is located. They think we should use the emphasis on user involvement as an opportunity to develop new 'knowledges' derived from service users' experiences (Beresford & Croft, 2001). In fact, they argue that this is already taking place, giving as an example the 'social model' of disability. Perkin (1996) goes further, arguing that the involvement of service users can be seen as a move towards democratising a hierarchical profession, as well as developing new knowledge.

1.2.   Current Developments

Since the study concluded, there have been changes in government policy in regard to social work education and social work professionalism. Firstly, higher education itself is going through dramatic changes in its funding arrangements. In addition, two reviews of social work have been carried out: that by the Social Work Reform Board (2010), and the Munro Review of Child Protection (2010).

The Social Work Reform Board made various suggestions for change in the admission of social workers, although the involvement of service users and carers in admissions remains. Where their involvement fits within the various other recommendations is not clear (SWRB, 2011). The response by the Government to the Munro report was to "oversee a radical reduction in the amount of regulation" and a new inspection framework that will have at its heart the experiences of children and young people. In 2012, a new College of Social Work was established: a college "capable of transforming social work across the UK" (BASW, 2011).

During this process of 'improved understanding', the newly elected coalition government decided to abolish the GSCC as part of a far reaching cost-cutting exercise, which cannot fail to have an enormous impact on the lives of vulnerable people (DH, 2010). At the time of writing, it is still unclear whether social work students will continue to receive bursaries; at the present time, the Department of Health is consulting on this issue (DH, 2012). Future funding for the university where this study took place is uncertain, and dominates most discussions amongst staff. There is a confidence implicit in this, and all the other proposals discussed here, that social work will accept these changes, isolated as it is from the political process

(Ward, 2008). However, since many of these changes are primarily about reducing the public debt, these policies are more obviously reflective of a backlash against the welfare state generally, than social work in particular (Gladstone, 2002).

1.3.   The Policy

In June 2002, the Department of Health laid out its new requirements for social work training with the new degree in social work (the minimum to be at undergraduate level) replacing the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW).   Amongst the many new requirements outlined for this new degree was one which specified that programmes approved to provide the new training must "Ensure that representatives of stakeholders, particularly service users and employers, are involved in the selection process of new students" (DoH, 2002, p.2). In line with this, the General Social Care Council (GSCC), responsible for monitoring the social work degree, stated that external examiners for the new degree in social work must comment on social care service users' and carers' involvement (GSCC, 2003, p.5). In addition, service users had also been involved in the development of the national occupational standards for social work, which underpinned the new training (Topss UK Partnership, May 2002).

In some ways the new degree was less prescriptive than what it replaced, but the Department of Health did stipulate certain changes (Orme et al., 2009). Placements would be longer, with the emphasis being on practice training; the minimum age requirement was removed for a qualifying social worker (students could therefore be admitted straight from school), and entrants had to have English and Maths at GCSE (grade C or above) or the equivalent level, as well as the usual academic requirements necessary for admission to higher education in England. They also had to declare any disability or health issues and students, along with qualified social

workers, had to register with the GSCC - the body set up by the Government in 2000 (Care Standards Act, 2000) to regulate social work. £21 million was invested in 2003-04, with the introduction of the new degree rising to £81.45 million in 2005-06 (although estimates are problematic, since some of the cost for training came through higher education funding (Orme et al., 2009)).

In addition to the requirements outlined above, programmes approved to provide the new training had to involve stakeholders, including employers, service users and carers in all processes of the degree, including student recruitment, curriculum delivery and assessment and, although many programmes already did this, it was the first time that specific funds had been made available for the purpose (Orme et al., 2009). The requirement to involve service users and carers in social work admissions was clear.

The Department of Health commissioned an evaluation of the implementation of the new degree, which began in 2004 (Orme et al., 2009). This evaluation was concerned primarily with differences between the new degree and the old DipSW, but five themes were identified in the tender document, the first of which was regarding "applications, recruitment and retention" (Orme et al., 2009, p.162). In contrast to the Department of Health's approach, I decided in this study to emphasise the user perspective in my critical analysis. Two studies in particular influenced my motivation to approach the issue in this way. The first was a Department of Health funded study, which investigated the experience of being a parent suspected of child abuse (Cleaver & Freeman, 1995). The other was a study of poverty carried out by Beresford & Lister (1999), from the perspective of those living in poverty. The latter was of particular interest, since people in poverty were

interviewed not only about their experience of being poor, but also about their views regarding the conceptual issues around poverty, as debated within the academic literature.

The involvement of service users and carers in the admissions process is a unique feature of social work education, firstly because social work at the time the study was planned was the only profession where their involvement was a statutory requirement. Secondly, the admissions process, unlike for example, course development or teaching, has a direct effect on who enters the profession. Once people are admitted for social work training, it is likely that they will qualify. Whilst issues around conduct were decided nationally at the time of the study (GSCC, Conduct Information), decisions regarding the suitability of student social workers were made within individual universities with locally agreed processes and procedures. These were subject to regulation, but the guidelines were scant (Currer, 2009)[2]. Therefore there was, theoretically at least, the opportunity for service users and carers to affect the admissions process.

1.4.   Summary

There are various conclusions that can be drawn from this discussion. The language of service user involvement is ambiguous, and this ambiguity has resulted in a variety of policies being developed in its name. Therefore it has been credited, under the guise of accountability, with the introduction of market principles into welfare services generally (including social work), whilst simultaneously posing as an activity seeking justice for disempowered groups in society, particularly those in receipt of social services. These issues are explored further in the following chapters.

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[2] Universities accredited by GSCC were required to have procedures in place whereby training can be terminated if a student was judged 'unsuitable' for social work (GSCC, 2002; GSCC, 2002a), but 'suitability' was not defined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The aim of this study was to investigate service user and carer involvement in admissions from the perspective of service users and carers. In particular, the study sought to explore some of the tensions implicit in service user and carer involvement in social work. Since the perspective of the study was a given, issues surrounding the research process itself needed to be addressed and, in particular, issues around the location of the researcher within the research site. In this chapter the literature regarding service user involvement is discussed, considering first the explanations for the policy. In particular, the antecedents and competing conceptualisations of service user and carer involvement are highlighted, the clarification of which underlies the purpose of this study. The relationship between service user and carer involvement and social work professionalism is raised. The literature concerned with service user and carer involvement in higher education is then described, and that relating to the admission of pre-qualifying social work students in particular. Possible outcomes which could be attributed to the policy, and problems as identified in the literature, are then explored.

This issue of power is raised within a number of debates, such as: empowerment versus tokenism; power differentials between the actors; language as a reflection of power within the service user and carer discourse, and power within the research process itself. An exploration of my role as researcher is included in this discussion since, despite my desire to study the implementation from the perspective of service users and carers, I had a direct role in the implementation of the policy. Differing

identities are discussed, since the positions of service user, carer and academic in higher education are not necessarily mutually exclusive ones.

The voice of service users is weak in academic texts regarding social work, and accounts of the direct experiences of service users and carers are unusual (Cree & Davies, 2007; Doel & Best, 2008). Although accepting that service user and carer involvement is required at all levels of social work education, this study concentrates on the involvement of service users and carers in admissions, because the requirement to involve accompanied the introduction of the new degree, and was unique at the time in that it was a requirement. Unlike Brown & Young (2008), who also study service user and carer involvement in admissions, the literature review here has not been restricted to texts concerned with involvement in the new degree, but includes all texts which informed the study. It should also be noted that much of the literature has been published since the commencement of the study.

2.1. 'Ideological' Origins

Service user involvement in social work education is not a new concept (Beresford & Croft, 1994; Gee & McPhail, 2007). Involvement is discussed in the literature in terms of: the development and delivery of services in health and social care (for example, Simpson & House, 2002); qualifying and post-qualifying education of health and social care workers (DoH, 2002; Khoo et al., 2004; Ager et al., 2005; Barnes & Carpenter, 2006; Elliott et al., 2005), and research (for example, Trivedi & Wykes, 2002; Waldman, 2005). In the UK, it is also considered as part of a broader trend of State interest in public involvement, reflecting contradictory ideologies of consumerism versus the opening up of opportunities for participation and involvement resulting from campaigns by social movements (Kemshall & Littlechild,

2000; Beresford & Croft, 2004; Taylor & LeRiche, 2006; Cowden & Singh, 2007; McPhail & Ager, 2007; McKeown et al., 2012). Although this study is concerned with the involvement of service users and carers in the admission of social workers, some of these points are relevant and are discussed in more detail below.

Cowden & Singh (2007) describe the historical antecedents of the user involvement discourse, locating it alongside an expansion of regulatory frameworks in welfare. This reflects the increasing commoditisation of basic human needs and welfare, they argue, and exemplify this with the notion of 'professional users' who participate as expert consultants, locating the development of service user involvement back to New Labour, where the user "was king" (Cowden & Singh, 2007, p.6). For New Labour, power was reduced to an issue of choice, they argue, and this enabled New Labour to absorb the New Right critique of welfare, whilst simultaneously developing policies which seemed to be attractive to those 'from below', for example, new social movements (Cowden & Singh, 2007). An example of this, they state, was the policy of community care. They utilise the term "chameleon", employed by Braye & Preston-Shoot (1995) to describe the dual meaning of certain concepts such as 'independence' and 'normalisation': "In this sense Community Care became a term that could float semiotically free", meaning something to everyone, with its vaguely progressive aura never needing to be defined concretely (Cowden & Singh, 2007, p.12).

The use of the term 'chameleon' to describe these policies is not dissimilar to the 'antinomies' analogy employed by Ferguson (2007) when examining personalisation policies. He does not reject the notion of personalisation, but criticises the ideological origins of this policy and the way it has been implemented, and concludes by arguing

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that social work should build on the philosophy of the collective experience and organization of service users. It is out of that experience, on the one hand, and the experience of front line social workers on the other, that we should be "building the new philosophy which twenty-first-century social work so desperately needs" (Ferguson, 2007, p.401). This concept of practitioners and service users and carers working together to bring about this new 'radical' social work (Beresford, 2011) seemed like a possible outcome of the involvement policy, despite its regulatory associations (Cowden & Singh, 2007).

2.2.   Professionalism – a Hindrance or a Help?

Several writers take a critical approach to service user involvement from a purely consumerist approach (McPhail & Ager, 2007; Cowden & Singh, 2007). Cowden & Singh (2007) argue for an approach where "user perspectives are situated in a process of creative, critical dialogue" with professionals, which is linked to the development of a concept of welfare driven by emancipatory, rather than regulatory, imperatives (Cowden & Singh, 2007, p.5). They criticise the consumerist conceptualisation of service user involvement, arguing that it is difficult to imagine any professional who is not also a user of services (Cowden & Singh, 2007) and point to the contributions of Freire (1996) and Frantz Fanon (1967), who both describe the difficulties that oppressed people face when trying to identify both the reasons for their oppression and what they should do about it. Finally, they conclude that it is always those from a more privileged background, who consequently have greater knowledge of how the system works (which they refer to as 'cultural capital'), who have historically gained the best services from the welfare state.

However, Beresford (2011) makes the point that an increasing number of students who enter social work training courses have experience of being a service user themselves and, as I point out in Chapter Seven, in this university several members of staff have experience of being service users.

2.3. Service User and Carer Involvement in Teaching

Service user and carer involvement is well established generally in education and training (Brown & Young, 2008). Rhodes (2012) reports that a large proportion of studies on service user and carer involvement in health and social care, and in nursing and social work in particular, concentrate on the process of involvement rather than the outcome; this is particularly the case with health (Molyneux & Irvine, 2004) and professional education (Lathlean et al., 2006; Repper & Breeze, 2007; Morgan & Jones, 2009). This has enabled the development of good practice guidelines (Levin, 2004; Tew, 2006).

A number of papers describe the involvement of users in curriculum development, direct teaching and the development of learning materials (Masters et al. 2002; Bennett & Baikie, 2003), including palliative care teaching in social work education (Beresford et al., 2006; Agnew & Duffy, 2010). A number of studies describe the benefits of involving service users and carers in: the design and/or delivery of mental health studies in both nursing (Masters et al., 2002) and, more generally, health and social care professionals in that area of service delivery and practice (Campbell, 1999; Molyneux & Fulton, 2003); Diploma in Social Work practice placements (Edwards, 2003; Taylor & Le Riche, 2006); social work managers' education (Farrow & Fillingham, 2011), and the design, delivery and evaluation of teaching by service users and carers (Benbow et al., 2011). Some studies involved an evaluation by

service users themselves (Dow, 2007) and carers (McSloy, 2007). A particular benefit was found by Furness et al. (2011) to be that user involvement in social work education enabled students to understand the perspectives of users, thus facilitating the application of theory to practice. The benefits of the insights gained by involvement in education have been noted, and in particular the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and stigmatisation, for example, in relation to mental health (Simpson et al., 2002). One study described service users discussing their experiences of discrimination, and the processes which were helpful in resisting oppression were used in teaching (Humphreys, 2005). The involvement of service users and carers in teaching, assessment and curriculum development are therefore well documented, but this is not the case when it comes to involvement in admissions.

2.4. Social Work Admissions

Concentrating on admissions was important for several reasons, a principle one being that it is instrumental in enabling the selection of applicants with a positive attitude towards learning from service user and carer 'colleagues' (Matka et al., 2010). Matka et al. (2010) make the point that there are few studies describing or evaluating the impact of service user and carer involvement outside teaching activities, despite the claims of empowerment, consumer rights and/or improvement in service outcomes associated with it. Using a written survey, they evaluated the involvement of service users and carers as observers of group interviews. Their research is one of the few studies which concentrate on involvement with regard to social work admissions, although the study also covers the admission of clinical psychology students.

The study by the University of Hull social work department (2010) describes two different systems for admissions which involved service users and carers. Their pre-qualifying undergraduate degree in social work had individual interviews with a service user or carer, an agency representative and a member of staff. Their pre-qualifying masters' degree used a group approach, similar to that described by Matka et al. (2010). Like the majority of studies, the report is positive, but concentrates more on the process of involvement in relation to admissions, rather than what possible outcomes might result.

There are some studies dealing with admissions from non-social work courses which are nonetheless relevant. Vandrevala et al. (2007) describe the involvement in the recruitment of students applying for a clinical psychology doctoral course. In an effort to avoid tokenism, they developed a new system for involvement in their admission process, rather than adapting what already existed. Rhodes and Nyawata (2011) evaluated involvement in the recruitment of student nurses. Along with Matka et al. (2010), all papers identify that service user involvement made a positive impression on candidates, who felt they should be involved in recruitment, although academics raised concerns about who should have the final say on who is selected and the need for appropriate preparation and training (Matka, 2010). Vandevala et al. (2007) raises the question of whether there might be a bias of optimism amongst those investigating this issue, and Matka et al. (2010) do question its appropriateness as a gate-keeping measure. These studies all argue that involvement in admissions should be considered differently from involvement in education and research (Matka et al., 2010).

2.5. What a Good Social Worker Should Be

Increased confidence and improvement in the wellbeing of service users were reported in some studies (Minogue et al., 2009; Morgan & Jones, 2009) as positive outcomes of involvement. However, one benefit implicit in the policy on involvement in social work admissions is that service users and carers have some insight into what a good social worker should be. Elliott et al. (2005) report on a study carried out at the University of Plymouth, where service users were asked to discuss, in conversation with social work students, what they thought a good social worker should be like. However, this was done in the context of a teaching tool, and it is the activity that is discussed, rather than an analysis of what was said. Although this obviously has implications for professional development, the paper is again primarily concerned with process, rather than what were actually put forward as preferred qualities. Beresford et al. (2006; 2008), reporting on a study looking at service users' views of palliative care social workers from the perspective of service users, argue that more attention needs to be paid to what service users want from social work practice.

2.6. Capacity and Funding

Various problems associated with involvement are identified in the literature, not least the burden it can place on service users and carers themselves. For example, McSloy (2007), a carer, makes the point that she did not choose her path to influence social work education. In fact, accessing the more vulnerable groups that use social services has been highlighted by some as a problem (Agnew & Duffy, 2010; Furness et al., 2011), as indeed has the issue of capacity generally (Brown & Young, 2008).

The tensions apparent in the "varying dispositions" towards payment for involvement (McKeown et al., 2012, p.178) were a factor within this study. Related to capacity and accessing service users and carers is the issue of funding and remuneration (Turner & Beresford, 2005; McPhail & Ager, 2007; Downe & Martin, 2007; Minogue et al., 2009; Rhodes & Nyawata, 2011). With regard to the involvement of service users and carers in the new degree in social work, some funding was made available to universities for involvement. The issue of remuneration has itself caused problems for those service users or carers who receive state benefits. Stickley et al. (2010), in relation to involving service users in student assessment, found that, although the principle of service user involvement is desirable in theory, it was difficult in practice, because it increased the workload for existing academic staff and was seen negatively by students. McPhail & Ager (2007) argue more generally that there is a mandate for involvement in legislation, professional values and service users' and carers' movements, but it is often ill-defined, with uncertain funding. "Wider organisation and professional change is required if we are to go beyond good intentions…" (McPhail & Ager, 2007, p.22).

2.7.   Tokenism versus Empowerment

Several studies report that service users involved in education feel empowered through their involvement (Frisby, 2001; Masters et al., 2002; Happell et al., 2002; Rees et al., 2007). However, others warn of the danger of a tokenistic response to the requirement for service user and carer involvement generally (Vandrevala et al., 2007), and in the new social work degree in particular (Gee &McPhail, 2007; Ferguson, 2007a). Ferguson (2007a) warns that universities might simply tick the involvement boxes in order to comply with the requirement, and raises the more general question of how successful the empowering aspect of involvement can be

when it is handed down by policy-makers, rather than being gained by service users and carers.

Ideological critiques such as Fergusons' (2007a) can be linked to the more recent debate around personalisation (Beresford, 2008; Cunningham & Cunningham, 2012), where neo-liberal market-driven 'personalisation', in relation to, for example, individualised budgets for people with disabilities[3], shares an uneasy platform with more collective, radical democratising proponents. With the election of the current Conservative-dominated coalition, and their commitment to austerity within free market ideology and where personalisation has been situated (Ferguson, 2007a; Cunningham & Cunningham, 2012), ideological tensions underpinning the personalisation policy agenda are perhaps more obvious than service user and carer involvement policies, despite the similar conceptual ambiguities which Cowden & Singh (2007) make reference to.

2.8.   Social Justice, Fairness, or New Managerialism?

Increased confidence and improvement in their health and wellbeing were reported by service users (Minogue et al., 2009; Morgan & Jones, 2009) as positive outcomes of involvement, and Cowden & Singh (2007) point out that service user involvement can be used in a positive, empowering way, through, for example, giving people a voice through research. On the other hand, they argue, we can see the construction of a new hegemony driven by managerial, rather than democratising, imperatives. Craig (2002) philosophically locates the notion of social justice with that of 'fairness', stating that "front line social workers can have a clear common interest with their

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[3] See SCIE paper 'Personalisation', available at:
http://www.scie.org.uk/topic/keyissues/personalisation

own management in arguing a bottom-up case for social justice on the basis of local evidence" (Craig, 2002, p.680), such as the poverty many service users experience.

Power differentials between the actors concerned are discussed as barriers to involvement (Gutteridge & Dobbins, 2010), and cultural differences between service users and academics (Felton & Stickley, 2004; Minogue et al., 2009; Morgan & Jones, 2009) are raised as problems. Nonetheless, most writers start from the premise that involvement is good (Rhodes, 2012). There are some notable exceptions. For example, discriminatory behaviour, and shortcomings regarding support arrangements for a service user employed in an academic post, are reported by Simons et al. (2007). This problem partly lay with the title given to the post, and therefore post-holder, which was that of 'User Academic' – raising important issues around the language used. In this particular case it was not the term 'user' in the post title which caused offence, but that of 'academic', since other 'academic' members of staff were never referred to as 'academics'. The honesty of this paper is commendable, but it is worth considering how this person felt about discussion regarding their post (and therefore themselves) being in the public domain. It raises interesting issues surrounding the relationship between identity at work and, more specifically, the private and public manifestations of this relationship.

2.9.   Power and Language

More commonly, the issue of language concentrated on the terms 'service user' and 'carer'. In relation to the literature, the language of service user and carer involvement can mean different things in different contexts (Morrow et al., 2012). Several writers draw attention to the use of language and its centrality in understanding how power relationships are constructed in relation to service users

and carers (Heffernan, 2006; Heffernan, 2006a; McPhail & Ager, 2007; Simons et al., 2007; McClaughlin, 2009; McKeown et al., 2010). The terms are considered separately below.

2.9.1. Service user

McLaughlin (2009) considers previous terms such as 'client', and concludes that the term 'service user' itself is problematic, since it is used to signify unequal power relationships between recipients and service providers, and can be seen as a way of preserving domination (Heffernan, 2006a). In addition, it is deemed problematic because it is originated by those in power (Heffernan, 2006). Although the term is meant to foster involvement, it can be argued that it in fact works against this principle if it is interpreted as stigmatising. Heffernan (2006a), along with McLaughlin (2009), argue for a new term which takes into account the empowering nature of social work practice. Some of the participants in Simons et al.'s study (2007) highlighted the stigmatising aspect of the label 'service user' and questioned whether it was a useful one to use in an academic setting. However, as mentioned previously, it was the label 'academic' which the service user found more problematic within an academic setting. In this study it was the relationship within the academic field that was more significant, rather than the more general label of having been a user of social services. Perhaps, therefore, it is the relationship to the norm which the label identifies within this culture, rather than the actual terminology.

2.9.2. Carer

There is an assumption in much of the literature, and certainly the policy, that carers should be perceived in a similar way to those receiving care, and this is consequently reflected in much of the literature which refers to involving service users and carers (McPhail & Ager, 2007), despite being quite different (Fadden et

al., (2005). McPhail & Ager support Stalker (2003), who presents a case for the consideration of service users and carers as "an integral caring system to guard against the polarising of one group against the other" (McPhail & Ager, 2007, p.14). This approach can overlook the complex status of formal or informal carers as oppressed, or possibly oppressing, individuals within the health and social care field (Manthorpe, 2000). Manthorpe (2000) identifies three models that come into play when involving carers in Higher Education: firstly, they can provide personal testimony; secondly, they can contribute as co-trainers, and thirdly, they can contribute in a way that "draws on students' own experiences and is influenced by feminist approaches which argue that the personal is not only political but can be professional" (Manthorpe, 2000, p.19). Manthorpe is referring mainly to the student group, but this is not necessarily the case; all experience is relevant. As she states,

> "...it should also be remembered that programme organisers, lecturers and tutors may well have experience as carers, currently or in the past. This is not always part of the academic tradition" (Manthorpe, 2000, p.24).

The issue of multiple roles was significant, not just in regard to the grouping together of service users and carers, but also in regard to the multiplicity of experiences which could fall within the service user/carer remit and how this might affect identity. It was important to differentiate between roles "defined by norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society" and identities "which are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves" (Castells, 1997, p.7). Chambers and Hickey (2012) report that the HPC, who funded their research into service user involvement, included carers in their definition of service users, who were:

> …those who typically use or are affected by the services of registrants
> (courses registered with the HPC) once they qualify from programmes
> and become registered (e.g. patients, clients, carers organisational
> clients, colleagues etc. (Chambers & Hickey, 2012).

The complexities around the terminology of 'service user' and 'carer', and issues of stigma and power in relation to these terms, were factors which the study sought to explore. This, in turn, required an examination of the relationship between identity and experience, which involved a reflexive consideration of my own position.

This personal/political/professional interplay is ontologically significant but also has epistemological relevance, since I was truly inside the research as researcher, social work academic and, for two years, admissions tutor. The intention was to investigate the perspectives of service users and carers, but I had some authority in the scenario that I wished to investigate – an issue that was explored when considering my methodological approach, as discussed in Chapter Six. Several studies have been carried out by people from within their own universities (for example, Allain et al., 2006; Brown & Young, 2008; Anghel & Ramon, 2009; Matka et al., 2010). Rhodes, an insider with a vested interest in reporting positive findings from her research (she was employed to involve service users and carers), used her research assistant to act as a "critical outsider" (Rhodes & Nyawata, 2011, p.440). Some felt that service user and carer involvement should be organised independently (for example, S.W.I.G. (no date); Baldwin & Sadd, 2006; Gee & McPhail, 2007; S.W.I.G.), and some argued for service users to be partners in the research itself (for example, Allain et al., 2006; Kirkwood, 2012; Duffy & McKeever, 2012; Barnes & Cotterell, 2012). Positive results may well have been gained partly, as Vandevala (2007) reflects, due to the bias towards a favourable response from within the research site. My feeling at the planning stage was that a focus group approach

might prevent participants in my study from being able to discuss honestly the way they felt. However, focus groups along with interviews were a popular method of data collection in these studies (Vandevala et al., 2011; Rhodes & Nyawata, 2011).

2.10.   Summary

McPhail & Ager describe the issue of power, with regard to service user and carer involvement in social work education, as "the elephant in the room" (2007, p.15). One of the main aims of the study was to understand whether service user and carer involvement in social work admissions is really about "redressing the balance" (Brown & Young, 2008, p.86). The literature substantiates the argument that service user and carer involvement in social work admissions is different from involvement in the actual training and education of (in this scenario) social workers. It raises issues of professional competence and power, which involvement in curriculum design and delivery does not necessarily do. It can be seen by some as a more 'political' activity (Matka et al., 2010). Issues of power permeate the discourse of service user and carer involvement: the language that is used and what it signifies; issues of remuneration; differing access to decision-making, and control over the process of both the research site and the position of any research undertaken from within. Language is significant in regard to the power it signifies and the differing identities and categories it identifies. The following chapters consider these issues in more depth, looking at professionalism, identity, ideology and power.

There is limited literature regarding the issue of trust in relation to service user and carer involvement in admissions, despite its relevance. The requirement to involve service users and carers in admissions can imply a lack of trust in social work

academics in terms of their gate-keeping role. This regulatory approach aspect of service user and carer involvement is a further tension, since it is contained within policies which, on the face of it, seem to imply increased professionalisation of social work. The issue of trust is therefore also considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Overview

The policy of service user and carer involvement, therefore, tends to be simultaneously welcomed as beneficial by those with neo-liberal sympathies, because it conforms to market principles and consumerist ideology, whilst at the same time being accepted by those from a more critical standpoint, albeit with caution, as an outcome of successful campaigning, particularly by service user and carer campaign groups (Alcock, et al., 2008). Ontological tensions along similar lines are manifested in other areas of the policy in regard to both its origins and its outcomes. For example, the policy could be interpreted as a regulatory response to criticisms of social work professionalism, whilst also simultaneously representing a contribution to the social work professional project. Participants' views were therefore sought regarding the social work professional project and the role they saw themselves playing in this project during their involvement. There was a third tension identified in the literature, concerning how we define 'service user' and 'carer'.

In order to investigate these tensions, a theoretical framework was needed which could accommodate these various interpretations, whilst also accepting that an understanding of the issues could be advanced by investigating the subjective views of service users and carers. This chapter explains in more depth the tensions described above, and explains how Bourdieu's conceptual framework can be helpful in facilitating an examination of the policy from a variety of theoretical perspectives, whilst not losing sight of the relevance of power relationships and structural factors.

As stated in the previous chapter, several studies (for example, Rees et al., 2007) argue that service users felt empowered by their involvement in education. The

chapter begins by considering the concept of empowerment, and then considers various theoretical approaches which account for individual and structural analysis of power, and assist in understanding the location of service users, carers and social work education and practice. With regard to agency, the work of Foucault (1989) is argued to be particularly useful in providing insight around issues of positionality, identity and discourse, whilst at a structural level, Abbott's (2005) theory of linked ecologies proved a useful means of locating the relationships between the State, the university, social work professionalism, social work practice and service users and carers. Bourdieu's theory of fields (1998) provided a useful overall framework, since it accommodated a variety of theoretical approaches within a social-spatial theory which acknowledges the determining significance of power relationships.

3.1. Empowerment

As mentioned earlier, some service users and carers felt empowered by their experiences of involvement in education (Rees et al., 2007). The policy of involving service users and carers in admissions implicitly assumes a transfer of power, but the specific desired outcomes of the policy are not clear. Empowerment is commonly associated with involvement of lay people, particularly in terms of the rhetoric concerning the involvement of service users and carers within social work (Trevithick, 2005). Barnes, Carpenter & Bailey (2000) suggest that 'partnership' is a more realistic concept when we talk about involving service users and carers, because it acknowledges differentials in power without demanding equality (Barnes & Carpenter, 2006,), but this would be to deny the participatory and politicised aspects of involvement (Kirkwood, 2012).

Nonetheless, several writers (Lathlean et al., 2006; Allain et al., 2006; Simons et al., 2007; Rhodes, 2012; Chambers & Hickey, 2012) use measurement models of service user involvement, such as that developed by Arnstein (1969). Chambers & Hickey claim that these models "all help explain the level of user involvement and degree of power transferred from teaching staff/educational institution to service users" (2012, p.8), concluding that most studies achieve only piecemeal involvement. Purtell et al. (2012), however, argue that there is actually no agreed measure of success in regard to service user and carer involvement when discussing service user involvement in research, and are sceptical that it is actually possible to do so.

The term 'empowerment' is not used in the wording of the policy, but it is increasingly present in the rationale for involving service users and carers generally in social work education, particularly in the context of consumer rights and arguments for improved service outcomes (Matka et al., 2010). Lack of clarity around the concept of power may be seen to lead to the often vague and sometimes contradictory usage of the term 'empowerment' in social work and social welfare (Pease, 2002). In the Introduction to the current thesis, the notion of empowerment was linked to the perceived lack of accountability of public service workers (Stewart, 1995). Qualified social workers are expected to have the necessary skills to empower service users to participate in assessments and decision making, and to ensure that service users have access to advocacy services if they have been unable to represent their own views (Leadbeater, 2006).

Therefore, empowerment is an important notion within modern social work, as demonstrated not only by its place in the Key Roles (GSCC 2008) for social work,

but also by the term's appearance in the definition of social work, as agreed by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) in 2001:

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work (IASSW, 2000/2001).

However, whilst the term is used frequently in social care and social work, there is seldom any detailed explanation of what empowerment actually means and how it can be achieved. The most common usage of the term is to denote whether service users are given 'meaningful' choices and 'valuable' options (Trevithick, 2005, p.219). This assumes that meaningful choices and valuable options are always available, and fails to signify who decides what is meaningful and valuable.

One approach to these issues is to consider how changes within welfare can be connected to more encompassing social forces and "how a particular ruling bloc in a given social formation maintains 'hegemony'" (Garrett, 2009, p.880), and in particular, "Whose 'voices' are rendered subaltern, silent or marginal within the discourse… and why is this so?" (Garrett, 2009, p.880). One way of approaching an answer here is to consider the role of ideology as a means by which those in power maintain their privilege. Lukes' (2005) three dimensional approach to studying power is an example of how this approach can inform the study, since it involves a consideration of how power can be maintained by individuals when it is not in their interests to do so. Althusser (2005) raised similar questions regarding ideology when considering how those in power impose social practices on individuals (subjects) in

order to maintain the capitalist economic system. This approach is useful in gaining insight into the contradictions implicit in free market capitalist economies when confronted by welfare issues, but in terms of the power relationships in the present study, the situation was not so clearly understood through economic analysis.

3.2. Structure/Agency

I have argued so far that it was necessary to identify a conceptual overview which incorporated the systemic and structural aspects of power affecting service user and carer involvement in admissions, whilst also incorporating the subjective experiences of the service users and carers involved in the admissions process. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, there has been a variety of research into the process of service user and carer involvement in admissions, but a gap exists with regard to analysing what involvement can actually achieve in this area. I argue here that an examination of possible outcomes leads to an exploration of some of the tensions within the policy of involving service users and carers in social work admissions. What was needed was a theoretical perspective which could account for the subjective elements of service user/carer/agency, whilst at the same time acknowledging the asymmetrical aspects of power such as class and race, or gendered and abled inequalities – the structural aspects.

One approach to understanding the structural factors reflected in the policy is to utilise those sociological accounts concerned with how the wider society operates. Functionalists, such as Durkheim (1957), see hierarchies as essential for the existence of society, and position professionals positively within the structure. For Marxists, such as Althusser (2005[4]) and Habermas (1991), hierarchies within capitalist society can be seen to act against the interests of the working class. As

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[4] Translated and published 1969

demonstrated in the last chapter, service user involvement has been interpreted as an outcome of struggle for human justice, whilst simultaneously being seen as part of a process of incorporating neo-liberal market principles into an area of welfare provision (Alcock,et al., 2008). Both are examples of theories which concentrate on the structures of society (holism). Other theorists concentrate on studying individual and collective agency, and how people act or interact, and it is from this perspective that literature which is more concerned with the process of involvement can be situated (for example, Anghel & Ramon, 2009). Cassley (2011) argues that the agency/structure dichotomy cannot be resolved, but we can accept that both approaches co-exist to varying degrees and in different situations. Or we can, as Marx suggests, examine how social interactions produce history (agency) but in circumstances not necessarily of our choosing (structure) (Cassley, 2001).

3.3.   Involvement as a Means of Correcting Inequality

The idea that involving service users and carers is a means of empowering disadvantaged groups can be linked to critical Marxist or neo-Marxist interpretations. Hall, for example, argues that "what is 'scientific' about the Marxist theory of politics is that is seeks to understand the limits to political action given by the terrain on which it operates" (1996, p.45). Gramsci argued that a class could maintain its unfair interest by dominating the subjective experiences of everyday life, a process he described as hegemony (Mouffe, 1979). The task for those concerned with inequality was to engage in exposing the contradictions through education, mass culture and popular movements, so that eventually people would see through the ideological façade and choose a more egalitarian society. Freire (1996) brought a particular educational outlook to this approach which is more directly applicable to the setting being studied here. Education, according to Freire (1996), functions either to

facilitate conformity of the working classes into the current social and economic system, whether it is in their interests or not, or as a means whereby people can critically engage in understanding and possibly transforming society. The oppressive pedagogy Freire refers to is characterised by narrative: "the narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students)" (Freire, 1996. p.52). He likens this process to that of a bank, where knowledge is deposited by teachers into the 'bank', which is the passive student. Instead, he argues, education should be a more egalitarian, critical, transformative process leading to a more egalitarian, free society. Theoretically, this approach provided substance to critically investigating the tensions apparent in the SUCI policy from the subjective standpoint of service users and carers. However, involving service users and carers in admissions is not solely about education *per se*; it is also about choosing potential social workers. In addition, Freire (1996) clearly states that freedom is something that is won, and not something that can be handed down by the powerful, as the policy of involving service users and carers clearly was. Critical accounts such as this are important because they remind us that this policy has developed within a society dominated by neo-liberal, free market values, encouraging inequalities in health and social welfare.

The subjective perceptions of the subjects, including their critical reflections, are crucial to an understanding of the ideology which allows an essentially unfair system to continue. Freire's approach offers clarification and an explanation regarding the hierarchical structure of higher education, its relationship to the State, its purpose and possibilities; but, as an overall approach here, it is problematic. Firstly, this approach does not easily locate service users and carers in the educational field. They are obviously not students, but that need not necessarily matter. However, as will be shown later, they are not necessarily easily identified in any clear way. For

example, they are not necessarily from one class or gender, and they are not necessarily even service users and carers at the time of involvement. This is not to underplay the value of this theoretical approach, in particular the identification and analysis of unequal power relationships, but the subjective and fluctuating element(s) in relation to identity needed to be included in the study.

Although the policy of involving service users and carers in higher education necessarily involves a consideration of the role of knowledge and power, involvement in the admission of social work students is not necessarily about the actual process of education. The notion of 'communicative community', which Habermas (1990) employs, was more useful, since it is concerned with subjective meaning and because it employs the notion of a space where critical dialogue concerning welfare can take place (Lovelock & Power, 2004). This approach proved useful when considering the issue of fairness in relation to the candidates and selection, discussed in Chapter Seven.

3.4.   Identities, Discourse and Power

One of the problems with the concept of power and empowerment is the modernist notion of power being a thing that is possessed, rather than a social relation which can reflect both the top-down and the bottom-up operation of power (Tew, 2006). This could involve the systematic organisation of power across particular constructions of social difference, and it needs to be recognised that there may be localised and personal performances of power that can serve to either reinforce or stand against this (Tew, 2006). Empowerment, in this sense, is dynamic and can be contradictory (Anderson, 1996); "often the operation of power may be a double-edged or contradictory process, oppressive or limiting in some respects and

productive or protective in others" (Tew, 2006, p.40). This echoes Foucault's approach:

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? …[Power can] induce pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body (Foucault, 1980b, p.119).

Foucault's (1980b) account of power is pertinent to this study in two ways: firstly, because it accounts for the various identities that make up the service user and carer population, as well as the other professionals involved at the university, and secondly, because it identifies the way that knowledge and power are inter-related. The claim to knowledge that social work academics possess directly informs their practice in the field, and it is therefore a way that they can claim authority. If social work discourse involves a degree of surveillance and correction (albeit of undesirable behaviour), as Foucault (1975) argues, then service user and carer involvement can be interpreted as a means of extending that control and surveillance discourse to seemingly include control over the profession itself. This rather less positive interpretation of empowerment leads to the possibility that the policy of involving service users and carers in admissions is not necessarily beneficial to service users, carers or the profession of social work. This aspect of Foucault's work, as Hall points out, comes close to some of the questions that Althusser (2005) was trying to address through his conceptual discussions around ideology, if one discounts its " class reductionism, economistic and truth-claiming overtones" (1996a, p.11).

However, although there are inherent contradictions in the policy of involving service users and carers, we cannot assume that there are no advantages for them,

because not all power relationships are necessarily exploitative. This approach highlighted the subtle ways that power interacts on the ground from the perspective of service users and carers, and allowed for a consideration of issues around the varying identities discussed in Chapter Four. What was more problematic for the study was that Foucault's (1980b) obscure definition of power underestimates the structural inequalities present within this situation. In addition, it is not clear how a researcher can distance themselves sufficiently from the dominant discourses in which we are all engaged, in order to expose the 'truth'.

3.5.   Abbott's Linked Ecologies

A framework which could link the narratives and the various interests involved was that put forward by Abbott (2005). He takes an ecological approach to understanding the social world, and states:

> In its simple form, ecological theory allows us to escape the false historiography produced by assuming immanent development. A linked ecologies argument moves beyond this by taking into account the simultaneous existence of numerous adjacent ecologies, all of whose actors seek alliances, resources and support across ecological boundaries (Abbott, 2005, p.247).

An ecology is characterised by its locations, the actors within them, and the relationship between these. Ecologies can be linked by what Abbott (2005) calls 'hinges' – strategies which work in both ecologies at once, and 'avatars', where a colony or a copy of actors is institutionalised into another. This approach was found to be useful because it allowed for a conceptualisation of the main players involved: service users, carers, the social work profession, the university and the State. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. However, although Abbott (2005) does accommodate competition within his conceptualisation, the issue of power and

inequality is not structured in. These issues appear in his analyses, but they are not central.

This problem is highlighted when he compares his theory of linked ecologies with Bourdieu's theory of fields (Abbott, 2005a). He accepts some similarities with Bourdieu's approach, as they both locate actors within social space, and that space is defined primarily by the process of interaction. He argues also that there are units of social locations that are considered as macro structures – Bourdieu's fields or Abbott's ecologies, "And we both see processes of conflict and competition as crucial to understanding the internal evolution of these collections of social locations" (Abbott, 2005a, p.2).

However, Bourdieu's use of economic metaphors (1998) such as capital, inheritance, etc. locates him within European, structuralist theoretical traditions used extensively here, emphasising the concept of power, whilst Abbott does not. Another problem with Abbott's approach (2005) was that of positionality and, to a certain extent, agency. His starting point is an analysis of the professions and, as a result, service users and carers receive scant attention. They are not his prime focus, whereas for Bourdieu, his starting point is with the socially excluded. Nonetheless, as pointed out earlier, Abbott proved useful in providing a means of analysing the various relationships involved and, in particular, the location of social work professionalism, social work education and the political arena (1999).

Abbott did not publish anything after 2005 with regard to his theory of linked ecologies (this was confirmed by the author). He develops further his critique of ethnography as a sociological method, arguing for what he terms 'lyrical sociology', the function of which is to "know not only society's causes and consequences, not

only its merits and demerits, but also… its beauty and sadness" (Abbott, 2007, p.96). This is an interesting contribution to understanding of the emotional issues raised during the study, since contact with social workers often occurs during times of crisis and distress. Abbott's concept of ecological fields goes some way towards providing a conceptual structure, but it lacks the analytical capacity to identify and locate the asymmetrical power relationships discussed earlier.

3.6.   Bourdieu, Fields and Power

Bourdieu locates social activity in 'fields', which constitute sites of struggle and contain their own structured power relationships, or 'relations of domination' (Peillon, 1998, p.215). For Bourdieu, the notion of field and social space replaces that of society (Bourdieu 1998).   He argues that the notion of the field is important in relation to power in order to "account for structural effects which are not otherwise easily understood". (Bourdieu, 1998, p.33).   This can assist social work because it moves us beyond social work's traditional systems allowing us to consider field-specific struggles relating to helping systems and social change (Fram, 2004; Emirbayer & Williams, 2005) .

The concept of fields embraces power, domination and class, with the organisation or system being seen as a sub-field, or as being embedded in a field. However, there are similarities: like fields, organisations are spaces where individuals compete for personal advantage (Everett, 2002). There can be fields characterised in terms of restricted production, or in terms of generalised or large-scale production (Bourdieu, 1985). In the example of a restricted field such as social work education, social work knowledge can be interpreted as 'cultural capital', and the involvement of service users and carers in admissions can be seen in terms of a struggle between the State

and the profession, not for economic profit (although there may be indirect economic rewards), but rather for control of the activity that is social work practice. It fulfils the criteria of production as being "conducted according to criteria internal to the field" (Everett, 2002, p.61). This type of field is in contrast to more generalised fields of production (such as welfare) which, Everett argues, have a less direct influence on producers, since their function is to produce cultural capital for the public at large who are not involved in the production of that capital.

There can be fields within fields. The whole of society can be a field, but it will contain fields which, although linked to the larger field, can be separately analysed. Fields are linked together by power: "the basic structure and hierarchy of all other fields derives from the overarching field of power" (Peillon, 1998, p.216). These fields are objective structures concerned with activity around access to, and control over, struggles for capital, where capital is power, or something which yields power. They have two central properties: first, they are patterned systems of objective forces, whilst simultaneously,

> …a space of conflict and competition, the analogy here being with a
> battlefield, in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the
> species of capital effective in it – cultural authority in the artistic field,
> scientific authority in the scientific field (Bourdieu & Wacquand, 1992,
> p.17).

As stated earlier, the resources which are used in these struggles, and whose appropriation is at stake, are defined as types of capital: economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Peillon, 1998).

One of the attractive features of this framework in relation to this study is that contradictory elements can co-exist (Bourdieu 1998). One of the important properties

of a field lies in the fact that it implicitly defines 'unthinkable' things, things that are not even discussed, which Bourdieu calls 'doxa':

> …everything that goes without saying, and in particular the systems of classification determining what is judged interesting or uninteresting, the thing that no one thinks worthy of being mentioned, because there is no *demand*… What is most hidden is what everyone agrees about, agreeing so much that they don't even mention them, the things that are beyond question, that go without saying. (Bourdieu, 1993, p.51).

In the field of social work education, doxa might be indicated by the networking amongst academics and policy makers, or acceptance of the status associated with higher education, which in turn might be associated with commonality of class, ethnicity and gender (Lane, 2000). These doxic relationships can allow the continuation of 'doxic' hierarchies to persist effortlessly. An example in relation to this study is the notion of empowerment, where the meaning seems so self-evident that everyone accepts it. These relationships pre-determine access to cultural capital but are not necessarily, or even usually, apparent.

The link between agency and structure in Bourdieu's theoretical framework is termed 'habitus' the "mediating link between social structure (maco) and individual action (micro)" (Everett, 2002, p.66).

It is this category that contains doxa. Habitus, in this case, describes the process whereby a set of norms and conventions becomes deposited into a structure of dispositions and expectations, of ways of seeing and doing in the world that are neither entirely conscious nor wholly unconscious but rather 'practically' oriented towards certain implicit goals. Where symbolic competitions are not apparent, we have a doxic society (Bourdieu, 1977). Where this produces an unequal distribution of personal capital, 'symbolic violence' can occur (Bourdieu, 2000). In relation to

service user and carer involvement, this could be exemplified by the service user who unquestioningly accepts the superiority of social work education.

Embedded within habitus is the notion of acquired dispositions mentioned earlier, which assist in the maintenance of social order (Bourdieu, 1984). This aspect of the theory attempts to clarify concepts without any obvious value, such as truth, honesty and, the thesis argues, trust. These concepts are embedded in habitus and Bourdieu uses the notion of symbolic exchange to explain how these concepts should operate in practice[5], although he is not optimistic that these rules will be adhered to:

> The group requires that formalities be observed, that one honour the humanity of others by asserting one's own humanity, by affirming one's "point of spiritualist honour". There is no society that does not render homage to those who render homage to it in seeming to refuse the law of selfish interest… Practical euphemisms are a kind of homage rendered to the social order and to the values the social order exalts, all the while knowing that they are doomed to be violated (Bourdieu 1998, p.98)

The underlying *raison d'être* for social activity within fields is the accumulation of social, economic and cultural capital. Competing for social capital, as pointed out earlier, is a crucial dynamic within the field and a fundamental aspect of its operation.

Bourdieu describes the various forms of capital as presenting in three ways: as economic capital; cultural capital (which he says can, in certain situations, be converted into economic capital), which might be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications, and social capital, which is made up of social obligations ('connections') and is also convertible, under certain conditions, into economic

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[5] The link to Titmuss' (1973) work 'The Gift Relationship', regarding the UK blood donation service, comes to mind here, although it is unlikely that Bourdieu was aware of this work.

capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p.244). Cultural capital is not as obvious as economic capital, and often functions as symbolic capital, although, he argues,

> Every kind of capital …tends…to function as symbolic capital(so that it might be better to speak, in rigorous terms, of the *symbolic effects of capital*) when it obtains an explicit or practical recognition (Bourdieu, 2000 p. 242)

Some argue that professionalism is a form of symbolic capital (Schinkel & Noordegraf, 2011).

The notion of cultural capital can be loosely equated with Weber's work on status (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 1996). It can be argued that cultural capital itself comes very close to the notion of legitimacy (Peillon, 1998) – a valuable concept for service users and carers and welfare recipients generally, who are at a disadvantage in their access to cultural capital.

Various forms of capital in the field of social work education can be identified. Economic reward is evident in the form of salaries and research grants for academic staff, and the status associated with social work education, situated as it is within Higher Education, contains both social and cultural capital associated with rewards of status. Doxic relationships might include the networking and common gender, class and ethnic backgrounds of most academics in higher education, but also include their control of social work knowledge.

It is important to explain how Bourdieu positions his approach within current theoretical debates concerning knowledge, partly because it goes some way to explain how habitus works, and also because, as mentioned earlier, the power associated with specialist knowledge is a key feature of this study, in regard to both the cultural capital associated with it, and the legitimacy of where social work training

is located. He identifies three modes of theoretical knowledge, "each of which implies a set of (usually tacit) anthropological theses" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.3). Firstly, he talks about phenomenological knowledge; this knowledge,

> …sets out to make explicit the truth of primary experience of the social world i.e. all that is inscribed in the relationship of *familiarity* with the familiar environment, the unquestioning apprehension of the social world which, by definition, does not reflect on itself and excludes the question of the conditions of its own possibility (Bourdieu, 1977, p.3).

Secondly, he talks about 'objectivist' knowledge; that is, the objective relations (e.g. economic or linguistic) which structure practice and in particular, primary knowledge, including tacit knowledge, of the familiar world (Bourdieu, 1977). This objectivist knowledge assists in perpetuating and legitimising habitus. This is perhaps where Abbott (2007) might be placed in terms of the theoretical approach to social investigation characterised by some ethnographers (Spradley, 1979).

His third mode of knowledge is what he calls practice knowledge or the "theory of practice"

> This theory of practice, or rather, of the 'practical sense', defines itself, above all, in opposition to the philosophy of the subject and of the world as representation. Between the socialized body and the social fields, two products of the same history that are generally attuned to each other, there develops and an infra-conscious, corporeal complicity (Bourdieu, 1993. p.46).

The concept of a 'theory of practice' linked with tacit knowledge, when applied to the role of service user and carer involvement in social work education, is an attractive one in regard to social work evaluation generally, which consistently struggles ontologically with its knowledge base (Sheldon, 2001; Webb, 2001). The emphasis on experience as a central conceptual tool locates this study firmly within the experiences of those involved in the admission of social work students and, in

particular, the experiences of service users and carers – the practice. This is an important break with more traditional, abstract social theory (Adkins, 2004). His approach, furthermore, recognises the importance of differing experiences as well as similarities:

> Action is not a response that can be fully explained by reference to the triggering stimulus; and it has as its principle a system of dispositions, which I call the *habitus*, which is the product of all biographical experience (so that, just as no two individual histories are identical, so no two individual *habitus* are identical, although there are classes of experiences and therefore classes of *habitus* – the *habitus* of classes) (Bourdieu, 1993, p.46).

There are problems with this approach which need to be considered. Firstly, there are no obvious ways of communicating the differences between the different fields and sub-fields (Lane, 2000). As Lane argues,

> What Bourdieu's field theory seems to lack is any convincing account of the articulations between different national fields and sub-fields, and between those national fields and the increasingly important supranational fields, whether economic, political or cultural. Bourdieu's reluctance to specify a priori any 'transhistorical' rules governing the relations between fields is understandable (2000, p.199).

There is a particular tension between the sub-field of social work education and that of social work practice, and within both in regard to the political field, which Bourdieu's theory does not really address. The notion of fields is vague and bears some similarity to other social theories which define society as inter-related structures (Jenkins, 1992). It is not clear whether they are analytical constructs (as used here) or whether they exist in the social consciousness of those who inhabit them (Jenkins, 1992). Social work admissions can be identified as a restricted field

within social work education, and within the wider field of welfare policy and wider society.

Secondly, we are given only limited information regarding the relationship between habitus and fields which are inhabited by "a very limited range of definite phenomena: biological individuals, observable events and material things" (Jenkins, 1992, p.92). An example of this is that we are offered no theorised understanding of social groups or social group identity and the related notion of culture but, as stated earlier, his approach facilitates the use of other approaches.

A third problem with using Bourdieu's approach in regard to this study is that it can be seen to pre-dispose the interpretation of the 'dominant discourses' by taking a critical stand:

> Foucault states the possibility of analysing a problematization neither as the effect of external causes, nor as the cause of behaviour, but as just a way of putting a problem where there was no problem before, under certain conditions (Callewaert, 2006, p.93)

The critical stance can be easily justified, since it only reflects the values implicit in the policy, despite the absence of clear outcomes. This criticism, however, disguises a more subtle problem. One of the main problems with adopting Bourdieu's approach in regard to this study was not the inherently critical stance that it takes, but rather the problem of the relational analysis "where the 'view from nowhere' is missing" (Schinkel, 2003, p.90). In other words, using this approach could be interpreted as pre-empting the findings of the study, because it can be interpreted as imposing ontology from above. Firstly, this is not the case, as the study uses more than one perspective. In addition, if one accepts this Foucauldian critique, the study would be little more than an empirical, largely discursive analysis of service users

and carer's views, thus ignoring any power relationships which are not apparent in the discourse.

3.7. Summary

There is a morality about Bourdieu's approach which insists that factors taken for granted be put under scrutiny, and this questioning of beliefs can be as strong an example of what sociology is about as that of the 'view from nowhere' (Schinkel, 2003). In addition, this problem diminishes if we accept the basic premise that there is always something 'at stake' in a field in which people have an interest (Schinkel, 2003, p.86). It has been demonstrated that this is particularly the case in regard to the field of social work admissions, where some of the stakes are taken for granted to such an extent that the State insists that lay people be involved to redress the balance. In some ways, this problem echoes the objectivist-subjectivist dichotomy that is discussed elsewhere, which can highlight the detailed relationships within the field from the perspective of service users and carers. Another way to interpret this dilemma, rather than seeing the positions as contradictory, is to see the differences together with the similarities. Both Bourdieu and Foucault raise the same issues and frame their solutions similarly (Callewaert, 2006). The difference is rather the focus of study: Bourdieu's approach accounts for both discourse, action, structure and agency, and also the logic which reflects the relationship between them. His framework facilitates the utilisation of all relevant critical theory. Foucault is more concerned with the "free construction of meaning" (Callewaert, 2006, p.96). These issues are developed further in the following discussion regarding professionalism and trust.

Chapter 4: Professionalism - Protection or Closure

Some of the literature in Chapter Two highlights the issue of professionalism as something that is affected by the involvement of service users and carers in social work admissions (McPhail & Ager, 2007; Cowden & Singh, 2007). However there is no agreement as to whether this is likely to be a beneficial or harmful effect, or what form those changes might make. This chapter explores some of the tensions around social work professionalism and the ways in which service user and carer involvement in admissions might contribute and clarify those arguments. Trust is also considered in this chapter. This is partly because trust is an integral part of the professionalism discourse, but also because it was a popular concept in which some participants chose to locate negative experiences of social work practitioners.

Asymmetrical power relations are implicit in any discussion regarding social work professionalism, firstly because of the social status differentials implied by the process of extended qualification, but also because professional social workers are given a statutory shelter in the human services marketplace, and in addition are able to undertake sometimes coercive interventions in the lives of service users on behalf of the State as a result of their professional licence. The literature on professionalism consistently identifies conformity to professional standards and the capacity to engender trust as the corresponding part of this regulatory bargain. Power, trust and professionalism are therefore key concepts underpinning this study. It is worth noting at this stage that these concepts are exemplified at a structural level through regulatory bodies, statutes, consultation exercises and so forth.

As stated, one justification for the policy of involving service users and carers in social work admissions was the implied criticism of social workers, and so the regulatory aspect of the policy can be linked directly to a concern about supposedly poor professional practice. This section begins with a consideration of the various theoretical debates surrounding the term 'professional', with particular reference to social work. It is argued that most accounts can be located within either a Durkheimian framework, or a Weberian one, both of which identify power as a defining issue for professionalisation and professionalism. The section concludes by explaining how this literature informed the study and, in particular, raised key questions in relation to power and trust.

4.1. Professionalism and Professionalisation

There is considerable debate around the subject of professionalism, partly because it is, in itself, an abstract concept. Most of what can be said about the professions is contested, including: what constitutes a professional attribute (Goode, 1969; Millerson, 1998); how professions developed and why (Macdonald, 1995). and how some occupational groups acquire professional status whilst other specialist occupations do not (Macdonald, 1995; Lymbery, 2000). The role of professionals within modern society is debated, with particular reference to the legitimacy of their specialist evidence base (Traynor, 2009), the relationship between tacit and skills-based knowledge (Stephens & Delamont, 2009), and how this relationship reflects the regulatory nature of modern societies (Isham et al., 2002). In relation to social work, the situation is further complicated by the fact that social work as a profession was established, and is regulated, by the State (Parton, 1996), unlike some of the older professions (for example the law or medicine), which have traditionally been self-regulating and developed independently (Goode, 1969). However, even these

professions depend on the State's endorsement of their monopoly and self-regulation to some extent, since both are enshrined in statute and, as Abbott (2005) points out, their personnel are, increasingly, salaried employees rather than independently self-employed.

Service user and carer involvement in admissions was imposed on university social work departments by the State when the new degree was introduced, though without a clear rationale. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, it can be interpreted as a tool imposed by the State to regulate the social work profession's selection process. An alternative, and equally viable, explanation is that the notion of empowerment is embedded in the concept of social work professionalism (Leonard, 1997; Lymbery, 2000). From this position, professionals protect and assist service users as part of their responsibility to the 'client'. This is a compelling argument for social work professionalism, attracting as it does, people who wish to make a difference by challenging inequality and improving the lives of vulnerable people (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009).

This somewhat contradictory position regarding social work professionalism can be traced back to early sociological theory on the subject of professionalism more generally. On the one hand, it was argued that professionals were the guardians of civic morals against the free-for-all of the market - a positive moral force:

> It is therefore extremely important that economic life should be regulated, should have its moral standards raised, so that the conflicts that disturb it have an end, and further, that individuals should cease to live this within a moral vacuum... For in this order of social functions there is need for professional ethics to be established... (Durkheim, 1957, p.12).

In contrast, there was the belief that professions existed as part of the neo-liberal market – professional status acting as a means to gain advantage over competitors, through restricting access ('closure') to occupational groups (Weber[6], 1978).

The concept of professionalism contributes, in the main, to one of these models which, I will argue, mirrors the seemingly contradictory functions of service user and carer involvement under investigation here. For example, are they regulators, necessary because social workers have too much power, or are they assisting in the professional task? Thus, issues around power and domination are considered as contributing to Weberian or neo-Weberian models, as they might apply to the involvement of service users and carers in social work. Writers critical of professionalism, such as Illich et al. (1977), Witz (1992), Johnson (1979) and Finlay (2000), have been considered as being consistent with the Weberian tradition, including those associated with conflict theory and market control theory (Eraut, 1994). Considering neo-Marxists such as Illich in this way has been justified by others (Macdonald, 1995; Murphy, 1990). Murphy argues that Marxist theory and Weberian closure theory differ only in their predictions concerning the fate of the professions, not in their purpose (Murphy, 1990). Callinicos, in discussion of the social theory of history, inadvertently reinforces this point:

> It is almost a truism that the basic choice in social theory is that between Marx and Weber. Weber – the 'bourgeois Marx' – is the only social theorist comparable to Marx in conceptual acuity and historical range [but]… Their political stances represent a dramatic opposition… (1995, p.110)

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[6] First published posthumously in Germany in 1920, the year that Weber died.

Their point of divergence was in regard to power and domination; Weber saw it as universal and pluralistic, while for Marx it was inextricably bound up with class exploitation and, under certain circumstances, could be abolished (Callinicos, 1995).

Literature and research concerned with 'new managerialism' (Harris, 1998; Lymbery, 2000), mentioned earlier, and its effect on the professions, is perceived as contributing to a Weberian model because of its emphasis on power. In a general sense, this is an approach which might be seen to cross the boundaries of both Durkheimian and Weberian approaches, but this is understandable since there are some similarities between the two models.   Both emphasise the important relationship between professionalism and liberal market forces. However, they differ fundamentally in regard to the purpose of professionals. The possession of expert professional knowledge from a Durkheimian perspective is one of the tools that professionals possess, to be used in the interests of the community, whilst for Weberians, it can be regarded as a boundary-setting activity.

Therefore, writers concerned with the ethical aspects of professionalism and the professional project in a positive sense, that is, the development of professional status (for example, Macdonald, 1995; Lymbery, 2000), are considered as contributing to a Durkheimian model, including those writers associated with a positivist approach generally (for example Parsons, 1958; Merton & Storey, 1973).

To summarise, it should be noted that there are other ways of classifying the literature on professionalism. For example, Frost (2001) prefers to use Johnson's (1979) approach, concentrating on the one hand on those that attempt to define the traits of professionalism and those that examine the role and function of professionalism (functionalism), and then also considering the issue of power.

4.2.   Professionals as Moral and Ethical Guardians

Durkheim (1957) argued that the State, although a moral institution, could not regulate the various functions of the market economy except at a very general level (Thompson, 1982). He believed that professions existed in order to protect those civic morals that free market economies undermined, and was critical of those who advocated free-market policies (and 'scientific' theories of socialism based on economic theory), believing instead in self-regulating activities within each occupational group, based on ethical principles.

> Therefore, the true cure for the evil is to give the professional groups in the economic order a stability they so far do not possess. While the craft union or corporate body is nowadays only a collection of individuals who have no lasting ties to one with another, it must become or return to being a well-defined and organised association (Durkheim, 1957, p.13).

From this perspective, the involvement of service users and carers could be conceptualised as assisting the professional (moral) task or, alternatively, as a threat to the distinctiveness of the professional.

Professionalism and the professional ethic can be seen as being pre-requisites for the functioning of a market economy operating in a complex society (Marquand, 1997). Markets depend on knowledge, and consumers need to have knowledge of goods and services in order to purchase them. In the absence of this knowledge, information asymmetry renders the market imperfect. The 'market' for professionals rests on trust as a proxy for 'product knowledge' and in this context, consumers of professional services trust the qualification to provide value. Professional services are necessary for a complex market economy, but are non-marketable. Thus, professional ethics are not just a self-serving ideological position, as Weberian critics

propose, but a response to a social need, and require the bearer to buy into values, as well as a qualification:

> Professionals are allowed to rig the market by controlling entry and regulating supply. In return, they internalise a set of values which prevent them from abusing their market power. They refrain from exploiting their clients, not because they are afraid of competition from other professionals, but because they believe it to be wrong to do so (Marquand, 1997, p.145).

4.2.1. Traits which indicate professionalism

Trust, within this conceptualisation, is considered a trait that differentiate*s* professional occupations from non-professional occupations (Goode, 1969; Millerson, 1998[7]). But there are others, such as the possession of expert knowledge (Goode, 1969). Goode identifies seven major characteristics which affect the acceptance of an occupation as a profession, all of which relate to the knowledge base:

> Knowledge and skills should be abstract and organised into a codified body of principles;
>
> The knowledge should be applicable, or thought to be applicable, to concrete problems;
>
> Society should believe that the knowledge can solve these problems;
>
> Members of society should accept that these problems be given over to some occupational group for solution;
>
> The profession itself should help to create, organise and transmit the knowledge;
>
> The profession should be accepted as the final arbiter in any disputes over the validity of any technical solution lying within its area of supposed competence;

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[7] Published originally in 1968 and reprinted in 1998.

> The amount of knowledge and skills and the difficulty of acquiring them should be great enough that the members of the society view the profession as possessing a kind of mystery that it is not given to the ordinary man to acquire, by his own efforts even with help (Goode, 1969, pp.277-278).

Social work would not fit these criteria, since they lack the acceptance and independence required and, although there is a claim to expert professional knowledge, this is contested (Webb, 2001).

However, the attempt to define professions by the traits they possess was deemed largely unsuccessful for three main reasons: there were few common traits, some were culturally specific, and the lists appeared to reflect the particular author's preferences (Eraut, 1994). According to Eraut (1994), these discussions around traits simply drew attention to the issue of power that professional occupations possessed. This in turn developed into a debate between functionalist theorists (for example, Parsons, 1958; Merton et al., 1973), who emphasised the role of professional knowledge as the defining characteristic of professions, and conflict theorists (for example, Illich et al., 1977; Marcuse, 2001), who followed the same logic in reverse, concentrating on the power that professionals derived from their 'superior knowledge' (Eraut, 1994).

However, the notion of traits was relevant for this study partly because it was an identifiable debate to which service users and carers could usefully contribute. It might not be possible to develop a set of universal traits for all professionals, but it is possible to ascertain what people believe are useful traits in the professionals they come into contact with. For example, Farnfield, relying on research and his "less formalised reflection on everyday practice with children and families", found that the profession of the person offering help mattered very little (1998, p.59). "Whether you

see a psychiatrist, a social worker, an art therapist or a community nurse seems less important than the application of core skills and the degree to which they discharge the role" of the helpful professional (Farnfield, 1998, p.59). This ideal type is, firstly: empathetic, available, confident, eager to listen, understanding, able to talk to service users, able to help them make decisions, is open and trustworthy, and is someone who has the service user in mind (Farnfield, 1998). Kindness and sympathy, he found, were not made explicit, but there was considerable emphasis placed on listening and genuineness. The second order of helpful professional, he says, is the person 'who makes things happen' and thirdly, the helpful professional is one that "has the child in mind… This is a peculiarly 'adult' responsibility, in that it may be independent of the wishes of the child" (Farnfield, 1998, p.60). Distancing between professionals and service users can, in some circumstances, be beneficial (Malin et al., 2002).

These traits might be desirable, but how can they be enforced? One solution is that professions should possess a written code of conduct (Millerson, 1988) as the way to protect against incompetence, carelessness and exploitation (Eraut, 1994). Millerson found that in the UK, only one-fifth of 'qualifying'[8] associations had a written code of conduct (Millerson, 1998, p.148).

4.2.2. Regulation and professionalism

Of course, Millerson's study was carried out in the 1960s, and so these results cannot be taken as an accurate record today, but it is informative to reflect on the possible reasons why this was the case. One reason could be that professionals can be trusted and therefore do not need written codes of conduct, or it could be an indication that these groups do not prioritise dealing with professional misconduct;

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[8] An association which could qualify as a profession, out of approximately 160.

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unfortunately, it is almost impossible to assess why. What can be assessed are the efforts made to control conduct and professional effectiveness (Millerson, 1998). Thus, service user and carer involvement as a means to regulate professional misconduct does not necessarily undermine its professional function.

Others argue that professional status is being undermined by regulation (Broadbent, et al.,1997). This is because "institutional control is being degraded by the introduction of systems of individual accountability based on customer reaction" (Broadbent et al., 1997, p.1). However, social work has always been subject to the institutional control of the State, and has never been self-regulating, so there is no evidence that service user and carer involvement need undermine what professional status is possessed, from a regulatory point of view.

4.2.3. The professional project

Yet perhaps the involvement of service users and carers undermines social work's desire for professional status, the 'professional project', which it has not yet succeeded in gaining (Casey & Allen, 2004). In sociology, "the professional project is understood as a collective endeavour of occupational groups that only succeeds if those groups possess, and control access to, a unique stock of knowledge" (Casey & Allen, 2004, p.395). Some argue that occupations such as social work have sought to improve their status and maximise their degree of occupational control (Witz, 1992; Macdonald, 1995; Limbery, 2000). With regard to social work, it is argued that the lobbying which was a crucial factor in the passage of the Local Authority Social Services Act in 1970 (Hill, 1993) can be seen as an attempt by the social work profession to increase its power, status and prestige. One of the ways in which it sought to accomplish this was to present the social work task in such a way as to

emphasise its professional nature and intellectual complexity (Butrym, 1976; England, 1986). Recently the 'Left' critique of professionalism has been revised by some writers concerned about the rise in managerialism generally, and what they argue is the deprofessionalisation of some social work functions, particularly in regard to adult services and community care (Healy & Meagher, 2004). One response has been to see the professional project as an outcome of the bureaucratisation of monopoly capitalism; independent professionals are increasingly being forced into employed positions *(*Abbott, 2005*)* serving the interests of the economy (McKinlay & Arches, 1985). On the other hand, it is argued that the professional project in social work is built on a recognition of the potential for professional knowledge to be used in the interests of service users, while at the same time maintaining wariness towards elitist professional claims (Leonard, 1997; Lymbery, 2000; Healy & Meagher, 2004).

4.2.4. The semi-profession

Within the professional project, some writers, and in particular those concerned with the classification of professional traits mentioned earlier, (Williams, 1993, for example), describe a move towards a new understanding of professionalism, namely a category of "semi-professions" (e.g. nursing, social work) which involves a greater importance given to the personal qualities of the professional than to the importance of 'expert' knowledge (Williams, 1993). The term 'semi-professions' derives from Etzioni (1969), who sought to explain changes in society heralded by the growth of professional occupations. The 'semi' nature of this type of profession, according to Goode, is not supposed to signify inferiority, but rather an occupation which is half-way to becoming one of the "four great, traditional person professions" (1969, p.266)

i.e. the law, medicine, university teaching and the ministry[9]. Teachers, nurses and social workers were the 'semi' professions identified in 1969. Etzioni's (1969) central thesis, namely the professionalisation of industrial society and how a profession comes in to existence, is not of concern here (an account more or less dismissed within the literature (Eraut, 1994). The relevance is, firstly, the idea that professionalism as a concept can be manipulated to reflect more accurately the activities of those occupational groups which are possibly less dependent on expert knowledge and more dependent on personal attributes. Secondly, the concept of a semi-profession goes some way to acknowledging the lack of independence social workers appear to have in comparison with other professional groups, whose own independence might now be in question (Gladstone, 2002).

Ward (2006) argues that social workers as professionals are not involved in the political process in the same way as, for example, clinicians. Therefore, changes (or cuts) in services tend to be accepted by those agencies which employ social workers, whereas the medical profession fights its corner (Roach Anleu, 1992).

4.2.5. The role of abstract expert knowledge and professional legitimation

Since it was increasingly difficult to identify universal traits that identified an occupation as a profession, the possession of expert knowledge as the defining category (Goode, 1969; Abbott, 1988) needed consideration. Professionalism is one way in which society structures expert labour, but there are 'many alternatives' (Abbott, 1988, p.323). There are experts that we do not always refer to as professionals (such as plumbers and electricians, for example).

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[9] It is hard to accept that a description of something as only half-way towards being something does not signify inferiority to some extent.

In order to achieve status, professionals need, then, to stress the distinctness of their knowledge, "…the undoubted authenticity of their altruism and the responsibility of their members" (Malin et al., 2002, p.25). This assumes that there is some body of knowledge which is in the possession of the social work profession, a notion that is contested (Webb, 2001). The concept of empirical practice is itself problematic in regard to social work professional accountability, because it is very difficult to isolate practitioners' interventions as a cause of any changes which might have come about in the lives of service users, although developing ways to evaluate practice is a growing research area (Cheetham & Kazi, 1998). In addition, professional accountability is not solely concerned with justifying a method of intervention; it is also about judging whether this or that method is the superior or more appropriate one (Wakefield & Kirk, 1996). Witkin (1996) argues that if one moves away from the 'meta theory' of empirical practice, then accountability can include being accountable to oppressed service users, and can include challenging existing forms of oppression (Reid & Zeergren, 1999).

This question of expert professional knowledge can be explained more generally:

> The claim to expertise then is doubly challenged – first, by the questioning of expertise by different social groups, and second, by the pace of organisation and knowledge-based change they face. The fragmentation of social consensus around what "expertise" is and the undermining of authority-based claims will lead to a series of tensions for professions and professionalism (Frost, 2001, p.11).

This paradox (Evetts, 2005) needs clarification. For some (for example, Donzelot, 1979; Pease & Fook, 1999; Frost, 2001; Evetts, 2005; Parton, 2008), this clarification can be obtained by considering the analyses of Foucault (1980a) and, in particular, attempting to identify the distinguishing characteristics and "at the level of the

discursive what 'rules of formation' operate in social work" (Parton, 2008, p.254). It is argued that social work knowledge itself is paradoxical, since it is concerned with the subjective within some sort of universal (objective) (Philp, 1979, cited in Parton, 2008). Therefore, "Personal and social change comes about by unravelling the discursive power of dominant discourses and re-creating ourselves as the basis for a collective politics of the future" (Pease & Fook, 1999, p.15).

4.2.6. Subjugated and naive knowledge

Some writers isolate this tendency towards the discursive rather than the experiential as a major problem with Foucauldian analysis (Archer, 2000). However, in his discussion of subjugated and naïve knowledges, Foucault seems to contradict this view. He argues that subjugated knowledge refers, on the one hand, to

> ...the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemisation... Subjugated knowledges are thus those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and which criticism – which obviously draws upon scholarship – has been able to reveal (Foucault, 1980a, pp.81-82).

Since academics dominate the production of knowledge, it is not surprising that it is the subjugated aspect of knowledge which tends to attract academic discussion.

The other meaning is what Foucault calls 'naive knowledges', located

> …low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity... a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it – that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work (1980a, p.82)

It would be misleading to argue that the work of Foucault originates from, or necessarily contributes to, Durkheim's (1957) model of professionalism, but aspects of his work can contribute to the debate surrounding the power of professional knowledge and, in particular, to the question of who benefits from the professional project. The policy of involving service users and carers in admissions, with their naive knowledge, can be seen as a criticism of the specialist knowledge of social work, since admissions are located within Higher Education. Inextricably linked with this is the moral and ethical justification for professionalism, which is a necessary component, and yet can also be interpreted as being contested by the policy of involving service users and carers in the admissions, since, for example, it undermines the notion of expert knowledge and skill.

This is particularly important in regard to the moral and ethical features of social work professionalism which, when questioned, can highlight the position of service users' and carers' naive knowledge within the social work discourse (Foucault 1980a), and open up their potential to contribute to the professional project (Reid & Zeergren, 1999; Frost, 2001). It opens to scrutiny the whole area of social work knowledge and what is perceived as knowledge – for example, the knowledge held by professionals about service users, which might include the knowledge produced through research but also the personal details surrounding service users' experiences.

Foucault (1980a) is primarily concerned with the relationship between knowledge and the power it bestows on people, and how particular knowledge claims become dominant; so for Foucault, the study of subjugated knowledge is a study of the

> ...historical knowledge of struggles. In the specialised areas of erudition,
> as in the disqualified, popular knowledge, there lay the memory of

> hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the
> margins of knowledge (Foucault, 1980a, p.83).

This conceptualisation is helpful in explaining the relevance of service users' and carers' experience of social work when studying their involvement in social work admissions.

4.2.7. Professional identity

Day et al. (2006), in their paper regarding teachers' identity, trace the development of the subjective professional self, arguing that it is a flexible identity similar to what they call the personal self. They attempt to isolate the component parts of this multi-faceted identity. Professional identity, they argue, evolves over time and reconstructs when necessary, and manages the contradictions and tensions along with both the positive and negative emotional effects on the individuals' own identities, all of which have positive and negative effects on the service they provide (Day et al., 2006). Therefore, just as we cannot assume that professional identity is static or binary (as both Durkheim and Weber seem to assume), we must question whether service users and carers can similarly be taken as given (Silverman, 2010).

4.2.8. Linked ecologies and the professions

Abbott (2005) conceptualises professions as competing ecologies made up of actors who wish to "aggrandize" themselves, taking over work which they constitute in "jurisdiction" by means of professional knowledge systems (Abbott, 2005, p.246). He differentiates his approach to social work professionalism from functionalist accounts, which generally conceptualise social work as a profession of interstituality. His account talks of an ecological approach, as discussed in the previous chapter, in which social work emerges from a variety of social "boundary groups" into a defensible area, or "turf" (Abbott, 1995, p.545). He justifies this approach by

considering why areas of social work responsibility have been both absorbed and lost (e.g. probation). He points to the differing origins and competing ontological origins of the more scientific and individualistic charities, and the more political and community action-oriented settlements, with the former victors then absorbing occupational groupings (for example psychiatric social work).   Abbott (1995) differentiates his account from functionalist accounts, but does not reject them and, rather, sees his approach as a development. Conflict is implicit in the account, but it is not really clear why, other than being due to self-aggrandisement. Nonetheless, as will be shown in Chapter Six, his approach was useful when trying to identify and conceptualise some of the tensions which arose in the study.

To sum up, the Durkheimian model of professionals as necessary moral and ethical guardians of integrity informed this study, firstly, in regard to the normative, 'moral' justification for professional projects and the significance of professional traits which the social work profession might possess, and which service user and carer involvement might expand upon. However, the professionalisation of social work is theoretically problematic, since it does not fit the classical model as identified by Durkheim (1957). One solution to this conceptual problem was to confer 'semi-professional' status, along with similar professions such as teaching and nursing. Another was to identify social work as part of a growing number of occupations seeking professional status ('the professional project') by emphasizing their skills base. However, these explanations, although they go some way to explaining how to classify the social work professional project, do not explain why service users and carers should be involved in the selection of social work students, or what their role in this activity signifies.

Expert knowledge was discussed, not just because of its primary importance as an identifiable professional attribute, but also because of its contested nature. The power and status associated with certain types of knowledge, in particular with what Foucault (1980a) referred to as subjugated knowledge and naïve knowledge, introduced the notion of power in regard to knowledge, calling into question all cultural knowledge (not just that associated with social work) (Foucault 1980b). Indeed, "if there is no truth but many truths constructed through discourse, then in the end is there any way of knowing whether the practice is 'good', 'good enough', 'poor' or even 'corrupt'?" (Everitt & Hardiker, 1996, p.105). The alternative view of professions as occupational elites which dominate and exploit is equally relevant, and is discussed in more detail in the following section.

4.3. Power, Domination and Closure as Features of the Professions

Foucault argues that "theory is a toolkit" to help us understand "power relations and the struggles around them" (Foucault, 1980c, p.145). The concern that professional occupations can exploit their position of power was originally put forward by Weber (1978), although it would be misleading to argue that Foucault followed in the Weberian sociological tradition. For Weber (1978), societies are not held together by contractual relationships, agreeing with Durkheim (1957) here, or moral consensus and trust (Durkheim, 1957), but by power. From this perspective, professionalisation directly relates to 'domination': "a special case of power" (Parkin, 1982, p.74) – more subtle and less obvious than overt power. There are two types. One arises from the control of economic resources in the marketplace, and the other originates from authority of office (Parkin, 1982, p.74). It is this second type of domination, the

'legitimate' power that professionals possess and are able to exploit (Weber, 1978), which is of interest here.

Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in their edited collection of essays by Weber, provide this insight into this view of professionalism:

> Weber thus identifies bureaucracy with rationality and the process of rationalization with mechanism, depersonalization, and oppressive routine. Rationality, in this context, is seen as adverse to personal freedom… He deplores the type of man that the mechanization and the routine of bureaucracy selects and forms. The narrowed professional, publicly certified and examined, and ready for tenure and career. His craving for security is balanced by his moderate ambitions and he is rewarded by the honour of official status. This type of man Weber deplored as a petty routine creature, lacking in heroism, human spontaneity, and inventiveness (1970, p.50).

Whilst Durkheim (1957) saw professional groups as occupational groups, bound by codes of ethics, acting independently to protect civic morals, Weber (1978) saw the same groups establishing monopolistic, 'closed' organisations, working to advance their own interests. In social work, however, the situation is complicated by various factors, not least, as already mentioned, the fact that the professionalisation of social work was initiated by the State. Social work after the Second World War was carried out by welfare workers employed as 'officers' rather than 'professionals' (Miller, 2004, p.22). They were not referred to in deferential terms by service users, but rather as someone 'from the welfare', and there was a "virtual absence of formal qualifications for all but a few state welfare workers" (Miller, 2004, p.22). It was the State that pushed for the professionalisation of social work. The better educated of these 'new' welfare professionals became disillusioned with the slow pace of welfare reform, and any ambition for professional recognition was further undermined by a lack of conviction amongst a significant proportion of public sector employees, who

rejected the implicit elitism of professionalism, and opted instead for a trade union identity (Miller, 2004, p.23).

This can be contrasted with the profession which seeks to control and restrict access to a privileged market position. The challenge for welfare professionals is to "disentangle the relationship between discretion and knowledge on the one hand and elitism and reward on the others… and behave as contributing partners in addressing complexity and uncertainty" (Miller, 2004, p.24). Knowledge, including the knowledge gained about service users, can then be used constructively to help all partners in the care scenario: service user, professional and carer (Douke, 2003).

Independent professionals are increasingly being replaced by salaried employees working for organisations, rather than for themselves (McKinlay & Arches, 1985). This reflects the transformation of capitalism from competitive capitalism to monopoly capitalism, a process of bureaucratisation (Murphy, 1990) whereby professional power becomes less and less necessary. This analysis can explain the policy of service user and carer involvement in admissions as part of the process of social work deprofessionalisation, despite the language of policy seeming to argue the opposite (Healy & Meagher, 2004). It also provides one explanation for the contradiction between, on the one hand, extending the social work qualification and introducing registration, whilst at the same time making social workers more accountable, by, for example, involving service users and carers in admissions. The notion that social work developed into a "hierarchic bureau-professionalism" (or managerialism) during the 1970s (Sibeon, 1991, p.124) has some empirical support (Whittington & Bellaby, 1979), and provides support to the proposal by some that if the bureaucratisation can be brought about by lobbying, then transferring power to

service users and local people might be equally feasible (Rojek, 1989). In order to consider this argument, the concept of managerialism needs to be explored.

4.3.1. Involvement as a response to managerialism

It is apparent that managerialism has impacted on, and changed, social work, as exemplified by increased regulation of practice (Burt & Worsley, 2008). This further affects the capacity of the social worker to make independent judgements, and limits their professional discretion and professional autonomy (for example, Jones & Joss, 1995; Howe, 1996). Howe argues from a post-modern perspective, and states that the professional activity of social work has changed, so that,

> Less and less is the social worker expected, or indeed allowed, to make any independent on-the-spot judgement or diagnosis of what is the matter. Less and less is the social worker likely to respond with a tailor-made professional intervention based on his or her own knowledge and skills… The emphasis is on competencies rather than professional skills (1996, p.92).

The increased use of government-initiated checklists for use in practice illustrates this point (Howe, 1996). One problem with this account is that it is largely theoretical and retrospective; were social workers ever really that independent, and did the knowledge base warrant such confident professional decision making? Some argue that these debates are not particularly fruitful, because of their reliance on the discursive rather than the experiential (Archer, 2002; Beresford & Croft, 2001), as mentioned earlier.

> While post-modern discussion of social work theory has helped connect it with broader contemporary theoretical discussions and highlighted the social production of theory, it hasn't resulted in a radical reassessment of the role of service users in social work theory building (Beresford & Croft, 2001, p.1).

This is not quite the case; for example, service users were involved in the design of the new degree and also the requirement for universities offering the new degree to involve service users (Ward, 2006). However, despite generous funding for these developments being made available, implementation has been patchy (Levin, 2004). Since responsibility for implementing the involvement strategy in the new social work degree has been largely left to individual universities (GSCC, 2003), this is not altogether surprising. We might assume that the involvement initiative is a policy established to counter ineffective managerialism within the social work profession. Even if this were the case, we cannot assume that the policy was a serious attempt to do so.

4.3.2. Professions as disablers

There are some writers who emphasise the power and domination element within Weber's model to such an extent that they see no benefit in the existence of professions. This is exemplified by the arguments put forward by Illich et al. (1977). They focus on the power and domination achieved by professionals, in order, they argue, to individualise and exploit the problems experienced by people in modernised societies, and they argue that professional power leads to disablement rather than enablement. This professional power/dominance was achieved through identifying individualised public problems and then pathologising the people who suffered from them (Illich et al., 1977).

With regard to social work, this disabling process was achieved by removing 'need' from its social context and then defining the needy person as the problem. The person is then defined as 'deficient'. Specialisation further objectifies the client and the literature supporting these helping professionals reinforces this process. A

market is then created for professionals and the "self-interested systems, with inherently disabling effects" (McKnight, 1977, p.91). Donzelot (1979) takes this further, arguing that welfare exists to support what he deduces is in effect a policing role with families. From this perspective, service user and carer involvement in admissions is, therefore, a continuance of this deception.

However, not all writers who emphasise the organisational and structural constraints on social work reject the notion of professionalism. The possibility that social work was potentially making things worse for vulnerable people led some, at the time, to propose a radical form of social work practice (Bailey & Brake, 1975; Corrigan & Leonard, 1979). Like Illich et al. (1977), they sympathised with welfare workers who were disillusioned with the welfare state and their controlling role within it. These writers established a critical tradition in social work practice which has, in part, led to the notion of community social work, anti-oppressive practice and the importance of involving service users. Some believe that critical interpretations should be attached to the notion of social work professionalism, arguing that they can provide support for social work's distinctive knowledge, values and skills, and encourage progressive user-centred practice (Dominelli, 2002; Raser & Matthews, 2008; Smith, 2008; Beresford, 2011). The trouble with this approach is that it neither explains how critical practices co-exist alongside the identified contradictory function of statutory social work, nor does it explain how it accords with state control of the professional project.

Weberian and neo-Weberian critical accounts remind us that professions are not necessarily the decent and honourable organisations that Durkheim (1957) described. Members of professional organisations can exploit their position of power

and status, activities which are the antithesis of what social work claims to be. Social work continues to have[10], the professional project imposed upon it by the State. This does not mean that some social workers cannot exercise their power and status. However, it is equally possible and plausible that they are not primarily concerned with doing so.

4.4.   Summary

This has been a dense and full review of the literature, the purpose of which was to tease out issues that might later be reflected in the research. It was beyond the scope of the research design described below to test the strength of all these theoretical perspectives; however, they will serve to illuminate the analysis of the data collected in the course of the study.

Consideration of the literature on professionalism demonstrates the tensions that exist in regard to professional boundaries, positionality, power and status in relation to service user involvement and the role of the State. On the one hand, Durkheimians justify professional power as a means whereby citizens can be protected from market forces: the protection which professionals might provide for vulnerable people against a free market economy. Social work attracts those that 'want to make a difference' in people's lives (Ferguson & Woodward, 2009), and who sometimes do (Farnfield, 1998; Reid & Zeergren, 1999): moral people who can be trusted (Marquand, 1997).

On the other hand, there are problems with this professional project, which Weberians highlight. It is elitist and can be restrictive to the extent that it is harmful (Illich et al., 1977). Professional justification through the possession of specialist

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[10] For example, the Social Work Reform Board, 2010 and the Munro Review, 2010.

knowledge is problematic and contested, and it is who social workers work with which seems to differentiate it, rather than specialist knowledge (Abbott, 1995; 2005). One of the aims of the study, therefore, was to ascertain whether service user and carer involvement in social work admissions informed this debate, and in what ways.

Chapter 5: Trust, Mistrust and Risk

As mentioned in Chapter Four, trust is a key element of the professional 'mandate' and lack of trust in social work educators is a plausible explanation for the policy of involving service users and carers in admissions. However, trust, and more specifically broken trust, was also a theme in the way participants represented their negative experiences of social work. As discussed in the previous chapter, trust is a fundamental component of Durkheim's (1957) definition of a profession, and one of the issues that sets it apart from Weber's "petty routine creature, lacking in heroism, human spontaneity, and inventiveness" (Gerth et al., 1970, p.50). It is from this perspective that trust can be perceived as the moral pre-requisite for the professional mandate. In public services in general, a perceived erosion of public trust has been seen as the underpinning rationale for increased intervention (Power, 1994) and the development of systems of regulation and compliance which generate confidence (Fukuyama, 1995; Smith, 2001). This chapter's exploration of some of the debates around trust in relation to social work is a significant backdrop for interpreting service user and carer responses to the process of involvement in recruitment. As Smith argues, the relationship between assumptions of trust, and the language of empowerment and entitlement, is complex and riven with potential contradictions (2001).

This discussion therefore explores the significance of trust at the broader social level, in terms of whether it represents an aspect of a moral value system, or is a more functional normative assumption that enables any social transaction to take place. It also explores trust as an aspect of individual relationships between social

worker and service user, and considers how trust in such circumstances is grounded.

5.1.   Trust as a Social Norm

Smith has identified the way in which trust was an essential component of social work's value system in the era when the relationship between social worker and 'client' was seen as therapeutic (2001). However, it can be argued that trust, rather than being a moral activity, is essentially normative, allowing actions which would otherwise prove problematic if trust was absent (Coleman, 1990). Trust involves a voluntary transfer of resources which can be physical, ontological or financial, although there are problems in relying solely on normative pressures, because

> ...few such normative systems… are perfectly effective, since, as in all
> normative systems, it is to the interest of each to violate the norm as
> long as sanctions can be avoided (although it is also to the interest of
> each that others observe the norm) (Coleman, 1990, p.116).

Only very small, tight communities would be able to rely on social norms alone to enforce trust, so it is argued that formal regimes of compliance, backed by the power to coerce and enforce, may operate at the social level; some argue that where this is the case, it is more appropriate to talk of confidence rather than trust (Gambetta, 1988). This concern with the normative aspect of trust, as pointed out earlier, can be traced back to Durkheim (1957)[11] and more recently Talcott Parsons (1958), who attempted to classify trust within a functional approach related to moral obligations and a sense of duty more generally. From this perspective, macro sources of trust arise from the institutional environment of laws, norms, values, standards and agencies for their enforcement, and yield 'institutional-based trust' (Nooteboom,

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[11] Although this collection of essays was published in 1957, the essays were written much earlier on various dates. Durkheim lived from 1858 to 1917.

2006). Micro sources of trustworthiness arise in specific relations, called 'thick' trust. This distinction can be linked to particularistic sources (Deutsch, 1973, p.55), and impersonal, institutional sources versus personalised sources of trust (Shapiro, 1987; Bachmann, 2006).

5.2.   The Moral and Ethical Aspects of Trust

Some argue that these differentiations are incomplete because they do not account for the moral and ethical aspects of trust; the normative must include moral and ethical conceptualisations (Banerjee et al., 2006; Coleman, 1990).

> Thus to say that a person or organisation is trustworthy is normally to praise or commend… Also the 'trust' occurs in discourse about truth telling or contracts… A trustworthy party is one that will not unfairly exploit vulnerabilities of the other parties in the relationship (Banerjee et al., 2006, p.308).

But this view is problematic, since trust is not necessarily a virtue: "Though trust is essential for moral relations, this does not imply that all instances of trust are moral occasions" (Brenkert, 1998, p.278). Trust may not be reciprocated and should be distinguished from trustworthiness, the latter being an evaluation of whether someone is worthy of trust. Although trust, morality and ethical behaviour are linked and valued by some societies and cultures, there are some instances where trust can serve immoral ends, such as the trust some criminal gangs require from members. Despite this, it is argued that trust has an intrinsic value; like 'courage', we value it even in circumstances we do not support or think are foolish (Brenkert, 1998).

Despite the growth in trust research, particularly in regard to organisational settings, there is a bias of optimism in the research, in that all the existing studies stress the

benefits trust can bring to the parties involved, rather than considering the disadvantages (Gargiulo & Ertug, 2006). Trusting can

> ...result in extremely low levels of monitoring and safe-guards to a relationship, both of which facilitate opportunistic behaviour by the trustee and reduce the trustor's ability to both detect opportunism and to control its negative effect (Gargiulo & Ertug, 2006, p.77).

Therefore, although service users and carers may, for whatever reasons, place their trust in social work professionals, it might not necessarily be in their interests to do so.

5.3.   Trust as a Social Construction

In contrast, trust can also be perceived as socially and culturally constructed. Although there may be general norms of fairness which underpin trust, they do not cover all situations; for example, a game of poker or a job interview, where one is not necessarily expected to act fairly and integrity can be something of a moving target (Banerjee et al., 2006). One manifestation of integrity may be to not take advantage of the vulnerabilities of others but, as Banerjee et al. argue, "competition and capitalism [are] all about taking advantage" (2006, p.309). Of course, Durkheimians would argue that it is precisely because of these values that we need professionals. This is particularly so in regard to social work with its, albeit constructed, value base.

However, since public goods are socially constructed, it can be argued that they can be socially deconstructed (Grahl, 2007). Wood & Roper (2007) argue that it is a key part of the neoliberal project to deny or diminish the public character of service activities which it intends to privatise and/or deregulate. Indeed, it might suit those in power to prefer less 'worker-friendly' employment practices, in order to make them more acceptable within the private sector (Wood & Roper, 2007). The involvement

policy, in this respect, in a similar way to regimes of audit and inspection, could be interpreted as a subtle attempt by the State to erode the credibility of professional social work interventions, and thus to open the door for deregulation of social work education without appearing to have the intention to do so.

5.4. Trust and Risk

Trust is therefore a complicated concept, with objective and subjective elements which can operate at individual, organisational and societal levels. It can exist between people at the same level and between different levels (Banerjee, Bowie & Pavone, 2006), and is an essential component of professional accountability, and in the constructive uses of knowledge in particular (Douek, 2003). In relation to this study in particular, it is a fundamental component of the social worker's relationship with service users (Guttmann, 2006). The 'fiduciary' (trust) relationship:

> …is the central nucleus in social worker-client relationships. Included in this concept are the autonomy and privacy of the clients and the risk they are taking. These are what clients value and risk most when they ask for help… Social work has a value perspective that is beyond the scientific basis, the expertise, the skills, and professional values that are characteristic of a helping profession… trust and empathy are the soul of the profession (Guttmann, 2006, p.146).

This 'fiduciary' relationship is not restricted to that between social worker and client – it also involves the employing agencies. Guttmann's (2006) work is concerned primarily with US and Israeli social work, but reflects a popular perception of one sort of relationship which should exist between social workers, service users and carers, even without empirical justification (Smith, 2004). Paradoxically, it is the perceived failure of social work in carrying out effective risk assessments which has contributed to the perceived untrustworthiness of social workers. Miller cautions the families he works with in the statutory sector "not to trust (him) until they get to know him" (2009,

p.121) and yet, two chapters later, we are reminded by Crichton-Hill that 'mutual trust', 'shared decision-making' and 'reciprocal relationships' are conceptual themes running through the social work literature on family work (Crichton-Hill, 2009, p.186). Trust is therefore paradoxical in many ways and not just in relation to social work.

Nooteboom (2006) lists nine paradoxical characteristics of trust. He argues that trust:

> Goes beyond self-interest but has limits;
>
> Entails a state of mind and a type of action;
>
> May concern competence or intentions;
>
> Is based on information and the lack of it;
>
> Is rational and emotional;
>
> Is an expectation but not a probability;
>
> Is needed but can have adverse effects;
>
> May be broken and deepened by conflict;
>
> Is both a basis and an outcome of relations (Nooteboom, 2006)

This list highlights the various and conflicting ways that trust can be used (and abused), but also emphasises the negative aspects of trust for both the trustor and the trustee. Some argue that when trust is enforced, we might be better to refer to it as confidence (Nooteboom, 2006). Nooteboom (2006) is concerned primarily with trust in market situations, but distinguishing between enforced trust and trust given voluntarily is a useful differentiation in regard to this study, since most users of social services have little choice when it comes to which social worker they get, particularly if risk is involved.

5.5.   Trust, Risk and Regulation

Regulation is the means by which professions traditionally defend service users against breaches of trust, along with codes of ethics which supposedly defend the user against the possibility of unethical behaviour (Guttmann, 2006, p.147). External regulation is another means by which service users and carers might be protected in this way; although, if one accepts Durkheim's (1957) basic premise, discussed earlier, that professionals are needed precisely because they are independent of the State and market, this is rather contradictory (Evetts, 2005).

The idea that we should substitute regulation for voluntary trust as a means of protecting vulnerable groups from market forces is a powerful argument (Wilson, 1984; Stanford & Vosco, 2004). However, explaining the sources of regulation in this way only accounts for the phenomenon in terms of public interest, originating from situations where "regulation results when legislation mobilised by a broad social movement or energised by a dramatic crisis" (Wilson, 1984, p.84). Self-interest can also be a motive for instigating regulation, where "regulation results when an industry successfully uses its political influence to obtain legal protection for itself to impose legal burden on its rivals" (Wilson, 1984, p.84). Since social work was professionalised by the State, the latter does not seem, on the face of it, to be applicable.   However, it might be argued that self-interest plays a part in that it enables policy makers, on behalf of the State, to classify wider social problems resulting from, for example, market forces, as opposed to problems of trust in welfare professionals.

Giddens (1990) argues that it is the manipulation of trust that is more prominent in this process. In this sense, trust is synonymous with having confidence in the reliability of people or systems. Some of these exist regardless of the society one finds oneself in, basically because human life is risk-laden. With the onset of modernity, this trust is undermined because communities and family ties are undermined and faith (religious faith, for example) is questioned. These relationships are restructured with regard to trust via two mechanisms – the first being symbolic tokens (such as money), and the second being expert systems, such as professionals (Giddens, 1990). Modernity, whilst on the one hand increasing our sense of insecurity, also demands trust in what are effectively abstract systems. From this perspective of perceived lack of trustworthiness, and therefore accountability, scepticism concerning university social work academics being responsible for recruitment is justifiable, and the employment of service user and carer involvement as a kind of auditing tool can be seen as an understandable and even positive move. If this is the case, however, then the status of social work knowledge must also be called into question. This is not just an issue in regard to professional legitimation, but also one of security – the fiduciary relationship which Guttmann (2006) identifies, mentioned earlier.

Security is the fundamental task of social work and is evident in the language used, such as 'place of safety orders' (Webb, 2006). The home traditionally provides this but is increasingly being undermined, Webb (2006) argues, and he further links the tensions within social work to the security of its knowledge base (Webb, 2006). This is exemplified by the 'pin down' scandal which occurred in some UK children's homes in the 1980s, and in particular by how the concept of expert knowledge and professional distancing contributed to the scandal. In this example,

'Care' programmes based on behavioural psychology and 'time out' systems of stimulus reduction provided the theoretical backdrop for the pin-down regime... For the badly trained and poorly educated residential staff in the children's homes this amounted to 'the appliance of science'. [This led to] ...a secure environment slipping uncontrollably into a brutally regulated regime of containment (Webb, 2006, p.91).

It was assumed that the security provided by closed residential units for children would lead to a "protective environment", underpinned by the "coherence of routine structures and trust mechanisms" (Webb, 2006, p.90), one of the most important of those being the knowledge underpinning the practice. What should have been a secure environment was made insecure by the knowledge underpinning the practice. Trust is therefore inextricably linked with risk assessment within social work.

Related to the risky nature of trust is that of its fragility, which, although it takes a long time to establish, can be destroyed quickly and easily (Slovic, 1999). Others differentiate between conditional and unconditional trust (Bowditch & Buono, 2005). Conditional trust is a willingness to interact with others as long as each behaves appropriately, uses a similar interpretive scheme to define the situation, and is empathetic towards the other. Unconditional trust, in contrast, reflects a much higher level of trust, where shared values not only structure the social situation, but become the primary mechanism through which team members experience trust:

Rather than simply suspending belief, one's teammates' trustworthiness is assumed, based on confidence in the others' values and repeated behavioural interactions, further contributing to a sense of mutual identification (Bowditch & Buono, 2005, p.170).

It is this second type of trust that appears the more risky, since it would include situations where one were forced to trust because there was no choice, such as that

experienced by the majority of service users and carers in their relationships with social services.

When it comes to winning trust, the playing field is not a level one, but is tilted toward distrust (Slovic, 1999). The psychological explanations for the unequal balance between trust and mistrust are first, that negative (potentially trust-destroying) events are more visible than positive ones. Secondly, even when this is not the case, the negative ones carry more weight. Thirdly, bad news is seen as being more credible than good news and lastly, distrust tends to reinforce and perpetuate distrust (Slovic, 1999). But the 'psychological tendencies' are exacerbated by structural factors, one of which is the electronic and print media, and the other is the rise of powerful special interest groups, "well-funded (by a fearful public) and sophisticated in using their own experts and the media to communicate their concerns and their distrust to the public to influence risk policy debates and decisions" (Slovic, 1999, p.699). This is compounded by the adversarial legal system "that pits expert against expert, contradicting each other's risk assessments and further destroying public trust" (Slovic, 1999, p.699). Risk analysis is largely subjective, despite its pseudo-scientific language (O'Neill, 2002).

The relationship between risk, trust and power, then, is pivotal. We should perhaps place the notion of trust alongside that of risk, since the systems we have to trust are increasingly abstract (Giddens, 2009), or at least define risk as a subclass of trust, since "They are situations in which the risk one takes depends on the performance of another actor" (Coleman, 1990, p.91). Much of statutory social work with both adults and children is concerned with risk assessment.

To summarise, public perception wrongly assumes risk analysis to be in the main scientific and accurate, and there is general condemnation when social work gets it wrong. This is perceived, with assistance from the media, as a case of professional failure, the assumption being that social work has the knowledge to avoid all risk.

One response has been the introduction of audit-type activities in areas other than the traditional one of finance and, in particular, the use of audits as a policing mechanism (Power, 1994). Whether audits create greater accountability or actually exacerbate distrust can be questioned. Audit in this sense is portrayed as an idea as well as a quantitative activity, and the spread of this idea corresponds to changing conceptions of administration and governance. In particular, this trend can be seen a way of reconciling contradictory forces: the need to extend control in order to maintain existing structures of authority which do not seem to be working on the one hand, whilst on the other, reconciling the need to cope with the failure of control (Power, 1994). Audits can actually make organisational systems less transparent; for example, who really understands the procedures for collection of data, or indeed the data itself? In fact, "It may be that the audit explosion signifies a displacement of trust from one part of the economic system to another; from operatives to auditors" (Power, 1994, p.7). When audits fail, more audits are called for, rather than looking critically at the system of auditing itself. Finally, audits can serve to construct the contexts in which they operate; environments are "made auditable, structured to conform to the need to be monitored" (Power, 1994, p.8). As Bourdieu argues, you cannot have equality in conditions of inequality. There are other ways of achieving accountability, involving more qualitative methods alongside public dialogue (Power, 1994), and perhaps service user and carer involvement might be included in this type of accountability system.

Some argue that there is no evidence to support the view that public service professionals are any more untrustworthy than they have always been, and that there have probably always been a few incompetent ones (O'Neill, 2002). However, there is a perception of diminishing trust, and this has been responded to because "loss of trust' has become a cliché of our times" (O'Neill, 2002, p.9). As argued previously, journalists play a leading role in this misleading discourse, despite the fact that we continue to trust professionals and public service institutions generally. We still consult doctors and social workers, for example (O'Neill, 2002). The 'new accountability' is "widely experienced not just as changing but distorting the proper aims of professional practice and indeed as damaging professional pride and integrity" (O'Neill, 2002, p.50).

5.6. Trust as a Potential Source for Increasing Social or Political Capital

It is important to consider why service users and carers might voluntarily trust social services and, in particular, why they might trust universities to involve them in a meaningful way in the admission of social work students. One way of thinking about the advantages of trust, or of trusting people whom we might have reason not to trust, is in terms of the potential for increasing an individual's social or political capital (Burt, 2003). "Trust is presumably a valuable resource for individuals because it facilitates the attainment of desired outcomes" (Kramer, 2006, p.69), so we may engage in reciprocal trusting relationships involving some disclosure, hoping to get the same in return. On a day-to-day basis, 'trust behaviour is readily apparent throughout most social systems and organisations' (Kramer, 2006, p.81). As has been argued already, trust is not a principle, "let alone a moral principle", but an attitude or disposition to respond in certain ways; that is, to accept a risk of harm

from another on the basis of the belief, "for which there is some degree of uncertainty", that the other does not intend to do harm to one, even though they could do so (Brenkert, 1998, p.277). This can be contrasted with Bourdieu's (1998) concept of acquired dispositions, which describes the operation of trust in a similar way to Brenkert (1998), but links its function to the maintenance of social order.

Trust may seem the preferable coordination and control mechanism when someone is not in a position to make a credible power claim, for example, where they do not have enough authority or resources; but in practice, trust and power often occur in combinations and "the question is only which of the two mechanisms is dominant in coordinating expectations and controlling interactions" (Bachmann, 2006, p.400). This can be judged to be the case when considering service users and carers who become involved in the social work admissions field. They obviously have less power than the academics and policy makers who control admissions, but they do have some power, since the policy requires that they are involved.

Bourdieu's notion of 'acquired dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1998), of which trust is an example, is considered as a concept without economic value, unlike Bachmann's (2006) conceptualisation, but which has unwritten rules which we are 'disposed' to agree to, such as the rules associated with giving gifts. These dispositions are shaped by past events and structures which prepare our perceptions of current practices (Bourdieu, 1984). As mentioned earlier, this essentially normative approach exists for reasons of social order and to assist in the "ongoing and successful reproduction of relationships of domination (which) lies at the heart of Bourdieu's theory" (Jenkins, 1992, p.99). This conceptualisation provides explanatory value for trust in terms of its function and role. and goes some way

towards explaining the value of trust and unequal relationships within the social work field.

5.7.   Summary

As mentioned earlier, trust, and more particularly broken trust, was raised as an issue by some participants and so this was explored in the literature. One of the most striking things regarding trust is the lack of consensus regarding its purpose and meaning. When exploring the responses of service users and carers to their involvement in the process of social work recruitment, some of the following issues have been highlighted. Trust might signify normative behaviour for some, but in modern western societies the idea of universal norms is problematic. I have argued that Bourdieu's normative interpretation of trust is useful here, in that it incorporates a notion of collectively agreed rules which we should not assume will be adhered to. Therefore it was important to explore how participants construed the process of selection in terms of trust and trustworthiness and, in particular, whether participants were transferring perceptions of trustworthiness to the general professional level, and to general future standards in the profession.

Chapter 6: Methodology

Mason (2002) argues that our predisposed view of the world similarly pre-disposes our research topic choices and methodological approach. This project interested me in particular because it epitomised government policies which seemed to enhance the power of vulnerable groups of people on the one hand, whilst simultaneously satisfying contradictory neo-liberal market demands. My social work career began in the voluntary sector, working with and for service users rather than the State, and the statutory social services team that I joined following qualification as a social worker was one that was community based, with a strong emphasis on what was then called community social work[12] (Barclay, 1982). Along with other teams in that local authority at the time, we believed strongly in the principle of partnership working.

From this perspective, I found the policy of closing the large mental hospitals following the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act puzzling. On the one hand, I supported their closure; on the other, I was aware of the financial savings being made and was concerned about the lack of consultation with residents, many of whom had spent most of their lives in these hospitals. There did not seem to be a coherent way to voice concerns about the policy whilst at the same time supporting the closure. When service user and carer involvement was introduced as a requirement for providing the new social work degree, I thought the policy had similar qualities to that of community care. On the one hand it seemed to have positive intentions, but on the other hand, the benefits it could bring to service users and

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[12] Although this term is probably associated more widely with the Barclay Report of 1982, the local authority I am referring to organised small, area-based, generic social services teams following the Seebohm Report of 1968.

carers were far from clear. Mason (2001) argues that the data collection method follows the aims of the study and, since this study sought to understand the implications of the policy from the perspective of service users and carers, I needed a method which could elicit the quality of their views and feelings. Furthermore, many of the issues raised by the literature review concerned transactional or relational aspects of service user and carer involvement: for example, perceptions of trustworthiness, or the intangible sense of power asymmetry generated in transactions between professionals and others. For this reason, the approach chosen was a qualitative one.

This chapter describes the approach and methodological instruments utilised in the study. It begins by explaining and justifying why a case study approach was chosen, and goes on to describe the choice of qualitative interviews as the main data collection tool. The advantages and problems associated with my status as both researcher and 'insider' are critically examined; the importance of being reflexive is explored within this context. The ethical issues that arose from the study are then discussed. The chapter concludes by explaining the process of data collection and analysis. The research took place over a period of four years. From 2004 to 2005, three service users and one agency representative who had previously been involved in interviewing applicants for admission to the social work course were invited to participate as a pilot for more comprehensive involvement. These four people were then interviewed as a pilot for this study. Over the following three years (2005-6, 2006-7 and 2007-8), all contactable service users, carers and agency representatives who had been involved in social work admissions in the university where the research was located (including three of the four involved in the pilot) were asked to participate in the study. As admissions tutor from 2004 until 2007, I had

direct experience of the various systems which impacted on the admission process at that time, many of which were unknown to service users and carers.

6.1.   Why a Qualitative Case Study?

The study took the form of a single case study relying on qualitative methods. There is a variety of qualitative research into service user involvement in social work education, training, planning and practice, (for example, Taylor and LeRiche, 2006; Tew, 2006; Crisp et al, 2006; Baldwin & Sadd, 2006; Matka et al, 2010) This approach is a strategy for doing empirical research of a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Robson, 2002). It may use multiple sources of evidence and can equally involve qualitative or quantitative methods (Yin, 2009). Patterns of activity can be approached through the concept of 'case', which has some similarity with the concept of 'habitus' (Segert & Zierke, 2000). It is through a particular habitus that people develop their lifestyles (Bourdieu 1998) and "evolve symbols which designate others as insiders or outsiders, and create their special 'places' and rituals to feel at home" (Segert & Zierke, 2000, p.230). Indeed, context and setting in a case study is crucial, and some argue that the term 'site' might be preferable to that of 'case' (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

From a sociological viewpoint, qualitative research methods are relevant, because they can offer a more precise analysis of the connections between structural change and attitude change, and are useful for the study of processes of social transformation (Segert & Zierke, 2000). They can, for example, reveal the subjective basis for lasting social change in the patterns of perception and behaviour of particular social groups, such as service users and carers. However the subjective element of the case study is most likely to be challenged. What distinguishes scientific knowledge "is not so much its logical status, as the fact that it is the

outcome of a process of enquiry which is governed by critical norms and standards of rationality" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.121). Case studies "simply are what they are – studies documenting and analysing phenomena appealing to subjective ways of knowing to gain insight and understanding" (Simons, 2009, p.162).

Being overly vigilant in regard to the scientific critique of subjective methodology can lead to false attempts to secure 'objectivity' (Yin, 2009). Harding (1991) takes issue with the idea of a value-free notion of objectivity which, she argues, has been used to legitimate the values and interests of powerful institutions and individuals, including the 'scientists' themselves (Harding, 1991). She argues for what she terms 'strong objectivity', which requires the researcher to come under the same scrutiny as those that s/he studies. This is achieved through a process of 'strong' reflexivity where, for example, rather than seeing the relationship between the observation and its social consequences as a problem, it is seen as an opportunity to identify the cultural values and interests of the researchers. She argues that,

> A notion of strong reflexivity would require that the objects of inquiry be conceptualized as gazing back in all their cultural particularity and that the researcher, through theory and methods, stand behind them, gazing back at his own social situated research project in all its cultural particularity (Harding, 1991, p.163).

In any case, we should not mix up subjectivity with bias related to an assumption of an objective method as the key to sound inquiry (Schwandt, 2001). A more relevant approach is to acknowledge inherent subjectivity and concentrate on how values and feelings impact on the research (Harding, 1991). Therefore, the aim of this study was not to eliminate subjectivity, but to acknowledge and critically reflect on how it influenced the research process (Denzin, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, Schwandt, 2001). It was therefore important to describe those issues which could impact on the

accuracy of the study; for example, the possible conflicts involved in being a researcher within the organisation being researched, how reflexivity was put into practice, and a consideration of the ethical issues involved. The next section discusses these issues.

6.2. Insider as Researcher

The debate surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of insider research can be traced back to Merton (1972) and his discussion regarding the ethnocentric critique of US academia, and specifically in regard to the history of slavery and the issue of racism. Although rejecting what he calls the extreme insider position, that only insiders can research their own knowledge base, he nonetheless argues that the conflict brought about by this debate is productive, since it leads us to reflect more critically on our sources of knowledge.

According to Fetterman, the insider's perception of reality is "instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviours" (1998, p.20). Additionally, as Kvale suggests,

> Familiarity with the content of an investigation is not obtained only through literature and theoretical studies. Just hanging out in the environment where the interviews are to be conducted will give an introduction to the local language, the daily routines and the power structures and to provide a sense of what the interviewees will be talking about (1996, p.96).

There were advantages in being able to carry out this research within my workplace. This included access to, and working knowledge of, the university, the professional requirements for social work, and of the teaching team, for example. Having gained permission from the university to carry out the research, I was able to gather evidence unhindered by problems of access. Little of what went on in the day-to-day

operations of the admissions process was missed, particularly during the first two years whilst I was acting as admissions tutor. Service users knew who I was and it was easier to gain access to them because of this.

Insider research it is a growing area of research activity and there is a wealth of research which has been obtained in this way (Koester, 2006). My situation can be linked to the concept of 'self-ethnography', "in which the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has 'natural access', is an active participant, and is more or less on equal terms with other participants" (Alvesson, 2003, p.174).

But insider research can also be problematic and perceived as not conforming to standards of academic rigour because insider researchers have a personal stake, and perhaps some emotional investment, in the research site (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The role of reflexivity is crucial here in countering the negative aspects of researching within one's place of work; for example, in terms of fulfilling the demands that both roles – the organisational role and that of researcher – made on me, being aware of the strengths and limits of my pre-understandings, and in considering the impact of organisational politics on the research process (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

This 'checklist' acted as a useful reminder during the research process as to whether I was acting as 'researcher', or as 'university tutor', or both, and gave substance to reflexive activity. However this was only half the story. As Labaree, (2002) observed, there are particular issues that need to be recognised when carrying out insider research within professional work cultures, as opposed to the more general types of insider research related to issues of race, ethnicity and gender, for example. He states:

> This is often the case within the organizational life of professional settings, such as a hospital or university, where the distinctions are less apparent and positionality is defined more by what you do than whom you are (Herndon & Kreps, 2001; Symone & Cassell, 1998, cited in Labaree, 2002, p.119).

I was conscious that being an 'outsider' might be as relevant as being a service user or carer when it came to being involved in the university's admissions process. On a very practical level, then, I needed to 'step outside in order to get a new understanding of the inside ('distancing') (Laberee, 2002, p.110). I was aware that I had private space at my disposal when not engaged in actual interviews with candidates, whereas those from outside had to wait in public space or in 'my' office. I had status associated with academic and professional qualifications, as well as many years experience of social work and academia; I was comfortable in this space, whereas those from outside might not be. There were potential career benefits involved in my carrying out this research, which did not extend to the participants. There was support for me from colleagues, and a trade union, neither of which applied to those from outside. I was not in a position to change this situation but I did, as much as possible, seek to demystify it. I explained to participants how I might gain from the research and asked those from outside in what ways their participation could be made more advantageous to them.

I was aware that "what is projected as "inclusive participation" continues to involve service users in an ad hoc way such as through "existing local networks of service users and officials" (Carey, 2011, p.226). The structural constraints that hindered involvement were known to me as a member of the academic staff and I had to reflect on how I used that knowledge. There was no choice but to include this aspect in the analysis, since it affected how much influence service users and carers could

have. However, I was aware that this could be seen as a criticism of the involvement policy locally, as well as a criticism of colleagues who did not challenge this situation. This led to a need for the issue of status to be included in any analysis. An uncomfortable but necessary inclusion if I was to avoid "normalising, controlling or dismissing" the opinions and interests of service users (Carey, 2011, p.226).

My role as researcher, and the power it potentially held, was not restricted to my role as an insider or an academic, but importantly included my role as reporter and interpreter of participants' views, and this raised important ethical points. In regard to the research process, participants were invited to comment on the questions that I asked. This could be interpreted as being tokenistic (McLaughlin, 2006), but it was actually a genuine attempt to discover what was important to those service users and carers involved in the admissions process. Working within such a hierarchically structured institution as a university, I felt that any attempt at participatory research (Barnes & Cotterell, 2012) would have been impossible. Apart from the ethical issues raised by participatory research (Turner & Gillard, 2012), and this is not to underestimate the ethical issues involved generally, there were practical restraints such as lack of funding, training, support and possible difficulties with the process, such as writing up (Carey, 2011, p.228; Turner & Gillard, 2012). One of the problems of attempting participatory research was brought home to me during the feedback session held at an 'informal' research café organised by one of the research centres. None of the participants in the study asked a question during the question and answer session at the end; however, several stayed behind after the session had finished and everyone else had left, to discuss issues and make comments.

The reflexive diary was an important tool in relation to understanding the various aspects of being an insider researcher. For example, I was not only aware of the

various demands on my time and thinking in relation to admissions which did not include service users and carers, and by default excluded them, but additionally, the other demands on my time meant that service users and carers from outside the university were only involved at certain times of the year – an aspect of involvement that was raised by outsiders on occasions. Delays in remuneration payments, problems with parking, off-hand treatment by university staff and so on exacerbated power differentials that already existed. Getting an access card so that a service user in a wheelchair could move more easily across the campus proved difficult. Service users on state benefits continued to lose benefits if they claimed their consultancy fee. As staff we had none of these problems. We had our jargon, keys to rooms, access to the library and advance information about the applicants. This issue did not apply just to service users and carers, but also to representatives from the social work agencies who were also involved in admissions, and for this reason I decided to include them in the research.

6.3.   Identity and Positionality

The issue of agency and structure has been discussed previously in relation to power and the perspective of the study, but methodological considerations are also valid since, as Archer (2000) points out, structure (for example, the ability to bring about changes in structure) and agency (for example, the desire to bring about change) often conflict. As a researcher, I had concerns about insider/outsider research, but as admissions tutor, I was concerned with bringing those from outside into the organisation; in addition to this, there were issues regarding my occupational status as a social worker and a university lecturer which were being explored. I needed to be aware, as Day et al. (2006) point out, that these various roles are situated, or positioned and therefore flexible, but differ according to the needs of

situations, whilst the substantive is the stable presentation and core to how a person defines themself. When researching, I was also an outsider to some extent, since I positioned myself outside the organisation. I was an outsider to those from outside the university who had commonality which I did not share. The issue of social work professionalism illustrates these complexities, since the actual issue of social work professionalism was one that, whilst in practice as a social worker, I had a certain ambivalence towards; and yet, at the time and subsequently, I often found myself describing certain behaviours as 'unprofessional'. In this sense, my professional status both as a social worker and university lecturer were areas which I felt, on a personal level, the research into involvement might clarify. In the end, the views of service users and carers in this area surprised me, in that I expected views similar to my own from at least some of the participants, but this was not the case, and I was forced to consider the benefits which service users and carers might gain from social work being a profession, and what sort of profession it should be.

In summary, the positions of insider and outsider in the research process are not binary concepts but are, in-fact, complex and multi-faceted. Nonetheless, as Bourdieu argues (1999), as a researcher I should be able to imagine myself in the shoes of participants and to understand what it would be like to be and think like them, but without being them. In order to do this, I needed to be aware of myself as researcher, as university tutor and as social work academic, and consequently needed to develop a reflexive approach which could recognise and acknowledge the positionality of the various roles and the status which accompanied them, and how this impacted on the research.

6.4.   Reflexivity

During their semi-structured interview, a participant in the study discussed an incident that had occurred in one of the admissions interviews in which she had participated. She was concerned about the conduct of a member of academic staff within the interview who, she felt, had made an inappropriate comment to the applicant. We discussed this incident and I suggested that she might like to discuss this matter with the course leader. She did not wish to do this but said that she would be happy for me to do so. During the whole time she was talking to me she kept intense eye contact, with what can best be described as a 'knowing glance'. I believed she was communicating to me an understanding that she did not expect a change to result from this disclosure. This incident was not something that could be recorded, and yet was significant. The member of staff she was referring to had worked in the university for some time and was 'well thought of' academically, and therefore this 'feedback' would have potentially been embarrassing for them. The glance could be construed as communicating differential power relationships – why?

Therefore, simply recording what was observed, written, and so on, was not enough – I had to reflect on the various meanings and/or contexts attached to the observation. Geertz (1973) uses the example of a boy winking to illustrate this point. A wink can be seen as an involuntary twitch, a sign of recognition, or it could be someone copying someone else winking, to name but a few interpretations (Geertz, 1973). Simply describing the 'wink' in isolation, Geertz calls 'thin' description, whilst a reflection of the social conditions and possible meanings of the wink, he calls 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973). My 'knowing glance' discussed earlier is a good example of thick description.

What Geertz (1973) is describing closely resembles Bourdieu's reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). However, Bourdieu is criticised for uncritically accepting his own reflexive ability: "significantly, though, Bourdieu does not indict himself but instead prides himself on exercising an unusual degree of reflexivity in his analyses of masculine domination" (Witz, 2004, p.215). One practical approach to operating in a reflexive way is to identify different subjective 'voices' (Hertz, 1996), alongside the macro political forces which may influence the position of participant and researcher. Then it is suggested that the researcher isolate the different 'voices' involved in the research, and in particular the voice of the author, the presentation of the participants' voices and thirdly, the voice of the author when they are also the subject of the enquiry (Hertz, 1996). This approach was a reminder that I, as author, was the person who chose which quotations to use and how the results were interpreted; in this respect the participants' voices were 'filtered' through mine (Hertz, 1996, p.5). It was taken for granted by both the participant and myself that, despite my willingness to take the matter raised further, nothing was likely to come from it. She wanted me to try, but she also wanted me to know, in her knowing glance, that she knew this. We both took this situation for granted; it did not need verbalising. White (2001) calls the reflexive process here the "process of problematization" (White, 2001, p.102), where we seek to open out what is taken for granted. Like Harding (1991), White argues that this process of research activity is more likely to be valid and reliable when carried out by an insider, since it holds the possibility of defamiliarising routines and practices (White, 2001).

I was aware of the various cultures that existed in admissions, for example, those associated with being a social work lecturer, and so was careful not to assume knowledge of the service user and carer culture prior to the study, and to be aware

that my pre-conceived ideas should not influence the study (Fielding, 1993) as this could affect outcomes:

> The notion of discursive accountability suggests that as we engage with "the world", we acknowledge that we have to take responsibility for the possibility that our own understandings (and ways of expressing and working with our understandings) might affect outcomes… for others (Romm, 2001, p.283)

As Romm (2001) points out, trust is a crucial factor in qualitative research – what he refers to as "high trust" (Romm, 2001, p.283). The reflexive process, therefore, was nothing without taking account of the ethical issues involved in the research. These are discussed in the next section.

6.5.   Ethical Considerations

People were being studied and reported on in this research and so ethical issues had to be considered, particularly since vulnerable people were being asked to participate. They may have been vulnerable, for instance, because they might not have understood fully the implications of participating in the research. It is the

> …inability to adequately engage in the process of voluntary and informed consent – for whatever reasons – raises the research participant's degree of risk and vulnerability… A protectionist stance that shields vulnerable groups from research participation may deny them the benefits garnered from scientific research that are available to other populations. Paradoxically, such exclusion may reinforce their vulnerability (Stanley & McLaren, 2007, pp.43–44).

Although Stanley & McLaren (2007) are concerned primarily with medical ethics, this point is equally relevant across most, if not all, other subject areas and particularly in social work research where, it can be argued, social work academics have a duty to bring unethical practice to an end when policies and practices are in conflict with the ethical principles of the profession (Heffernan, 2006a). This study invited

participation from people who could be described as being particularly vulnerable for reasons of health or intellectual capacity, for example. The latter group had personal assistants who were employed to protect their interests. Therefore, even if those service users agreed to participate, their assistants also needed to agree. In addition, their assistants were able to help them. I met informally with participants after the interviews had taken place, so that they could raise any problems that might have arisen for them during the interview. One participant with intellectual difficulties discussed his nervousness about being interviewed, since, despite having been involved in many interviews, he had never been interviewed himself. Despite understanding issues around power imbalance in relation to my post and my role as researcher, and my preparation in regard to explaining what questions would be asked and why, it was only after the interview that this participant felt able to tell me about his fears before the interview took place.

One source of reference for ethical guidance was the British Sociological Association, which provides a 'Statement of Ethical Practice' outlining advice for researchers on ethical issues. The research was approved by the School Research Ethics Panel where the study took place. Consideration was given to the "inevitable" issues of power which may influence the relationship between participant and researcher (Etherington, 2004). Therefore, being open and honest with participants was important, so that they could make informed decisions about being involved. Detailed information (Appendix 1) was given out to those involved in the study prior to their agreeing to be involved. It was made clear that they were under no obligation to be interviewed, and no remuneration was offered (as this could be deemed as a form of coercion to be involved). In addition, participants were shown the interview schedule (Appendix 2) beforehand. This latter initiative also helped to allay the fears

of some participants. The consent form (Appendix 3) was transparent and covered all obvious eventualities, including the situation whereby someone might be unable to sign on their own behalf. After they had seen the interview schedule, one group of service users chose not to be involved.

The anonymity and privacy of those who participated in the research process was respected in accordance with the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice (2002) mentioned earlier. It was also important to guarantee confidentiality to participants so that they would be able to discuss freely any issue they wished in relation to admissions, without feeling that there might be consequences. Changing names was not necessarily enough to guarantee confidentiality. Reproducing the interviews in full would have potentially breached confidentiality also. Because it was potentially revealing, I asked one participant for additional permission to recount his 'story' in full.

If a participant reported some transgression, or misconduct, or simply something they were unhappy about, there was a procedure in place to allow them to take it further. This involved my contacting the course leader on their behalf. The course leader would then invite the participant to discuss the matter. It was made clear that they would be offered support through this process for as long as they felt they needed it, and that no blame would be attached to them for speaking out. Prior to the interview process, participants were informed that whatever they said would not be attributed to them in any report or publication, and this included issues around the university admissions process. If they did have issues of concern which they wished to raise or discuss more formally, the course leader was available to them. In recognition of the power imbalance involved, it was made clear to participants that I would be willing to raise issues on their behalf and that this would be treated

confidentially. However, despite my reassurances and this procedure, the power imbalance remained.

The university was easily identifiable and therefore it was part of my role to ensure that nothing that was said could be attributed to a particular individual. This was achieved partly by not including the full text of the interviews and partly by considering this aspect when deciding which quotations to include. Within NVivo QDA software, personal characteristics pertinent to the study are held in a case-book, whilst text from interviews is coded and themed separately. Of course, names were changed, but it was important to recognise that names are only one route to identification. With this in mind, the tapes from the interviews were given coded labels and a decision was made not to include data which had the potential to lead to identification of participants.

6.6. Methodological Approach to Data Collection

As mentioned earlier, the study was based on qualitative data. Grbich (2007) points out that what constitutes truth (and acceptable knowledge) has been a source of considerable debate over the last two hundred years, but that qualitative research contributes to critical or emancipatory epistemological positions, as well as constructivist, interpretive ones and postmodern or post-structural ones.

One problem when choosing and justifying a qualitative method was the sheer number of qualitative approaches. Lee (1999) identifies eighteen major categories of qualitative research as practiced across the social sciences (not including phenomenological ones). From this literature it is possible to identify four underlying themes: they are concerned with natural settings; the data is derived from the perspective of the participants; the designs are flexible, and traditional analytical

methods are not standard. This approach to qualitative research was helpful since it permitted consideration of various methodological approaches regarding the study, and indicated what problems I needed to overcome, rather than trying to find a method with which to 'fit' the research study.

Bourdieu (2000) adds to this debate in his critique of rationality. He argues that rationality, "which the historical sciences claim for themselves in asserting the status of science", has become a tool of domination ("dominated by forces armed with reason") rather than a sincere search for truth (2000, p.83). He follows Durkheim generally, in his approach to methodology, who states that sociological method rests "on the principle that social facts must be studied as things; that is, as realities external to the individual" (Durkheim, 2004, p.33). Bourdieu argues that it is the job of social scientists to:

> …unmask and counter the completely new strategies of domination… [and] choose which side they are on: either they place their rational instruments of knowledge at the service of ever more rationalized domination, or they rationally analyse domination and more especially the contribution which rational knowledge can make to *de facto* monopolization of the profits of universal reason (2000, pp.83-84).

Bourdieu, in effect, warns against getting tied up in 'sectarian' methodological arguments to the detriment of 'theoretical vision' (cited in Wacquant, 1992, p.28). Oakley (2000) makes a similar point in her defence of qualitative methodology when she argues that the methodological argument should not be about the terminology we use, but rather about how we can develop methods to understand as much as we can about the social world. The interviews carried out by Bourdieu expose the subjective experiences of those who are experiencing change (Reed-Danahay, 2004, p.130). Although Bourdieu is critical of the colonialist associations with

ethnography (1993), he relies almost totally on qualitative interviews, and the subsequent narratives obtained in this way, to demonstrate the social suffering resulting from modern neo-liberal societies (Reed-Danahay, 2004).

6.7.   Semi-structured Interviews

Like the majority of researchers carrying out qualitative doctoral research, I utilised interviews as my main method of data collection (Mason, 2010). Mason (2002) makes the point that the data collection method and research approach is directly related to the ontological position of the research. Earlier it was explained that the research was concerned with investigating the perceptions of service users and carers regarding their role in the admission of social workers – who they represented; what was in it for them; their views and feelings about the future social workers they were involved in recruiting, and how far 'involvement' actually went. Qualitative interviews recognise the contextual interactive nature of knowledge (Mason, 2002), and it was the situation that service users and carers were in that I was concerned with. I wished to explain something about social process, social change, social organization and social meaning rather than more superficial accounts of large numbers of people (Mason, 2002). Therefore, semi-structured, qualitative interviews were chosen as a research instrument, in order to find out the thoughts, aspirations, feelings and intentions that service users and carers had regarding their involvement in social work admissions. This was because:

> We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things (Patton, 2002, p.340).

There are various types of qualitative interviews (King, 2004). Two interview types which King identifies influenced the approach here: social constructionist interview types, and realist interview types (King, 2004). Although the study was grounded in a realist approach, it was concerned with identifying power relationships within the field and how they were reproduced; the relationship between action and structure. This can be illustrated by the interview schedule, which contained both direct questions about, for example, power, but also less direct questions, which were aimed at uncovering how participants in the study constructed the power relationships when describing their role within admissions (Appendix 2). The concept of power was mobilised by asking participants about how much influence they felt they had during their involvement, how comfortable they felt when they were involved, who should have the final say over a candidate and so on.

Power was also a dynamic within the interviews with participants. For example, although the agenda was fairly open about what could be discussed, I was aware that participants would probably be hesitant about complaining against individual members of staff who they knew were my colleagues. In fact, three incidents of this nature were reported to me, none of which resulted in any formal complaint. This was a good example of where the methodological approach taken produced insight in regard to the aims of the study, since if participants were hesitant about discussing irregularities (as they saw it) with me as a researcher, despite the guarantee of confidentiality, how much less likely were they to raise these issues as potential regulators of our admissions procedure?

It is easy to underestimate how intimidating interviews can be, especially when they are audio-taped. My aim was to make the interview as conversational as possible, whilst being completely open about the purpose of the study and the confidential

nature of the interviews. Humphries (2008) discusses the possible dangers of being too informal, to the extent that participants might be lulled into a false sense of security and divulge things that they might regret later. If participants did not wish to openly share something within the interviews, they could ask for the audio-recorder to be switched off. Several did so, which can be seen to reinforce Humphries' (2008) point that participants are not necessarily passive or easily manipulated. Allowing participants to choose where and when the interviews took place was another attempt to achieve this.

The study was piloted with service users and agency representatives who had been involved with social work admissions previously, in order to gain feedback around these issues. The interview schedule was planned so that the first question 'broke the ice' and allowed participants free reign to discuss their views and experiences of social work. At the end of the interview, participants were asked what they thought of the questions and whether anything had been missed out.

Another major concern raised regarding interviews as a method of data collection, pertinent to this study, was the question of how far the data was a result of the relationship that was established between myself and the participants (Humphries, 2008). For example, did they simply wish to please me rather than divulge their true feelings and beliefs? Firstly, an open and honest approach within the interviews would have shown that I had no agenda other than wishing to understand their views, but of course this cannot normally be evidenced. More importantly, therefore, as Humphries (2008) recommends I audio-taped the interviews, thus creating a record which is available for scrutiny.

Interviewing can be a tiring, isolating and emotive activity (King, 2004). The interview schedule was designed so that interviews would last approximately one hour and only one interview was carried out in any particular day. 21 interviews were carried out. As Mason (2010) points out, samples for qualitative studies are smaller than those used in quantitative studies, and in fact, more data does not lead to more information. One piece of coded data is enough for analytical purposes – frequency is not necessarily important. Indeed, too large a number of interviews can become repetitive and, on occasions, superfluous (Mason, 2010). I chose to interview all service users, carers and agency representatives who were involved in the admissions period over the period of the study. It was not a longitudinal study, but before the research began I had no way of knowing who would be involved. I thought that the first year would involve people already known to staff at the university, but that in subsequent years different service users and carers would come forward. It was for this reason that the study was carried out over three years, and why 21 interviews were obtained.

Questions were designed to elicit the views of service users and carers regarding issues that were pertinent to the aims of the study, and which had been raised in the literature review, but also to unravel the power relationships which existed from the perspective of service users and carers. A schedule was drawn up with the intention of testing the questions during the pilot year and later adapting it, as mentioned earlier (see Appendix 2).

The interviews opened with a question about the participants' contact with social work and who they felt they were responsible for representing. This question was partly concerned with putting participants at ease, but was also intended to ascertain what experiences led participants to define themselves as service users or carers or

agency representatives. As Kvale states, a "good interview question should contribute thematically to knowledge production… [and] dynamically to providing a good interview interaction" (1996, p.129).

The next group of questions were concerned with how participants described the interview process and their experiences. Prompts encouraged them to think about the process in some detail, and what their expectations of candidates and the interview process (and their part in this process) were. They were asked to discuss if they had intervened in the interview process (either during the interviews, or in discussion with the other interviewer later), and whether they had had any disagreements with the other interviewer. If there were no disagreements, they were asked what they would do if there was one. These questions were aimed at assessing, firstly, how much influence (and therefore status and power) they perceived within the process, and where they situated themselves within the field.

Participants were then invited to discuss their views on social work and professionalism, partly to ascertain whether they felt this was an issue of relevance. Spradley (1979) argues against asking direct questions about meaning, arguing instead for the relational theory of meaning; that is, to ask questions about how the concept is used instead. However, it was important to investigate whether participants had a view on the concept itself. They were also asked about the practice of professionalism as a concept, such as their views on the good social worker, bad social worker, good candidate and unsuitable candidate.

Lastly, the interviewees were asked whether they thought involving service users would bring about any changes, and if so, what they were. This last question was aimed at assessing their feelings about the regulatory role the policy implies. Advice

about framing the questions in as descriptive a form as possible (Spradley, 1979; Kvale, 1996) was utilised, for example: "What happened and how did it happen? ... How did you feel and then what did you experience?" (Kvale, 1996, p.131). Sometimes a good descriptive question kept an informant talking for more than an hour as Spradley (1979) predicts. Rather than using the interview schedule as a list of questions in a particular order, it was used as system of prompts in the main interviews. Often the question about previous contact with social work, for example, led to discussions around many of the issues being evaluated, such as professionalism, issues around power, status, powerlessness and so on. After the pilot interviews, participants were asked about the relevance of the questions and whether any needed changing, or if any questions should be added. The response was negative on both counts, and therefore the schedule remained unchanged.

I had decided to interview one of the agency representatives in the pilot, since there was a possibility that some of the issues raised in the study might be more generally attributed to the status of 'outsider'. During the pilot, I began to realise that the terminology of 'service user' and 'carer' were problematic. For example, one service user was also a university lecturer, albeit in a different department, and some service users had been employed by the university as consultants and part-time lecturers. Related to this was the issue of representatives from practice agencies who, under previous regulations, had been 'partners' to social work training programmes. As outsiders they also had commonality with some of the service users and carers, in that they were outsiders. Since being an outsider was an important feature of involving service users and carers, I decided to include them. However, in retrospect, the perspective from practice on some of these issues proved extremely interesting and relevant.

6.8.   Undertaking the Study

Interviews, as described earlier, were carried out over a three year period with service users and carers who had been involved in the admissions process. As a member of staff at the university where the study took place, and admissions tutor for part of that time, it was important to reflect on the potential problems of carrying out research in one's workplace and any other problems which might arise with the data collection. The pilot scheme for involving service users and carers provided an ideal opportunity for piloting the actual study.

6.8.1. The "pilot"

It was the job of the admissions tutor to recruit service users and carers, although in reality this was more of a team effort. As stated previously, the search began at the end of 2004 so that more service users and carers could be involved in the admissions process for the intake of students the following year (September 2005). Time was short, since interviewing began in early January 2005 and the Christmas vacation was coming up. Some service users were already involved with the social work course delivery, and it was agreed by the course leader that they would be approached and involved in the 2005 interviews as a trial run, or 'pilot'. Additional funding accompanied the policy of involving service users in the course, and part of this fund was used to reimburse people for their time. Agency stake-holders already involved in interviewing under previous arrangements would continue to be so. Three service users agreed to be involved in the interviews, all of whom had had substantial involvement in the existing course, both in a voluntary and a paid capacity. The plan was that an academic member of staff would partner a service user, carer and/or agency representative when interviewing prospective social worker students. A list of standard questions already existed and this system would

continue, although the questions had been updated with input from a service user. In addition, the text used in the comprehension test was replaced by a piece of text written by a service user about their experiences.

6.8.2. The pilot interviews

Participants were briefed as to the purpose and content of the interview (Kvale, 1996; Spradley, 1979). An information sheet for this purpose was produced (See Appendix 1) and I was aware of the necessity of possessing interviewing skills (Fielding, 1993; Kvale, 1996). More specifically, Fielding warns that response rates and extensiveness of response are different between experienced and inexperienced interviewers, and recommends not only experience, but "a full programme of pilot interviews in your research design" (1993, p.145). Kvale points to ten qualifying criteria for the interviewer, namely that they: are knowledgeable; can structure an interview; are clear; gentle; sensitive; open; can steer the interviewer in the right direction; are (self) critical; have good memories, and can be interpretive (1996). Although difficult to evidence, I was confident that I possessed the first eight of these. The final two were supplemented by audio-taped interviews. Interpretation itself depends largely on the perspective taken and, as previously stated, my primary aim was to gain the insight of the participants. However, being aware that these qualities are required when interviewing is important, and the transcribed interviews to some extent provide evidence for this.

Audio-taping enabled me to concentrate not only on what was being said, but the way it was being said (for example, the degree of emotion demonstrated by some participants when interviewed). Reflexive methods must be open to the unexpected and to keep "the bias of one's own vision to a minimum" (Fook, 2002, p.122). I was also aware that, however much I worked against any 'bias of vision',

The politics and context of service users' situations and the professional contexts in which they… find themselves, will obviously influence both the mutual interpretations made and the narratives constructed (Fook, 2002, p.122).

As stated earlier, the interviews were planned to last for approximately one hour, being mindful of the advice given by King (2004) that being interviewed can be tiring for interviewees as well as interviewers. Apart from the information sheet provided (mentioned above), I repeated my commitment that anything said in the interviews would be treated in confidence but that the course leader would welcome all feedback on the process, including negative experiences. The intention was that this preamble would reinforce my role as researcher in that situation, rather than my role as admissions tutor, and to avoid undermining any attempt on the part of service users, carers and indeed agency representatives to affect the admissions process. A reflexive stance necessitated the view that this could not be taken for granted. With this in mind, I made it clear to participants that I was not denying my role as admissions tutor, but that the interviews with them were a different activity, one that they did not have to engage in and one where their perspective was the one sought after. The fact that some people chose not to be involved reflects, to some extent, that the participants were willing participants.

6.8.3. Reflections on the 'pilot' year - the interview process

The four interviews from the pilot demonstrated some flaws in my approach to the interviews which needed attention. Firstly, I was talking too much – in particular filling the silences rather than allowing people time to think and respond. This reinforced the advice that "when it comes to interviewing, you generally get a lot of advice on what to say and how to say it, but much more important is your listening skills.

Perhaps the golden rule of interviewing is to: listen more than talk" (O'Leary, 2004, p.168).

Secondly, I was keeping too rigidly to the interview schedule, rather than responding to what was being said. More valuable and in-depth information was sometimes being given when the interview had finished and the tape recorder was turned off. Interviews should be spontaneous. "The shorter the interviewer's questions and the longer the subject's answers, the better" (Kvale, 1996, p.145) was good advice.

There were limits to the efforts that could be made to conduct the interview in the same way every time (Fielding, 1993). Additionally, differences between participants and the contexts of interviews diminished the importance of similarity (Fielding, 1993). Following on from this point, I decided to aim for a more informal, conversational approach generally to the interviews (Patton, 2002), whilst keeping in mind the schedule, in order to create the more relaxed atmosphere such as that which sometimes developed after the audio-recorder was turned off. After each interview, I tried to spend a few minutes recalling and reflecting on what I had learnt in the discussion (Kvale, 1996).

6.8.4. Reflections on the 'pilot' year - audio-taping the interviews

My purpose was to develop as relaxed and informal an interview with participants as possible, so that they would feel able to share their thoughts and feelings (Spradley, 1979; Kvale, 1996; Mason 2002). However, as mentioned earlier, audio-taping the interviews limited how relaxed some people felt they could be. During one of the pilot interviews, it emerged that a participant had been interviewed by the Home Office with regard to her status in the UK, and that interview had been audio-recorded. The interview for this study reminded her of this distressing experience. This was a

dilemma, since she was keen to participate but at the same time it was obvious that a further interview would be stressful for her. Rather than put her through this ordeal again, I asked her if she would be willing for me to include her pilot interview in the study, which she was. This issue made me very aware of how easily we can take for granted the interview as a preferred method of data collection for the researcher, whilst overlooking some of the problems it can cause participants, particularly when the interviews are recorded. Most participants relaxed and were able to talk more freely when the tape recorder was turned off (Kvale, 1996). During the study, participants were asked if it was OK to turn the machine back on when this happened (and sometimes to repeat what they had said). However, I was mindful that this should only be offered and not requested.

6.8.5. Lessons from the pilot - reflexivity

What constitutes a reflective journal varies considerably, as Etherington (2004) demonstrated when she asked some research students to share their experiences of keeping one. Some kept what were in effect diaries at regular, or sometimes irregular, intervals. Some found them useful, while others were not so positive.

As stated earlier, during the 'pilot' period I kept a weekly research diary intended to be both a 'reflexive log' and an account of relevant events that occurred during the period of the study. However, this system of recording was problematic for various reasons. Firstly, things did not happen on a regular timetable, nor did reflective thoughts fit into a timetable set aside for journal writing. What was written more than often reflected my mood relating to what was happening with admissions at the time; so for example, when I was very busy, the diary did little more than reflect the stress I was under. This was useful information in its own right, and reminded me that admissions were just one competing demand on the time of social work academics.

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However, I was concerned that the reflexive log would overemphasise my side of the admissions story, to the detriment of the focus on service users, carers and agency representatives (Geertz, 1973; Bourdieu, 1992).

In relation to the reflexive process, I followed a similar pattern to one of Etherington's (2004) students by jotting down notes as thoughts occurred to me, and then incorporating them into the study when appropriate. Therefore, a diary was kept during the research period which included electronically stored, relevant communication and, in particular, emails and related documentation concerning admissions. Notes were kept to bridge gaps, to aid explanation, or as a source of reflection. This proved to be an extremely useful and reliable source of historical accuracy and assisted verification (Fielding, 1993).

This section has described how data was collected using semi-structured, qualitative interviews, which were planned and piloted. It has explained what changes were made as a result of that pilot. In particular, a more conversational approach (Patton, 2002) was aimed for in the interviews, and electronic emails and other documentation were used as an independent record of the study period. From the summer of 2005, the research period began as more service users and carers were recruited to assist in the interviewing of potential candidates.

Over the next three years, these service users and carers, as well as some agency representatives, were interviewed for the study. All service users, carers and agency representatives involved in the university admission of social work students, who were contactable, were invited to take part, and twenty-one participants in total were interviewed. This process is described in more detail in the next section.

6.9.   The Research Process

In this section the research process is described. The section begins by contextualising the social work admissions process at the university where the study took place.

Service users and carers participated in the individual formal interviewing of candidates applying for the full-time course, but there were different arrangements for work-based route applicants. Agencies that participated in the work-based route had slightly different systems, both from the university and from each other; one, for example, allowed service users to interview candidates separately and then their views were fed into a discussion following the formal interview. There was little guidance provided by the GSCC regarding procedures for admitting social work students and, although subject to scrutiny, these procedures were particular to each university providing training (Currer, 2009).

All short-listed applicants on both full time and work-based routes were asked the same questions at interview. The questions candidates were asked were reviewed at the end of 2004 and a service user was involved in this review. Answers were graded and the interviewers decided whether a candidate was deemed suitable for training (although candidates also had to pass a comprehension test and comply with other statutory requirements).

As admissions tutor during the first two years of the study, it was my responsibility to explain to service users and carers how they would be involved in the admissions process. The possibility of providing training had been considered but some of the team, myself as admissions tutor included, did not think this was a good idea. It was felt that our training might undermine service users' and carers' independence, and

might encourage the use of the same service users year after year, rather than involving as many different people as possible. It would have assumed that we were the experts. However, the process of admissions, and in particular interviewing as a means of selection, was explained to those service users and carers who were involved, and they were encouraged to be proactive. Some service users asked if they were allowed to reject a candidate (which they were). It was explained that they would be partnered with an academic member of staff and would jointly interview shortlisted candidates using set questions, which a service user had assisted in developing, and that, together with the member of staff concerned, they would make a recommendation as to whether a candidate should be accepted or rejected on the basis of that interview. It was agreed by the course team that the member of academic staff would meet the service user or carer they were paired with when they arrived, and discuss the applications allocated to them prior to the interviews taking place.

The search for more service users and carers to be involved in admissions began during the pilot year, and was a fairly ad hoc affair. In my role as admissions tutor, I contacted organisations who had involved service users and carers as consultants or had contact with service users and/or carers directly. Members of the Social Work Department passed on contacts that they had made in either a professional or personal capacity, and it was at this point that it emerged that several staff had personal experience of being a service user, carer or both. We had already involved some service users and carers in the delivery of the course, and these were approached.

6.10.   The Interviews

Following their involvement in admissions, I carried out hour-long interviews with all the service users, carers and agency representatives who were contactable and who had agreed to be interviewed. This included university staff who identified themselves as service users or carers. In total, 21 interviews were carried out over a three year period. Although this was not a longitudinal study, three years were needed in order to obtain enough participants. My intention was to contact all service users and carers who had been involved, but in practice that was not always possible. One agency representative, after seeing the interview schedule, did not return my calls. A service user organisation, which had been involved in one of the agency admissions, agreed to be involved but their worker did not respond to a request for a meeting.

 For unavoidable logistical reasons, these interviews often took place some time after the period of involvement. They usually took place within the university, although this was not always the case; one interview took place in the person's home, one in their agency workplace and one in a service user organisation - participants could choose the location. A letter of invitation had been prepared so that it could be sent out to prospective participants (Appendix 5), but it was more usual to meet prospective participants beforehand, give them a copy of the letter, information sheet (Appendix 1), interview schedule (Appendix 2) and the consent form (Appendix 3) to read, answer any questions and then arrange to interview them. Most questions referred to the audio recorder and, in particular, who would have access to the tape recording of the interview. As in the pilots, it was the tape recorder that caused most concern. Although there were identifiable themes running through all the interviews, no two were the same (Spradley, 1979). Having seen the

interview schedule beforehand, participants were aware of what the study was concerned with, and so could tell their stories in their own way. The first question, asking them about their experiences of social work (meant to be a warm-up question), often resulted in bringing painful memories to the fore. For one service user this was the only question, as such, she was actually asked, although the 'interview' lasted over an hour. We both assumed that the interview would have to be completed at a later date, but when it was transcribed I realised that all relevant areas had been covered.

6.11. Data Analysis

This section describes how the interviews were analysed and contextualised following their transcription. The main themes that were identified initially were, as stated earlier, those which were deduced from the aims of the study and arose during the literature review. This included: what service users and carers brought to the admissions process; how they perceived their influence within the field of admissions and how this might affect the professional social work project; to what degree they were able to affect the admissions process, and what effects, if any, their involvement had on the social work professional project.

However, we cannot assume that participants necessarily reply with some external reality or internal experience or are even necessarily telling the truth (Silverman, 2010). I have pointed out earlier that we cannot assume that the identity of 'service user' or 'carer' is some sort of binary self-definition, but might simply be an aspect of a more substantive one, such as student, ex-teacher and so on. As Silverman (2010) points out, it was important to acknowledge this and, as far as possible, build checks and balances into the research design in order to check the accuracy of what respondents told me. This was done partly by looking for similarities or patterns in

the data from different participants when coding or "inter-coding agreement", as Silverman calls it (2010, p.225). Another device Silverman (2010) recommends is the use of computer assisted software for qualitative analysis; "Containing elements of positivism (facts) and emotionalism (feelings), we can call this a realistic approach to interview data (Silverman, 2010, p.225). The reflexive diary was useful in this respect. For example, I was told of an incident in one of the interviews by a member of staff, which I had also been informed of by a participant in the study. The incident involved a comment by a service user regarding how an applicant was dressed. This form of triangulation not only provided confirmation regarding the truth of this account, but could also be seen as reinforcing the truth of other accounts from this participant.

The interviews were concerned with how participants constructed the issues regarding service user and carer involvement, whilst acknowledging that these narratives or self-presentations, or even 'performances', would be positioned. It was important for the study that the wider aims of the study were not lost and so, apart from asking participants 'what' and 'how' questions, they were also encouraged to explain 'why'; so, for example, when participants were asked if they thought social work was a profession, they were asked why they did or did not think this was the case.

The approach taken to data analysis was one best described as a process whereby "Theory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process" (Mason, 2002, p.180). This approach is a recognition that researchers in practice move back and forth between data analysis and the process of explanation and theory construction, using both deductive and inductive reasoning. My approach was similar to the model described by Hardwick & Worsley

(2011), which in turn is based on a review of the literature on thematic analysis. I began by knowing the data through reading and re-reading prior to coding. I began the analysis by looking at the issues that arose with regard to the aims of the study, the literature search, and the questions that were asked. According to Carey (2009), most qualitative research is inductive, seeking to discover rather than test explanatory theories, and this was certainly my aim to some extent. The issue of 'trust' came directly through the process of induction – something that participants referred to directly and indirectly. However, I also had explanatory theories in mind, in regard to power and professionalism for example, and so deductive reason, that is, reasoning that started with theory, also guided the analysis. It is arguable whether any qualitative research is purely inductive or deductive (Mason, 2002; Carey, 2009).

My research diary was used to record events and reflections on the admissions process, but also issues that were raised during the research interviews over this period. I was particularly concerned with issues of power, including access to power, language and power and the views of participants on these issues, including non-verbal as well as verbal manifestations; for example, whether participants from outside appeared comfortable when we involved them in admissions, and any comments that were made about their involvement. One early observation was that there was no easy division between service users, carers and academic staff, and so that needed to be reflected theoretically and epistemologically in the study.

The next sections explore the choice of qualitative content analysis for data analysis. The process of analysis is then described. NVivo QDA software was utilised for data analysis and management purposes, and is discussed separately in Appendix 6. Examples of coding and second-rater assessment of codes are provided in Appendix 7.

6.11.1. Data analysis procedures

When the interviews were all completed, I moved on to the second stage of the data analysis process (Mayring, 2000; Hardwick & Worsley, 2011), which involved going through the transcribed interviews line by line and coding issues that were commonly raised by participants as issues in their own right. I used NVivo software to assist me in this task, which is detailed in Appendix 6. As mentioned earlier, the word 'trust', in the context of perceived untrustworthiness in relation to past experiences with social workers, was an example of this. At the same time, text relating to the aims of the study and current literature was also coded, for example, text in relation to professionalism and/or power relationships within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). During the whole of the research process, use was made of the research diary, both to consider points worthy of reflexivity, and also as a record of activity. Coffey & Atkinson maintain that analysis is a contested complex activity. It is "an inductive data-led activity". It should be "artful... and reflexive, It should also be methodical, scholarly and intellectually rigorous" (1996a, p.10). It was, as Masson (2002) indicates, "a process of moving back and forth between our own data, our experience, and broader concepts" (Masson, 2002, pp.180-181). The interviews told the story but in the background, and perhaps equally important, was the record of thinking and activity within the field during that time.

"Theming", as Harwick & Worsley (2011, p.127) point out, was an extension of my coding process. This involved taking a hybrid approach which incorporated the data-drive inductive approach (Boyatzis, 1998) and the deductive (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A template of codes (Crabree & Miller, 1999) was developed from the research aims following a consideration of relevant literature. The coding process also involved recognising important events prior to the process of interpretation

(Boyatzis, 1998). A code was chosen, for example 'the desirable candidate', in order to describe and organise possible observations and interpret the meaning of phenomena of service user and carer involvement in social work admissions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). However, other codes developed from the data, such as 'the professional standard of candidates', or 'bad experiences', which emerged as significant issues for participants.

Inductive and deductive codes were formulated, derived from the theoretical background of the study and the data produced from the interviews. Coding rules were then developed for each category, as Mayring (2000) suggests.

I was collecting data over a period of three years and, whilst collecting data, inductive and deductive meanings were considered. I reflected on the data and queried what was in the data that confirmed what was already known and/or suspected, what was surprising and what was puzzling (Ryan, 2006); for example, the fact that nearly all participants thought that the university staff should have the final say over which candidates come on the course.

Thus, for example, all data regarding professionalism was coded. This partly resulted from direct questions, such as whether participants considered social work a profession – deductive data. However, issues surrounding professionalism and social work arose in less obvious ways, such as what they looked for in prospective candidates and what qualities they thought were important in social workers, or such as participants' views on the professional standard of candidates; this can be identified as more inductive data.

If other points were raised which did not fit with the main themes, they were still coded. What came up time and time again in this category was the issue of trust: in

particular how, as a concept, it allowed service users and carers to legitimise their concerns about certain social work practices and, more specifically, their lack of power in past relationships with social workers.

At the end of the data collection period I used QDA software to assist in the process of coding the findings and developing themes. The software enabled me to concentrate on the data itself, helped me to ask questions about the themes and to read between the lines, and to consider the values, attitudes and/or meaning of those who produced the data (Ryan, 2006). This process is described in more detail in Appendix 6.

6.12. Summary

In this chapter I have explained why a qualitative research approach was the most suitable one for this study and the advantages of my being situated within the research site. However, this approach is not without its disadvantages and I have demonstrated the importance of reflexion during the research process, in order to be aware of the importance of power relationships within the research process, and also to achieve a more rigorous and more objective (Harding, 1991) study. In this sense reflexivity, it was argued, problematised the 'taken for granted' assumptions within the site (White, 2001). A single case study approach was adopted as a strategy for the research, since it emphasises the importance of context and setting – both crucial for the study being undertaken here. Semi-structured interviews were adopted as a means of ascertaining the views of service users and carers involved in social work admissions. Some of the problems inherent in this means of data collection were overcome by audio recording them, thus providing an independent record of the event. However, the mobilisation of power was acknowledged rather than diminished and an open and honest approach was taken with participants,

including the recognition that participating in the study was a voluntary activity, all information regarding the study was shared with participants, and they were invited to comment on the results. The study was piloted and my behaviour in the interviews changed as a result. Issues around the audio-taping of interviews were acknowledged, but it was felt that this aspect of the study needed to remain.

The chapter then went on to explain the process of the research and the contextual and procedural issues which impacted on the involvement of service users and carers in social work admissions. The logistics of interviewing participants in the study was described and, in particular, how participants were recruited and engaged in the research. A description of the data analysis process concluded the chapter, explaining that, although the interviews were analysed in some detail following their transcription at the end of the research period, analysis was a continual process which involved reflecting on the issues being raised from a fluctuating insider/outsider and researcher/lecturer/practitioner position. The following chapter will consider the results of this task.

Chapter 7: Data Analysis and Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate service user and carer involvement in the process of admission to social work courses from the perspective of service users and carers themselves. The study sought to explore some of the tensions implicit in the policy and, in particular, the sense in which it might be seen to perform the function of empowering service users and carers, and redress an imbalance between the profession and users, through user involvement at the ground floor of social work training.

This chapter provides a reflexive account of this exploration. It begins with a discussion of the field which was the site for the study. This discussion provides the context for understanding respondents' accounts in two ways. Firstly, it provides the factual background in terms of the calendar and processes for admission to the social work courses under study, and secondly, it seeks to identify the ways in which the rhythm and the pressures of the admissions year shaped the cultural environment in which service users were expected to participate. My analysis will suggest that service users were required to operate within a cultural context that they had little part in shaping, and that this tended to reinforce the asymmetrical power which is seen as characterising relationships between professionals and those who use their services. After discussing social work admissions at the university, the chapter goes on to explore the selection of service user participants in the recruitment process, and how this relates to the social construction of the idea of service user. The chapter then continues by considering the tensions surrounding trust as they were raised by participants, and concludes with a consideration of the role of service users and carers as agents of change through their involvement in

social work admissions. The data discussed in this chapter was generated from qualitative semi-structured interviews, and a reflexive research diary which was completed during the period that the study took place.

7.1.   The Field of Social Work Admissions

Transactions which take place within a specific case study site bear meaning and significance which is specific to the particular event, but are also shaped by cultural and structural factors which frame them. Sociological theorists provide us with a range of conceptual devices for understanding this process of framing. Bourdieu (1993) and Abbott (2005) each provide frameworks which are useful in analysing the role of service users in social work admissions: Abbott uses the concepts of linked ecologies, avatars and 'hinge' to describe relations between professional actors and key institutions (2005), while Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus support the analysis of how these relationships are transformed into cultural practice (1977).

This section describes the field of social work admissions within the case study university, and identifies some of the issues which emerged from the policy of involving service users and carers during the study period. In particular, it considers 'service user' and 'carer' as fragmented, socially constructed identities and teases out the tensions which emerged from the data in relation to the identity of participants and their positionality. This positionality was framed by a number of broader policy features at both national and institutional level, which affected everyday practice in a number of ways: for example, higher education finance necessitated a balance between achieving financial viability and the maintenance of a sense of 'standard', which framed the application of criteria to admissions judgements, whilst the integration of the admissions process into specific points on the academic calendar imposed a rhythm which affected the capacity of service

users to participate in the process as full equals. Full-time academics, like myself, might be less than fully aware of the way in which the taken-for-granted assumptions of institutional life, that Bourdieu would describe as 'doxa' (1998), were not shared by outsiders, and so one of the aims of this section is to interrogate admissions policies and processes from this point of view.

7.1.1. Background

Over the period of the study, there were two routes through the new BSc (Hons) in Social Work available to prospective social work students at this university. Most students applied for the BSc Social Work full-time course through UCAS, and were selected by academic members of staff assisted by local social service agency representatives, service users and carers. A smaller number of students were sponsored by local agencies that organised their admissions separately, but in partnership with the university (a member of staff being involved in selection) as well as service users and carers. Some of the applicants were already employed by these agencies, but they still needed to go through an admissions process which satisfied both the university and professional requirements. Although not a strictly accurate description, the work-based route (WBR) students were, at the time of the study, often referred to as part-time students, whilst those that came through UCAS in the more conventional way were often referred to as full-time (FT) students and, for convenience, the term 'full time' or FT for the former students and work-based or WBR for the latter will be used. I had no involvement in WBR admissions during my time as admissions tutor, but did contact as many of the service users involved in that process as possible, and some were interviewed as part of the study along with those from the FT route. As far as possible, all the service users and carers that had

been involved in both FT and WBR admissions were invited to participate in the study.

The admissions process for social work, as for most academic courses in higher education, ran over the academic year from October to the beginning of September. Students applied through UCAS from October to the cut-off date the following January. After January, students could still apply but there was no obligation to consider these 'late' applications. Service users and carers had been involved in the delivery of some parts of the old course and, to a lesser extent, in parts of the admissions process. This had happened in an ad hoc manner and was mainly at the instigation of particular members of staff rather than in any organised sense. The development of the new degree necessitated a more organised response and this was reflected in the development of a dedicated module planned and delivered by service users. When I took over as admissions tutor, planning was already under way for their increased involvement in the admissions process. In contrast, local 'stakeholders' had been involved in the old course in their capacity as partner agencies, though this involvement was minimal in regard to the admissions process, and restricted mainly to particular staff from local agency training departments.

7.1.2. Criteriology

Many of the judgements regarding suitability for social work training are imported from outside the university social work department. At the time of the study, the admissions process for FT students began in about November 2004, with all social work academic staff shortlisting UCAS applications as they were received by the university. Students were assessed on whether they had the minimum academic requirements as laid down by the university, and the minimum professional ones, as laid down by the GSCC. They had to have GCSE Mathematics and English at grade

C or above, or the equivalent, and they needed to provide information regarding their health and whether they had any criminal convictions, either of which might affect their ability to gain a place on the course. All of these requirements were laid down either by statutory bodies or the university, and were non-negotiable. In addition, applicants had to demonstrate through their personal statement an understanding of social work and a desire to be a social worker, and provide satisfactory references; these requirements were established criteria for entry, which had evolved from discussions with agency representatives and previous requirements. Other aspects of the application were also taken into consideration, such as grammar and style.

Service users and carers had no influence at this of the admissions process. It was an essentially normative exercise based on academic qualification, knowledge of social work and previous experience (which could be voluntary or personal experience of social work). Applicants with previous criminal convictions needed to be considered for suitability. In addition, the new social work degree regulations (GSCC, 2002) insisted that people sign a health declaration (although it was not clear what was supposed to happen to applications where a health issue was disclosed). Although candidates needed to reveal any health problem or criminal conviction history, these issues were not taken into account at the shortlisting stage, since decisions regarding both of these were taken by those from outside the university and outside the school of social work respectively. Because there were often delays in obtaining these decisions, candidates who were deemed to be suitable apart from either of these factors were often shortlisted and interviewed before a decision had been made. This could be frustrating for candidates who had spent time attending the interviews and for interviewers who felt that their time was

being wasted. Most of the social work lecturers were engaged in shortlisting, which at the time entailed the completion of an off-line form.

Also there were a number of other criteria-related tasks which required attention. For example, whilst I was acting as admissions tutor, we received applications from people applying for UK citizenship or from overseas, and these needed checking. Sometimes applicants assumed that you knew if their access course included the required Maths and English components, and so this would need to be checked with the colleges concerned.

During my first year as admissions tutor, interviews were conducted mainly by academic staff with a service user, carer and sometimes an agency representative, and this model continued throughout the study period.

7.1.3. The pressure of student numbers and market forces

Higher education funding policy, and the way in which it has encouraged market forces, underpins the recruitment of social work students for university training, and the admission process therefore has to be seen as a compromise between these forces and any regulatory or quality control function that involving service users and carers might have.

The issue of student numbers provides insight into one of the subtle constituents of the social work admissions field at the time. The method of funding universities was dictated by the Government via the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC, 2000), and it was the role of some academic staff to operationalise it. Unlike the policy of involving service users and carers in social work admissions, the issue of student numbers affects university core funding, and therefore heavily influences admissions practice generally. It is unlikely that service users and carers from

outside the university would have been aware of this important aspect of admissions, or that university staff would have considered their ignorance in this matter.

However, one only has to consider what the response would be by university staff if service user and carer involvement were to adversely affect university funding, to understand the value of student numbers within the admissions process compared to service user and carer involvement. During the study period, the only time this issue was raised in relation to service users and carers was indirectly, when a participant commented to me that they only seemed to be needed at certain times of the year.

7.1.4. Rhythm of admissions

As pointed out previously, there were large parts of the admissions process that service users and carers, and anyone else from outside the university, were simply not involved in, either because there was no opportunity for them to do so because of external institutional requirements, or because the rhythm of admissions demanded it. I found out early on as admissions tutor that the rhythm of social work admissions rested on two beliefs: firstly, that the earlier we shortlisted and interviewed candidates the better, since, I was told, the better candidates tended to be those that applied to UCAS early on, and if we did not process these applicants quickly, they would go to other universities. Secondly, we needed to shortlist all candidates who applied within the designated time, and so it was preferable if all our offers could be made to those applicants, since if we wished to consider late applicants, we would have to consider them all. Because of these two factors, we decided to try and interview the first batch of applicants before Christmas, which meant that both shortlisting and interview arrangements had to be undertaken very quickly.

Certain times of the year, therefore, were particularly busy. From December to April, academic staff shortlisted applicants and then, along with service users, carers and agency representatives, were involved in interviews. As admissions tutor it was my job, along with other staff, to process the subsequent offers and also to deal with the large number of enquiries about the course.

In short, the admissions process for social work students was at times complicated and time consuming, and could further accentuate the difference between those employed to recruit potential students and those from outside the university. Therefore, not only did issues in regard to criteria hinder true involvement, but also, so did issues in regard to rhythm. For example, the contact with service users and carers from outside the university took place just before and during the period when interviews took place. There was little contact for the rest of the year, a factor which confused some participants who were external to the university.

The second particularly busy time with regard to FT students was from August onwards, when the results for 'A' level and other entry qualifications were made available and we could make a more accurate assessment of numbers. WBR numbers were more reliable in this regard, since applicants without the required entrance qualifications were not considered. August and September were traditionally seen as months when academic staff wind down from teaching and assessment duties and concentrate on scholarly and/or research activities; admissions could therefore be an unwelcome intrusion into this time, in direct contrast to those service users and carers who were recruited from outside and who prioritised this activity, and had an expectation that the university did also.

Bourdieu argues that these taken-for-granted arrangements, or 'doxa', tend to favour the particular social arrangement of the field, thus privileging the dominant and taking their position of dominance as self-evident and universally favourable (Bourdieu, 1998). A doxic situation may be thought of as a situation characterised by harmony between the objective, external structures and the 'subjective', internal structures of the habitus. In the doxic state, the social world is perceived as natural, taken for granted and even commonsensical. The information asymmetry described above might be interpreted as giving academic staff an advantage over anyone who came from outside, although this situation was not of their making, nor necessarily one that they desired. For this reason, Weberian accounts of professionalism, such as those given by Larson (1977) and Macdonald (1995) which concentrate on the exclusionary aspect of professional closure, do not fit easily here. Bourdieu's theory of fields, where doxa tend to favour the particular social arrangement of the field, is more helpful (Bourdieu, 1998). This explains the privilege of academic staff within the institution as a self-evident and universally favourable situation. Therefore, the categories of understanding and perception that constitute the admissions habitus are congruent with the objective organisation of the field, and tend to reproduce the structures of the field. The knowledge of the field of social work admissions can be seen as a component of the cultural capital that academic staff possess, although there was no evidence that tutors perceived it as such.

To summarise, the preceding discussion has been concerned with contextualising the case study and describing the social work admission process, and in particular demonstrated how economic considerations ultimately control social work admissions. It went on to explain how insiders, because of their knowledge and responsibility for administrating the admissions process, have an obvious advantage.

This section now continues by considering how this was experienced by the participants in the study, following an examination of who the service users and carers involved in the admission of social workers were, who participated in this study.

7.1.5. Identifying participants and tensions around identity

As admissions tutor for the first two years of the study, I was responsible for recruiting service users and carers; this was a team effort, although in practice, certain members of the team were more responsible for this than others. There was little discussion initially about who we would include or exclude from the category of service user or carer, and thus the act of selection can also be seen as one of social construction (Barnes & Cotterell, 2012a). One member of the team had employed carers and some of these were approached. Another member had been working with a group of young people who had been in care. One of the specialist practitioners who contributed to our teaching around vulnerable adults worked with service users in his agency, and these people were invited to participate. Two of the statutory agencies involved in the work-based course had links with service users' groups for people with learning disabilities, and they were also approached. Representatives from local agencies (local authority social services departments and non-statutory agencies who employed qualified social workers) were already involved. One way of understanding this scenario is that employed by Foucault, where knowledge and power work together to control an institution – in this case the admission of social work students (Foucault, 1995). We decided who would be invited and so maintained control in the very activity of involving. Of course, Foucault (1995) in this situation is describing a prison and not a university, but the question raised, that of who uses

power and to what ends, is equally relevant here, particularly since it was so clandestine.

A local non-statutory agency working with older people was approached, and they included an advertisement for involvement in their newsletter; two people responded. The possibility of involving families currently receiving social work intervention was investigated, and also an agency working with young people who were at risk of offending[13] , but no contact details were forthcoming. It is worth noting, however, that prior to approaching the latter organisation, I did raise the question of whether someone with a recent criminal conviction could take part, and this was discussed with my manager. It was decided that we could involve such individuals if the circumstances and offence(s) were such that they would not prevent someone from joining the course. This is a further example of the way we unwittingly assisted in the social construction of service users. Other members of the social work team were involving service users and carers in the delivery of parts of the course, and some of these people were willing to be involved in admissions also.

Allain and colleagues at Middlesex University took a more systematic approach than us. Below, they describe how they recruited five service users and carers to be involved in their social work course following 2002:

> The question of who should we involve as service user and carer representatives involved careful consideration. We did not want to fall into either of the categories that Arnstein (1969) calls 'non-participation' or 'tokenism' but rather wanted to make a real attempt at 'partnership'... We believed that we were most likely to achieve this where we were able to identify service users and carers we already had established working relationships with and where all parties had found those working

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[13] Contact with these agencies came about because they offered practice placements for social work students.

relationships to be sufficiently comfortable and effective. We thus recruited two carers and three service users who met those criteria. All those recruited also had experience of membership of and participation within other organisations as service user and carer representatives and had developed skills and knowledge associated with those roles. Most particularly, we recruited people who had excellent communications skills, commitment, energy, ideas and integrity (2006, p.405).

However, they were similarly engaged in an exercise in social construction, albeit more consciously differentiating between service users and carers generally and those suitable for involvement. That universities should do the recruitment was taken for granted within the policy and by us. Alternatives did not enter the discourse. Foucault (1995) provides a means by which we can understand this power/knowledge situation and explains how individuals within the institution reproduce these relationships. Using Bourdieu's (1988) approach, the advantage that academic staff possess here can be linked to the advantage they possess as higher education lecturers generally: that is, as access to social capital, the social capital being the access to information and the production and dissemination of knowledge. From that perspective, academic staff have an incentive to maintain the status quo.

Unlike Allain et al. and colleagues (2006), we did not consciously seek people with particular communications skills, commitment, energy, ideas and integrity, though several had experience of participation within other organisations as service user and carer representatives. In the hectic and pressurised environment of social work admissions described earlier, involving the 'right' people was crucial, especially at the beginning, although 'right' did not necessarily mean compliant. At the same time, someone who used inappropriate language, or was deemed aggressive, or had a recent criminal conviction would not have been considered. Thus we were Lipsky's

(1980) street level bureaucrats, largely responsible for interpreting how this policy was put in to practice and regulating it.

Hall (1996a), in his discussion regarding representational identities, makes the point that identities generally are characterised by exclusion. When the discursive 'outside' is constituted within marginalised groups, it proves troubling and unsettling to the 'normal' identity (Hall 1996a) and has the potential to disrupt the status quo. Certain groups of people were excluded from being involved as service users or carers. People suffering from severe mental health problems, or people who had committed serious criminal offences were not involved and, since social work academics were responsible for organising admissions, it was social work academics who were involved in this normalisation process. Foucault's (1975) notion of people being controlled by less obviously oppressive means – the 'managerial gaze' – is useful here. The involvement policy under this gaze assumes a discontent with social work and assumes a need to regulate or control it, but by the very people who are being regulated and controlled. However, Foucault (1980b) is clear that power is not simply about being repressive. Involving service users with recent criminal convictions, for example, would have alienated service users who felt strongly that people with criminal convictions should not be considered for social work. Similarly, aggressive behaviour would have been intolerable for all, not least the applicants. It is important to identify power, and how it operates and why, but it should not be assumed that this is always undesirable or harmful. As admissions tutor, I knew that I had a certain degree of control and enjoyed the idea of using that power to involve service users and carers, for example. I also enjoyed being able to introduce them to each other (friendships and alliances were made). More generally, there was a certain satisfaction gained from meeting the numbers requirement.

Involving service users and carers was perhaps more interesting and enjoyable for me because I was carrying out this study. I got to know people intimately and developed an understanding of how participants in the study perceived things. I became aware of competition between individuals within the university regarding who had 'expertise' in the involvement of service users and carers, when their involvement was implemented across other professional courses. There were individual as well as professional advantages to being associated with involvement for those working within the university.

There is no doubt that involvement could have been achieved in a 'tokenistic' way. Like Allain et al. (2006), our intention was not to be tokenistic or 'non-participatory', but how useful was this terminology? It was a hard case to prove one way or the other, particularly when one considers the dual responsibilities of, for example, producing professional practitioners and fulfilling government student number requirements in higher education, as discussed earlier. It also ignored what was, in retrospect, an obvious point – that some members of the academic staff had experience of being service users and/or carers themselves. Indeed, some service users and/or carers had trained as social workers before joining the university as social work academics. This was an early indication that the insider/outsider differentiation was not accurate and that generally, the concept of a homogenous identity does not exist for service users or carers, and also that any attempt to separate them is about control (Foucault, 1995).

A short description of participants in the study is provided in Appendix 4. One route to understanding who could be called 'service user' and 'carer' was to consider the attributes of all service users and carers who participated; that is, how we at the university, consciously or otherwise, interpreted the terms. Those who had applied to

be adoptive parents were included, since they described themselves as service users, whilst carers described themselves as carers (one as a 'professional' carer) even though in some circumstances they required services. This is a good example of when the 'normal' identity of service user and carer does not bear up under scrutiny, as Hall (1996a) predicts.

In line with current literature regarding service user involvement (for example, Croft & Beresford, 2008), not all service users had actually experienced social services involvement. They were recruited from local service user groups; for example, a group of older people recruited by the local authority to assist in planning services were approached. However, when interviewed, it emerged that two people from this group had actually had contact with social services earlier in their lives.

Others had previous experience of social workers through their earlier working lives, or through volunteer work. Some service users had part-time teaching contracts with the university, as did some carers. For example, Janet was paid by social services and so could, on the one hand, be deemed an agency employee, but also described herself as a service user:

> *I would describe myself as a service user and a carer really, as I have been a professional respite carer and dealing with social workers on two accounts, as I deal with social workers dealing with reviews and things and I also give input into a social worker's work.*

Others described themselves as being service users in some respects – for example, their feelings of powerlessness over decisions regarding placements or delays in payments. In the following quotation, Edna describes how being a social worker did not necessarily ease the problems of being a service user:

It was quite hard for me as an active social worker having to access services in other departments. I think one of the things that it showed to me was how frustrating it can be on the other side of the fence to be an actual service user, because I think it is very easy as a worker to fall in the trap of thinking we are doing the best we can, when I waited something like two weeks as a response for a referral as a service user. Then the person that came out was absolutely fine; I had no problems with the face to face, but it was the length of time of the process that I found hindered me as a carer and a service user.

This is a good example of how complex identities can be, echoing the point Hall (1996a) makes regarding identities being structured representations, contradictory and always situational. Edna begins this piece by saying how hard it was for her as a social worker to access services for her service user self. Here Edna portrays the complications which her service user identity causes her social work one. She can no longer feel so good about her professional self because she is forced to confront the reality of being on the receiving end of the service. Of course, Edna can return to being a social worker once her need to access social services ceases, unlike many service users and carers. Hall (1992) argues that we are all involved in the political games around fractured or decentred identities.

Like Cooks, I use the notion of position "as a metaphor for discussing the ways individuals are constituted and reconstituted through social interactions and discursive practices" (2010, p.249). When I first considered carrying out this study, I thought the process would be straightforward. However, I realised early on that this was not the case. Some full-time academic staff within the social work department had experience of being either a carer, or a service user, or both. Therefore, an invitation to participate was sent to all staff asking those with experience of being

service users or carers to participate in the study. Three staff came forward. Jean was one of these: *"I work as a lecturer at the university but I have worked as a social worker and in the voluntary sector. I have also had experience of being on the receiving end of social work."* Again, however, complexities existed. Some service users and carers were involved in teaching and had consultancy or hourly-paid teaching contracts, whilst some academic staff were on part-time contracts. One service user was a full-time member of staff but from a different department. All these different arrangements had significance for the people concerned. Full-time members of staff were fairly straightforward, except that some of those were, or had been, service users or carers. Some part-time members of staff were on fractional appointments, whilst some part-time, hourly-paid staff were employed because of their service user or carer experience, and some were paid as consultants. Most full-time academic staff involved in teaching and recruitment were qualified social workers, but so were some of the part-time staff. As Hall (1996a) points out, identities are always situational. For the purposes of this study I decided to situate myself alongside the involvement policy, and invite all those with experience of accessing social services who were involved in the admissions process, including academic staff, to participate in the study.

Experience of being either a service user and/or carer was something that participants, whether they worked at the university or not, brought to the admissions process. However, there was also a notion that they would in some way represent service users and carers in putting forward their perspective. When asked if she saw herself as representing any particular group, Nora explained some of the anomalies regarding representation generally:

> *Yes, older people and quite a few older people; but the very first meeting that I was involved with, with this [representing older people], they said that I represented the hundred and forty thousand older people in… and I said that that is ridiculous. So I am always going back to the fact that I represent those who I can ask their opinions of and feed back what I know, rather than take this general thing, because we're all so different. I am lucky I have got my health, I'm not just on the state pension and that puts me, I consider, in a privileged position to what others are. However, with all the work that I do with older people, I hopefully cover people not as lucky as me. So I am pretty representative, yes.*

Nora took her representative role very seriously – as someone who had no direct experience of being a user of social services, representation was her Identity claim. Hall (1996a) argues that the act of representation echoes the fragmented and contradictory nature of identity. Here Nora differentiates herself from other older people because she is healthy and financially better off than those older people who depend on the state pension. These differing, socially constructed identities, as pointed out earlier, have different values. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital is useful in understanding the value attached to different identities. The term 'social capital', as applied here, emphasises "its role in social control... [and] as shorthand for the positive consequences of sociability" (Portes, 1998, p.1). If we accept that Nora's representation is a form of social capital, we can understand why it is so important for Nora that we understand the value of it.

Most of the service users and carers from outside the university emphasised their representative value. Olivia, a young person who had been in local authority care, was very clear that she represented children who are in care, whilst Robert saw himself as:

> *…a bit of everything really because so much of what happens involves a variety of different areas… Myself as an individual, a lecturer, a service user and someone who offers services and skills to social services within the metropolitan area.*

It is worth noting that representation can be specific to a particular group, such as people in care, or more generally. Allain et al. reinforce this point:

> In doing this we were aware that involving service users and carers in the Social Work Programmes should not mean that we fell into the trap of locking service users and carers into fixed roles. Service users need to be seen as equal citizens who are able to move on from their former or current status and are valued for the broader contributions they can make (2006,p p.404-405).

Hall (1996a) argues that representational identities, like all identities, are characterised by exclusion: who is or is not a service user or carer is characterised by discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalised subjects. He argues that we need to question how identities are normalised and who is excluded (Hall, 1996a), which Foucault does to some extent, in relation to how normalisation can be linked to power and knowledge (1995).

The tensions around being identified as a service user were not confined to this study. The search for an appropriate term for those who use social services is a feature of social work history (Wilson, et al., 2008). The word 'client' was favoured originally, as the standard term used by professions (such as lawyers), but its voluntaristic connotations, Wilson et al. (2008) argue, did not accurately describe the position of those users of the service. The more neutral term 'service user' is now favoured, "which seeks to convey the related ideas of 'entitlement' and 'partnership'" (Wilson et al., 2008, p.419). However this term is also controversial, and in particular the word 'user', with its drug and alcohol abuse connotations. As Wilson et al comment: "It is interesting that, after over a hundred and thirty years of its history,

there still is no accepted term for people who use social services" (2008, p.419). It is also interesting to note that a similar debate has taken place in the medical profession concerning the term 'patient' (Neuberger, 1999).

The term 'service user', therefore, is not homogenous but rather a shorthand for a group of individuals who are in receipt of (in this case social) services (Beresford, 2000). It can also include those who do not receive social services at this point in time but feel they are likely to in the future (Levin, 2004); although in this study, this could also be interpreted as a representative role. The term 'service user' is socially constructed and, I have argued, can negatively restrict people's identity: the service user becomes defined by the services they have received (willingly or unwillingly), a point reinforced by the National User Network (Shaping Our Lives National User Network, 2003), and reinforced by this study.

Defining a carer is no less problematic. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers (Clarke & Riley, 2006) defines a carer as someone who "without payment" provides help and support despite the existence of paid carers; and Warren, citing research into young carers, found that "when asked, children tend to describe their situations in terms of feelings and tasks rather than attempt a definition of 'young carer'" (2007, p.9). Twigg expands on this:

> Carers are thus not free to act fully in their own interest (e.g. relinquish their caring responsibilities)... It is this fact that enables carers to lay claim to public consideration in their own right. Regarding someone as a carer rather than just a relative endows them a different status within public discourse (1994, pp.290-291).

This differentiation was taken for granted in the application of the university policy. We did not attempt to recruit people who were carers of their own children (or child-minders), for example, unless they were distinguished in some way, such as a caring

for a child or adult with disability of some kind. Similarly, carers who assisted service users involved in admissions were not interviewed, although I did discuss this issue with one of those carers. She said she would not feel comfortable about being interviewed for the study because she believed it would conflict with her enabling role.

Harriet, a social work agency representative, wondered how long the label of service user continues after their involvement with social services has ceased. She stated,

> *…you've got somebody who has been out of the service for twelve years, but when somebody hears of them they'll discuss them in terms of being a service user. So it's almost like, when do you stop being one?*

This comment by Harriet provides a clear example of the socially constructed nature of 'service user' and its negative connotations. If the service user identity were not perceived negatively, then ceasing to be one would not really be an issue. One would assume that if a social worker were more powerful, then it would be advantageous to be one if one ever needed to ask social services for help. However, Edna's experience does not reflect this, and she stated:

> *Because it has been difficult for me as a working social worker as well, in the fact that I am admitting failure because it is like, 'I am a social worker as well but I need to ask for help from other social workers because I can't sort out my own problems' if you like; it isn't problems, I need the service. I suddenly became a different category and that initial approach from me to social services was quite difficult and I think that initial response that you get is vital.*

Thus, as soon as one asks for help from social services, one becomes *"a different category"* which, for Edna at least, was not a particularly desirable one. The reason this happened, Edna believes, was because she 'couldn't sort out her own

problems'. This assumption that problems are the personal failing of an individual, rather than an outcome of circumstances, is a well versed feature of neo-liberal free market thinking, as is the notion of individual moral responsibility as opposed to state responsibility. If competition is a feature of growth and prosperity, then 'failure' will always be an uncomfortable tension for those that support it.

Heffernan (2006a) uses Bourdieu (1997) to argue that authority comes to language from outside in the social world and, because authority can come from the speaker, those in power have the means of using language as a way of preserving their domination (Heffernan, 2006a). The term 'service user' is meant to foster involvement but, as Heffernan (2006a) notes, it has the ability to work against this if those that refer to it in practice see it as stigmatising. Perhaps one way of resolving this tension is to assess its value. Another is to argue, as Cowden and Singh (2007) do, that we are all potential service users.

7.1.6. Summary

As stated earlier, Hall (1996a) makes the point that, when considering the discursive construction of identities, we need to question how they are normalised and who is excluded. Within the field of social work professional training, a culture exists where social capital plays a key part. It is dominated by higher education and social welfare policy agendas, as established in the introduction to this thesis.

The policy of involvement at the university being studied here was implemented by social work academics who decided who should be involved and how much. This policy was neither a result of campaigning by service user groups, nor accepting of the expertise of service users and carers in regard to education. The emphasis here

was on socially constructed difference subtly reinforced by academics, many of whom themselves had experience of the service.

Although the State ultimately controls social work education, within the field of social work admissions, the university and academics who work there clearly have some influence over the admissions process and are conversant with it, which Bourdieu (1988) might designate as cultural capital, since this information is advantageous. University academics clearly have more influence than service users, carers and agency representatives brought in from outside. It was university academics that recruited the service users and carers and decided their level of involvement. However, the cultural capital accumulated as a professionally educated social worker or a social work lecturer bore no value when that person became a service user or carer, according to those participants. This is echoed in an article by Gina Tyler in her description of service user involvement at the University of Lincoln:

> After becoming disabled later in life, I discovered what it meant to be a 'service user' in terms of health and social care. I could see gaps in service provision, and how some workers did not appear to see why they needed to involve service users at every possible level of the decision making process. Some workers often offered tokenistic gestures to involve people, but this was not real involvement, and made me more determined to challenge this. Involving service users in a tokenistic way achieves nothing other than ticking boxes and fabricating figures, which are then used to measure counterfeit involvement (2006, p,385).

Tyler (2006) takes it as read that we know what "*I discovered what it meant to be a 'service user' in terms of health and social care*" means. Whilst it is not altogether surprising that some service users go on to become social workers and even social work academics, nor that some social workers and even social work academics

might find themselves, willingly or not, in the position of being a service user of social services, they are not treated any differently to other service users and carers.

However, this does not seem to work the same way in reverse. In terms of being a service user or carer in regard to the admission of social work students, it is more advantageous to be within the field of social work academia than not. This prompts us to consider why the terms 'service user' and 'carer' have such little status (cultural capital). It allows us to deconstruct terms such as 'service user' to demonstrate the fragmented and potentially stigmatising component of being in need of a social worker.

I have already mentioned that participants generally were supportive of social work professionalism. In the next section, the views of participants in regard to professionalism are discussed in more detail, and in particular how this informed their choices around suitability in regard to candidates.

7.2. Social Work Professionalism and Linked Ecologies

In earlier chapters, I alluded to the fact that the introduction of service and carer involvement in social work admissions could be seen as a regulatory response, resulting in part from a crisis of legitimation in social work professionalism (Beresford, 2002; McLaughlin, 2007), as in professionalism generally (Wilson, 1984; Broadbent et al., 1997). This crisis was associated with the predominance of neo-Weberian theory in academic analysis of the professions, and the introduction of consumerist rhetoric and social market perspectives on the consumption of public services. Commentators have identified the policy with a specific critique of public service professionals (Stewart, 1995; Malin et al., 2002; Alcock et al., 2008), and in particular the hegemony of a managerial approach, which downgraded the professional autonomy of social workers (Walton, 2005; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009). It has been argued earlier that faith in the 'trait' model of the professions has eroded alongside the professional project, leaving 'professionalism' as a disciplinary resource for managers in 'new' professional contexts (Fournier, 1999), while others have identified tensions between 'occupational' and 'organisational' professionalism (Evetts, 2003). I have argued, alongside others (Burt & Worsley, 2008), that service user and carer involvement may be seen as having a quasi-regulatory function: using Abbott's concept of an 'avatar' (2005), social work training can be located within the social work professional ecology which has been reproduced within higher education. From this perspective, service user and carer involvement may be seen as part of an attempt by the State to institutionalise a critique of social work through social work training. If the policy of involving service users and carers in admissions was indeed developed as a form of regulation, its efficacy is questioned by the fact

that the regulators were recruited, organised and controlled by those who were being regulated.

In this context, the range of perspectives on what it was that constituted, or should constitute, social work professionalism was of considerable significance. Understanding these values provides an essential context for exploring how the policy of service user and carer involvement might provide a transformative element in admissions to the social work professional project within higher education, despite the fact that it was largely controlled by the State. Consequently, all participants were asked directly about their views concerning social work professionalism, but also encouraged to discuss what qualities they thought a good social worker possessed and what they looked for in potential social work students. The binary opposites of these qualities were also sought. The following section contextualises these findings within the case study.

As stated, the majority of those interviewed thought social work was, and should be, a profession, although of equal interest is what they considered a profession, or professionalism, to be. This might be considered surprising, given some of the negative experiences which many of the participants had had at the hands of social services. No-one argued that it was in any way different to other professions, as others have argued (Etzioni, 1969; Williams, 1993).

When pushed on the statutory status of service user and carer involvement with social work admissions, as compared with the medical profession, Edna made the following point during her interview, which to a degree supports Williams' (1993) view that for social work, greater importance is given to the personal qualities of the professional than their knowledge and/or expertise:

E: For my interview I wear three hats and you do pick up different things and I think that is invaluable, and at the end of the day I think service users and carers are probably more important than the rest of us because at the end of the day the candidate, when they become a qualified professional, there are the users that they are going to be dealing with, and that skill is hopefully what will make them good social workers.

R: But we don't do it for doctors do we, we don't have patients involved in their selection?

E: I often think that's why doctors are the way they are, to be honest.

This supports Abbott's (1995) analysis of social work where he argues that, despite its claims of scientific, evidence-based practice, its public image, and one that it does little to dispel, is one of altruism. Social work, Abbott claims, is the only profession which still makes claim to that rather Durkheimian character trait (1995). In fact, he argues, it is a feature of most modern professionals that they value direct one-to-one contact with 'clients' or 'service users' less and less, citing the English barrister as a prime example of a profession which demands the presence of another profession, a solicitor, before any meeting with a client occurs.

Most participants defined professionalism in terms of the skills and knowledge social workers possessed after training, as argued, for example, by Goode (1969), Abbott (1988) and more generally, functionalists such as Merton & Storer (1973). Patsy, when asked if she felt social work was a profession, replied that it was, *"Because of the skills involved and I think because of the knowledge you need to be able to take on board and at least be able to find out about things."* Terry agreed, but highlighted the ethics and values element: *"I think because it has a professional training, it has a professional qualification… So actually having professional ethics and values is absolutely key to doing the job in a professional way."*

This fits with a Durkheimian (1957) model of professionalism – professionals having the role of protectors of the vulnerable – with moral values and ethical codes. Abbott (2005) is scathing of the functional account of professions in regard to issues of traits but, as demonstrated here, they provide a valuable means by which recipients of professional services can articulate what they would wish to expect from professionals.

However, as Abbott (1995) also observed, most social workers spend a lot of time on the phone negotiating with other professionals on behalf of service users. My experience of statutory social work would support this observation. Most of my friends, unless they were social workers themselves, did not understand what I did whilst at work, but thought, as Abbott (1995) so accurately observed, that I 'helped people'. These two aspects of social work, the altruism and negotiating with other professionals, he argues, define the social work profession (Abbott, 1995). The third defining characteristic is that they work predominantly with what Abbott (1995) calls 'despised groups' of people, such as poor people, people with a mental illness or with people who abuse or neglect children, for example. Within his theoretical framework, social work ecology has at its centre these groups of people – people with whom other professions do not wish to engage, whilst at the boundaries of their turf are the less despised groups who also need help. In Abbott's (1995) world of competing professional ecologies, it is these latter groups in the suburban boundary which might be lost to other professions.

 Patsy's and Terry's answers perhaps also reflect their position, not just as service users and/or carers who have trained as social workers, but also as social work lecturers, when considering a philosophical issue such as whether social work is a profession or not. This seems to echo the point which has already been noted, that

where service user/service provider duality exists, the primary identification seems to be 'provider', thus emphasising the valorised nature of the professional provider versus the service user experience. Providers can be seen as having a vested interest, since this interpretation casts their occupation, and therefore status, in a positive light. As pointed out in the last section, Abbott (2005) describes a process whereby parts of an ecology (social work professional training, for example) are copied and institutionalised into another ecology (higher education). Service user involvement can be described in a similar way, but it can also be perceived as a 'hinge' between the professional ecology of social work and the political one, where policy is formulated. The 'hinge' exists between the professional and political ecologies and, as Abbott (2005) points out, the State, representing the political ecology, only becomes involved when there are evident political issues such as a perceived discontent with social work. This last point is not one that Abbott (1995) concerns himself with, and this is perhaps where his theoretical contribution ends. If one considers positionality here, it might be helpful to consider where the political discontent originates, and what relationship political discontent has with social work professionalism.

This different and unequal valuation of capital possessed by service users, as opposed to that possessed by professional providers, can be illustrated further in the following example, and can also be likened to Weber's notion of professional closure, whereby professionals protect their advantaged position by constructing exclusive organisations with boundaries. In the following example, Terry talks about the social worker who creates false boundaries between themselves and service users under the umbrella of professionalism:

I've been interested in the number of people that wouldn't have a cup of tea in the house of the service user. Not necessarily because they'd been working with people who are living in very difficult housing situations, but almost a rule that they're making, 'No, I wouldn't dream of having a cup of tea with someone that uses services'. To me that suggests the 'Them and Us' view on people who use services. It's very different to, say, 'Well I don't want to just go out for an evening with a service user because there are professional boundaries and I need to be aware that I respect those'. It is something about respect, because it's fundamental.

This reflects a dilemma generally which semi-professionals have to grapple with (Etzioni et al., 1969). Are they on the side of the service user or are they not? Terry supports Durkheim's (1957) view that professional boundaries exist to support and protect people, whilst being aware that this can lead to a 'them and us', elitist, Weberian position. In fact, both views have value within Bourdieu's theoretical approach, since the former indicates the existence of habitus, whilst the latter illustrates professionalisation more as a structured and structuring medium. This issue might also reflect more subtle aspects of social work habitus that are predicated on the inferiority of service user identity.

7.2.1. Positionality and professional identity

In the last chapter I discussed the issue of positionality in regard to Abbott (1995; 2005) and how, by not considering his own positionality, he might have understated the position of service users within his conceptualisation. As Cooks (2010) points out, any discussion that involves positionality must necessarily recognise the position of its author, and that must include myself (Cooks, 2010; Barnes & Cotterell, 2012a).

Like several of the participants, I was a social worker prior to working as a lecturer in higher education. When in practice as a social worker, I was ambivalent regarding

the issue of social work professionalism and did not join the British Association of Social Workers. My background prior to qualifying as a social worker was community action and child care campaigns, working directly in under-fives day care for a time. I trained in social work to widen my options and, on completion of my training, entered statutory social work. I struggle with the concept of career in regard to social work and I consider myself fortunate in gaining experience of statutory social work at a time when community social work was fashionable (Walton, 2005) and operationalised in the borough where I worked. Having said that, I was I was sometimes involved in carrying out statutory duties such as removing children. The isolation and poverty experienced by many of the people that accessed social services was a constant reminder of society's failings, and the benefits of group work and community support were apparent daily, largely because of the commitment of certain individuals within that team but also, in my opinion, due to the philosophy of the department and the Director of Social Service in post at the time. Despite being a registered social worker, I have not had any direct experience of social work since entering higher education as a lecturer. However, I find myself talking about professional standards more and more, and notice that I use the term 'unprofessional' more and more frequently.

Day et al. (2006) argue that the professional self, like the personal one, evolves over time. They argue that it has five complements: self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perfection. They say (Day et al., 2006) that agency in each form is concerned with the fulfilment of these identities, their reconstruction where necessary, and managing critical incidents and trends which may threaten them or which need to be managed. Emotional factors are involved

when managing the positive and negative emotional effects on their identity, which can in turn have positive and negative effects on services they provide.

It could be assumed that service users and carers who were employed as lecturers by the university, and the agency representatives who participated in the study, might be perceived to have more invested in this area, since they were all qualified social workers. Susan, an academic member of staff as well as a service user, stated:

> *…but in terms of it being a profession, yes I do think it's a profession if you define a profession as being something that demands people within it having a good knowledge base; if they've got enhanced skills that they have to apply to very complex situations then I think yes, social work is a profession.*

Academics involved in training professionals within higher education, as Abbott points out (1995; 2005), are in a different position to those who teach the more traditional academic subjects. He goes on to argue that, initially at least, they are placed lower within a hierarchy which values research over undergraduate teaching (Abbott, 1995; 2005), and which has little to do with vague concepts such as altruism and even less contact with Abbott's 'despised' people than most. However, social work training is dependent on social work practice for its legitimacy and, on a more practical level, the need for placements. During my time as a social work academic, I have witnessed first-hand how these dynamics play out within higher education and between higher education and social work practice. In regard to the latter, I have not noticed any particular difficulty on a personal level, although I have occasionally been conscious of a 'those who can't, teach' philosophy. However, in regard to the former group, I have witnessed direct hostility in meetings around issues of turf (why should social work lecturers teach social workers subjects that others have expertise

in?), and also the issue of social work practice and its academic value. Although those issues have largely been played out with the growth of professional training courses generally, and the moves by some academic subjects to have practical grounding (as described by Abbott, 1995), I still feel that social work is in some way different and we are perceived as being so by academic colleagues. Last but by no means least is the issue of what we produce and how that interfaces with social work practitioners – the legitimacy of our evidence base (Traynor, 2009). I felt that this was perhaps an issue with the social worker who did not participate in my study. He saw my lists of questions and, I believe, did not like them. What was pertinent, really, was that he did not feel able to tell me so, for whatever reason, or to discuss his decision with me. To return to Day et al. (2006), professional identity is also fragmented, and social work identity particularly so. As Abbott (1995) points out, much of social work professionalism in practice is rather different to the one which academics strive to underpin.

Due to my ambivalence around social work professionalism, I was surprised that participants from outside the university and the profession were generally supportive of the professional project, but in retrospect it was obvious that they would be. If I was in need of a social worker for whatever reason, I would prefer someone who knew what they were doing and was trained in the field. Professionalism assumes specialist knowledge – I would also want that assurance of specialism.

All participants were asked directly about their views concerning social work professionalism, but also encouraged to discuss what qualities they thought a good social worker possessed and what they looked for in potential social work students. The negatives or opposites of these were also sought.

7.2.2. Professionalism and knowledge: legitimation and training

Susan stated:

> *So, does that make sense? So I think on one hand I support social work being a profession; I would like to see it being a much more inclusive profession, or one that is less geared towards ticking boxes and doing assessments and one that contributes alongside professions.*

Susan expanded on what she meant regarding inclusivity, describing what could be the seen as naive knowledge that Foucault (1980a) alludes to, and which Miller (2004) differentiates as the knowledge we should be seeking rather than the knowledge to control. The knowledge identified below relates to the importance of punctuality and honesty to service users, which Susan describes as qualities but which also reflect issues around trust and valuing service users and carers. As Susan said:

> *I think it can be easy to lose sight of 'What are the key things that people want?' What service users and carers have told us, both in terms of national research that's taking place but also when we were doing our initial consultation in our initial degree, what they told us that was really important for them was somebody who would turn up on time, somebody who'd be straight with them. Therefore I think that we do need to be looking and assessing those qualities [in prospective social workers].*

According to Susan, defining social work as a profession was partly about being responsive to the needs of service users, and in particular reflected certain values but, conversely, was also about the (controlling) skills and knowledge that they believe social work possesses, reflecting post-Durkheimian functionalist definitions of a profession (Parsons, 1958; Merton & Storer, 1973). However there was a less positive view, expressed by Alf, regarding social work knowledge.

Alf, although seemingly positive about social work as a profession, differentiated between social work knowledge acquired during professional training, and that which is acquired through life experience:

> *I think it's a profession because I think there are many. many areas of need and you really need people who are trained to cope with these... I think the training, and the experience working with people - you can have all the professional qualifications in the world, [but] if you can't get along with people, if you can't get your point over, if you can't deal with them in a friendly efficient manner...*

The differentiation Alf was making could be located within the debate surrounding 'tacit' knowledge and technical knowledge (Stephens & Delamont, 2009). As argued previously, one of the main justifications put forward by Durkheimians for all professional projects is that they possess specialist knowledge which enables them to intervene to assist vulnerable individuals. However, Alf seems to be making a more critical point here regarding social work knowledge, reflected in the more Weberian, position: that is, the status-obsessed professional with *"all the professional qualifications in the world"* is seen in contrast to the professional protector, responsive to need, who deals with the needy in a friendly efficient manner, and who 'gets along with people'. It is taken for granted by Alf that these latter aspects of the social work task are not necessarily included in 'all the professional qualifications in the world'. Additionally, there is an assumption that tacit knowledge cannot be taught, which Stephens & Delamont (2009) contest. However, another way of interpreting this is that it is the unequal value given to experiential knowledge that Alf is really talking about here.

Experiential knowledge is considered important in social work (Skilton, 2011; Cotterell & Morris, 2012), and in this university a dedicated module was delivered by

service users at the time of the study, established as a response to the requirements stipulated with the establishment of the new degree in social work. Much of the debate around the hierarchy of knowledge has centred on the denigration of social research methods (Webber, 2011) and in particular, the status of qualitative research.   However, the debate has had an effect and one result is that the Social Care Institute for Excellence has developed a new typology of evidence for practice based on various sources rather than a hierarchy (Pawson et al., 2003). This non-hierarchical typology places equal value on all sources of evidence for care practice, including user and carer research (Pawson et al., 2003). Alf, however, might prefer the research to be positioned from the perspective of service users, as Pease (2010) argues, or at least grounded in the traditions of social work practice as Boaz & Blewett (2010) suggest.

Generally, participants struggled with this issue of professional legitimacy, perhaps because, as Abbott (1995) argues, what social workers do is different from what people think they do, even those people who are at the receiving end of the service.

7.2.3. Service user and carer involvement as a regulatory function

Cowden and Singh (2007) see the development of service user and carer involvement in the new degree as an example of a growth in regulatory frameworks generally in social work. Susan picked up on this when criticising the increasing use of audit-type activities or assessments (of risk), and alluded to the lower professional status of social work in comparison with other professionals, wishing that it could instead work more alongside them[14].

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[14] "The actual tasks of social workers are shaped by the claims of other occupational groups, the demands of the State, in the form of legal mandates, and the intervention of organisational superiors. Ironically, the least professionalised segment of social work –

Social work in the UK already possessed a code of conduct but, during the introduction of the new degree, the Government introduced a Register for Qualified Social Workers, controlled at the time by the GSCC (GSCC, no date), an obviously regulatory initiative. This might also be deemed as indicative of an advancing professional project, particularly since only those on the register were allowed to call themselves social workers. However, the register was not initiated by the profession and, like many of the 'new' or 'semi' professions, it is not controlled by them either. When asked to discuss whether social work was or was not a profession, it is interesting to note that only three of those interviewed mentioned the GSCC Register for Social Workers at all, despite the requirement for social workers to be registered being a new and well publicised policy development at that time. Two of those were members of academic staff and one a social work agency representative. The most likely explanation for why the register was not raised in connection with social work professionalism was that people were not clear exactly how the register would operate, or even what its true purpose was.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the exclusion of care workers from the social work professional project had not been understood (or known) by some of the participants, and it raises the issue here of how this can be logically justified apart from the obvious: that is, the cost implications of 'professionalising' social care. It is not surprising, therefore, that service users and carers, especially those from outside the university, were confused about where the boundaries surrounding what the State defines as a professional social worker lay, and in particular about the fact that that social care workers were not included. This was raised inadvertently by Patsy (see

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hospital social workers – possess the strongest professional self-identity" (Anleu, 1992, p.25)

below), who described herself as a professional carer. This can be seen as another example of an occupational inequality between, in this case, social care professionals ('social workers') and those that provide personal care (Barton, 2008).

Involving service users and carers raises the contradiction of this rather ironic tension in regard to the involvement of carers in social work admissions. If social work is the caring profession, and in my experience Abbott is correct in assuming that altruism is a primary factor in people deciding to join it, why are carers excluded? Perhaps, as Abbott argues, a defining aspect of professionalism is that the higher the professional status, the less time those professionals spend with their clients/service users (2005). This issue can be compared to the situation with early years workers, where the workforce is split between a minority of teachers and a majority of child care workers, who, despite doing very similar work, possess lower qualifications and have poorer pay and working conditions (Moss, 2006).

Regulation of any sort would not solve the problems that participants identified in their past dealings with social workers. Service users and carers cannot choose their social worker and for some this issue, exacerbated by a high turnover of social workers, was deemed problematic. This conversation with Olivia, a young person who had just left care, demonstrates the problem:

> *O: That's F, then we had that C [female], that's the one that worked with my mum, and then that's K…*
>
> *R: Who was the first one, the good one?*
>
> *O: M. You know when they first started getting involved, there was like a couple, because M used to come with one other and then the other one started coming out first and then it was like M that was our social worker.*

Not only do service users have no choice over which social worker is allocated to them, many do not choose to have social work intervention (Donzelot, 1979). High turnover was therefore an issue for some participants in terms of competence, developing a working relationship, or simply a sense of loss (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Patsy, who described herself as a 'professional carer', stated that she had had "a *fair amount of contact with a considerable number of social workers, both as child social workers, fostering link officers and all sorts of others in between.*" Some she said were exceptional, but there were others who

> *…treated you as if you were the owner of a bed and breakfast. They didn't listen to your opinions of the children's behaviour or the actions after contacts or things like that. They wouldn't ring if they weren't coming, they'd see you or the child, and they'd turn up at odd times like just at teatimes without previous arrangements, didn't do the reports and didn't do the pay…*

High turnover in this instance was a problem because it potentially increased the probability of getting a poor/bad social worker.

Lack of professional independence was raised as a problem by Maria, demonstrated in social workers' reluctance to work with asylum seekers[15] . As Maria said,

> *For an age assessment [to ascertain whether someone is a young person under the 1989 Children Act] they take months and months… The reasons were no good – that they hadn't understood the situation, and the reasons they gave were irrelevant… They don't want to cooperate.*

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[15] This issue has also been raised by Humphries (2004) in relation to social workers implementing current immigration policy.

Bourdieu (2000) might interpret this type of experience as symbolic violence, since Maria is describing a situation where people are being denied resources and generally being treated as inferior (Webb et al., 2002).

The bad experiences that these participants described, if they were common, would seem to undermine the legitimacy of a social work professional project. It is hard to make a case for professional status for an occupation which is largely controlled by the State and where receivers of the service need to ask for those professionals to be honest and punctual. Maria's experience would support the view of social work professionals 'disabling' rather than enabling service users (Illich et al., 1977), discussed earlier, or that of social workers being used as 'enforcers' for their own ends (Donzelot, 1979). However, if service users were able to have some choice regarding which social worker was allocated to them, and/or had a greater degree of involvement in the service, these problems might be reduced. For some participants, however, involvement in admissions was a means by which poor practitioners could be identified and excluded. From this negative perspective, it can be argued, a notion of the good social worker was being constructed.

7.2.4. Constructing the good social worker

Participants were encouraged to discuss what attributes they looked for when interviewing applicants. Doel & Best (2008) argue that much of the publicity concerned with social work concentrates on social work when it fails, thus providing a very unbalanced account. Like Doel & Best, I was concerned with what service users and carers valued in social work, since I assumed this would inform their judgements regarding candidates.

In the admissions interviews with applicants, standardised questions were asked, some of which were to ascertain: the candidate's understanding and experience of social work, discrimination and oppression; how they dealt with stress; their ability to reflect on their own actions and life experiences, and their reflections of something they had recently read or viewed about social work. None of the participants thought that any of the questions should be changed or any questions should be added. Asking participants what they were looking for not only provided an opportunity of evaluating the questions from a service user and carer perspective, it also assisted in isolating what they actually brought to the process of admissions and the debate surrounding professionalism and, in particular, what attributes professional social workers should possess from a service user and carer perspective. Several participants raised the issue of trust, not in relation to this question, but more in relation to a past experience of social work. I have dealt with this separately in the following section (7.3). Below are traits that were more overtly mentioned as qualities that were looked for when interviewing candidates.

Alf was one of several participants who thought the ability to talk through problems was an important attribute. He stated,

> A: …all they want is somebody to talk it through with them, calmly and assured, and that something will be done with the problem. It's this kind of thing when I was in the interview was looking to see.
>
> R: Is that what you look for?
>
> A: Yes.

This point was also made by service users in Doel & Best's study (2008) of service users, and is a good example of the professional trait which involves being able to listen and make things happen, identified by Farnfield (1998). Of course it is pretty

hard to assess the potential for being this sort of person, and the ability to 'do' something about the problem will often be outside the capabilities of the social worker and further raises the issue of who has the power to make things happen in social work practice. Certainly very few social workers have the power to make decisions on anything that involves resources and, in terms of generally defending vulnerable people against the workings of a free market economy, they have very little opportunity to make much of a difference. It is this activity which can be conceptualised, in Abbott's ecological approach, as an area of turf with which social work competes with the political ecology, if social work, by being essentially concerned with the relationship between individuals and society, is, as Lovelock & Powell (2004) argue, an essentially political activity. The sense of the social worker being someone that assists a service user to solve their own problems is more likely to be identified within the discourse of empowerment (Lymbery, 2000), but is also associated with Durkheimian accounts of professionalism. Durkheim's account in this conceptualisation is also a political one, since it rests on an explicit criticism of liberal capitalist economies. This political nature of social work must be concerned with disadvantaged groups, and this was reflected in participants' concern regarding the identification of candidates who might discriminate.

Alf referred to the 'does he take sugar' scenario as a reason for rejecting a candidate. This was a particular point for Bob, a man with learning difficulties, as the following exchange reported by Bob's helper demonstrates:

> *Helper: We had a candidate that came last year, and again it was just another one to one, with a facilitator as well. Bob asked his four questions and then at the end, he asked, 'Have you got any questions for me?' She ignored Bob and looked at me and she said, 'So I can ask him some questions then, can*

> *I?' It was very patronising and very, very rude. That particularly upset you, didn't it Bob?*

Being ignored, then, is one way that some service users and carers can identify an unsuitable candidate. Charles identified ageism:

> *C: From my point of view, it would've been dealing with older people more than anything else, which I felt like I was there for. Because there were some very young students and I felt one or two of them, unless they changed, they weren't going to be comfortable with older people.*
>
> *R: Oh really? How did you find that out?*
>
> *C: It was just my impression from the way they answered various questions and I thought, 'Well, if I was an older person I wouldn't have liked the way they approached…'*

Robert stated that *"…some individuals have, in the past, been very judgmental. I have been in a position where I was given lots of 'advice' which wasn't appropriate to me because I was prejudged because I was a wheelchair user."* Edna also identified lack of respect more generally as an indicator:

> *E: …like, you are never going to be one hundred percent certain, but I think you can get an idea if people turn up late, have no reason for doing it. Don't apologise, expect things to happen to them, the whole attitude to other people. Then you have the body language and what you say and how they say it, and I think you can get an awful lot from an interview.*

Therefore, conversely, a good candidate was someone who was concerned with discrimination and 'concern for the underdog' as Jean, for example, stated:

> *Open and honest is foremost. Also compassionate. They need to be concerned for people who are stigmatised – the underdogs if you like. They also need to consider that they might need to help/work with people who have done pretty awful things. This is quite a complex set of expectations and so*

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> *the person should also be intelligent and have some experience of life.*

Jean's description of service users here as people *"who have done pretty awful things"* fits with Abbott's (2005) account of social work in the USA – that is, working with people that other professionals do not wish to work with.

Charles, Kate and Terry all mentioned that they valued enthusiasm and/or passion as an attribute. Charles *"was looking for somebody who had the enthusiasm, who had the knowledge with coping with social service work."* Kate and Terry were more concerned with the passion. Kate stated, *"What I call the gleam in the eye, somebody that gets excited when they are speaking about any area; so also to have experienced some kind of need expressed by people. As I said, I judged the personalities and the buzz that they get,"* whilst Terry thought,

> *One of the things that sometimes concerns me is the lack of passion in applicants. Somebody who's really committed to improve things for people; it's something I would like to see, and see more of in people applying.*

Enthusiasm and passion might not readily be associated with social work, although there is no reason why this should not be the case. Social work is an emotive occupation and therefore emotive discourse would not be inappropriate, as it might be in, for example, law or accountancy. This could be linked with Abbott's 'lyrical sociology', the function of which is to "know not only society's causes and consequences, not only its merits and demerits, but also… its beauty and sadness" (2007, p.96).

I have already established that altruism is a perceived trait associated with social work. Non-verbal messages were important for some service users and carers in

assessing candidates' potential for altruism. For example, George stated that he judged a candidate

> *…by the way they answered the questions, the body language and their communication. The way they answered the questions, one or two looked at the service user and pulled a facial expression, as if 'Why are they here?' I thought that was quite interesting; you could tell they didn't want to ask the question.*

For Zoe, unsuitable candidates were those that "never smile". As stated earlier, service users and carers have a very small window of opportunity to assess whether someone is suitable or not. Therefore, non-verbal behaviour becomes even more important than it might normally be, as a means of judging these sorts of attributes. Olivia used these non-verbal signals to judge whether someone had the desire to help people: the helping professional that Durkheim (1957) alludes to. She stated: *"When they're talking, I just thought, 'Yeah they're alright.' It seems like they want to do it to help people and not just because they can or whatever, they want to do it to help people."* Robert indicated that he looked for non-judgmental, active listening. This would be hard to assess and, it could be argued, is a skill that could be taught on the course.

What is immediately apparent with this trait, and the following one, is that despite their importance to service users and carers and, arguably, most social workers, they are extremely hard to measure. Boaz & Blewett (2010) make the point that social work research should be grounded in social work traditions, rather than social work research traditions. Research into altruism as a constituent of welfare practice can be traced back to Titmuss (1973), and for these participants, is just as relevant today.

Sincerity and honesty were, perhaps not surprisingly, identified as desirable attributes and, as mentioned previously, are attributes which we might assume are taken as read. However, they emphasise the importance of trust for service users and carers. For example, Nora, discussing a candidate's behaviour in an interview, stated: *"I mean. I had my reservations about one of them; I thought their answers was a bit 'what it was expected of me to say', rather than other people who have got a bit of experience."*

Incongruously, she then linked this with the concept of experience. Another example of this was the implied criticism of people only wanting to be social workers for economic reward. Bob raised this as a negative, stating, *"He also asked, 'Why did you want the job?' and she says, 'Oh, because it's more money'."* This can also be interpreted as Bob's way of saying that professional social workers should be putting service users first (Durkheim, 1957), rather than acting for their own gain (Weber, 1978). This underlies the case for an ethical, moral profession, proposed by Gray & Webb, whose view of good social work "is conceived as morally good when achieved within the relationship of social worker and client" (2010, p.3). As Terry commented, an 'honest' candidate is the most desirable one.

7.2.5. Life experience

As mentioned previously, Nora was one of several participants who mentioned lack of experience linked with age:

> *…how would they get on by going into somebody's home when they are so young? I mean we all know that even the policemen look young, but they need to have a real maturity about them, if they have a real mature attitude; but some of them just said, 'Well I've looked after my gran'. Although it's*

> *very important to look after your gran, but it doesn't make you*
> *a social worker.*

Alf and his interviewing partner rejected someone *"because I think that we felt that perhaps, not just at the moment, perhaps in the future, a bit more experience in life generally and a bit more experience in working in related areas [was needed]."* Arguing for 'maturity' can seem to reinforce the very ageism that some service users and carers indicate as a reason for rejection. However, if one is looking to a professional for security, maturity is an indication that someone might be capable of providing it. 'Life experience' and maturity, although articulated by some as an issue of age, is equally likely to be an indication of the candidate's capability. It is worth remembering that age as an indication of maturity is one that the State used to reinforce with a minimum age requirement for those entering social work practice, a requirement which was only recently abolished. These participants assumed that this 'life experience' could not be taught, but as mentioned earlier, research by Stephens & Delamont (2009) contradicts this view[16] .

7.2.6. Summary

It has been argued in this section that the involvement of service users and carers can be perceived as a particularly useful exercise for a profession or occupational group which has little information about what would make a good candidate for social work (Flexner, 2001; Currer, 2009). Participants provided specific qualities which they looked for in potential social workers, were supportive of the social work professional project, and a source of knowledge for social work practice. However,

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[16] What Stephens & Delamont (2009) actually argue is that a distinction can be made between two types of knowledge and skill, "separating the indeterminate or tacit from the technical skills and knowledge", using as an example the Portuguese malicia – a presentation technique used in the Brazilian dance and martial art 'capoeira', which is taught to dance students of this genre. Malicia is a technique which originated as a survival technique used by slaves.

this involvement is a problematic concept when introduced as a statutory requirement for a profession which, by its very nature, is deemed to be independent of government. Using Abbott's (2005) theory of linked ecologies, service users and carers can be conceptualised as being part of a dispute over jurisdiction between the ecology of social work professionalism and the political ecology. However, Abbott's (2005) approach does not account for issues around power and particularly, in this instance, the power differential between social work professionalism and the State. Bourdieu's theory of fields (1977) provides an account whereby access to power can be conceptualised as access to cultural capital within the field. In this instance, social work professionalism would be one field and the political field another, within a wider societal field. The difficulty with Bourdieu's approach is that it is not clear how or why different fields relate to, or conflict with, each other as in this case.

Some argue that the concept of empowerment is embedded in social work professionalism (Toren, 1969; Leonard, 1997; Lymbery, 2000), and therefore it is essentially a political activity (Pease, 2010), which can bring it into competition with the State. The involvement of service users and carers in the admission of social work students can therefore be interpreted as an attempt by the State to gain or regain control over the ability to solve problems between individuals and the State. Put crudely, they are seen to be resolving a problem of social work competence because social work has failed to do so and, within this conceptualisation, it is here that the regulatory aspect of the policy resides. If Abbott (1995) is correct, and social work's *raison d'etre* is to work with the dispossessed, then we might assume that this will continue, albeit with increasing state control.

There was evidence from this university that service users and carers involved in admissions were positive about the activity and, by doing it, gained some of the

influence and status associated with it. Some participants reported stories which demonstrated evidence of institutional control overriding acceptable social work practice (Broadbent et al., 1997), but if anything, involvement has been shown to have the potential to strengthen the social work professional project by highlighting the contradictions.

As mentioned earlier, the issue of trustworthiness was raised by several participants as a trait which they considered important in social workers, because of previous negative experiences in their contact with social workers. The next section considers this issue in more detail.

7.3.   Regaining Trust

In this section the issue of trust is explored, as it was raised by some of the research participants. Several participants conceptualised negative previous dealings with social workers within a framework of trust. The relationship between trust and character is explored in this section as an illustration of the tension within social work between outcome-based approaches and moral, ethical approaches to practice (Clark, 2006). Another tension identified in the study, and problematised as one of trust by participants, is that of knowledge and its relationship with dominant power discourses (Foucault, 1980a). Using Alf's and Patsy's stories as an example, this relationship is explored, and the efficacy of Bourdieu's notion of social capital is also considered when conceptualising social work knowledge in risk analysis situations. Further, I explore how this relationship is played out in some of the participants' narratives stories. Several participants with bad experiences said they would never trust a social worker again because trust had not been reciprocated, something that was also reported by service users in Doel & Best's study (2008). Trust in this instance fits in with Bourdieu's (1993) notion of trust, and in particular its normative characteristics as an exchange mechanism. The section then considers how and in what ways participants tried to affect the admissions process in their search for trustworthy characters.

As I have stated, one of the most perceptible tensions highlighted by participants in the study was that of trust – or more accurately, what participants described as trust, including what they described as past experiences with social workers who had not been trustworthy. It is important to remember the point that Hammersley (2008) and Silverman (2010) make here, in regard to the accuracy of interviews: I have no way

of knowing whether the bad experience stories that some participants described did indeed happen, or if they happened in the way that they described. They may also be influenced by what Doel & Best call the unbalanced picture of social work, which concentrates on social work when it fails (2008). However, there was an identifiable issue which emerged from the study relating to negative previous experiences of social work by some participants, which they depicted as trust issues.

As an examination of the literature on trust has demonstrated, trust is a problematic concept, but the argument that trust involves normative characteristics is widely accepted (Coleman, 1990). If trust is to be considered as normative, this in turn must include moral and ethical considerations (Coleman, 1990; Banerjee et al., 2006). In fact, it is moral and ethical reasoning that determines Durkheim's (1957) justification for professionals. The literature also points to the ways in which trust can be misused, since it can lead to a false sense of security and low levels of monitoring (Gargiulo & Ertug, 2006). Participants who mentioned trust assumed that they could and should trust social workers, and assumed certain behaviour as a result. Therefore, bad experiences with social workers tended to be individualised rather than perceived on any structural level.

7.3.1. Trust and risk

For Bob, a service user with learning difficulties, trust was partly engendered by treating him in a polite way; talking about a particular candidate, he stated: *"He shook hands, he said hello. It's important."* Bob's helper went further:

> *…he didn't just answer your question, did he? It was a natural thing, he was comfortable. You said he was the only candidate that you would actually trust. You said you wouldn't work with some of the others.*

For Bob, the character of a social worker is the defining aspect when looking for potential social workers. The detail is revealing in that the candidate partly demonstrated his suitability by being polite, but also by how comfortable he was with Bob. However, this is further qualified by the fact that this was a *"natural"* thing, indicating that it could not be taught – rather, it seemed to be more about the character of the candidate.

The notion of social work as a trusting, ethical, caring profession does not sit so easily alongside notions of outcome measurement and duty-based social work which dominate the literature (Clark, 2006), despite it being seen by some as a fundamental component of social work (Guttmann, 2006). Clark (2006) locates these trust/ethical/caring components within the philosophy of virtue ethics. He points to a continual tension between abstract requirements of universal liberal rights and their context. For example, he argues that we would not, when appointing a social worker, ask what football team they supported, despite the importance of football allegiance in some communities (Clark, 2006). This tension is not resolved by relying on professional ethics, but "must be squarely faced in the everyday judgements made by practising professionals" (Clark, 2006, pp.85-86). He concludes that social workers are context-sensitive practitioners of moral values, and so we should be concerned with the social worker's moral perspective. There is scope to do this, both in regard to professional registration, as Clark (2006) suggests, but also perhaps by more actively constructing a more altruistic, caring, liberatory social work, as Beresford & Croft (2004) suggest. However, it is also important to consider the reasons which might militate against the 'caring' aspect of social work and, in particular, the fact that it is difficult to measure. As Clark (2006) points out, codes of ethics do not cover what is essentially a subjective disposition.

7.3.2. Assessing trustworthy candidates

Other participants discussed ways by which they tried to assess the character of the applicants. Nine of those interviewed mentioned eye contact or similar non-verbal means by which they assessed the trustworthiness of a candidate, which can be seen as a way of identifying normative rules in this search for trust, but equally demonstrates the difficulty of doing so. Identifying candidates who might discriminate was another example of trying to conceptualise the candidate who could be trusted to care for them.

Another way of approaching the issue of the 'caring' character of potential social workers was to consider the value of 'caring' generally. Building on research carried out by Deacon & Williams (2004), suggesting that people make their social decisions on the basis of interdependency rather than selfishness, Butler & Drakeford (2005) argue that compassionate realism should define 21st century social work. This must include a commitment to equality, and include a knowledge and skills base that social work values and others can trust (Butler & Drakeford, 2005). Also, as Butler & Drakeford (2005) point out, Deacon & Williams (2004) carried out their research in the north of England. Thus, bearing in mind Clark's (2006) point that there can be a community element to morality and ethics, it cannot be assumed that their findings apply elsewhere. They certainly do not fit with consumerist rhetoric and social market perspectives which dominate current welfare policy.

Several of the examples which participants described as indicating their lack of trust in social work also reflected unequal relationships between social workers and service users and carers and, as has been argued, trust exchanges should ideally take place between equals (Slovic, 1999). Social workers do not enter their relationship with service users and carers as equal, independent professionals, but

rather as state employees and with access to information that service users and carers do not possess. Nonetheless, as Rebekah, a service user in Doel & Best's study, points out, service users are more likely to trust social workers who have trust in them (2008).

Despite the information asymmetry, participants in this study indicated that some social workers could be trusted whilst others could not; Alf stated, for example, in regard to his original social worker, *"I'd had him for a few months, and the original social worker was superb,"* whilst the second social worker could not be trusted.

As stated earlier, Bourdieu accounts for this in terms of 'rules':

> Social agents are not expected to be perfectly in order, but rather to observe order, to give visible signs that, if they can, they will respect the rules (that is how I understand the formula:" hypocrisy is a homage that vice renders to virtue") (1998, p.98).

What is unique about Bourdieu's approach is that it gives substance to those participants with differential experiences of social work, whilst allowing recognition of the structural factors which affect social workers' ability to be caring. The stories which participants recounted in detail were nearly all negative (see for example Alf's story in section 6.3.3). This did not necessarily indicate that their experiences of social work were generally negative, but rather might confirm Slovic's (1999) theory that mistrust carries more weight than trust, and that negative experiences were more likely to be remembered. In addition, bearing in mind the negative discourse which accompanies social work, particularly in the mass media[17] , these accounts might not be wholly accurate. However, these accounts did, at the very least, provide an indication of the subjective experiences that these participants wished to project

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[17] See, for example, Butler & Drakeford, 2011.

(Silverman, 2010). For example, Robert's 'bottom line' was that he could not accept someone for training whom he wouldn't trust to come into his home, which is particularly pertinent since some of the dominant media images relate to social work's intrusion into the private realm. This was a fairly basic test which really anyone could practice, and could be easily accepted as a true representation of how Robert assessed candidates. However, some candidates were more specific. For some, delays in responding were an issue. Emma stated:

> *Like if you need money and they've got to do all the paperwork for it. Like this payment, I think I told them about three weeks ago that, 'I haven't got the money for it,' and the only reason it got paid last week was because I was going to this other university thing…*

This reinforces the point made by service users in Doel & Best's study, that a speedy response was something they valued (2008).

For others, it was more about the way social services operated generally that led them to feel let down. Janet, a carer, stated that she would like a social worker

> *…who can respond to things in an appropriate way and within a reasonable time. I mean, to ring in an office and be told, 'Sorry there is nobody available,' and you don't hear anything for several days, sometimes that might be OK, but at other times it may be critical.*

Kate, also a carer, felt that she ended up supporting some social workers:

> *…but when social workers go away for the weekend off, or it is holidays and you are dealing with new social workers coming in, then you are passing on that information and you are teaching the social worker effectively, and that takes up a lot of time. I have found that being a foster carer, you do end up doing a lot of the stuff yourself.*

Lack of time spent with people was raised by some as reason for distrust. For example, Edna stated:

> *…one thing that I do have a beef about is that normally these social workers haven't got the time to do what I think is important and that is to listen, to look around and think, 'Yes I am putting in this service but this person really needs more help.'*

It is worth reflecting on the point Doel & Best make when this issue is raised by service users in their study (2008). They reflect that a lot of social work is time limited but, if social workers are involved at what they call a community level, service users are able to access them on a more informal and regular basis.

All of these examples reflect understandable dissatisfaction with the service the participants received. Butler & Drakeford (2005) argue that social work in the 21st century also needs to accept that it is fallible, and it might be that participants assume wrongly that the opposite is the case. However, the issue of social workers' reliability is one that regularly emerges from surveys of what service users value in social workers (Doel & Best, 2008). The picture which emerges from some of these accounts is more akin to a 'hit and miss' scenario as to whether the contact with social services was good or not, and provides one explanation why the turnover of social workers was a problem for service users. In other words, every time a social worker left, the service user ran the risk of having a social worker who might not be trustworthy. At the same time, as Doel & Best's study acknowledges, sometimes contact with social workers will not be welcomed, and the point really is about acknowledging that and handing back control (over their lives) to service users as soon as possible.

Several participants described upsetting experiences where they felt they had been let down by social services in the past. Olivia had spent some years in the care of the local authority and then had a child of her own. She felt that, because she had been in care, social workers took the view that she was not able to look after her baby, and had been overly vigilant in their surveillance of her as a parent, whilst lacking in offering support. Although she described some good individual social workers, she felt very let down by social services generally and said she did not trust them. This way of describing trust as something of intrinsic value, as Brenkert (1998) argues, was common amongst participants who raised trust as an issue. It also links the concept with that of the caring social worker – that is, the social worker who cares is also one who trusts and can in turn be trusted.

Carers echoed a point made by service users in Doel & Best's study (2008), when they complained about social workers not turning up for appointments. Delays in payments were also raised. Although Gargiulo & Ertug (2006) may be right when they argue that trust does not necessarily benefit the parties involved, because trust can assume there is no need to regulate, these examples demonstrate that service users and carers had little choice in the matter. Banerjee et al. (2006) argue that trust is socially and culturally constructed; they note that the values of capitalism and, in particular, 'competition' and 'taking advantage', do not sit easily with notions of trust and integrity. It is these stories of bad experiences which some participants relate, whether typical or not, which fuel what Wood & Roper (2007) identify as the neo-liberal project to diminish the public, caring character of public service activities, which it would prefer to privatise and/or deregulate. It was difficult to see how service users and carers, therefore, could influence this situation through identifying

untrustworthy applicants. However, there was another aspect to these stories: that of the relationship between risk and trust which Olivia mentioned earlier.

As mentioned previously, it is the perceived failure of social work in carrying out effective risk assessments which has dominated popular critiques of social work. Trust in these situations can be interpreted as something that is manipulated by the State (Giddens, 1990). Within Giddens' (1990) conceptualisation, trust in symbolic systems such as social services has replaced the more traditional support systems of family, community and religion which modern living (modernity) has undermined. However, these symbolic systems become problematic if they conflict with the State and the neo-liberal values they represent (Giddens, 1990). For one carer, it was the return of a child she had been fostering to the birth parents which was particularly distressing, since she believed very strongly that the child would be abused. This led her to question her trust in social services:

> *I couldn't believe they would do this. It was obvious… was at risk if she went home. I still worry about her and just pray she is alright. I'll never trust that social worker again. I mean, I know it's hard, and they have to listen to everyone, but it was so obvious…*

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (2000) explains the 'violation' that occurs when the rules of trust are broken. To describe these stories in detail would compromise the confidentiality agreement with participants, since they could be identified from their accounts, but Alf gave permission to use his story in full. It also goes some way towards demonstrating the motivation which drove some participants to be involved in social work admissions and what they hoped to get out of it.

7.3.3. Alf's story – an example of broken trust and powerlessness

Alf had volunteered to be involved with the admission of social work students as a potential service user representing older people. When he was interviewed as a participant, it transpired that Alf and his wife had adopted a child many years ago, and he provided the following account of the experience. The child they had fostered, and later adopted, had been removed from their birth parent because of serious concerns for their safety, and taken into the care of the local authority, according to Alf. The parent concerned did not agree with the care order and was not happy about the child being fostered, which had caused Alf and his wife problems at the time. What was particularly difficult for them was the parent's refusal to accept the court order and her attempts to breach the order and contact the child. This resulted in extremely challenging and disruptive behaviour from the child, which Alf and his wife had to manage.

After some time the situation settled down, and Alf and his family were able to relax a little bit. Then a new social worker took over the case and he decided that it was in the child's interests to be given access to their biological parent. This caused Alf and his wife considerable anguish and, after realising that their views were not welcomed, Alf informed the social worker that if he went ahead with this action, they would be unable to look after the child in the future. Alf eventually telephoned the social worker's manager, who told him that there was no question of this child being given access to their biological parent and that the social worker concerned had made a mistake.

As Alf told me this story he became quite distressed, as the following quotation demonstrates:

> *I'd had him for a few months, and the original social worker was superb, and this [new social worker] came in and he was taking things without really knowing the background; that's how we felt anyway. I said, 'If you do that and that's your case and that's what you're prepared to do, I think the best thing is if I go pack his clothes up now then you can take him, but we won't be able to have him back. We can't have the disruption that he's going to be away on the weekend and come back on the Monday and we have to pick up the pieces and by the time we've sorted it he's going to be a mess…' I think it was the only time I've been that angry. The next day I phoned the main social worker and fortunately we got help, and this was what we needed, and he agreed the other social worker shouldn't have said that and that he shouldn't have been going down that route, and he decided that we should apply for adoption without parental consent.*

We have no way of knowing why the 'new' social worker behaved in this way, or even whether this is an accurate story, although existing policy and practice in child and family social work (for example, the 1989 Children Act) is based on the assumption that children should, where possible, be with their birth parents. Webb (2006) argues that a tension can be identified between social work and the security of its knowledge base. This tension can in turn be linked to that of the 'caring' social worker and the outcome-measured, task-centred social worker discussed in the previous section. This aspect of Alf's story can be seen as an example of a Foucaultian (1980a) relationship between knowledge and power, and in particular the power of those with dominant knowledge such as the new social worker in this story, which takes precedence over those with "disqualified, popular knowledge"

which has been "confided to the margins of knowledge" mentioned earlier (Foucault 1980a, p.83).

In Alf's story, the lack of inclusion in decisions which directly affected him caused him to question his trust in social workers. Bourdieu's theoretical ideas about trust explain why Alf felt powerless and distressed in this situation. More specifically, it contextualises the unequal aspects of trust (Backmann, 2006) within the field, not just in relation to knowledge, but also in relation to the decision making process, without discounting the use of other theories to further explain and understand what is an essentially subjective exchange, such as the lack of a discourse which Alf could equally engage in. It is also relevant to this study because it provides an explanation for why some service users and carers, and particularly Alf, decided to be involved in admissions, and what some participants in this study hoped to identify in prospective candidates. Again, there are similarities with the points that emerged in Doel & Best's study, where a service user did regain her trust in social workers following some bad experiences, but it took some time (Doel & Best, 2008).

On the face of it, this story has a satisfactory conclusion for Alf and his family, and he did after all experience a 'superb' social worker. However, in the interview Alf appeared to be reliving the experience, reinforcing Slovic's (1999) point about the fragility of trust. It is important to recognise the importance of emotion here, although, as Adkins (2004) points out, emotion does not fit easily with Bourdieu's notion of habitus, driven as it is by the desire to accrue value. The notion of emotional capital introduced by Reay (2004) is more usefully employed here, particularly since it accounts for one's position in the field. Reay states, in relation to the emotional capital invested by parents, that

> Middle-class investment... generates higher, more secure returns for the same level of investment compared to that of working-class parents for whom any level of emotional investment is relatively risky (2004, p.69).

Alf demonstrates the emotional risks taken for working class parents who foster.

Alf was told that the second social worker should not have taken the approach that he did but, according to Alf, no-one explained to him why. The notion of knowledge being a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) provides one explanation. Within the field of social work professional training, a culture exists where 'social capital' plays a key part. It is dominated by higher education and social welfare policy agendas, as established in the introduction to this thesis. There may be a taken-for-granted view that social workers do not usually discuss the knowledge base behind the decisions that they make with service users or carers in risk situations, although they might discuss their methods of intervention (Wilson et al., 2008). If professional carers, such as foster carers, were seen as colleagues, then this situation might be somewhat different. However, as part of social work's recent professionalisation, those who work in care are increasingly excluded from calling themselves social workers; an example of this might be the demise of the term 'residential social worker'.

The only possible explanation available to Alf, therefore, was that the new social worker was either incompetent or untrustworthy. This description bears a resemblance to that of the 'disabling professional' described by Illich et al. (1977), where Alf seemed to become the problem, rather than the solution in this child welfare scenario. It is interesting to note here that much of the literature concerned with service user and carer involvement in research concerns collecting information from service users, rather than giving them information. It would not necessarily have

had an impact on the outcome of Alf's story, but it might have reduced the anguish and confusion he described experiencing if he had understood what was going on.

In Alf's story, he was not asked to give his opinion regarding the possible risks associated with the decision to resume access, and he felt that the only course of action open to him was to withdraw his caring labour. Alf's distress can be located within a hierarchy of power. In the field of social care, carers possess less economic and symbolic power than qualified social workers (Barton, 2008) [18]. Alf's only recourse was the threat to withdraw his services, something he did not wish to do because he and his wife cared for the child concerned.

7.3.4. Summary

In this section I have considered the notion of trust as it was used by some participants to describe situations where they believed that their trust in social work had been misplaced. Various tensions were identified, including the tension between a trusting, altruistic social worker and what Donzelot (1979) refers to as the 'policing' role of social work, discussed in Chapter Four, which, in the participants' stories discussed above, are linked to issues of risk and protection work. I differentiated between this tension and a more specific one, where participants identified some social workers as uncaring, incompetent and possibly dishonest.

The role of knowledge is significant in both of these cases; in particular, the dominant social work discourse can be experienced negatively by service users and carers. Giddens (1990) provides some useful insight here, linking this tension with a more general one which identifies changes in the source of our personal security. Foucault (1980a) provides a picture of how the link between power and knowledge is

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[18] See section entitled 'Empowerment'.

reinforced through discourses, whilst Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) provides a structural framework for understanding how trust exchanges reflect unequal positioning within the field of social work, and how the admissions process provides an opportunity for some service users and carers to make a constructive difference in their gatekeeping capacity. How much difference they can and do actually make is discussed in the next section.

7.4. Power and Change

This section concerns the changes which service users and carers could achieve. Taking Cassley's (2011) argument, that agency and structure can exist side by side, the first half of this section considers what changes participants stated they thought they were able to make, whilst the second half considers structural factors which might impact on participants as agents of change. Some participants thought that they were more likely than academic staff to identify candidates who might relate readily to service users and carers. However, some participants raised this in relation to the powerlessness of candidates, and in particular the possibility that service users and carers might not be fair. I argue, in this section, that fairness is significant for university lecturers, also as evidenced by the use of a common list of questions and decision form used in the selection process, and that generally it is helpful to conceptualise social work admissions as a space for constructing the desirable social worker.

The section also considers how much influence participants felt they had in the process of admissions. Although positive in this regard, they were less confident about what would happen should they have serious concerns, since generally there was a belief that the university should make the final decision in a dispute, or at least some form of arbitration should be employed. The fact that no disagreements occurred led me to consider Bourdieu's argument that habitus supports the status quo. In this case, the institutional values of the university were seen as the obvious truth by participants.

The second half of this section considers whether this policy of involving service users and carers in admissions can, or should, bring about change. The qualities sought for in candidates did not proffer any evidence of disagreement, and so any gatekeeping function might be contested. However, some participants raised the issue that universities, as powerful institutions, might undermine the influence of service users and carers. This raises the issue of the status of knowledge and its relationship to power, and in particular what knowledge is produced by universities and for what benefit. The issue of the relationship between knowledge, power and professionalism was raised in regard to the regulatory role of service users and carers. Regulation as a concept is critically considered, and I have concluded that a regulatory framework which involves service users and carers can be seen as a means by which power can be exercised positively by service users and carers in the construction of social work, as it is played out in the admissions process. However, the unequal access to power, exemplified by the financial disadvantage which many service users and carers face if they become involved in admissions, undermines any regulatory or gatekeeping role they might have.

Bourdieu (1993) emphasises the importance of using experience as a conceptual tool. In order to investigate this aspect of the study, participants were asked about their experiences of the admissions process and of any interventions they might have made (see Appendix 2). Their experience and/or views regarding the raising of disagreements with the university about an admissions decision, and who they felt should have the final say regarding a candidate, was also sought. Issues of power and status were apparent in more subtle or 'latent' forms (Graneheim & Lundman, 2003), or as Bourdieu (1997) would term, doxic relationships: the taken-for-granted assumptions of habitus. As mentioned already, it was taken for granted that

admissions should be located within a university rather than, as Jean observed, in a more 'neutral' venue. Additionally, academic staff appointed the service users and carers who would be involved, decided on their remuneration, and status was attached to their position as both educators and producers of knowledge. However, service users and carers had a statutory, quasi-regulatory function and the benefit of experience.

Participants were not asked directly about 'power' and the word 'empowerment' was only used occasionally during the interviews with participants. The concept of empowerment forms part of practitioner discourse and it could not be assumed that it preserved that meaning for all participants, and consequently, issues relating to power were addressed indirectly in the interview process. This might, in part, relate to Spradley's (1979) advice about avoiding direct questions in favour of more descriptive ones. However, it also reflects the vagueness of the concept and the controversial and various ways in which it is employed (Trevithick, 2005; Horder, 2008).

As Beresford (2002) and Vandrevala et al. (2007) point out, in the literature on service user and carer involvement there is a tendency towards optimism – that is, to assume that it is a positive activity. It was important for me to acknowledge this and allow for the possibility of the unknown and possibly negative. Prior to undertaking this study, I attended an event organised locally by children's rights activists for social workers, social work managers, social work lecturers and young people who had been in care. In small groups we were asked to discuss what we felt were the most important issues facing young people in care. After much discussion within my group by the adults, which included the issue of empowerment and other such weighty issues, the young person stated that she thought these issues were

important, but could the local social services department stop using black bin bags in place of suit cases when they moved young people from one location to another? This example, with its obvious insensitivity and negative symbolism, is a reminder that being ethical means being sensitively aware of the stance being taken. It also reinforced for me the point made by Macfarlane, that research ethics is about recognising authenticity rather than "justifying a pre-determined course of action based on whichever principle happens to most conveniently 'fit' with the research design" (2008, p.26). I needed, therefore, to be very sensitive to the experiences of involvement that participants were sharing with me (Banks, 2006).

7.4.1. Agency: effecting change through involvement

As mentioned previously, several participants in the study thought that they were more disposed to identify candidates likely to discriminate or be oppressive towards people. The outcome of discrimination can be directly linked to Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic violence', which he sees as a result of unequal access to cultural capital in the field, where access to that capital is unfairly distributed (Bourdieu, 2004). In this conceptualisation, discrimination can be seen as a means by which power is abused and access to power unfairly restricted.

Bourdieu is specific about the use of the word 'symbolic' - for example, symbolic violence is exerted through schemes of "perception, appreciation and action that are constructive of habitus" (2004, p.340). As an example, domestic violence can be seen as a result of unequal access to cultural capital through gender, and can involve non-physical as well as physical violence (Bourdieu, 2004).

Charles identified ageism as a form of discrimination which service users might suffer from. He stated:

> *…and I said, 'Well I felt, I'm not sure that this person could, would be suitable with older people,' and I was agreed with more than not. One or two didn't agree with me.*

But this was not in response to any question – it was a response to their actual presence as, in Charles' case, an older person. George made a similar point, only in his case it was a response to his usage of a wheelchair:

> *…because I think it made the student look and think, the person was in a wheelchair, and it made the student think about what they were doing and why they were answering certain questions, and some of the body language did say as much if not more about them.*
>
> *R: Did you have to turn anybody down?*
>
> *G: Yes, we did.*
>
> *R: Was that decision made by you all?*
>
> *G: Yes.*
>
> *R: Was that due to the input of the service user?*
>
> *G: Yes.*

For Zoe, it was her learning disability that was an issue. Zoe's carer, on behalf of Zoe, stated:

> *There was one particular person that we thought was very, very chatty, and we had been told 'Ooh it didn't go very well with Zoe,' and we thought, 'Oh that's strange, because she seemed very bubbly, very very chatty. It was the first lady in the afternoon, can't remember her name, but she had long hair – but she didn't talk to you at all, Zoe.*

One of the questions which candidates were asked during their admissions interview was to describe their experience of discrimination. Kate, a carer, stated:

> *I homed in on the questions asking whether they had done any research, or whether they understand disabilities or discrimination. I found that part [was] where I could add my*

bit to it. I was just surprised how many people didn't understand discrimination, the young ones especially, which did surprise me. I know it is still discrimination, but they were on about discrimination with jobs or age, and disability discrimination didn't come into it a lot.

Related to this was the point made by several participants who claimed that service users and carers were important in the admissions process because they could directly assess how candidates interacted with them. Edna, a service user, carer and part-time tutor, thought so:

E: I think service users and carers are probably more important than the rest of us because at the end of the day the candidate, when they become a qualified professional, there are the users that they are going to be dealing with, and that skill is hopefully what will make them good social workers.

R: But we don't do it for doctors do we, we don't have patients involved in their selection?

E: I often think that's why doctors are the way they are, to be honest.

Emma, a young person who had experience of being in care, thought interacting with service users indicated whether someone would be a good social worker, as this interaction demonstrates:

R: Do you think you'd know if someone wasn't going to be a good social worker, do you think you'd pick that up?

E: I'd like to think so, yea.

R: Are there any things in particular?

E: If they don't interact well with you at the interview, then they aren't going to be able to interact well [with] people on a daily basis.

E: So that interaction is important then?

A: Even if they're nervous, they might be nervous if they meet someone for the first time... they've got to get over their nerves.

E: Right, so particularly interacting with you.

A: Yes.

Some argued that the symbolic presence or visibility of a service user or carer could help in this regard (Matka et al., 2010). This was an important reason for Susan, a service user but also a member of staff, who illustrated her point by describing an experience when she interviewed a candidate with a service user:

I can recall interviewing with a young person who'd been looked after. After, I guess what was important was we already knew each other beforehand, and I think that is really, really important, so we'd already got a certain familiarity with each other. In one of the interviews I'd noticed that one of the candidates was only directing answers towards me, and was only looking at me, and the person that I was interviewing also noticed that and said how cross it had made her feel because she felt she had been sidelined... For me, the person they've really got to be impressing is the person that I'm interviewing with, if it's a service user or carer.

In this exchange we can see the subtle power differentials between actors and how they might be a barrier to involvement (Gutteridge & Dobbins, 2010).

Elizabeth, an agency representative, expressed a similar view:

You know the person that turned round when the service user brought the people down for their interviews? Some people just came in, but some people turned round and said 'Thank very much,' and it was just the little things that made the service user feel valued and part of the process.

This is a good illustration of how the culture of admissions and the language used could be confronted and/or changed, and the subtle way it constructs and

deconstructs power relationships (Felton & Stickley, 2004; Minogue et al., 2009; Morgan & Jones, 2009). Having the service user carrying out the task which is usually carried out by an academic member of staff changed the relationship between service user and academics within the sub-field of the admissions interview.

Use of language and its centrality in understanding how power relationships are constructed in relation to service users and carers was discussed earlier (Heffernan, 2006; Heffernan, 2006a; McPhail & Ager, 2007; Simons et al., 2007; McClaughlin, 2009; McKeown et al., 2010). However, this was also raised as an issue in relation to service users and carers. For example, Terry raised the issue of a service user's suitability to be involved. She stated:

> *This is a service user who hadn't been involved in our admissions process. So in a sense, it wasn't the purpose of the meeting, because it wasn't a meeting to talk with people who might want to be involved to explain the process and discuss the process, or a meeting to involve them in looking to how we develop it; it was a meeting for people who'd already been involved, to review it.*
>
> *R: Bit of a training thing really…*
>
> *A: The comments weren't being that helpful, because it's somebody who'd not yet been involved.*
>
> *R: What sort of comments?*
>
> *T: I think the person concerned made it very clear that there was a certain amount of kudos with being presently involved with the university, which is absolutely fine, why shouldn't people feel they're being respected, in a way? It didn't seem to show an understanding of the importance of being involved.*

If one perceives the admissions process as a hierarchically structured field, then the shortlisted candidates were the foundation, not the service users and carers involved in their potential admission. Patsy recognised that power relationships can affect the

behaviour of applicants: *"You see, they don't [complain] because they're not in a position of power; they want to get on the course."*

Patsy described her intervention as pivotal in helping a candidate and ultimately changing the direction of the interview. Her comments were insightful, firstly because she recognised the nervousness and powerlessness of the candidate, and secondly, because she was prepared to intervene when the academic member of staff was being 'authoritative'. This could be linked to her rather negative perception of their high status in the field:

> *I think once when I interviewed here, not the last one but the one before, the candidate wasn't hardly giving any full answers at all and was obviously just a gibbering wreck, and so [I] intervened as, because the other person asking the questions came over quite authoritatively, and I'm not saying it was scaring the person but it didn't help, so I intervened, saying, 'You just need to take your time and think about what's being asked rather than just talk straight away,' just trying to encourage them to relax.*
>
> *R: And did that help?*
>
> *P: It did; I mean she didn't say an awful lot, but she did say a bit more.*

Patsy felt she was more sensitive to the candidate because of her own position as an outsider, and felt able to intervene to help them. Her approach shows a concern with fairness that perhaps those who are involved in admissions full-time could overlook. However, not everyone thought this way. Emma, for example, stated:

> *Only one I think of is, if you're being interviewed, you might think they've got a bias against you. Say, if they take a dislike to you or something. They might think you're not very professional about it. I don't think I would, but some people might be.*

Edna had similar concerns:

> *No, I think one of the difficulties for me personally is that service users, it's just like you are getting one part of the story, and that's fine if you have just two service users interviewing, they are just coming in from that agenda. The thing that might worry me is that someone might be rejected, not for the wrong reasons, but not because it was given an overall view. I think that you have to be very careful to be seen to allow people to project themselves and it's the skill of how you do that.*

I have mentioned previously how I related the issue of fairness philosophically to that of social justice (Craig, 2002). I found this concern for the candidates quite revealing of how complacent I had become in my role. One member of staff pointed out early on that the service user involved in her interview had asked the candidate if she would like a glass of water. Like the member of staff who related this story, I had never thought to ask candidates this. Two issues were worthy of further consideration. Firstly, were service users and carers more sensitive to the needs of candidates, including any possible unfairness, and therefore more aware of power relationships within the university than academic social work staff, and secondly, if this were the case, what did this say about my own search for the truth in this study? As mentioned earlier, Humphries considers the separation between social policy and social work in relation to asylum seekers, and takes issue with social workers' claim that they are on the side of 'the oppressed' (2004). She concludes that it is not enough for social work researchers to simply state their (our) values and position, but they (we) also need to think through the implications of our research for practitioners and service users. My research concentrated on service user and carer involvement in social work admissions, but admissions is also about how we respect

and appreciate those who apply for our courses. People from outside the institution were in a position to identify complacency here, and were valuable for that reason.

 As university lecturers teaching on a social work course, the social work team were in a good position to know what language and terminology was currently being advocated by social movements concerned with discrimination. Zoe and her carer related an interesting story describing a more obvious form of discrimination, but notice that it was dealt with as a problem from the start by both helper and service user. Zoe's carer raised the issue (I have called her A1):

> *A1: We talked through issues, so if there was a reason why Zoe, you've liked the first person but you didn't like the last person, but the last person was very very good, we've talked through why and in fact we've said, the person supporting you has said, 'Well that woman did talk to you, Zoe,' and in the big group she did talk. We also took into consideration things like, you've got tired by the end of the afternoon.*
>
> *Zoe: Yes, I know.*
>
> *A1: It had been a long day. The final say is interesting really because in our own setting within supported living we've had people who've liked the blonde hair females.*
>
> *Zoe: *laughs**
>
> *R: This is a man, presumably?*
>
> *A1: Yes. Obviously they would prefer that, but we've had to be sensitive to that and say, 'To be fair, this person is very very good and in fairness, this person who you really wanted didn't look at you and was a bit rude at the interview,' and we've had to sort of discuss it.*

There is evidence that personal appearances in work settings are differentiated by gender (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985). They found that attractiveness was advantageous for women in non-managerial positions and disadvantageous for

women in managerial ones, but had no effect for men in either situation (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985). What is worthy of attention here also, is that not only is Zoe aware that this has occurred, she is aware that it is wrong. Unfortunately this understanding does not necessarily prevent a recurrence. This can be seen to confirm Adkins' view that heightened awareness, in this case of the differential power position of women within the workplace field, does not necessarily lead to social change, as Bourdieu suggests (Adkins, 2004a, p.191) .

Other participants were less sensitive. When discussing what should happen if there was disagreement amongst interviewers regarding a candidate, Patsy thought that the candidate should be rejected.

> *I think if any of those involved have reservations about a candidate and can justify it, then the person should be rejected. I think this is hard on applicants, but our first obligation is to the vulnerable groups that receive social work intervention. I think it is important also that we are fair, but this seems fair to me.*

Of course, this was more inclusive in regard to the service user being part of the panel, but perhaps the position for the candidate is less straightforward. The justification referred to assumes some sort of universal understanding of truth regarding candidates, but it is not clear what that might be in this statement. Rejecting a candidate can be seen as a solution to most of the dilemmas which were raised. Equally, it could be argued as a rather simplistic and harsh way of resolving issues more generally, and also raises the issue of candidates' rights.

This came up again during a discussion with Bob, when he explained why he thought he should have the final say a candidate if there was disagreement about this within the interview panel:

B: Think it should be them [i.e. service users should have the final say] - I think it should be me.

R: You think it should be you?

B: Because if I don't like them then I'll tell them.

R: But what if you didn't like them for something that wasn't their fault? Like the colour of their hair, or their clothes?

B: I don't know.

R: Do you think it's possible to not like people for those reasons?

B: Yes.

R: So you still think it should be you?

B: Yes.

These comments from Bob appear quite discriminatory. However, the service users were concerned that they might not be fair and wished to both discuss and seek clarification. One solution might be to provide training for participants, as some of the academics in Matka et al.'s (2010) study suggested. However, I believe a more fundamental question was being posed here, which is that of fairness.

7.4.2. Being fair

The issue of conducting fair and transparent interviews was an important underlying principle of the social work admissions process from my perspective and, I believe, from that of the rest of the team also; being fair to candidates is not just about getting the best candidates, it is also an ethical issue. All candidates were asked the same questions (which were graded numerically), and the form which recorded the outcome of the interview also had to record the reasons why that decision had been made. Should an applicant ring up and ask why they had been rejected, whoever took the call would be able to refer to this form and explain why. Candidates who were rejected could then appeal against the decision. This obviously had

implications for service users and carers involved in admissions, who were, as I have demonstrated earlier, looking for candidates whom they could trust – a quality not so easy to demonstrate on the form that was used. This was a dilemma for me, since on the one hand and for various reasons, I supported the involvement of service users and carers in admission, but equally as important was the principle that people should be treated fairly. This dilemma was compounded when the possibility of service users and carers being unfair to candidates was raised. Having demonstrated the socially constructed nature of service user and carer identity, and located these fragmented identities within a discourse which reflected their power relationships, the location of their own ethical behaviour towards candidates was problematic.

Lovelock & Powell (2004) argue that, since social work is essentially about the relationship between the individual and society, then it is essentially caught up in the political and philosophical debate of human rights, needs and obligations, and therefore is also the articulation and justification of both claims to knowledge, and judgements of value and 'prudence' (Lovelock & Power, 2004, p.183). Using what they describe as 'critical reflection', they make use of the work of both Foucault and Habermas to develop this theme.   It is this, they argue, that underpins Foucault's notion of 'biopower', whereby knowledge and power can act as an agent for the transformation of human life (Foucault, 1975, p.143; Lovelock & Power, 2004). They argue that the notion of 'communicative community' employed by Habermas is useful because it opens up a space where creative critical dialogue regarding welfare can be explored and developed, as Cowden & Singh (2007) recommend. Habermas argues that individuals communicate on the basis of a shared understanding of validity – that when we verbally communicate we assume that the truth is spoken

and sought and that claims are validated (1990). Lovelock & Power (2004) argue that Habermas provides us with a shared social space where all ideas which seek 'enlightenment' are welcome. It is within this philosophical space that the debate around fairness has to be located. It is not just an issue for service users and carers, but for all those involved. That is the purpose of the admissions form mentioned previously.

Philosophically, fairness rests with the belief that truth should be sought, even if it is challenging to do so. However, it was important to bear in mind the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980a) and the structural inequalities in the field (Bourdieu, 1977). The latter was particularly apparent when the issue of the powerlessness of candidates was raised by participants. It was therefore pertinent that some participants believed that involving service users and carers made them reflect on their role within admissions, particularly academics.

For some academics and agency representatives, the involvement policy encouraged them to rethink their roles. Susan stated:

> *What it has done in a very powerful way is that it has meant many of us have had to rethink our positions and understanding about our own roles, about or own expertise, about our own power and our own decision making, and for some people, I think that has been more challenging than others. I don't mean that in a derogatory way, I just think that it has meant that we have had to reconsider our position and decision making.*

This is another less obvious example of the symbolic benefits of involving service users and carers, and could be seen as reinforcing Bourdieu's (1977) argument that an understanding of habitus can bring about social change. Although it has been argued that academics are not necessarily aware of the subtle ways that power

operates within the admissions habitus, those participants with experience of being service users or carers might be more aware of their situation within the power structures in operation here.

For Harriet, an agency representative, the presence of service users and carers helped to keep the professional staff focused and less likely to collude with bad practice. She stated that we can collude as professionals and yet, when there is a service user present, that does *"crystallise I believe, what it is we're supposed to be offering."* Harriet is talking about the culture of social work admissions here, and how that culture can sometimes lead to collusion in what she refers to as bad practices. The benefit, then, is not just about choosing candidates who will not engage in bad practices, it is about preventing bad practices within the social work admissions field itself. The practice discourse being relayed by Harriet is negative – there is an assumption of bad practice which she assumes service user presence can abate.

7.4.3. The power to intervene

The imbalance of power between social workers and service users and carers identified in the literature could lead to an assumption that service users and carers from outside the university might be reluctant to intervene in the admissions process. However, this was not necessarily the case. All the participants reported that they felt confident in intervening should they wish to, for example, Edna:

> *R: So you intervened on that?*
>
> *E: Yes, we did, just basically asked about how they felt about how social workers should look like or what people perceived social workers to be as a professional. It might not be to some people that important but to service users it is important.*
>
> *R: What was their reaction?*

E: Their reaction was that they dressed appropriately for a student going to university. We agreed yes, in that context it was appropriate dress, however what we were hoping to teach them was for the future. But it is a starting point.

Emma gave examples:

E: There was one person, I can't remember who it was, I think it was a girl. They all thought she was alright but I was like, 'Oh I don't like her' for some reason, I don't know why, she just seemed a bit strange. I think she wanted to work, can't remember if she wanted to work with kids; she wouldn't get along with kids, I see her more as working with older people.

R: Oh right, OK; so what happened with that? Did they think she was sort of, OK?

E: Yes. I think it put, he said, 'Well when she comes on the course, she'll get a taste of each different thing when she does her experience, so she'll find out then.'

R: Yes. But do you not think she should?

E: I don't know. I can't remember why I didn't like her; there was something about her that was a bit strange. I can't remember what it was.

There was a woman and she were, like, really nice and everything, but she didn't really have a clue what it was about. She was like, 'Oh yea, I really like people, I want to do this for a living.' We didn't let her in because she hadn't really bothered to research it. I think we asked her a question about what had she read or something, and I think she gave an example of something in Heat magazine.

Emma was one of several service users and carers who asked me beforehand whether they would "really" be able to participate in the decision making process. In particular, she wanted to know whether she would be allowed to reject a candidate, indicating her awareness of hierarchical power relationships within the field of admissions, demonstrated by her needing to ask permission. She was one of several

participants who expressed surprise at the end of the process that there had been little disagreement with the social work staff about candidates' suitability for social work training. Emma, talking about a candidate who was one of her peers in terms of age, went on to say:

> *There was a girl who I thought was really good but she was going to defer for a year, and we thought, 'Hmmm, if she really wants to do it as much as she says she does, then why is she deferring?' I think she said she wanted to go to Australia or something. So I was just like, 'Hmmm.' She seemed to know what she was on about, she seemed really good, but I thought, 'Why doesn't she want to do it just straight away.' But I think she was from a well off background so she probably wanted to travel the world, sort of, while they were young and then carry on their education.*

There was a suggestion of relief from some participants that there was agreement, as demonstrated in the following statement from Janet:

> *I thought at first the problem [was] with who I chose; the other person [interviewing] would choose someone totally different. But actually we were on the same wavelength and when we interviewed the score that we gave was practically identical scores.*

Although the participants reported general agreement, there were disagreements about other things. For example, Terry, an academic member of staff and service user, reported an incident when she was interviewing with a service user from outside:

> *I think the one that stands out was where somebody had a history of some offences which, although they weren't offences against the person, were certainly serious offences, and the service user, and I think it happened on a number of occasions, were absolutely adamant that if somebody had a*

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history of fraud or theft – they didn't want them to come into their house. They wanted to be absolutely sure that the person wasn't just more than supporting the person and that they were coming to support and they were absolutely honest and trustworthy. I think the university was more sympathetic; they tended to be more sympathetic. These weren't offences by a fourteen-year-old that had been cautioned for picking something up at the shop – it was something, can't remember the details, but it was something that had happened as an adult. We might have been more prepared to say, 'They've learned from the experience, it was five years ago.' With a service user it was very clear, 'No, they are wrong, they knew [what] they were doing.'

However, this was the exception to the rule. Agreement here can be seen as indicative of doxa (Bourdieu, 1998) – that is, that the status quo of admissions was so embedded that any disagreement was unthinkable. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, some participants from outside did ask if they were 'allowed' to disagree with academic staff concerning a candidate. Although the question itself is indicative of unequal power relationships (permission was being sought), it could also be the case that there was general agreement over candidates.

Emma, a young person with experience of the care system, commented that *"only an 'idiot' would not know who would be a good social worker or not."* This might indicate Emma's ambivalence towards the profession; however, it was not articulated in that way. Alternatively, this comment can be taken at its face value: that the actual selection of potential social work students in itself was not a difficult task. The general agreement, or shared doxa (Bourdieu, 1998) between service users, carers and academic staff around which candidates should be selected, questions the validity of any regulatory or gatekeeping role service user and carer involvement in admission might have.

Jean, a service user and a member of the academic staff, thought that because the involvement took place within a university, their influence might be undermined – a clear indication that Jean identifies the power imbalance between 'the University' and service users and carers. Jean stated:

> *I think any influence they might have is diminished by doing interviews at the university – a more neutral venue might make it less dominated by universities. However, I'm not totally convinced that practitioners (although how many agency reps are actually practitioners?) would be any better than lecturers at picking out the bad ones. What worries me is that the really bad social workers, i.e. the ones that exploit service users' vulnerability, aren't any more obvious to service users than the rest of us. People like that can easily work out what is expected of them and 'play a part'. But I suppose the more people involved in admissions the better.*

This supports the point that the organisation of involvement should be independently organised (Gee & McPhail, 2007). But does this need to happen? Jean, as a member of the academic staff, is part of this dominant group who have the advantage she refers to. Bourdieu is critical of the notion of what he calls the "free-floating intellectual" who are rather, he argues,

> …holders of cultural capital, intellectuals are a (dominated) fraction of the dominant class and that a number of stances they take up, in politics for example, derive from the ambiguity of their dominated-dominant position" (1993, p.43).

If there is general agreement between academic staff and service users and carers regarding who would be a suitable candidate, then outsourcing this particular function would not really make much difference. More generally however, the issue of access to cultural capital remains. Bourdieu believes that his sociology provides an opportunity of "denouncing the possessed/possessor" relationship characteristic

of academics within higher education (1993, p.43). We can use the concept of organisation habitus to compare how different organisations, such as universities, organise and reproduce cultural capital. If universities cannot be trusted to involve service users and carers when required to, then the question arises regarding their ability to provide service-user-and-carer-sensitive training.

This therefore raises the issue of universities as creators of specialist knowledge. As discussed previously, specialist knowledge is deemed by many as a fundamental prerequisite for any occupation which claims 'professional' knowledge (Abbott, 2005). Indeed, as discussed earlier, some participants identified specialist knowledge as one of the reasons why they felt social work was a profession. This tied in generally with the underlying assumption by participants that social work training should be provided by universities. However, as Nora commented, universities can be daunting places:

> *I'm just a member of the public - here's someone who works at the university, so you automatically think they know more. So you're left to your own devices so as to what you can do and what you can't; now, I can work that out from my own background. But somebody else who could be really good as a service user may not have the confidence in this setting which is a setting which is outside people's experience. It could be really quite daunting.*

It is interesting that Nora stated that people *"automatically think"* those academics at the university know more, perhaps inferring that they might not. The statement reveals some insight into the status of 'university' knowledge as a form of currency Nora feels she does not possess, but also the value of her own tacit knowledge. She affords university knowledge a higher status than service user knowledge, giving credence to Foucault's point regarding the hierarchy of knowledge and, in particular,

what he calls "naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy (of knowledge), beneath the required level of cognition of scientificity" (1980a, p.82). In this respect, Nora's experiential knowledge is constructed as 'naïve'.

Lastly, Nora distinguishes herself from other service users who might not be so confident working on admissions within a university, indicating a difference in status perhaps between service users and carers who bring their experience to the university, and those who are employed to produce it.

Beresford poses regulation in opposition to liberation as a possible outcome of service user involvement in research (Beresford, 2002). I was less sure that this was always the case. Much has been made of the increase of state control in social services through regulatory 'form filling' demands (Howe, 1996), but the 'black bin liners' issue mentioned earlier reminded me that bad practices might not always be obvious to practitioners, and regulatory 'lists' was one way of avoiding them.

In Matka et al.'s (2010) study of the involvement of service users and carers in admissions, some academics raised concern over the possibility of service users and carers having the final say over which candidates should be offered a place on their course. Having the last say over a candidate denotes the ultimate control within admissions decision making, whilst involving service users and carers as a statutory requirement denotes an element of statutory regulation over what Black (2002) describes as the more 'decentred' one. This is one of the many different usages that the word 'regulation' can cover (Black, 2002). However, Black (2002) does argue that the word usually involves power over decision-making. When the law is involved, then a statutory element is introduced, as is the case with the involvement policy, and so it was important to understand whether participants saw themselves in

this role. It was also important because regulation can be interpreted as an attack on social work professionalism (Beresford, 2002), and in particular the notion of closure (Weber, 1978).

The majority of participants felt that if there was a disagreement over a candidate, a third person from the university should be brought in to adjudicate, indicating that participants shared the institutional values of the system (Vincent, 1994). This is demonstrated in the following dialogue with George, an agency representative:

> *G: If you don't agree then I think it should go to another member of staff with the three separate perspectives.*
>
> *R: So someone makes a management decision?*
>
> *G: Yes.*
>
> *R:- Do you think it should be here, and not the agencies?*
>
> *G: No, I think it should be here, as they will be taught here.*

Harriet, another agency representative, agreed, but was more specific:

> *H: But ultimately, I mean this is one of the questions, I think; I do believe that one of the academic members of staff should have the final say. It should be with the university*
>
> *R: Why do you think that?*
>
> *H: Because I believe the university should be more responsible to have criminal convictions checked. Also they will be with the student for three or four years, so they have the responsibility. I am only going to see this person once and I will get an idea of what he will say there and then. So I can't say the decision might be wrong or right, but I can give my input on the day that the candidate is interviewed. But for the whole of the rest of the time, it is the university who has to make the decision.*

So neither Harriet nor George considered making a bid for power over the decision making process regarding admissions, for reasons that sound logical: universities

train the students and know what is required. This view was echoed by other participants in the study. For example, Nora stated that: *"I think it depends what you are disagreeing on. The member of staff knows what the course is, I don't, for a start. There is an element of this as to whether that person really has the staying power and the commitment."*

Patsy considered the issue from a more 'practical' point of view, in regard to the settlement of disputes:

> *Well I suppose the university staff should, to an extent. I suppose the practicalities are, if it comes to the verdict of, 'We're not really sure,' the practicalities are it will be university staff that make it, I think to some extent, especially if you have been involved in recruitment for a while, as long as the people who were organising it knew what we were thinking.*

The participants wished to exert influence on the process, and were quite clear about what they looked for in candidates, but were not so confident about what would happen if they did disagree over a candidate.

There was some dissent. Elizabeth, another agency representative, argued that on occasions the practice agencies' perspective should be the foremost one:

> *Yes, in terms of one interview where a student was saying that they didn't want to go into older peoples' services, and then I intervened asking if they had reasons for that, because in my opinion every service area is valuable for a student. So I then was saying, 'If I got a placement application from you saying that you didn't want older people services then I as a placement coordinator would be saying that maybe we ought to send this back to the university.' I have also been involved where there have been criminal convictions and the university wants to know whether the agency would offer that person a placement or indeed employ someone.*

But she went on to say,

> *E: It depends on what the differences were, because... the university needs to have some input - because it's no good putting someone on a course if they don't have the academic ability.*
>
> *R: So that would be a consideration which would need to be satisfied?*
>
> *E: Yes. But I think if it were a choice between the agencies and the service users, then I would be inclined towards the service users making the decision.*

Susan, an academic and service user, thought that in certain situations service users should have the last say about a candidate:

> *It's about working it out where the area of difference is: if it was about values and attitude, and the service user was saying to me very categorically, like, 'I would be really concerned about this person meeting with me because I didn't like the way they spoke about...' or, 'I didn't like the way they totally ignored me,' then that has got as much relevance for that particular question; does that make sense? They ought to be able to say, 'I'm scoring a 0 on that one.' That has got to be as valid as me saying, 'I'd like to score a 0 on this final question because they simply haven't prepared; they talked about 'Who wants to be a Millionaire.'*

But Terry, an academic member of staff as well as a service user, thought this was impractical:

> *I think involving somebody else at that stage, I think if we're not able to agree then I'd like to be able to talk that through with somebody else. I think when that has happened it has tended to be somebody else from the university probably, because of ease of access to other university staff.*

Kate also thought agencies should have more of a say in choosing candidates, because they would know who had the potential to be a good social worker, but she echoed the surprise expressed by several service users and carers that there was general agreement about the candidates:

> *But if it's like, the older person or the service user, they may not be able to go down with all these questions and ask complementary questions, but at the very end they [agency reps] would be able to say, 'That person would be able to make a good social worker'... but I was surprised at how many agreed with me. I made my own decision and when we sat down to discuss it, I was surprised that the other person had picked up the same thoughts.*

Most participants did not think service users should have the final say if there was disagreement around a candidate's suitability for social work training, strengthening the view that participants generally supported the existing power structures in the field of social work admissions, as stated previously. As stated earlier, bringing in an arbitrator from the university was the most popular method for dealing with potential disputes over a candidate, as Charles, for example, outlined:

> *I think I would've just put my point across and if they came up with a stronger one then that was it. But on the last day there was one or two questions where I didn't think the candidate had answered very well or given us enough, and of course I said this to the person I was with and they agreed with me fortunately, for that was alright. Had they not agreed with me I think I would have complained to someone else.*
>
> *R: Would you have known who to complain to?*
>
> *C: Well someone like yourself, or the lady…*

It is interesting how Charles commented that it was 'fortunate' that they agreed. He did not relish the possibility that he might disagree with the academic interviewer.

Nonetheless, he did point out that he was prepared to disagree, but this would take the form of a complaint rather than his view being the overriding one.

Emma also wanted an arbitrator. She saw the third person as playing a supportive role when there was disagreement:

> E: I think if you disagree you should have someone else do it as well.
>
> R: Bring in a third person? But that's likely to be someone from the university.
>
> E: I don't think it would make a difference. I think just because you're from a university doesn't mean you're stupid, you still know if you think someone's good enough to be a social worker and if you think they're a weirdo or not.

Emma was arguing for someone to support the service user if they disagreed, but she was happy for that to be someone from the university. Despite her acceptance that disagreements were relevant, there was still an acceptance that universities were competent to control admissions. Kate also thought the problem should be resolved in this way:

> K: I picked up on some things that others didn't, but we were in agreement if there was a question mark or if we thought they were useless.
>
> R: What do you think would've happened if there was a disagreement?
>
> K: I would have argued until we went borderline; I wouldn't have pushed for them to get accepted if we weren't both in agreement, but I wouldn't have settled for either.
>
> R: So you would ask for somebody else to make a decision?
>
> K: Yes, somebody else would be involved; if we both had different opinions, it would only be fair.

The language was that of arbitration – bringing in an outsider if they disagreed, rather than any notion of asserting their role of regulator.   However, the research literature regarding negotiated exchanges is not supportive of this necessarily being a 'fair' solution:

> Negotiated exchanges and trust problems can be regarded as two different forms of exchange, the former representing exchanges with negotiation and binding contracts, the latter representing asymmetric transactions in which one actor has the opportunity to deceive the other. Both forms of exchange have been extensively studied but the two respective research traditions exhibit very little overlap (Barrera, 2007, p.510).

Service users and carers are therefore being optimistic here if they believe an outsider will necessarily affect the asymmetrical power relationships within the field of social work admissions in a positive way; but justice and fairness are difficult issues to resolve generally in the field of social work admissions. University admissions tutors should also be concerned with justice and fairness for candidates, and for the service users and carers they may come into contact with in the future, as Craig (2002) suggests.

It is clear that asymmetrical power relationships existed in the field of admissions and that, in the main, this situation was not contested by participants. However, this was partly due to a consensus regarding who was a suitable candidate. This could be interpreted simply as an example of people supporting power relationships even when it is not in their interests to do so (Lukes, 2005). However, there is evidence that service users and carers from outside the university were aware of the differential power relationships and were not expecting to agree about suitable candidates. This could not easily be deemed an example of a decision being made which was objectively against the interests of service user and carers. When it came

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to the issue of who should arbitrate if there were disagreements regarding candidates, participants overwhelmingly chose the university.

Capacity and funding were issues which affected the implementation of the SUCI policy, both from the university's perspective, as well as that of those service users and carers who were recruited from outside. This problem is one identified in the literature (for example, Brown & Young, 2008; Stickley et al., 2010). Some participants were concerned that service users and carers might be exploited by their involvement in social work admissions. Elizabeth, an agency representative, felt that the requirement to involve could exploit service users because, either they were not able to receive remuneration for their time, or they were, but it was not very much (and certainly not comparable to what the professionals were being paid). She said:

> *I mean, the interviewers are being paid. I don't know how that works. You have to be careful that you are not just using people because they have a disability or are a service user, but using them as part of the process.*

Larry put it more succinctly, stating, "*Our main bug is payment*". As McSloy (2007) points out, service users and carers did not choose the path that led them to influence social work education. The issue of finance placed a burden on some service users and carers from outside the university, and particularly those in receipt of state benefits. This yet again calls into question any gatekeeping role service users and carers from outside the university might have, and also raises the issue of cultural capital, since money denotes status and symbolises worth within capitalist societies.

This matter of payment was raised when the policy was brought out, and in particular, the issue of those service users who were not able to claim expenses or

fees because it would affect their benefit entitlements (SCIE, 2010). This concern was also raised by a service user in a course committee at the university, but to my knowledge has still not been resolved. It clearly highlights an inequality in the field, and in particular the relevance and access to capital and who controls it.

George, an agency representative, and Terry, a service user and academic member of staff, were concerned that service users and carers might not be taken seriously. This gives substance to Ferguson's (2007) concern that because the policy of involvement is a requirement of the new degree, a tokenistic tick-box response might result.

McPhail and Ager (2007) argue that we need wider organisational and professional changes if we wish to go beyond good intentions, and this can certainly be argued in regard to the remuneration issue which confronted some participants. As Cunningham & Cunningham point out, neo-liberal market values do not easily share a platform with more collective radical democratising proponents (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2012). This certainly seemed to be the case when the issue of funding the policy was considered.

7.4.4. Summary

The discussion in this section has demonstrated the asymmetrical power relationships in the field of social work admissions at the university where the study was located. The way in which admissions were organised and operated within the university, and the relationships which existed in the field of admissions, were accepted by most participants. These unequal relationships were reflected in the unequal access to cultural capital, identified as coming partly from the status associated with higher education generally; partly from the hierarchical nature of the

knowledge associated with academia (including information asymmetry discussed in the first section) and partly from the status associated with professional qualification. Service users and carers seemed accepting of this as long as the right candidates were being chosen. In the classroom this situation might be different, since in that part of the field, service users and carers would be in a position to pass on their experiential knowledge. However, it was also suggested that involvement in admissions might encourage academics to think more critically about their role.

Although most participants in the case study took for granted the condition that the university should ultimately control which candidates should be admitted for social work training, some participants identified situations where they intervened in a way that affected the process of selecting individual candidates. In particular, several believed they could identify candidates likely to act in a discriminatory way. Discrimination, I have argued, can be conceptualised as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2004), resulting from the unfair competition for cultural capital in society generally. Service user and carer involvement seemed, to some participants, to be an opportunity to choose candidates who would not be disposed to behave in this way, although it was noted that service users and carers might themselves discriminate.

However, some participants questioned whether service users and carers might be unfair to candidates. Critical theory was employed to consider the issue of fairness to candidates, since the search for fairness can be linked to a more general search for rationality and truth – one that is constructed for the benefit of the least powerful, and one that service users, carers and academic staff can work together to achieve. This can be evidenced, both by the general agreement between all those involved regarding what a suitable candidate should be like, and also by the common

questions asked of candidates and the common feedback form used to arrive at a decision. Admissions in this sense can be seen as a forum where the ideal candidate can be constructed as well as recruited. An alternative interpretation, using Bourdieusian theory, could be that service users and carers from outside had adopted the institutional values of the university. This need not be an either/or interpretation, however. It largely depends, as Bourdieu (1998) argues, on the institutional values being questioned: that is, whose truth and whose rationality is being sought. In other words, are the knowledge and experiences of service users and carers being promoted – the 'naïve' knowledge that Foucault identifies (1980a)?

These contradictions within the field went largely undiscussed. As already stated, the local admissions field is controlled ultimately by the State and then the university. Matka et al. (2010) question the appropriateness of using service users and carers as a gatekeeping measure. This study found little evidence that involving service users and carers could disrupt power hierarchies, and therefore any regulatory or gatekeeping function was extremely limited. Involvement policy did not change the field itself in any significant way, but it could be that practice in that area did not need to change.

Chapter 8: Conclusion - The Implications of the Study for Social Work and Social Work Education

This case study was concerned with gaining insight into the policy of involving service users and carers in the admission of social work students from the perspective of those same users, since, it was assumed, they were the proposed beneficiaries. This necessitated a consideration of any potential outcomes the policy might achieve for service users and carers, including any changes in existing power relationships. This concern with outcome, and the resultant critical approach taken, including my own position as researcher working within the research site, differentiates this study from much of the existing research on this topic. A range of sociological theory was employed in order to explore the tensions raised by the policy when viewed from this perspective. A Bourdieusian framework proved central for this purpose since it emphasises the importance of unequal power relationships within social situations. Within this critical framework those tensions could be located and theories identifying the relevance of power, human justice, positionality, fragmented identities, and professionalism, were utilised.

Clearly, there are limits to what can be established by a study such as the one carried out here. The analysis undertaken in the preceding chapter cannot claim to support generalisations about the way in which service user and carer involvement has been developed in social work education generally, or even in the admissions process in particular. Nor can it claim to evaluate the efficacy of the policy in terms of its stated aims, although observations are made. As has been noted in the course of

the discussion, qualitative researchers must also accept the limitations of interview data in terms of specific factual claims. However, the data does provide an insight into the perceptions which participants had of the process, what they thought its purposes were, and what they expected to be able to achieve through it. These perceptions have embedded within them previous experiences of service user and carer relationships with the profession, and inscribed within these experiences, in turn, are the imbalances of power and trust which involvement is designed to redress. I have argued that there are tensions inherent in the policy, which were mirrored in respondents' accounts, and these have been summarised and reviewed throughout the thesis; the main issues are now explored and summarised below.

8.1.   Social Construction of Identities

One of the issues that arose from the literature (see above, section 2.9) and raised during the study (see above, subsection 7.1.5) was the issue of identity. I have demonstrated (see section 7.1) how I, along with my lecturing colleagues, actively engaged in the social construction of service user and carer identity as we sought to identify people to participate in our admissions process as service users and carers, and have suggested that these actions were carried out almost unconsciously – in a 'taken-for-granted' way that Bourdieu calls habitus. The study revealed that these identities, rather than being binary entities, were fragmented and often overlapped, but that a service user identity could be associated with powerlessness and stigmatisation (see subsection 7.1.5). A carer identity could be similarly classified, but also raised the question of why it was being constructed as separate from the professional caring role of social work generally. This caring, trusting role, that participants in the study valued and identified as an essential component of professional accountability generally (Douek, 2003), was seen to be in conflict with

the more managerial role concerned with risk management (see subsection 7.3.1), which was perceived negatively, and this conflict indicates that social work itself is fragmented, as Lorenz (2004) claims. Thus, it might be argued that by constructing service users and carers in this way, social work is constructing itself as 'different' to them. In other words, instead of recognising the commonality of people who, for one reason or another, need to seek help from social workers, we are constructing and embedding in the habitus of social work education, identities which are at odds with each other and separate from the altruistic liberatory social work role so central to its identity.

8.2.   Positionality and Power

The policy of involving service users and carers originated from policy makers – policy which in many ways was redundant from the start in regard to this university, since we already involved service users and carers in admissions. Participants in the study reported general agreement about who was a suitable candidate (see subsection 7.4.3) and, since the desired outcome(s) of this particular policy were never made clear, we are left to consider why this requirement was thought important enough to legislate for. Using Abbott (1995; 2005) (see subsection 7.2.4), I have argued that the policy implies a criticism of social work education which had no evidential base and that implied criticism of the profession. This can feed in to the construction of social work education as being in some way incompetent, and can become embedded in its identity. This policy, therefore, can be interpreted as an outcome of competition between the ecology of social work and the political ecology. Put simply, it can be interpreted as a denigration of social work's ability to solve the problems that occur between individuals and the wider society which, it is argued, is a role social workers share with politicians. If this were a serious attempt to involve

service users and carers the policy surely would, for example, have addressed the problem of payment for those on state benefits (see subsection 7.4.3).

8.3.   Professionalism of Social Work

The involvement policy has been identified by some (see section 2.2) as a critique of social work professionalism. Participants in this study did not support that view. However, the situation is complicated by the issue of fragmented identities (see subsection 7.2.1) anyway, and in particular the possible interest that some service users and carers might have in promoting their own professional status as social workers and social work educators. However, participants generally supported the professional social work project (see subsection 7.2.1). Their criticisms did not extend to a desire that social workers should be demoted or got rid of; on the contrary, they were generally positive. Therefore, involving service users and carers in this university did not uphold the view that involvement undermined professional credibility. Indeed, I have argued, along with others (Chambers & Hickey, 2012), that one of the advantages of involving service users and carers (or lay members as we might perhaps call them) is that it offers an opportunity for social work and service recipients to construct the sort of social work that meets the needs of those it supposedly serves (see subsections 7.2.3, 7.2.4 &. 7.3.1).

8.4.   Regulatory Function and the Managerial Function

I have argued (subsection 7.4.3) that there was no evidence that, in this university, service users and carers were in a position to carry out any real gatekeeping or regulatory function. The service user and carer 'regulators' were appointed by those supposedly being regulated, so any independent regulatory function is compromised

from the start. The gatekeeping role is not quite so straightforward. There might be a gatekeeping role if academic staff were somehow shown to be admitting unsuitable candidates. However, this is problematic, firstly because the 'suitable candidate' is not clearly defined, and secondly, there was no evidence of incompetence in the selection of suitable candidates, to my knowledge.

8.5.   To Deny or Diminish the Public Character of Service Activities: all that Glistens is not Gold

The policy of involving service users and carers in social work admissions sounds good for social work and good for service users and carers. Even social workers and social work lecturers who have commented that the policy of involving service users and carers in admissions is 'another stick to beat social work with' usually follow this up with a remark along the lines that 'nonetheless it is good to involve service users and carers for whatever reason'. This study raises the legitimacy of that response; as Wood and Roper (2007) point out, undermining the public character of service activities is often a pre-curser to privatisation within the neo-liberal project.

The study identifies issues that do not necessarily benefit service users and carers, such as reinforcing differences and possible financial loss, and warns that this could lead to complacency in regard to the changes under way in social work training and social work professionalisation, which continues to be a largely state-initiated project (Miller, 2004). Participants in this study indicated support for social work generally – what they wanted were altruistic, caring candidates, people they could trust: people with qualities similar to those which academic staff sought. If we are to welcome policies such as these, we should be very clear about why we do so, and look carefully at the assumptions that surround them

Appendices

Appendix 1

Information Sheet

University Headed Paper

<u>Research into Service Users' and Carers' Involvement in Social Work Admissions</u>

INFORMATION SHEET

This research is concerned with a vital aspect of social work – the initial entry of prospective social workers to professional training at qualifying level. More specifically, it is involved with a recent initiative to involve service users and carers in the admission process. It is a particularly good time to carry out this research, because the initiative is new and has many possible consequences for social work as a profession and for the people it serves.

The research aims to identify what service users and carers bring to the admissions process and what changes they are able to make. The study will also aim to find out how service users and carers see their role in the admission of social workers, how much they are able to affect the process and how supported they feel by staff in the University.

In order to find all this out, I intend to ask service users and carers some questions. You will be shown the questions beforehand and, if you agree, will be interviewed. The interview will last for about an hour and will be audio-taped.

 You will not be named and false names will be used when the research is written up. Information given in the interviews will be treated as confidential. I intend to publish the results of the research as part of an academic thesis, but also plan to present my findings to service users and carers at an event organised for them at the University. During the research period, relevant aspects of the research may be presented to conferences concerned with this subject. It would be useful, sometimes, to use quotations from participants, and I am asking that participants give permission for me to do this. I repeat that your name will not be linked in any way to the quotations used, or indeed any part of the study.

If you would like further information, please contact me at the above number. Thank you for taking the trouble to read this and I hope that you will agree to participate.

Rosemary Rae.

Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

University Headed Paper

An evaluation of Service User and Carer Involvement in Social Work Admissions

<u>Interview Schedule for Service Users, Carers and Agency Representatives involved in Social Work Admissions</u>

Can you describe your contact(s) with social workers or social services?

Do you represent any particular group or organisation?

Would you describe social work as a profession? If so, why? (Explore)

What would an unsuitable candidate for social work training look like?

What do you think about the interview questions candidates are asked? Would you change any? Are there any questions that you would like to ask? Were any questions better than others?

What was it like interviewing with a social worker lecturer? Have you interviewed with more than one? If so, were there any differences?

Did you make any suggestions during the interview? Describe a decision where your opinion was taken into account/you contributed?

How much influence do you think service users and carers should have in the admissions process?

In a dispute over a candidate, who should have the final say? Agency Representative? Service user? Carer? Academic staff member? Other?

Do you think involvement in admissions will change social work practices? If yes, in what way? If no, why and in what ways could/should service users and carers influence practice?

Appendix 3

Consent Form for Participants

University Headed Paper

CONSENT FORM FOR SERVICE USER AND CARER INTERVIEW

Researcher:
Rosemary Rae,
Senior Lecturer in Social Work,
University.

Tel:
Email:

Please delete as appropriate:

I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
Yes/No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.
Yes/No

I agree to the use of my direct quotes in publications of the findings.
Yes/No

I agree to take part in the above study.
Yes/No

_____   _____

Signature of participant   date
_____
Name

_____   _____

Signature of person taking consent   date
(if different from participant)

_____

Name

Appendix 4

Descriptors of Participants

Elizabeth: A qualified social worker and representative from a local authority social services department.

Janet: A carer who provides respite care for young people who are ill.

Kate: A carer who provides foster care for young people with disabilities.

George: A qualified social worker and representative from a local authority social services department.

Larry: A service user with disabilities.

Edna: A qualified social worker, carer, service user and university tutor.

David: A service user with disabilities.

Maria: A service user who also works locally with asylum seekers.

Nora: An older person representing service users.

Bob: A service user with a learning disability.

Alf: An older person representing service users.

Patsy: A qualified social worker, foster carer/adopter and university tutor.

Susan: A qualified social worker, foster carer/adopter and university tutor.

Terry: A qualified social worker, carer and university tutor.

Emma: A young person with experience of the care system.

Olivia: A young person with experience of the care system.

Harriet: A qualified social worker and representative from a local authority social services department.

Charles: A service user representative from an older people's resource.

Robert: A service user with physical disabilities.

Jean: A service user and a university tutor.

Zoe: A service user with learning disabilities.

Appendix 5

Letter of Invitation to Participants

University Headed paper

Rosemary Rae,
Senior Lecturer in Social Work,
University of
School.

Tel:
Email:

Dear.............

I am carrying out an evaluation into the involvement of service users and carers in the admission of students to the B.Sc (Hons) Social Work, the details of which are outlined in the accompanying information sheet.

Basically this means that I would like to research as much as possible about the effects of involving service users and carers in social work admissions. In order to do this, I am asking service users and carers who have taken part in the admissions process to consent to my interviewing them.

Because you have been involved in social work admissions, I would like to invite you to participate in this evaluation. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the evaluation is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the enclosed information sheet carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If you require further information, please do contact me.

If you decide you are willing to be interviewed, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided.

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Rae

Appendix 6

Use of NVivo Software for Data Analysis and Management

The sheer volume of data which formed the basis of this study needed some system of management to assist in the coding and development of themes. Some attempts were made to do this manually, but this proved time-consuming and cumbersome, and limited any analysis.

> Any researcher who has ever completed PA by hand knows full well that the sheer amount and complexity of the process can be overwhelming. Many have used such tools as pens, paper, photocopiers, index cards, highlighters and cut and pasted sections of text to try to make sense of the verbal protocols and to make comparisons within and across subjects. (Göransson, et al., 2007, p.272)

One concern regarding the usage of computer software packages generally centres on the possible loss of data, as Crowley et al. (2002) point out:

> Data loss is not unique to qualitative software (it routinely occurs when tapes are transcribed or field notes are typed, for example) but some software, by only accepting plaintext, can certainly cause further loss (2002:193).

Due to a delay in obtaining funding for the package, the file had to be transferred from NVivo 7 to NVivo 8. During this transfer, the descriptors of memos attached to some of the codes were lost, as illustrated in Figure 1.
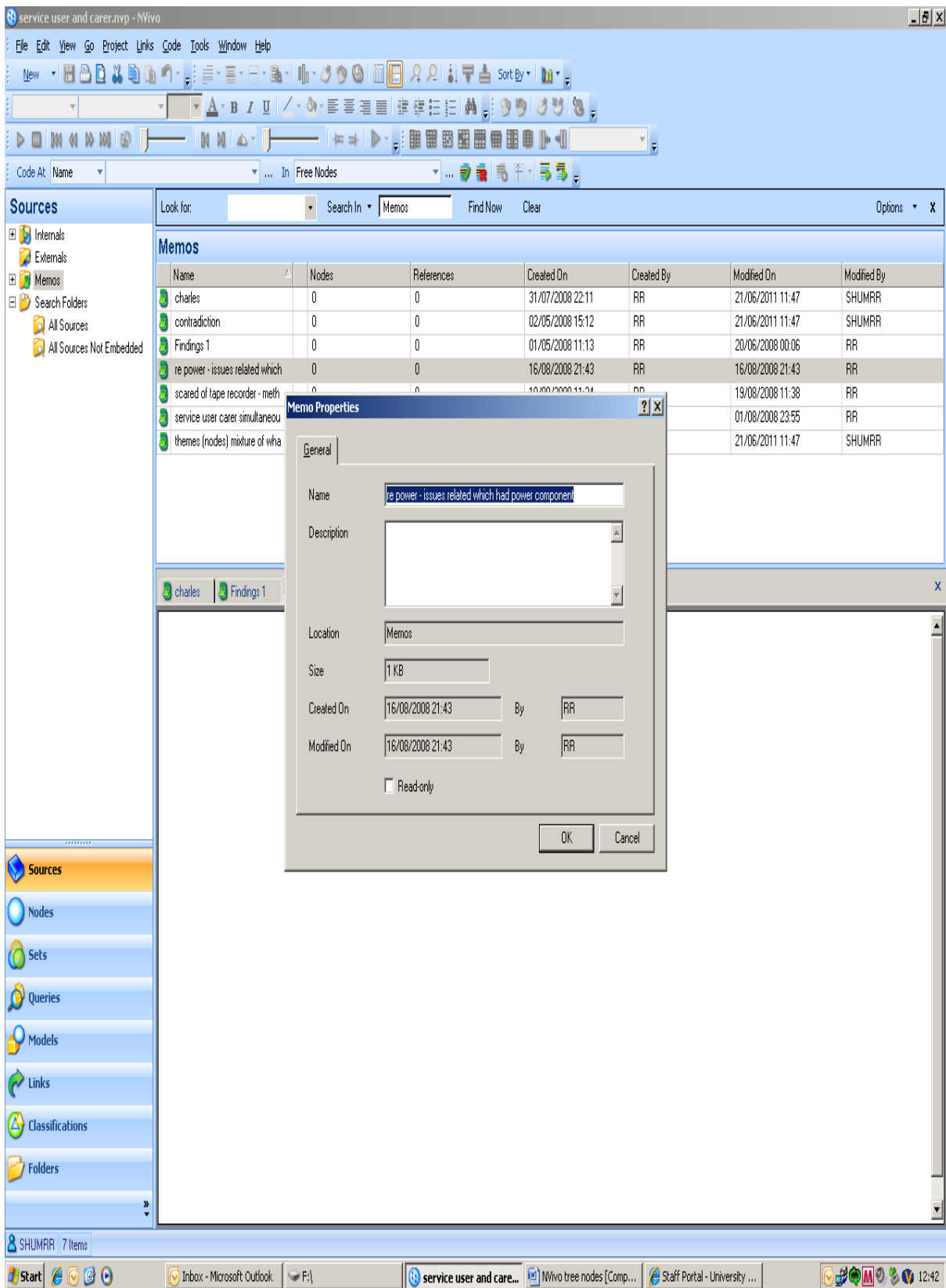
Figure 1: NVivo screen showing memos with lost descriptors

It was not clear why this had happened, and it was inconvenient, but I could recall the main points these memos raised, so thankfully no damage was done. A related problem was that the software had inbuilt security, limiting usage to two computers. When the home computer crashed, it took some time to have the software installed onto another computer. Similarly, moving from one computer to another proved problematic. Lastly, perhaps more should be written about data security generally, if Crowley et al. (2002) are correct, and data loss is so routine.

As already stated, NVivo works with a coding approach to analysis which links passages in documents. These can then be organised into hierarchical trees, which some feel is problematic because they may encourage a hierarchical and perhaps 'fixed' conceptualisation (Crowley et al., 2002). Data which related to the aims of the study, or appeared significant to the participants, was coded and then organised into trees, thus avoiding this problem.
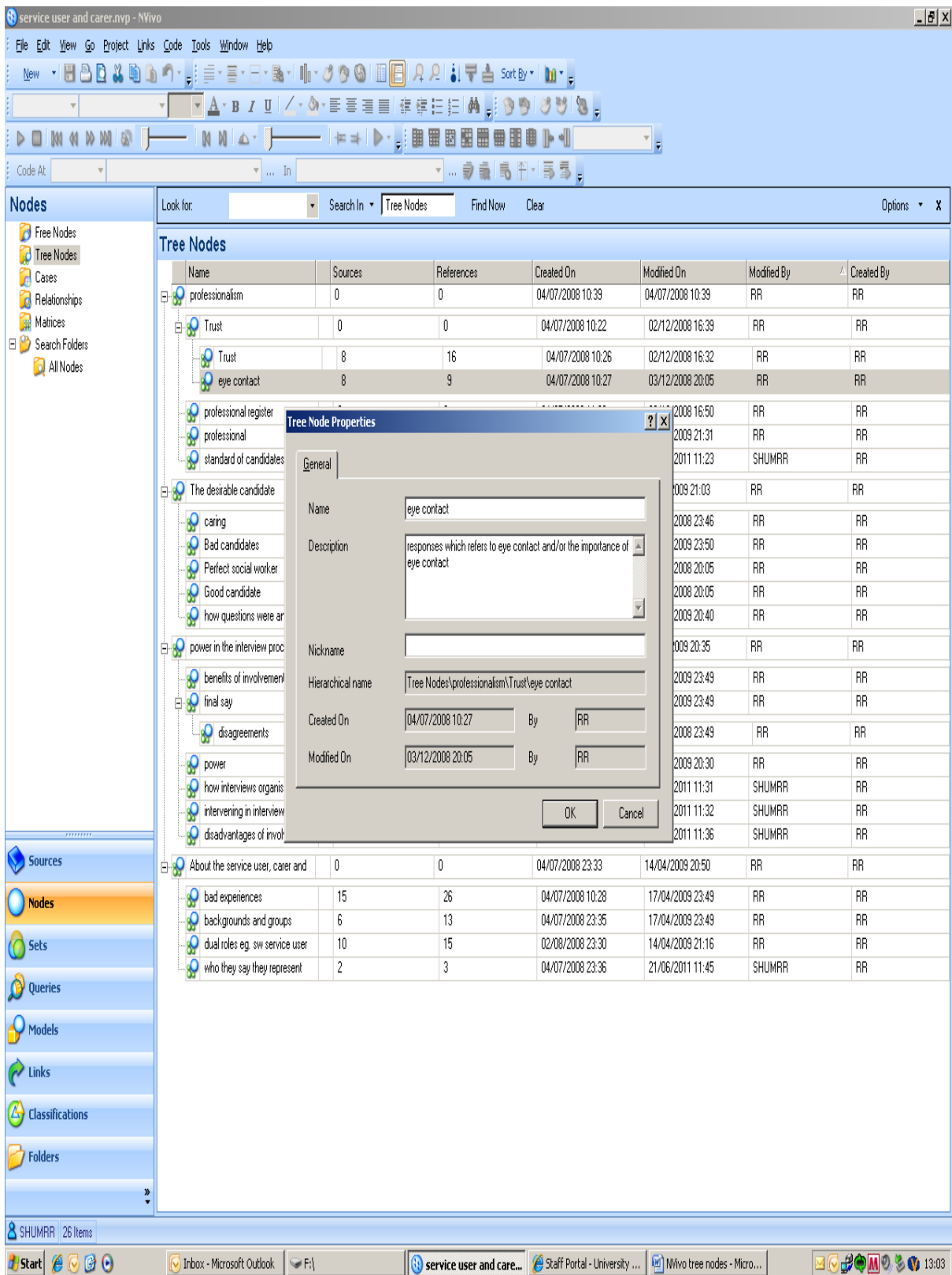
Figure 2: NVivo screen showing nodes (codes) with example of node attribute

Another debate surrounds NVivo's relationship with the methodology literature, and in particular the separation of NVivo as one tool amongst others (Fielding, 2002), leading to a false dichotomy between 'tool and process' (Johnston, 2006, p.381). This is exacerbated, in Johnston's view, by "those embracing Glaser's[19] Grounded Theory (GT) perspective … aggravated by his scathing and misplaced critique of computer-assisted approaches to GT analysis" (2006, p.381). After using NVivo, I sympathise with this view to a certain extent. Not using NVivo can be equated to not using computers generally. At the same time, the pictorial ways that NVivo recommends for representing data can be rather regimented.

NVivo was used at a basic level and, as previously mentioned, used long after the analytical approach had been decided upon. The concern that increased expectations might result from use of software were ignored – in particular, the raised expectation of those engaged in research analysis could be increased for thesis assessments at doctoral level (Johnston, 2006). Raising standards can hardly be a good reason for not adopting something. I did not take full advantage of all that NVivo has to offer, and freely admit that I treated "the later stages of the tutorials as an 'advanced' stage of analysis" (Johnston, 2006, p.387). However, many of these later stages either dealt with situations that were not applicable to this study (such as using video clips), or the research process was too advanced to consider them (such as incorporating the literature search).

The most obvious reason for using NVivo has been mentioned previously – it reduced large quantities of qualitative data into manageable 'chunks' (Welsh, 2002).

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[19] See Glaser and Strauss (2006).

It was particularly well suited for qualitative content analysis, since it facilitates a system of 'code and retrieve', making the process of theory testing more straightforward (Crowley et al., 2002, p.195). As Crowley et al. (2002) emphasise, it is not a method of analysis in its own right. NVivo facilitated the storage of data for analysis and allowed a more comprehensive way of asking questions and 'filtering' out issues – "the 'who' and 'which' questions", rather than just what can be picked out of the data (Richards, 2002, p.214).

The software was also useful because of the way it enabled a search of documents for text (Gibbs, 2004), as exemplified in Figure 3.

It also provided a mechanism for labelling and storing codes (or nodes, as a code is called in NVivo) (Gibbs, 2002) and then developing themes from the codes, as illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.
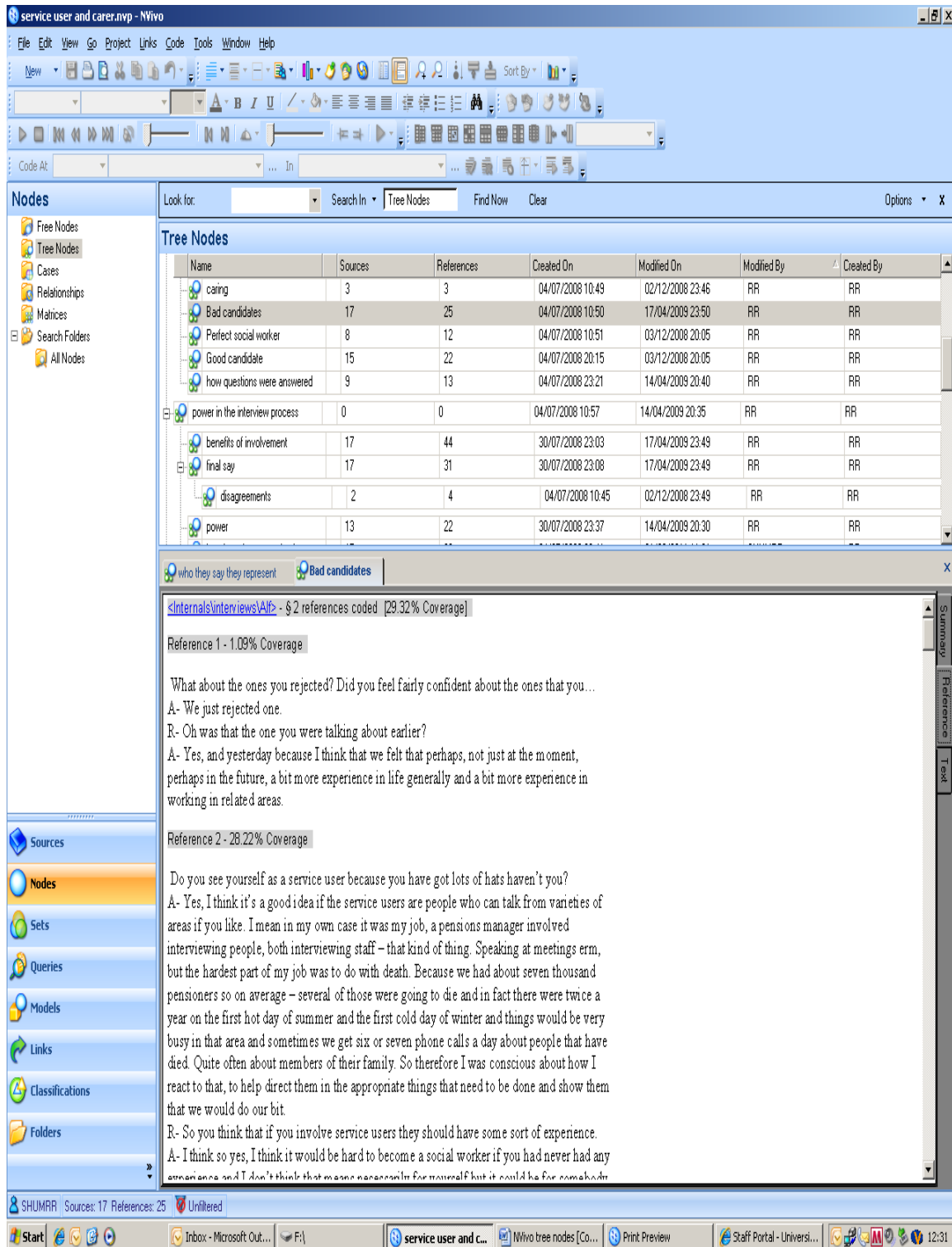
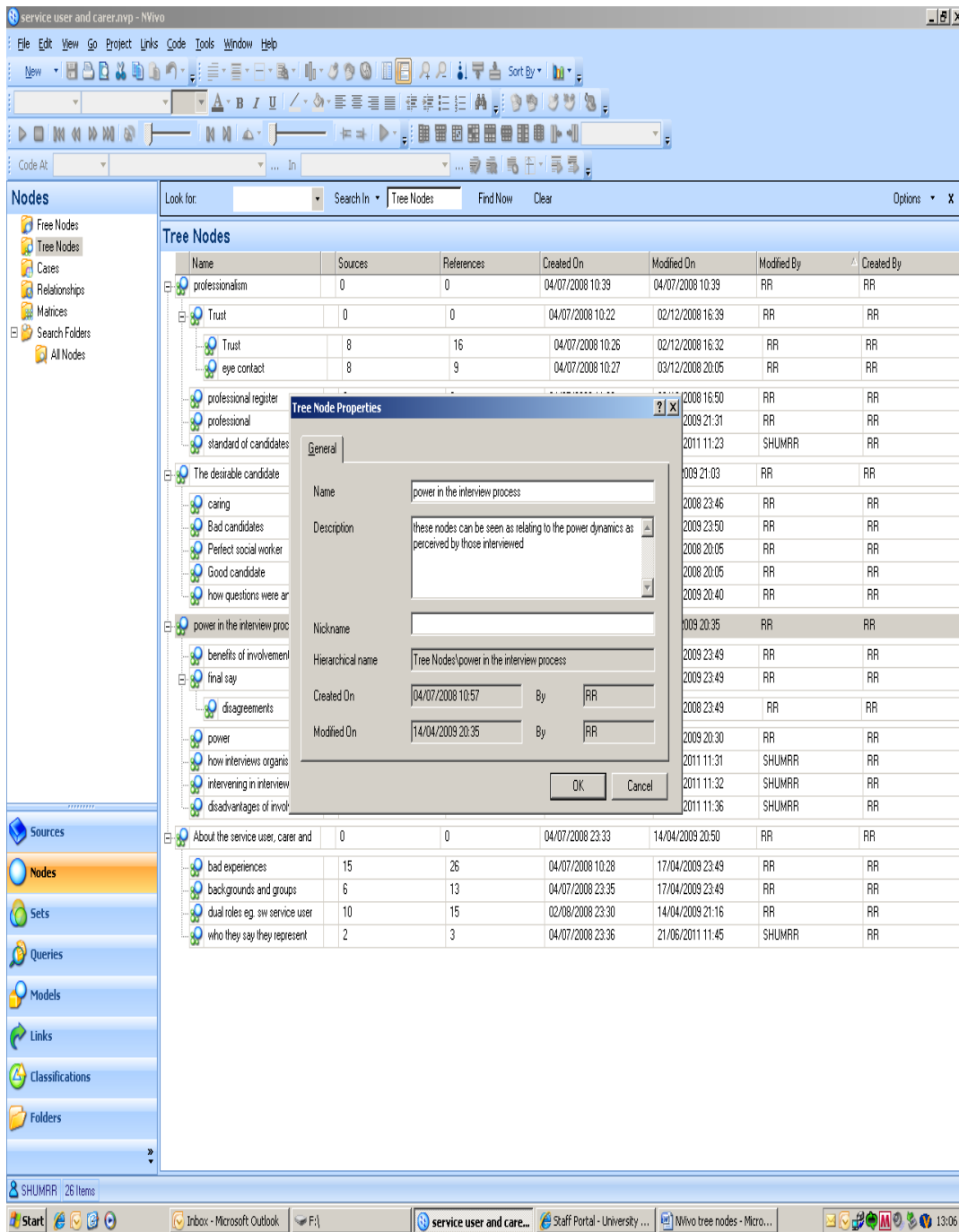**Figure 4: NVivo screen showing example of coding**

Figure 5: NVivo screen showing an example of how coding was themed using tree codes

In particular, it enabled me to step back from the data and think logically about how to develop the results of searches creatively (Johnston, 2006). It is very easy to re-organise or change coded categories, for example.

It also, as mentioned earlier, meets some of the criticisms from those "from more traditionally positivistic backgrounds" (Johnson, 2006, p.382). As an analytical tool, it was transparent and easily replicated. As Johnston states,

> QDA programs such as NVivo provide a considerable potential to give unprecedented levels of transparency within qualitative research. For example, it is now possible for supervisors and examiners to view not only the data, but also what a student has done with that data (2006, p.385).

I began by going through the documents and coded points of relevance to the study. Although looking for data which related to the aims of the study, data which contained interest or relevance more generally were also coded. The tree system facilitated the tabulation of themes. The visual representation of these themes provided a further perspective on the data, and was invaluable as an aid to further conceptualisation and reflection.

The 21 transcribed interviews were imported into NVivo as rich text files, as shown in Figure 6.
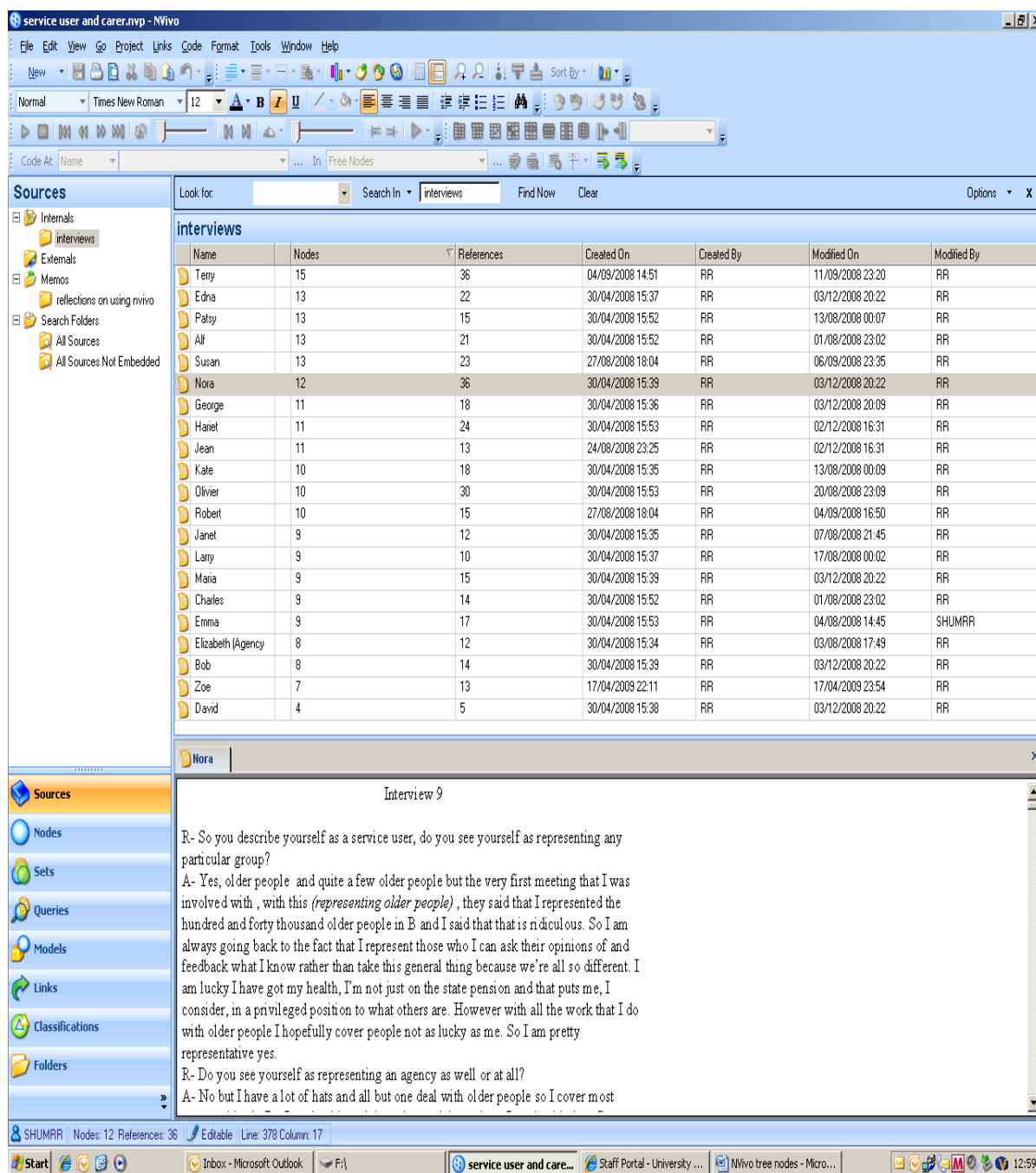
Figure 6: NVivo screen showing imported files with an example of content

The codes identified using qualitative content analysis were labelled using the nodes in NVivo, and in this way a database was created (see Figure 5), enabling a record to be kept and the development of ideas from that data. In particular, specific

sections could be examined through node reports and case reports (Göransson et al., 2007).

As stated, the tree system was utilised as a way of modelling the themes from the data, and did not fall into the trap outlined by Richards, where 'new users',

> ...view the index (tree) system as a way of modelling their theory, or expected thesis Chapters, rather than viewing it as a functional infrastructure that can maximize the way the data are searched. Poorly organised tree structures include different types of concepts in the same tree and typically contain multiple repetitions of the same node in various places throughout the tree structure (2002, p.388).

Appendix 7

Code/Node Descriptors, Examples of Coded Text and Second Rater Assessment of Codes

Node (Code)	Descriptor	Example	Rater agreement?
Trust	Responses from service users and carers which related to the importance they attributed to 'trust', and how they attempted to assess whether someone (candidates) could be trusted	Well yes, who can respond to things in an appropriate way and within a reasonable time. I mean, to ring in an office and be told, "Sorry, there is nobody available," and you don't hear anything for several days, sometimes that might be OK, but at other times it may be critical.	**93.8%**
Eye Contact	Responses which referred to eye contact and/or the importance of eye contact in professional social workers	R: Do you think that you would be able to tell if someone was not going to be a good social worker, do you think that you could tell? A: Yes. R: Is there any way in particular that you would know? A: Lack of eye contact, talking to me and not my carer.	**100%**

Node (Code)	Descriptor	Example	Rater agreement?
Trust	Responses from service users and carers which related to the importance they attributed to 'trust', and how they attempted to assess whether someone (candidates) could be trusted	Well yes, who can respond to things in an appropriate way and within a reasonable time. I mean, to ring in an office and be told, "Sorry, there is nobody available," and you don't hear anything for several days, sometimes that might be OK, but at other times it may be critical.	**93.8%**
Eye Contact	Responses which referred to eye contact and/or the importance of eye contact in professional social workers	R: Do you think that you would be able to tell if someone was not going to be a good social worker, do you think that you could tell? A: Yes. R: Is there any way in particular that you would know? A: Lack of eye contact, talking to me and not my carer.	**100%**
Professional Register	Responses which included reference to the professional register	I think it's a shame that registration doesn't (like nursing) insist social work educators do some actual practice each year.	

| Professional | Responses where professionalism, professional standards and issues relating to professional traits were discussed | I think it is definitely a profession, it's a vocation - 50% is academic and 50% is emotion.
R: What do you think the academic thing is?
A: Depending on what they specialise in once they have qualified. The academic side is all the red tape, all the ferrying to courts and dealing with things. The bureaucracy.

Reference 2 - 2.80% Coverage

The good social workers treat me as a professional (she is a professional carer), whereas the bad ones treat me as a carer which, when you are dealing with children who are so badly damaged by people or by illness, you have to have a lot more skills. I haven't got it on paper but it has to be a natural thing. | **97.8%** |
| **Professional Standard of Candidates:** | Responses where the standard of candidates was discussed | The second thing was, and again this was my first time, so I've got nothing to base it on, but the standard of people coming through I felt was quite low. So that surprised me.

R: Was that consistently low?
A: I felt, consistently.
R: In what way? Was it an academic thing? Or experience, or just generally?
A: I think what kept coming across was their inability to be able to grab the concepts of what was required and make links, and it felt to me like they were struggling.
R: Even though they had the questions beforehand?
A: That is what surprised me. Yes, I actually put that down, the level of ability I thought was low. I just, I'm not sure | |

		what level … you know what I mean, but I was quite taken back by it.	
The desirable candidate:	Codes which identify the qualities of a desirable and undesirable candidate and how interviewers assessed this	Themed from the following codes:	
Caring	Responses where 'caring' was mentioned as an attribute of a desirable candidate or social worker	I think I played a listening role and sort of a analysing, if you like. I mean each of the cases, they were always different, and they always are. But I think I've picked up on the people I think were caring. R: Was caring important? A: I think caring is important, and to show a caring attitude. But the caring was being realistic, what can actually be done. You can be caring or not actually achieve what the other person needs. R: So it's like realistic caring?	
Bad Candidates	Responses which contained reference to bad candidates or text which inferred reference to what a 'bad' candidate would look like	I think that you could get some idea of the profile. Things like, you are never going to be one hundred percent certain, but I think you can get an idea if people turn up late, have no reason for doing it. Don't apologise, expect things to happen to them. The whole attitude to other people. Then you have the body language and what you say and how they say it,	

		and I think you can get an awful lot from an interview.	
Perfect Social Worker	Text which described what the perfect social worker would be	Easily approachable. Have to have a really good understanding, that sometimes you depend entirely upon them and what they can do for you. To get things done on time, as quickly as they can, because you always need stuff.	<u>**100%**</u>
Good Candidate	Responses which described what a good candidate would look like	Helper: Is it because you look for different things? A: I look for different things than the panels. R: Well what do you look for? You've said the eye contact and body language. Helper: You look for people that'll talk to you and have a conversation, not ignore or dismiss you, but respect you and treat you as they'd want to be treated themselves. A: Yes. R: Do you think you can do that in your interview? A: Yes.	<u>**100%**</u>
How Questions were Answered	Responses regarding how the interviewees responded to the admissions questions	What about the answers to any of the questions? How did that work? Did the good one give good answers? A: Yes, he did. R: Why do you think they were good? A: They were good questions R: Can you remember what he said? Why did he want to be a social worker, for example? A: No, I can't remember … (to helper) can you remember? Helper: Yes, he talked about,	

		if you remember, about working with people, rather than telling them what to do. He talked about how you've got to be patient and non-judgemental. He also talked with you about other things as well, he engaged you in the discussion. He didn't just answer your question, did he? It was a natural thing, he was comfortable. You said he was the only candidate that you would actually trust. You said you wouldn't work with some of the others. A: Yes. Today there was one that wouldn't look at me this morning. She said, "Oh, is it soon over?" Helper: Very dismissive, wasn't she? A: Yes, she was.	
Power in the Interview Process **.**	Codes which relate to the power dynamics as perceived by those interviewed	Themed from the following codes:	
Benefits of Involvement	Responses to the question about the benefits of involvement and also observations made at other times in the interview. If someone discussed a benefit of involvement, it was included	Yes, because I think it made the student look and think, the person was in a wheelchair, and it made the student think about what they were doing and why they were answering certain questions, and some of the body language did say as much if not more about them. R: Did you have to turn anybody down? B: Yes, we did. R: Was that decision made by you all?	**97.6%**

		B: Yes. R: Was that due to the input of the service user? B: Yes	
Final Say	Responses relating to the direct question about who should have the final say. These include other sections of text where this was raised	I think if you disagree you should have someone else do it as well. R: Bring in a third person? But that's likely to be someone from the university. A: I don't think it would make a difference; I think just because you're from a university doesn't mean you're stupid, you still know if you think someone's good enough to be a social worker and if you think they're a weirdo or not.	
Disagreements	Responses which described how disagreements in the interviews were dealt with or potentially dealt with	We tried some of that, you see, but then again I don't know what went out on the form in the case of two or threes (grading of answers). But the first time (first occasion she interviewed) it worked very well, but as I say, we both had the forms and it was most interesting that coming from quite different angles we got it together: he had seen what I had seen, or what we couldn't see, and even so we slightly differed, by talking we came round to it. There was nothing we disagreed on. R: What about the second time? A: The second time we didn't really disagree, but I don't think we really had the sort of in-depth thought about it.	

Power	Responses where interviewee specifically raised issues of power	I don't know; I know one December I got asked to go on (can't hear) and when I got there all your colleagues were there. They said, "Sorry, but this year we've got internal problems, sorry but we couldn't get in touch with you before, but we don't need you." I just said, "OK then."	**100%**
How Interviews were Organised	Responses which related to the organisation of the student interviews that they participated in	I had my doubts about having students having the questions beforehand, but once I have interviewed with the students having the questions, I realized how that is a really good process because students can prepare and end up being much more prepared than the students who are not bothered preparing for an interview. One thing that I think is lacking is that we do not see the comprehension test that the student has written. I think that was part of the package, then we have the student answers and the comprehension answers, it would be better. Sometimes when students have the questions then they can learn it off by part, but they have to write it down. Then it gives you a feel of both.	
Intervening in Interviews	Responses which referred to participants interventions in the admissions interviews	Because we saw things quite differently and because of his status I started off quite apprehensively, a) because I'd not even been to a university – don't particularly know the running, procedures and protocols of things like that and certainly not in that role of interviewing potential students. But in my ordinary interviewing skills from work, you ask every question to everybody. R: Yes that is the way it	**92.9%**

		should be done. A: He kept missing out one section of question one, because he tended to do it from memory and that looks very good when you're sitting there not looking from papers, and I always say, "I hope you don't mind if I write notes because my memory is not that …", because there is no way you can remember after four interviews; sometimes I even write down what someone is wearing, because that brings an instant picture and one question on two occasions he left out completely. Now I didn't feel I should correct him, and in the end I thought, "Hang on a minute, that's not fair to the students," and so I did say in between, "Would you just like to…", and no, he hadn't, and this question you haven't asked at all. That was what made it not such a good experience the second time, so I am a little concerned that that is not obviously a personally comment, and that we are taping, but at the end of the day if that person regularly interviews then it is something that needs to be looked into.	
Disadvantages of Involvement.	Responses where participants identified disadvantages of involving service users and carers in admissions	I suppose the disadvantages are if they don't feel confident in what they are doing and are unsure about making huge decisions about people's careers, making that sort of recommendation, so I suppose that could be a disadvantage if they're not used to doing that.	

About the Service Users, Carers and Agency Representatives	Codes describing the issue of who they were, who they represented and how they saw their role. What did they bring to the process?	Themed from the following codes:	
Bad experiences	Responses where people described a bad experience that affected their ability to trust social workers	It's just outrageous. And you just can't get anywhere with them at all, the frustration. It feels like you're banging your head against the wall. I think the worst... was this little lad, oh I did adore her, I'd love to know what's happened to her, although I probably don't because she'd perhaps want to strangle me. But we had to force her to go on contact with her father, and we knew damn well that man was abusing her.	<u>**100%**</u>
Backgrounds and Groups	Responses discussing the background of participants and the groups they represented	I was a pensions manager until I retired and, erm, shortly after that I became involved in a focus group for older people.

And I was involved with a small group setting up a drop-in centre for older people | |
| **Dual Roles e.g. SW Service User** | Responses where text identified the dual roles that participants had - i.e., they were not just a service user but also carer &/or agency rep | Yes, I direct with the Disabled Information Advice Line, which is based in *, but at this point I would respond from an individual level rather that of the organization as such.
R: So as a service user, you see your involvement. Do you see yourself as a service user and/or a lecturer?
A: I see myself as a bit of everything, really, because so much of what happens involves a variety of different areas. I.e., myself as an individual, a lecturer, a service user and someone who offers | <u>**100%**</u> |

		services and skills to social services within the * metropolitan area.	
Who they Said they Represented	Responses regarding who participants felt they were representing specifically	Is that how you see yourself, as an older person representative when you interview? A: Yes, I think we put an older person's perspective in. And I ask the occasional question that I felt was, well not solely from an older person's perspective because I've been involved with social workers for personal matters.	

OVERALL RATER AGREEMENT WITH ORIGINAL CODING: 98% (220/224). SECOND DATA CODER: SASHA EMMA WILLIAMS

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