

Humanities students' shifting identities
throughout their postgraduate research studies

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Abstract

Two prevalent trends in the literature regarding postgraduate research education seem somewhat in opposition; doctoral students complete their studies at the lowest rate, in comparison to all other degrees, yet the assumption of expertise presumes postgraduate students are experts, based on their previous academic success. A further noticeable aspect of the literature is its scarcity regarding master's by research students, compared to doctoral students. Although little of the reviewed literature is socio-culturally underpinned, the extant findings support the suitability of such a lens to understand learning on the postgraduate research level, which is how it is conceived within this project. Namely, it is mainly drawn upon Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice, while also employing Bronfenbrenner's (1979b, 2005) Process-Person-Context-Time model as well as Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development which was integrated with Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) emphasis on relationships. Ethnographic methods were employed at a post-1992 university in the North of England, which entailed collecting data in the form of non-participant observations; fieldnotes were produced in several settings: the postgraduate study space, supervision sessions and departmental seminars. Local documents were included in the analysis, and semi-structured interviews were conducted, with 12 postgraduate researchers, eight of whom were interviewed twice, and with two staff members, who were responsible for postgraduate education on the disciplinary and institutional level. The data was analysed in three ways: via a qualitative content analysis, the construction of participant stories, and a reflexive thematic analysis. The findings elucidate that attendant practices influence students' participation, which are individually negotiated. Thus, practices which enable some postgraduate researchers to participate, may hinder others. It is recommended to construct institutional and departmental opportunities which facilitate peer interaction, as this likely enables postgraduate researchers' participation. Further, relationships with fellow PGRs and supervisors are conceptualised as successful when they facilitate the negotiation of meaning and of the self, which may be through providing insight into the academic community of practice, or through allowing the PGR to conceive themselves as such. It is recommended to explore if PGRs' non-academic relationships, such as to their family, partner, or non-academic friends, contribute to PGRs' identity development in a similar, or dissimilar, facilitative manner.

Preface

Research journey

During the second year of my psychology with counselling undergraduate degree, I was introduced to Bronfenbrenner's (1979b) theorising around development, focusing on the person as situated in their context. I really identified with this theoretical approach, as I had moved from my family's farm located in rural Germany to the North of England to attend university, which, of course, impacted my learning experience significantly. I think understanding my own experience through this theory, understanding learning as a distributed process, fostered my interest in learning, which was reflected in my third-year module choice including psychology of education, as well as in my undergraduate dissertation project exploring the learning experience of undergraduate students. It was some time in my third year that my supervisor asked whether I had thought about doing a PhD, because she thought I would do well at it. I had not considered that; I further did not know that it was a possibility to transition from undergraduate studies directly to the PhD. I thought a PhD would be an excellent idea, which thus became the aim and motivator for my third year, as I needed to achieve a first-class degree to access funding for my tuition fees.

Beginning my PhD, the one thing I was sure of was that I was lucky to be able to continue working with Jane, who had already been a brilliant supervisor for my undergraduate dissertation. Her guidance was vital, especially considering that within the early reflections on my PhD journey, which I plan to analyse and publish as an autoethnographic study, the main characteristic seemed to be that I was unsure of what I was doing, and was taken aback by the overwhelming isolation I experienced, which was not something I had anticipated. One of the first things to be decided was the focus on humanities students, as the literature seemed to reveal particularly negative trends in terms of completion rates and times. Focusing on one specific field to begin with was based on the plan to conduct an ethnographic study which entailed my participation in my participants' context. The reason to conduct ethnographic work stemmed from my previous educational engagements, which shaped my understanding of the learning experience, and consequently the socio-cultural underpinning of my project. At this time, my research aims were

1. To holistically explore students' transition-experience to and throughout their postgraduate research course within the field of Humanities.
2. To explore participation and learning in postgraduate research students within the field of Humanities.
3. To understand postgraduate research students' transition-experience via employing a socio-cultural theoretical framework which addresses the complexity of this multi-faceted process.

Beginning data collection, it was fascinating to conduct interviews with postgraduate researchers who were more senior compared to me being a first-year student. For example, one of the first interviews I conducted was with Marcus (all participant names are pseudonyms), who had passed his viva a couple of weeks prior. Thus, our conversation was not only valuable to me as a researcher in terms of data, but also to me as a PhD student. The insider status I held, which I briefly discuss in the methodology chapter, seemed to lift this project. I think it was the shared experience that enabled me to establish a good rapport with my participants, I got the impression that they shared their experiences as they were, and their readiness to be open and honest about them led to the detailed and rich data that I analysed as part of this project. Some of my participants also indicated that they enjoyed our conversation as a way of sharing their experiences, to which I listened and also shared my experiences when relevant. It was the engagement with my data that led to a considerable shift towards my methodology. It became apparent to me that the approach of a traditional ethnography, with its focus on understanding the context of the phenomenon under study, did not suffice. Clearly, my participants negotiated the context they shared very differently, which shifted my focus towards their perspectives. Yet, this did not entail discarding the influence of attendant contextual practices, which remained fundamental to my understanding of PGR learning, but was combined with the understanding that individuals negotiate their learning experience very differently. This is further detailed in the methodology section, and reflected in the change of my research aims:

1. To explore contextual practices and their concomitant impact on PGR participation.
2. To provide insight into the lived experience of being a PGR.
3. To explore humanities students' shifting identities through participation in their research programme.
4. To understand PGRs' experiences through the socio-cultural lens.

Engaging with this topic for the past four years via the literature, my data, as well as my personal experience of being a postgraduate researcher has enriched my understanding of it enormously. I realised that a lot of points discussed in the findings I also experienced. For example, I experienced unexpected feelings of aloneness at the beginning of my studies, which I overcame by engaging, for instance via being part of a team organising an internal conference. I distinctly remember feeling delighted to have put effort and energy towards the planning of this event, as it was received well. This sort of work-feedback dynamic was an aspect I missed from my undergraduate studies, which I realised later was echoed by some of my participants. Key to my progress through these doctoral studies were the successful interpersonal relationships attendant in my personal as well as academic context. The latter included my supervisory team as well as fellow postgraduate researchers (PGRs), who enabled me to keep the momentum going. Having day-long virtual meetings with fellow PGRs

throughout the pandemic certainly enabled my persistence and benefited my wellbeing. And, being researchers, we seized the opportunity to collect data concomitant to these meetings, which are anticipated to be analysed and published in due time. These academic relationships enabled me to negotiate academic practices, retrospectively clearly interacting with identity negotiations. This was distinctly apparent upon shifting from the traditional ethnography towards a non-traditional ethnography, upon which I started to shift from seeing myself as doctoral student who is entirely focused on others' understandings towards being a researcher, capable of making a contribution.

Thesis overview

The remainder of this thesis is divided into five chapters. Firstly, the theoretical conception of PGR education is outlined. The main theoretical framework drawn upon in this project will be presented, the Communities of Practice approach to learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This is followed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979b, 2005) ecological and Process-Person-Context-Time model. Lastly, Lev Vygotsky's (1978) work on the Zone of Proximal Development will be outlined and connected with Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising on interpersonal and learning relationships. The chapter concludes with an illustration of how the three theoretical frameworks are drawn upon, and a synthesis of these theories as well as the analytic opportunities derived from them.

The second chapter consists of the literature review, which has been undertaken through a socio-cultural lens, broadly speaking understanding PGR education as a distributed process. An introductory section sets the scene via explicating international differences regarding doctoral and master's by research degrees, as it enables an informed understanding of the literature. The remaining subchapters address attrition, the writing process, wellbeing, relationships, and disciplinary differences. The chapter is concluded with the presentation of my research aims.

The third chapter, the methodology, begins with presenting my ontological position, followed by the outline of my ethnographic study, and ethical considerations. Then, I detail data collection processes, as well as the three methods of data analysis I have undertaken.

The fourth chapter presents my findings and discussion in five subchapters. Firstly, I set the scene via situating PGRs' experiences, followed by shining the light on PGRs' experiences as a whole. The latter three subchapters are composed of the three themes generated in the course of the reflexive thematic analysis: expertise and not knowing, interpersonal relationships and participation, and individual ways of being a PGR.

The last chapter reviews my thesis, considering the limitations of my project as well as the extent to which my research aims have been met. I then present the main conclusions and recommendations, as well as suggest further research.

1. Theoretical framework

This introductory chapter conceptualises the theoretical framework regarding how people, particularly postgraduate researchers (PGRs), learn. To do so, Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) will be introduced, which is the main theory I draw upon within this thesis. This is followed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979b, 2005) ecological and Process-Person-Context-Time model. Lastly, Lev Vygotsky's (1978) work will be presented, specifically the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which will be combined with Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising on interpersonal relationships. The chapter ends with an illustration of how I draw upon the three theoretical frameworks, followed by the synthesis of the three theories and the outline of analytic opportunities based on the established theoretical conception of PGR learning.

1.1. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger: Communities of Practice

The Communities of Practice approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) has emerged from research with apprentices, but has wider implications for education and learning in general (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger Trayner, 2016). Learning is viewed as a situated activity, which may be explored via the learner's participation in communities of practice (CoPs). A community of practice encompasses three characteristics (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015a); the domain, which entails members having a shared interest and competence within a certain community-specific field. The community: members are engaging in activities to pursue their shared enterprise. Lastly, practice connotes that community members are practitioners, who continuously negotiate their community-specific way of being and share a repertoire of resources. A common critique of Communities of Practice is the ambiguity of what constitutes a CoP, at the core of which lies the difficulty of understanding what constitutes participation, specifically how it differs from mere engagement (Handley et al., 2006). Aligned with Wenger's (1998, p. 57) explanation of participation based on claims processors, also the participation of PGRs is not bound to only the academic context. Of course, participation does take place in the academic context via engaging in certain activities, such as writing on their thesis, discussing a journal article with peers, or meeting their supervisor. However, PGRs' participation does not cease when they are outside the academic context, as being a PGR is part of who they are, which carries an influence on their membership in other communities. In response to the criticism of ambiguity regarding the makeup of a CoP, Cox (2005) expressed surprise at researchers' seldom reference to Wenger's (1998, pp. 125-126) 14 indicators, as they provide clarification on what constitutes a CoP:

- 1) sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual
- 2) shared ways of engaging in doing things together
- 3) the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- 4) absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- 5) very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
- 6) substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs
- 7) knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise
- 8) mutually defining identities
- 9) the ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
- 10) specific tools, representations, and other artifacts
- 11) local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter
- 12) jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- 13) certain styles recognized as displaying membership
- 14) a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world.

This section focuses on the individual as well as their context as influences on the learning experience. The four foci generated from the theoretical underpinning of the Communities of Practice approach are: the notion of situated learning, practice and participation, the negotiation of meaning and identity, and shifting identities.

1.1.1. Situated learning

Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed that learning is always situated. Accordingly, PGRs are required to enact skills they have acquired during their undergraduate studies in the new postgraduate context. This reflects the theoretical imperative that to understand learning it is necessary to consider the whole person who acts in and with the world. Learning is not located within a person, but rather distributed, and occurring in activity with the social surrounding.

As per contemporary understandings of learning in educational institutions, the context in which learning is supposed to take place, such as schools (Tobbell, 2006), or universities (Gardner, 2009a), should be a focal point of research. Tobbell (2006) explored pupils' transition from primary to secondary school. Postgraduate researchers also undergo a transition as they enter a new community when starting their postgraduate research studies, even if PGRs are continuing students at the same institution (Tobbell et al., 2010). This is because PGRs participate in a different context, like the year seven context in secondary school is different to the previous year six context in primary school (Tobbell, 2006). There is a new purpose and goal to one's trajectory, a new group of people who may interact in different ways, thus a new context has to be negotiated. As Tobbell (2006) outlined, the

notion of transferring behaviour among different CoPs is problematic, as certain behaviours may not be appropriate in some CoPs. It seems similarly unsuitable to assume that skills are simply transferable across different contexts. Rather, skills have to be adapted and negotiated specific to the CoP (Turner & Tobbell, 2018). For example, when PGRs begin their studies, they may assume that they know how to competently work with literature, as they may have developed this skill over the course of their undergraduate studies. Working with literature in an undergraduate context involves reviewing the literature specific to an assignment topic for example, and is utilised to clarify concepts and strengthen one's arguments (Mligo, 2017). In the PGR context there is a different meaning to working with literature, as a literature review constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in a certain field, and involves engagement in dialogue with the literature, such as ongoing debates, and key theories, which then inform one's theoretical stance (Wisker, 2007). However, PGRs are likely unaware of this difference initially, and are required to form an understanding of the CoP and its valued practices to be able to adapt their skills. Context and skill are inextricably linked; one's skills exist within the context they take place in (Wenger, 1998). This clarifies that when entering the new PGR community, PGRs' participation, akin to year seven pupils' participation in the new secondary school context (Tobbell, 2006), is restricted by their understanding of the new practices which construct the PGR-context.

When entering a new community, participation usually takes place in the form of legitimate peripheral participation, holding a newcomer status (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This involves observing oldtimers, as Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to them, within the new CoP; How do they conduct themselves, and tasks? What do they talk about? What do they not talk about? Via such observations, newcomers gain an understanding of valued forms of behaviour and activities in the new community (Lang & Canning, 2010). Being in the periphery initially is not viewed as problematic, because it is understood that newcomers will unavoidably take time to understand and negotiate the appropriate skills and forms of behaviour valued in the new CoP (Tobbell, 2006). Negotiating one's current knowledge and skills within the new CoP represents an inbound trajectory towards full participation. This displays the empowering potential of being in the periphery – when access to the CoP is granted (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the PGR-context, Gardner (2010) recommended induction or orientation programmes that extend beyond the first week of entering PGR education as well as events aiding newcomers' integration into the academic context, for example via seminars that connect PGRs across different phases of studies as well as staff members. However, when access to the CoP is denied, an outbound trajectory seems a likely route. When a member of a community is prevented from full participation they are in a marginal position, which is characterised by non-participation (Wenger, 1998). A marginalising practice was presented by Morris (2021), who reported of frustration among postgraduates who were parents or had caring responsibilities, when departmental events were

continuously organised in the evenings, which constituted an inconvenient time for them. The author thus emphasised the importance of varying meeting times, which would constitute a more flexible practice, likely enabling a wider range of PGRs to participate. But, non-participation can also be a member's chosen form of participation. Voluntarily remaining in the periphery may be due to a member feeling like they do not belong to the CoP, as *"it would be absurd to think that we can or should identify with everyone and everything we meet."* (Wenger, 1998, p. 165). An example of voluntary non-participation were Margerum's (2014) participants, who experienced extended periods of inactivity from their doctoral studies when they prioritised professional or familial commitments. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation suitably addresses a common criticism of Lave and Wenger's (1991) theorising, namely that the implications of power relations are not sufficiently considered (Roberts, 2006). This was echoed by Contu and Willmott (2003) in that they viewed Lave and Wenger's (1991) implementation of the importance of power relations, which played a central role in their theorising, was underdeveloped in their analysis. Contu and Willmott (2003) acknowledged that the Lave and Wenger's (1991) theorising does allow for a sufficient consideration of power relations, as demonstrated by their concept of legitimate peripheral participation. As reflected in Morris' (2021) example above, newcomers' full participation was impeded by oldtimers, who through their status held greater power (Roberts, 2006), in this instance manifested through setting meeting times.

1.1.2. Practice and participation

A CoP's practice is ever-evolving and reflects the shared enterprise and social relations (Wenger, 1998). A community's practice determines a way of being and doing in a specific context, which includes a certain use of language, artefacts, tools, tacit knowledge, appreciating certain values over others, and a shared perspective on things (Tobbell, 2006). Wenger (1998) defined competent membership as consisting of mutual engagement, accountability to the shared enterprise, and the negotiability of repertoire. Contu and Willmott (2003) criticised these concepts, in terms of their implication of a consensus among group members. Similarly, Cox (2005, p.532) echoed the use of the term 'community' as problematic, due to the implication of sameness, it *"lure[s] the reader into the trap of seeing it simply as a rather large, helpful and friendly, bounded group. This is a view Wenger himself warns against"*. As clarified through the last sentence, implying a predominantly harmonious environment was most likely not the intention of using the term 'community'. Instead, as Handley et al. (2006) pointed out, CoP recognises the potential for conflict, as community members are individuals, when they enter a new CoP they enter it with certain values and responsibilities which may complement or collide with the new community, which would subsequently require negotiation.

Furthermore, the first of Wenger's (1998, p.125) aforementioned indicators is "*sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual*", clearly indicating that a CoP is not necessarily characterised by harmony or consensus.

Tobbell et al. (2010) applied community membership to the postgraduate context and suggested that this would entail that the studies, which postgraduates engage in, change the students, who in turn also contribute to changing the institutional practices governing their studies. A further indication of competent membership would be PGRs understanding and appreciating the underpinning meaning of practices and thus would be able to perform practice competently, resulting in academic success. However, the authors found that postgraduate students were rather dominated by university practices, than empowered to change them, which suggests that they were hindered from competently participating in this CoP. Further, students perceived the practice of independence, which is common in postgraduate education (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b), as a lack of support, yet this was met with little reaction from the institution. University practices appeared inflexible, not considering students' lives outside the university environment, which seemed problematic as students did not tend to distinguish between their lives outside the university context and their learning within, suggesting not merely the university environment influences their learning experience (Tobbell et al., 2010).

Practices being negotiated by the CoP's participants is a social endeavour, which makes participation an exchange. Again, this contributes to the notion of learning being a distributed process (Tobbell, 2006). Wenger's (1998) notion of participation represents the inherently social dimension of how we as humans experience our lives. There is a social aspect to participation, even when there is no active interaction with others. Applying this to the PGR context, the aforementioned example of Wisker (2007) outlining that a literature review on the PGR level entails the engagement with current debates and key theories in one's field is applicable; the PGR does interact with others, for example by agreeing or disagreeing with their conception of a key theory, via referring to a journal article they produced for example. Thus, despite no direct interaction between two persons, interaction takes place by proxy of their academic work. Participation constitutes the interaction of practice and identity, as Turner and Tobbell (2018) pointed out, which will be further detailed in the following.

1.1.3. The negotiation of meaning and identity

Understanding participation as the interaction of practice and identity, the focus of this section is on the negotiation of meaning and of the self, which constitute parallel levels of analysis; on the practice-

level and the identity-level respectively (Wenger, 1998). I then outline the role of identity negotiations within the learning process, and the concept of multi-membership.

From a CoP perspective, the negotiation of meaning is central to learning, as opposed to previous perspectives of learning as the acquisition of information or skills (Farnsworth et al., 2016). The negotiation of meaning entails that its members interact, negotiating CoP-specific practice (reflecting the CoP's joint enterprise as well as concomitant social relations), essentially negotiating how to be in a specific context (Wenger, 1998). This is how a CoP develops regimes of competence; within the CoP it is clearly defined what constitutes a competent participant, or an outsider (Wenger, 1998). However, a community's regime is ever-changing, as competence and experience are in constant interplay (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b). Thus, a community member's new experience may lead to the community re-negotiating, and adjusting their regime of competence accordingly, however, it may also lead to the member's marginalisation. The autoethnographic account presented by Gearity and Mertz (2012) seems applicable; upon reaching the stage of postgraduate study which necessitated proactive, independent study, Gearity prioritised work and family responsibilities for several months. Consequently not being in touch with his supervisor or peers, the PGR was left wondering why nobody was reaching out to him, and felt ignored. This illustrates a robust regime of competence, with the PGR in a marginalised position due to his non-proactivity. This is another instance demonstrating the CoP's consideration of power relations, which has been critiqued as insufficiently developed, as aforementioned. Roberts (2006) emphasised the importance of acknowledging the role of power in the process of negotiating meaning, as newcomers' participation may be hindered by powerful oldtimers (Handley et al., 2006). In this example, the regime of competence was upheld by oldtimers like Mertz the supervisor, Gearity's behaviour (not seeking contact yet wondering why nobody was contacting him) did not affect the attendant regime of competence in a way that would lead to change. Thereby Gearity's participation was impeded, until he behaved in a way that was aligned with the regime of competence, via contacting Mertz. Regimes of competence reflect a CoP's development over time, in terms of its history of learning (Farnsworth et al., 2016). The imperative of members interacting (in order to establish practice and regimes of competence) implies accountability, which Wenger-Trayner has pointed out as an underappreciated aspect of the CoP-theory, regarding the notion of identity (Omidvar & Kislov, 2014). Accountability links to the reciprocity which constitutes regimes of competence; members shaping regimes of competence, and also being shaped by them. Therefore, members of a CoP are accountable to their CoP's practice, as they fundamentally develop practice, which is central to the way identity is theorised (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

One's identity changes with participation in practice (Turner & Tobbell, 2018). We negotiate our identity on two different levels, via reification and participation, an integral duality (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Reification connotes the projection of meaning into the world, it solidifies a part of our experience into a fixed condition (Wenger, 1998), reification ascribes CoP-specific meaning to a certain object, or procedure (Tobbell, 2006). For example, Thein and Beach (2010), supervisee and supervisor respectively, reported of co-publishing articles and book chapters, which would constitute a reification of their identity as members of the academic community. However, reification only becomes meaningful with participation (Farnsworth et al., 2016). This entails accepting or refusing the label and living it. As such, Thein enacted her label of being a member of the scholarly community via engaging in collaborative projects with her supervisor, as well as presenting their academic work at conferences (Thein & Beach, 2010). This interplay between reification and participation illustrates that identity has a distributed connotation, as it is negotiated personally, and socially (Farnsworth et al., 2016). As such, Tobbell (2006) explained that reification requires members' understanding of what is and what is not reified, and this understanding is gained via participation. This works both ways, as participation requires the recognition and appreciation of the reified. Both processes are considered to enrich each other in the negotiation of meaning, which is driven by the negotiation of identity (Farnsworth et al., 2016). The negotiation of meaning and the negotiation of identity seem to influence each other reciprocally. Examples of this reciprocity seemed apparent in Turner and Tobbell's (2018) exploration of undergraduate student trajectories. One of their participant's incoming identity enabled her to negotiate meaning. The student had previously worked as a project manager and was used to working independently, which enabled her to seek for help in the new academic context, which enabled her to participate successfully. Through participating competently, as she enacted the valued practice of independence prevalent in higher education, this student was able to form a successful learner identity as a consequence. Conversely, other students were unable to negotiate the new practices concomitant to higher education. One example demonstrated the resort to practices from previous CoPs, such as relying on A-level textbooks, which does not constitute successful participation, as it does not enact a practice valued in the new higher education context. As a consequence, their learner identities did not adapt to the new educational context, which may lead to ongoing participation in the CoP's periphery.

1.1.4. Shifting identities

The above example indicated the central role of identity construction in the process of learning in socio-cultural theories like Wenger's (1998). As such, a socio-cultural perspective on learning understands it as a *"process of human change and transformation"*, which *"always entails*

participation in relationship and community and transformation of both the person and of the social world" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 239). Aligned with this perspective, Schoen (2011) referred to Wenger as taking a stance towards learning that views it as a process of transformation of the self, as a process of becoming. Farnsworth et al. (2016, p. 8) were in conversation with Etienne Wenger, who clarified that *"The point is that the theory does not separate learning from the becoming of the learner"*. The development of identity, informed by the lived experience of being, is an integral part of learning. Participating in a CoP (or a network of CoPs as outlined below), connotes the ongoing negotiation and thus changing nature of how we experience ourselves (Turner & Tobbell, 2018). This continuous, active process of identity construction and reconstruction is what I will refer to as *shifting identities* going forward – a concept threaded through this thesis, as reflected in its title. Based on the aforementioned reciprocity of the negotiation of meaning and of identity, identity shifts may be conceived as changes in one's understanding of oneself in the attendant context (for instance, conceiving oneself as a researcher), or as changes in behaviour (for example, enacting valued practices such as presenting one's research at a conference in the PGR context) – because, as outlined above, these processes are inextricably intertwined. Ontologically, the concept of shifting identities refers to the socio-cultural conception of learning and development as embedded in identity, which I expand upon in the beginning of chapter three.

The concept of shifting identities has been addressed in the literature, despite not always referring to it as such. For instance, Coffman et al. (2016, p.30) referred to *"a process of transformation and identity development"*, McAlpine and Lucas (2011, p.695) to *"doctoral identities under construction"*, and Choi et al. (2021, p.89) to *"doctoral students' identity development"*. Most literature focused on identity on the doctoral level presented a socio-cultural stance, typically considering it as distributed in context, resultant from the interaction between the individual and their social environment (Choi et al., 2021; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019). Commonly, identity development was perceived as goal of doctoral education (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019), via a process of becoming, for instance becoming a researcher (Coffman et al., 2016), or scholar (Mizzi, 2014). Frequently, this process of becoming was associated with independence, with the goal of becoming an independent researcher (Gardner, 2008; Mantai, 2019b; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019).

The question remains, what enables identity development, how are identity shifts facilitated? Mizzi (2014) proposed that identity shifts in doctoral students may be facilitated by publishing their work, as a way of becoming a scholar, which was seconded by Cotterall (2015) who outlined that writing and publishing were key aspects of developing towards a scholarly identity. Further, Inouye and McAlpine (2019) found that learning about the writing practices in one's discipline contributes to becoming part of the academic community, thus enabling academic identity development. Another aspect

contributing to identity development was students' future perspective. Specifically, McAlpine and Lucas (2011) outlined that students' perception of possible future academic posts, and subsequently whether they could see themselves as future academics, had an impact on their engagement within and beyond their department, for instance in terms of networking. Similarly, Mantai (2019b) pointed out that participants' academic identity was viewed in terms of their employability. Through engagement in academic practices like teaching or supervising undergraduate students, participants' view of themselves as possible academics was facilitated. These two examples again represent the reciprocity of the negotiation of meaning and identity. McAlpine and Lucas's (2011) participants' negotiation of identity impacted their negotiation of meaning, affecting their participation, whereas Mantai's (2019b) participants negotiated meaning through participation, which influenced their negotiation of identity.

MacFarlane (2018) explored students' transition experience to higher education, who participated in a widening participation model that allowed them to take part in a programme at university while they were still in school. Among the aspects facilitating a positive transition experience were firstly, that participants were introduced to independent learning, for instance they were asked to conduct independent reading, which prepared them for what was going to be expected of them at the university level. McAlpine et al. (2009) echoed that informal activities like reading the literature contributed to doctoral students' identity development, as well as rather formal activities such as submitting a journal article. Secondly, the physical space of being at university, not having to wear school uniforms, and holding an associate student status enabled a sense of belonging in MacFarlane's (2018) participants, as well as a learner identity beyond the school setting. Thirdly, the participants established relationships with teachers that were of a less formal nature, for instance they were on a first-name-basis, which made the participants feel more like students than pupils. The author outlined that forming new relationships with like-minded peers, in terms of a similarly positive perspective on learning, was most influential on participants' identity development towards experiencing themselves as university students. Through the CoP lens, it seems that being introduced to practices attendant to higher education, such as the physical environment, but also through 'university-like' relationships, participants were enabled to begin shifting their identity toward 'university-student' before entering this setting.

Cotterall (2015), studying the identity development of international doctoral students, found that it was their supervision experiences which bore most influence on their identity trajectories. When students' interactions with their supervisors encouraged them to see themselves as academics and researchers, for instance via talking positively about a student's work or analytical skills, their researcher identity was affirmed. Such instances may also foster students' confidence, which – as well

as competence, autonomy, and agency – are qualities through which scholarly identity may be exhibited (Choi et al., 2021). It is not only interactions with staff members that may allow doctoral students to experience themselves as scholars, as this may also be enabled through interactions with fellow students, especially when they are in a more advanced phase of their doctoral studies (Choi et al., 2021). This may be achieved in the setting of writing groups (which will be elaborated on in the following chapter), when a sense of trust is established, as this allows students to share their struggles as well as their scholarly writing, the feedback upon which is key to their scholarly development (Choi et al., 2021).

The role of relationships in the process of identity development was explored in more detail by Baker and Pifer (2011). Focusing on doctoral students' transition from dependence to independence, the authors found that relationships within and beyond the academic context enabled students to cope with commonly experienced feelings of isolation. For instance, people in the academic context kept doctoral students up-to-date regarding opportunities they may want to engage in (such as research and teaching assistantships) and provided them with personal support. Beyond the academic context, friends and family were found to hold an equally significant role in terms of supporting doctoral students by sharing their perspective, which enabled doctoral students to retain focus and motivation. This was echoed by McAlpine et al. (2014) who suggested that considering students' experiences outside the academic realm was essential to understand their doctoral experience, because of students' reliance on their family, partner, and friends for emotional support and encouragement. When such close relationships and their concomitant support were absent, this may result in feeling isolated (Jaber & Kennedy; Gardner, 2008) and students' transition to independence may be complicated (Baker & Pifer, 2011). This was echoed by Cotterall's (2015) participants who did not feel as a part of their departmental community, and thus felt they held a peripheral position. It seems that the students' social environment and the relationships within is what facilitates their identity development – through the CoP lens; relationships may enable or hinder students' participation (in their academic context), which affects their identity development towards independent researchers.

Another prevalent aspect of identity development in the literature was that it is not a smooth, straightforward process. As per the above paragraph, it may be complicated by the absence of close relationships within the academic context (Cotterall, 2015; Gardner, 2008; Jaber & Kennedy, 2017) and beyond (Baker & Pifer, 2011; McAlpine et al., 2014). Shifting one's identity from student to scholar is an effortful, complicated process (Coffman et al., 2016), which is dynamic, always in progress (Choi et al., 2021; Green, 2005). The process of identity development may be further complicated by having to negotiate multiple identities (Coffman et al., 2016). According to Wenger (1998), identity is more than the trajectory within one CoP, as individuals are participants of multiple CoPs, more or less

engaging in the practice of each CoP; he conceptualised identity as a nexus of multi-membership across different CoPs. Hence, identity work involves experiencing multi-membership, and reconciling different identities belonging to different CoPs (Turner & Tobbell, 2018). In the postgraduate context, success involved not only identity shifts within students' university context, but also in the broader context of their lives; negotiating demands from different parts of their lives is likely more difficult (compared to the undergraduate context) as their lives tend to be more complex (Tobbell et al., 2010).

Colbeck (2008) pointed out that facing demands attendant to multiple identities likely leads to stress, because of the meaning attached to one's subsequent behaviour. For instance, if a doctoral student foregrounds an academic deadline over taking care of their sick child (as the other parent takes on that responsibility), the doctoral student likely experiences stress due to not wanting to be perceived (by oneself or others) as a bad parent. When the family and academic identity are in conflict, doctoral students may be helped by adapting their conception of the non-foregrounded identity (Colbeck, 2008). To elaborate on the example, this may mean trying to view oneself as a competent parent as the sick child was taken care of, the fact that it was not the doctoral student themselves who took care of the child, does not make them a bad parent. Hall and Burns (2009) explained that doctoral students in education are likely to have a strong professional identity and becoming a researcher demands the negotiation and reconstruction of their doctoral and professional identity. This was echoed by Choi et al. (2021), who further outlined that identity tensions resulting from multiple identities may be resolved in two patterns. Students either compartmentalise the conflicting identities and concomitant responsibilities (for example, parent during the day, doctoral student when the children are asleep), or they adjust their view on the irreconcilable identities in such a way that they complement each other (for example, the practical knowledge gained in one's profession may be useful in the academic context). Choi et al. (2021) expressed in CoP-terms that becoming a scholar was facilitated by moving away from a position of peripherality, by acting in legitimate ways, which through Wenger's (1998) lens may be understood as participation. Importantly, the process of negotiating identities is not solely characteristic of transition but is a consequence of multi-membership (Fenton-O'Creevy, et al., 2015).

Overall, the CoP approach focuses on the relationship between the person and the social world, how they interact, and how this enables learning (Farnsworth, et al., 2016). It contributes to the notion of learning being distributed in context that it is not necessarily limited to the educational context, as factors concomitant to other life-aspects may also influence the learning experience. As outlined in this section, the CoP approach to learning is essential to the exploration of the postgraduate research experience, and thus the main theoretical framework drawn upon within this project. Yet, what

remains to be addressed are broader contextual factors which influence the learning experience, such as the political or societal landscape, which will be addressed in the following.

1.2. Urie Bronfenbrenner: the ecological and the Process-Person-Context-Time model

The second section of this chapter detailing the theoretical framework outlines Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979b, 2005) approach to human development. Akin to the CoP perspective, a socio-cultural underpinning is prevalent; the notion that learning is distributed, rather than located solely within the person. According to Wenger's approach, community-specific practices influence learning, as they may hinder or enable participation. The following section will further expand on the learning context, considering distal influences on the learning experience. As per Bronfenbrenner (1988) (as cited in Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020) distal influences are indirect and stem from settings beyond one's immediate environment. Such broader influences will be outlined in the context of presenting the development of Bronfenbrenner's theorising (1979b, 2005).

1.2.1. The ecological model

Bronfenbrenner's (1979b) initial conceptualisation of human development offered a new perspective on development at the time, focusing on the interaction of the developing person and their environment, throughout one's lifespan. The ecological environment was perceived as a set of four nested structures, which he compared to a set of Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b). However, as Rosa and Tudge (2013) pointed out, the image of Russian dolls does not effectively convey the interrelatedness between systems, which Bronfenbrenner posited.

The centre of the ecological model is occupied by the individual, the developing person, and includes aspects such as personal characteristics and genetic inheritance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b). The most immediate environment surrounding the developing person, was termed the microsystem, and comprises activities, symbols, objects, and interpersonal relationships in specific settings. A prominent example would be the supervisory relationship, the importance of which cannot be overestimated in the PGR context, for instance as demonstrated in Gearity and Mertz (2012). Bronfenbrenner's (1979b) notion of the interconnectedness of the systems becomes particularly apparent with the mesosystem, as it is viewed as the "*system of microsystems*" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 25), thus, containing the interrelations between two or more settings, in which the developing person actively participates. Applying this to the PGR context, Tobbell et al. (2010) found that postgraduate students who were engaged in teaching activities within the university (compared to postgraduates working in a setting unrelated to the university such as call centres) were thereby enabled to engage in the university community, due to an increase in their understanding of the community. PGRs' everyday work not

being connected with their academic work was found to contribute to making the decision to drop out (Leijen et al., 2016). The exosystem considers more distal influences, as it comprises at least one setting the developing person is not actively participating in, yet is affected by events taking place or decisions being made in that distant setting. For example, considering the University and College Union strikes in early 2020 (Weale & Al-Khalaf, 2020); these may have hindered postgraduate students from meeting with their supervisor regularly, despite not being part of this Union.

Lastly, the macrosystem refers to consistencies across the above-described systems within a culture, or subculture, underpinned by shared belief systems, values, and morals, thereby representing a societal blueprint. An example of a macrosystem influence on the postgraduate experience in the UK is the opportunity for doctoral students to apply for a Doctoral Loan since August 2018 (UK Government, 2020). Eligibility is contingent on meeting certain requirements, such as their course, the PGRs' age and their nationality or residency status. This was preceded by the availability of the Master's Loan, which was introduced in 2016. These loans are in place to support PGRs' tuition fees, or their living costs. This reflects different facets of the attendant societal blueprint; offering financial help may indicate appreciation towards postgraduate researchers, and maybe even the need for a workforce with an increasingly higher proportion of individuals holding postgraduate degrees. It also reflects how education is viewed in a broader sense, in terms of the charge of tuition fees; in 1998 tuition fees for home students were charged at £1,000 in England, tripling by 2006 (Hillman, 2016). The coalition in power from 2010-2015 tripled the tuition fees again, capping fees at £9,000. In 2020 tuition fees have increased to £9,250 yearly (UK Government, 2020). In comparison to another macrosystem; there were no tuition fees in German universities until 2005, when the German Constitutional Court ruled to permit German states to charge tuition fees, which seven of the 16 states followed (Bruckmeier & Wigger, 2014). However, the authors reported that the introduction of tuition fees was heavily disputed politically, and also caused concern regarding reduced enrolment rates at universities. In 2014 tuition fees were abolished altogether in Germany. This difference between the UK and Germany demonstrates what Bronfenbrenner outlined as differences across cultures, they constitute two different macrosystems.

1.2.2 The Process-Person-Context-Time model

After publishing his seminal work (1979b), Bronfenbrenner continued to develop his ecological theory; he established the chronosystem, which refers to the passage of time, considering the historical time of the developing person, as well as the individual life course (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Further, he reaffirmed the significance of the individual, in terms of person characteristics substantially

influencing one's development (reflected in adjusting his theory's name to bioecological model), as scholars were often fixated on contextual factors when referring to his ecological model (Tudge et al., 2016). All modifications resulted in the mature version of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development; the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The first of the four elements refers to the often-termed 'engines of development': proximal processes (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). They are the primary contributor to one's development and consist of reciprocal interactions between the developing person and other individuals, objects, and symbols, which are part of one's microsystem. The influence of such processes becomes more significant with the frequency of the interactions, and with their continuance, as they grow in complexity. Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (2005) further proposed that the nature of proximal processes, in terms of form, power, content, and direction, vary with both the developing person, and the environment they are surrounded by. The second P represents person characteristics, which are separated into demand; resource; and force characteristics. Thereby the influence of the individual on development is acknowledged, referring to aspects immediately stimulating a response in another person (such as age, gender, skin colour); mental, emotional, social, and material resources; and innate drivers (such as motivation), respectively. Thirdly, the context-element refers to the four nested structures outlined above: the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystem. Lastly, time refers to what was previously termed the chronosystem. Importantly, the elements constituting the PPCT model are perceived to be in synergy, therefore going beyond conceiving the four elements merely in addition (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Tudge et al., 2009; Tudge et al., 2016).

While acknowledging the development of Bronfenbrenner's theorising over time, as well as the repeated emphasis on proximal processes, the use of Bronfenbrenner's theory in this project is focused on its contextual elements. Although Tudge et al. (2009) criticised the extant literature for its conceptual incoherence when claiming that one's work is based on Bronfenbrenner's theory without referring to its most developed version (the PPCT model), the authors further pointed out that using the theory in its entirety is not a requirement, but what is required is to explicate one's choices. Thus, I would argue that conceptual coherence is maintained within this project; despite relying on the PPCT-model only in part, other elements are considered elsewhere. For example, the following section encompasses Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) notion of successful interpersonal relationships, which are situated in the individual's immediate environment in the context of PGR learning, which may constitute proximal processes. In this instance, Bronfenbrenner's theorising may contribute to an understanding of distal influences on the formation of such relationships.

1.3. Lev Vygotsky: The Zone of Proximal Development

Lastly, some of Lev Vygotsky’s work will be outlined, particularly focusing on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), as scrutinising the entirety of his work would go beyond the scope of this project. Vygotsky’s work is commonly considered a developmental theory, yet is exceptional in its operationalisation of learning, which serves as a valuable tool to understand the learning process. Despite the literature at the time usually referring to the ‘child’ collaborating with the ‘parent’, ‘teacher’, or ‘more knowledgeable peer’ (Vygotsky, 1978), Gallimore and Tharp (1990) pointed out that adults progress through the same stages when learning. Thus, considering this project’s focus on postgraduate researchers, it was deemed most appropriate to use the terms ‘learner’ and ‘more knowledgeable other’ (MKO) going forward.

Vygotsky’s approach to learning considers the learner’s development beyond their ability to demonstrate competence independently. Vygotsky regarded the independent performance level as actual development, whereas the ability to perform a task with the guidance of an MKO was regarded as potential development. The distance between the actual development and the potential development is what Vygotsky referred to as the ZPD. This enables a prospective understanding of one’s level of development, because “*What is in the zone of proximal development today will be in the actual development level tomorrow.*” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 78). As illustrated below in Figure 1, the progression through the learning process occurs in four stages (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). The ZPD spans over the first two of these stages, which is detailed in the following via the example of learning on the PGR level.

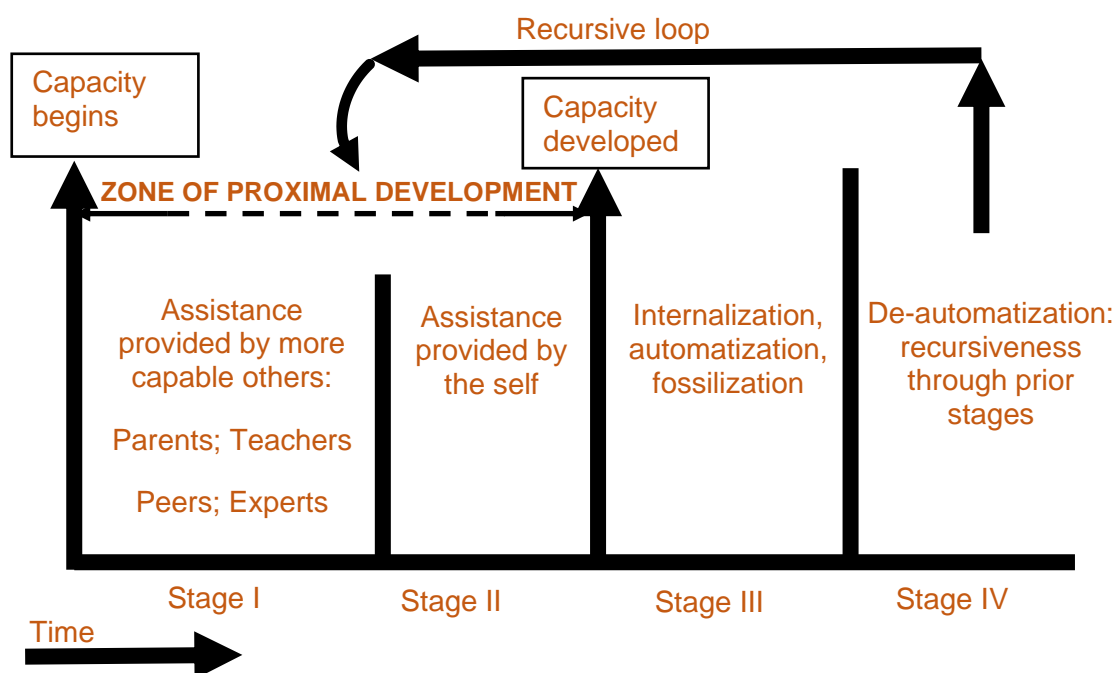


Figure 1: Progression through the ZPD and beyond (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990, p. 185)

1.3.1. The operationalisation of learning in stages

During the first stage the learner requires the assistance of an MKO when presented with a new task. The learner is likely to have a limited understanding of the motivation, the performance, or the goal of the task and therefore is reliant on the guidance of the MKO and their understanding of the needs and goal setting as appropriate for the learner (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). A fitting concept here seems to be that of intersubjectivity; Bråten and Trevarthen (2007) outlined that soon after birth, the interaction between, for example mother and child, is attuned to one another, for instance when making emotive expressions, gestures, and sounds. The authors suggested that mirroring others' acts from such an early age may serve as precursor to understanding others' thoughts and emotions, which constitutes intersubjective understanding. Having an intersubjective understanding, in the context of the ZPD, especially in terms of the MKO understanding the learner, seems imperative, as only a sufficient understanding of the learner's perspective will enable a successful progression through the ZPD. Demonstrating the reliance on the MKO's intersubjective guidance, one of Robertson's (2017) participants reported of an instance where this was lacking; the doctoral student reflected on the beginning of her studies, saying she wished there would have been a clear outline of what her supervisors' as well as her responsibilities were. Instead, the supervisors seemingly lacked an intersubjective understanding of their student's needs, the lack of guidance made her feel as if she had no idea what she was doing. It is the MKO's responsibility to motivate and support the learner, who will gain some understanding of the meaning of the task, by the means of collaboratively performing processes of the task numerous times (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). The end of stage I is reached once the responsibility for the tailoring of assistance and for the structuring of the performance of the task lies with the learner. Manathunga (2005) provided an elaborate example of a supervisor systematically guiding her international doctoral students through the first stage of their ZPD enabling them to understand and critically assess literature. The supervisor initially asked her students to produce summaries of articles for example, which they then discussed, and she also provided constructive verbal and written feedback as well as her own review of the chosen text. As the students' understanding of academic English improved, the focus shifted from summarising the texts to critiquing them, following the same procedures. The supervisor conceded that this is a labour-intensive approach, but viewed it as investment, as it usually is only necessary for about six months and "*saves a lot of heartache later*" (Manathunga, 2005, p. 228). Clearly, this supervisor had an intersubjective understanding of her students and their needs, in this case the need to develop competence in reviewing academic texts, which enabled her to guide them through the first stage of the learning process.

Continuing the progression through the ZPD, Gallimore and Tharp (1990) explained that stage II is characterised by self-assistance. The interpsychological collaboration between learner and MKO has enabled the learner to now assist themselves intrapsychologically. As the responsibility for the task now lies with the learner, they structure, plan, and perform the task independently. During this stage, the learner performs the task numerous times, learning strategies of how to perform or improve performance. During this phase the learner also develops an advanced understanding of the purpose and meaning of the task, of which they might have been previously unaware. An applicable example is apparent in Thein and Beach's (2010) reported co-publishing, who were supervisee and supervisor respectively, as aforementioned. Beach emphasised to Thein the meaning and purpose of publishing in terms of its importance regarding future employment, especially when applying for academic positions at research universities. Akin to the previous stage I, Beach provided not only advice, but collaborated with Thein via co-publishing academic work. Doing so, Thein learnt how to produce writing for certain audiences and journals, and how to structure theoretical arguments within scholarly debates. This seemingly demonstrates how their collaboration enabled the shift from interpsychological work between the pair to intrapsychological work within Thein, who was enabled to independently extract parts of her thesis in order to produce publications. In her Assistant Professor role post-PhD, she continued to publish academic work, not only by herself, but also as co-author with her graduate students, acting as mentor, or MKO. Once the learner has fully developed the capacity to perform the task, the end of stage II and the ZPD is reached; potential development has turned into actual development (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990).

The two stages following the ZPD are characterised by the learner having gained full development of the task (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). It is then that the learner's performance is automatised. In this stage assistance provided by others or the self is no longer necessary and would actually be perceived as disruptive (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). Despite the capacity to automatically perform a certain task, stage III is also characterised by fossilisation (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). This describes the rigidity with which a task is performed once automatised. The following stage IV is where de-automatisation takes place, which leads to a recursion through the ZPD (Gallimore and Tharp, 1990). The authors further explained that individuals progress through multiple ZPDs concurrently, developing multiple capacities and skills. Of course, different ZPDs progress on different timelines, and having reached stage III in one ZPD might draw one's attention and focus on something else, another ZPD. This may lead to problems when returning to said capacity, as it may be de-automatised. Within the concept of the ZPD, the learner returns to the stage which provides suitable assistance. For instance, it may be sufficient to return to stage II, where the capacity will be fully developed once again via self-assistance.

1.3.2. Interpersonal and learning relationships, and their fit with the ZPD

Having presented the operationalisation of the developmental learning process according to Vygotsky, it seems the relationship between the learner and MKO is of paramount importance, as the formation of the ZPD is fundamental to learning. Within the literature, it is well established that the often termed 'student-teacher-relationship' is essential to learning (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a), with a good-quality relationship impacting the learner and their performance positively (Farr-Wharton et al., 2018; Split et al., 2012). However, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) pointed out that the nature of those kinds of relationships usually remains unexplored. Further, it seems that processes of forming interpersonal relationships are neglected within the literature, the focus most often lies with assessing the quality of already formed relationships. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) noted that research supports the notion that relationships cannot be reduced to variables, rather, they are deeply interwoven with one's learning experiences. They distinguished between interpersonal and learning relationships, terms which are, problematically often used interchangeably. Further, they proposed that only a successful learning relationship enables the passage through the ZPD, with the ability to do so classifying the quality of the learning relationship. They posited that all learning relationships evolve from successful interpersonal relationships, yet not every interpersonal relationship will inevitably result in a learning relationship.

Regarding interpersonal relationships, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) explored students' transition experience to secondary school within three schools in the UK via an ethnographic approach. Their findings include that courtesy, which can be perceived as demonstrating basic social behaviour, was an important influence on the formation of interpersonal relationships. A lack of courtesy hindered the emergence of interpersonal relationships, as students felt treated unfairly: students were expected to adhere to certain social behaviours (such as waiting outside of classrooms before being invited in), whereas teachers did not behave accordingly (for example, no apologies for arriving late for class); a discrepancy of principles in social behaviour. A converse example related to the PGR level stems from Tierny and Hallett (2010); basic social behaviour in the sense of upholding an agreed meeting time and place was conceived as beneficial for their supervisory relationship, as it conveyed respect and trust, therefore seemingly contributing to the formation of a successful interpersonal relationship. In contrast, Ee (2013) reported of international PGRs being treated unfairly based on their race, such as being treated particularly harshly in comparison to Caucasian students, and staff not acknowledging their contribution to lab meetings. Such a lack of basic social behaviour certainly hinders the formation of a successful relationship. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) further outlined that teachers' persistence on rules was met with resistance when students perceived the rules to be unfair, or when the rules were perceived to be enforced inconsistently, clearly impeding the formation of

successful interpersonal relationships. Lastly, school systems and practices did not enable the formation of interpersonal relationships, for example, timetables did not allow for interpersonal student-teacher-interaction. This is an example of a distal influence on learning as mentioned in the previous section, demonstrating the impact of the context in which interpersonal and learning relationships are embedded.

As aforementioned, a learning relationship only emerges from a successful interpersonal relationship (which may be characterised as friendship, but not necessarily), and is extended by an element of learning, with the motive and aim of a learning relationship being the acquisition and growth of knowledge. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) further explained that it is the interaction between learner and MKO (a collaboration that enables the learner to eventually perform a task independently), which characterises this type of relationship. The beginning of the collaboration between learner and MKO aligns with the first stage outlined above, and therefore constitutes the beginning of the progression through the ZPD. This situates the formation and development of a successful interpersonal relationship as a prerequisite to the ZPD. The ZPD then emerges – with the emergence of the learning relationship. The assistance provided by the MKO has been conceptualised as scaffolding (Rogoff, 1990), or guided participation (Wood et al., 1976), with both concepts shining light on the learner having an actively contributing role in their collaboration with the MKO (Gregory et al., 2004). Nevertheless, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) emphasised that the learner and the MKO conjointly contribute to the learning experience. The collaborative nature the authors posited aligns with the first stage of the ZPD, which I above coupled with the concept of intersubjectivity. Situating learning as distributed in context within this thesis, as *"inextricably embedded in mutuality of social interaction"* (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a, p. 11), necessitates that the parties involved in the social interaction have a shared understanding of the situation, of each other, in other words that they have intersubjective understanding. Synthesising Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising and intersubjectivity (Bråten and Trevarthen, 2007), it seems that the reciprocity that Bråten and Trevarthen (2007) refer to regarding intersubjective attunement is akin to Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) emphasis on the conjoint nature of a successful learning relationship. Yet, it seems that developing an understanding of each other's thoughts, emotions, situations via one's intersubjective capabilities likely is a prerequisite of a *successful* interpersonal relationship, thus preceding the learning relationship. As clarified throughout this section, Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theoretical conceptualisation constitutes an essential contribution to the socio-cultural understanding of learning, and concomitantly of the importance of relationships in learning, which therefore will be drawn on.

Applying Vygotsky's socio-cultural operationalisation of learning to the postgraduate context has clarified the importance of relationships in learning through their precursory role. As per Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a), the establishment of a ZPD is contingent on the formation of a learning relationship, which successful interpersonal relationships are posited to precede. Failing to form such meaningful interpersonal and learning relationships in the PGR context likely hinders students' learning, as their progression through the ZPD would be impeded.

1.4. Conclusion: Synthesis of theories and analytic opportunities

As previously mentioned, and as illustrated in Figure 2 below, I do not draw on the three theoretical frameworks equally. I mainly draw upon Communities or Practice, and as reflected in the title, the concept of *shifting identities* takes a central role within this project. However, to consolidate the use of the three theories, the below outlines their shared underpinning, specifically the notion that learning is distributed in context, and the emphasis the three theories place on relationships.

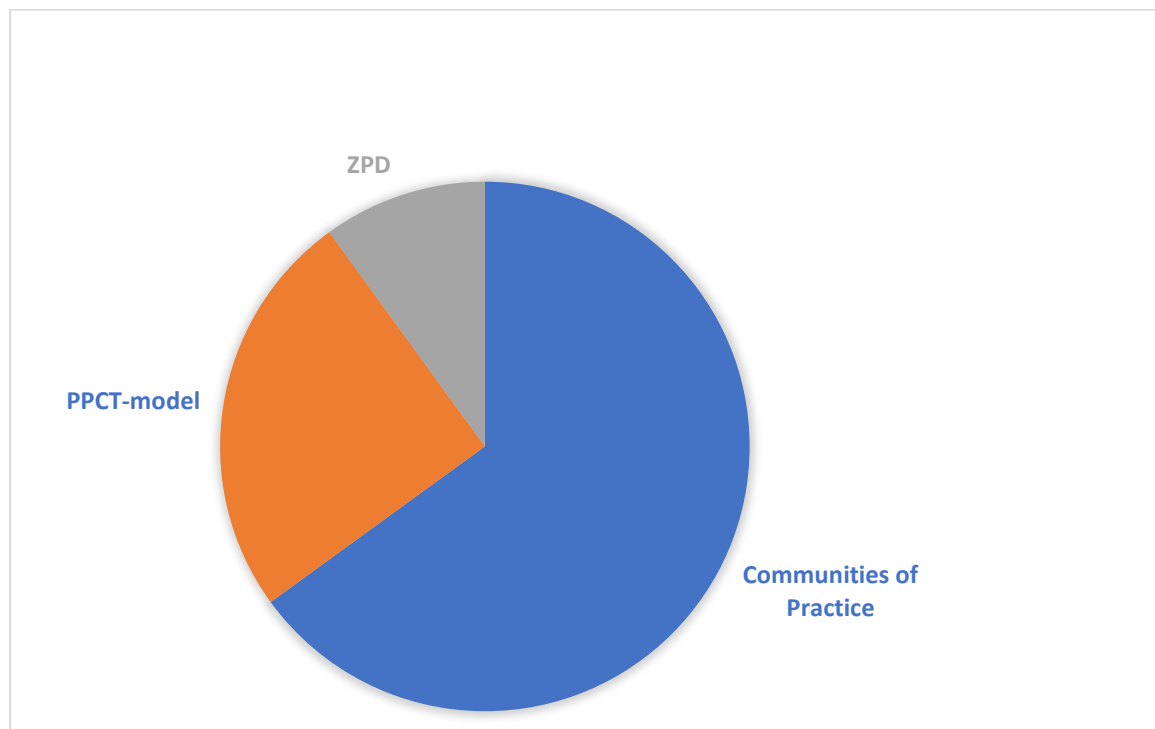


Figure 2: Illustration of how the three theoretical frameworks are drawn upon within this project

First of all, the three theories share the fundamental notion that learning is a developmental process which is situated in context. Regarding Vygotsky (1978), this is manifested through the ZPD, from a CoP perspective learning may be viewed as participation, and one element of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT-model stands for context. This connotes that learning is conceived as an exchange between person and context. From the outset Bronfenbrenner's theorising viewed the individual as influencing as well as being influenced by their environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Similarly, the interaction of negotiating meaning, and identity (Turner & Tobbell, 2018) indicates reciprocity, in terms of individuals shaping practices while being shaped by practice. Also signifying the notion of reciprocity, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) referred to the joint collaboration between learner and MKO when they share a learning relationship.

In more detail, the below illustrates that Bronfenbrenner's theorising was influenced by the work of Lev Vygotsky (Rosa & Tudge, 2013); this becomes apparent when considering two of Bronfenbrenner's (1979a, p. 845) propositions, which he posited as necessary conditions for development:

Proposition 1. A primary developmental context is one in which the child can observe and engage in ongoing patterns of progressively more complex activity jointly with or under the direct guidance of persons who possess knowledge and skill not yet acquired by the child and with whom the child has developed a positive emotional relationship.

This proposition is clearly relatable to Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the learner being assisted by a MKO, similar to the aforementioned stage I of the concept of the ZPD. Noticeably, Bronfenbrenner grounds this on the development of a "positive emotional relationship". Correspondingly, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) theorised the necessity of establishing a successful interpersonal relationship to allow the formation of a learning relationship, which thus constitutes a prerequisite for the passage through the ZPD. The proposition below demonstrates consistency with Vygotsky's above-mentioned stage II, due to its main feature being self-assistance (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990).

Proposition 2. A secondary developmental context is one in which the child is given opportunity, resource, and encouragement to engage in the activities he or she has learned in primary developmental context, but now without the active involvement or direct guidance of another person possessing knowledge and skill beyond levels acquired by the child.

Integrating Bronfenbrenner's notions with the CoP approach, Tobbell (2006) synthesised the two; as aforementioned, Bronfenbrenner posited that actions must take place regularly and continually to affect one's development. This could be related to the process of either becoming a full participant, being hindered from participation, or choosing not to participate (Tobbell, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's conception of development is that of a complex process; when actions occur repeatedly, and over time, they likely develop and may intensify, therefore complexity arises, which in CoP terms may be paralleled to participation (Tobbell, 2006). For instance, Buissink-Smith et al. (2013) introduced an initiative with the purpose of facilitating PGR peer groups, with the overarching aim of students establishing a sense of belonging to the postgraduate research community at one university in New Zealand. The groups were led by selected PGRs and they met regularly (at least monthly) over the course of one year. Especially PGRs who mainly worked independently seemed to benefit from the regular meetings, many of which celebrated academic as well as social successes. They achieved a sense of community which led to positive consequences beyond the structures of the peer group meetings, as PGRs produced newsletters, an induction booklet, and one group organised a postgraduate conference. This example again demonstrates the shared underpinning notion of learning being distributed. The way in which group meetings were scheduled as well as the outlined

findings indicate that these groups served as proximal processes, as the relationships they formed were impactful in terms of the participants developing a sense of belonging. From the CoP-perspective, engaging in these group meetings would be considered a form of participation, and the achieved sense of belonging would indicate a somewhat inbound trajectory, which seems particularly meaningful considering the practice of independence (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b) which would likely encourage continuous peripheral participation.

Clearly, the three theories emphasise the importance of relationships. Regarding Vygotsky, the significance of learning relationships as fundamental to learning was illustrated via the ZPD, and the interpersonal level has been further accentuated via integrating Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising. Bronfenbrenner's proximal processes are considered most impactful on one's development, which refers to the exchange between the individual and their immediate environment, encompassing relationships to others (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Regarding CoP, it was pointed out that moving from the legitimate peripheral participation towards an inbound trajectory is contingent on gaining an understanding of the CoP's practice, which may be enabled by establishing relationships with community members (Lang & Canning, 2010).

The contribution of this first chapter lies in its conception of learning on the PGR-level. Although similar theoretical syntheses have previously explored educational contexts (for example Tobbell, 2006) this is the first project which integrates Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising on interpersonal and learning relationships towards an understanding of PGR education. The following list of analytic opportunities was generated based on my theoretical stance as outlined in this first chapter, and is rooted in the emergent imperative to consider the person situated in context in order to understand PGR learning:

- Based on interpersonal relationships preceding the ZPD which is fundamental to learning: How are interpersonal relationships between learner and MKO formed, and what is the nature of successful interpersonal relationships?
- Based on learning conceptualised as shifting identities and the consequent impact on participation: How do PGRs negotiate their identity? Or put differently, how do they experience PGR education?
- Based on the impact of contextual practices and distal influences: How does the context construct PGR education?

2. Literature Review

Having outlined how learning is understood on the PGR level, the following literature review will scrutinise how the postgraduate research experience is represented in the existing literature. The structure of this chapter is as follows: I begin by briefly setting the scene of postgraduate education in terms of international differences, which is necessary to understand the literature. The rest of the chapter is structured into five different sections: attrition, the writing process, PGRs' wellbeing, relationships, and disciplinary differences.

In terms of conducting the literature review, socio-culturally based research typically aims to gain a broad insight into the context that the phenomenon under study is situated in, to gain an overview of the key factors (Schoen, 2011). Hence, my approach was rather exploratory, I began by trying to gain an overview over the PGR experience as a whole, by reading literature reviews like Sverdlik et al. (2018) for example. I decided to present the following sections within the literature review, as they seemed salient aspects of the PGR education. The first section concentrates on attrition, which has been identified as an important aspect of postgraduate education, as particularly doctoral attrition rates are universally poor (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Through the lens established in the preceding chapter, attrition is tied to hindered participation, which may be based on unsuccessful interpersonal relationships, which have been posited to impede learning (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). Secondly, gaining the doctoral award is contingent on being able to effectively communicate via one's academic writing (Aitchison & Pare, 2015). Socio-culturally, the writing process may be understood as participating in the academic CoP, and the development of one's writing skills would be akin to gaining an understanding of the attendant practices. In order to gain this CoP-specific knowledge, the newcomers, in this case PGRs, are reliant on oldtimers' insight, based on the distributed nature of PGR learning. The third section on PGRs' wellbeing emerged as problematic for postgraduate researchers. One concern is that for example experiencing depression or anxiety may carry negative influences on students' academic performance but also on their general health (Liu et al., 2019). The effect of participating in several life-aspects and of attendant contextual practices on PGRs' wellbeing will be considered. The fourth section of this chapter explores different relationships PGRs engage in. As posited in the preceding chapter, establishing successful interpersonal relationships serves as prerequisite to learning (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). Thus, the role of different types of relationships as well as their characteristics as presented in the extant literature will be discussed. Lastly, a brief section on disciplinary differences explicates my choice to focus on humanities PGRs, as apparent in the thesis title. The chapter ends with a chapter conclusion, followed by my research aims.

Providing more insight into my process of conducting the literature review, I worked according to the same pattern for each of the sections. It became clear that I would yield more results when searching for papers using keywords like 'master students' and 'doctoral student/education' rather than 'postgraduate student/education' or 'postgraduate researcher', which is why I used a variety of the former keywords for each of the sections. I created a Word-document (eventually over 30 pages long) on which I noted all relevant references per section. Further, I would follow up on salient points (for instance made in the introductory section of a paper) by checking the paper's reference list, trying to access the paper and add it to my reference-document. I ceased reading for a section once I felt I had gained a satisfactory overview of the topic, which was often indicated when I recognised numerous references while reading a new paper, indicating that a sufficient insight into key papers and authors. For instance, Levecque et al. (2017) was a frequently cited paper regarding PGR wellbeing, and Gardner, S. K. seemed a key author regarding attrition. A further indicator that I had reached a good level of insight was recognising when key points were echoed across papers. While reading the papers, I took extensive notes on a new Word document, to such an extent that the first step of summarising my notes would be to create a new Word document including pertinent, more concise information. The next step involved reading through all the notes again, thereby identifying salient points, and putting them into a line of argument in yet another Word document outlining the structure for my writing for the relevant section, which I would begin once I finalised the structure. This was a lengthy process which I conducted for each section, which facilitated an in-depth insight into the literature.

Lastly, I want to highlight a few pre-emptive points; firstly, because the matter under study, the PGR learning experience, encompasses a plethora of different aspects, the following presents an overview of the literature regarding the whole experience, as addressing each aspect, such as the examination process (Houston, 2018), in detail would go far beyond the scope of this thesis. Further, the extant literature features research specific to groups of PGRs experiencing inequalities, such as international students (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Laufer & Gorup, 2019; Wu and Hammond, 2011), students of colour (Burt et al., 2019; Haskins et al., 2013), first-generation students (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Holley & Gardner, 2012); part-time students (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012; Zahl, 2015), students studying at a distance (Denman et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2019) and there also seems to be a cluster of research focusing on women's experience of undertaking doctoral studies (Carter et al., 2013; Ramos & Yi, 2020). Yet again, considering each group specifically would go far beyond the scope of this thesis, as each of them likely covers the scope for a doctoral thesis. Secondly, despite artificially separating each section for structured ease of reading, they are of course inextricably intertwined, which will become apparent as I refer back and forth as appropriate within this chapter. Thirdly, considering the preceding chapter, the literature review will be presented through the socio-cultural lens. By this I

mean that the literature was searched and presented as outlined above, however the literature is understood through the socio-cultural lens. Thus, throughout this chapter I frequently discuss the presented findings from a socio-cultural perspective, for instance via outlining what the findings may mean from a CoP-perspective for instance.

2.1. Setting the scene

The following considers international differences in postgraduate education. The previous conceptual chapter theorised learning as situated in context, therefore it is imperative to outline the context of learning on the PGR level. Regarding learning on the doctoral level, there are significant differences across countries (Shin et al., 2018). Pointing out these differences is fundamental to an informed understanding of the existing literature presented in this chapter. Jones (2013) examined publications regarding doctoral education, spanning from 1971 to 2012. Over 85% of the articles were published by authors from the USA (65%), Australia (12%), and the UK (10%); hence, the respective international differences will be addressed briefly, regarding the entry, general structure, and examination process of doctoral programmes.

2.1.1 Doctoral education

In the US, doctoral candidates typically have a master's degree, although entry to doctoral studies is also possible with a bachelor's degree (Evans et al., 2014). This is also the case in the UK, additionally candidates typically have to provide a proposal, outlining the thesis (Bernstein et al., 2014). Likewise, in Australia, entry necessitates a bachelor or master's degrees, however most universities admit candidates provisionally, the confirmation of their admission is contingent on students presenting their research proposal, a seminar, and significant writing relevant to the thesis (Bernstein et al., 2014).

In terms of the structure of doctoral programmes in the USA, at least the first year is dedicated to advanced coursework, with a written comprehensive examination before entering the phase of independent research (Bernstein et al., 2014). Evans et al. (2014) pointed out that some doctoral degrees incorporate a master's degree, to benefit a seamless transition. In Australia, a doctorate is typically a three-year programme when studying full-time, consisting of self-directed research, or a combination of research and coursework (Evans et al., 2014). In the UK, doctoral programmes are fundamentally based on the production of original research and scholarship (Evans et al., 2014). It seems in Europe doctoral candidates are viewed as early career researchers, whereas in the US they are considered doctoral students (Shin et al., 2018). This indicates differences in underpinning cultural perspectives on doctoral education, corresponding with Bronfenbrenner's (1979b) macrosystem. Passing the comprehensive examination after the coursework-stage in the US initiates the transition from being a student to being a doctoral candidate (Guloy et al., 2020). Relating this to Wenger's (1998) theorising, a shift in identity is necessary for the individual to participate, to learn. It may be argued that the American structure possibly facilitates such an identity shift more effectively, in

comparison to the UK structure, where it is possible to move directly from undergraduate to doctoral studies, which would likely demand complex identity negotiations to enable a shift.

Regarding examination, Bernstein et al. (2014) pointed out that procedures are determined by faculties, universities, or governments, yet globally there is no consensus on criteria for assessing the thesis. Despite institutions providing such criteria and instructions, they include little information on how theses are actually assessed – and, often examiners favour adhering to their own standards, however, their personal knowledge (stemming from their own assessment, their students' assessment, et cetera) is usually partial and incomplete (Golding et al., 2014). In the US, the doctoral thesis is examined by a dissertation committee, which may include examiners external to the institution (Bernstein et al., 2014). The oral examination, the *viva voce*, may comprise a public seminar presentation followed by a private meeting with the committee, or a public defence. According to the Australian government, doctoral examinations must be conducted by at least two external examiners, yet some universities also use internal examiners (Bernstein, et al., 2014). Typically, the examination process in Australia is a report-only model, without an oral defence (Lovat et al., 2015), yet the interest in including some form of oral defence is growing (Dally et al., 2022). Houston's (2018) doctoral thesis investigated the PhD examination process in the UK, which is a two-part process: the independent assessment of the thesis, and the assessment of the doctoral student in the *viva*, usually conducted in private. The examiners, one of whom is usually internal, yet not the candidate's supervisor (QAA, 2018), share their assessments of the thesis before the *viva*, and produce a joint report post-*viva*. Although examiners' views do not tend to radically change as a result of the oral examination, both phases of assessment interdependently contribute to the examiners' judgements. According to Houston (2018), examiners sought for four attributes in the candidates: originality or contribution to knowledge, publishability, and research competence (mainly apparent via one's thesis), whereas the last attribute – intellectual rigour – was mainly appraised in the oral defence. Examination outcomes in the UK are either pass or fail, yet institutions are free to determine their own classification of outcomes; many universities differentiate between 'minor' and 'major' 'corrections' or 'amendments' (Houston, 2018).

One shared aspect of doctoral education is that doctoral graduates worldwide are expected to have gained extensive knowledge in their field and are "*required to demonstrate a significant and original contribution to knowledge in his or her field.*" (Evans et al., 2014, p. 44). Yet, there is no unanimous definition of what constitutes original research, Clarke and Lunt (2014, p. 818) argue that "*true 'originality' conveys uniqueness and the creation of knowledge, and therefore that the work is significant in the field, not simply 'a contribution'*".

2.1.2. Master's by research

Doctoral and master's by research degrees are closely connected as they are rooted in independent research (QAA, 2018). As outlined above, the originality aspect, or contribution to knowledge, is central to doctoral theses, yet in the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) (2015b) Characteristics Statement regarding master's degrees, the term "originality" is absent. Instead, master's degree graduates are characterised by their advanced knowledge in a specific field and their ability to conduct research independently. In the UK, assessment criteria, which may vary across disciplines, are specified by the higher education provider (QAA, 2018). Further, master's programmes are characterised by the provision of research methods training, and the assessment usually requires a thesis (alternatively an artefact, performance, or musical composition), and commonly an oral defence (QAA, 2015b). Pilcher (2011) placed UK dissertations on the master's level between undergraduate and PhD dissertations, as originality is not required, yet an excellent master's thesis may be publishable. Bettany-Saltikov et al. (2009) explored the reliability of the marking of master's theses. The institutional guidelines of the participating staff members did not include a criterion assessing originality, yet participants did factor it in, as they felt original thought is a fundamental element of research, and essential to knowledge and practice.

Biggam (2015) pointed out that transitioning from the undergraduate to the master's level entails a shift in learning; from directed to independent learning. As per Thompson et al. (2021), entering higher education via enrolment in undergraduate studies constitutes a shift in independence compared to previous educational engagements, as students are required to take responsibility for their learning, for example via organising their time to meet deadlines. Yet, Biggam (2015) pointed out that on the undergraduate level, learning is contingent on the lecturer via lectures, seminars, et cetera, whereas the responsibility shifts towards the student on the postgraduate level, as students independently conduct a research project. Making such a transition can be challenging (Tobbell et al., 2010).

Noticeably, the literature regarding master's level of studies is particularly scarce, be it in relation to examination processes (Bourke & Holbrook, 2013), or the supervisory relationship (Biggam, 2015). Thus, this project does consider doctoral as well as master's by research students, on the basis of both programmes being clearly distinct from undergraduate programmes, and concentrating on independent research (QAA, 2018).

2.2. Attrition

Having outlined the context of education on the PGR level, the following section focuses on attrition, which, compared to any other educational endeavours, seems particularly problematic on the doctoral level (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Sverdlik, et al., 2018). Emerging from the literature as part of doctoral attrition, its consequences are outlined, followed by contributing factors, which transpired to be personal characteristics, non-academic commitments, and relationships in the academic context. Due to this project's focus on PGRs, this subchapter ends with a consideration of master's by research attrition.

Doctoral completion rates are reported as low as 40% in the US-context (Golde, 2005), Vassil and Solvak (2012) outline the European average completion rate of 65% – despite a seeming consensus of completion rates being an issue on the doctoral level, sufficient evidence to support such claims is not always presented. A survey conducted by the European University Association's (EUA) Council for Doctoral Education (Hasgall et al., 2019) was sent to over 250 universities in 36 countries belonging to the EUA, to gain insight into the current approaches to doctoral education in Europe. It was found that on average, two thirds of doctoral students completed their dissertation within six years – although it must be mentioned that the relevant question in the survey was *“What percentage of doctoral students that enrolled in 2009 graduated within six years?”* (p.28), thus the average percentage of doctoral students graduating in each year of their studies remained unclear. Further, findings indicated that at 49% of institutions, the average time it takes full-time students to complete their studies was more than four years, while the recommended completion time lies at three to four years according to the Salzburg Principles. The UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency does not appear to publish completion times or rates with regard to PGR studies.

2.2.1. Consequences of attrition

Dropping out has negative consequences for the students as well as the institution. Doctoral students pay an emotional toll, which can be exacerbated by repeatedly having to explain the attrition decision to family members, for example (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). The authors further outlined that this may lead to depression, and even to violence and suicide attempts, in rare cases. As aforementioned, PGRs tend to live complex lives in terms of negotiating various responsibilities stemming from multiple life-aspects (Tobbell et al., 2010), thus such severe consequences are likely not only to be ascribed to doctoral attrition. Willis and Carmichael's (2011) study retrospectively explored the departure of six doctoral students in-depth, offering detailed insights into their experiences. They found that the

emotional consequences may be endured long-term, as interviewees seemed to struggle with their emotions when talking about dropping out of their doctoral studies, even decades later.

High attrition rates are detrimental to institutions, as it affects the university's ranking, prestige, and reputation, among other factors (Gardner, 2009c). It connotes a waste of human resources (faculty who invested time in a project that has been discontinued), and financial resources (drains assets of doctoral programmes) (Gardner, 2009c; Litalien & Guay, 2015; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). However, despite the continuously high attrition rates, insight into the attrition decision and departing students' experiences is lacking (Sverdlik, et al., 2018). Gardner (2009c) interviewed faculty members to explore their perspective on doctoral attrition. They tended to locate the reasons for departure within the student; most frequently referring to the student lacking, for example, ability, drive, or motivation. This seems underpinned by traditional conceptions of learning as the acquisition of skills or information, as mentioned in the previous chapter. However, following a socio-cultural understanding of learning as a distributed process, attrition would also be conceived in context, rather than locating reasons for departure solely within the person.

2.2.2. Personal Characteristics

Some studies regarding the attrition of doctoral students examined demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, marital status, or nationality (Litalien & Guay, 2015; Vassil & Solvak, 2012; Wollast et al., 2018). For example, Vassil and Solvak (2012) found that higher age is associated with failure, when compared to their youngest age group (23-30). However, they suggested that this may be due to the heightened likelihood of familial responsibilities affecting academic progression, rather than purely one's age. This is supported by Tobbell et al. (2010) as aforementioned, who had found that postgraduate students tend to lead more complex lives, compared to undergraduate students. Thus, conceiving attrition socio-culturally, it would seem that students are hindered from participating in their academic context in an effective way. Consequently, PGRs are unable to shift their identities, they may remain in the periphery or become marginalised, which may lead to their departure.

Litalien and Guay (2015) found psychological factors to be prominent influences on study persistence; they found perceived competence to be the strongest distinguishing aspect between completers and non-completers and suggested it to be essential to PhD completion. They defined competence as (p. 219) "The feeling of being effective in one's interactions with the environment and being able to exercise their capacities", and assessed perceived competence via doctoral students indicating whether they had experienced pre-defined situations, such as "I was successfully completing difficult tasks and projects", or "I struggled doing something I should be good at" (p. 222). It could be

questioned, despite such items assessing the extent of doctoral students exercising their capacities, to which extent they assess their effectiveness in “interaction with the environment”, as the authors posited. Considering the previous chapter outlining the PGR experience as interaction between student and their environment, it may be valuable to take this into account when assessing perceived competence. For example, Litalien & Guay (2015) further found that the farther doctoral students progressed with their studies, and the more often they presented their work (for example at conferences), the less likely they fostered dropout intentions. Understanding this socio-culturally, their attrition is less likely as they participate in their academic context, which indicates an inbound trajectory.

The need to progress, in terms of perceiving one’s doctoral journey as moving forward, as opposed to feeling stuck, is central to completers’ and non-completers’ respective daily experience (Devos, et al., 2017). Non-completers typically had at least one of the three following experiences; firstly, being unable to develop their own project, in terms of failing to develop a project, or being led into taking the project into a certain direction. This illustrates the importance of understanding the literature in context, as outlined in the introductory section of this chapter. Relating this to the UK context, PGRs are typically required to apply with a proposal, thus, general objectives for the research project have been outlined, and accepted by the institution, although of course one’s initial idea for a research project likely develops and changes over time. Noticeably, the authors did find that even just having a general idea of their research project was characteristic of completers’ accounts. The second characteristic experience of non-completers was being stuck or unable to generate material required for the thesis (for example, struggling to solve a mathematical problem), or thirdly, they progressed, but experienced emotional distress as a result, leading to an inability to cope, and consequently dropping out. Similarly, Castello et al. (2017) found one of the motives for dropping out to be stress and emotional management, as doctoral study demands caused emotional difficulties, which at times led to anxiety and depression.

Sverdlik et al. (2018) pointed out that many cited a lack of motivation as the main reason for leaving graduate school. Gardner (2010) suggested that this is due to the increasingly unstructured nature of doctoral work, which requires doctoral students’ self-direction. However, perceiving the doctoral experience as situated in context, as outlined in the previous chapter, would entail that rather than situating this difficulty within the student, it may be appropriate to address the problem in the context. Following the above-outlined socio-cultural theorising, a successful trajectory is contingent on participation (Turner & Tobbell, 2018), which in the PGR context necessitates PGRs to take ownership of their learning, due to the imperative of independence, which is inherent to postgraduate study

(Tobbell et al., 2010). If such attendant practices rather hinder than enable PGRs' participation, attrition may become more likely.

In contrast to these negative consequences of doctoral attrition, Willis and Carmichael (2011) reported the story of one participant who expressed their departure as leaving, as opposed to dropping out. They explained that this participant left due to a reassessment of personal goals; the student realised that she had started her doctoral degree to prove she is capable to her father, by whom she was criticised since her childhood. Once she recognised that this was the case, she decided to leave, upon which she felt relieved, and consequently found herself with more money and time at hand. Through the socio-cultural lens outlined in the previous chapter, this demonstrates how the participant's identity shift impacted her participation, via her decision to leave.

2.2.3. Non-academic commitments

Conversely, Willis and Carmichael's (2011) remaining five participants expressed negative connotations of their attrition, viewing their experience as dropping out due to being hindered from continuing. All five shared problematic relationships with their supervisors (feeling left without guidance, neglected, one even harassed), which will be further addressed in the following relationship-section. The other main barrier was connected to their profession in counselling; they all entered their doctoral studies while holding a professional work position. Thus, when frustrations with their academic commitments increased, they began to retreat in their career, which gave them the opportunity to feel in control and like they belong, opposing to how they felt about their dissertation process. Leijen et al. (2016) also referred to non-academic commitments influencing doctoral students' progress. Only one of their participants had the opportunity to continuously dedicate time to their academic studies, whereas most participants had to temporarily interrupt their studies due to everyday work, family life, and personal events. Their paid work was demanding most of their time, however, doctoral students were unable to resign from their paid positions, as grants and scholarships did not sufficiently provide for their living costs, therefore requiring them to prioritise their economic situation over their academic progress. This relates to the aforementioned socio-cultural understanding of attrition as a result of PGRs' inability to participate; in this case, because they have to prioritise their economic responsibilities, which may be linked to aspects of their familial identity, in terms of having to provide for their family. Further, the reason for engaging in paid work being insufficient funding indicates distal influences on PGR education constituting a hindrance to doctoral students' participation.

Leijen et al. (2016) suggested that non-academic factors are fundamentally related to attrition, especially when paid work and academic work are not compatible, which was referred to in the previous chapter via Tobbell et al. (2010). Likewise, Castello et al. (2017) found that participants' difficulties exacerbated when they were unable to combine their doctoral studies with their paid work. The underlying difficulty contributing to doctoral students' attrition was having to negotiate their work and personal lives, and their academic responsibilities. Relating this to socio-cultural theory, aspects of attrition seem to derive from the challenging negotiation of identity, and when aspects relating to a PGR's academic identity are positioned in the background, they are not engaging with the relevant CoP to an extent that would engender a successful trajectory. Thus, to foster such a trajectory, academic identity has to be in the foreground. For example, Odena and Burgess (2017) reported of participants "*burning the candle at both ends*" (p. 582), meaning that although engaging in familial and social aspects of their lives, they set aside timeslots for their doctoral thesis, even if this meant writing late at night or in the early hours of the morning. This echoes Choi et al. (2021) outlining that compartmentalising may serve as a strategy to reconcile identity tensions. A different outcome of such identity negotiations seems to be presented in Margerum's (2014) doctoral thesis; she explored the experiences of doctoral students, so-called late completers, as their doctoral journeys lasted between 11 and 16 years. As mentioned above, participants' non-academic responsibilities, such as familial or work-related (11 of 12 participants were employed full-time), likely impact one's studies, and seemed to have prolonged participants' doctoral journey. However, participants did not perceive such external responsibilities as barriers to their doctoral progress, rather they chose to prioritise, for example their familial life over their PhD, which none of the participants regretted. Margerum (2014, p. 149) proposed that "what becomes clear is that they *didn't need* the PhD and that they *did need* their families, jobs, and other external life components." [original emphasis]. Seemingly, participants have foregrounded their non-academic responsibilities, yet compared to Leijen et al.'s (2016) example above, it seems by choice, rather than *having* to provide for one's family. Margerum (2014, p. 145) pointed out that in order to complete their prolonged studies, participants had to switch to a "doctoral completion mind-set", which was often brought by a letter reminding them of their 10-year deadline. This shift to seeing the light at the end of the PhD-tunnel facilitated participants to prioritise their academic responsibilities and complete their studies. Understanding this socio-culturally, their shift in identity enabled participants to participate and progress with their studies.

2.2.4. Relationships in the academic context

A study conducted in Spain found that a third of over 700 students had indicated drop out intentions at some point of their doctoral studies, however, they were enrolled on the course at all times, thus,

the sample did not include students who left definitively (Castello et al., 2017). One of the main motives for drop out intentions, besides the difficulty of balancing one's professional, personal, and academic life as mentioned above, was doctoral students' lack of social integration in their academic community. This was problematic on the supervisor- and department-level, as well as with regard to the wider scientific community. The authors pointed out that this was experienced more frequently by doctoral students who worked on their research projects by themselves, as opposed to working as part of a research team. Again, this demonstrates the importance of taking PGRs' context into account when exploring and trying to understand their experience, as such discipline- or programme-specific structures influence the way in which they participate, and ultimately, learn.

For instance, PGRs in STEM fields often work collaboratively in teams, enabling them to frequently interact with their peers and faculty, whereas in non-STEM fields it is more common to conduct research projects solitarily (Margerum, 2014). Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) pointed out that particularly the dissertation stage is challenging for doctoral students due to the shift from being guided throughout the coursework-stage to being left to one's research project, with hardly any structure. As mentioned in the introductory section, there is typically no taught component when undertaking doctoral studies in the UK, whereas in the US the first year constitutes the coursework stage. Thus, doctoral students in the UK seem confronted with the independent study phase from the outset. Commonly, doctoral programmes are distinct from previous academic endeavours, for example, due to the substantial research-component, the degree being time-intensive and characteristically stressful; factors which contribute to social isolation (Ali & Kohun, 2007), which constitutes a key contributor to high attrition rates (Ali & Kohun, 2006).

Conversely, doctoral students' perception of being well-integrated, via adopting the values, norms, and knowledge prevalent in the department or wider scholarly communities was associated with greater academic success, and better wellbeing (Gardner, 2009b; Golde, 2005; Sverdlik et al., 2018). Gardner (2010) found that lower-completing departments often constituted the least supportive environments, with faculty-support lacking. In contrast, when the academic context constituted a source of support, that is when people in the academic context were perceived as supportive, such relationships benefited doctoral students' persistence (Greene, 2015). Gardner (2010) did not outline the nature of support in detail, yet it appeared that PGRs in lower-completing departments referred to faculty-support in relation to academic work, whereas the highest-completing department was characterised by participants as family. Similarly, Ferrer De Valero (2001) found that the departmental context in which completions were typically high, was described as "*friendly*" and "*collegial*", whereas low-completing departments were described as "*productive*" and "*competitive*" (Ferrer De Valero, 2001, p. 361); a difference between the prevalent relationships within the departments seems to

transpire. The author concluded that a nurturing and supportive context seemed to foster student success to a greater extent than a professional, formal environment. Golde (2005) pointed out that the structural and cultural makeup of departments, which frames the doctoral experience, affects decisions about persistence and attrition. For instance, Ferrer De Valero (2001) found that high-completing departments offered more orientation, through the CoP-lens (Wenger, 1998) this may be viewed as introducing newcomers to departmental practices. Again, this illustrates the distributed nature of learning; high completion rates were related to departments that seemingly regarded PGRs not solely as students, but rather as persons, and tried to integrate them into their community.

According to Sverdlik et al. (2018), the most widely researched and most influential factor regarding the doctoral experience is the supervisory relationship. They suggested that an open, supportive relationship featuring frequent communication between supervisor and supervisee is essential for student success and satisfaction. Students who perceived their supervisory relationship as positive mostly found *“they were personally compatible with their supervisor”* (Leijen et al., 2016, p. 138), which aligns with Tobbell and O’Donnell’s (2013a) proposition that a successful interpersonal relationship serves as prerequisite to the formation of a learning relationship. As aforementioned, Devos et al. (2017) pointed out that one aspect of non-completers’ experience was related to the supervisory relationship, as some reported being required to work in the direction suggested by their supervisor. However, when this did not make sense to doctoral students, they were thereby blocked from progressing. This relates to the concept of intersubjectivity (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007), which seemed not established within the supervision team, which may be due to the supervisor having an insufficient understanding of the student’s needs, manifesting in being too directive. Also Leijen et al.’s (2016) participants reported that a negative supervisory relationship was related to their attrition decision. Their main themes of dissatisfaction included a lack of clarity and the quality of the feedback (such as too general or shallow), leaving the supervisee unsure of how to proceed. Further, half of the participants felt their supervisors were not interested in supervising doctoral students, due to incompatible research interests and students’ perception of supervisors prioritising other professional commitments.

Further, an abusive supervisory relationship may affect students’ persistence, as students may withdraw from their studies (Greene, 2015), or take longer to complete (Humphrey & Simpson, 2012). Another contributor to attrition may be losing one’s supervisor, thus being *“orphaned”* as Wisker and Robinson (2013, p. 300) termed it. Despite supervisory changes occurring relatively regularly, students are left with feelings of loss, abandonment, and powerlessness, irrespective of whether the loss was due to supervisors’ natural attrition (retirement, leaving institution) or due to conflict (McAlpine et al., 2012). One example of supervisory loss is embodied in supervisor neglect, for example via

unresponsiveness (Wisker & Robinson, 2013) which may lead to the student becoming disappointed and frustrated. Yet, the authors pointed to the difficulty of parting with a poor supervisor. Contributing to this difficulty may be students' unawareness of relevant policies and practices, as well as fearing retribution (McAlpine et al., 2012). And, also the aftermath of supervisory changes can be challenging, as a new supervisor may have differing views on the student's project and its completion, and different perceptions of the student's writing; a new relationship must be negotiated, as must possibly the research project (Wisker & Robinson, 2013). The penultimate section of this chapter will explore the nature of different relationships affecting PGRs' experiences to a greater extent.

2.2.5. Master's by research

It became apparent that the literature is particularly scarce regarding the attrition of master's by research students, for example compared to research on undergraduate attrition (Lenio, 2019). Lenio referred to a study conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools (2013) as the only US-wide study which assessed completion and attrition trends of master's programmes of five institutions; 23% of STEM master's students left within two years, compared to 10% in the business administration programme. The author suggested that the difference may be due to business administration being closer aligned to career outcomes, yet this seems disputable considering the above outlined layered factors contributing to attrition.

Dlungwane, et al. (2017) referred to the Council on Higher Education in South Africa, who reported that 46% of master's students left their programme prematurely in 2013. No such information on master's by research degrees seems available for the UK. Dlungwane et al. (2017) explored reasons contributing to leaving a Master of Public Health programme within the first semester in South Africa. The programme was described as consisting of equal coursework and research components, with the expectation of completing four of six modules within the first of two years. One of the main reasons for master's students' departure was their struggle to balance professional, personal, and academic commitments. Again, the importance of understanding the context of students' learning experience is demonstrated; the master's programme was only offered part-time, and *"aimed at equipping public health practitioners with collaborative strategies to address major risk factors contributing to the global and national burden of disease"* (p. 111). All participants were in full-time employment while undertaking this part-time programme. This certainly impacted their ability to participate effectively, for example one participant outlined her struggle with competing timelines set by her professional, academic, and church environment.

A study exploring the attrition of three Indigenous Australian master's students was conducted by Chirgwin (2015). The master's students withdrew due to health reasons (physical and mental), combined with non-academic commitments, and all three found it difficult to make the attrition decision. The author pointed out that many Indigenous research students' progress is impacted by their involvement in complex and dynamic personal, family, and community issues. While they may have coped with this successfully during their undergraduate studies, a research degree adds another dimension of personal responsibility, as pointed out in the preceding chapter. Further, individual resources (such as knowledge and motivation) interacting with one's context (including their personal circumstances, obligations and responsibilities) generate large and complex burdens, and often one's academic responsibilities are the easiest to drop (Chirgwin, 2015). This seems applicable to all PGRs, irrespective of their ethnicity, considering the common theme of non-academic commitments influencing attrition, particularly the struggle of balancing work, family, and academic responsibilities, as outlined above.

Noticeably, and again in support of perceiving learning as a distributed process, attrition decisions are commonly not solely related to purely academic struggles, for example doctoral students being incapable of understanding a theory, or a specific problem, which one may assume due to this highest level of education. This is particularly apparent in Chirgwin's (2015) study's title: "Burdens too difficult to carry? A case study of three *academically able* Indigenous Australian Masters students who had to withdraw" [*emphasis added*]. Transitioning to the next section, Kelly and Salisbury-Glennon (2016) pointed out that over half of doctoral students fail to complete their theses, and therefore hold the 'ABD' status, 'all-but-dissertation', which is a common acronym in the US doctoral context, assigned to doctoral students who have completed their coursework-phase but not their dissertation. As mentioned above, the focus on independent study is likely a contributing factor to this status, and of course the dissertation has to be written. The concomitant writing process has been consistently found to hinder completion (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019) and is concentrated on in the next section.

2.3. The Writing Process

This section will briefly focus on academic writing, as it is one of the main aspects of postgraduate research education, yet addressing the writing process on the PGR level in-depth would go beyond the scope of this project. With regard to doctoral education, success is tied to producing an original contribution to knowledge, yet this criterion is not met by merely knowing, it also implies the ability to communicate this knowledge, which of course is contingent on one's academic writing abilities (Aitchison & Pare, 2015). Also on the master's by research level, success is contingent on independently conducting a research project, and presenting it via a thesis (QAA, 2015b). The final product of writing is central to assessing one's eligibility to being awarded the doctoral degree (Cotterall, 2011). As per the introductory section of this chapter, this effect is likely exacerbated in an Australian context, as doctoral students are commonly assessed based on their final piece of writing only (Lovat et al., 2015), whereas in the UK an oral defence is typically part of the doctoral examination process (Houston, 2018), and of the master's by research examination process (QAA, 2015b).

Developing one's academic writing abilities is a time-intensive process (Wegener et al., 2016), which is essential to doctoral degree completion (Odena & Burgess, 2017). Considering the importance of advancing one's academic writing abilities, it seems surprising that support for developing these skills is somewhat scarce (Aitchison & Pare, 2015); the support offered on the doctoral level is commonly scattered across the institution, for example situated in language and academic development units (Kumar & Aitchison, 2018). Such sources of support for academic writing increasingly contribute to supervisors' support, who are traditionally responsible for their students' writing development (Kumar & Aitchison, 2018). Academic writing not being addressed via compulsory components in research degree programmes implies the underlying assumption that writing abilities will advance without support (Odena & Burgess, 2017). This further reflects the above-mentioned imperative of independence; PGRs are required to take a proactive approach to their learning (Tobbell et al., 2010). Yet, Aitchison and Pare (2015) hold institutions morally and ethically responsible for doctoral students' academic writing development, as achieving a certain level of writing effectively constitutes a prerequisite to students graduating and disseminating their research.

Relatively recently there has been a shift in perspective; from viewing academic writing as process of acquiring linguistic proficiencies, to positioning it as a process occurring in social context, via engagement with texts as well as members of one's discipline (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019). Further, the writing process is increasingly linked to identity work; as Kamler and Thomson (2014, p. 17) proposed that "*It is the writing which literally produces the text and the person*". The writing process contributes to doctoral students becoming scholars as they make decisions, such as referencing certain scholars' work, or selecting a specific methodology (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). Such decisions are influenced

by the feedback received on one's writing, thereby influencing identity formation (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019). Another facet of this socio-cultural notion of learning is that receiving feedback on one's writing is also what allows the PGR to gain an understanding of the attendant practices of how to write, which is fundamental to becoming a member of the academic community. Thus, the first subsection explores the notion of feedback, whereas the second part considers academic writing groups, which represents an explicitly distributed understanding of the writing process.

2.3.1. Feedback

Receiving feedback on one's writing is central to learning the ins and outs of scholarly writing on the doctoral level (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019), as well as on the master's level, yet little research considers the latter (Neupane Bastola & Hu, 2020). From a CoP perspective, it introduces the PGR to the attendant practices. Feedback is characteristically met by an emotional response by its recipient (Carter & Kumar, 2017). Wei et al. (2019) found doctoral students felt predominantly negative emotions (such as feeling anxious, nervous, or vulnerable) when submitting writing to their supervisors for the first time. Students felt they were exposing themselves via their writing, which was likely enhanced due to uncertainty regarding the level of doctoral standards, and regarding the imminent beginning of their supervisory relationship. The latter seems particularly meaningful considering the importance of relationships to learning as established in the first chapter. Half of the participants who felt anxious upon their first submission felt at ease in response to positive feedback, validating their evolving doctoral identity, and contributing to students' confidence. Yet, the negative emotions experienced by the other half of participants upon submission, exacerbated in response to their negative feedback. Connecting this with Wenger's (1998) theorising, such a negative experience with receiving feedback for the first time may be the starting point towards an outbound trajectory. As aforementioned, being a novice in the doctoral CoP, one's participation is legitimately within the CoP's periphery, yet this negative feedback-experience does not affirm one's community membership, instead it likely prompts the feedback-recipient to question their membership in the doctoral CoP, likely elongating the student's position in the periphery.

Noticeably, Wei et al. (2019) emphasised that doctoral students' previous feedback-experiences were likely positive throughout their undergraduate, and master's studies, which may contribute to an exacerbated effect when receiving critical feedback. This would presumably be the case for master's students also. Thus, despite postgraduate study being seemingly underpinned by the assumption of PGRs being experts (based on their previous academic success) (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013b), they clearly enter a novel context. For instance, PGRs have to learn the practices of scholarly writing, while

also learning how to handle receiving critical feedback, possibly for the first time. Notably, in the UK students can progress directly from their undergraduate to doctoral studies, thus this would possibly constitute an augmented leap.

Through the socio-cultural lens (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013a), it seems that the relationship between the feedback-provider and feedback-recipient, in this context likely between one's supervisor and the PGR, impacts the success of the feedback-mechanism. Although there is little understanding about how doctoral students learn scholarly writing, and how their supervisors foster students' writing development (Maher et al., 2013), there are some studies reflecting this socio-cultural conception of feedback: for instance, deKleijn et al. (2014) conceptualised the supervisory relationship via interpersonal control and affiliation. The authors expressed surprise at students ascribing considerably more importance to affiliation (interpersonal proximity between the supervisor and student, as opposed to emotional distance) than control. But, relating this to the significance of successful interpersonal relationships as previously outlined (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a), this finding seems unsurprising. As mentioned in the previous section, doctoral students did not value supervisors being too directive (Devos et al., 2017), which may contribute to the relative lesser importance ascribed to 'control'. Further, deKleijn et al. (2014) suggested that supervisors who struggle to establish a relationship which is suitably directive and supportive, may explain feedback more extensively, for example, a negative elaboration should not solely indicate what is below standard, but should further explain why.

Kumar and Stracke (2007), who explored the written feedback on a completed draft of a PhD thesis, found that open dialogue is crucial for interactive feedback. This entailed the supervisor presenting their understanding of issues, thereby prompting the supervisee to reflect on them, prompting further discussions. Emphasising the importance of stimulating dialogue between student and supervisor, and aiming to generate a shared understanding of the complexities of feedback, the authors presented the Feedback Expectation Tool (Kumar & Stracke, 2020). The authors listed 13 pairs of conflicting statements, each pair separated by six dots between them, both supervisor and student indicated their views individually, and then went through the statement-pairs together, thereby facilitating a conversation aiming to understand the expectations and understandings both hold. For example, one such pair was "*Feedback is effective when it highlights the strengths of the candidate's work. Feedback is effective when it highlights the weaknesses of the candidate's work.*" (p. 278). This statement-pair offers the opportunity to discuss their perceptions, as the authors pointed out students need to understand that negative feedback is intended by their supervisor to improve their writing, while supervisors need to consider their language when critiquing, or praising, due to its impact on students. Despite an open dialogue about such things likely benefiting the relationship, it seems such a dialogue

would be contingent on a successful interpersonal relationship. For example, if there is not trust between the parties, they may not openly share their true opinions, especially considering the repeatedly referred to assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b). Carter and Kumar (2017, p. 73) pointed out that providing honest feedback is fundamental to supervisory practice, as opposed to generally dismissive feedback (such as "*Irrelevant*"). The authors further suggested that in addition to supervisory feedback, peer-mentoring groups may enrich students' learning experience, an example of which may be what constitutes 'writing groups' within the literature, which is explored in the following.

2.3.2 Writing Groups

Academic writing groups have varying purposes, addressing the needs of doctoral students at different phases of their studies; some with the objective of peer review, others provide support and accountability; and their structure may be concentrated around collaborative, or individual writing (Tyndall et al., 2019). Lassig et al. (2013) were part of a writing group that consisted of five doctoral students, yet the group was initiated by one of the authors, who was supervisor to all group members. The aim was for doctoral students to advance their scholarly writing, and group membership entailed participating in group sessions led by the supervisor (learning about writing skills, and collaborative activities), an email group (sharing and providing feedback), and individual writing (applying the learnt skills to one's writing). The authors emphasised the importance of developing trust within the group; members were initially apprehensive when critiquing others' work, as writing and its exposure is a very personal matter. The importance of trust in such settings was seconded by Roulston et al. (2016); their writing group met for a series of five weekend-sessions (15 hours overall), which was not a sufficient timeframe to establish trusting relationships, and therefore hindered peer review. This may explain the lack of writing groups on the master's level; due to the shortened timeframe it is likely more challenging to form such groups. The findings are explained via Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising on interpersonal relationships; trust seems characteristic of a successful interpersonal relationship, which in Lassig et al.'s (2013) case seems to have facilitated the formation of learning relationships. Lassig et al.'s (2013) establishment of trust seemed facilitated through informal exchanges, such as talking about their insecurities. Similarly, Wardale et al. (2015) characterised the nature of their writing group as trusting, as members felt comfortable and safe to ask naïve questions and share experiences of incompetence and insecurities.

Kumar and Aitchison's (2018) student-led writing group members felt more inclined to ask senior PhD students novice questions, as opposed to asking their supervisors. This may be indicative of a more

trusting or safer environment among PhD students, without fear of being judged, which may not be as easily achievable between doctoral students and their supervisors. Nevertheless, Wardale et al.'s (2015, p. 1304) writing group members were a mix of doctoral students and faculty, with members holding varying degrees of formal power within the institution, but it was understood that these aspects of their identities "*are left at the door when [they] meet*". Similarly, Lassig et al. (2013) questioned the conception of the term "peer" exclusively meaning fellow students in this context, as their writing group was led by the students' supervisor and yet functioned collaboratively; the usually distinct roles of student (as novice) and supervisor (as expert) were blurred in the writing group context, as the supervisor shared writing and asked for feedback. The group also co-produced a journal article, which meant that a student may naturally have more expertise than the rest of the group, for example when referring to specific theoretical frameworks. This collaborative approach enabled doctoral students to move along an inbound trajectory, towards becoming an oldtimer, via participating in the writing group. Considering the reports of success of writing groups in which members feel comfortable to be open about their insecurities, ask any questions, and share their writing for feedback indicates that interpersonal relationships characterised by trust and openness are essential to successful writing groups.

Maher et al. (2013) reported of a writing group initiated by a member of staff dedicating one weekend-day to writing, and inviting one of their doctoral students. This organically formed group evolved into holding monthly weekend day-long sessions, to which all doctoral students and faculty members were invited, with four to six people attending on average. The doctoral students who participated were usually enrolled part-time, lived several miles away from campus, worked full-time, and generally had to negotiate a complex web of academic, professional, and familial responsibilities. This writing group's sessions were flexible in structure, as participants used them for individual writing. The authors outlined that simply the presence of other people increased group members' sense of accountability, which was linked to their productivity. Echoing accountability, Wardale et al.'s (2015) writing group was named Writing Accountability Group to reflect the group's aim for productivity, accountability, and collegiality. Tyndall et al.'s (2019) writing group shared the same name with its purpose being to set goals and hold members accountable to them, as opposed to peer review.

Maher et al. (2013)'s group further served as a support network; doctoral students received advice from more senior doctoral students, and particularly valued conversing with their dissertation committee, which is specific to the US context as outlined in the introductory section of this chapter. Although the group sessions focused on individual writing, there were also opportunities for academic, personal, emotional support. Members felt comfortable enough to share insecurities, thereby indicating trusting relationships within this writing group, which again reaffirms that learning

relationships are contingent on successful interpersonal relationships (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). Further, doctoral students shared that they were able to find out departmental information, which would have been difficult to access via more formal avenues. Relating this to CoP (Wenger, 1998), newcomers' participation allowed them to gain more insight into specific practices, seemingly gaining tacit knowledge. This seems particularly meaningful considering this group's doctoral students being characterised as at risk of slower completion and of attrition, due to being enrolled part-time, working full-time, and being geographically distant to campus, which would most likely be associated with an outbound trajectory. The authors pointed out that after one year of writing sessions, the number of doctoral graduates was growing, while completion time was reducing. Continuously participating in the writing sessions was associated with a shift in identity; *"from that of a course-taker to researcher and scholarly writer, thus solidifying the link between text creation and scholarly identity formation"* (p. 206). This is compatible with Kamler and Thomson's (2014) quote above regarding the writing process as production of text and the self (as scholar), and also matches the proposition that the negotiation of meaning and the self are inextricably linked, as outlined in the first chapter. Overall, it seems that the context of the writing group, encompassing the relationships within them, determines its success, which is consistent with the socio-cultural understanding of learning as a distributed process.

2.4. PGRs' wellbeing

Janta et al. (2014) pointed out that although doctoral programmes feature different structures and processes across countries, institutions, and disciplines, students likely experience loneliness and social isolation, which significantly influences their wellbeing. Despite international students being particularly at risk of feeling lonely, especially at the early stages of their doctoral studies (likely exacerbated due to experiencing language as well as cultural barriers (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019)), data collected from online fora suggested that local students similarly experience social isolation; for example, loneliness was experienced even by a student living in their home town (Janta et al., 2014), indicating that loneliness is a broader, programme-engendered issue. In support of Janta et al.'s (2014) suggestion, it seems mental health difficulties are prevalent among doctoral students across different countries; in France, 42% of doctoral students suffered from anxiety, and 54% from depression (Marais et al., 2018). A Canadian study reported that a third of graduate students' scores indicated symptoms of depression, 18 participants' scores (approximately 6%) indicated a significant clinical impairment (Peluso et al., 2011). Noticeably, they found participants' degree level (master's, direct-entry doctoral, doctoral) did not significantly impact depression symptoms. A study assessing the wellbeing of graduate students in the USA revealed that stressors hindering students' academic performance were academic responsibilities and pressures, financial concerns, anxiety, and a poor work-life-balance (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012), stressors which were experienced by over half of their participants.

Another study on American graduate students' mental health was conducted by Barreira et al. (2018), which was a response to a suicide within the Economics graduate programme of two of the authors. Eight universities participated, including doctoral students and faculty, utilising clinically validated surveys screening for anxiety and depression. Eighteen percent of students' scores indicated a depression or anxiety disorder, over three times the proportion among the general US population. Eleven percent, 56 doctoral students, reported suicidal thoughts on more than one of the last 14 days, yet a quarter of these students believed their mental health was above average. Sixteen percent reported feeling isolated from others, the authors suggested that the average Economics doctoral student is significantly lonelier than the average retired American, seemingly affirming the contributing effect of loneliness on depression (Erzen & Cikrikci, 2018). It was further revealed that 15% of first-year students' scores indicated a diagnosable depression, compared to 25% of graduate students studying on the doctoral level for more than five years (Barreira et al., 2018). It may be that this is due to the above-outlined US-specific context, as the typical first-year coursework-stage appears more structured and peer-engaging compared to the inherently solitary latter stages of doctoral studies. A report assessing the graduate experience at Berkeley in the US found 47% of PhD students', and 37% of master's students' scores indicated depression (Panger et al., 2014). Regarding

doctoral programmes, they are inherently fostering social isolation, due to being distinct to prior studies, the length of doctoral studies, and due to being innately stressful (Ali & Kohun, 2007). This may indicate mental health difficulties to be more prevalent among doctoral students than among master's students, although for example Cisco (2020), Dutta and Chye (2018), and Peluso et al. (2011), have not distinguished between participants' degree levels when reporting their findings, indicating similar experiences regarding mental health difficulties across degree levels.

In contrast, the number of official records of PGRs' accounts regarding mental health difficulties continues to be low (Levecque et al. 2017). Correspondingly, a report focusing on mental health difficulties in higher education in the UK revealed that only 1 in 125 students disclosed mental health difficulties to the university (Equality Challenge Unit, 2014), although the proportion of students experiencing mental health difficulties is likely more substantial, considering the above-mentioned studies on this matter. Further, thus far the focus laid on the mental health of undergraduate students (Levecque, et al., 2017), and practically, mental health support for doctoral students is often similar to the support provided for undergraduate students, seemingly assuming that the support provided would equally benefit both groups (Mackie & Bates, 2019). This further assumes that the prevalence and kind of mental health difficulties may be similar among undergraduate and postgraduate students, which may not be the case considering the distinct structures and features of the programmes. But, recently there has been more attention paid towards doctoral students' wellbeing, as their mental health difficulties are being recognised (Benjamin et al., 2017). This is further evident considering the 1st International Conference on Mental Health and Wellbeing of Postgraduate Researchers took place in Brighton (UK) in May 2019. Additionally, the 2019 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (William, 2019) featured questions on PGR wellbeing for the first time. Clearly, it is important to concentrate on PGRs' wellbeing, based on a sincere interest for individuals' wellbeing (Leveque et al., 2017), and also academically, as mental health difficulties, such as experiencing depression or anxiety, can negatively impact students' academic performance as well as their general health (Liu et al., 2019). The remainder of this subchapter is separated into the impostor phenomenon and the personal-professional-academic-life balance.

2.4.1. Impostor Phenomenon

This phenomenon is characterised by experiencing "*intellectual phoniness*" as per Clance and Imes (1978), as referred to in Tigranyan et al. (2020, p. 2). A report by the UK Council for Graduate Education noted the impostor syndrome to be one of the challenges to PGRs' wellbeing (Lane et al., 2019), for example Tigranyan et al. (2020) found a positive correlation with feelings of depression and anxiety.

The negative impact on PGRs' wellbeing was further supported by Waight and Giordano (2018), who ascribed feelings of inadequacy to the impostor phenomenon. Barreira et al. (2018) found 61% of their participants often experienced impostor syndrome symptoms.

Cisco (2020) pointed out that students' perception of their struggles is essential to understanding the impostor phenomenon; that is when students perceive their struggles to be based on incapability, rather than based on being a novice. This seems relatable to the aforementioned assumption of expertise prevalent in postgraduate education (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b). It may be that PGRs themselves assume that they have to be, or are expected to be, experts upon entering postgraduate education, thus, when they are unable to perform on an expert-level – which is what actually is to be expected upon entrance – they feel academically incapable, rather than assuming their position of being newcomers in this new CoP. Cisco's (2020) participants studied on the doctoral and the master's level, and over half of their scores were categorised as highly characteristic of the impostor phenomenon. Noticeably the author did not distinguish between master's and doctoral students' experiences, indicating similar experiences. Three ways of inducing the impostor phenomenon were: firstly, via comparing oneself to peers or faculty. For example, PGRs were concerned about lacking knowledge, for instance about methodologies or disciplinary jargon. PGRs not experiencing the impostor phenomenon would likely conclude this to be based on their novice-status, whereas PGRs experiencing the impostor phenomenon may not make this conclusion, and rather ascribe their lack of knowledge to lacking academic capability. Secondly, 70% of participants felt reading academic texts induced the impostor phenomenon, for example via being challenged by the academic language or by extracting important parts from texts. Problematically, PGRs would spend an extended period of time trying to understand such texts, thus continuously validating their perception of incapability. Thirdly, academic writing was perceived as contributing to experiencing the impostor phenomenon, as participants were concerned about someone else evaluating their writing, for example they did not want to be perceived as stupid by their supervisor.

A strategy to improve PGRs' experiences of the impostor phenomenon was extracted from clinical research and applied to the PGR context; it was suggested that grouping PGRs with similar experiences could have a beneficial influence, via identifying shared feelings and having honest conversations (Cisco, 2020). Relating this to CoP (Wenger, 1998), this may affect PGRs' identity through feelings of belonging; for example, realising that an oldtimer experienced similar feelings of inadequacy may affirm their group-membership, feeling like they legitimately belong to this CoP, which would be somewhat in opposition to feeling inadequate and incompetent. Further relating this to the previous writing-section, an accountability-based writing-group not only alleviated stress and anxiety, but also

served as a supportive environment, where PGRs shared similar experiences and hardship, which decreased their writing-anxiety (Beasy et al., 2020), which may reduce experiences of impostorship.

2.4.2. Personal-Professional-Academic-Life balance

Another key challenge for PGRs' wellbeing, as outlined by the UK Council for Graduate Education, is the work-life balance (Lane et al., 2019). Seconded by Juniper et al. (2012), general stress and maintaining an adequate work-life balance potentially create hardships for PhD students. Successfully balancing 'work' and 'life' alleviates emotional stressors which are inherent to the doctoral process, whereas an unsuccessful balance potentially affects degree attainment negatively (Benjamin et al., 2017); as mentioned in the attrition-section, non-academic commitments were a contributing factor.

A Belgian study exploring PhD students' wellbeing utilising the General Mental Health Questionnaire, found that 51% of participants' scores indicated psychological distress, a third of which were at risk of having or developing a common psychiatric disorder, particularly depression, compared to respectively 27% and 14% of Belgium's highly educated general population, 25% and 12% of highly educated employees, and to 30% and 15% of higher education students (Levecque et al., 2017). Further, mental health problems were especially prevalent at the early stages of the doctoral process and in the writing-up phase (Levecque et al., 2017). This seems in line with the Barreira et al.'s (2018) above-mentioned finding suggesting students in the latter phases of their doctoral studies to be at risk. Considering doctoral education in Belgium is similar to the UK in terms of its emphasis on independently conducting a research project (without the initial coursework-stage typical in the US), it may be that the initial unfamiliarity with the programme contributed to mental health difficulties. Levecque et al. (2017) further found that mental health problems were significantly more prevalent as a result of incompatible demands, for example academic demands interfering with family demands, which constituted the best predictor for psychological distress, and for being at risk of having or developing a psychiatric disorder.

Martinez et al. (2013) outlined doctoral students' strategies to maintain a work-life balance. Firstly, students tried to consciously manage their time, which participants regarded as fundamentally important as well as challenging, for example they often found themselves running out of time towards deadlines. Secondly, students prioritised tasks on a daily basis, dependent on tasks' urgency, for example preparing a presentation for an upcoming conference, while also finding it difficult to turn down opportunities they considered valuable experience towards their potential future employment in academia. Thirdly, regarding different roles and responsibilities, participants usually prioritised their 'life', for example one participant tried to be at home for dinner to spend time with his family, and

carried on working once the child was asleep. This seems relatable to Margerum's (2014) thesis on late completers featured in the attrition section, as participants wished to not miss out on family-events, such as a son's wedding, thereby foregrounding personal, or familial, aspects of their lives. Another of Martinez et al.'s (2013) participants was strategically integrating tasks from different aspects of their life, for example using the data they were already analysing within their position as research assistant, to write a research proposal in class (US-context). Correspondingly, as mentioned in the conceptual chapter, Tobbell et al. (2010) found that students working within the university setting were enabled to participate in this setting in an advanced manner, compared to PGRs working in an unrelated setting. Thus, if there is a connection, tasks and demands from different aspects of students' lives seem less incompatible, thereby enabling a balance, compared to different aspects having no intersection, which impacts PGRs' participation.

Martinez et al.'s (2013) participants tried to achieve wellbeing via managing their stress levels, for example by talking to friends, via maintaining physical health through exercising, and via creating personal time, which was an important aspect to all participants' wellbeing. Noticeably, participants with familial responsibilities described their time spent with family as vital to their wellbeing, for example watching TV with their child meant relaxing, stress-free time. Participants with no children seemed more stressed than participants with parental responsibilities, despite the latter being involved in more projects. So, for Martinez et al.'s (2013) participants, the family-aspect of their life served as opportunity to achieve or maintain wellbeing. Yet, negotiating different aspects of one's life is a difficult juggling act, especially considering doctoral students hold numerous, often competing responsibilities (Martinez et al., 2013). Referring back to Willis and Carmichael's (2011) study mentioned in the attrition section, all participants were in the counselling profession which served as opportunity to escape the frustrations they experienced within the academic aspect of their lives and enjoy feeling successful within their profession. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that Willis and Carmichael's (2011) study explored doctoral students' attrition-experience, thus participants' profession was perceived as a barrier to academic success, although the professional aspect of their lives likely benefitted participants' wellbeing.

Briefly relating the established link between an adequate balance across different aspects of one's life benefiting wellbeing to the 2019 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (William, 2019); PGRs' wellbeing stood out in terms of anxiety; only 14% of PGRs reported no or very low anxiety, compared to 41% among the UK population, and 16% among undergraduate students. In the 2020 version of the survey (Pitkin, 2020, p. 30) only 40% of part-time PGRs and 31% of full-time PGRs indicated "*I did not feel much anxiety yesterday*". Other items in the 2019-survey wellbeing category included life satisfaction, life happiness, and life being worthwhile. Regarding these 'life items', students' scores

indicated worse wellbeing compared to the UK population, yet undergraduate students' scores particularly stood out in comparison to PGRs'. My suggestion is that this may be because PGRs' wellbeing seems rather spread across different aspects of their lives, compared to undergraduate students' wellbeing. For example, spending time with one's family (Martinez et al., 2013) or professional success (Willis & Carmichael, 2011) seemed to benefit PGRs' wellbeing. In comparison, undergraduate students are for example less likely to have already established a professional career. One reason for this is simply age; over half of undergraduate students enrolled in 2019/20 were under 21, whereas 43% of PGRs were 30 and older (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021) (regrettably there are no further age-distinctions beyond 30). In England, starting one's undergraduate studies is commonly coupled with departing the family home at age 18 (Henderson, 2020). Thus, undergraduate students' wellbeing is likely more centred around one aspect of their lives, the university-aspect, compared to PGRs' wellbeing. Thus, if an undergraduate student felt lonely within the university-context, this may have an exacerbated effect on their overall wellbeing, compared to a PGR feeling lonely within the university-context, who may be more likely to have another aspect in their life (profession, family) that could balance this negative experience, and thus have an overall better wellbeing. Hence, it may be insightful to explore the effect of PGRs' academic experience on their wellbeing, with questions specifically relating their academic experience and wellbeing.

Despite the potential benefit to wellbeing, negotiating multiple aspects of their lives, whether these are personal, familial, professional and/or academic is challenging (Martinez et al., 2013). A contrasting experience was reported by one of Janta et al.'s (2014, p. 559) participants, an international student who was completely immersed in the academic aspect of their life:

I am 100% alone day and night, all the time. I am alone in my office all day, get up, go to my house to be alone. When the weekend comes, I stay alone at my home, go to do shopping alone, and so on.

This illustrates the social isolation stemming from solitary work inherent to doctoral education (Ali & Kohun, 2007), and indicates that not having an adequate balance across more than one life-aspect, and instead completely focusing, for example, on one's studies likely affects wellbeing negatively. Overall, achieving and maintaining an adequate personal-professional-academic-life balance seems essential for PGRs' wellbeing.

As indicated in the above paragraphs, familial relationships for instance may affect PGRs' wellbeing positively, but relationships may also impede wellbeing (Benjamin et al., 2017): relationships to one's family and significant partners were mainly considered to affect doctoral students' wellbeing positively, as they presented an opportunity to escape the overwhelming doctoral process. In contrast, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013b) revealed that one of their participants was confronted with tensions

within the family, as their partner's family disapproved of their doctoral studies. Peers within the university setting constituted a positive contributor to wellbeing when experiences and problems were shared, but a negative influence on wellbeing when lab-mates dampened the spirits, for example (Benjamin et al., 2017). The supervisory relationship positively affected wellbeing when PGRs felt supported, for instance via constructive feedback, and when their supervisor encouraged and believed in them, but negatively affected wellbeing when supervisors were unable to create a welcoming, encouraging environment (Benjamin et al., 2017; Peltonen et al., 2017). The role of relationships will be further detailed in the following section.

2.5. Relationships

As outlined in the conceptual chapter, through the socio-cultural lens learning is understood as distributed in context. Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) emphasised the role of interpersonal relationships, which, when successful, serve as prerequisite to the formation of learning relationships. Due to the focus of this thesis on PGRs' learning experience, non-academic relationships will be addressed briefly, followed by representing the extant literature's findings surrounding relationships in the academic context.

2.5.1. Non-academic relationships

As portrayed in the previous wellbeing section, non-academic sources of support, such as stemming from one's family or friends, typically affected PGRs' wellbeing positively (Benjamin et al., 2017). For instance, graduate students who had a person they could share their concerns and fears with reported significantly fewer depressive symptoms (Panger et al., 2014). Further, familial support encouraged PGRs' persistence in Burt et al.'s (2019) study, as they regularly communicated their belief in the PGRs' capabilities and success, which fostered students' self-efficacy. Another source of support in this study was PGRs' spirituality and faith-based community, which is historically deemed as source of encouragement for individuals belonging to a marginalised group; in this case, the study's participants were black males, who are typically underrepresented in their field of engineering, and were found to be discriminated against by their peers and faculty (Burt et al., 2018). But, within their spiritual community not only their spiritual needs were met, but they also received social support via interpersonal relationships, which PGRs were lacking within their institution. One participant for example, reported connecting with engineering peers via attending church, who also became a source of academic support. Relating this to CoP (Wenger, 1998), he was seemingly marginalised from the engineering-CoP within the university-context, but his membership within the church enabled him to access academic support. Other forms of support sourced from non-academic relationships were practical and financial (Jairam & Kahl, 2012): helping with chores in the household, assistance with one's children as well as financial support enabled doctoral students to dedicate more time towards their studies, as opposed to having to devote more time towards a paid position for example.

In contrast to the positives of non-academic support, McAlpine et al. (2012) found that although most participants received continuous support from their family, they also required continuous investment. For example, being a mother requires one to financially provide for one's children, and having to devote time and energy towards a paid position impacts the way they can engage with their studies, as mentioned in the above paragraph. Again, this refers to the difficulty of maintaining an adequate

personal-professional-academic-life balance. Some of Jairam and Kahl's (2012) participants likened the levels of support they sourced from their family to a pattern of ebb and flow; during the latter stages of studies of one participant, their familial support ebbed, as illustrated in the following quote (Jairam & Kahl, 2012, p. 322):

When I passed my dissertation, my husband was out of town, and my children were still in bed when I got home. I told them I passed, they essentially said "okay," then went back to bed. My parents stated how proud they were, but did not attend graduation, a few months later. My sister who lives 50 miles away, said it was too far to come to graduation.

Problematically, McAlpine et al.'s (2012) participants assumed that disclosing difficulties, for example related to balancing different aspects of their lives, would be perceived as them not meeting expectations. This relates to the aforementioned assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b), via the students assuming that their struggles (for example with their workload, financial concerns, or family responsibilities) were an uncommon experience, indicating the belief that most doctoral students would not experience such struggles. This perception perpetuates the assumption of expertise, as McAlpine et al. (2012) pointed out that the consequence of non-disclosure is unchanged institutional policies, implying that change may be prompted if students would disclose their difficulties; this would rely on perceiving such struggles as the norm among the PGR population. Barreira et al.'s (2018) above-mentioned study found that doctoral students who faced mental health difficulties primarily sought support from family members, friends outside their department (although there was no clarification whether this category included friends outside academia) and from friends within their department. As most doctoral students considered their social support network as the most effective tool to handle mental health issues, the authors suggested students aim to establish strong relationships within and outside their departments with the purpose of averting isolation and dealing with emerging mental health difficulties. The nature of these relationships seemed key: having a trusting relationship with peers, who understand the doctoral experience and genuinely want the best for the PGR experiencing mental health difficulties, were a valuable source of support.

2.5.2. Academic relationships

The scholarly community constitutes the principal context of doctoral education (Pyhältö & Keskinen, 2012). Although it was found previously that the majority of doctoral students viewed themselves as passive bystanders in relation to their academic community, as opposed to active contributors, many of them voiced the desire for connecting with their scholarly community, as they anticipated a concomitant enhancement of their doctoral process (Pyhältö & Keskinen, 2012). Conflicting interaction between students and members of their communities (such as with fellow PGRs or

academic staff) and students' lacking sense of belonging propelled students' disengagement from their academic endeavour (Vekkaila et al., 2013). For example, in the form of viewing themselves as incapable of conducting their research, or growing apathy towards their work (Vekkaila et al., 2014). A study conducted in Finland by Stubb et al. (2011), found that academic communities were perceived as a burden more often than they were perceived as empowering. Being excluded or an outsider contributed to perceiving these relationships as burdensome, in CoP-terms: being marginalised into the periphery of the CoP involuntarily (Wenger, 1998). When doctoral students recognised their scholarly community as empowering, they perceived relationships within as supportive and fostering a sense of belonging, which was related to strengthening participants' identity as a researcher in terms of positioning oneself as colleague or expert rather than as student (Stubb et al., 2011); clearly a shift in identity, enabled via participating in the CoP (Wenger, 1998), with no hindrance to do so from obstructing relationships. Further, they reported better wellbeing, less academically engendered stress, exhaustion, and anxiety, compared to participants who perceived their scholarly community as burdensome (Stubb et al., 2011). Similarly, when doctoral students in Canada felt supported within their department or faculty, they were less exhausted emotionally (Hunter & Devine, 2016). Noticeably, Mantai (2019a) found that social support typically regarded the student as a person, thus addressing varying needs, for example technical as well as emotional. Based on the conception of PGR education outlined in the preceding chapter, as well as demonstrated through the extant literature, students' level of integration into their scholarly community substantially affects the doctoral process. Thus, PGRs' relationships with their fellow PGRs, academic staff, and their supervisors, are outlined in the following.

2.5.2.1. Fellow PGRs

This part further explores the relationship between PGRs and is separated into two parts. Firstly, the importance of trust is considered, as it has been established in the context of writing groups for example, that trusting relationships facilitate their participation (Lassig et al., 2013). This further reflects Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) emphasis on successful interpersonal relationships. Secondly, the focus lies with the characteristic of these relationships that facilitates an advanced understanding of each other: their shared experience (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). This further reflects the concept of intersubjectivity, which likely underpins this advanced understanding (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007).

2.5.2.1.1. Trust in PGR relationships

As mentioned in the writing section, writing groups' success seems contingent on trusting relationships among their members, for example, so they feel safe to ask any questions (Wardale et al., 2015). This was seconded by Guerin et al. (2013), who outlined that trust and respect are fundamental to establishing a sense of community, and a safe space within their writing group. The

importance of trusting relationships has been mentioned several times throughout this literature review (such as Roulston et al., 2016 in the writing section; Barreira et al., 2018 in the above section on non-academic relationships), but how are such trusting relationships formed? Guerin et al. (2013) proposed that trust has been gradually formed as each writing group member exposed their work to the group, thereby making themselves vulnerable, as writing is a very personal matter as aforementioned (Lassig et al., 2013). After sharing their work, receiving feedback from a person they have formed a trusting and respectful relationship with, either contributed to the student feeling confident in their work in case of positive feedback, and in case of negative feedback it facilitated academic progress via building confidence in their ability of improving their work to meet required standards (Guerin et al., 2013). This evidences Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) proposition that learning relationships are contingent on successful interpersonal relationships. Guerin et al.'s (2013) writing groups benefitted its members academically via building a community, for example, one doctoral student reported of another group member taking time beyond the scheduled group-meetings to pose as audience for the former to practice a conference-presentation. Similarly, Stracke and Kumar (2014) reported of peer support groups' members' learning experiences via participating in group discussions, this advanced their critical thinking skills for example. These examples support the notion of learning being distributed in nature, as outlined in the conceptual chapter, as the context was imperative to learning in both cases.

Further, Guerin et al.'s (2013) group setting enabled social support, in the form of lessened feelings of isolation. This was seconded by Allen (2014), and Lorenzetti et al. (2019), as working with peers contributed to vanquish feelings of isolation. A further characteristic of Guerin et al.'s (2013) writing group seemed to be openness, as members shared experiences of struggles and difficulties. Notably, this led to reduced self-doubt and anxiety in doctoral students because they realised that others were going through similar experiences, they were not the only ones struggling. Again, this relates to the assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b), yet demonstrates the benefits of disrupting this assumption via disclosing one's experiences incongruent with being an expert (such as experiencing difficulties or feeling incompetent). According to the Equality Challenge Unit's (2014) report three out of four students who experienced mental health difficulties during their studies had disclosed this to fellow students. Guerin et al. (2013) pointed out that the sharing of one's journey was contingent on the group constituting a safe space, for example harsh criticism was not part of the group's feedback practice (Guerin et al., 2013). Rather, the practised belief (in line with Wenger's (1998) notion of practice) was that mistakes are an opportunity to learn, as opposed to shaming students for making them. This enabled group members to not have to worry about being perceived as inadequate, as this seemed normalised.

2.5.2.1.2 Shared experience

Another study that explored the nature of peer relationships in-depth was conducted by Denman et al. (2018). Three of the four peer support group members had partners and children, all of them were employed full-time, they undertook their doctoral programme online, and the group stayed in contact via email. All four agreed that being a part of this group was a key source of support and a fundamental contributor to their success. This effect stemmed from sharing one's progress, which also included sharing experiences of struggling to progress. One group member reported that her family and friends were supportive, but the other group members had an advanced understanding of her situation due to their shared journey. As such, they would share struggles and frustrations, venting has been associated with peers in the academic context; it allows a fresh perspective on things (Jairam & Kahl, 2012), and was deemed a healthy approach to voicing anxieties regarding one's work and oneself (Fickey & Pullin, 2011). Regarding academic peer-support, Jairam and Kahl (2012) found encouragement was promoted via celebrating academic successes, such as a publication. Buissink-Smith et al. (2013, p. 699) pointed out that the size of such celebrations was irrelevant, the importance laid with having a space to share their success with peers, and to give, as well as receive, a "*well done*". Within Denman et al.'s (2018) group, members considered each other friends, the support they provided extended beyond academic matters; they were there for each other during personal and familial triumphs as well as challenges. In line with this, Holley and Caldwell (2012) found that peer relationships within their mentoring programme were most effective when peer mentor and mentee became friends. A suggestion as to why is provided by Tobbell & O'Donnell's (2013a) proposition that a successful interpersonal relationship is fundamental to learning.

Referring back to peers' shared experience, according to Denman et al. (2018) this encouraged students' perseverance; according to one group member (p. 113) "*These ladies in this informal group are the reason I finished my doctorate, hands down*". In terms of persistently progressing, sharing experiences and being part of a peer-group motivated students to keep up their momentum (Fickey & Pullin, 2011; Stracke & Kumar, 2014). Allen (2014) even suggested that the current lack of development of such communities in higher education constitutes a missed opportunity of improving PGR completion rates. This seems plausible, as students establishing a sense of community was found to positively affect degree persistence (Lorenzetti et al., 2019). For an example of establishing such a sense of belonging to peer groups via an institution-wide initiative, see Buissink-Smith et al. (2013). However, it must be noted that most likely not all PGRs would readily engage in such peer groups, for example based on the complex lives they lead (Tobbell et al., 2010); participation is reliant on the group's practice, for example Denman et al. (2018) were all enabled to participate due to the flexible way of engaging asynchronously via email. Lastly, during the current pandemic times, it seems rather

promising that Denman et al. (2018) reported of such a connected experience considering it was maintained almost exclusively via email. This may raise hope in the possibility of virtually establishing PGR relationships characterised by trust, respect, and openness, that consider the PGR as person (rather than exclusively as student), thus enabling all-encompassing support.

2.5.2.2. Academic staff members

Concentrating on PGRs' relationships with academic staff within this part does not encompass relationships with their supervisors, as this will be the focus of the last part of this section. Faculty relationships, as these relationships are commonly termed within the US-literature, are situated at centre stage of doctoral education: the disciplinary and departmental context, featuring distinct customs, values, and culture (distinct *practices* viewing them through a CoP-lens), rather than the wider institutional context, which is commonly regarded within undergraduate education (Gardner, 2009a).

2.5.2.2.1. Student-staff-relationship

Typically, the literature on doctoral education focuses on student characteristics, such as demographics and entering qualifications, yet both, doctoral students and academic staff, emphasised the role of the latter within student-staff-relationships, ascribing them greater responsibility as they provide guidance throughout the doctoral journey (O'Meara et al., 2013). In line with this, Zhou and Okahana (2019) found that programme and faculty characteristics bore more influence on doctoral completion and time-to-degree than academic support, but the authors did concede that the measurement of their 'academic support' variable was limited. Nevertheless, Posselt (2018) found that doctoral students preferred to seek academic advice from peers and postdoctoral fellows and only seldom from members of staff, because students were unsure about how to do so appropriately and concerned about potential consequences. For example, students did not want to be perceived differently, in terms of being unable to maintain a certain academic performance, or in relation to their peers. This was supported by Holley and Caldwell (2012), as doctoral students did not want to appear uncertain or confused to academic staff members. In the same vein, one of Mantai's (2019a, p.374) said:

I feel like there's this image that I must maintain with my supervisor. Originally, she thought I was good enough to get into the PhD, so I want to maintain that image, and not come across as being an idiot.

Akin to the wellbeing section, specifically regarding the impostor phenomenon, this seems relatable to the assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b) in terms of students wishing to present

themselves as experts. Though the quote refers to the supervisory context, the above seems to indicate that students' desire to uphold an expert-like image relates to their supervisors as well as non-supervisory academic staff members.

Zahl's (2015) part-time doctoral student participants formed a connection to their department via establishing relationships with peers and academic staff, the latter were admired for their achievements, and looked up to, rather than perceived as equals. Participants considered academic staff as "*knowledgeable, experienced scholars*" (p. 310), likely considered MKOs according to Vygotsky (1978), or old-timers according to Wenger (1998). Conversely, Posselt's (2018) participants valued staff members who deemphasised the staff-student-hierarchy, for example through humour. This enabled the formation of trusting relationships, which was further fostered by staff's effort to humanise this relationship. The author pointed out (p. 1005): "*This common-sense goal [...] required social skill and as much emotional intelligence as scholarly brainpower*", requiring staff members be wary of what they do and say to minimise the conception of high stakes, and to normalise struggle. It was noticeable that four of Zahl's (2015) participants considered the same member of staff (not their supervisor) as their mentor, who was a recognised advocate for part-time students; they had all formed a successful interpersonal relationship with this member of staff. Zahl (2015) referred to Lovitts (2001), whose findings were affirmed by substantiating the posited importance of a strong, supportive relationship with an academic staff member, yet expanded that this may be a staff member who is not their supervisor. To further expand on the nature of a successful student-staff-relationships, Szen-Ziemiańska's (2020) participants described their mentor as positive, mindful, and capable of creating a safe atmosphere, which was characterised as constructive, friendly, and motivating. The mentoring programme was particularly valued in times of crises, regardless of whether difficulties were experienced in one's academic or personal life. This echoes the theoretical imperative that understanding PGR learning necessitates understanding PGRs as situated in the context of their lives.

Another person in the academic environment that doctoral students had formed a relationship with was their undergraduate mentor (Burt et al., 2019). Frequently, they were the first to mention graduate school to the now-doctoral students (then-undergraduates) and supported them, for example via explaining the application procedure. Noticeably, the relationship to their undergraduate mentors was not necessarily ongoing, yet simply memories of interactions with them benefited students' persistence. This was particularly the case when they did not experience a similar mentoring relationship in graduate school.

2.5.2.2.2. Hindering departmental context

As indicated, the departmental context is not always positive, for example, Greene's (2015, p. 508) participants spoke of a "*suck it up' mentality*" conveyed from supervisors and other staff members, which was perceived as unsupportive. This affirms Golde (2005) suggesting that it is necessary to understand the prevalent departmental culture and how it affects students' integration. Jairam and Kahl's (2012) participants criticised the lack of staff members' efforts in establishing interpersonal relationships with students, and even staff members' inappropriate behaviour, such as communicating in a way that was perceived as threatening by students, or as petulant, or passive aggressive. Another example was provided by Vekkaila et al. (2013): one participant reported a rather adverse encounter with a professor from a different field, who told them that there is no point in their work, which the doctoral student perceived as rather inappropriate and defeating. The authors outlined that participants did not feel a sense of belonging due to trying to join the community and being rejected, or being unable to gauge the community's practices and rules. Following Wenger's (1998) CoP approach, they were marginalised from the community, as their position in the periphery of the community was not their chosen form of participation. Their sense of not belonging contributed to their disengagement from their doctoral studies (Vekkaila et al., 2013), they were hindered from participating effectively. Yet, when doctoral students were able to relate more to their community and were acknowledged, in other words, when their membership was legitimate, doctoral students seemed more dedicated and efficient (Vekkaila et al., 2014).

2.5.2.2.3. The dissertation committee

Lastly, it is worth referring to Bronfenbrenner's (1979b) notion of context, specifically macro-influences, in terms of differences in doctoral education across countries. As mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, the US-model typically features a dissertation committee (Bernstein et al., 2014), which students form when entering the independent research phase of their doctoral studies. The importance of the formation of this committee was emphasised (Young et al., 2019), particularly selecting faculty members who work well with one another, or are at least willing to work with each other (O'Meara et al., 2013; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Doctoral students strongly associated committee-characteristics with their degree length (Wao et al., 2011). Specifically, doctoral students enrolled in programmes which typically took longer to complete, tended to have problematic experiences with their committee, for instance four professors agreeing on the students' dissertation topic constituting a time-intensive process. In contrast, when enrolled in programmes with typically shorter completion times, doctoral students commented on their committee positively, such as providing timely feedback enhanced students' progress-speed. Committee members were characterised as good when they were prepared and willing to discuss

ideas and had a positive attitude towards students (Wao et al., 2011). This seems to indicate the prevalence of different practices across departments, which are practised by staff members, and thus committee members.

Transitioning to the last part of this section, the supervisory relationship, Zahl (2015) outlined that recent literature distinguishes between faculty advisors and faculty mentors (UK-equivalent: supervisor and academic staff, respectively). In support, the majority of research reviewed within this part followed such terminology, but findings were frequently presented concurrently (for example: Jairam & Kahl, 2012; O'Meara et al., 2013; Posselt, 2018). At times, themes, or articles overall, regarding the academic context rather concentrated on programmatic or departmental structures and influences (for example: Golde, 2005; Greene, 2015; Zhou & Okahana, 2019), than on the relationships within them. Whereas the supervisory relationship was addressed via specific themes at times, which were established through the data analysis process (for example, Golde, 2005, p. 686: "Mismatch between Advisor and Student"; Jairam & Kahl, 2012, p. 322: "Lack of professionally active faculty" – which counter-intuitively solely regarded advisors). This reflects the universally accepted importance of the supervisory relationship, compared to other relationships within the academic context, the nature of which is the focus of the last part of this section.

2.5.2.3. Supervisory relationships

This section presents two prevalent notions in the literature, firstly how 'good' or 'poor' supervisory relationships are constructed, and concomitant characteristics of supervisors and students. Secondly the narrative around student-supervisor 'compatibility', 'match', or 'fit' will be addressed. This will be followed by considering the development of the supervisory relationship over the course of PGRs studies, and lastly considering the relational aspects of trust and openness.

2.5.2.3.1. Prevalent notions of 'good' and 'poor' supervisory relationships

The first notion prevalent in the literature addressed here is the construction of 'good' and 'poor' supervisory relationships, and concomitant characteristics of supervisors and students. First of all, the supervisory relationship is an extensively researched aspect of doctoral education, which may not seem startling as it is also deemed the most influential aspect (Sverdlik et al., 2018). In the UK, a supervisory team commonly consists of two members of staff, with one of them considered primary, or first, supervisor, yet neither of the two participate in the final examination of the thesis (Ali et al., 2016). The long-term engagement between the two parties is not comparable to relationships concomitant to previous educational endeavours; the length of the relationship requires an ongoing negotiation of it, the process of which has received little attention in the literature (Parker-Jenkins,

2018). It seems most of the aforementioned *extensive* research remains on the surface of the matter, demonstrated via the presentation of consistent notions of what constitutes a ‘good’ or ‘poor’ relationship.

It appears that both parties perceive personal and academic aspects to contribute to a successful relationship, as Grant et al. (2014) pointed out, postgraduate supervision not only relies on supervisors being scholars but also on them being able to form an effective professional relationship with the supervisee. As outlined in the conceptual chapter, this requires a successful interpersonal relationship prior (Tobbell & O’Donnell, 2013a). Supervisors should be approachable, supportive, responsive, and have knowledge of the relevant field, methodologies, and publishing (Masek & Alias, 2020; Woolderink et al., 2015; Young et al., 2019). Noticeably, Ali et al. (2016) found that supervisors and doctoral students both deemed supervisors showing interest in doctoral students’ research, the provision of timely and critical feedback, and encouraging students to present their work at conferences most important, whereas continuously motivating students, ensuring that students assessed and identified training opportunities, and accessibility outside scheduled appointments least important. But, all 30 items the authors utilised to clarify expectations held of research supervisors, were scored at least 3.5 on a 5-point Likert-scale, only four items were scored below 4. This seems to indicate the overall importance both parties ascribed to the supervisory relationship. Regarding postgraduate students, it was considered valuable when they were proactive in terms of the development of a collaborative relationship, rather than expecting it to be engendered by the supervisor alone (Young et al., 2019), which seemingly relates to what Masek and Alias (2020) regarded as good interpersonal skills. This would indicate that the establishment of successful interpersonal relationships is a collaboration, as Tobbell and O’Donnell (2013a) characterised the learning relationship. Being proactive was also appreciated with regard to the research project, via being independent and taking responsibility, particularly as time progressed (Woolderink et al., 2015), which seems to reflect the practice of independence (Tobbell and O’Donnell, 2013b). In addition, also academic qualities, such as analytical skills, or good writing skills, were valued, (Woolderink et al., 2015).

In contrast, it was not valued when supervisors were perceived to control, rather than guide the student, or when they did not seem interested in the student’s research (Manathunga, 2005), reflecting the above-mentioned and positively regarded display of interest in students’ work. This was seconded by Wright (2003) who also outlined that a lack of time contributed to difficulties in the supervisory relationship, McAlpine et al. (2012) elaborated that supervisors’ absence complicated students’ understanding of expectations held of them. Cornér et al. (2017) found that doctoral students were dissatisfied when supervision meetings took place infrequently. Correspondingly,

Guccione (2018) reported of students' frustrations upon non-responsiveness from the supervisors, and further of confusion upon conflicting guidance and contradictory feedback from different members of the supervisory team. Regarding students, Manathunga (2005) deemed their failure to keep appointments, and general avoidance of contact or of submitting work as warning signs, indicating they experienced academic difficulties. Further, it was not valued when doctoral students were over-confident, too passive, too perfectionist, or sloppy (Woolderink et al., 2015). Briefly relating this to the theoretical conceptualisation of this project, the characteristics outlined above relating to the supervisory relationship, or specifically to students as well as supervisors, reflect the prevalent practice of this CoP (Wenger, 1998). Thus, to successfully participate they have to find out which behaviours and expectations are valued, and act accordingly. For example, the practice of independence which was reflected via the appreciation of students being proactive, may not be apparent to PGRs when they are newcomers.

2.5.2.3.2. Student-Supervisor 'match' and 'mismatch'

The second notion prevalent in the literature, is one surrounding a certain compatibility, match, or fit, between student and supervisor. Sharing similar perspectives on supervision is not a given, yet is important due to the effects on student satisfaction and attrition (Pyhältö, et al., 2015). Hence, sharing similar work values, such as being committed to timelines, seemed to benefit the relationships, contributing to students' persistence (Sverdlik et al., 2018). It was suggested that supervisory relationships should be built on research and interpersonal compatibility (Bastalich, 2017), and to form explicit agreements clarifying responsibilities and expectations to avoid misunderstandings (Woolderink et al., 2015; Wright, 2003). Noticeably, these suggestions seem based on the supervisory relationship being somewhat static, rather than developing over time, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner with regard to proximal processes for example (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This would seemingly negate the PGR as well as the supervisor from evolving. Socio-culturally, for example relating to the CoP approach, learning is viewed as developmental process, facilitated through participating in the CoP, being shaped by practice and shaping practice, which the above notion seems incompatible with. Corresponding to these suggestions, supervisory issues were founded in unclarified or unrealistic expectations of both parties (Ali et al., 2016; Guccione, 2018; Manathunga, 2005; Parker-Jenkins, 2018). A mismatch between supervisor and student may be characterised by lacking communication and support (Golde, 2005), and may even lead to supervisory loss; matching expectations, or negotiating them, is also part of the following, new supervisory relationship (Wisker & Robinson, 2013). Referring to my critical point above, the notion of a mismatch similarly negates the process of developing a relationship over time.

The above notions surrounding a match, or mismatch pose a crucial question; how would one go about negotiating such expectations, responsibilities, or views? One example of negotiating perceptions and expectations was outlined above regarding Stracke and Kumar's (2020) Feedback Expectation Tool. In line with their suggestions, Young et al. (2019) indicated that conversations about the setting of general expectations and goals contributes to establishing a positive relationship. Correspondingly, Masek and Alias (2020) proposed that effective supervision is contingent on having such conversations in the early stages of the supervisory relationship, as supervision is context-bound; both parties should have a shared understanding of things. The authors exemplified that a student may perceive supervision to be of good quality if they can meet their supervisor whenever they wish, whereas a supervisor may prefer meetings on a scheduled basis. This seems to clarify why communicating and negotiating both perspectives seems key, which would likely contribute to a reciprocal intersubjective understanding (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007). Masek and Alias (2020) further proposed a framework for supervision, which begins with both parties initially and clearly communicating their expectations, in terms of supervision procedures and overall goals. They then formally negotiate their expectations, followed by monitoring expectations via progress, and modifying expectations when necessary. Although there may be benefits to having conversations about each party's expectations, it is noticeable that this is based on the assumption that students know from the outset what they want and/or need from the supervision process. Yet, this seems questionable, for example, considering the repeatedly mentioned assumption of expertise prevalent in postgraduate education (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b). Also in practice, Stracke and Kumar (2020) conceded that doctoral students in their first year may not be confident enough when negotiating their perspectives on feedback. Similarly, we cannot assume that PGRs would be knowledgeable and/or comfortable enough to discuss and negotiate their responsibilities and expectations within the supervisory process, which they demand and are demanded of them.

2.5.2.3.3. [The supervisory relationship in the course of PGR studies](#)

Anderson et al.'s (2006) study, which was considered to be of exceptional detail regarding the supervision process by Grant et al. (2014), explored supervision in the master's context, yet entirely focused on the dissertation process, which may suggest applicability across postgraduate research degrees. The participants, supervisors, outlined that at the beginning of this process, collaborative work between supervisor and supervisee was required, in order to clarify the research project's objectives, and constructing an appropriate, practicable research design. Hereby, the student was mainly responsible for the origination of the topic area, whereas supervisors' main responsibility laid with ensuring the topic is well defined and focused, with a manageable and realistic design. This clearly relates to Vygotsky's (1978) theorising; the supervisor acts as MKO, guiding the student's project via

their experience and knowledge, for example, on what constitutes a realistic, manageable research design, and what would make a research project unrealistic and unmanageable, as the student likely has little knowledge of this at the beginning of their studies, based on their newcomer-status. However, as outlined in the preceding chapter, the establishment of the ZPD is contingent on the establishment of a successful interpersonal relationship as per Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a), thus the above critique asserting the imperative of negotiating such a relationship as prerequisite to learning is also applicable here.

Anderson et al. (2006) continued that after the research project was clarified, supervisors take a step back, while students should take the project forward in a proactive and well-organised manner, progressively more autonomously. This seems relatable to Vygotsky's (1978) stage II of moving through the ZPD, as the student is expected to progressively rely on themselves. This also reflects the above-outlined value ascribed to students working independently and proactively, and reflects the expectation held of PGRs to become independent scholars (QAA, 2018). Through a socio-cultural lens however, it must be considered that intersubjectivity (Bråten and Trevarthen, 2007), posited as characteristic of the MKO-learner-relationship, serves as prerequisite to Anderson et al.'s (2006) process. Thus, it would only be suitable for the supervisor to take a step back when the PGR's needs are satisfied in a way that enables them to work autonomously via self-assistance. It is also noteworthy that such a process is most likely different for each PGR.

The latter stages of the supervisory process were characterised by supervisors re-gaining a rather involved role, via assisting with analysis and writing up (Anderson et al., 2006). This seems connected to stage I of Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, as these latter stages seem to be characterised by different tasks, such as data analysis, requiring the guidance of an MKO. Overall, the supervisors experienced a dilemma regarding the appropriateness of the level of detail and frequency of changes they suggested to students. This reflected the wider duality between supervisory guidance and student direction; between supervisors supporting and shaping students' work. What comes into play is supervisors' experienced responsibility of ensuring that a certain level of academic quality and standard is sustained, while also being under pressure to ensure students' on-time completion (Bastalich, 2017; Guccione, 2018). Their dilemma seems further reflective of the idiosyncrasy of PGR studies, as aforementioned, supervisors' guidance most likely is individual to each PGR.

2.5.2.3.4. Trust and openness

Another element of the supervisory relationship, indeed all relationships, is trust. This aspect of the supervisory relationship has been repeatedly outlined as important throughout this chapter, as detailed within the first part of this section on relationships with fellow PGRs. Just like establishing

trust, also destroying it happens over time; the latter may be due to unmet expectations with regard to the supervisory relationship, for example via either the supervisor or student being unavailable, or failing to act on agreements (Guccione, 2018). The effect of a relationship lacking trust is continued insecurity, potentially resulting in increased experiences of stress, and feeling less confident and independent (Guccione, 2018).

Tierny and Hallett (2010) shared that trust would not transpire if a supervisor gossiped about other supervisees during meetings for example, consequently students would likely be reluctant to share their insecurities due to the implication that the supervisor may laugh about them behind their back. Concerns about confidentiality, as well as shame, and embarrassment constituted hindrances to seeking social support (El-Ghoroury et al. 2012; Waight & Giordano, 2018). Relating this to Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising on interpersonal relationships; the PGR may be less worried about these concerns if a *successful* interpersonal relationship is shared, which may enable them to disclose for instance, mental health difficulties. Irrespective of the direction of causality, clearly PGRs' mental health and their PGR experience are intertwined (Barreira et al., 2018), and a comfortable, safe environment may enable PGRs to share their issues and concerns. Such an environment seemed present for one of Berry et al.'s (2020, p. 9) participants, but upon sharing an issue with their supervisor, they reported an altered understanding of their relationship:

I said [to my supervisors] "I don't know if it's appropriate to tell you [but I'm really upset that a family member is really unwell]" and they said "Yes, I'm fine with it, some other supervisors it wouldn't be"... in my head that manifested as... it wasn't an appropriate thing... maybe I'd gone over the top and just over-shared

The 'tough love' approach outlined by Roberts and Ferro-Almeida (2019) featured doctoral mentors being trustworthy as well as demanding, which they found made their relationship to students effective. This was conveyed via sharing tough feedback with the student, as well as encouraging them to aim higher. The authors believed that this approach was related to their participants being successful, as their participants' students withdrew at a rather low rate of 10%. Further, the authors did not anticipate the participants' emphasis on connecting with students on a personal level, which seemingly relates to Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) emphasising the importance of interpersonal relationships, nevertheless established a link to extant literature which outlined that effective mentoring considered students as whole persons. This is in line with Mantai (2019a) outlining that social support typically regarded the student as a person, as aforementioned.

Knowing each other on such a personal level enabled the supervisor to make accommodations in students' academic life-aspect if they experienced stressors in other aspects of their lives (Roberts & Ferro-Almeida, 2019) for example, if a student was made redundant. In contrast, when students could

not have open and honest conversations about mental health with their supervisor, they tended to do less well regarding their mental health (Barreira et al., 2018). As indicated in the writing-section of this chapter, honesty and openness seemed to be key aspects to successful interpersonal relationships. Yet, this is a two-way street, few of Barreira et al.'s (2018) participants would have wanted to discuss mental health issues openly with their supervisors, which the authors suggested was possibly due to supervisors being advisors as well as evaluators. The aspect of openness in the supervisory relationship, or a lack thereof, was reflected in a quote presented above (Mantai, 2019a), in which a doctoral student was concerned about wanting to maintain a certain appearance of themselves in front of their supervisor. Similarly, Manathunga's (2005) participants wanted to uphold an image of professionalism, rather than admitting that they lack understanding of how to conduct a literature review, or how to perform certain tasks. With regard to mental health difficulties, participants felt they could not share these with their supervisors, as some supervisors seemed to perceive stress and depression as a normal part of research studies (Manathunga, 2005). Further, participants felt pressured to not show weakness to their supervisor; family responsibilities for example were viewed as weakness, due to their interference with academic responsibilities. This seems particularly problematic due to the commonly experienced difficulty of balancing different aspects of one's life, as outlined in the wellbeing section.

Lastly, Stracke and Kumar (2020) outlined that most of the literature on emotions in feedback considers students, but not supervisors. Similarly, Humphrey and Simpson (2012) pointed at the pressure doctoral supervisors experience, for example relating to their students' on-time completion. Bastalich (2017) pointed out that supervisors being blamed for longer completion times and high attrition rates may lead to them resisting training; instead, such educational outcomes must be understood taking into account institutional and political responsibilities. Noticeably, Roberts and Ferro-Almeida (2019) suggested that there should be a reciprocal awareness of each other's personal life, implying that this would not only enable the supervisor to make accommodations for the student if they experienced stress in another aspect of their life, but also vice versa. It seems one contributing factor to the lack of consideration for the supervisors may be that the majority of research seems to be rather descriptive of supervisory relationships, instead of aiming to understand what underpins them, for example via the concept of intersubjectivity (Bråten and Trevarthen, 2007). Nevertheless, despite the clear importance of not being dismissive of supervisors' wellbeing and experiences, Woolderink et al. (2015) pointed out that a negative supervisory relationship affects students to a greater extent than it does the supervisor. Therefore, and to not go beyond its scope, this project is focused on PGRs' experiences, rather than supervisors'.

2.6. Disciplinary differences

It is well established that doctoral students in the humanities have longer completion times and higher attrition rates, compared to students in the social sciences and sciences (Gessner et al., 2011). Yet, Gardner's (2009a) research categorised English as a high-completing department, whereas computer science and engineering were categorised as low-completing departments. Noticeably, staff members from these departments were insistent on the relationship between funding and completion rates; in this case, the English department received additional institutional funding, which the computer science and engineering departments were lacking, demonstrating distal influences on PGR learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b). Particularly the lengthier completion time in the humanities appears to be discussed by many, Leonard et al. (2006) as well as Wright (2003) pointed out that students in the sciences were more likely to complete within four years, compared to students in the arts and humanities; Zhou and Okahana (2019) considered STEM and non-STEM departments, the former featured quicker completion times and also higher completion rates. Also Kim and Otts (2010) found that humanities students took longest to complete their doctoral degree.

McAlpine and Austin (2018) referred to Golde (2005) and Gardner (2009a) to point out that doctoral students are commonly funded via teaching in the humanities, though this may hinder students' academic progress. Correspondingly, teaching assistantships are prominent in departments with longer completion times, indicating that the type of financial support (funding via teaching assistantships) may elongate completion times (Ferrer de Valero, 2001). This was seconded by Kim and Otts (2010), comparing teaching assistantships to fellowships and research assistantships. Similarly, Zhou and Okahana (2019) found a higher likelihood of quicker completion and increased completion rates in departments offering more research assistantships, compared to departments offering more teaching assistantships. But, despite teaching responsibilities standing in conflict with one's research responsibilities, which is likely a crucial factor in hindering them from effective participation, it was often valued (McAlpine & Austin, 2018). For example, Guerin's (2020) participants, who wanted to remain in academia post-PhD considered teaching as experience contributing to their employability in the academy.

Another characteristic of the nature of research programmes in the arts and humanities is that it has been repeatedly outlined as rather solitary; this is often contrasted to collaborative work in laboratories which is more common in the sciences (Golde, 2005; Greene, 2015; Owler, 2010). Noticeably, Owler (2010) connected this aloneness experienced in the humanities with the doctoral requirement of producing original research, which may serve as indication as to why isolation is prevalent across doctoral education (as outlined in the wellbeing section). Yet, a laboratory context seemingly enables students' enculturation (Golde, 2005) and social integration (White & Nonnamaker,

2008). An example of achieving this in the humanities was presented by Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016), as aspiring graduate students participated in humanities summer institutes, for either four or eight weeks, which offered daily classes, workshops, opportunities to conduct their own research projects, and social activities. Participants were not only introduced to graduate level skills, knowledge, and norms (the graduate CoP's practice), but also to a social network, via interacting with peers and mentors (the graduate CoP's community). Despite the aforementioned assumption of collaboration in lab settings, Walsh (2010) pointed out that students in the sciences, who may be part of a research group, are not unsusceptible to such experiences of isolation, as, according to local anecdotal evidence, some international students did not feel supported, and instead marginalised. This divergence from the assumed collaborative environment in lab settings seems supported by Chang and Kanno (2010), as their participants in engineering not only evaded interacting with their lab mates at times, seemingly due to language barrier issues, but also experienced isolation due to the physical separation of lab spaces. It would seem that the context of one's studies is experienced individually, and the attendant practices likely vary across institutions, and considering Gardner (2009a), also across departments.

2.7. Conclusion and Research Aims

Although little of the reviewed literature is socio-cultural in nature, the extant findings reaffirm the suitability of the socio-cultural lens to understand PGR learning. Firstly, the literature seems in support of understanding attrition as distributed in context. That is because reasons for attrition stemmed from PGRs' context, such as the relationships they held within their academic context, rather than being solely located within them. However, also the non-academic context was impactful, such as difficulties with balancing non-academic commitments with their studies. Thus, it seems the particularly high attrition rates on the highest level of studies may be related to the relatively complex lives they lead (Tobbell et al., 2010), which has the potential to hinder their participation.

Secondly, understanding writing as participation in the academic context entails interaction with a CoP's members, and the learning of CoP-specific practices of academic writing seems reliant on oldtimers' insight. On the PGR level, one oldtimer they typically have access to is their supervisor, whose feedback is useful when it is open and honest, which seemingly indicates the importance of establishing a successful interpersonal relationship (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). This is also apparent in the writing group context with regard to peers, as trusting relationships were necessary for effective feedback. Notably, participating in such writing groups, may their purpose be peer review or accountability, seemed to only hold positive implications for doctoral students, indicating inbound trajectories.

Thirdly, PGRs' wellbeing seemed affected by negotiating different aspects of their lives two-fold. On the one hand, it was stress-inducing trying to balance personal, professional, and academic commitments, but on the other hand, PGRs also benefited from having these different life aspects, as they served to balance academic stresses. Again, this reaffirms Tobbell et al.'s (2010) notion of PGRs leading complex lives, and that PGRs' participation in their academic life-aspect should not be considered in isolation, as it functions in interaction with other life-aspects. Other contextual influences on PGRs' wellbeing may be the solitary nature of doctoral education. This section further illustrated the importance of considering PGRs as individuals, especially when considering the work-life balance; one PGR may be able to competently balance personal, professional, and academic commitments, whereas a similar situation may prove as too stressful for another PGR.

Fourthly, non-academic relationships may serve as source of emotional support, but for example familial responsibilities may also complicate PGRs' participation. The support deriving from non-academic relationships was somewhat restricted to their understanding of the PGR's undertaking, whereas fellow PGRs were in an ideal position regarding this. As they commonly have a shared experience, they have an advanced understanding of, for example academic struggles, which also

carries the potential to disrupt the assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b), when these relationships are characterised by trust. This likely enables PGRs' participation as identity shifts may be facilitated when difficulties are normalised. The departmental context carries the potential to foster a sense of belonging, when attendant practices enable PGRs' participation and consider them beyond their studenthood, via connecting on an interpersonal level for example. Prevalent notions in the extant literature regarding a supervisor 'match' or 'mismatch' are not compatible with a socio-cultural understanding of learning, as they do not allow for the development and negotiation of such relationships, which within this project are conceived as key to PGR learning.

Lastly, the brief section on disciplinary differences served to present my rationale for focusing on humanities PGRs. Certain implications seem prevalent in certain disciplines, such as the trend of humanities students taking longer to complete their doctoral studies, yet the discipline is not the only influence (McAlpine & Austin, 2018), as exceptions to such trends have been presented (Gardner, 2009a; White & Nonnamaker, 2008). Rather, it seems necessary to explore the attendant learning context rigorously, in combination with PGRs' accounts of their experience, in order to gain an informed understanding of their learning experience. Due to the disproportionate focus on the social sciences in the extant research (Leonard et al., 2006), and the outlined trends regarding attrition in the humanities, it was the chosen field for study for this research project. Further, it should be noted that the main focus of this project is based on PGRs studying full-time, rather than part-time, as each mode of study likely yields different learning experiences, based on the "*dynamically different nature*" (Gardner & Gopaul, 2012, p.72).

Overall, it has become apparent that research exploring the experience of master's by research students' is particularly scarce, which is addressed via this project, as participants were doctoral as well as master's by research students. Further, a socio-cultural understanding of PGR learning seems amiss from the extant literature, although its findings affirm the suitability of it, as demonstrated throughout this chapter. Thus, based on the theoretical framework outlined in the first chapter, and the review of the literature in this chapter, the research aims are as follows:

1. To explore contextual practices and their concomitant impact on PGR participation.
2. To provide insight into the lived experience of being a PGR.
3. To explore humanities students' shifting identities through participation in their research programme.
4. To understand PGRs' experiences through the socio-cultural lens.

3. Methodology

After conceptualising the theoretical framework, and reviewing the literature through a socio-cultural lens, this chapter outlines details on the ethnographic study I have conducted. I will firstly present the ontological position underpinning my methodology, by drawing upon socio-cultural underpinnings and symbolic interactionism, and the subsequent consequences on my ethnographic study. Then, I will illustrate ethical considerations and decisions I made regarding such issues I encountered. Further, the different data collection methods will be discussed and presented, including procedural details, which is followed by a section on reflexivity. The last section of this chapter transparently details how I analysed the collected data.

3.1. Ontological position

My ontological position has been expressed as a socio-cultural one in the previous chapters, most indicatively by referring to Wenger (1998), Bronfenbrenner (1979b, 2005), and Vygotsky (1978) whose theories share a socio-cultural underpinning. In general, socio-cultural philosophy is attentive to the influence of individual, social, and contextual factors, thus the importance of gaining an understanding of the context in which the phenomenon in question is located, is emphasised (Schoen, 2011). The phenomenon in question of this project is of course PGR learning, which, as aforementioned, is conceived as distributed in the context that a person is situated in, aligning with a socio-cultural position (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000). Namely, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggested that learning is inherently situated in one's social surrounding and progresses through participating in a CoP. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), even broader systems must be considered, such as societal values and norms. I further referred to Vygotsky, whose work is deemed to be at the root of socio-cultural thinking (Nasir & Hand, 2006; Schoen, 2011), such as the notion of development being a process that extends beyond the individual, to social others for instance. Specifically, according to Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a), learning is contingent on a successful interpersonal relationship between learner and MKO. Clearly, the theories employed to understand learning are underpinned by the socio-cultural notion that learning is driven by the interaction between the learner and the context in which they are situated.

A further key aspect of a socio-cultural perspective on learning is the concept of identity, which is reflected in the third research aim as well as the notion of *shifting identities* throughout this thesis. As outlined in the first chapter, this refers to the understanding of learning as being at least in part a process of becoming, a transformation of the self. For instance, Vadeboncoeur et al. (2011) proposed that such processes of identity negotiations are mediated by three interrelated, contextual layers,

spanning from the individual acting with cultural tools, with other individuals, and within institutional contexts. Nasir and Hand (2006), who also viewed identity as situated in the individual and in the social world, conceived learning as driven by the changing relations between the individual and the CoPs they participate in. To clarify my stance, I refer to Lave (1992, as cited in Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 229), who conceived learning as situated, on the basis of viewing the person as “*an acting being, engaged in activity in the world.*” I too understand the role of the individual as a rather active one, in terms of conceiving people as meaning-makers. And although authors like Vadeboncoeur et al. (2011) to some extent considered identity negotiations as ongoing and active processes, I draw upon symbolic interactionism to clarify my understanding of the active role of the individual.

First of all, it should be outlined that there is a fundamental overlap between socio-cultural and symbolic interactionist positions, based on the emphasis on the person-in-context. Regarding socio-cultural theorising, the importance of contextual factors has been outlined throughout the first chapter. Regarding symbolic interactionism, it was Blumer (1969), who coined ‘symbolic interactionism’; he was heavily influenced by George Herbert Mead’s work, and both are seen as responsible for developing the theoretical conceptualisation serving as groundwork for this research tradition (Travers, 2001). Blumer (1969) presented three premises underlying the nature of symbolic interactionism. Firstly, acting towards ‘things’ (this term encompasses everything, from objects, to people, activities, or situations) is guided by the meaning ascribed to them. Secondly, meaning emerges in interaction with other persons, thus it is a social process. This echoes a fundamental aspect of socio-cultural theory – the notion that human action is influenced by contextual factors, such as social interactions with others (Nasir & Hand, 2006). This is reflected in my reference to Vygotsky’s (1978) ZPD, and Wenger’s (1998) understanding of participation for example. It is Blumer’s (1969) third premise which contributes a clearer understanding of the role of the individual: meaning is created, and modified through an interpretive process, which does not entail applying existent meanings to things, but is instead a formative process, guiding one’s action. Following these premises, people create their own subjective reality, through interpreting the meaning of the elements in the social world surrounding them, which informs their actions. Thus, it is my symbolic interactionist ontological stance that underpins my interest in the individual’s experience from their point of view. The emphasis on contextual influences, that one may not be aware of and thus would struggle to articulate if asked about, is underpinned by the socio-cultural aim of understanding the person-in-context. The methodological consequences of my ontological stance are outlined in the following, via providing details on my ethnographic study.

3.2. An ethnographic study

As argued in the preceding chapters and as reflected in my research aims, this project is based on the socio-cultural understanding of learning on the PGR level as distributed in context. As per Schoen (2011) socio-cultural research characteristically aims to gain insight into the whole context of the phenomenon under study, and to appreciate the complexity of aspects influencing people's action. Thus, to become familiar with this context I conducted an ethnographic study, which involved participating in my participants' social surroundings. Originally, ethnography has emerged as the study of non-Western cultures via the researcher participating in and familiarising themselves with said cultures, with its roots in anthropology and sociology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Although there is not one definition of ethnography (Atkinson et al., 2001), it is commonly characterised by a form of observation in combination with other qualitative methods, and the participation of the researcher (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2017; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The core of ethnography, as pointed out by Atkinson (2015), referred to by Walford (2018), is not to gain an understanding of participants' perspectives of their social world, the goal is to understand the world they inhabit. This is where an ethnography with its traditional, anthropological roots does not suffice in terms of allowing me to meet my aims, because I am indeed aiming to gain an understanding of my participants' points of view. It is important to note, and as I have previously argued, that understanding the learning context is necessary to understand the learning experience (see CoP's 'practice' and Bronfenbrenner's 'context'). But, rather than exclusively focusing on the context as such, I also want to find out how my participants negotiate their context. I endeavour to understand how they experience being a PGR, from their point of view.

Following a symbolic interactionist notion, Rock (2001) argued that data should be collected in the field. The emphasis on conducting fieldwork, such as observations, is based on the view that only entering the social environment of participants will enable a researcher to gain somewhat of an insight into this world. But, Blumer (1969, p. 5) stressed that "[...] the use of meanings by the actor occurs through a *process of interpretation*" [original emphasis]. The perception of one's experience is dependent on how one assesses, evaluates, interprets it. Following this logic, Travers (2001) noted that researchers guided by symbolic interactionism have aimed to represent how people understand their social worlds. This echoes my research interest mentioned above, which is to understand how PGRs understand their experience. The methodological consequence following this is that observations alone are likely not sufficient in gaining insight into participants' interpretation of their experience, as this is likely not apparent via one's observable actions. Suitably, ethnographies are characterised by flexibility; varying with the discipline they are employed in (Pink & Morgan, 2013), and influenced by the researcher's underlying assumptions (Hammersley, 2018). Consequently, this

would translate to a – for traditional ethnography untypical – focus on individuals’ accounts over participant observations, as my interest lies not only with the learning context, but also with the individual and their lived experience.

3.3. Ethical considerations

Before providing details on the practicalities of the conducted study, ethical considerations and decisions will be outlined. In line with the British Psychological Society (BPS) guidelines (2014) I received ethical approval for my proposed research project from my school's ethics panel, as well as from the participating university. This was achieved through emailing my school's preliminary approval to the person responsible for postgraduate education in the humanities at the participating university, who in turn checked this with their ethics committee. Shortly after beginning observations, I revised my ethics application, to gain approval for interviewing participants twice, which was also approved (Appendix 1).

In terms of ethical procedures, all participants (whether involved in observations or interviews), received the relevant information sheet (Appendix 1), enabling participants to autonomously decide whether they wanted to take part or not, on the basis of comprehensive and accurate information about the research project (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Participants also received the relevant consent form (Appendix 1) if they decided to take part in my study. In terms of confidentiality (BPS, 2014), all electronic data has been stored securely, and only accessed by me. All physical data (such as signed consent forms or fieldnotes) were scanned and transcribed in a timely manner, followed by shredding the originals. In order to protect my participants' identity, their names (as well as others' names mentioned during interviews) were anonymised via the use of pseudonyms in the case of interviews and supervisor observations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). However, similar to Aarnikoivu (2020) it became clear that some participants had openly told each other about their participation in this project, which resulted in a new attribution of pseudonyms post data collection, replacing the originally used pseudonyms. Observations of the PGR study space involved referring to participants individually (P1 - P39), whereas in seminars, participants were largely referred to as group. Due to the in-depth nature of the interviews, further alterations were undertaken during the transcription when participants disclosed information that may lead to their identification, such as their hometown, which were noted on the 'participants sheet' (Appendix 1). As outlined on the consent forms, participants agreed to the disclosure of their status (master's by research student, PhD student, or staff member), and the current phase of their studies (for example, 2months into one's master's, or year 1 of one's PhD).

The consent forms further included the option to review interview transcripts, or fieldnotes, due to the potential recognisability to peers (either at their home institution or within their field) when using direct quotes, hence participants were given the opportunity to omit any parts. Thus, the purpose of this was to ensure participants' anonymity, with the secondary purpose of accuracy-checking (Thomas, 2017), based on me, as well as some of my participants, speaking English as an additional

language. One instance which demonstrates this, involved me emailing a participant after our interview, as they seemed somewhat uncertain about the degree of anonymisation. For example, during the interview they said *“so this will identify me even more for the tape”* when talking about specifics of their educational trajectories. Upon reflection, I was concerned about my participant appearing concerned, I thus emailed them after the interview, thanking them for their time, and asking if they would like me to make any changes during transcription, such as when talking about their project, highlighting that this would be no problem. The participant responded saying it is fine, as they did not feel as if anything out of the ordinary was said. I reiterated the offer of changing, or omitting parts if they liked, when I sent them the transcript two months later, to which they responded by saying the content is fine, and solely pointed out one inaccurately transcribed word, which I apparently misheard during the transcription. Thus, this procedure did not constitute the frequently referred to practice of member checking, which commonly involves participants reviewing data transcripts or interpretations with regard to the conveyed meanings and whether participants’ intended meaning is represented (Varpio et al., 2017), as this would suppose the underlying ontological assumption that there is ‘one true’ representation of meaning, which opposes my symbolic interactionist stance. To maintain meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010), there are other practices to enhance trustworthiness (Goldblatt et al., 2011) or credibility (Tracy, 2010). For example, via analysing data in a systematic and organised manner, which will be detailed below, or via providing sufficient context in addition to verbatim quotations, as this facilitates the reader to evaluate the trustworthiness of my interpretations (Goldblatt et al., 2011), which is well-aligned with my socio-cultural stance emphasising the importance of context, and will be evident throughout the findings chapter. The example of me considering my participant’s potential concerns regarding anonymity demonstrates the dynamic nature of ethical considerations, particularly in ethnographic studies based on their ongoing nature. Further ethical decisions in the context of the ongoing nature of ethnographic studies, such as the ethical imperative to renew consent (BPS, 2014), will be addressed below, in the reflexivity section.

3.4. Data collection

This section firstly discusses different methods of data collection, which is followed by providing details on data collection processes, with regard to the interviews, observations, and documents I collected. Then, I reflect on how my active role as a researcher impacted data collection, by firstly outlining ethical decisions I made, and by reflecting on my researcher positionality.

3.4.1. Rationale for data collection methods

As outlined above, my ethnographic study relies considerably on interview data. The data collection method of interviewing is utilised in order to make sense of participants' experiences (Hockey & Forsey, 2012), which may be conducted in an informal or formal manner (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2017). Ethnographic researchers utilise this method based on an increasing acknowledgement of the complexity of the human experience and the wish to directly ask participants how they interpret their experiences (Heyl, 2001). This aligns with the argument for symbolic interactionism underpinning this study. However, predominantly relying on interviewing participants was criticised by Walford (2018) due to potential issues such as participants lying, hiding information, or presenting a façade of themselves during interviews. But, as Raz (2005) pointed out, from a symbolic interactionist stance, there is no need to search for 'the truth' in participants' accounts, for instance because there is no way one could verify or falsify participants' accounts. Similarly, Sullivan (2012) explained that there is always a level of uncertainty regarding people's genuineness in interactions, thus researchers' time would be better spent on searching for the meanings which participants relay. This aligns with my symbolic interactionist stance of viewing meaning as individually interpreted – one of my research interests is to explore how PGR students interpret their experience, to gain insight into how they understand their experience, which I aim to achieve through talking to them.

In addition to questioning the authenticity of participants' accounts when relying on interview data, Walford (2018, p. 47) critiqued, although acknowledging that participants' understandings and perspectives are required to gain an understanding of their social surrounding, that this was also possible via observations, and that overall, a *“greater emphasis on observation in all its many forms, using all of the five senses, may improve the quality of ethnographies immeasurably”*. Similarly, Hammersley (2018) claimed that observations in natural settings allow for more informative data in comparison to more structured settings, such as interviews. In contrast, Hockey and Forsey (2012) argued that formal interviews, taking place in 'unnatural' settings, may enable interviewees to speak more freely with the prospect of comparatively deep insights. The authors further pointed out that research participants are indeed able to grant researchers an insight into their lives via engaged

listening. They conducted research exploring parents' educational priorities, which the authors deemed as involving internal rather than external processes, which they could get an insight into via interviews. This aligns particularly with my second and third research aim, as both regard internal processes; the interpretation of their lived experiences and identity negotiations, respectively, which relates to the aforementioned underpinning notion of symbolic interactionism that meaning is formed as an interpretive process within the individual. Thus, relying on interview data allows me to meet these aims.

Nevertheless, at times it is valuable to observe human action, whereas at other times it is less valuable, or even possible (Hockey & Forsey, 2012). For example, as outlined in the literature review, it became apparent that different aspects of PGRs' lives influence their PGR experience (Juniper et al., 2012), yet it would certainly not be ethically valuable, nor practically possible, to observe participants' whole lives, such as their professional or familial environments. Thus, I limited the settings to be observed to the institutional context. When opportunities for observations are not viable, methods such as interviewing are particularly useful (Mannay & Morgan, 2015), which further substantiates my significant reliance on interview data within this ethnographic study.

Documents may be collected as part of an ethnography considering its common reference to various data sources (Grant, 2019; Hammersley, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Documents can offer insight into the setting under study, or wider contexts, which may corroborate or challenge what was found from observations or interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The use of documents will be particularly useful in order to meet my first research aim, as they will enable an insight into the context which PGRs inhabit. Although ethnographies commonly rely on data sources such as observations or interviews primarily, while documents may be utilised peripherally, the latter contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, offering another perspective (Grant, 2019).

The typically ethnographic use of multiple methods of data collection, which are combined to inform each other, is commonly referred to as triangulation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). However, Tracy (2010) noted that triangulation is seemingly underpinned by a realist notion, Grant (2019) and Varpio et al. (2017) shared critiques presuming positivistic underpinnings, when different types of data are utilised to assess to which extent 'the truth' is represented. A different process of conceiving the multiplicity of data sources, methods, or theoretical conceptions is aimed at gaining insight into the phenomenon under study from different perspectives instead, which is termed crystallisation (Tracy, 2010). The benefit of such a technique is the enhanced rigor, "*through comprehensiveness rather than convergence*" (Varpio et al., 2017, p. 45). The reliance on multi-method data collection in this study, specifically via observations and documents, allows me to meet my first research aim. In coherence

with my ontological stance outlined above, this ethnographic study relies substantially on interview data, to gain access to participants' lived experiences, addressing the second and third research aim. The fourth aim is enabled through the theoretical framework outlined in the conceptual chapter, its application is apparent throughout the findings and discussion in chapter four, and the contribution to socio-cultural understandings of learning outlined in the last chapter.

3.4.2. Collecting the data

Providing a brief overview of this research project, the participating university is a post-1992 university in the North of England. After receiving ethical approval, I started collecting data in the form of non-participant-observations. These took place in different settings within the institution, the humanities PGR study space, supervision sessions, and departmental seminars. I further explored the PGR experience by interviewing 12 PGRs and two members of staff with varying degrees of responsibility for the humanities PGR education at the participating university. Contextualising the PGR experience, I also collected documents on the institutional level.

3.4.2.1. Interviews

In terms of sampling, I was already familiar with two of my participants from a previous research endeavour, who introduced me to three other participants. The other main route of sampling was via my observations of the study space, although I also recruited one participant after one seminar observation. After a few hours of observations in the study space, participants becoming familiar with me, and once some rapport was established, I asked whether they would be happy to take part in an interview, yet highlighted that this was voluntary. Some agreed, others did not. As Mahoney (2007) pointed out, becoming an insider had useful recruitment implications, because key informants, with whom he had established friendly relationships, spread the word about his research, and these introductions from trusted individuals facilitated further recruitment of other community members. This is particularly relatable to one of my participants, who welcomed me into the community via inviting me to a 'luncheon group', which will be further elaborated on below. He also informed me about a departmental conference, which I thus attended, where he introduced me to numerous of his acquaintances in the field, which ultimately facilitated the recruitment of two more interview participants.

Overall, I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews (see table 1 below), which lasted between 43min to 93mins, amassing to over 26,000 lines of verbatim transcripts. Two of the interviews were conducted with members of staff, one of whom oversaw postgraduate education in the humanities (subsequently referred to as staff school-level), and the other one was responsible for postgraduate

education across the participating university (subsequently referred to as staff institutional level). These two interviews, which took place in the staff members' offices, were particularly useful in combination with the documents to contextualise postgraduate research education within the participating university (Zahl, 2015). The 20 remaining interviews consist of 12 individuals' accounts of their PGR experience, eight of them were interviewed twice (with a 7–11-month gap in-between). Four of the PGR-participants were master's by research students, seven were PhD students, and one of them was first interviewed as a master's student and then in the first year of their PhD.

Table1: Overview of interview participants

	Participant's pseudonym	Programme	Interview 1: study point (interview duration)	Interview 2: study point (interview duration)
1	Melissa	MA (+ 8-month extension)	Month 2 (76mins)	Month 13 (79mins)
2	Jen	MA (+ 4-month extension)	Month 2 (61mins)	Month 13 (65mins)
3	Dom	PhD	Year 2 (75mins)	Year 3 (66mins)
4	Chloe	MA, after completion: PhD at different institution	Month 9 (57mins)	PhD Year 1 (86mins)
5	Emily	PhD	Year 1 (67mins)	Year 2 (85mins)
6	Ted	PhD	Year 1 (70mins)	Year 2 (59mins)
7	Andrea	PhD	Year 1 (61mins)	Year 2 (63mins)
8	Matteo	PhD	Year 2 (74mins)	Year 2 (81mins)
9	Leo	MA (part-time)	Month 20 (93mins)	-
10	Marcus	PhD	Few weeks after viva (86mins)	-
11	Chris	PhD	Year 4 (70mins)	-
12	Tim	MA	Month 11 (67mins)	-
13	Staff – school-level		(43mins)	-
14	Staff – institutional level		(57mins)	-

In terms of procedure, once a PGR had agreed to take part in an interview, I booked a room within the participating institution's central library. Upon meeting the participants there, I thanked them for coming, and provided them with the relevant information sheets and consent forms as mentioned above. Once the consent forms were signed, I typically started the interview by asking PGR-participants which programme they were enrolled on and since when, in order to start the conversation. The interviews were guided by the interview schedules (Appendix 1) that covered certain themes, such as PGRs' journeys pre-enrolment or their social support networks throughout their studies. All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. If a participant was interviewed twice, I re-listened to the first interview usually the day prior to the second interview and individualised the second interview schedule as appropriate. For example, if a

participant mentioned being concerned about their upcoming annual assessment of progression, I would include a question specifically asking about how that went. I ended interviews by thanking participants for their time, and sent them the interview transcript (if so indicated on their consent form) once I completed transcription.

3.4.2.2. Observations

Overall, I overtly observed three different institutional settings, the humanities PGR study space, supervision meetings, and seminar sessions – as mentioned in the previous section, the settings were limited to the institutional context. As outlined in the literature review, undertaking research studies in the humanities was repeatedly described as solitary, commonly contrasted with collaborative work in laboratories in the sciences (Golde, 2005; Greene, 2015). Thus, it seemed valuable to insert myself in the attendant learning context of my sample. Namely, the participating institution provided a shared study space for all humanities PGRs, a workspace including computer desks that were available via the practice of hot-desking. The second observation setting was supervision meetings. As outlined in the previous chapter, the supervisory relationship is deemed one of the key influences on doctoral education (Sverdlik et al., 2018), yet I also suggested that the extant literature at times lacks an in-depth exploration of the matter. Therefore, as I aimed to gain insight into the PGR experience, it seemed appropriate to try to access this fundamental aspect of PGR education via observing supervision meetings. The last observation setting was that of seminar sessions. As outlined within my ethics application (Appendix 1), I had anticipated that in the course of participating in my participants' learning context, I may become aware of what I referred to as "networking activities", which I presumed would allow me to gain insight into another facet of PGR education. Two such opportunities became apparent to me, the luncheon group, which I will reflect on below, and PGR seminars, two of which I observed. Further details on the observation of each of these settings are outlined below.

Throughout, conducting non-participant observations entailed the purpose of sole observation, in terms of looking at what people were doing, listening to what they said, without actively participating in such interactions. I took fieldnotes as I was in the setting, noting details of the space, the persons present, as well as their actions and talk. My style of fieldnotes seems most compatible with Van Maanen's (1988) realist tales as they were primarily descriptive, with little (although not none) inclusion of myself in the fieldnotes. Aligned with my underlying symbolic interactionist stance, fieldnotes are viewed as a representation of the observed, as it is impossible to 'wholly' or 'objectively' describe the observed; instead, they are my interpretation of what I observed, and thus inherently selective (Emerson et al., 2001).

3.4.2.2.1. PGR study space

Initially, in the planning stages of this project, I proposed to conduct 10 one-hour observation sessions in the study space, but ceased observations after the seventh session (see Appendix 2 for an overview). This decision was not based on claiming data saturation, often conceived as ‘information redundancy’, as this concept seemingly relies on realist ontology (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which is incompatible with my above-outlined ontological stance. An alternative concept was proposed by Malterud et al. (2016): information power. In relation to interview-studies, the authors indicated that the fewer participants are needed the more relevant information a sample holds. Relating this to the PGR study space observations, I appraised these to hold rich information particularly due to the specificity and relevance to the first research aim in terms of gaining an insight into the context that PGRs inhabit, and applicability to the theoretical framework. Similar to Braun and Clarke (2021), my decision to limit PGR study space observations to seven observations, was based on judging the data as adequately contributing to the first research aim, while also considering that the aim was further addressed via additional data sources. Overall, observations of the study space extended over two months, taking place on different weekdays, at different times, and I created a ‘floorplan’ for each session, noting where PGRs were sat (Appendix 3). I was unable to observe the study space later than 14:00 due to me holding a part-time position at the time, thus my time was constrained.

I was granted access by the humanities’ administrative team, as there was an electronic gate to enter the space. Usual observations of the study space began with me entering the study space and distributing information sheets and consent forms as relevant. This was deemed relevant when participants were ‘new’, meaning I had not met them in any previous study space observations. Ethically, two aspects were of particular relevance. Firstly, in terms ongoing consent, it is not unusual that participants forget that data is being recorded once familiar with the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). To ensure participants’ ongoing consent, I tended to check with them verbally upon my or their entrance to the study space each time after they had initially signed the consent form. Secondly, to counter any potential for invading my participants’ privacy (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2017), I avoided watching people too closely. For example, it would have certainly been interesting to look over my participants’ shoulders to see if and what they were working on, but this would have clearly invaded their privacy. As outlined by the BPS (2014), observing natural settings must be respectful of individuals’ privacy. Further, I included in my reflexive notes that participants often seemed busy and under pressure, to which I certainly did not wish to add to, thus I remained as unobtrusive as possible. Typically, this meant that I would sit down on the settee and take notes of what I was observing, I would seldom walk around the study space. On rare occasions I briefly talked

to participants, as I had acquainted a few of them in the course of conducting these observations, thus pleasantries would be exchanged while ascertaining their consent.

One irregularity happened on what was going to be the third observation, which I planned to conduct on a Saturday. However, upon arrival on campus the doors to the study space were closed, I thus went to the institutional library to inquire, as it was my understanding that the study space was also open on weekends. I was ultimately not able to conduct an observation on that day, yet reflecting on this anomaly in the participating university's central library facilitated a conversation with another humanities PGR who I was familiar with from previous study space observations, enabling me to recruit another interview participant.

3.4.2.2.2. Supervision meeting observations

Considering the importance of the supervisory relationship, a tangible setting that PGRs commonly take part in, I aimed to observe as many as possible. Due to the typically private nature of and value ascribed to supervision sessions, I decided to only approach participants for recruitment with whom I had already established a positive relationship. I felt that interviews allowed participants to get to know me to some extent, as I shared some of my experiences with them on the basis of my insider-status (Berger, 2015). Thus, I asked participants who I had interviewed whether they would be happy for me to observe one of their supervision meetings. Few participants felt comfortable with a supervision observation, of course I reassured them that this is no problem, as I did not want to cause any feelings of guilt or pressure. As a result, I observed three supervision sessions (Appendix 4), two of them happened to involve the same supervisor.

In practice, upon the PGR indicating that they were happy for me to observe a supervision session, the PGR checked with their supervisor, and arranged a date that would be suitable; on one occasion the PGR agreed, their supervisor declined when the PGR asked them via email. All three supervisions took place in the supervisor's office, upon arrival I handed the PGR and supervisor information sheets (unless I emailed them prior) and consent forms, which were signed before the supervision began. Then they would hold their supervision as usual, with me sitting somewhat on the side, taking notes of what they talked about. Once the supervision session ended, I thanked both for their time again, and subsequently emailed them my observation notes if they had made the according indication on their consent forms. In terms of the trustworthiness and credibility of these sessions, a relevant comment came from one of the supervisors, who apologised after the meeting, saying that they had not paid any attention to me, that they kind of forgot that I was there. This comment implied authenticity of said session.

3.4.2.2.3. Departmental seminars

I was able to observe two departmental seminars, which emerged as an observational opportunity after entering the field and building field relations with community members. I negotiated access to these seminar sessions via the member of staff who organised the seminar series. Ultimately, they suggested two such seminars sessions which they deemed most suitable. During both seminars, I would sit at a table like all other seminar participants, and take notes of what participants were doing, of the questions that were asked, and of conversations taking place after the seminars.

After the first observation, I decided to not provide information sheets and consent forms for the second seminar observation, as it seemed rather obstructive the first time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019); it felt like people were not too interested and/or bothered about my project and me asking attendees to read and sign information sheets and consent forms was likely an annoyance. I mentioned this when emailing the staff member ahead of the second seminar, checking whether I would still be okay to conduct an observation and if they were fine with that decision. The staff member responded saying that they did not think this would be problematic, thus affirming my decision. The staff member further explained that they would not be present for the seminar on the following day, but CC'd the colleague hosting the upcoming seminar session, who assured me that I will have the opportunity to outline my project at the beginning.

3.4.2.3. Documents

In terms of sampling, a convenience sample was collected. Documents on different levels were considered, however, due to the restricted size of this thesis, I limited documents to the local level. Thus, documents on the school and institutional level were analysed via a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2013). Specifically, this included the participating university's 'Students' handbook of regulations' as well as the 'Regulation for awards' effective in 2018, when the majority of data collection took place. In addition, the humanities school handbook was included, despite not being distributed to PGRs as they were referred to the information online, thus I was provided with an in-progress version, as this was accessible to me. The collected documents amassed to over 300 pages to be analysed.

3.4.3. Reflexivity

As Berger (2015) pointed out, in qualitative research it is important to be reflexive, because the role a researcher plays with regard to their research possibly affects different aspects of processes, such as

data collection – from participant recruitment to conducting interviews. Being reflexive is a continuous and dynamic process (Finlay, 2002), which may serve as indicator of quality in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). It involves being aware and critical of one's role as a researcher and concomitant effects, and is demonstrated by presenting reflexive decisions in a detailed and transparent manner (Berger, 2015). To do so, the below details firstly how my consideration of the ongoing nature of consent affected data collection, and is followed by acknowledging my researcher positionality.

3.4.3.1. A couple of decisions demonstrating the dynamic nature of consent

Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) noted that informed consent is dependent on the participant's accurate understanding of the research project via the provided information. This seemed problematic with one of my participants, my best guess is that this was due to a language barrier. I provided my participant with the information sheet and consent form, which was signed by both of us before the interview started. I interviewed them, which went as usual, in terms of nothing out of the ordinary was talked about. However, after the interview, my participant mentioned that they would prefer if parts of what we had talked about were not mentioned in my thesis. I was rather startled by this, as it indicated my participant did not fully understand the purpose of the interview we just conducted. My best idea in the moment was to amend the consent form, so I wrote a short paragraph on the back of the consent form, saying that I would omit the relevant information from transcription. We both signed underneath the added paragraph, which seemed like the best solution to this emergent issue. However, upon reflection, I decided to fully omit the interview data of this participant, because it seems they had not fully understood the information sheet and/or the consent form, which is imperative to giving consent. My concerns were furthered by the participant not opting to receive the transcript to review if there were any further parts they wished to be omitted. Thus, ethically, it seemed most appropriate to remove this interview from my data corpus.

The most significant decision I made based on ethical reasons, was with regard to an informal 'luncheon group'. It occurred that through getting to know a number of my participants, via observing the humanities PGR study space and conducting interviews, I was invited to an informal 'luncheon'. I started attending such lunch meetings regularly, at times weekly, for over a year. I perceived that I was invited as 'Regina, the fellow PGR', rather than 'Regina, the researcher' – uncertainty regarding different roles, or identities, is a common problem in ethnographic research, in terms of becoming familiar with one's participants and being uncertain whether they talk to you as a friend or as a researcher (Goodwin et al., 2003). This uncertainty led me to question whether I should treat this as an opportunity for data collection, or not. On the one hand, it would have been valuable to collect data regarding these informal meetings to explore another aspect of PGRs' experiences, benefitting me as a researcher. On the other hand, there seemed to be an issue around ethnographic methods

being perceived as exploitative, as this is repeatedly mentioned in the literature (Goodwin et al., 2003; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Heyl, 2001; Rock, 2001; with a key example: Humphrey, 1970). Thus, I decided to participate in these informal lunches as 'Regina, the fellow PGR'. That is because, taking fieldnotes covertly, for example via making these notes after our lunch meeting, was not covered in my ethical approval (see Appendix 1): the relevant point on consent forms for observations was: "I agree to the researcher taking notes of my activities in *agreed* contexts." [emphasis added]. Alternative to covert observations, I could have asked the group if they would be okay with me taking fieldnotes, which would have constituted overt observations and thus be congruent with the consent form. But, as indicated above, it did not feel as though the invitation was extended to me as a researcher, and I was concerned that this would have altered the nature of the group's lunch meetings, which I feared may entail negative consequences. Firstly, I suspected the group may cease inviting me if they perceived me as taking advantage of the situation to collect data, potentially damaging these field relationships (Emerson et al., 2001). Instead, I felt it was valuable to foster these relationships, in hope of other data collection opportunities, especially supervision observations, as these seemed contingent on having established a trusting relationship due to the private nature of supervision meetings and the importance of them. Secondly, I did not want to alter the nature of the group's lunch meetings by me being there. This was of the utmost importance to me, due to the value I ascribed to informally interacting with fellow PGRs in my academic environment, and also considering the importance of peer interaction outlined in the literature review. This group constituted a valuable opportunity for such peer interactions, which I did not want to take away, for example by people feeling like they could not disclose and discuss certain (private) issues, without me recording these. Ultimately, I made the decision to participate as 'Regina, the fellow PGR' because ethically, my data collection needs should not be prioritised over the opportunity for my participants to interact with other PGRs in a safe space. Participating as 'Regina the fellow PGR' enabled me to establish friendly relationships with the PGRs involved. Lastly, it should be acknowledged that despite me explaining that I participated in this group as fellow PGR, rather than as a researcher, it is impossible to entirely separate these two roles. For instance, I – as a researcher – benefitted from being a part of this group, for example, as this was how I found out about a departmental conference that I subsequently attended, which led to the recruitment of further participants, as I outlined above.

3.4.3.2. Positionality as a researcher

Similar to Wan (2016), and Aarnkoivu (2020), I found myself as an insider, being a PGR while exploring PGR education, while also being somewhat of an outsider, as I did not share my participants' field of study. As Wan (2016) outlined, being a student himself facilitated a more balanced researcher-researched dynamic compared to most of the literature which has been conducted by established

scholars, thus likely enabling a more open dialogue, including the sharing of opinions and experiences, in particular with regard to supervisors. Advantages of being an insider involve access, understanding the language (including what remains unsaid), sharing an aspect of identity, and the assumption of understanding and of the shared experience, associated with greater openness and consequently greater depth of data (Berger, 2015; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Mahoney, 2007; Naaeke et al., 2011). Challenges that come with an insider status include that the assumption of similarity may prevent participants from outlining their stories fully (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), or may lead to the researcher failing to notice certain facets of the participants' experience, when they are different to the researcher's. Such challenges may be addressed via acting reflexively (Berger, 2015). Reflecting on my interviews, it seems being an insider allowed a relatively balanced dynamic, my aim was to create an atmosphere that would allow my participants to openly share their experiences. This was somewhat achieved, as apparent through participants who disclosed experiences of struggle or hardship, such as Melissa's experience of hopelessness, which is outlined in her story in the next chapter. Viewing the researcher's insider-outsider positionality as dichotomy has repeatedly been challenged, for example for being too simplistic, instead favouring a fluctuating notion of the researcher's positionality that aligns with the complexity of the human experience (Berger, 2015; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Naaeke et al., 2011). Thus, Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) suggested "*the space between*", specifically the hyphen connecting the insider and outsider, suggesting that viewing oneself as insider does not necessarily mean that all experiences with regard to the phenomenon under study will be shared. One's positionality may even shift within one conversation (Naaeke et al., 2011). Dwyer (2009) pointed out that whether researchers position themselves as insiders or outsiders does not make them better or worse researchers – although she finds her insider-status useful – rather it makes us different researchers.

Exploring the experiences of White parents of Asian children, Dwyer (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), who was an insider in this respect, found that enhancing her understanding of these experiences not only benefited her academically, but also personally, as well as her children via helping her become a better parent. I found this rather relatable with regard to my research experience and context. Especially in the earlier phases of my studies, I found it fascinating and useful to talk to PGRs who were further along their studies or had even recently submitted their thesis. Further, I would claim that me researching the PGR experience also positively affected my departmental PGR community to some extent. Most noticeably, I was taken aback as some of my participants told me about departmental seminars constituting a welcome opportunity to interact with their peers. This left me wondering why such seminars did not take place in my PGR environment. Experiencing the early months of my PhD journey as rather isolating, I felt the need to act, thus voiced and discussed this with others in my

school in the role of being a PGR representative, ultimately leading to launching the school-wide 'Tuesday Seminar' series at the beginning of my second year, which has been carried on since.

As aforementioned, and as demonstrated via the previous example, being reflexive is an ongoing process, which of course extends beyond data collection, which may be indicated via transparency (Berger, 2015). Transparency is intended to be demonstrated in the last section of this chapter, as I outline how I analysed my data.

3.5. Data analysis

I analysed my data in three ways, via a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2013), the construction of participant stories, and via reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). Each analytic procedure was coupled with advantages, as well as aiming to fulfil certain purposes, as detailed below.

3.5.1. Qualitative content analysis of documents

As mentioned above, the documents (students' handbook of regulations (2018); regulations for awards (2018); the humanities PGR handbook; observations of the PGR study space, research seminars, and supervision sessions; and two staff interviews) underwent qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2013). Conducting a qualitative content analysis, which is somewhat similar to a codebook thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), seemed an appropriate method of analysis due to its descriptive nature, which is systematically enacted through the process of building a coding frame, which is at the core of this method (Schreier, 2013). Further, a qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to focus on selected aspects of meaning, which was useful due to the number of pages to be analysed (Schreier, 2013). I implemented this via generating the overarching category: *Context shapes 'being a PGR'* to facilitate the contextual focus necessary. Clearly, this was informed by the socio-cultural conceptualising outlined in the first chapter, presupposing that PGRs (and their learning experience) are influenced by the context they participate in. Thus, the data analysis was conducted through this lens, the subsequent generation of main- and subcategories was mainly data driven. Following Schreier's (2013) suggestions, I built a coding frame using selected documents (Students' handbook of regulations (2018); the humanities PGR handbook; fieldnotes of one observation of the PGR study space; of one research seminar, and of one supervision session, as well as one staff interview). The pilot phase was conducted using the institutional regulations for awards, the second staff interview, and fieldnotes of one observation of each the above-mentioned settings. The pilot phase resulted in minor re-consideration of the coding frame, the finalised version of which (including category definitions) can be viewed in Appendix 5. The analysis process was conducted utilising the software package NVivo, and I kept a reflexive diary within the memo section, which proved particularly useful in the process of clarifying and defining categories and subcategories. An example of my thinking is provided via the following:

Maybe *contract-like consequences* is more about a description, for example, "If you breach the code of conduct, you could be subject to disciplinary proceedings." (Students' Handbook, p. iv), so "if you do this wrong/don't follow this [rule]: these are the consequences", whereas *non-ideal procedures* actually outlines what these procedures are. I think that's the distinction here. Think of new name, maybe "Procedures in case of non-ideal occurrences"

An overview of the generated main categories, subcategories, and sub-subcategories is depicted in the table below.

Table 2: Overview of qualitative content analysis

Main category	Subcategories	Sub-subcategories
Different ways of addressing PGRs	Considering PGR as person	
	Contract-like consequences of non-adherence to rules	
Institutional provisions	Opportunities for academic engagement	
	Procedures in case of non-ideal occurrences	
	Signposting to services or material providing advice and support	
	Supervisor provisions	
PGR responsibilities	Communication	
	Knowing and performing the rules	
Programmatic characteristics	Programme rules	
	Flexibility	
Specific school context	PGR study space	Available facilities
		Dedicated workspace
		PGRs have 'their' space
		Space for peer interaction
Supervisory relationship	Supervisor positioned as 'in charge'	
		Relationship rules
		Supervisor requirements
	Three observations	Constructive conversation
		Sent work
		Nature of the relationship
	Talking positively about PGR and/or their work	

3.5.2. Construction of participant stories

As the qualitative content analysis enabled a macro-view on PGR education in terms of the construction of the context, it seemed suitable to construct participant stories, allowing a micro-view on how PGRs navigate that context. Constructing the stories aimed to present an in-depth insight into each PGR's story as a whole. Relying on a thematic analysis as sole type of analysis would entail a rather fragmented insight into PGRs' experiences, as themes tend to be dislocated from their contextual surrounding (Schofield, 2013; Snape, 2019). The storied approach to analysis represents an extension of my ontological stance, specifically symbolic interactionism. As aforementioned, making meaning is an interpretative process (Blumer, 1969), and the stories seem a suitable way of representing my participants' subjective understanding of their experience (Tovey & Manson, 2004).

Yet, it must be acknowledged that the stories also somewhat represent my interpretation of data, due to my central role in constructing them, being influenced by my ontological and theoretical stance. For the focus to remain with participants, all stories were narrated in the third person, and when writing the stories, I frequently incorporated my participants' words, as indicated by the use of quotation marks. The procedure of writing the stories began by me choosing to create eight stories, as I deemed the data of these participants (mostly interview data) as particularly in-depth while also demonstrating diverse experiences (Snape, 2019). As such, the chosen participants were of different ages, some were master's, others PhD students, home as well as EU-students, and they carried varying levels of responsibility outside their academic engagements. I aimed to convey richness, depth, and detail within each story, remaining close to the data throughout, and avoiding interpretation so participants' understanding of their PGR experience would remain on the forefront. The first story I constructed was written from memory, directly after reading the interview transcripts. I then started taking notes while reading through transcripts, which I would rely on when then writing the stories so I would not miss to include certain details, which became my preferred method of constructing the stories. In order to protect my participants anonymity, certain details featuring each story were changed. Due to the limited space available this thesis features four stories.

3.5.3. Reflexive thematic analysis

Having gained insight into the PGR context as well as PGRs' lived experience, all interview transcripts and supervision fieldnotes were analysed thematically. After zooming into individuals' experience via the PGR stories, the reflexive thematic analysis (TA) enables the generation of collective meaning, via identifying patterns of meaning across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflecting on the central role of researcher subjectivity and reflexivity and the active role in interpreting data and creating themes, Braun and Clarke (2019; 2021) more recently refer to their preferred method of analysis as reflexive TA. This is suitably in line with my interpretivist stance, particularly apparent via relying on symbolic interactionism. Further, reflexive TA entails the understanding of themes as "*patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept*" rather than a topic summary (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 39), which the fourth research aim is in line with, as I aim to understand the PGR experience via interpreting the data through the theoretical lens outlined in the first chapter, thus the "organising concept" derives from my theoretical understanding of the data. As Braun and Clarke initially outlined in their popular 2006-paper, the flexibility of their general approach requires researchers to be vocal about a number of decisions to sufficiently detail one's use of thematic analysis. Firstly, my analysis is rather theory-driven, than data-driven, as my understanding of the PGR experience is shaped by the theorising outlined in the first chapter. This is apparent in some codes

clearly stemming from my theoretical understanding (*supervisory relationship - interpersonal*) while others are data driven (*disciplinary differences*). Secondly, after the qualitative content analysis and the construction of the PGR stories remained rather close to the data, the development of my themes relied on interpretative work. Lastly, regarding epistemological positions, my contextualist stance seems to fall somewhat in between the realist-constructionist spectrum (Braun & Clarke, 2006), due to the focus on the individuals' understanding of their experience, stemming from my symbolic interactionist stance (Blumer, 1969), while also concentrating on contextual influences on PGR learning, stemming from my socio-cultural stance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998).

In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), the first step of data-familiarisation was facilitated through the verbatim transcription of the interviews. After I uploaded all interview transcripts onto the data analysis software NVivo, I read through the whole data set and noted initial coding ideas (for example *individual ways of working, or paid work*). As I began the second step, coding, I decided to keep a table with all codes and their intended meaning, as I found keeping track of the exact meanings I ascribed to category-names proved as useful practice when building the coding frame during the qualitative content analysis. Another practice I had previously engaged in while conducting the qualitative content analysis, was the use of the memo-function on NVivo to keep track of my thoughts as a reflexive diary. As per Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestion that theory-driven analysis may involve keeping certain questions in mind while coding, this meant paying attention to interpersonal relationships (as per Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). Further, based on Wenger (1998) conceptualising identity as nexus of multi-membership across different CoPs, and on the commonly experienced struggle of negotiating a work-life-balance as outlined in the literature review, I was mindful of such instances which were ultimately coded under *non-academic commitments*. Relying on Bronfenbrenner's (1979b; 2005) theorising, I was cognisant of distal influences on the PGR experience (such as *help through uni*).

As per Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggestions, I coded as broadly as possible, thus extracts were coded under as many codes as suitable. This is illustrated in Appendix 6, which features a couple of pages of coded extracts of the second interview with Melissa. This example is depicted via screenshots from NVivo, the so-called coding stripes visualise my coding of the interview extract. I worked systematically, in the sense that I coded one interview transcript after the other, paying equal attention to each transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My coding process may also be described as organic (Braun & Clarke, 2021), as my codes were not fixed, rather the codes developed as my understanding of the data grew. One example of this seems reflected within the aforementioned table

of codes I produced, detailing the codes' meaning, which also featured a column for notes. One such note was in reference to the code *Supervisory Relationship – supervisory expertise*:

Previously *subject expertise* → through theoretical lens though, also included instances where expertise is conceived through CoP lens, i.e., incl. knowing “how to be” (it’s like that’s needed when PGR is *not knowing?*). Example: Adam knowing what’s necessary for Matteo in case he wants to remain in academia.

This example also reflects that my analysis was guided by the theoretical framework I presented in the first chapter. In this instance supervisory expertise was tied not only to subject expertise, but also to understanding supervisors as oldtimers in the relevant CoP, thus knowledgeable about the prevalent practices within the CoP.

The third step of analysis involved the search for themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006) noted, this is where the focus changes to the broader level of meaning, beyond each code. The authors further suggested that conducting a reflexive TA is a recursive, rather than linear or procedural process. This was the case within my data analysis, for instance I began noting theme-ideas during the coding-phase, two such examples were:

Currently thinking *not knowing* has a lot of different facets, might be a good theme? Would serve well to provide evidence against assumption of expertise + could connect with transition literature and CoP [in terms of] being in the periphery.

Just thought *disciplinary differences* and *disciplinary practices* are really intertwined (especially for Andrea and Chris who both have changed disciplines, maybe that’s why these are very apparent in their interviews) – might fit into a theme of “how to do a master’s/PhD with *individual ways of working?*”

As mentioned above, within a reflexive TA, themes are conceived as patterns of meaning, based on a fundamental concept (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which in my case derives from my understanding of the data as guided by my socio-cultural theoretical framework. Thus, I would assess my analysis process as somewhat of a combination of bottom-up and top-down procedures – on the one hand, the coding was mostly data-driven, yet the search for themes was directed by my understanding of the data, which is of socio-cultural nature. In addition to the aforementioned creation of a table including code-meanings as well as the NVivo-memo serving as reflexive diary, I also created a document named “ThemeGeneration”. Within this document, I began to collate codes under the initial theme ideas I had noted previously. At this stage, the meaning underpinning the three chosen themes were: firstly, despite the prevalent assumption of expertise, participants predominantly shared experiences

contributing to the notion of *now knowing*. Such experiences complicated PGRs' participation, whereas seldom experiences of expertise enabled their participation. Supervisory expertise may serve as mediator of PGRs *not knowing*, due to supervisors' familiarity with the attendant CoP. Again, referring to the non-linear process of data analysis, facets of this theme were already apparent in earlier notes of my thinking, as apparent in the above quote about the development of the code *Supervisory Relationship – supervisory expertise*. The second theme seemed particularly clearly linked to my theoretical framework, illustrating the close connection between relationships and learning, as the former may hinder or enable the latter. This echoes Vygotsky's operationalisation of learning as being distributed in the social context (ZPD, MKO), and more specifically Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) understanding of successful interpersonal relationships preceding learning relationships. The third theme was generated based on PGRs' experiences of aloneness as well as engagement, which was individually negotiated. It seemed valuable to focus on how differently PGRs participate in their studies.

These themes were subsequently reviewed via the practical NVivo-function enabling the easy access to all extracts under one code, and conjointly to each theme. As per Braun and Clarke (2006), re-coding is to be expected due to its continuous nature, which, for example, was the case regarding the codes surrounding interpersonal relationships. It became apparent that I had coded these too broadly, and thus re-coded the instances into smaller facets (such as *engaging in academic context – peers – interpersonal, being on the same page*; or *supervisory relationship – interpersonal, friendly*). With regard to the themes, it became apparent that the scope of the second theme was too broad. Thus, the focus of the theme was placed on interpersonal relationships, and the concomitant effects on participation. Due to the nature of this project being focused on PGRs' learning, their references to interpersonal relationships were most frequently with regard to the academic context. Therefore, the theme was slightly altered in terms of focusing on the hindering and enabling effects of interpersonal relationships with peers and supervisors on PGRs' participation, with a brief consideration of contextual influences on the formation of such interpersonal relationships. Regarding the third theme, this was further refined through reviewing it in relation to the data set. Particularly the codes *individual ways of working* and *individual ways of viewing things* provided insight into PGRs' individually interpreted understanding of and participation in their studies.

The penultimate phase, defining and naming the themes, begins with the establishment of a thematic map, which may be viewed in Appendix 7, which is followed by the table of codes outlining the meaning I ascribed to each (Appendix 8). In order to provide a succinct overview of the themes see the table below, depicting the themes I generated and the codes I collated under each of the themes. Italicised codes (such as *Previous influence*) are hierarchically above codes (right column, such as

Disciplinary differences), and underlined codes (such as Supervisory relationship) are highest level codes.

Table 3: Overview of the codes as collated under each theme

Theme	Higher-level codes	Code
Expertise & not knowing		Disciplinary differences
		Not knowing
	<i>Previous influence</i>	Way of working
		Topic
	<u>Supervisory RS (relationship)</u>	Supervisory expertise
	<i>Supervisory RS – negative</i>	Lacking subject expertise
	<i>UG-PGR difference</i>	Lacking feedback
		Lacking structure
Interpersonal relationships and participation	<u>Engaging in academic context - peers</u>	<i>Interpersonal</i> – Not on the same page
		<i>Interpersonal</i> – Being in the same boat
		<i>Interpersonal</i> , friendly
		<i>Interpersonal</i> , knowing each other
		Funding
	<i>Help through</i>	Consortium
		Department
		Uni
		Lacking understanding of non-PGRs
	<i>Previous influence</i>	Supervisor
	<i>Supervisory RS – interpersonal</i>	Friendly
		How are you doing
		PGR considering supervisor beyond supervisorhood
		Interest
		Supportive
		Knowing each other
		Encouraging
	<i>Supervisory RS – negative</i>	Not on the same page
		Uni-process not working from PGR POV
	Individual ways of being a PGR	
<u>Engaging in academic context</u>		Conferences

		Departmental seminars
		Publishing
		Social media
		Teaching
		Individual way of working
		Individual way of viewing things
		Mental health
		Post-PGR prospects
		PRO PGR course
		PRO participating uni
	<u>Non-academic commitments</u> - <i>Paid work</i>	Positive aspects
		Time constraint
	<i>Support</i>	Family
		Partner

The thematic map was developed in interaction with the last step, being mindful of its usefulness to the reader, for example by not over-complicating the visualisation via illustrating each possible connection between codes, and by colour-coding the codes according to themes. The last step involves producing a report, which is presented below. I took notes of particularly exemplary extracts throughout the analysis process, and took care to present extracts across the whole of the data set, representing the views and understandings of all participants, and indicating the prevalence of each theme across the data set.

4. Findings and Discussion

This large chapter is organised in five subchapters. The chapters are broadly related to method of analysis, yet it must be noted that this is not a strict separation; presenting my findings in this way is rather for ease of structure and reading, and they also each serve a variety of purposes. The first subchapter mainly presents the findings of my qualitative content analysis, which aligns particularly well with the first research aim, as the extant practices become apparent through analysing institutional and school-level documents. The second subchapter, which comprises the participant stories that I constructed, allows an insight into the PGRs' experiences, thus addressing the second research aim, which is underpinned by my ontological stance. Representing their whole stories is in line with the previously expressed importance of considering participants' context as per socio-cultural notions, while also remaining close to their telling of their experiences, thus representing their interpretation of what it is like to be a PGR, which aligns with my symbolic interactionist stance. The three themes I generated via the reflexive TA I conducted constitute the third, fourth, and fifth subchapter. The generation of meaning across the data set via interpretative work concomitant to the reflexive TA enables the exploration of PGRs' shifting identities as per the third aim, as well as an understanding of the PGR experience via the framework outlined in the first chapter, as per the fourth aim. As the aforementioned division of subchapters according to method of analysis, also the outline of the aims as aligned with each type of analysis is not a strict separation, as each aim is addressed to some extent via each type of analysis. For example, attendant practices will be discussed following participants' stories, and PGRs' lived experience will be presented in the findings of the reflexive TA. Highlighting the shortfalls and benefits of each type of analysis, findings will be intertwined where appropriate, to enrich the overall picture of PGR education.

The first subchapter, *'Setting the scene – situating PGRs' experiences'* is a relatively short chapter outlining the context and subsequent implications for PGRs' participation, thus conceiving PGR learning from a macro-perspective. The second subchapter, *'Under the spotlight – shining the light on PGRs' experiences as a whole'* introduces the stories of selected PGRs, allowing a micro-perspective on their lived experience of being a PGR, taking advantage of the opportunity to present their stories as wholly as they outlined them to me. The four stories are followed by a brief discussion outlining the differences in the individual navigation of the PGR context, focusing on the structure of the PGR context, as well as on peer engagement. This is followed by the presentation of the findings and discussion resulting from the reflexive TA, with each theme constituting one subchapter. As outlined in the previous chapter, my interpretative work concomitant to the reflexive TA was underpinned by my theoretical conception of PGR learning, specifically understanding it as identities shifting with

participation, as outlined in the first chapter. Thus, the intertwined processes of the negotiation of meaning and identity are prevalent across the discussion of the findings. At first *'Expertise and not knowing'* discusses the repeatedly mentioned assumption of expertise prevalent in PGR education (Tobbell et al., 2013b) by providing evidence for and against this notion. Further, supervisory expertise is discussed in its mediating role relating to instances of not knowing. The second theme, *'Interpersonal relationships and participation'*, concentrates on PGRs' interpersonal relationships in the academic context, namely their relationships with fellow PGRs as well as their supervisors. Various facets of unsuccessful and successful relationships will be presented and their concomitant influence on PGRs' participation and identity development will be discussed. Lastly, the influence of the attendant context on relationship formation will be outlined. The third theme *'Individual ways of being a PGR'* firstly presents PGRs' individual experiences of aloneness and engagement, followed by their negotiations underpinning their decision to study on the PGR level as well as their way of working. Frequently the participants' extracts presented within the themes are rather long, which is based on what was outlined in the methodology; providing sufficient context enables insight into the interpretative work I conducted (Goldblatt et al., 2011), which is also provided when referring to participants' stories when relevant. Moreover, the length of extracts I provide allows me to convey my participants' voices authentically, which reflects the symbolic interactionist underpinning of this project. Lastly, quotes are preceded by the name of my participant, when it is followed by [1] or [2] this refers to the quote stemming from our first or second interview, respectively. When quotes include "R", it refers to me, the researcher.

4.1. Setting the scene – situating PGRs' experiences

As conceptualised in the first chapter, learning is understood as identities shifting with participation (Turner & Tobbell, 2018). But, to understand participation, it is imperative to explore what it is that PGRs participate in: their context. The PGR context, which is at the core of this short chapter, features the community's practices (Wenger, 1998) and is influenced by interconnected contextual systems, as described by Bronfenbrenner's (1979b; 2005). As briefly mentioned in the preceding chapter, wider documents were considered for analysis, but had to be excluded due to the restricted scope of this thesis, such as documents concomitant to the Bologna process (for example the Salzburg Principles). The UK has been involved in the Bologna process from the outset, which was set in motion to form the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which was established in 2010, aiming for the mutual recognition of qualifications and enhanced mobility across the countries in the EHEA (Reilly, 2016). Further, national documents were considered for analysis (such as the QAA's (2014) UK Quality Code for Higher Education) as they constitute the national-level implementation of said European principles. Needless to say, all above-mentioned documents would likely make a valuable contribution to my analysis, yet this would go beyond the scope of this project, particularly considering the above-mentioned ontological imperative to explore the individual experience. Instead, the more proximal enactment of these distal principles and regulations constitutes the focus of this brief chapter, via focusing on the findings of the qualitative content analysis of institutional and school-level documents.

As depicted in the coding frame (Appendix 5), six main categories were generated under the overarching category *Context shapes 'being a PGR'*. Due to this project's central focus on the individual experience, the space within this thesis to consider the context PGRs inhabit is somewhat restricted, thus the following coverage of main categories is in varying detail. This qualitative content analysis was utilised as a rather descriptive tool to understand data, and consequently the PGR's context, which in the following presentation of findings is enriched through the socio-cultural framework established in the first chapter, and interweaved with pertinent literature as well as the lived experience of navigating the context. One important note is that there will be no direct quotes from institutional regulations or handbooks throughout this chapter or in the appendix (within the coding frame) as these documents are publicly available, thus a quick internet search would likely disclose the participating institution.

4.1.1. Programmatic characteristics

This main category encompasses codes that are typical of PGR programmes at the participating institution. The two subcategories represent two opposites of how 'being a PGR' is constructed. On

one hand, the subcategory *programme rules* comprises rules that govern PGR programmes, in particular connoting that there is one way of being, or one way of how things may proceed. As outlined in the coding frame (Appendix 5), there is a shared facet under this subcategory with *knowing and performing the rules* (under *PGR responsibility*). The former is applicable when there is no explicit reference to the PGR (for example, that all submissions must be in English), whereas the latter is characterised by the PGR's part in upholding the rules.

On the other hand, *flexibility* determines that there is more than one way to proceed, such as PGRs being able to enrol full-time or part-time, to present a thesis in a non-standard format, or to choose between various options at the end of one's standard enrolment period, dependent on the individual PGR's progress. However, it must be pointed out that frequently, despite the existence of various options of how PGRs may proceed, the chosen option is coupled with certain consequences. Thus, although some degree of flexibility is in place through the option of different paths to take, each of these paths is coupled with concomitant rules. For example, respective to the above-outlined examples, different modes of study are coupled with different, yet set timelines, and certain attendance monitoring rules, and presenting a thesis in a non-standard format is contingent on institutionally validated guidelines being in place (detailing rules regarding the submission and examination of the work, amongst others). And each path a PGR might continue after their standard enrolment period comes with subsequent rules, for example a PGR may apply to enrol for additional research or writing time, but there are certain timelines in place for each option, as well as for any subsequent paths.

Overall, it seems that despite some degree of flexibility, PGR programmes are governed by set rules. Situating the participating institution in the wider context of being a member of the EHEA, the concomitant macro-influence is apparent on the more local (institutional and school) level, enacted through regulations, which demonstrates Bronfenbrenner's (1979b) notion that the contextual systems are interconnected. This wide, EHEA-concomitant influence seems apparent via the first of the ten Salzburg Principles (European University Association, 2005), outlining original research as a core component of doctoral training, which is echoed on the national level, via the QAA's Characteristics Statements for Doctoral Degrees (2015a, p. 3; 2020, p. 3), stating that an "original contribution to knowledge in [one's] subject, field, or profession" is required of all UK doctorates. Impacting the more proximal, institutional level of PGR education, the Regulations for Awards state that the doctoral award is contingent on the demonstration of new knowledge via original research. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that higher education institutions do not exist in a vacuum, instead they are situated in a wider context with concomitant influences on the proximal PGR context. A detailed exploration of such influences far exceeds the scope of this thesis, yet it is ontologically

valuable to demonstrate that PGRs are not solitarily bound to departmental, school, or institutional (proximal) regulations, but to values enacted through these, values which underpin a much wider (macro) European context.

4.1.2. PGR responsibilities

As the name suggests, instances fell under this main category when they outlined what a PGR must or should do. This further encompasses expectations of PGRs, as an expectation (often voiced by the institution through the analysed documents) connotes responsibility to contribute to its fulfilment. One subcategory is *communication*, conveying that it is on the PGR to communicate issues or difficulties as appropriate. Intersecting with the second subcategory; *knowing and performing the rules*, PGRs seem responsible for knowing who to contact dependent on their issue. Focusing on the second subcategory, *the rules* of 'being a PGR' are expressed on different levels. On the school level this encompasses, for example, having to swipe one's ID card at a certain place and in regular intervals. On the institutional level, the code of conduct may serve as example of 'how to be a PGR', as it features examples of appropriate and inappropriate conduct that any member of the institution must adhere to. Lastly, this subcategory encompasses the knowing (which is commonly implied), adhering to and performing of the rules.

Overall, it seems that the onus of action lies with the PGR, for example with regard to *communication*. From a CoP perspective (Wenger, 1998), what appears valued is the PGR being proactive, such as communicating any difficulties or problems. For example, in the humanities PGR handbook, PGRs are informed that all they need to do is ask in order to get help from their supervisory team. Relating this to the literature review, it has been established that PGRs struggle with disclosing difficulties, particularly to members of staff, may they be of academic nature or related to their mental health (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012; Kumar & Aitchison, 2018; McAlpine et al., 2012; Waight & Giordano, 2018). If PGRs do not communicate the difficulties they experience to their supervisory team, a trusted member of staff, fellow PGRs, or university services, their unfavourable situation may persist, which may lead to the PGR straying into the periphery, potentially withdrawing. However, the purpose of explicating this problematic situation is not to blame the institution, nor the PGR. Instead, it seems to be inherent to PGR education. As outlined at the beginning of the literature review, doctoral and master's by research degrees share being rooted in independent research (QAA, 2018). Although initially entering higher education via an undergraduate degree constitutes a shift in independence from secondary education (Baker, 2018), the practice of independence on the PGR level is qualitatively different. This is apparent via the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2014), as holders of

bachelor's degrees have typically acquired skills such as taking initiative and personal responsibility, holders of master's degrees are additionally characterised by their ability to learn independently, and holders of doctoral degrees are able to work largely autonomously. The context requires PGRs to become increasingly independent as they progress through their studies; as mentioned in the first chapter, becoming independent researchers – via a shift from dependence to independence – is a frequently expressed goal of doctoral studies (Gardner, 2008; Mantai, 2019b; Inouye & McAlpine, 2019). This notion of independence was echoed by Tobbell et al.'s (2010) participants, whose successful participation was complicated by it. Thus, it seems that the way the context constructs PGR education via the notion of independence, based on the onus of activity being with the PGR, evident via *PGR responsibilities*, likely impedes participation and thus learning for PGRs.

4.1.3. Different ways of addressing PGRs

When analysing the institutional documents, it became apparent – unsurprisingly perhaps, as the purpose of these documents is to set out the rules governing PGR education – that they mainly addressed PGRs in rather formal ways. A common practice seemed to be the outlining of rules, followed by stating the consequences PGRs will face in case they do not follow these rules, frequently disciplinary procedures, or being withdrawn. Such instances were coded under the subcategory *contract-like consequences of non-adherence to rules*. As this seemed the common way of addressing PGRs within the documents, it was particularly noticeable when PGRs were addressed differently, perhaps considering them beyond their studenthood. These noticeably fewer instances were subsequently coded under *considering PGR as person*.

As referred to in the conceptual chapter, Tobbell et al. (2010) explicated that inflexible university practices problematically do not consider students' non-academic life aspects, instead focus on their studenthood only. Turner and Percy-Smith (2020), through a CoP lens, analysed documents related to the UK care system in order to identify reified practices. Despite the difference in research focus, the authors' suggestions appear applicable. They pointed out that documents (such as the Care Leavers Strategy) conveyed a concretised stance of how, for example preparing care leavers for independence, should be gone about, seemingly similar to how the institutional documents analysed for this project govern PGR education. The authors further argued that the 'principles of good parenting' consider parenting in a vacuum, rather than in context, which seems akin to the students' handbook's university and PGR charters featuring bullet point lists, seemingly assuming PGR education is limited to the institutional context. Noticeably, Turner & Percy-Smith (2020 p. 5) perceived that "The cared for child is conceptualised in the documentation as a future citizen and needs driven service user

rather than a living feeling being.”. This notion of considering a person solely within the context in which the document exists is apparent in *contract-like consequences of non-adherence to rules* (as well as within *procedures in case of non-ideal occurrences*, and *knowing and performing the rules*). This may be problematic, because – as outlined in the previous chapters – PGRs’ learning is influenced by aspects outside the academic context. For instance, their academic participation is likely complicated when students struggle to balance their personal, professional, and academic life aspects (Martinez et al., 2013), which may be due to experiencing stress or tensions of negotiating multiple identities (Coffman et al., 2016). As mentioned above however, the purpose of explicating this is not to blame either party, as it seems documents (especially of the regulatory kind) are inherently ill-suited to consider people’s, in this case PGRs’, whole humanness, beyond, for example, their academic context. Therefore, considering the significance ascribed to relationships thus far within this thesis, it is imperative to find opportunities where PGRs are conceived beyond their studenthood, as the documents governing PGR education seem to primarily encompass the formal aspect of their experience.

4.1.4. Institutional provisions

As suggested in the name, pieces of text are coded under this main category when referring to, for example, procedures or services that are in place to benefit PGR education. This is not limited to institution-level provisions, but also encompasses the school-level. “Provisions” carries a broad meaning in this case, as evident in the various subcategories. *Signposting to services or material providing advice and support* is a straightforward subcategory, encompassing instances where PGRs are provided with further information or links they may access. Aligning with *communication*, establishing contact is contingent on the PGR’s initiative. *Supervisor provisions* connotes the institutional-level provisions and rules regarding the supervisory team, for example, upon accepting a PGR the institution will ensure adequate supervision. Another aspect mentioned in one of the staff interviews was the institution providing supervisor training, which apparently not all supervisors welcomed, whereas the interviewee found this more than appropriate considering the impact of supervision on PGRs, as established in the literature review.

Procedures in case of non-ideal occurrences is one of the aforementioned consequences of *knowing and following the rules* (under *PGR responsibilities*), when rules are not followed, as this would constitute a *non-ideal occurrence*. In addition to the institutional point of view of what may constitute *non-ideal occurrences* (such as not adhering to the code of conduct), also the PGR’s point of view is encompassed under this subcategory, via, for example, complaints procedures. Text is coded under

this subcategory when the procedural details are clearly outlined, rather than solely referred or signposted to (in which case text may be coded under *contract-like consequences of non-adherence to rules*). The above outlined lack of humanness within documents is apparent under this subcategory through the formality with which the procedures are detailed – yet, as mentioned this formal tone does align with the purpose of the document being to outline *the rules*.

Opportunities for academic engagement refers to concrete opportunities for academic engagement which are arranged by the institution. For example, during one of the study space observations I took note of a poster which advertised a departmental conference within the school. This subcategory also includes research seminars, which are organised on the school, or departmental level, by staff members. Thus, these seminars are not strictly institutionally organised events, but the analysed documents indicated that it is institutional responsibility to provide the opportunity for PGRs to attend research seminars. I was able to observe two of these seminars, specifically within my participants' humanities school. On both occasions a staff member acted as host, introducing the speaker, who presented their work, followed by time for questions from the audience. The seminars were attended by PGRs as well as members of staff. Before the second seminar observation, I had undertaken an observation, therefore I was in the humanities building, which allowed me to see the rush of staff members locking their offices as they made their way to the research seminar. Reflecting on this, I deemed this a suitable representation of staff involvement in the apparent research community and culture within the department, which is a continuously problematic aspect of PGR education according to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (Pitkin, 2020). Within the observed research seminars, two types of engagement seemed apparent; firstly, engagement with the material presented by the speaker, and secondly engagement with people. The latter constituted not only asking questions in response to the speaker's presentation, but also informal conversation which usually took place before and after the seminar. After one of the seminars Vicky (a staff member) introduced Jen (a PGR) to newly enrolled PGRs, clearly demonstrating her understanding of the importance of forming interpersonal relationships.

4.1.5. Specific school context

Text was coded under this main category when it was specific to the humanities school, which the participants belong to. The data coded within this category largely stemmed from observational fieldnotes and staff interviews. At the core of this main category is the *PGR study space* and the further sub-subcategories *available facilities*, *PGRs have 'their' space*, *dedicated workspace*, and *space for peer interaction*. As depicted on the floorplans (Appendix 4), the humanities PGR study space is

equipped with kitchen and printing facilities, as well as lockers, all of which the PGRs utilised during observations. As outlined in one staff (school-level) interview and one PGR-interview, the prior PGR study space consisted of outdated, individual research offices in a different building, so both interviewees viewed the new study space as improvement. Yet it seems that there was some sense of desire for individual spaces, opposed to the hot-desking arrangement in the new study space, which is apparent via *PGRs have 'their' space*. Participants have expressed this desire physically, 'reserving' *their* desk via leaving books or personal items on the desks. I monitored this over several observations, on one occasion I counted 36 of 52 desks laden with piles of books, mugs, or letter trays, amongst other things. The desire for one's own desk is further evident in the floorplans (Appendix 4), particularly with regard to P12 as well as P17 and P18, who repeatedly occupied the same desks.

The remaining two subcategories seem somewhat at odds. The definition of *dedicated workspace* includes the notion of silence, based on the humanities PGR handbook describing it as quiet shared office space for work and study only. This conception of the space was affirmed by a sign placed in the entrance area of the study space, which pointed out that "This is a quiet study area, please respect those who are working and keep the noise to a minimum – Thank you", as noted in the fieldnotes of one observation. In contrast, *space for peer interaction* connotes PGRs conversing, about academic or non-academic matters. Nevertheless, the codes under this subcategory commonly connote the notion of silence, as PGRs were usually talking quietly or whispering as well as keeping their conversations brief, as if they did not want to be too disruptive. I reflected on this during one of the observations, noting that "Despite people occasionally talking to one another, they usually do so briefly and quietly, so overall it remains quiet within the study space.". But, of course, individual experiences differ, and in favour of presenting a nuanced insight into the PGR study space, the following quote stems from Leo, who elaborated on his understanding of the PGR study space towards the end of our interview.

Leo: Yeah, there is a lot of noise [externally intruding into the study space], I mean basically, that's why I use that space as a social space, rather than a research space, I mean the thing is and, and one of my mates, who is one of the lecturers here, he said the same thing, he said "That space, if you wanna do work, go somewhere else, that space is for researchers to, to discuss and talk and to get to know each other and to work together", to socialise in the sense of understanding what each other are doing, and maybe do a bit of work, and... but you can't sit there and work...

R: in silence

Yeah, 'cause, one or two people are in there, and the lady thankfully now has left, she was a fucking pain in the arse, she was "Could you be quiet, because b-b-b" and all we were doing was having a chat in the kitchen, getting to know people, and as this lecturer says, that's what that space is for, that's why there are so many researchers together, so that you can speak to other disciplines, and you can understand what they're doing, so you can go "Oh you're doing that?", one of the guys [...] we were talking about how I could do my study and he said "Oh

well, we use this type of study”, he’s from a completely different field, and yet I’ve learnt how to approach a specific type or way of doing a study from him. How did I do that? I was talking to him in the kitchen, so, you know, that’s why that space is so good, but the idea that that’s a work space (.) that that’s an academic space, I think, I think it is a work space, but I don’t think it’s, I don’t think it’s a (.) a writing space (.) you can read, you can do whatever, but the noise and everything else is a problem as well, but I think anybody who, you know, realistically, would, if they want to really work, would go somewhere else, hide in a corner, you know, because I think what we do there is the thing to do, “What are you doing?” – “I’m doing this” – “No way, I’m d-d-d-d”, you know, so that, that to me is why that is good. We used to be over in [another building], in a crappy little research office, it was rubbish, [...] it was a pathetic place. So [the new PGR study space] has really been a massive bonus, despite the noise, but I think the noise, like I say, you know, and the space shouldn’t be just for, you know, you could put your headphones on, and get on with something, if you really wanna do that, but I think it’s got a different dynamic, it should have different dynamics, because in this modern age of research, none of us are historians and none of us are psychologists, and none of us are sociologists, we have to be a mixture, of everything. I have to include sociology in my history, [...] we can learn a lot from each other and if we start actually saying, you know, “You must be quiet because you’re talking” – not learning anything, all you’re doing is putting me down, you’re not helping me.

The interaction Leo described with “that lady” seems to relate to the potential of developing negative social relationships in shared working spaces (Morrison & Macky, 2017). In contrast, Leo’s interactions with others in the shared space seemed to contribute to his development as a researcher, to his participation in the academic context, for instance through learning about different ways of approaching a study. Of course, there is no ideal study space that will satisfy all PGRs within one institution, based on PGRs’ idiosyncratic understanding of the space. Following the ontological stance outlined in the previous chapter, it must be acknowledged that PGRs’ understanding and use of the same study space are individual, yet they coexist in it with others whose understanding and use may differ. This may lead to PGRs being at odds with each other (as Leo’s description of interaction demonstrated), potentially compromising each other’s way of being within the study space as a consequence, which may ultimately hinder PGRs’ engagement.

4.1.6. Supervisory relationship

Data stemming from documents, staff interviews, as well as supervision observations were coded under this main category, which consequently comprises various facets. Firstly, *supervisor positioned as ‘in charge’* frequently referred to instances requiring supervisors’ authorisation, for example via their signature, for PGR absences, or forms like the research support plan. Secondly, *relationship rules* encompasses instances which govern the relationship per se, or the whole team more generally, with further sub-subcategories being *supervisor* and *PGR requirements*. This may indicate that both parties are provided with a clear understanding of what is required of them, which in the interview with the

school-level staff was a descriptor of a constructive supervisory relationship. Yet within the students' handbook of regulations, it was deemed the PGR's responsibility to maintain contact with their supervisory team in one place, and supervisors' responsibility to maintain contact with the PGR in another, which may lead to one party assuming the other would take on this responsibility. Grant et al. (2014) pointed out that policy documents commonly acknowledge the importance of the supervisory relationship, yet fail to offer guidance in case of a relationship breakdown for example. Congruent with the above-outlined lacking consideration of humanness within documents, the authors emphasised the underlying expectation of such relationships operating in a mechanistic manner, while lacking direction beyond procedural details of appeals and such. This lacking consideration of the lived experience of the supervisory relationship is also apparent within the analysed humanities PGR handbook as well as the institutional documents.

Another valuable facet is represented via *Three observations*, under which each supervision observation was analysed, thus representing the lived experience. On a basic level, all supervisions were focused on the PGR's *sent work*, which was forwarded to the supervisor prior to the meeting. *Constructive conversation* was also part of each supervision, yet featured different nuances; Jen and Vicky's *constructive conversation* was mainly specific to Jen's written work, whereas Chloe asked for more general advice, such as whether it is appropriate to perform the same presentation at two different conferences. While the *constructive conversation* in these two supervisions seemed of encouraging and reassuring nature, Matteo and Adam's *constructive conversation* seemed of a rather challenging nature, as Adam seemed to challenge Matteo's knowledge and understanding at times, yet these instances frequently constituted the basis of stimulating discussions, thus certainly deemed as constructive. This already indicated the varying *nature of the relationship* across the pairs. Matteo and Adam seemed to hold a rather formal relationship, focused on academic matters, constructive and respectful, within the fieldnotes I noted that both seemed "very knowledgeable and they are listening to each other and engage in discussions". In contrast, Vicky seemed to consider both supervisees beyond their studenthood, caring and considering them as persons. Yet, this seemed to manifest slightly differently, as Vicky provided many instances of reassurance to Jen, for example, Vicky said Jen's overall approach is really clear, to which Jen jokingly responded "which is really a surprise", upon which Vicky laughed and said that the plan she sent last was great, that her material is really, really good, but a bit all over the place, with organisation being the main issue. In contrast, Vicky seemed more concerned about Chloe in terms of her taking on too much, which she therefore voiced, yet still provided points of reassurance to Chloe. In both sessions, Vicky was encouraging and *was talking positively about PGR and/or their work*, a sub-subcategory noticeably absent from Matteo and Adam's supervision. As outlined in the first chapter, such encouragement may enable students to

view themselves as academics and researchers (Cotterall, 2015), thereby contributing to students' identity development. Further relating this to the aforementioned problematisation of documents considering PGRs in their academic capacity only, the lived supervisory context seems an opportunity allowing for humanness.

4.1.7. Conclusion

To conclude this subchapter, it should be noted that although this thesis' scope enabled me to explore the local context, discussing this in combination with more distal documents served to give insight into the wider context a higher education institution, and thus PGRs, are situated in. It seems there is an opportunity to explore the wider context in more detail via analysing concomitant documents. Two important points seem to be that local context (enacting wider-context principles) requires PGRs to act independently and proactively, and that the analysed documents are incapable of considering PGRs beyond their studenthood, the importance of which has been outlined in the literature review. Having presented a macro-view on PGR-education for most of this short chapter, the lived experiences captured via fieldnotes of observations demonstrate the notable differences across individuals. As the example of the three supervision pairs has illustrated, despite inhabiting a somewhat shared context, via belonging to the humanities field at one institution, and thus being governed by the same rules and regulations, the qualitative experience likely differs with each person. Despite similarities in the two supervisions with Vicky as supervisor, varying nuances seemed evident, demonstrating the value of focusing on the individual experience, which will be presented in the following.

4.2. Under the spotlight – shining the light on PGRs’ experiences as a whole

This second subchapter presents four participant stories. The stories were chosen based on the diversity of experience they represent as well as the richness of information participants provided. The construction of the stories entailed further altering of certain details for each participant in order to obfuscate their identities. As briefly mentioned in the Methodology chapter, it must be emphasised that while the aim of presenting these stories is to convey my participants’ experiences, it must also be acknowledged that the stories are a representation of my participants’ experiences, represented through my lens. It is my voice which tells their stories, based on my active role of constructing the stories. This aligns with my symbolic interactionist understanding of the world as interpreted individually, meaning that the re-presentation of my participants’ experiences via the constructed stories stems from my individual understanding of what they shared with me. Yet, to meet my aim of conveying my participants’ experiences, I remained as close to my participants’ words as possible, explicitly demonstrated through the use of direct quotes, which are italicised and indicated by quotation marks. The stories are followed by a brief discussion of the structure of PGR programmes (via Melissa’s and Ted’s story) and of peer engagement (via Emily’s and Chloe’s story); both aspects are discussed in terms of the effects on PGRs’ participation and identity development.

4.2.1. Melissa’s story

Melissa was interviewed at month 2 and 13 of her English literature master’s by research, and was in her early 20s. She had completed her undergraduate English literature degree at the participating university about half a year before enrolling onto the English literature master’s by research programme. She felt the need to take a break because her final year “*was a heavy time*”, she spent particularly intense times almost exclusively at the library, being sleep deprived and developing an unhealthy balance in general. This break between programmes also allowed her to “*miss the uni, and miss doing research and writing projects*” as well as to develop her research-idea sufficiently, as she felt she did not have time to do that for her undergraduate dissertation, regarding which she felt somewhat rushed. Melissa was very passionate about English literature, she “*really love[s] literature, ‘cause it’s uhuh everyone thinks it’s this stuck up like subject and so like tedious and academic, but it like, it applies to everything*”, she challenged anyone to go for a day without seeing a piece of literature, or writing, without a piece of art, or without hearing music. She especially appreciates the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, as she felt English literature is applicable to everything: films, music, philosophy, sociology, photography to name a few.

The decision to study on the master's level was based on her view that it will give her *"that little bit more of an edge"* in the prospect of future employability, as nowadays an undergraduate degree alone does not set you apart from the masses as much. Additionally, she has enjoyed aspects of the master's level study, such as the freedom of choice in terms of her thesis topic, compared to set essay questions on the undergraduate level. She happily stayed at the participating university, as she knew a lot of staff members in the department as well as fellow PGRs, and she really appreciated the established community. Despite knowing that isolation and aloneness are PGR-prevalent issues, Melissa felt *"I'm alright because of that little community"*. She took part in weekly research seminars, and regular meetings among PGRs which she called *"breakfast Wednesdays"*. She expressed that *"it's nice to have like a little community that are looking out for each other"* – in the sense that they sent each other work or articles that they had come across, as they all knew each other and each other's subjects rather well. Also, with regard to staff members, Melissa felt that students have been considered as persons since starting her undergraduate degree. For example, one time a lecturer thought she was not speaking up during a lecture, so they checked with her if she was doing okay and if everything was going alright.

Regarding topic choice, Melissa felt that – similar to one's undergraduate dissertation topic – one should choose something they are passionate about, or at least interested in. Her passion was ignited by the media representing Syrian refugees in a certain light, she said she will *"always remember David Cameron saying, calling the refugees a swarm, erm a swarm of, erm, of immigrants"*, carrying obvious negative connotations. Thus, her thesis focus became the literary response to the refugee crisis. She did enjoy the first months of her master's course, just before the half-way mark Melissa had produced the first 10,000-word chapter, some material of which she entered into an edited book competition, and presented at a conference, thus was generally busy. Despite probably not getting enough sleep, she generally liked keeping busy, because she goes *"to another level of efficiency"*, as it enables her to prioritise her time due to only limited time being available for different commitments, academic work being one of them. In contrast, she did not like to have excessive time on her hands, as it allows her to be lazy. In that regard, she preferred her undergraduate experience *"'cause I was like 'Oh, I've got a lecture at nine at then at four, so I'll just spend the day in the library'"*. In contrast, having the whole day available, especially without having a job, resulted in her struggling to structure her time efficiently.

At around month 5-6, Melissa and her supervisor Paul started discussing the second chapter, such as the arguments within, Melissa was beginning to struggle. This was due to not being able to figure out the points she wanted to make in her second chapter, but she also started to think that her whole thesis was pointless. In the first months she thought her thesis was *"gonna show the injustices within*

the literary community, of how Western authors are still getting favoured by, over the people whose actual stories are being told”, it would “shine a light on how much refugee literature there is actually out there, but it’s not getting like funded and stuff like that”, to then thinking “what’s the point of the literature, which is really sad for you to think about. Being a literature student and my interest in literature, but it was more a case of: this is a real actual crisis going on, there are thousands of people still today in Calais and this – even if I publish this thesis today, it’s not gonna do anything”. Although she was aware that it was not her responsibility to affect change via her thesis, the struggle with her second chapter argument, and the hopelessness towards her thesis led to her disengagement – which she regretted in hindsight as at month 13 she could see that it would have been fathomable to write the second half of the thesis in the remaining standard enrolment period of 12 months – yet disengaging was her only resolution at the time.

Melissa felt that her supervisor Paul somewhat blamed himself for the whole situation that emerged, which he somewhat indicated, based on him not suggesting for her to take a suspension in good time, which she said was likely due to him not being too worried as she had already produced a substantial chapter. She pointed out that guidance in the form of supervision meetings was lacking over the summer, though the plan was for Melissa to complete the research relevant for chapter two as well as writing it during that time, but it did not happen. At times *“it was like “Right, I’m not doing any work, I feel sick looking at the work”, so yeah I should have definitely got a suspension then, but I think in me, I’m always determined to be like “No, just have a break, you can chill out for a little bit” [...] but I ended up just not doing [it], I tried it and then the same sickness looking at it happened”*. Ultimately, they started discussing Melissa suspending her studies at the end of month 10, Paul encouraged Melissa to think about it, who then submitted the relevant paperwork in month 11. Problematically, the admin office did not respond until after the end-date of Melissa’s standard enrolment period, and they had declined her suspension. Melissa was not sure why her application was declined, as she had submitted evidence from the institutional wellbeing services as well as her doctor, but thought it may be due to her submitting the application too late in her timeline, and Paul suggested that their admin office constitutes of only two part-time employees, thus communication is not the best. Nevertheless, upon the decline of the suspension, Paul spoke to the head of the department and managed to coordinate a double-extension: a four-month extension of research time (with the £1,000 fees fee-waivered) followed by a four-month writing-up extension (for £100 fee). Melissa was grateful for Paul sorting this out, because she *“just kn[e]w I’m not gonna do it in four months and if I do it’s gonna be like third year again, where I’m surviving on one hour sleep, sleeping on the couch, living in the library and I thought; I’m not doing it again, ‘cause it drained me so much”, but “as soon as [the double extension] was offered, I was like, my instinct [wa]s saying “Do it””*.

Going forward, Melissa was vocal about her needs to her supervisor: *“I told him straight “I need to meet you every two weeks at least, I need to be in better contact with you, I need you to give me more deadlines, because I am self-motivated but if the pressure’s on, I will do it, whereas if I can get away with it, that’s when I’m like “Oh, I could just not meet him, I could just say I’ve not finished” whereas if he says “I want this by this” then I’ll do it, [...] ‘cause it’s alright, I do, I have my own deadlines, but if no one’s there to read what I’ve done [...] then (.) it’s just pointless.”*. That was because what *“pushed [her] over the edge last time”* was the argument within the second chapter, so she wanted to meet regularly, as she needed *“a coherent meeting, with a coherent idea on a coherent argument for [the] second chapter”*. Another benefit of regular meetings Melissa anticipated was that she would have to stay focused, as opposed to falling down a rabbit hole of getting lost in researching relatively inconsequential tangents, and she anticipated that frequently checking in with Paul would keep her writing more focused as well as her time-management efficient.

Melissa was somewhat concerned about this as she had met with Paul one time after sorting out the extension-paperwork, at the end of which Melissa asked on which weekday Paul wanted to meet next, so Melissa would be aware of the deadline for the agreed upon tasks. They agreed on a day, a few days prior to which Melissa got in touch with Paul to find out which time on the day would be convenient for him to meet, he did not respond. Despite being on campus, she did not see Paul on the agreed upon day. After that, Melissa was *“hoping it’s not the fact that he’s just not doing it, he’s not keeping committed to meeting, because I need to meet, ‘cause I need him to be more organised, he is organised, this is why I’m shocked that he’s not replied, ‘cause he’s usually the lecturer that replies every like couple of days or whatever, but the fact he’s not, I’m like either something’s seriously wrong, personally, with him, or, [...] he’s just not taking it seriously, and I’m like “I need this” [chuckles]”*. At month 13, Melissa felt like she can complete the writing of her thesis in the remaining time; it was about *“getting it written down and finding the argument points I want to make and making sure that with my writing what I do is following those bullet-points”*.

4.2.2. Ted’s story

Ted was interviewed in his first and second year of his Creative Writing PhD. Now in his early 60s, he began his higher education trajectory with studying Music and English, after which he was employed as an opera singer, before gaining a teaching qualification several years later. He then completed a taught master’s in Media Arts. Prior to his PhD, he worked as a part-time lecturer in a teacher training college abroad, which he really enjoyed. Then, his mother became rather ill, which led to him and his family relocating back to the UK, which was about four to five years ago. Just before his PhD he worked

in compulsory education, he considered his options of what to do next in terms of a career, with the PhD ending up being the chosen option. He chose the participating university as the offer included a fee-waiver. That was one of the reasons why he was able to do his PhD in the first place, another being that his wife was happy to financially support the family (Ted, his wife and daughter under 10), he *“did the same for my wife when she was in her 20s”*. But, *“sometimes the guilt, the guilt, kills me sometimes, where I think “What are you doing?”, you know, “I should just give it up tomorrow and go and work in a post office or something, or go and work in Sainsbury’s”, erm, but, you know, there is a plan behind it all, ultimately I think I’ll probably be better with the qualification than without it”*.

Studying on the PhD level has been different to Ted’s expectations, in a good way. His previous educational experiences, in his 20s and 30s, were “horizontal” in the sense that *“I was, erm, in university studying, I was much more campus-based, and so, even for my MA, even though the MA was part-time, erm, I was much closer to the campus, whereas this time, [...] so I can only come in one day a week, I’ve got a family, I got a small daughter, erm so it’s slightly more complicated in organising everything, so everything is organised into one vertical day where, you know, the travelling and all the seminars, it just happens that all those research seminars are on a Wednesday as well, and everything is fitted in wonderfully, erm, but that changed the sort of experience, so instead of being a sort of horizontal experience, it’s much more vertical”*. His “vertical” PGR-experience still allowed him to be part of the departmental community, by attending the research seminars as well as *“touch[ing] base with [his supervisor] Vicky”*, all condensed into one day. Also, the nature of his PhD being creative lends itself to a more vertical experience, as he felt that if he was doing a project requiring him to create to a lesser extent, he would *“need to be nearer, on campus, nearer some other scholars for their support and their, you know, their feedback and their camaraderie and the rubbing along of ideas”*. Overall, Ted was appreciative of the flexibility of the course, as there seemed to be *“multiple paths to reach the same goal”*, with each path taken being equally legitimate to the path another PGR chooses to take. This seemed to be taken into consideration by the staff members that Ted interacted with, which he valued.

Ted’s project involved the creation of a fantasy novel, constituting the *“lion share”* of his PhD, whereas the thesis itself constituted just under half of the material of his submission. The novel featured a female protagonist, who is in her late 60s and suffers from dementia. In an earlier stage of her life, she worked as an opera singer, but due to her illness has lost her voice in more than one way. Prompted through an event taking place at the care home where she is located, she enters a parallel world, where she quite literally finds her voice again, which holds an empowering force. The clear relation to Ted’s personal experience laid with him having worked as an opera singer previously, and his mum is suffering from Mild Cognitive Impairment, an early stage of dementia. The plan for his first

year was to mainly focus on researching and writing the novel, and concentrating on the concomitant thesis, amongst novel writing, from his second year onwards. There were two different facets to Ted's research. Firstly, he was exploring specific aspects regarding his novel, to base his writing on, such as the intersection of musical memory and dementia, or visiting care homes in order to gain an insight into the lived experience. Secondly, he was also reading a lot of fantasy novels; Ted found it useful *"to see world-building, to see how novelists that have selected to use this kind of approach to magic, how they then realise it, you know, 'cause there's as many ways to realise it as there are writers to write it, [...] so there are great writers in the genre and more of them coming in now than there have ever been and so it is interesting to keep reading good stuff that's coming out as well, so there's kind of two things, there's kind of focused genre on target stuff that's bang-on kind of the area where you're writing in, you're hoping that nobody comes and writes the same thing as you're writing [chuckles] and then there's the wider sort of genre stuff, where you're taking the best from the genre [...] so I have my bucket list of stuff as well, that I want to get through, and that reading erm, is something that goes on in the background, just keep three or four books on the go."*

Regarding his writing, Ted's second supervisor Harry, who was a published author, provided him with valuable feedback for example regarding his style, for instance trying to avoid the development of bad habits, such as using clichés, from the outset. Vicky's strong suit was more regarding technical and administrative side of things, she *"continues to be full on, very very helpful, always thinking one step ahead, always with an eye onto what's 'round the corner for you, and I think in a supervisor, you know, it's like textbook-stuff, I mean she's really conscientious in that regard, and it makes things, erm for me, much easier"*. That way, rather than rushing to produce the progression report within a couple of days, Vicky gives the heads-up months prior, reminding Ted that now would be a good time to start thinking about it for example. Ted can only imagine how much more difficult it would be, for instance if he had to chase his supervisors, especially as he has *"a small girl and a life that is, erm, outside of academia and outside of the university"*. He typically met both supervisors separately every two to three weeks, and they tried to have a joint meeting monthly, but it may also be less frequently due to both supervisors working part-time, making it difficult to schedule at times.

Ted's first progression meeting, the run up to which he found extremely stressful due to him putting pressure on himself, was an overall positive experience due to the constructive feedback he received. Shortly after, Ted was rather ill for a month (heart-related), which meant he was not able to do much work, and since then, he felt he has less energy. This *"hiatus"* was followed by experiencing writer's block. It did not help that he was at the beginning of a new chapter as this meant he was staring at a blank page, but after following a series of smaller steps he got back into writing. He omitted writing his novel chapters in a linear way, for example Ted has already written the last chapter, which— a few

months into his second year – was number 27, yet he was unsure whether he will be able to stick to the anticipated length. He may have to shorten the novel, so the final chapter would be number 20, as he will “*need to start working at the moment I’ll hand in*”. Ted has hoped from the beginning to produce a novel (as first part of a trilogy) that he would be able to market and sell, “*but erm [...] getting the qualification comes first, that’s the most important thing on my mind, procedurally, practically, then, if it’s worth something and somebody else shows an interest in it, then, you know, it would be great to then make something out of it*”.

4.2.3. Emily’s story

Emily was interviewed in her first and second year of her history PhD, and was in her early 20s. After completing her undergraduate degree in history at the participating university, she did not have a job lined up and thus decided to do an MA, as she had the opportunity to receive a fee-waiver. Her proposal outlined a focus on museums, heritage and knitting in the 19th century. However, continuing with this topic “*would have been so boring, I was a month in, and I went “I don’t wanna do this anymore” [...], then got it straight changed ‘cause I didn’t like what I was doing but its’ worked out well*”. Emily knew her supervisor from her undergraduate course, they got to know each other well in second year as Emily took an intensive module that he was leading (four hours per week), and he was also her undergraduate dissertation supervisor. They “*get along really well, [...] he was always there like you know, if I wanted to email him and stuff like that, so I was like “Oh yeah, I’ll just stick with him [as supervisor]”*”, and she felt comfortable asking any questions. Her new focus explored specific aspects related to Girlguiding, which she thought was a better choice as very little is written on her specific topic, and she found it more interesting. She has been “*Girlguiding all my life, since I was like five*” and was currently a Brownie leader. Additionally, she held the role of the archivist, meaning she had access to all the archives which was a great advantage in terms of data collection.

Around six months into her MA an internal opportunity to convert her MA into a PhD became available. Emily applied upon her supervisor’s suggestion – initially she was not planning on applying as she would have favoured a PhD with the heritage consortium as this involved an additional museum and heritage certificate – yet she is glad in hindsight, as the internal opportunity most likely attracted fewer applicants than the external position with the heritage consortium. She also heard that “*none of [the heritage students] ever finish within the three years and they have to take a writing-up year, unpaid*”, due to assessments and compulsory placements in the earlier years, which she was not keen on. Emily’s application was successful; thus she converted her MA into a PhD, her fees were waived and she received a £10,000 stipend annually. At this point, Emily had produced 12,000 words, after

the conversion she thought *““Oh well I can add loads of stuff in now, I don’t have to restrict what I’m putting in” so then it went up to like 20,000 words”*. She then carried on with her next chapter, focused on scouting, writing an additional 20,000 words. She found it easy to write because sources were easy to find, whereas she was aware that data collection is a common struggle for PhD students. Thus far, she did not find the PhD difficult; *“People say like “Is it hard?” like but I haven’t’ found it hard at all. Like I know I didn’t find undergrad hard, I found it really easy, [...] I just, I find it really easy to connect the dots, so people sit there, struggling [...] but I have never found it difficult.”*

By the point of her Year 1 progression, she had produced 40,000 words, but was aware that she had now reached the end of her plan and was unsure about how to proceed. Emily was discontent with a few aspects regarding her first progression meeting. Firstly, she thought it was nonsensical having to present a whole PhD within ten minutes. Secondly, she found it difficult that she *“didn’t really know how it was gonna go, what they were gonna say, what they even want from me”*. She perceived the examiners talked at her for 25minutes about what she could and should look at and telling her to engage with the PGR community via going to conferences and seminars. She found the examiners’ questions were frequently irrelevant because she wrote her report a few months prior, since which her project had moved on substantially. She was thus planning to write her report not as far in advance in the following year.

One issue Emily experienced was in relation to her living situation. Beginning her MA, she had moved in with a friend, based near the participating university. Problematically, they lived back-to-back to *“a really like volatile couple, erm, abusive towards each other and stuff”*, and sharing very thin walls caused Emily to lose some sleep. One day her housemate was on the phone to someone *“and they like banged on the wall, so [Emily’s housemate] went downstairs, came back up, went on the phone to her friend again, erm, and they came ‘round and just went psycho, [were] like smashing, there [were] people in the street, we got a friend who lives like, I don’t know, ten doors up, she came out, she heard it, and he was like smashing on the door, being like, calling her all sorts of names, like screaming through the letter box, she said she thought he’d smashed the glass like it was that loud from the front door, erm, so they rang the police and the police came, and they were like, sorted it all out and defused the tension, [...] so yeah, that’s one of the reasons why I moved home”*. Another reason for Emily to move home was that she was not required to be on campus very frequently. So far, commuting has not been too difficult. This also enabled her to spend time with her friends and boyfriend and look for a job close to home. She wanted to work part-time as security in case she will struggle to find a job post PhD, and because she *“had too much time on [her] hands”*. Emily found a job in an office at the local council, where she worked every Monday and Tuesday. She enjoyed going to work and got on

well with her colleagues, despite them being older and having children for instance, she felt they are “*on the same wavelength*”, sharing similar interests.

One academic aspect Emily struggled with was connecting with other PGRs. Initially, she progressed with some of her friends from the undergraduate degree to the MA. They never really spoke about work, and if so, they were joking about how boring each other’s topics sounded for example, as they had already established a friendship, and were sharing the same interests. Her supervisor tried to encourage Emily to connect with other PGRs. For example, he invited all his supervisees to talk to each other about their research. Emily struggled to relate as everyone is older, “*‘cause they’re all like, turns out they’ve got like houses and families, and I’m sat here with £10 in my bank account, in my pyjamas all day*”, so then “*I feel instantly like a world away*”. In Emily’s view other PhD students were “*just all so enthusiastic that I find it really difficult to connect with them, ‘cause I’m not, like I’m not [chuckles] [...] and I’m just like quite reserved I suppose, and not, especially making commitments, so they’re like “Oh I’ve got this funding, shall we do a conference together?” – “Yeah, yeah, that sounds good” – “Yeah, so I’ll get all your emails and sort all this stuff out and we can start doing it tomorrow” and I’m like [chuckles] just sat there with like wide eyes [...] ‘cause it’s just such a wide age gap, I think we just are on a different wavelength [...] I think a lot of people that do it, like it’s their main interest, they love it, they’ve come back to [university] because they’ve been interested in it, like their whole lives, so they think “Oh, I might as well just do a PhD on it” and they’re self-funded or whatever, whereas mine’s like a means to get somewhere else, not necessarily something that I’ve been passionate about since I was like four years old [...] I am interested in it, but it’s not like my number one passion*”. Emily also did not understand “*the whole academic banter*”, and perceived most PhD students to be into politics and philosophy, for instance always wanting to talk about the theory behind their projects, which she had no interest in, thus kept to herself. She thought that this would likely change if she got to know them, but did not want to engage in conversations, because “*a lot of the time it goes over my head so I don’t know what they’re talking about and I don’t have any interest in finding out what they’re talking about*”. Instead, she wants to talk about food, dogs, and Love Island, which are interests she shared with her colleagues at work.

However, in her second year, Emily tried to connect more with the PGR community. She participated in a PGR conference, which she found enjoyable as everyone was really friendly, and was also at a networking event in Leeds. She generally did not mind PGR-specific events, as everyone is a PGR and likely a bit nervous, making the event less intimidating, whereas she found non-PGR-specific events more intimidating, she “*[was] always kind of scared when they ask me about my research that they’re gonna be like “Well, that’s wrong, ‘cause that didn’t happen”*”. At one of the networking events, Emily was surprised to find out that other PGRs were not producing writing at a pace similar to hers. Because

she is limited to three days per week for her PhD work, she tried to write 500 words a day. Despite the time constraint on her PhD through her part-time job, she found it is a good distraction in the sense that it hindered her from becoming too consumed with writing, or writer's block. Instead, she wrote when she was *"in the zone"*. Her typical working day was separated into shorter sessions, going to the gym, having lunch, or meeting a friend for a coffee in between. She liked to work in coffee shops or on the train, yet worked mainly at home, and felt more productive towards the evening. In terms of practical experience, Emily had previously worked at a North Yorkshire museum, where she enjoyed setting up a couple of exhibitions, and disliked working front of the house. She was aware that curator positions in museums are very competitive, which is why she continued to do placements, to enrich her CV, and in the hope that if she applied for a position at a place she had worked before, this would positively contribute to her application.

In terms of writing, about halfway through her second year she had produced approximately 60,000 words. After month 9, Emily was slowed in her writing-pace as she *"did a massive re-structure, I completely changed like, not entirely what I was doing, but I hit like a dead-end with my source material"*. In search for sources, Emily spent a few weeks in Manchester at the university archives, where she came across one particularly useful 300-page book written on scouts. In contrast, some archives she has visited had *"just been rubbish"*, for example as sources turned out to be irrelevant, based on archivists cataloguing them imprecisely, for example only considering the first paragraph of a book rather than the overall content of the book. Another source-impeding instance was the Girlguiding archive in London being closed. However, *"it [was] not too bad, because I'm a Guider, I know a lot of old, like they have a guild that's for old Guiders, so I got in touch with them, and they lent me quite a lot of stuff and like quite a lot of the stuff I think would have been in that Guiding archive anyway, so it hasn't been the end of the world"*. As there was overall less material than anticipated, she and her supervisor felt her initial structure of focusing chapters by organisation (Girlguiding, Scouting, Boys Brigade) did not work. Instead, she arranged her chapters thematically, by overarching aspects of these organisations. The re-structuring was a lengthy procedure, requiring Emily *"to do a massive – strip everything off all the chapters, and then like re-write it – oh, it was so awful, so that took me like three or four months"*. Currently, she had an agreement in place with her supervisor entailing that Emily submits a new chapter every two months, so she would have a full draft by the end of year two and consequently would have one year to edit. According to Emily, this worked well thus far, her supervisor has fed back that she would not be able to submit the chapters as they were, but that she was on the way. When editing previous chapters, she could retrospectively see the issues, which were typically that her structure and arguments are not clear, and that she repeats her ideas too frequently. In her view these issues have likely derived from a lack of experience of producing a

larger piece of work, as her dissertation was 6,000 words long, and she did not produce a master's thesis due to the conversion. But, *"I don't feel like I'm (...) it's too much to fix"*, especially as her feedback is getting more positive, for example her supervisor deemed the structure of her last chapter as *"fine, erm, it's like getting there"*. Emily found aspects concomitant to the PhD, such as the networking or teaching, challenging but overall felt that the PhD per se is not too difficult and believed that she can do it.

4.2.4. Chloe's story

Chloe was in her early 20s and was first interviewed at month 9 of her English literature master's by research, and then in the first year of her PhD. After her undergraduate degree in English literature, she continued her studies at the participating university on the master's level. Although her initial plan was to go into teaching via a PGCE after her undergraduate degree, she felt like she was not quite ready to step into that after some volunteering, which she enjoyed nevertheless. Another reason for the master's was that she *"enjoyed the actual research side of uni more than I thought I would, [...] when it came to like second and third year, and I was doing the dissertation, even though it was stressful, I was finding it enjoyable and I didn't expect it [...] and then, erm, because I've got a first and it was free to do it here, I thought, it seemed sort of, you know, I think it would have been silly not to do it."* Embarking on her master's trajectory, she focused on a new-to-her topic: surveillance in science fiction from the 20th century until now. Coming across David Eggers' *The Circle*, Chloe was intrigued by its concern with social media and surveillance, and looked into any underlying theoretical concepts. She explored the field of surveillance studies, an interdisciplinary field encompassing law, sociology, psychology – yet literature was largely absent from it, which Chloe recognised as a fitting originality aspect to her work, aiming to demonstrate the new contributions of literature to the field of surveillance and to establish connections.

Especially in the beginning there was a lot of work to do around surveillance theory, as neither Chloe, nor her supervisor Vicky, had been familiar with it. However, Chloe felt okay with knowing that it was *"sort of up to me; to make sure that I know what I'm talking about"*, in the sense that Vicky is an English literature – not surveillance – expert. That was because Chloe also had not been taught about historical fiction during her undergraduate degree, yet chose it as third year dissertation topic, because *"it was just something I was interested in, so when I mentioned it to [my dissertation supervisor] Susie in first year, because we had a module that it built on, we had a module that was called "Introduction to research" in first year, we started thinking about what you could do for your dissertation, and then in second year, erm in "Research methods", the second summative was actually*

the proposal for your dissertation, so we were thinking about it right from first year, and, erm, Susie said to me straight away like "With historical fiction, you've got to know what you're doing", you know, so the task in second year was to present to Susie and say "There is this material out there, there is enough to do a dissertation with". Chloe spent the summer following her second year researching, thus entered the third year with an 8,000-word document of relevant research, which enabled her to start writing the dissertation quite early, which she ultimately handed in one month early. In Chloe's view it was the structure of her course, that enabled her to think about her dissertation from first year onwards; to do the relevant research in first and second year, and thus complete the dissertation early in third year. Further, the experience of independently and proactively conducting the research aspect made the master's less daunting to her, in terms of substantial aspects of it being previously unknown to her as well as to Vicky.

After Chloe and Vicky focused on surveillance theory in the beginning of the master's, Chloe felt like she was *"getting ideas from [Vicky] all the time,"* as she has also gained a good understanding of the field. Chloe thought they share a good relationship. She has known Vicky since her undergraduate degree, and particularly enjoyed one of Vicky's modules on speculative fiction. Chloe went to see Vicky in her third year to talk about the master's proposal (for which Vicky provided advice and guidance) as she thought her literature-focus was well-aligned with Vicky's research. Chloe was commuting from home to campus to see Vicky every two or three weeks for supervision, however, it was not always possible to come in. For instance, one time Chloe *"[hadn't] been able to get in because of the train",* so she and Vicky had a supervision *"over the phone for an hour, where [Vicky] just basically sent me, I sent her something in advance, she sent me back over email the comments and I was reading it while I was on the phone to her, and then just sort of explaining things to me and just having like a general chat really about it, erm, but that was useful, and I thought "Okay, that makes me feel better", that when we're not meeting up face-to-face, we can still have a good meeting together over the phone, or by email"*.

Due to living at home, Chloe made a conscious effort to keep in touch with her fellow PGRs, for example via setting up a group message via social media to arrange meet ups or to just chat, and via attending the departmental research seminars. Even though she thought these seminars were about the guest speakers and thus not necessarily beneficial regarding one's specific topic, it was more of an opportunity to bring everyone together, to counter feeling alone. She was a bit concerned in that regard as the seminars were about to end for the summer-break and would not take place until the last month of Chloe's master's, but she felt *"quite lucky with Vicky, 'cause, erm, she's only going in August, so erm, she'll be available over summer for me to come and see her, and she said in August we can still email and talk over the phone [...], whereas I know other lecturers are sort of leaving quite*

early on, so I think that will be hard on other students, but I don't think for me, because Vicky comes in quite a lot, that's made it a lot easier on me". Chloe valued the departmental community, as most of them know each other having carried on after their undergraduate degree. She enjoyed talking to other PGRs as they were familiar with each other's topics and recommended texts to read. Everyone was supportive, also staff members asked how they are doing. Since the undergraduate, Chloe felt like the staff members are quite relaxed, always respectful, and she would be comfortable to talk to any of them about academic or personal issues.

At month 9 of her master's, Chloe submitted an application, upon Vicky's suggestion, to convert her master's by research into a PhD. This opportunity became available within their school, including two years of funding plus a £10,000 stipend each year. Chloe thought that the conversion would address one of the problems she has had with her project from the beginning: its large size. She had conducted enough research to see how she could turn her master's into a PhD project and was happy to continue with her chosen topic. The application included a proposal outlining the work she had done so far and how she would extend it, a report functioning as a sample of her writing, and a timeline featuring a rough outline of the next two years, followed by an interview. Chloe found it difficult to compose the application, as there was no online advertisement she could work off, thus she was grateful for Vicky's guidance. In the case of her application being unsuccessful, *"none of the material is wasted"*, as Chloe *"had to focus all of my ideas down onto paper, what it is that I want to say and then I've basically directly used that for my introduction to my master's [thesis], 'cause I thought 'That's exactly what I am saying' but before I was sort of struggling to put my ideas down clearly, and erm, so actually writing the proposal's been a useful exercise for the master's"*. After about four to six weeks of not hearing back, Vicky got in touch with the relevant people to find out that Chloe was not selected for an interview. In hindsight, Chloe could see why perhaps her application was not successful, she thinks that her proposed extension to a PhD may have rather proposed a whole new project.

Instead, Chloe secured a PhD scholarship with the North England Consortium for Arts and Humanities (NECAH), which began shortly after the end of her master's (which she completed with minor corrections), at a university that is part of the consortium, which was not the participating university. The consortium was one of the best aspects of her PhD in her opinion. Chloe anticipated that it was solely going to function as her funding body, but found that it was more of a community, a set-up of fellow PhD students one can communicate with. The NECAH students, as well as students belonging to the associated heritage consortium, spent one week together, getting to know each other. The consortium leader pointed out that his PhD was a rather isolating experience, whereas being part of the consortium means *"we've already got, you know, 20 people set up, that you can talk to, and even though they're in different universities we've just sort of set up a like WhatsApp group, where we can*

just talk things through and, you know, meet up every now and then". According to Chloe, being part of the consortium was *"really nice because – it's sort of weird thinking I only spent a week with them, that I know them quite well now, because it was just like one week intense, and I haven't seen them in five months, but that I sort of feel like [chuckles] I know them"*. Different to a typical PhD in the UK, the consortium PhD requires students to complete three assignments each in year one and two, upon which they receive a postgraduate certificate, which is considered on the master's level. Chloe appreciated that these assignments were of broad nature, thus could be made specific to one's project. For example, for one essay Chloe picked the topic interdisciplinarity as it was applicable to her project's intersection of English literature and sociology, which she thought will enable her to market her project later. A further useful aspect of these assignments was that she received feedback on her writing, for example regarding structure. The lack of feedback on the master's level, compared to continuous marked feedback on the undergraduate level, had been one of the hardest aspects for Chloe previously, in terms of being unsure about her performance.

In Chloe's view her master's year prepared her well for her PhD, she gained *"a clear focus about what's in every chapter and then how it fits with the broader framework, and then how each chapter connects to each other, whereas in the master's, I didn't really"*. Remaining at the intersection of surveillance and English literature, the project focused on speculative fiction in 21st century texts, exploring social sorting and biometrics and talking about race, gender, and diversity. With regard to the interdisciplinary nature of her project, Chloe *"got the best of both worlds"* regarding her supervisory team, as her first supervisor Jake was a surveillance-expert situated in sociology, and Vicky remained her second supervisor, thus providing English literature feedback. One useful aspect was that each of them questioned terms concomitant to the field they are less familiar with, which indicated to Chloe that she should improve the clarity of her writing.

Other than her involvement in the consortium, Chloe was rather aware of the competitive nature of securing post-PhD positions and was thus involved in other academic engagements. Thinking practically, she has used the material of her master's thesis to produce conference papers. She was planning on attending several conferences over the year. She was also keen on publishing a book-review soon, for which she got in touch with the editor of a specific journal. Further, she was part of a small group of PGRs who were jointly organising a PGR conference (related to a broader writing network), being responsible for organising marketing aspects. She felt the role was not too stressful, as *"we can rotate things if we need to"*. Another beneficial aspect of being part of this small group was that two of them were further along their PhD trajectory and were happy to provide advice and guidance to Chloe. For instance, she *"wanted to start getting published by writing book reviews, I didn't have any idea – How do I got about that? And I just asked them, and that's the good thing, it's*

erm, [...] because they're so much further ahead with their PhD, and their experience, I can ask them for advice, and, you know, they'll want advice from me further down the road". So far, Chloe was pleased with her progress, she was glad that she had an extra-year of master's studies rather than converting, and felt *"confident that within the three years, I could hopefully get that done"*.

4.2.5. Discussion of the stories

The value of these stories became particularly apparent when considering the other two types of data analysis, as I was able to tell my participants' whole story – by that I mean considering them as people, rather than solely as students by including details that laid outside the purely academic realm. Clearly, the four participants had varying experiences of being a PGR. When constructing the stories, it seemed particularly noticeable how differently Melissa, compared to Ted, viewed the structure, or lack thereof, concomitant to PGR studies. The second analytic opportunity surrounded peer engagement, which was navigated very differently by Emily and Chloe.

4.2.5.1. *Lack of structure and flexibility – Melissa and Ted*

Melissa and Ted quite clearly had different experiences with the structure of their PGR studies. In contrast to Melissa's previous undergraduate experience, which she felt enabled her to structure her time, the lack of structure on the PGR level hindered her from organising her time efficiently. This indicates a time management issue different to the literature review, where such issues were related to struggles of balancing commitments concomitant to different aspects of one's life, such as work (Willis & Carmichael, 2011), or familial responsibilities (Martinez et al., 2013). Thus, it seemed time management issues on the PGR level are rather based on having too little time to dedicate to one's studies (van Rooij et al., 2021), rather than too much, which seemed to be the case for Melissa. Yet, the consequences were similarly debilitating, as too much time, or in other words too little structure, hindered Melissa from continuous, effective engagement in her studies. This notion of the lack of structure obstructing effective participation will be further explored in the following subchapter. As mentioned in the previous subchapter, the onus of activity via working largely autonomously, certainly lies with the PGR, which in this case relates to organising one's time. For Ted this imperative, concomitant to the lack of structure, which in his case may be conceived as flexibility, enabled his participation, starkly contrasting Melissa's experience. Ted's experience seemed more aligned with the time management concerns as presented in the literature review, due to his familial responsibilities which he sought to arrange with his academic commitments.

Melissa managed to make good progress in the first months of her master's, but disengaged over summer, which she reflected on in our second interview.

Melissa [2]: the weird thing was – I can't remember what I was watching, I think it might have been QI actually, as usual – erm, but they was talking about procrastinators, how they're actually perfectionists, so they'll do the work, it's not a matter of they're not physically able to do it, it's just they get to a point where failure becomes more (.) like

R: favourable?

a resolution in you than attempting to do it (.) badly, so [chuckles] and I think maybe that's me [laughs] I think the fact that I'd got to this point where I've written half of my thesis, [...] and I was struggling with the argument, and the hopelessness of the whole thesis itself and how it's not gonna do anything, that it erm [chuckles] maybe my brain just switched off and was like "Nope, don't need to do it" like "you're just gonna fail this part of it all"

Especially the last part of her quote seems to indicate Melissa's fear of failure, which has been associated with procrastination (Zhang et al., 2018), which seems apparent via Melissa's disengagement. As per Hoppe et al. (2018), procrastination may be prevented when there is a consensus between student and supervisor in terms of the content of the next goal, how it will be achieved, and within which timeframe. This seemed to be in place for Melissa, as there was an agreement with Paul that she would conduct research and writing for her second chapter over the summer months. This relates to the accountability that members hold for a CoP's practice as outlined in the first chapter, yet problematically, Melissa did not hold herself accountable to it, nor was held accountable by her supervisor to enact their agreement as planned. Melissa's need for accountability became particularly apparent towards the end of her story, as Melissa was rather vocal about her needs to Paul, in terms of needing to be held accountable to agreed deadlines. The situation seems underpinned by her need for structure, which she was unable to establish when left to her own devices. This would indicate that Melissa struggled with her transition from her undergraduate to postgraduate research studies, specifically related to the increased level of independence required of her in terms of time organisation. This likely contributed to an unfavourable identity development as expressed in the above quote via *"you're just gonna fail at this part of it all"*, she did not experience herself as successful PGR at this point. In contrast, the flexibility concomitant to the structure of PGR education enabled Ted to negotiate his nexus of multi-membership. He found that *"everything is fitted in wonderfully"* in terms of coming to campus once per week to conduct PhD-work, engage in research seminars and meet with Vicky; this allowed him to identify as part of the community. Nevertheless, he held considerable familial responsibilities, and had a life *"outside of academia"* which he was able to attend to effectively, due to the flexibility concomitant to studying on the doctoral level.

Noticeably, in both cases, the supervisory relationship seemed to have an amplifying effect. Ted outlined that Vicky always had an eye around the corner for what is the next step for Ted such as progression meetings, which he really appreciated, as he knew he could trust Vicky to enforce a structure that would enable him to prepare for his progression points effectively. Thereby, the

supervisory relationship enabled Ted to participate in his academic life-aspect – his doctoral studies – effectively, he knew he could rely on Vicky to have an overview of his PhD timeline and to guide him accordingly. With regard to Melissa and Paul, it seemed Melissa would have needed more support from Paul in terms of him providing a structure via setting and holding Melissa accountable to deadlines. When this was not the case, at about the half-way point of Melissa’s master’s studies, it seemingly contributed to her disengagement. Another facet of relationships affecting the negotiation of meaning and identity is presented in the following, with regard to peer relationships.

4.2.5.2. Peer engagement – Emily and Chloe

Despite a clear difference regarding peer engagement between Emily and Chloe, they started their PGR trajectories rather similarly in that regard. They both remained at the participating institution, which meant they knew some of their fellow PGRs from their undergraduate studies. Relatedly, Sitch and Lowry’s (2019) participants experienced the transition to their postgraduate studies as smooth when they were able to maintain contact with people who they were close to prior to their transition. In contrast, having less peer relations, compared to one’s undergraduate experience, affected students’ ability to adjust negatively; for example, one participant found it difficult to stay motivated to attend now that they were by themselves. Noticeably, Emily’s transition to her PhD studies via her conversion was complicated by the reduced contact to her undergraduate friends and she struggled to connect to her ‘new’ peers. Despite Emily’s supervisor’s best efforts, and Emily thus engaging in peer interaction (for example with other supervisees), she did not form connections with her fellow PGRs, nor was she interested in putting in the effort to do so. As outlined in the first chapter, having shared interests is characteristic of members of one CoP (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015a), yet despite the shared goal of gaining the doctoral award, Emily was neither interested in her fellow PGRs’ conversations about the theoretical underpinnings of their projects for example, nor did she perceive they would share her interests in Love Island and dogs. What seemed to exacerbate the disconnect was the age-gap, as Emily was in her early 20s, whereas many of her fellow PhD students were married and had children. She then felt *“instantly like a world away, ‘cause they’re all like, turns out they’ve got like houses and families, and I’m sat there with like £10 in my bank account, in my pyjamas all day”*. Clearly, Emily did not experience herself akin to how she perceived other PhD students. Noticeably, Emily acknowledged that her work colleagues at the local council had similar characteristics to her academic peers (older age, had children), yet felt able to connect with them due to their shared interests, she found it easy to talk to them. In comparison, in conversations about academic matters, Emily frequently felt like things went over her head, which resulted in her disengaging. As mentioned in the literature review, a lacking sense of belonging, which in Emily’s case was manifested through differing interests and arduous conversation, likely contributed to Emily’s

disengagement (Vekkaila et al., 2013). However, Emily's disengagement must be differentiated from Melissa's disengagement above; Emily did not disengage from her academic studies as Melissa did, however she disengaged from her academic community, in other words she did not partake in academic engagements that were unrelated to her PhD studies in the beginning of her PhD. It seems like Emily was in a circular situation; she was situated in the periphery of her CoP, seemingly by choice rather than marginalisation, as she acknowledged that she would likely form relationships with her academic peers if she did engage in conversations, which would likely contribute to more of an inbound trajectory. However, she was not willing to do so, because she found these conversations too boring and things often went over her head, consequently Emily remained in the periphery. Her position may be characterised as a form of non-participation, which – as outlined in the first chapter – may stem from feelings of not belonging to the CoP (Wenger, 1998), which seems to be the case for Emily. But, she tried to up her academic peer-engagement in her second year. Similar to Engin's (2017) participants, who readily contributed to discussions when they were confident about the content or when sharing their opinion, she was more readily prepared to engage in PGR-specific events, for example via talking about one's experience, than at non-PGR-specific events, which she found intimidating. Participating in PGR-events seemingly allowed Emily to relate to and identify with fellow PGRs to some extent; indicating a somewhat less peripheral position compared to her first PhD year. Yet, Emily's development does not exemplify an inbound trajectory (yet), as she expressed feeling intimidated when interacting with peers at non-PGR events. However, her form of participation, seemingly underpinned by her view of the PhD as *"a means to get somewhere else"*, is legitimate as she continued to progress with her studies.

In contrast, Chloe put in effort to maintain contact with her fellow PGRs during her master's, which meant staying in touch via social media as she seldom commuted to campus. This may have enabled her to maintain a similarly close relation to the peers at the participating university after she moved to a different institution for her PhD. Similar to Emily, Chloe thereby joined a new group of fellow PGRs, however, navigated this rather differently. As outlined in the story, and repeated in many instances within the interview transcript, it seemed like Chloe tried to engage with others as extensively as possible. After getting to know her fellow NECAH-peers for one week they remained in touch via social media, which enabled them to share their experiences, for example regarding their assignments. McLaughlin and Sillence (2018) found that similar peer groups connected via social media countered feelings of isolation as well as enabled them to provide support for each other regarding their assignments. Chloe's engagement with a smaller group of PGRs organising a conference not only enabled her to participate in the wider academic community and gain skills regarding conference-planning, but also constituted a source of advice and guidance, which Chloe

appreciated. Similar to Sitch and Lowry's (2019) participants reflecting on the reciprocity of their peer-group in terms of seeking as well as providing advice, Chloe acknowledged that *"I can ask them for advice and, you know, they'll want advice from me further down the road"*. Clearly, Chloe's readiness to engage in the academic context in various ways, such as by participating in conferences, continuing to engage with her peers at the participating university, as well as connecting with her NECAH-peers, and as part of the smaller conference-organising group allowed an inbound trajectory. Chloe's continued successful participation seems to indicate a positive identity development; enacting valued practices, for instance via networking, planning and working on a publication, and presenting her work at conferences, allows Chloe to experience herself as member of this CoP. In fact, Chloe indicated that her extensive participation in the academic CoP was based on identity negotiations beyond her PhD, as she was aware that *"it's very hard afterwards to get an academic job"*. This is a clear example of the intertwined nature of the negotiation of meaning and identity.

4.2.6. Conclusion

The construction of my participants stories allowed me to convey their experiences as a whole. This addressed the second research aim via providing an in-depth insight into their PGR experience. Discussing aspects of their participation spanning over multiple life aspects further exemplified how differently PGRs experience themselves and navigate their context, thereby addressing the third research aim. A thematic exploration of PGRs' experience is presented in the following subchapter.

4.3. Expertise and not knowing

This theme discusses the assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b) by providing support for and against it. Particularly the notion of *not knowing*, which was prevalent in varying facets across the data set, opposes the assumption of expertise. To conclude this theme, facets of supervisory expertise will be discussed.

4.3.1. Supporting the assumption of expertise

As repeatedly featured in the literature review, it has been established that the assumption of expertise is prevalent in PGR education, which is based on students' previous academic success (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b). Analysing the data, it became apparent that there was some support for this assumption. For example, it is clear how Dom's way of working, which he established during his undergraduate degree, has carried over to his PhD, as presented respectively:

Dom [1]: the first year of undergrad I kind of worked out how to kind of write better essays, so for my second year then I always, so all essays after that were like 2,- or 3,000 words, so then I always basically divided a 2,000-word essay into three points, or three arguments, and then, within those three points, maybe (.) you'd give evidence, you put also other historians' views, so you'd break it down again, and so you work, it was like an essay would have an introduction and a conclusion, and like three 600 word bits, so, I was doing that kind of thing, yeah, and then it would all (.) somehow slide together and it, it worked, so that's, yeah, that's why (.) so even undergrad I was writing very little but it was more about just achieving that "If I can do that few hundred today", and then you're done in a couple of days

Dom [1]: okay, so there's, I give you an example; this week, so I'm describing aspects of what it is to be a medieval man, you know, what kind of things, so there's ideas of how you act, so it's like honour and shame, courage, bravery, so basically one, I just pick one of those and do one a day, even writing about that is very, so it's not much to actually do, but I just rather, I'll set that target rather than trying to "Ah, I'll do five today" and then I'll achieve nothing, so I just do it like that, I break it down very small (.) [...] it's more manageable and then I don't have to think about other stuff (.) (.) like I don't think how it all connects together, I just, when it's all finished, then you can connect it, do you know what I mean?

Dom's expertise is apparent in the way that he knows how to work as a PhD student, based on a way of working which he established previously, which has proved successful. Continuously meeting the targets he sets for himself affirms the legitimacy of his participation, likely allowing to conceive himself as legitimate member of this CoP. Dom pointed out that it is also about knowing yourself:

Dom [1]: I think it's just because it works and it takes the pressure off and only because I know (.) my own like abilities, I know how much I can do, so [inaudible] in all those tasks because it's about working with how you know how to work and then I know my own character

Knowing oneself, in terms of one's expectations and abilities for example, was found to positively affect doctoral wellbeing (Schmidt & Umans, 2014). Contrasting Dom's experience of continuing to engage in a previously successful way of working, Melissa's participation was underpinned by her aiming to not repeat her previous educational experience, specifically her third undergraduate year:

Melissa [1]: Yeah, like third year was a heavy year, it was a hard (.) hard year, like, I did not apply myself at the start, [...] like to my work, I didn't stick to a routine that I wanted, I didn't put myself into the space I should have been in [chuckles] so, erm, I think that's probably helped, because now I'm like "that's not happening in master's",

Marcus used the artefact representing his previous success, his master's dissertation, as reaffirmation of his competence and ability to succeed, thereby reaffirming his academic identity:

Marcus: because, when I did, when I was kind of writing, I was like, "Well I wrote a substantial piece of work for my master's", you know, that was 25,000 words, so I went and read it [laughs] and I was like "Do you know what, that wasn't that bad", I am a writer, I can write, if I put my mind to it [chuckles]

This is in line with Liu et al. (2019), who defined self-efficacy in the research context as one's confidence in successfully completing aspects of the research process, such as collecting data and academic writing. Similar to Marcus using his master's dissertation to remind him of his previous success and capability, Artiles and Matusovich (2020) reported of mastery experiences serving to reaffirm doctoral student identity. An example of mastery experiences positively influencing self-efficacy (van Dinther et al., 2011) was outlined in Chloe's story: it seems clear that her previous success in independently negotiating her undergraduate dissertation equipped Chloe with confidence in her ability to do so again. Successfully participating in this endeavour enabled her identity to shift, enabling her to work proactively before entering PGR education. The initial imperative to work on her undergraduate dissertation substantially independently was due to her supervisor Susie's lacking subject expertise, which she had clarified to Chloe from the outset. Chloe was in a similar situation with her interdisciplinary master's thesis topic, as her supervisor Vicky was an English literature, but not surveillance, expert. However, Chloe found that "*doing the master's didn't seem as daunting in that way, because I'd already looked at the actual research [...] for my [undergraduate] dissertation*". Seemingly Chloe had already mastered working independently, which is increasingly required from students as they proceed through higher education, as outlined in the first subchapter. Chloe's expertise from previous educational success was not only limited to her capability of working independently but extended to her topic area. After her master's by research, she remained in the same research area (surveillance) for her PhD project.

Chloe [2]: I think I only feel as focused because of the master's year, that sort of prepared me, I found the master's very, very difficult and I think I haven't found the transition as difficult

because erm, getting my head around the initial surveillance theory was very hard as a literature student, whereas now it's just becoming more nuanced and more informed and looking at something specific, [...] whereas for the master's I couldn't really do that, I had to look at the whole field and just take in, what's the main people, what are they talking about

Similarly, Dom has stayed within the same research area, which may have facilitated his transition as Chloe suggested, based on previously gained subject expertise:

Dom [1]: so I'm just looking at the crusades, so that's what my MA by research was about, and my PhD is the same, but it's a longer time period, so it's just a continuation basically

Dom [1]: the undergrad dissertation, which was similar, it was about the crusades

The above examples certainly indicate that there are instances where PGRs' previous educational success enabled their expertise through equipping them with self-efficacy, may it be regarding their way of working or their research area. As mentioned in the first chapter, qualities related to self-efficacy, such as competence and confidence serve as indicators of scholarly identity (Choi et al., 2021). Thus, having gained such qualities through previous successful participation likely contributes to a positive identity development in terms of affirming participants' PGR identity. However, a more prevalent notion across the data set was that of *not knowing*.

4.3.2. Opposing the assumption of expertise: Not knowing

The different facets of *not knowing* discussed in this section encompass an initial lack of information, not knowing how to structure one's time and how to judge one's performance, as well as lacking knowledge about disciplinary practices. The first issue with the assumption of expertise becomes apparent through Tim's quote: *"let's see, what age do you attend nursery at? [chuckles] [...] I've had 19 years in education and suddenly it's a completely different educative experience and that necessarily messes with your head a little bit"*. Clearly, despite the experience, and possibly expertise, gained through his previous educational endeavours, entering PGR education on the master's level is new, from Wenger's (1998) perspective this is due to entering a new CoP. Thus, one's previous conception of oneself as successful student (which the participants likely held based on their previous educational success) may be challenged or may require further negotiation, as previously enacted practices may no longer be valued, or require further development – one example would be the increasing independence required from PGRs as they progress through higher education. This seems particularly meaningful as Tim is a continuing student, having enrolled at the participating university for his undergraduate studies, and staying on for his master's by research. Despite remaining in broadly the same physical context – the participating university – there were aspects that students were not aware of before starting their master's:

Tim: I didn't actually look that much into how much contact time I would be having and I found out about a week or two before enrolling that it's just supervisory meetings and the occasional workshop and I was a little bit worried at that point because I knew, like I at least had this expectation that I'd be in a system of; I do work, I get rewarded for it, ideas are shared, they are commended by, erm, members of staff, which is supposed to help you develop those ideas, that wasn't there, and so my expectations were necessarily at odds with what actually became of this

Chloe [1]: I suppose I didn't realise, because we weren't given a lot of information at the beginning, what the master's would be in terms of timetabling, I knew it would just be a seminar every few weeks and meeting up with my supervisor every few weeks but there is a lot of, sort of, erm, postgraduate events that go on in the community, [...] that I wasn't aware of, that are beneficial

Andrea, who returned to the participating university for her PhD after completing her master's one year prior, experienced an extended lack of contact time:

Andrea [1]: I had a bit of a rough patch at the beginning, because when I enrolled, the person who enrolled me and said that they were gonna be my supervisor left and did not tell me and did not tell anybody that I had enrolled, and nobody else knew really that I had enrolled, except for like, admin people, because he was the one in charge of admissions, erm, I was supposed to have a second supervisor, who was, erm, the head of department at that time, who also left, so from September up until November I didn't have any supervision

This clearly relates to the findings of the qualitative content analysis, specifically the notion of independence reflected in the main category *PGR responsibilities*. Regarding Tim, the relative lack of contact time seems to demonstrate the imperative of working proactively and autonomously, whereas Chloe pointed out she was provided with insufficient information before the start of the master's, also implying the need for the PGR to take action. Affirming the plausibility of the onus of action on the PGR complicating their participation, as already indicated in Andrea's quote, Chloe ascribed her ability to negotiate her transition to the master's to being part of the broader institutional CoP.

Chloe [1]: so in the beginning it was a bit like I was just, I suppose because I had been here at undergrad I could just email Vicky or email Susie and say "When is it?", but I did feel that for people who were coming here new, I wonder how they found that experience and how informed they were, erm, and I didn't even know like to contact the postgrad office and not the undergrad and that there was a difference so (.) and stuff like that, like I was emailing the undergrad and not getting a response because it was a postgrad thing and didn't, but didn't know that there was a postgrad office or what the email was, so I think once the course started things have been very informative, but at the beginning it wasn't

This quote clearly demonstrates the tacit nature of a CoP's practice (Wenger, 1998), in this case emailing the postgraduate office for postgraduate matters. As a newcomer, this knowledge was not available to Chloe, thereby clearly opposing the assumption of expertise, yet what Chloe had access

to, through her previous engagement in the participating university, is oldtimers, who per definition have tacit knowledge. Thus, the relationships Chloe had already formed with her previous and prospective supervisor, Susie and Vicky respectively, enabled her to negotiate her entrance to PGR education. Conversely, Andrea did not access any of her previously established relationships, most likely because her master's was within the English literature department, whereas her PhD project was situated within the linguistics department; a new CoP whose oldtimers she did not know. As per the conceptual chapter, the absence of close relationships in the academic context may complicate students' identity development as they may conceive their position as a peripheral one (Cotterall, 2015). Yet, Andrea's situation was resolved by her proactivity and in collaboration with staff members:

Andrea [1]: in October [...], I sent an email erm to university saying "Shouldn't I have...?" like "When does this all start?" like come on, I'm doing some reading over here, but like, what's next? and I got an email saying "Oh, this person is now your new supervisor, pop them an email", so that's what I did, I sent an email and that poor man had no idea who I was, did not know he was my new supervisor and also, my area of research and his area of research had nothing to do with one another, like nothing. So I met with him and he said, you know like, yeah my [inaudible] was quite interesting blahblahblah, "but, you know, I'm gonna find you somebody else, so don't worry, I'll find you somebody that actually will work well with you"

R: Oh, that's nice

Yeah, he was so, yeah, he was so, so lovely, and he still is, like always says hi to me when he sees me, so [...] yeah, he found me my two supervisors, who are really good, so it worked out well, it worked out well, but basically my first supervision meeting, that counts, you know, like that makes me go forward, was in November

4.3.2.1. *Not knowing how to structure one's time*

In the previous subchapter, with regard to Melissa's story, I outlined how the lack of structure hindered her effective participation, due to struggling to organise too much time efficiently, which is a facet of postgraduate time-management issues yet to be addressed within the literature. Similar experiences with regard to organising one's time were shared by Jen and Marcus, indicating that this is not solely specific to the Melissa, demonstrating the value of the reflexive TA through establishing meaning across the data set:

Jen [1]: apart from [the weekly research seminars], you don't have any lectures, you don't have any seminars, there is nothing to actually anchor you to the university, there's nobody breathing down your neck and saying "You must go to the library for six hours every day", it's all in your own hands, and I think the lack of structure for that, erm, if you're the kind of person that thrives sort of being given your own time and manage it, then you're sorted, but if you're the kind of person who can get quite unmotivated, or maybe has a few too many things to handle outside of uni, it can be really (.) difficult, to get used to, because there's no, there's no specific lines, erm, like in terms of time-lines there's no specific like criteria that you have to tick off by certain points, so like for instance there is like one updated proposal you have to do, one confirmation of the date that you will hand in your thesis, but there's no actually like mini-

deadlines, it's not like someone's gonna, it's not as if it's compulsory for you to have a thousand words done each month or anything like that, it is completely on you, and how you choose to manage it

Marcus: There's no, it's entirely up to you, there's no real deadlines until your final one, you know, [...] erm, so it's, you have to control it, you have to say to yourself "I need to get a certain amount done by this time, by that time, by that time..."

In both Marcus' and Jen's quotes the onus of activity on the PGR is clearly outlined, in terms of their responsibility to structure their time. Problematically, their previous educational context likely did not require such time management skills of them, as the notion of independence, which seems to be at the root of the onus of activity on the PGR, increases with one's progression through higher education, as outlined above. As the data demonstrate, not knowing how to negotiate one's time, which is part of the new CoP's practice, directly opposes the assumption of expertise, and also complicates PGRs' participation. As Jen had indicated in the above quote, the lacking structure may enable or hinder one's engagement. The obstructing consequences of the lacking structure on PGR participation are demonstrated through presenting more detail on Melissa's and Jen's experience.

Melissa [1]: It is 'cause it's so unstructured though, you don't have that routine of like "Oh you've got this seminar today, and then tomorrow you've got one really early", I feel like that helped me have a structure of my study time in undergrad, 'cause I was like "Oh, I've got a lecture at nine and then at four, so I'll just spend the day in the library", whereas now, I'm like "Oh, I've got the whole day" [Both laugh] so I just wake up whenever, erm, so I think, yeah

R: Do you find that more difficult?

Yeah, I think especially with not having a job, you don't, you don't have to prioritise your time, so you can be lazy, and that's what I don't like, I really hate it

Jen [1]: I think it's, it's the new structure and me sort of realising how lazy I can be when left to my own devices, because it's not like someone was constantly pushing me throughout undergrad, but the fact that I had to actually present work on a more regular basis, the fact that I had structured assignments throughout the year meant that there was always some sort of mini-obstacle that I had to overcome and once that was done it was looking onto the next one, whilst with this, with it all being in my own hands, it's a lot easier for me to just sort of (.) avoid or, erm, procrastinate.

These findings extend the literature, specifically the well-established issue around balancing responsibilities alongside different aspects of one's life (Lane et al., 2019) by acknowledging PGRs' struggle with structuring the time they have available to dedicate to their studies. Seemingly only Cornwall et al. (2019) have briefly addressed the issue surrounding the 'lack of structure' as their participants anticipated difficulties with staying motivated, and describing themselves as lazy, like Melissa and Jen. Baker and Pifer (2011) outlined that the difficulty of dealing with the relative lack of structure may be exacerbated when doctoral students do not have close relationships with staff

members or more advanced students. Further, it is worth noting that the participants who experienced some difficulty with structuring their time (Tim, Jen, Melissa) were continuing undergraduate students. Tim enrolled on his master's directly after completing his undergraduate degree, Melissa and Jen both enrolled after a six-month break. It seems likely that this new aspect to their educational experience, the lacking structure, was particularly apparent to them, as they were in a more structured educational environment not long ago. Consequently, they employed strategies to enable effective structuring of their time. Marcus found *"it's best to find your best time of day, like find the day, erm, the time that works best for you and stick to it"*. In opposition to the assumption of expertise, this *"was a very, it was a difficult process to learn how to do it, it's the hardest thing I think, and then once you figured it out it becomes quite (.) fluid"*. The implication of PGRs having to adapt the way they work to the PGR context, rather than being able to continue to work in a way that previously led to success (as Dom for example), is that it cannot be assumed that PGRs are experts in knowing how to be a student – due to the new context, they enter a new CoP, even if they remained at the same institution. Anticipating improved efficiency, Melissa actively sought to occupy some of her time with non-thesis commitments.

Melissa [1]: I think with this week, 'cause I'm working at the lit[erature] fest[ival] and next week, I'll end up getting more done than I have in the last couple of weeks, because I know I've got all this time where I can't do work, that I'm like "Oh, I've got this day off, I could do this then", erm, so it is, I feel like I'm prioritising more when I've got more things on, which seems stupid, 'cause like (.) I probably have less time to do it

This is a somewhat similar strategy to Emily, who looked for a part-time job as she felt she had too much time on her hands, as described in her story. Jen, consistent with the well-established struggle of balancing different commitments, found herself *"working my normal retail job which I had, alongside another, what would be considered an industry-related sort of job, erm, which kind of left me with no time between to sort of work on my master's erm (.)"*. Due to Jen's participation hindered by her work commitments, she decided to dedicate all her time to her master's:

Jen [2]: following this very busy period of having two jobs back-to-back over summer I then consciously chose to become unemployed, thinking that that would be a good time for the fact that I could just focus on my master's, like solidly for a couple of months, but actually what I found was within a week or two of being unemployed, I was already really, really struggling with that in itself

R: I think you mentioned before that you've always had a part-time job, like for a lot of years now?

Yeah, I mean I first started doing odd part-time jobs when I was 14, so for, you know, ten years solidly, having that, and then what I thought was a great idea, to help me prioritise my master's-work actually [...] so it would only have been October to January that I would be unemployed, erm, within two weeks it was just not, I think something, it made me feel a lot

more underconfident, it made me feel like I'd lost stability in terms of having anything to force me out of the house, so it became quite an agoraphobic experience and I was working from home a lot more and struggling physically to get out of the house, erm I don't know what there was, some sort of fear, but it was sort of like debilitating where I was scared to leave the house so that kind of put pressure then on

Jen's decision to foreground her master's identity by deciding to resign from her part-time job, in anticipation of more effective engagement in her academic life aspect, took an unexpected turn. After years of holding part-time positions alongside academic engagements, the loss of that CoP, where Jen likely acted as an oldtimer, (similar to Willis and Carmichael's (2011) participants whose profession served as retreat from academic frustrations), affected her wellbeing negatively. As outlined in the conceptual chapter, negotiating multiple identities can be stressful (Colbeck, 2008; Hall & Burns, 2009), in Jen's case she had to negotiate "*feeling more underconfident*", a consequence of her deciding to become unemployed, with her expectation of this constituting an opportunity to "*focus on the master's*". As Schmidt and Hansson (2018) suggested, the wellbeing of doctoral students is likely not restricted to a particular setting, as Jen's experience demonstrates. This echoes the value of regarding PGRs beyond their studenthood, as outlined within the findings of the qualitative content analysis, and also demonstrates the distributed nature of learning, which in Jen's case was affected by a non-academic decision. This led to Jen reflecting positively on the lacking structure inherent to PGR education:

Jen [2]: but the lucky thing about the flexibility of the master's thesis and everything is that you can sufficiently work from home, in fact I know quite a lot of people that wouldn't come to university anyway and have spent the majority of the time just doing what they can, around their lives at home, including some people have had, you know, children, in the time they've done their thesis, so that, I always just think if it's possible for a person under that circumstance to do what they've done, then in theory it should be like that for me as well

This conception of flexibility in structure as enabling PGRs' participation was outlined in the previous subchapter, illustrated within Ted's story, which contrasts the obstructing consequences of lacking structure on PGRs' participation outlined above. The facilitative nature of such flexibility was also apparent in Andrea's experience, who was working 32 hours per week in her paid position in order to pay for her tuition fees, and Leo who was also working substantial hours, as well as having "*caring-duties for my mum a couple of days a week, so she's in a wheelchair, so, erm, those kind of things meant that, a part-time master's by research was the best way of doing it*". As mentioned in the first chapter, students' lives on the postgraduate level tend to be more complex compared to undergraduate students, based on having to negotiate a web of responsibilities concomitant to different aspects of one's life (Tobbell et al., 2010), hence the well-established struggle of work-life balance on the PGR level. Thus, in order to enable PGRs with such complex lives to participate in their

academic lives, the flexibility inherent to PGR education carries great value. This was demonstrated via Margerum's (2014) late doctoral completers, as well as one of Hunt and Loxeley's (2021) postgraduate participants, who chose a programme based on flexibility, as they had to work alongside their studies to support themselves financially.

4.3.2.2. *Not knowing about one's performance*

PGRs' uncertainty around how well they were doing was rooted in the lack of feedback they have received. Similar to the difficulty of organising one's time, this seemed particularly prevalent among continuing students.

Chloe [1]: I think, the hardest thing for me is because it's a research master's, is that you're not getting any sort of marked feedback until you've got it and that's your grade [chuckles] so that's the thing, is all the way through, it is like when you get an essay back, if you didn't look at the mark, you just looked at all the comments that are on it, you'd think "Oh, there is so many comments here, like this must be terrible!" and then you look at the mark and think "Okay, the mark is good, but there is a lot of comments", so I think this time, 'cause you don't have the mark there, you really just don't know how you're doing (.) I think at this stage, talking to Vicky, I don't know in terms of grades how I'm doing, but I know that my writing has got better, erm, and she said things like "Your critical engagement with the text has got better" and things like that, and I know how to improve, but I have no idea in terms of grade, where it is, I think that's the hard thing to get my head around, is not knowing like concrete, a concrete grade, and to know how to, sort of where I am at the scale at all, I mean I don't think it's a case of me not passing, but I don't know whether it is a pass, a merit, a distinction, you know, I just don't know [chuckles]

Jen [2]: I think it comes back to the similar thing of not knowing exactly where you are, in terms of progress with the master's, because it's not taught just that lack of idea as to where you should be and whether you're anywhere close to that so it's like, you know, it's quite easy, dependent on each person, like with me I think I find it very hard to judge efficiently whether I'm making sufficient progress, or in the grand relation to the actual thesis, like whether I'm at the point that I should be at, erm, but it's relative to each person

In both quotes it seems clear that Chloe and Jen are tied to their undergraduate experience, similar to the lack of structure being particularly apparent to continuing students, as outlined above. Both indicate the idiosyncrasy to postgraduate research projects, likely exacerbating not knowing how to estimate one's performance (Hopwood et al., 2011), as the previously structured academic experiences allowed for peer comparison. The uncertainty about whether one's progress is appropriate generated stress for Cornwall et al.'s (2019) participants, with one of them reflecting on their responsibility to take action, due to the lack of structure. Similarly, Dom outlined that "*no one tells you what you're doing is right or wrong, like "This is the right way to do stuff", there isn't, there isn't any in academia, it's just like the final product is either good or bad I guess*". This demonstrates how the lack of structure and feedback is tied to the notion of independence and requires the PGR to

take action. Thus, PGRs' previous notions of successful performance must be adapted to the practices attendant in the new PGR CoP, they have to learn to estimate their performance with less guidance. In other words, they are required to become more independent, which of course is a valued practice in PGR education. In contrast to her previous master's experience, Chloe's PhD within the consortium entailed completing assignments in her first two years to gain a postgraduate certificate. She appreciated the feedback she received in the course of this.

Chloe [2]: when I got my first mark back, and I was like "Oh," so well the good thing obviously isn't about the thesis directly, but erm, either for example it's Harvard referencing in Hull, so I could practice that, so it was things like that where, erm, structurally, where I could get some sort of feedback before submitting anything for my PhD, so it was things like that were useful, and just writing techniques and things, that you know, that sort of feedback

4.3.2.3. *Lacking knowledge of disciplinary practices*

A further facet of not knowing relates to disciplinary practices, as practice – such as doing research, or writing – changes with discipline, with engagement in said disciplinary practice connoting belonging to each CoP (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). Both Andrea and Chris moved to different disciplines from their previous educational experiences, from English literature to linguistics, and from sociology to history, respectively. Both of their trajectories were hindered by this.

Andrea [1]: I'm not a native speaker, so sometimes I'm gonna write something, and to me it sounds fine, but it's not really, it's academic English, but it's not the way linguists want it, 'cause obviously a different area will have style of writing and my style is very literary, because that's my background, so I need to take it to the next level, which is linguistic style, which is very time-consuming and very (.) unnatural for me, so something that would normally take me like 20 minutes to write like a paragraph, it would take me 20 minutes to reference then, takes me like an hour.

Non-native speakers' difficulties with academic writing may be rooted in academic English being rather different to non-academic English, the latter of which students may already be familiar with (James, 2018). However, Andrea's difficulties seemed to stem from not knowing how to write academic English that matched her disciplinary practice, academic English within the linguistics. The exacerbated difficulty of becoming used to the writing in a new discipline was acknowledged by Mizzi (2014). To participate successfully, Andrea is required to shift from writing practices attendant to English literature, to the way academic writing is enacted in linguistics. Chris' difficulties are extended by not knowing how to do research in history, and also the lack of disciplinary knowledge concomitant to an undergraduate degree.

Chris: [the PhD] is now about places and their history, erm so yeah, so accommodating that without a history degree and without a MA in history, not really having done historical research is probably quite difficult I suppose that's why I'm at the end of year four with, I'm quite scared what it is that I'm going to submit [chuckles] erm yeah

R: Is it, erm, (.) like what exactly do you feel are you missing out on with not having done a history MA or undergrad?

Erm, well so there's quite a lot of, well I suppose there's two things; that sort of a depth of historical knowledge that you get from doing three, four years of history, and also the skills to complete history research so erm a lot of the time at the moment my research is erm (.) looking at historic newspapers, so aggregating the best of thousands of newspaper articles on certain subjects, on the same subject basically erm and then also looking through erm archive material, and having not done that before, erm, it's hard, I suppose that's quite difficult to kind of develop skills to write up, erm, I feel like there's also a way of writing history, that I didn't really understand either, so that's three things I guess, erm, but I think when I first started trying to write history, you just think it's one thing after another, you know, "Something happened, then another thing happened, and another thing happened", but erm that tends to produce quite boring writing, so you're looking to be more kind of analytical, in terms of, you know, themes and that sort of stuff, so yeah, I don't know if I'm doing a very good [chuckles] job of that but erm my skill has been developing

The lacking knowledge of disciplinary practice seems to complicate their engagement, and Chris' quote further echoes the above-mentioned notion of being unsure about one's performance. Both Andrea and Chris are required to negotiate not only the transition to the doctoral level, but also across disciplinary boundaries, which complicates their participation, consequently their identity development constitutes of even more facets than for PGRs who remain in the same discipline.

4.3.3. Diminishing not knowing: supervisory expertise

As illustrated in Chloe's example above, PGRs' participation may be enabled via access to a CoP's oldtimers, which may be represented by one's supervisor. It was noticeable however, that there were rather few instances featuring PGRs' comments surrounding supervisory expertise, or lack thereof, in relation to their subject area, such as regarding Vicky's lacking expertise in surveillance. Yet, Matteo ascribed high value to supervisory subject expertise, which led him to move to the participating university:

Matteo [1]: during the summer [before enrolment] my supervisor wrote me "Hi, I'm moving to another university, I took a job at another university" [...] at the first moment, there was a decision of, erm, my supervisor told me "If you want, you can stay in Leeds [...] with a different supervisor and then, erm, perhaps I can follow you informally" but of course, I mean it wouldn't be the same thing as him being my principal supervisor [...] and then I decided just to move over here, because the other person, I mean, erm, her expertise weren't really matching what I'm doing, so basically it would have been like doing PhD with someone who really doesn't know, in depth, of what I'm working on, and so I decided to move here

It seems, Matteo foresaw that being supervised by a subject-expert was crucial to his studies, to his participation in the academic CoP. In contrast, Melissa did not value subject-specific supervisory

expertise like Matteo. It is worth noting that she had already established relationships with the departmental staff, as she said “it always just felt like they were just like older friends, like really intelligent older friends”, which likely influenced her view:

Melissa [1]: You do get assigned [a supervisor], but it's usually, you already know, with the topic you choose [...] but because their research area is so wide, it's, it's fine, like even if, even if I had, erm, [another staff member] for example, who is specialised in Shakespeare and environmentalism and eco and like environment-based things, he'd still be able to (.) like tutor me, because of his like knowledge about society and things, and he's just, he's crazy, he just knows everything and I don't understand how, so like, there's, there's again, with literature, 'cause it's so interdisciplinary, everyone knows about everything, [...] it's so broad as subject, that it doesn't really matter what tutor you'd have. As, like some people are obviously more knowledgeable about topics, but I don't think it'd drastically influence (.) your, erm (.) your thesis or like how well it came out, 'cause at the end of the day it's down to the research. So even if they didn't know, they'd have the tools and the ability to find research, that we might not be able to

Melissa recognised that a competent supervisor is not necessarily a subject-expert, but someone who is able to guide the PGR with their research, for example how to do things. Through a CoP lens, supervisory expertise may be understood as introducing newcomers (PGRs) to the new practice. As outlined in the first chapter, practice encompasses ways of being and doing. The examples below illustrate how supervisory expertise introduced the PGRs into ways of doing and being, which seemed particularly meaningful in combination with notions of not knowing.

Chloe [1]: we are sort of expected in a way to erm apply for things, like to write a journal article or a conference paper and things like that, which I wasn't aware of I suppose beforehand, I just thought that'd be at a PhD level, erm, but I think the actual workload is, erm, manageable, as long as you take responsibility for it, so when I have meetings with Vicky, we plan out like when I'll have done this by and everything, so that (.)

R: you said you weren't really aware of that you erm should produce conference papers and journal articles, how did you find that out? Or who told you?

Erm, well I suppose it was probably my first meeting with Vicky was like “So what are you gonna do for your PhD?” [both chuckle] I was like “I don't even know if I wanna do one” [both chuckle] erm and kind of, yeah, it was very daunting at the beginning erm and she just said, you know “Look out for conferences”, erm, I suppose at the introductory meeting when they was on about the conference funding and they said that is for master's and PhD, so I was aware of that, but erm, I applied to do a conference and I'm doing one in September

Chloe's example demonstrates how Vicky expressed that being a master's student involves engaging in the wider academic community, via publications and conferences for example. Thus, Chloe's relationship with her supervisor enabled her to participate in the academic CoP, Vicky provided insight into how to be a master's student, likely affecting Chloe's identity development positively. It is further noticeable that Chloe acknowledges the notion of independence by taking responsibility for her

learning. Matteo was very appreciative of his supervisor's professional expertise in terms of knowing what Matteo should do if he wants to stay in academia post-PhD.

Matteo [1]: [Adam] asked me at my first supervision, basically he told me "Why do you want to do a PhD?" – "Hm, I don't know" [both chuckle] erm no, I mean I told him, like I'm enjoying doing, to study – "Do you want to stay in academia after or are you just doing a PhD? That's not a judgement, but it's different, if you want to do it because you want to work outside academia, then we can take this path, if you want to stay in academia then there is another thing that you should do", and so he said, he told me, "Well these are the conferences important to do, you have to go this year you have to go to this conference, next year you are going to that conference, then third year you are going to that conference, because they are the conferences which are important for your, erm, reputation" [...] I mean professionally, he is really, really awesome and he told me "You should be member of this association, this association, this association, these are the erm journals which are important in your field, the other, I mean, if you want to, you can read them, but, I mean erm, but these are journals that you have to read every, each issue that erm of this journal, you have to read it, because these are the, where people publish important things" and so in, erm, on this side he was really, really, I mean, awesome [chuckles]

Similar to Chloe's quote above, Matteo's relationship with his supervisor enabled him to participate in the academic context successfully. Noticeably, Adam asked whether Matteo's plan was to remain in academia post-PhD, as this would entail enacting certain valued practices, which Matteo would not be required to engage in if he did not want to remain in academia post-PhD. As outlined in the conceptual chapter, when McAlpine and Lucas' (2011) participants could see themselves as future academics, their engagement with practices like networking was facilitated. Similarly, Matteo's identity negotiations regarding a possible professional future in academia influenced his present participation, enabled by his supervisor's expertise. This aspect of their relationship was also evident in their supervision observation, specifically under *constructive conversation*, for example via the fieldnote "Matteo asks about the progress of his involvement of another conference, Adam said he emailed to relevant people, however, Matteo said he hasn't heard anything. Both said they will follow this up." Jen's example is particularly meaningful in relation to her quote above, outlining that she finds it very difficult to evaluate her progress.

Jen [2]: I think my idea of how far I was behind, was a lot actually larger than the reality of the situation, 'cause even my tutor was saying to me, when I did see her after quite a while of being away and working, I was, you know, distraught thinking "Oh my god, I'm not gonna make up this lost time, I'm so behind!" and she was like "Actually, you're kind of where you should be, if not a bit further ahead" for the fact that I'd already done some, quite a bit of work before everything kicked off

Considering the impact of the supervisory relationship on the PGR experience as outlined throughout this thesis, Jen's example demonstrates the importance of a successful interpersonal relationship (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a), which will be the focus of the second theme. In order for Vicky's

feedback to have the intended effect, which is likely to reassure Jen, there must be trust between them, in order for Jen to believe and trust Vicky's judgement regarding her progress.

4.3.4. Conclusion

Although some support was presented in favour of the assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b) via previous success in the form of gained self-efficacy regarding PGRs' way of working as well as their subject knowledge, the varying facets of *not knowing* which directly oppose the assumption of expertise seem dominant. Extending the literature, PGRs – especially continuing students – did not know how to structure their time and how to evaluate their performance against appropriate progress, as they do not hold the knowledge of what constitutes appropriate progress. With regard to PGRs who had changed disciplines, attendant practices were difficult to negotiate. The result of not knowing was PGRs' complicated participation, at times obstructing participation. But, I presented instances where this was diminished via supervisory expertise, not necessarily with regard to supervisor's subject knowledge, but their knowledge of the community of practice, which they introduced PGRs to. Thereby the supervisory relationship enabled PGRs' participation, which positively contributed to their identity development, because these processes are inextricably intertwined, as outlined in the conceptual chapter. Having somewhat addressed the influence of the supervisory relationship through the CoP lens (Wenger, 1998), the following chapter focuses on the conception of interpersonal relationships PGR share with their supervisors and peers through the lens outlined in the first chapter, specifically according to Vygotsky (1978) in combination with Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a).

4.4. Interpersonal relationships and participation

The second theme explores the relationships PGRs were engaged in, mainly concentrating on peer and supervisory relationships. The focus lies with providing an in-depth insight into interpersonal relationships – as theorised by Tobbell & O'Donnell (2013a) – and the concomitant impact on PGRs' participation. As the majority of this chapter focuses on relationships it is important to note from the outset that the purpose of this theme, is not to present definitive characteristics of 'good' or 'bad' relationships. As Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a, p.12) pointed out, doing so "would be neither possible nor desirable" because relationships are complex, and people are individuals. What constitutes a good relationship for one PGR, may constitute a bad relationship to the next PGR – because PGRs are individuals with individual needs and understandings, just like their peers and supervisors. Instead, the purpose is to offer an in-depth insight into the relationships of my participants, the analysis of which aims to create meaning across the data set. After presenting facets of unsuccessful and then successful interpersonal relationships, the impact of the PGR-context on relationship formation will be outlined.

4.4.1. Facets of unsuccessful interpersonal relationships with supervisors

As mentioned in the previous theme, it was noticeable that there were few instances of lacking supervisory expertise negatively impacting PGRs' participation. However, issues on the interpersonal level, such as being *not on the same page*, seemed to carry greater consequences, as outlined in the examples below.

Marcus: then in second year I was a bit lost, I was a bit lost, and my supervisors had a falling out, erm, about my work, so they kind of, erm, they kind of said to me, erm (.) "We're not gonna work with each other anymore," [chuckles] erm, "so you're gonna have to pick one of us", erm, so I did and then that didn't go down well with one of them, erm,

R: Well, the one you didn't pick, I suppose?

Yeah, who was my original first supervisor, erm, [...] so that supervisor had been on sabbatical for most of my first year, erm, so I spent a lot of time with the second supervisor, so I ended up picking the second supervisor, erm, to kind of go forward, and it didn't, it wasn't acceptable by the original supervisor, erm (.) so, that was kind of like a, that was bit stressful, that was a bit stressful and then I had to kind of adapt to that, erm

R: Oh my god, so they fell out over your work?

Yeah, well, I think they had problems before, erm, but then I think there was a conversation behind closed doors between them, and, you know, they just said to me "Right, you're gonna have to kind of choose one of us, because we can't work together"

R: as in were they like, would they have wanted to take your work into different directions? Or was it like

Oh, definitely, yeah, erm, but they kind of, I think it was more to do with their relationship,

R: *Okay, like personally*

Yeah, erm, but, you know, it was kind of, the aftermath of that was a little bit tricky to negotiate, especially when it's such a small department, and you're kind of seeing them all the time, erm, [...] and then you have to pretend everything's okay, and all the rest of it, erm, but yeah, I mean, this happens though, this happens, supervisors fight over their students sometimes [...] it's probably quite rare, but it does happen, you know, people fall out over their PhD students, erm, but, you know, I went with one and it just like that kind of, it led to a couple of problems and then, erm

R: *in terms of what?*

well, the original supervisor, erm, wasn't very happy with it, erm, their partner wasn't very happy with it, their partner, who's got nothing to do with the university, was like sending me messages on Facebook and stuff, saying "How could you do this, after everything they've done for you"

R *Wow! Oh my god!*

[laughs] yeah, yeah, so erm, it was kind of, and it just became, and I was ready to quit at that point, erm

First of all, it must be noted that it was Marcus' supervisors who were *not on the same page*, who required him to make a choice between them, clearly reflecting that the onus of activity laid with Marcus. As pointed out by Cox (2005) as well as Li et al. (2009), Lave and Wenger's (1991) theorising recognised the power relations between newcomers and oldtimers, yet provided little insight into power relations among oldtimers or newcomers, and the attendant potential for conflict. Marcus' example demonstrates the importance of considering the relation between oldtimers, in this case his supervisors. Based on their conflict, they empowered Marcus to make the decision as to who would be his supervisor going forward. However, evident through the reaction of the non-chosen supervisor, as well as their partner, there was a right choice to be made from their point of view. Marcus' choice not corresponding with the non-chosen supervisor's view complicated his further participation within the department. Gunnarsson et al. (2013) suggested that upon a personal disruption between student and supervisor, a supervisor change should be undertaken as soon as possible. However, as apparent in Marcus' case, to understand PGRs' experiences, the context they are situated in must be considered, as Marcus had to face the aftermath of his decision, which he found tricky. The dissonance between the two parties, clearly taking place on the interpersonal level, led to Marcus being ready to leave. However, our interview took place a few weeks after Marcus' viva, he did complete his doctorate.

Melissa [2]: [my supervisor] is constantly telling me like "You're an expert on this, you know everything about it", I'm like [whispers] "No, I don't" [...] but I feel like they are trying to support you, motivate you and show you how good you are, but it's also like a scaremongering thing for you because you're like "Erm, no, I'm not" [chuckles] "No, I'm not going to be" but obviously

I've had the time off and my housemate's doing a literature master's as well and just seeing how far she's come in the last six months, and how much she knows about it, I'm like "Shit, yeah, she actually is an expert on it" like she actually knows everything about it, and maybe it's just because you're in that position that you can't see (.)

The identity her supervisor is suggesting, that of an expert, was rejected by Melissa, she did not view herself in a way that is compatible with her supervisor's view. They had not established an intersubjective understanding (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007) of each other. Noticeably, Melissa indicated an understanding of her supervisor's thoughts, specifically his intention when referring to her as an expert. However, it seems her supervisor lacked an understanding of how this would be received by Melissa. Melissa's clear rejection of the conception of herself as an expert, seems to indicate that this would be an identity shift too far – for now. Melissa further acknowledged that expertise may be more readily observable by someone other than yourself, however, her referral to the assumption of expertise as “scaremongering” seems to indicate pressure rather than motivation.

Matteo [1]: with my supervisor, erm my former supervisor, my master supervisor, basically it's a bit weird because we, erm, laugh and make jokes, and we complain about a lot of things, and it's more a friendship than, erm, I mean now we are peers, we are, it's not anymore that he's my, he's higher than me but we still use, erm, in language, a formal level [regarding Italian grammar], erm and the same thing is that, basically we use, I mean, vulgar words and bad jokes, but in a very formal way and for me it's normal, because, I mean, erm (.) while here, I mean with my supervisor, we call by first name and erm things like that, but I think the level of familiarity that I have with him is not the same, I mean, that I have with my former supervisor

Matteo pointed out in the first interview that he did not share the same familiarity with Adam as he does with his former master's supervisor. Noticeably, this may stem from the comparatively little time Matteo and Adam have had to form a successful interpersonal relationship, for example Gunnarsson et al. (2013) reported of supervisors forming friendships with doctoral students over time, as Matteo has with his master's supervisor. This is relatable to proximal processes, as their significance increases as they develop over time (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005). Correspondingly, Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) outlined that learning relationships are contingent on establishing successful interpersonal relationships, which takes time, as the two parties negotiate their relationship. However, the extracts below from the second interview indicate that Matteo and Adam struggled to form an entirely successful interpersonal relationship over time.

Matteo [2]: I got out [of his 'negative moment'], basically I was starting, I was (.) starting to see how much my work actually is appreciated here in the university, I mean, by my supervisor, by my, even if he doesn't tell me, but I have spies all over, [...] I mean they're not my spies, like one was my co-supervisor, we were having a casual conversation and erm (.) and she was saying "Well, I do know that Adam thinks this, this, and that about you"

Matteo [2]: I mean I really cannot complain about my workload, and about my PhD, about the research, I mean I don't have anything that I can see negative at the moment, also I mean the relationship with Adam is, I mean, it's working, in a way that's perhaps not really, super-friendly, and super-personal, but it's working, I mean, in some way – I started, after perhaps you told me, I started to notice that sometimes I can see, I can tell when he's happy, when he's really happy about my work, even if he doesn't say "I'm happy about your work, good job", or things like that, but I perhaps, I started perhaps noticing that, like for example, we met on Monday, I submitted like a literature review [...], and at the end he said, I mean, he was like "Oh, yeah, that's fine, I don't understand this, I understand, why you wrote this?", we have our usual chat, and at the end "Oh, I think this is one of the most lucid explanations of the problem that I have seen", and I was like "Yes!"

R: Wow, that's great!

Yeah, I was like "Okay, right, thank you" [both chuckles] and also the fact that, I mean, the fact that he accepted to be my erm, personal guarantor for my house, that was something, I mean, very, I mean, that I really appreciated much, because it was something that, it was not his duty, he could have refused of course, and say "No, I don't want to be your guarantor", or "I can't", or things like that it will be absolutely understandable [...] but the fact that he was like "Yeah, of course, I'm very happy to do it" – "Oh, really?" [chuckles] [...] I mean, even if he doesn't tell it, I can see that he cares about my work, about me as a scholar and things like that, so yeah, it's working [chuckles]

According to Matteo, his relationship with Adam works, yet it seems limited to the academic aspect of their relationship, as Matteo said Adam cares about his work and him as a scholar. What remains absent is what I have previously referred to as considering the PGR beyond their studenthood. Although Matteo presented the example of Adam accepting to be his guarantor, which does demonstrate his consideration of Matteo as a person rather than exclusively as a student, which Matteo greatly valued, this seems to be the exception to the rule. It seems the central issue regarding Matteo and Adam's relationship on the interpersonal level is a lack of openness from Adam, such as his thoughts about Matteo's work, or more specifically, when he is happy with Matteo's work. This is particularly apparent when Adam jokingly refers to others in the academic context as his "*spies*" who offer insight into what Adam thinks about Matteo and his work, and when Matteo outlined a seemingly rare occasion of Adam praising his work. There is a clear relation to the findings of the qualitative content analysis, specifically their supervision observation, in which it was noticeable, in comparison to the other supervision observations, that instances of *talking positively about PGR and/or their work* were absent. This may complicate Matteo's engagement with his studies, as a lack of external validation, for example via supervisory praise, may hinder identity shifts (Collins & Brown, 2020). Matteo's experience of lacking positive feedback, similar to Hu et al. (2016), with the first author of this self-study feeling insecure about their performance, clearly links to the aforementioned struggle with not knowing how to judge one's performance. Another facet of Matteo and Adam's relationship was the challenging nature of their supervision session, which was first outlined in the

first subchapter of this chapter. It seems that challenging Matteo's knowledge and initiating stimulating discussions reflected Adam's idea of what a supervision session should be like. But, considering the lacking praise, combined with Matteo referring to their relationship as "*perhaps not really, super-friendly, and super-personal*" indicates that this may have not reflected what Matteo would have liked out of their supervisory relationship. Again, the lacking understanding of each other's thoughts indicates that intersubjectivity had not been established, based on both failing to demonstrate openness. In contrast, Matteo seemed to have formed a more successful interpersonal relationship with his co-supervisor:

Matteo [2]: she's really good, and she's really, she has, I mean, erm, a way of doing things rather slightly informal, more informal, I mean, with my principal supervisor it's great, but he's a very, very formal person, so, erm, that's rather different, and erm, with her it's like, I mean, everything is more relaxed; "Yeah okay, let's talk about it in front of a beer" [both laugh] – "of course"

With regard to the supervisory relationship shared by Matteo and Adam, it seems they have somewhat different understandings of what their relationship should involve, which complicates the formation of a learning relationship as per Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a). Despite the in-depth presentation of aspects of Matteo and Adam's relationship which disadvantaged Matteo, it must be pointed out that they shared a good professional relationship, which worked according to Matteo. For example, in the previous subchapter I outlined how greatly Matteo appreciated Adam's expertise in terms of the different aspects of his participation as a PhD student who wants to remain in academia post-PhD. Thus, rather than demonstrating their interpersonal relationship as entirely problematic, the points made should be conceived as opportunities for improvement aiming to boost PGRs' participation.

4.4.2. Facets of unsuccessful interpersonal relationships with peers

As outlined in her story, Emily struggled to engage with her academic peers. Rather than positive or negative peer relationships, there appeared to be an overall lack of connection, which was seemingly by Emily's choice. However, when said disconnect to peers is not by choice, students experienced this as stressful (Cornwall et al., 2019). As outlined in the literature review, peer relationships were burdensome when students felt excluded from the community (Stubb et al., 2011), when lab-mates contributed to a dispirited work atmosphere (Benjamin et al., 2017), and increased anxiety levels via competitiveness (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). This last point was echoed in one of the staff interviews:

Staff [institutional level]: Be wary of people who think – I think students need to be wary of students, there's a few, who think they know it all, often they're not good students actually, I

remember I had a very good PhD student, who is a lecturer now, erm, and she was one of two who got a full bursary that year under a scheme years ago and the other person was forever sort of boasting and telling this other PhD student “Oh, haven’t you done this yet? Oh dear! You’re behind, aren’t you?”, erm, however, she passed with minor corrections, published half a dozen articles already – the other one never got a PhD

Similarly, McLaughlin and Sillence (2018) pointed out that being part of a social media group with other postgraduate taught students led to some feeling inadequate due to comparing their progress with their peers’. Similar comparisons, which may foster anxiety, seem grounded in doctoral students comparing themselves against an expected, ‘normal’ progress, which does not exist due to the idiosyncratic nature of postgraduate research studies (Hopwood et al., 2011). Extending the literature, Marcus’ example below seems to present a new facet of peer relationships impeding his participation.

Marcus: What I found really difficult was because there’s a lot of, erm, there’s a lot of foreign students, who do English linguistics, erm, and they come up to you all the time to ask you to look over a paragraph or a page [...] erm, so, there is a few people who’d come up to me every time I was in [the PGR study space], going “Would you mind just having a look at...?” – so I just, I can’t use it at all

R: It’s like difficult to say “No, sorry”

[jokingly]: “Just go away, just leave me alone” [both laugh] “I’m dying in my own pages at the moment”

Noticeably, the hinderance in dedicating time to his work seems to stem from being a well-integrated member of the community. But it appears they were *not on the same page* in terms of the use of the PGR study space, as Marcus wanted to use it to work on his PhD, whereas his peers wanted to engage with Marcus who had been helping them previously, not realising they were asking too much. Rather than openly addressing this with his peers, Marcus avoided the space altogether, instead he utilised the institutionally available PGR study space in the library. Thus, the relationship with his peers hindered Marcus’ participation in terms of being unable to utilise the study space. But, foregrounding his academic pursuit, he negotiated a way of participating in the PGR context in a way that allowed him to do so. The next example demonstrates being *not on the same page* based on opposing viewpoints.

Matteo [2]: also I mean when I was having this like erm negative moment, I was hanging out with some friend and she was like super, like (.) fed up, with her research and erm, and she doesn’t want to stay at university, she wants to have a “real job” and things like that, so perhaps it was also like I was influenced by that, and we were arguing, because she wants to come back to Italy, and she hates UK basically and erm I’m the opposite [...] and so we were, I mean it was like we were, not fighting but we were arguing about that, because it was, I mean, when she was saying that, that she wants to come back to Italy as soon as possible, and erm she doesn’t want to hear from England anymore, and she hates this place, she hates [the place

in which the participating university is located], she hates people from this place and everyone is erm, yeah [...] and on the other side I was having the opposite feeling

Matteo's example displays how the contradicting views that he and his friend held contributed to what he referred to as his 'negative moment'. His situation at the time was characterised by questions such as "*Why am I doing this?*", (*How is it important?*), "*Do I want to stay in academia for the rest of my life?*", "*Even if it's a shitty place?*". Part of Matteo's resolve of his 'negative moment' was situated in interaction with the peers he held a successful interpersonal relationship with, which preludes the next section.

4.4.3. Facets of successful interpersonal relationships with peers

The most important factor of a positive peer relationship seemed to be *being in the same boat*, which somewhat opposed the defining characteristic of unsuccessful interpersonal relationships being *not on the same page*. Continuing Matteo's dealing with his 'negative moment' he said the following:

Matteo [2]: I mean, I guess that I was talking with [P3], with other people, and they all said to me that at some point you question your PhD, you have issues with this and you start thinking "Why am I doing this?" and things like that, so I guess it's something normal, that it happens [...] also I mean, having some casual conversation, seeing that what you're struggling with is something that everybody went through in their PhD life, it's something that, it helps you a lot, to say "Okay well, it's something normal"

This is similar to the example at the end of the previous subchapter, proposing that Jen and Vicky share a trusting relationship, as this serves as condition for Jen to believe Vicky's judgement of the situation. Jen trusted Vicky having a good understanding "*of where [Jen] should be*" based on her oldtimer position in the CoP. Similarly, Matteo trusted his peers' advice who have been in the same position previously, thus making them more experienced newcomers. This is in line with Denman et al. (2018) and Guerin et al. (2013), who suggested that peers being open to each other about experiences of struggle and self-doubt was deemed a source of support via lessening feelings of self-doubt and anxiety, which also challenges the assumption of expertise (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b). This seemed to be the case for Matteo, who benefited from his peers' openness, as it contributed to the normalisation of experiencing difficulties. Conversing with his peers revealed to Matteo that his experience of struggle constitutes part of being a doctoral student, likely allowing him to conceive himself as a legitimate member of the academic CoP. There was a clear shift in his identity; from uncertainty expressed via wondering "*Do I want to stay in academia for the rest of my life?*" towards knowing that his experience embodies that of a doctoral student, which enabled his participation going forward.

Jen [2]: I've been to a couple of those [research seminars], we've gone for like lunch and stuff afterwards with the tutors, erm, so it definitely encourages the community sort of aspect of the department, and it helps, because I, you know, I end up talking to other people in the same boat as me if not worse [chuckles] like in rockier waters, doing their PhDs and being in the last stages of all of that and it's just good for perspective and advice really

Chloe [1]: Yeah, but I think it's nice to just to talk to PhD students on the course and everything, 'cause obviously I was taught by two of them, so I just see them as "Oh they're on it, they know what they're doing and everything" and then having conversation of saying "Oh we get nerves about conferences" or stuff like that makes me feel better then, going to something, 'cause I know that I'm not on my own or I'm stressing out and it's not just me

Jen and Chloe's quotes demonstrate the value of their departmental community in terms of the opportunities for interaction for all postgraduate researchers. This relates to the writing groups section of the literature review, specifically to Kumar and Aitchison (2018) and Maher et al. (2013) who reported of more senior PhD students providing advice and guidance to junior PhD students. This spanned across programme boundaries for Jen and Chloe as both were master's by research students at the time. Clearly, the peers Jen and Chloe interacted with served as more experienced newcomers, or even oldtimers, introducing them to the CoP's practice and thus enabling them to participate. Another positive aspect of peers sharing their experiences can be venting (Mantai, 2019a), as presented below.

Marcus: I was very good friends with another postgrad, who, we'd kind of have our [chuckles] sometimes daily rants about how horrible it all is, and it does help having someone who's also in it, who's also doing very similar stuff, erm, to kind of just, you know, bounce ideas off, and, you know, just kind of let your hair down with [chuckles] and discuss it with

Chris: it's more just about support I suppose between erm, people and talking to each other about erm about stuff and I suppose venting about stuff, I mean she more times than me I suppose but erm just having someone who's got the same experiences you're going through the same stuff as you, it's really helpful, yeah definitely (.)

Being able to talk about one's experiences and them being heard or even reciprocated may foster a sense of belonging (Morris, 2021), strengthening identification with the CoP. Sharing the experience of being a PGR enables relatability, understanding, and thus intersubjectivity (Bråten & Trevarthen, 2007). As indicated above, intersubjectivity further requires openness and trust, which is likely given when venting, as openly talking about things one is frustrated with or unhappy about, indicates that they trust each other to listen and not judge, that their conversation takes place in an environment where one can openly share their experience. Peers have an advanced understanding of each other's situation in comparison to other people in a PGR's life, such as one's family and friends, specifically if they have not studied on the PGR level. This was manifested through the code *lacking understanding of non-PGRs*, which due to the limited size of this thesis cannot be further elaborated on, but is exemplified via one quote:

Chloe [1]: I think what's useful about having friends that do their master and friends who do English is they understand what I'm doing whereas my parents don't understand the actual specifics of what I'm doing really, just that I'm writing a lot [chuckles]

The people participants referred to in instances that were coded under *lacking understanding of non-PGRs* were typically their family, friends, and partners, who knew each other well, and represented a source of emotional support for the PGR. One benefit of peer relationships was the academic support they provided, stemming from knowledge they had about each other's projects, evidencing the complexity of their relationships.

Melissa [1]: because we're, we see each other, and we know our topics, it's a bit more like "Oh yeah", 'cause I like often pop up to like Jen, or [another course mate] or Chloe and be like "Oh, I've seen this on surveillance you can have a look at this", or, if I'm reading stuff, like I did it with Jen when I was reading erm, Judith Butler text, I was like "This is all about feminism" and this post-it note, it'd be like "You need to read this chapter", so it, it's nice having that, 'cause even though you've got the lecturers, it's nice to have like a little community that are like looking out for each other

PGRs' shared experience is the aspect positioning peer relationships as particularly meaningful, as they have an intersubjective understanding of each other's situation, based on inhabiting the same context, being members of one CoP, and holding a similar position within the CoP. Another component indicative of successful interpersonal relationships was in line with Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) courtesy, which related to demonstrating basic social behaviour. Due to the restricted space for this thesis, I did not include quotes in this instance, but examples of friendliness among peers were found in Chloe's first interview, as she described a welcoming environment in introductory meetings, Leo outlined his readiness to talk to anyone in their humanities PGR study space, which he viewed as social space as pointed out previously. And Jen reported of her peer group staying in touch via a social media group, enabling them to share when each would be on campus so they could meet for lunch. Aspects of basic social behaviour in the context of the supervisory relationship will be established in the following section.

4.4.4. Facets of successful interpersonal relationships with supervisors

Examples indicating a friendly relationship being held include Andrea saying: *"they're both very, very good, they're lovely ladies"*, Chris said *"I think I get on really well with him, I really like him"*, and Emily pointed out *"we get along really well"*. Another aspect that may be considered as demonstrating basic social behaviour was asking the students how they were doing.

Chloe [1]: *I think everyone from the course is very sort of kind and supportive as well and like we do talk about our research, but also, even the supervisors and everything, ask, how we are doing, you know*

Vicky started the supervision session with Jen by asking “So, how has it been going?”. Asking the PGRs how they are doing, not necessarily in relation to their work, demonstrates their consideration for them beyond their studenthood, the importance of which has been repeatedly outlined in this thesis. Subsequently, there is the potential to engage in a conversation about personal matters, where both parties share positives or negatives, like Denman et al. (2018) reported of their peer group sharing familial triumphs as well as challenges as outlined in the literature review. This would contribute to supervision being a space where personal matters are talked about, to an extent that each feel comfortable with. The point is that sharing a supervisory relationship which both parties conceive as an environment characterised by openness and trust may enable the PGR (or indeed the supervisor) to disclose any issues they may experience, which would thereby enable the dismantling of the assumption of expertise. Further, as outlined above, normalising experiences of struggle or hardship likely contribute to PGRs’ identification with the CoP. Jen’s quote below clearly reflects that she perceived her relationship with Vicky to feature a safe space, meaning she was able to openly talk about any issues.

Jen [2]: *mental health wise, I had a complete dip, which was kind of unprecedented and erm something I hadn’t anticipated or, and that knocked me even more than what I thought the busiest period during summer would have done, erm, and that was something I was very vocal about, again, you know, the services at the university, they really do emphasise that before you start, during the course, constantly, if you need additional support, they’re the place to go, so with me it was more a matter of I emailed my supervisor as soon as I knew something wasn’t right, and said “I am struggling, something has changed mentally, I am not sure about my capacity to work right now, because I’m more worried about the implications of that generally, just my mental health changing”*

Jen’s readiness to openly communicate her mental health difficulties with Vicky is a testament to the successful interpersonal relationship they have established. This is particularly meaningful considering I outlined in the literature review that PGRs’ wellbeing tended to be worse when they could not be open about their mental health (Barreira et al., 2018).

Chloe [1]: *I think from the beginning, erm, our relationship with the tutors was quite relaxed, so it was always respectful, but it didn’t feel like a sort of teacher-student relationship, like school, erm, and I know like other institutions are more sort of strict on that, whereas, erm, for us, especially because I think few of my teachers or modules were, erm, PhD students as well, so, erm, I think all the supervisors as well are very supportive, and I’d feel comfortable going to any of them to talk about issues*

Chloe somewhat widened this to the whole department, who have seemingly established successful interpersonal relationships with their students from the outset. This seems to reflect the CoP’s

practice being underpinned by the notion that students' participation is enhanced when they can participate as persons, rather than solely students.

Chloe [1]: I feel comfortable saying to Vicky sometimes like erm, I have a meeting every two weeks and then if we plan something I think that's gonna take me longer, I say "Can I have three weeks to do that instead?" and then that's not a problem

Emily [1]: I am intelligent and stuff but I really struggle with like common, like vocabulary, so like people use words and I'm like "I don't know what that means" erm, so like really academic language, I can't even think of an example, but I don't get what they mean, like they were doing it in my [Y1 progression meeting prior to the interview] today, I was sat there like "What? What's going on?" but I didn't wanna say that 'cause I don't know them but with [my supervisor I have] a relationship where like I can ask, I feel comfortable enough to be like "I don't know what that means"

These quotes seem similar to Wardale et al.'s (2015) writing group, and Meschitt's (2019) collaborative peer group who highlighted the importance of a safe space in terms of enabling PGRs to freely express a lack of understanding or ask naïve questions. Meschitti (2019) conceptualised peer learning as contingent on the establishment of a safe space, which was facilitated by openness and trust. The quotes above demonstrate the applicability to the supervisory context, thus positing that establishing a safe space, trust, and openness are part of developing a successful interpersonal relationship, which enables PGRs' participation. As outlined previously, the negotiation of meaning and identity are inextricably intertwined, thus when one's participation is enabled, so is one's conception of oneself as member of the CoP. Another aspect of basic social behaviour in the supervisory context seems to be interest, the importance of which was outlined in the literature review (Ali et al., 2016; Manathunga, 2005). This was further echoed in both staff interviews; on the institutional level: *"the basic thing is being seriously interested in what they're doing and being on top of it"* and on the school level *"there should be at least one person apart from the student who is interested, you know, in a really honest and genuine way, in what the student is doing"*. The value of this is illustrated via the quote below, demonstrating the impact not only on one's PGR, but also beyond departmental and institutional boundaries.

Dom [2]: I think, erm, my supervisor, again, just loves the subject, she says that she likes supervising because she likes to learn herself, 'cause we're researching stuff that she hasn't researched, that's why other people like erm like her as well, because she, you know, if PhD student follows her, like not from our university, I might have said this last time, but there was at a conference in the Midlands, and they're like "Oh, I know your supervisor, they follow me on twitter" it's like "I can't believe it" and I'm like, so I told my supervisor and she goes like "Well yeah, 'cause I'm interested in what people are doing" and it's like, then you hear people who have other supervisors, and they're like, they live in ivory tower, like, and they don't know anything that's going on and it's, I guess that makes the difference and that's because it is just a community at the end of the day,

It seems one facet of Dom's supervisor's interest was expressed via following doctoral students (who were not their supervisees) on twitter, which these students were delighted by. It conveys not solely an expression of interest, but likely also invites doctoral students to view themselves as part of the community. In contrast, Dom reported of other supervisors who "live in the ivory tower" – an expression of separation, likely conveying to doctoral students that they do not belong. One of the indicators of a successful interpersonal relationship may be a continued relationship. As the examples below demonstrate, Tim and Melissa knew their master's supervisors since their undergraduate degree.

Tim: it just came out of continually meeting with the person in question (.) erm, I didn't necessarily expect to end up with that supervisor but we had developed a good enough relationship over the course of my undergrad that he was the first person I came to, to ask for guidance with this.

Melissa [1]: I think we probably get on more well, more than others. [...] I don't know if that's because of the whole like relationship that we've had over the past three, four years, [...] my interests are similar to the speciality that he is in, so I think it's just a case of, because we have similar interests and we know each other so well now, that it's, it's a good compatibility, to have him as a supervisor.

This is in favour of the notion that it takes time to establish a successful interpersonal relationship, as this provides opportunity to negotiate their roles and to develop a complex relationship (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a), which strengthens its impact (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 2005). This somewhat opposes the notion of supervisory 'fit' benefiting the relationship as outlined in the literature review (Sverdlik et al., 2018), because the relationship is conceived as a developmental process that changes over time, rather than a one-time measurement. Dom explained the value of getting to know one's supervisor: "that's the thing, isn't it? That's (.) everyone's different, and I guess it's building up that, erm, that relationship that you know, so you know how it operates". This certainly echoes the notion of intersubjectivity in terms of the PGR and supervisor getting to know each other, and negotiating their relationship. This is also explicated in the following quote.

Leo: For me it's about once every two months

R: you meet with your supervisor?

Yeah, but it should be more often, but he and I both know that, because of all of the other stuff that I have to do, I make no progress for two, three months, I haven't done, haven't written anything on my dissertation for three months, because I've been looking after my mum, I've been preparing for funding interviews, I've been working and things like that. He knows that I haven't done anything, but he knows that if, in a month I could probably get done as much as, because I'm so old and experienced

Leo's example demonstrates his supervisor's intersubjective understanding of Leo's situation and his way of working, they consequently have negotiated rules that work for them. Thus, through the successful interpersonal relationship they share, Leo's participation is enabled. Noticeably, the examples so far demonstrated when intersubjective understanding of the PGR was demonstrated, yet the following quotes display the other side of the reciprocal nature of intersubjectivity.

Chris: but you know, he's got so much other work that he has to be getting on with that it's, erm teaching classes, doing his own research, you know, so you can't be, I mean the fact that he has, I suppose, that you have to see them every month or whatever, but he has been available and erm whatever so erm you can't really criticise that

Also Melissa considered that "you've got to take into account that they're, that they're teaching undergrads and marking, and whatever else they're doing". As mentioned in the literature review, research regarding the supervisory relationship frequently remained on a descriptive level, with 'support' being one of notions that often require further exploration to gain meaning. Within my data, I found support to be in the form of encouragement and the supervisor having the PGR's back, as respectively presented in the following:

Matteo [2]: my co-supervisor told me that the conference in Switzerland, the one in Lucerne, erm, there will be this big name from Oxford, she's like a very big name, and she's told me that she's organising this seminar [...] every year at Oxford, and my co-supervisor told me "Well, you should talk to her"

Fieldnotes supervision Jen & Vicky: "Vicky suggests for Jen to present the chapter at the PGR conference in June, Jen responds "Really?" – Vicky said that she thinks Jen would be really good at it, and everyone knows that she started in January, not in September, and therefore wouldn't expect to present her whole thesis – Vicky suggests for Jen to think about it and says "You will be great at it"

As per the literature review, Peltonen et al. (2017) conceived encouragement to be one facet of supervisory support. Both quotes demonstrate that encouragement in this thesis is understood as encouraging PGRs' participation, via engaging in their academic context. As mentioned in the conceptual chapter, facilitating students to conceive themselves as academics or researchers affirms their researcher identity (Cotterall, 2015) – as per the above quotes, students were encouraged to network and present their work, respectively. Somewhat differently, below are examples of supervisors having their PGR's back.

Chloe [2]: I had my meeting and then [my new supervisor] said "Have you got your card yet?", and I said "I've done the online enrolment, so I just have to go and do it" and he was like "Alright, I'll walk you there" and walked me there and told me what I need to do, and then said "You know, just come back to my office if you don't get your card today", which was just really nice, 'cause I felt like there was somebody there, [...] 'cause obviously on the first day I was sort of there with my campus map, going "Where's this building? Where's this building?", and it

was just nice that, I'd already had a look where I needed to go for my enrolment, but then he'd taken me there, which was really, really nice, 'cause he just, you know, I just felt very, erm, supported then, and I felt like "Oh, I'm with a good supervisor, so it's gonna be okay"

Emily [2]: 'cause obviously I'm funded by the uni [...], I owe them a lot of hours [...] and they tried to get me to teach another module in September, and I just said "I'm not doing it" [...] they gave me like two weeks' notice, and it's three days a week, and [...] it would use my entire amount of money they pay me just on the train fare to come and teach [...] it's a careers-module and there's loads of different (.) things, I don't know, and I was like I don't understand why they'd want, like 'cause I was, what was I? I was like 22 at the time, a 22-year-old, who's never had a graduate job, who got rejected to all graduate job applications, [...] it just made no sense, and, 'cause I was working, well I'm still working, but I'm not supposed to be working, erm, at the council, I'd have to quit, [...] so I was like "Oh, I'm not doing it", and my supervisor was like "I don't want you to do it anyway"

Chloe's quote clearly demonstrates how her supervisor's readiness to support her by accompanying her to enrol, as he was most likely aware that Chloe was navigating a new space, resulted in Chloe feeling reassured that her relationship with her supervisor is on the right track. Emily's quote illustrates that her supervisor having her back somewhat opposed departmental requests, however enabled Emily's participation in terms of her being able to continue to work her part-time job at the council, and dedicate the time to her studies as she wants to. It seems considering the uncertainty students have indicated throughout this chapter, such as not knowing how to structure their time or being unsure about their performance, PGRs likely feel reassured when their supervisor approves of their choices. This is in support of Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013b) proposition that participation is enabled through relationships. The influence of the wider departmental and institutional context on PGRs' relationships is the focus of the following section.

4.4.5. The impact of the PGR context on relationship formation

Similar to Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013a) considering the impact of the attendant context on relationship formation, this section explores how the PGR context constructs relationships. As mentioned in Chloe's story, her context was shaped by the consortium:

Chloe [2]: I think one of the best things was, when I applied to the consortium, I thought "That's your funding body, and that's what it is", and it isn't. Erm, it's basically, erm, (.) it's a set-up to sort of, so that you have people that you can communicate with, like other PhD students".

Of course, this contextual impact is specific only to Chloe, however, serves as example of attendant practices enabling relationship formation and thus her participation. As applicable across the data set, the institutional context and its impact will be presented, followed by the departmental level.

Exploring the instances coded under *supervisor provisions* and *opportunities for academic engagement* under the main category *Institutional Provisions* of the qualitative content analysis, it became clear that the institutional context as it is outlined in the analysed documents carries some impact on relationships. For example, the institutional documents provide guidelines, such as the supervisory team constituting of up to three members, and supervisions taking place on a regular, scheduled basis. Some opportunities for engagement were apparent, for example in one of the study space observations I took note of a poster advertising a new group, run by the institutional wellbeing team, which would meet monthly, and discuss topics such as ‘working in isolation’, or ‘fear of failure’. A relationship-enabling practice, which was apparent in the qualitative content analysis (via *opportunities for academic engagement*) as well as the reflexive TA (via *funding*), was the opportunity for PGRs to attend and present their work at conferences, at the expense of the participating university.

Andrea [2]: like I had [a conference] in Iceland, but I knew I could get funding for it, so I got funding to go to Iceland

R: Oh, so you used the like £500 for international conferences?

I did, yeah, it's 800, yeah, that we get, so I used that for that.

Yet, dependent on one's engagement in the academic context, specifically the number and cost of the conferences PGRs attend, the institutionally available funding may not suffice.

Matteo [2]: we do have erm, £800 for three years of PhD, so we – and basically, I'm using all of that for these two conferences [in Switzerland], and there's still, I'm short of £250 to attend these conferences [...] so basically, what I'm doing now is begging around the department “Do you have any money left?” [chuckles]

However, it is certainly positive that this conference funding is available, which likely encourages PGRs to establish relationships with their peers. That was the case for Matteo as well as Andrea, who both recurrently met the same people at conferences.

Matteo [2]: Yeah, erm, I mean he is basically my age, we met a couple of years ago at a conference, and erm, since there are not many young (.) scholars [in our field] [chuckles] so it's easy to erm, and also he worked with, erm, he's now post-doc with a professor that I know, so that's why we, erm, we met each other, erm, yeah we became friends and also there is another friend of ours that has studied at my same university, but now he's in Warsaw for his post-doc, and so we basically we only meet at conferences

Andrea [2]: so last September I had gone to two conferences, but not to present, just like as a participant, [...] and I met quite a few different people and every time I've gone to another conferences then I've seen again some of those people, so like we sat together and had lunch and stuff, so it was quite nice and one of the people that I had met at that conference, they were in Iceland, and one of them said that he writes a blog for teachers, 'cause he trains teachers, and he wants me to write a piece for his blog, about what I'm presenting, because

it's linked to teaching, so, yeah [...] I didn't think it was gonna be that much of a networking tool, but it really is

Especially Andrea's quote demonstrates how her engagement with the scholarly community, via presenting her work at a conference in Iceland, which was facilitated via institutional funding, enabled her to connect to her peers and to extend her participation in the academic context. This is in line with the literature, as networking as well as personal and professional development have been found to be valued aspects of attending conferences (Mair & Frew, 2018). Further, Choi et al. (2021) pointed out that engaging with the scholarly community, for instance via participating in academic conferences, allows doctoral students to conceive themselves as expressing their scholarly identity.

In comparison, the departmental context seemed more influential on PGRs' relationships, in a facilitative way. As already mentioned in the first subchapter, research seminars constituted opportunities for PGRs to engage with their peers, with the seminar-presenters and their material as well as informally at the beginning and end of the sessions. Reflecting on their experiences within the history department, Leo and Chris shared their experiences.

Leo: I don't know about the other, the other master's, but for history, I would, the provision's pretty good, you know, and there are extra events and various other things you can go to, so every, month there's a history seminar from an outside speaker, who's, you know, cutting-edge research speaker, on a Tuesday, which, those are open to the researchers, erm, there is a researchers' conference, the master's are setting up their own conference

Chris: [MA students Chris had already got to know] were around, well they were doing history society as well at the same time, erm, and that was quite good, so I went along to some of those sessions, erm, they had speakers [...], erm, you know, mostly academics from here and stuff, and erm, and then they'd have some debates and stuff as well, so it felt like the history department was quite good in terms of getting, I met them, I mean not, it's not like I'd see them that much, but at least I felt part of, integrated into the department with other students and so on

The examples below are from participants who are part of the participating university's English department. In addition to the departmentally organised research seminars, the PGRs further took part in more informal gatherings, as presented respectively.

Tim: There have been some [research seminars] I've missed but it's been entirely intentional, there was one I was really annoyed that I missed 'cause it sounded amazing, but erm, yeah I tend to go to as many as possible because I think it's ultimately healthy for postgraduate researchers to, because after all there is no contact time and it can be a very lonely existence, like I said this takes up a lot of your time

Marcus: it's a very isolating experience, erm, so yeah, that's been helpful I think, erm, I've had a good kind of group of, erm, other PhD students, so we kind of had this, we met up every Wednesday, we had a breakfast-club kind of thing, so we'd go for coffee and pancakes every Wednesday, erm, so you're always kind of like connected to, and they were all in the English

department, so we'd just, and we'd just discuss mundane stuff, you know, we'd spend an hour talking about the Big Bang Theory or Friends or something, erm, just to kind of get our heads out of it

As explicated in the literature review, PGRs likely experience isolation, which affects their wellbeing (Janta et al., 2014). Tim's quote indicates the negative effects of the aforementioned lack of structure on PGRs' wellbeing, which was echoed by Cornwall et al.'s (2019) participants when feeling a disconnect from their scholarly community. Students reported better wellbeing when they were integrated in their scholarly community, when they felt a sense of belonging (Stubb et al., 2011), which was manifested by Tim and Marcus via their participation in the research seminars and beyond.

Melissa [1]: with the English lot, we've got our own little breakfast Wednesdays, which don't happen every week, 'cause obviously master's students are never around erm (.) but it's nice to have little like group where everyone can just come and be like "Hi, how's everyone getting on?", I think they have that for all master students, it's on erm, [the institutional level], there's something there, but that's, I feel like, that's less inviting, because it's just all, like all master's students [...] I think that one's a bit more (.) like it's not daunting, but you're like, there's people from like completely different topics, so, as much as you could get on, on the basis of it being a master's, when you're discussing things, you won't get it, it's like you talking to me about some Psychology-thing, and I'd be like "Oh yeah, that's really interesting but I have no idea", [both laugh] whereas in our group, like, it's, it's like (.) it's often that everyone like will talk about it, like "Aw, have you read this?" or "Have you seen this article? This might go with this", which we never used to do in undergrad

Marcus' quote above and Melissa's demonstrate how the departmental context they were part of enabled the engagement among peers. This was possible through the people who inhabited the context, who organised and attended these meetings, thereby enacting attendant practices. As apparent in Melissa's quote, once such peer interaction is facilitated, they are enabled to share their experiences and exchange ideas, which likely contributes to the development of their researcher identity.

Jen [1]: I do wonder sometimes how much of it is specific to my department, that I'm involved with, how much of it is actually the whole uni, because I think my experience is very different to a lot of people's, in terms of, erm, relationships with tutors, in terms of the openness there, there's a lot of departments, I reckon, where that level of (.) (.) erm, intimacy is not there, maybe people would be less comfortable with the idea of saying that they're struggling to a tutor, because when you're part of bigger lectures and bigger departments, you kind of have to face up to anonymity as well, [...] erm, but as I said, like our department is totally on it.

Specific to the English department, Jen acknowledged the effort of the staff members to relate to the PGRs via being open about their experiences, in order to facilitate PGRs being open about any issues they may experience, thereby fostering intersubjectivity. Thus, they created a safe space for meaningful relationships to emerge, encouraging PGRs to participate. It seems the PGRs as well as the staff members in the English department are part of a CoP which values interpersonal connection, a

practice which they enact. Jen seemed to particularly appreciate this due to the lack of structure concomitant to PGR education.

Jen [1]: Erm (.) the support from staff is like still sky-high, so I kind of expected less involvement from them, but their passion and their sort of, erm, (.) openness to meeting up to, to even social events, to, you know, "If you ever wanna talk about your, your diss-, your thesis topic, then you can come and approach us and stuff" – that is still there, still intact, if not more, so, because you see them less, unless you're actually here and stalking them, like you're not gonna come across them as much with there being no lectures and seminars, erm, so that's defied my expectations, 'cause I thought it'd have gone the other way round, I thought they'd be less, erm, prominent

It seems that the wider PGR-context, in terms of its inherent lack of structure does per se not enable the formation of relationships. As this seemed particularly apparent to continuing students, as outlined above, it seems they readily took action in order to engage with their peers.

Melissa [1]: But master's I think, especially with it being by research, because you don't have lectures and seminars, you often find yourself reaching out to people a bit more, so, whereas in undergrad you saw everyone everyday so it was like "Right, I've seen you like every day this week" erm, now you're like "Oh, let's go meet" or whatever

Chloe [1]: I think, erm, it's just, I've probably made more of an effort to turn up to seminars and things like that or, erm, or just to keep in touch, like I started a Facebook, erm, like message for all the postgrads to talk about things in there, and then just sort of trying to meet up for coffee if people, when they come in, but I suppose, yeah, at undergrad, you just bump into people in the library, or you can just say "Do you want to go for coffee?", whereas, 'cause I live so far away, I'm having to plan it, quite far in advance

The wider PGR context does not seem to enable relationship formation, due to the lack of structure. For example, compared to an undergraduate degree with regular lectures and seminars, the PGR degree does not offer as many opportunities to engage with peers. This is a distal issue, likely prevalent in any higher education institution. However, it must also be considered that if there were mandatory opportunities to engage with peers, akin to lectures, this would impinge on the flexibility that enables PGRs like Ted to participate in the first place. On the institutional level, some rules and guidance on the supervisory relationship as well as few opportunities for academic engagement were constructed. It was on the departmental level, that a lot of relationship-facilitating practice was enacted, by staff members as well as among peers.

4.4.6. Conclusion

Concluding this theme, it has been established that PGRs' interpersonal relationships in the academic context seem to be successful when there is intersubjectivity, which is facilitated via openness, trust, and the development of an environment where one's experiences may be shared with peers or

supervisors and where personal matters may be shared. Building an intersubjective understanding of each other allows PGRs to participate in their academic context as persons, rather than solely students. Having such successful interpersonal relationships is essential to participation as oldtimers, or more experienced newcomers, introduce newcomers, in this case PGRs, to their CoP's practice, which otherwise may not be learnt (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). When relationships enable participation, there is also a positive effect on PGRs' identity development, as enacted practices, for instance presenting one's work at conferences, allows the PGR to conceive themselves as such.

4.5. Individual ways of being a PGR

This last theme concentrates on the individual ways in which PGRs participated in their academic context. The focus on their individual interpretation of their experience, rather than the experience as constructed through the context, represents the symbolic interactionist stance outlined in the methodology chapter. Thus, the underpinning of this theme is similar to the construction of participants' stories, yet meaning was created thematically, across the data set. The three foci of this theme are firstly PGRs' wellbeing, specifically their experiences of aloneness and engagement, followed by their individual negotiations of reasons to commence their PGRs studies as well as of their individual ways of working.

4.5.1. Aloneness and engagement

As outlined in the literature review, PGRs' wellbeing was commonly negatively affected by experiences of isolation (Barreira et al., 2018; Janta et al., 2014; Peluso et al., 2011), which was conceived as an inherent part of doctoral programmes (Ali & Kohun, 2007). In support of my suggestion that this is likely problematic for master's by research students also, Tim's quote in the previous subchapter outlined that being a PGR "*can be a very lonely existence*", which is further echoed by another master's student.

Jen [1]: it's quite easy to become isolated, it's quite easy to lose perspective, in terms of not being around people as much, in terms of not seeing your family as much, and because research can be done at any time of your convenience, there are certain people who will work through the night and sleep during the day, because that helps them, but that also then costs you your interpersonal relationships, 'cause other people don't work to that timetable

As outlined previously, continuing students seemed to be particularly aware of the reduced contact time, which not only resulted in difficulties with organising one's time, but as demonstrated here, also in reduced engagement with one's peers, such as lecturers and fellow students. But, as discussed in the previous theme, continuing students seemed to readily engage with their fellow PGRs, likely enabled by already knowing each other from their previous studies. For example, Melissa outlined: "*I didn't move to a different uni, because, I was so comfortable with the lecturers, and the community here, that I was like, I don't wanna move somewhere else*", and Chloe said: "*I think we've all known each other for quite a long while, erm, and yeah I think everyone from the course is very sort of kind and supportive*". The notion of PGRs' peer engagement being facilitated by them already knowing each other was particularly apparent within the participating university's English department. Through the CoP-lens it seems their undergraduate identity entailed being part of a community of people, who they got to know over three years, which they were able to continue throughout their postgraduate

studies. Thus, their continued identity of being part of a wider departmental group, who were now PGRs, enabled them to participate; they were already community-members before beginning their PGR studies. Dom, who had a one year-break between his master's and PhD in history had a somewhat different experience:

Dom [1]: you can't really discuss anything, you can't discuss methodology, like, at undergrad when everyone's writing the same essay, you kind of, you can compare, and you can argue, and you're getting a bit more insight, and I guess yeah, that's why you have to go to conferences, and, and, you know, interact with other people. I mean history has some things, but not, not much. You know, for the MA, even by research, they're trying to do classes where you just kind of just get people together, and maybe to talk about [sighs] what they're doing, but it's very hard to talk in history about methodology, because the periods of time and the subjects are so vast that you can't, you're just talking very general and it's not always so useful but it's more that you go there and just to argue with other people [chuckles] [both laugh] 'cause that's, that's all there is to, erm, that's, that's also what makes supervision valuable

Dom's view of the history department's opportunities for academic engagement seemed to somewhat differ to Chris' and Leo's view presented within the previous theme. It seems Dom did not value departmental peer engagement due to a reduced academic value, based on different practices being concomitant to different methodologies or time periods. Correspondingly, Dom did find it valuable to engage in the academic context via participating in conferences as well as supervisions, based on the shared expertise. From a CoP perspective, it seems all history PGRs would belong to a wider CoP, yet holding expertise specific to one methodology or time period, likely leaves one in the periphery with regard to another methodology or time period. Such intellectual isolation (Skakni, 2018a) was also indicated by Jen:

Jen [1]: thinking that you have to pencil stuff in just to avoid that happening, but it's better to do that than to succumb to just being, feeling very alone, because the academic side of it as well, it's the fact that you're working in a specific field, and even amongst your friends, if they're doing different things, they're not gonna understand directly what it is that you're doing necessarily, so you're stuck on your own little island, and I think some people are more susceptible to sort of forgetting about the fact that you can get a nice little ferry to that other island, that's quite close, do you know what I mean? Like they just like, end up by themselves and it's, erm, it's a tough mental landscape to break out of when you're stuck in it and you don't have other people to (.) outline to you that "Oh, you're acting a bit strange recently" or "Maybe you need some help", then how would you know, how would you even identify that there's a problem, so I think uni have done a good job, of, of normalising that

In contrast to Dom, Jen thought it was important to engage with peers to counter these feelings of aloneness, as she anticipated that the intellectual aloneness PGRs necessarily experience due to the idiosyncratic nature of one's project, may result in more far-reaching experiences of solitude, that may extend to one's social environment. Jen's participation within the departmental context is likely enabled as she was already part of the PGR community, and due to the familiarity she has established

with her peers over the years, she may be aware of the non-academic benefits of engaging with them. As per Jen's quote in the second theme regarding successful peer relationships, talking to people who understand one's academic experience is "just good for perspective and advice really". This was echoed by Emily, but similar to Dom, she also viewed academic engagement with peers who did not share one's expertise as redundant.

Emily [1]: I'm interested when people say like "Oh", like time pressure and stuff like that, you know, when they're talking about their actual like stresses of the PhD, like that's fine, but when it's like [sighs] "Have you read this article by..." I was like; "No, because obviously I'm on a completely different time period and topic to you, so why are you even asking 'cause I've not read it? I'm not interested in medieval Jews"

In contrast, Andrea, the only participant who belonged to the linguistics department, would have valued engaging with peers to collaborate, thus anticipating academic benefits.

Andrea [1]: sometimes I feel very isolated, or like, you know when you go to the library and you want to work and you've got nobody to really work with or, even somebody to proof-read your work, like to exchange work, that you can proof-read each other's work, I don't really have that, so it's like "Hmm"

In Andrea's case it is noteworthy that she was working 32 hours per week alongside her studies in order to afford her tuition fees, thus had fewer opportunities to engage with her academic environment, which hindered her participation. Financial concerns are a common difficulty for PGRs (Corcelles et al., 2019; Sverdlik et al., 2018), for example as also mentioned in Ted's story. But, as outlined in the first chapter, PGRs have the opportunity to apply for a doctoral loan since August 2018 (UK Government, 2020), but PGRs are not eligible to apply if their start date was prior to this, which meant Andrea and Ted were not eligible. However, it is anticipated that this 2018-macroinfluence may result in fewer financial issues for PhD students who have enrolled since.

Despite Dom and Emily not valuing peer engagement due to the lacking academic benefits, and despite not begrudging the time spent by themselves, they did experience aloneness.

Dom [1]: it is isolating, I don't, I don't know, maybe I'm suited to it, I'm not, I'm not like an extrovert, I prefer, I'm happy to spend a long time on my own, I like to think and that all, it's not too bad, but yeah, sometimes you do (.) you do erm, yeah, you do suffer from, from some kind of loneliness? I don't know

R: Yeah, it's kind of weird to say, but that's what it's like

You're surrounded by people but yeah, yeah (.) just (.) you just, I don't know, it's weird, just every day, I'm in such a routine and then I just, lunchtime, I just walk around like town, but it's like, you're always on your own, and, you don't really see people, and I don't know it's kind of weird because you're surrounded by people

R: Yeah, I know what you mean, totally

It's like, I don't know (.) but I don't know, I get through it, so (.)

Emily [2]: it is isolating, like people will say it, and I was like "Yeah, it's not that bad", 'cause I like being by myself, but especially now, I'm not even here, like I'm at home and I live in like a tiny village, that's just, all my friends have gone (.)

Both outlined that they enjoy being by themselves, Dom saying he may be suited to this way of studying seems to be in favour of the expectation that doctoral students work largely autonomously (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013b). However, the aloneness that both refer to also seems indicative of negative effects on their wellbeing. According to Skakni's (2018a) doctoral student participants, some level of self-sacrifice, such as reducing one's time spent on social engagements, is required when studying on the doctoral level, which entails a level of suffering. Ethical issues surrounding the underpinning aloneness of doctoral studies, and potentially concomitant mental health issues were problematised by the author. Dom and Emily both engaged in non-academic relations to counter the aloneness concomitant to their PhD studies.

Dom [1]: I think there is a problem that (.) that there isn't people to talk to (.)

R: Do you think that's the advantage of conferences?

I think one of them, just because [chuckles] there's someone who knows what you're talking about [both laugh] erm (.) my wife's, erm, she's like Chinese, so I can't even talk to her about anything [chuckles] because we don't, we don't really talk in the same, erm, you know, what I'm talking about is so foreign and alien to her that she has no concept of it, so we don't, so, but I like that, you know, I like that I can't talk at home

Emily [2]: I was just sat there all day, and there was just no one, like "This is actually sad" so, [inaudible], it is actually a relief, as well, I think I work better, 'cause I'm not thinking about it, so when I'm at work, I'm not sat there thinking "Oh, writer's block", or if I just leave it, and then go to work, and then come back and think "Oh, if I'll get in the zone, I'll write when I get home, if not it's not a big deal", 'cause I think people obsess about it too much

Separating his work and home life seemed Dom's way of negotiating his multi-membership across different CoPs. Correspondingly, he also tended to not 'bring his PhD home', for example he "*can't work at home*", which seems akin to Choi et al.'s (2021) participants who compartmentalised their identities to relieve tensions resulting from multi-membership. As suggested in the wellbeing section of the literature review, non-academic relationships may constitute an escape from the doctoral process (Benjamin et al., 2017), somewhat functioning as distraction. As outlined in Emily's story, her difficulty of connecting with her academic peers stemmed from not being on the same page, whereas she felt she was on the same page with her work colleagues. Thus, countering aloneness in her non-academic life aspect enabled her to participate in her studies effectively. This seems relatable to Marcus' quote in the first theme, as he outlined the importance of finding a way of working that suits

you, he also advised to “try and create a structure for yourself (.) and go out as well, go out into the air, [both chuckle] and see other human beings, ‘cause there will be long periods of time when you don’t communicate with anyone”. The importance of engaging with others to counter aloneness was echoed by Chris:

Chris: whereas I feel like at the MA, I did that at [another university], I just, I don’t know, that was, I didn’t, maybe I was younger and didn’t have the social skills I guess, erm, but I don’t know, just, that was quite, erm, isolating, I was on my own for a fair bit of time, especially towards the end, and erm, that was definitely very lonely and difficult to deal with, so

R: So you kind of already, like you expected it to be like this at PhD level as well?

*Erm, (.) no, I think I expected it to be different, because I was in a different place personally, basically, and I don’t know if I would have, I think having had that experience, I think I would have definitely, even if I was coming into it in a similar kind of way, say if I wasn’t, if I didn’t have a girlfriend or didn’t meet people, I think I’d have known that I needed to definitely go out and do some volunteering or, you know, whatever it is, to get you away from doing, to meet people and to do stuff that’s worthwhile that *isn’t* your PhD study, so I feel like, erm, (.) being pushed to do volunteering or stuff like that is probably something that would be useful for students and stuff like that*

It seems Chris’ earlier MA experience enabled a shift in his understanding, in terms of not wanting to repeat this previous experience characterised by loneliness, demonstrating how the lived experience of being, and of conceiving ourselves in a certain way in a certain context, affects participation. Upon entering doctoral education, he may have been in a similar situation to Dom and Emily where relationships outside his academic context enabled him to participate in his studies, thus seemingly benefiting their work-life-balance. However, Skakni’s (2018a, p. 935) staff participants outlined that doctoral students’ progress benefited when they had an “obsessive side” to them, enabling them to concentrate on one topic for many years. This seemed reflected in Matteo’s second interview, as he somewhat surrendered his personal life, which seems in congruence with the above notion surrounding self-sacrifice:

Matteo [2]: I’m quite at peace with the fact now, until recently I wasn’t, but now I’m quite at peace with the fact that erm, I want a full professional life, and that basically my personal life is inversely proportional to my working life, so I have a wonderful working life but I don’t have any personal life, but at the moment I can live with it, I mean it’s not really a problem right now, if you ask me in a week I don’t know what my answer will be [chuckles]

As outlined in the literature review, balancing one’s studies for example with talking to one’s friends (Martinez et al., 2013) enabled PGRs to manage their wellbeing. While the importance of PGRs’ wellbeing cannot be overestimated, considering my participants’ accounts of aloneness and also the telling section in the literature review, Marcus interestingly acknowledged that some degree of

aloneness is necessary on this level of study, as the idiosyncrasy inherent to PGR studies requires it of its CoP's members.

Marcus: it is important to kind of find a balance between your isolation, which you need, you need to be on your own for a lot of the time to do the work, erm, but you also need to find ways to speak to other human beings, 'cause there are periods when you don't speak to anyone

Despite some PGRs (Emily, Dom) minding large amounts of time spent by themselves less than others, most participants experienced some kind of aloneness. They also dealt with it individually, for example, Dom and Emily engaged with people outside the academic realm, whereas Jen engaged with her PGR peers. This reaffirms the symbolic interactionist stance underpinning this project, as PGRs interpret and act upon their experiences differently. The following section also focuses on PGRs' individual interpretation of their experience, concentrating on the individual reasons for their PGR studies.

4.5.2. Individual reasons to commence PGR studies

There are likely as many different reasons to study on the PGR level as there are PGRs. But, the underpinning of these reasons being connected to identity negotiations was a joint characteristic.

Andrea [1]: Yeah, so as soon as I graduated for my PGCE [Postgraduate Certificate in Education] I got a job into a school to pass my NQT [Newly Qualified Teacher] year, erm, which I really did not like at all, and now I'm on my second year of teaching, and I still, I'm gonna start my third and I really, I just didn't enjoy it, so that's why enrolled for my PhD, I thought "I love teaching, and I feel like I've got loads of things that I can share", or because I've been through it myself, that I can help others, like students, achieve better, so I love that side, I just really don't like children and teenagers, so I thought I'd like to teach university instead

Needless to say, Andrea anticipated teaching to be her profession, considering the qualifications she obtained, the passion for teaching she exudes, and the preparation she engaged in via volunteering.

Andrea [1]: when I was doing my master's, I was volunteering sometimes in a school and because it was only one afternoon the week, I didn't realise that really (.) I didn't really like it and it was a very much different school than where I've been teaching so far, erm, I think it hit me when (.) you feel very depressed all the time and you can't really put your finger at why, like what's dragging you down, and then I had that like Eureka kind of moment, where I had two kids that started fighting in my classroom and I was like "I can't do this anymore" like yeah

As per Turner and Tobbell (2018, p.711) "We define who we are by the ways in which we experience ourselves through participation." Clearly, Andrea's experience of being a secondary school teacher was not ideal, it affected her wellbeing negatively. Non-identifying with this new CoP resulted in a shift in how she viewed herself, she liked teaching, but not who she was teaching. As a consequence,

she wanted to become a teacher in the higher education context, thus enrolling on the doctoral level. Similarly, Ted had to re-think his professional future when relocating.

Ted [1]: [after coming back to the UK four or five years ago] I had to re-think what happens, erm, here, and so I was thinking about the future and how to future-proof, you know, I'm past 50 and the one thing was, possibility of doing another degree, and so we talked about it between us and (.) I did the same for my wife when she was in her 20s, so, so she said yeah, and that's how it happened

An identity shift seems equally apparent; it seems after having worked as a supply teacher for a while, Ted gauged his options in terms of his future career. Identity negotiations related to his family certainly came into play, and the PhD seemed the best choice. As outlined in his story, the nature of his creative writing PhD extends beyond reasons for undertaking doctoral studies related to career progression as described in the literature (Guerin et al., 2015; Skakni, 2018b), in terms of him working on a hopefully marketable novel. This makes his participation and identity negotiations rather complex, in that he is not only a student working on his thesis to gain a qualification, but further a father and husband, wanting to create a product which enables him to contribute to the family's economic situation. Another reason for entering doctoral studies was research experience, which Guerin et al. (2015) suggested to be likely more applicable to students who have recently graduated. This suggestion was supported in Chloe's story, as she described enjoying the research aspect of her undergraduate dissertation. This was further supported by Jen and Melissa:

Jen [1]: naturally with the limitations of some of the other assessments that we had, there were always ideas that I didn't get to explore in enough detail or erm things that I couldn't explore, because of other assessments that got in the way and timing and stuff, so I was quite insistent and excited about the idea of, erm, having that time after undergrad, to sort of, really go into a lot more detail on one of those kinds of ideas

Melissa [1]: Erm, I think research is probably better for literature, because, all your essays that you do, are, they're not run by you, they're suggested, but, you get to choose what you wanna do, so, the freedom of that research time and you choosing your own topic, I think made me wanna study a bit more.

But, this seemed also applicable to Chris, who expressed "it was quite nice coming back to university after being ten years in admin-type jobs".

Chris: after finishing [my MA in sociology] I didn't really know what it was I wanted to do, I never really knew what it was I wanted to do, well but like I enjoyed academia to some extent, erm, parts of it at least, erm, well I thought academia was a worthwhile fulfilling thing to be in

Despite spending a considerable time away from university, Chris developed his professional profile throughout these years, for example by gaining a conservation of historic buildings qualification. This indicates that despite being away from institutions he remained invested in learning, thus his identity

extended beyond the role of the jobs he was holding. His quote further reflects the notion of not knowing, specific to his career choice. This was echoed in Emily's story, who "didn't have a job, so I was like "Oh, I might as well just stay"". Tim said upfront "it was that I got to do it for free" contributed to his decision to study on the master's level. Being able to get funding, specifically the institutional fee-waiver which students were generally able to access upon gaining a first-class degree previously, was a contributing factor for Dom, Emily, Jen, and Chloe. This constitutes an enabling practice, a distal influence positively affecting the PGRs' participation. Dom's quote below reflects Skakni's (2018b) conceptualisation of the doctoral trajectory as a 'quest for the self'.

Dom [1]: I think it's worth achieving, like, I don't know, I think it's a (.) (.) I think it's something that's valuable, as a, as a sense of achievement, I kind of see, erm, because it's essentially researching and writing a book, which to me is, (.) it's some kind of noble thing to do, so there is that, like it's, it's like the, erm, it's the apex of education, which (.) you know, I think, I think is important, so there is that like wanting to do it for, I guess the honour of doing it, like you achieve something by getting a title, a doctor or whatever it is, something that's, it's earned and that's sort of like recognised, and I think – even though I think what I'm doing is whatever, but if you tell family members like "Oh, alright" it seems quite, it seems impressive, whereas working at, before I came to university I worked in like an export company [...] manufacturer and export, but it seems like there's no value in it, it's just, it's all about money, and then once you, if you don't care about that then there's no point to it [sighs] so I guess I care about this, that's why I want to do it, it's, it seems more fulfilling, erm, also, working in, like industries like that, I'd rather then, and then coming to university, I think this is a better environment for working and that if a PhD somehow gets you into a job, here or in a university, then that's one reason to do it, otherwise, it's, it's difficult, erm (.) but I suppose since doing the PhD, erm, I also like doing the teaching-element, and that's another reason to do it, but that wasn't the reason why I started doing the PhD, that's just something that's happened along the way, but I think, I think the main thing is, it is a prestigious thing, and it's a sort of (.) it's an achievement (.) that most people don't do (.) and I think that's the reason why, I think that's the reason why, [jokingly:] anyone can do physical achievements

The author elaborated that at the core of this quest is the desire for social recognition, which clearly was one important aspect for Dom undertaking his doctoral studies. In the course of his studies, he seemingly found enjoyment through participating in the academic context, such as teaching, and began to see the institutional context as opportunity for a future-career. According to Wenger (1998) one's identity is the continuous negotiation of the self, including one's past and future. Dom did not feel fulfilled when working at an export company, which led to him returning to higher education. Participating in new practices, such as teaching, enabled him to negotiate his self in relation to his future, with regard to his future career. This echoes Mantai's (2019b) participants' conception of themselves as possible academics, enabled through engaging in practices such as teaching, as outlined in the first chapter.

Marcus: that's why I left retail, because I hated it, hated it, and you know, I started doing quite well at it, which was really upsetting me, so I became like a store manager and everything, and I was like, "This can't be why I went to university", you know, "I went to university to read books and talk to intellectual people and discuss politics and all the rest of it", and (.) all of a sudden, I found myself being really good in retail, so I got out, 'cause I just didn't want to do that with my life

Similar to Dom's experience of working at an export company, the way Marcus experienced his self through participation in the retail environment was not in congruence with what Marcus wanted to do. The quote clearly conveys his devaluation of his lived experience, despite being successful within the retail context. Having gained this understanding of himself in the retail context is what led Marcus to leave that environment, and in fact throughout his PhD, Marcus was "*very motivated by not wanting to work in retail*", demonstrating the impact of identity negotiations on participation. Marcus' experience also relates to Andrea's experience outlined in the beginning of his section. This indicates that the way PGRs experience themselves through participation carries consequences, such as their way of working, which is the focus of the following.

4.5.3. Individual ways of working

Dom's view of what studying on the doctoral level should be is that "*It should be at least fun, get no money, so there's gotta be some pay-off, and erm, yeah, so if I didn't think it was fun or I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it*". This is in line with one of Skakni's (2018a) staff participants, who emphasised the importance of enjoying the doctoral process to enable their persistence. This contrasted the above-outlined notion of the requirement of self-sacrifice voiced by the student-participants, which Dom disagreed with.

Dom [1]: A lot of people try and make it a hardship and try to make out that it's some form of suffering and that this is good – or that it should be suffering [both laugh] but, erm, I don't fall into that mindset.

Dom's view is reflected in his way of working as outlined in his quote at the very beginning of the first theme; he breaks his work into smaller, manageable tasks. The reason is that Dom does not "*like working under pressure, erm, because then I start thinking about the pressure rather than thinking about what I'm doing, so, I'm not even putting any pressure on myself*". Similarly, Chloe tried to avoid working under pressure.

Chloe [2]: Yeah, like [my parents'] thing was just always, erm, "Just try your best", and, you know, "Turn up to school" and erm, yeah, "Just try your best" and like, I suppose I kind of always put that kind of pressure on myself, so they tried to take that away a bit, so I remember going, for like sixth form, you still have like parents' evening, and erm, I went with my mum and she was talking to my geography teacher and she says "Do you think she's doing well?"

and the teacher said “Yeah”, and she said, like “She’s working, like studying, on weekends, like do you think that’s a problem, ‘cause I do” [both laugh] and she was like “Well, you tell her to kind of slow down, because she won’t listen to me” [both chuckle] and I was there like “What are you doing mum?”, I mean she was right, that kind of thing that, where my geography teacher’s saying “Yeah, like, you know, don’t put too much sort of pressure on and” ...

R: *Yeah, but it’s so hard when you’re that kind of person*

Yeah! ‘Cause you kind of then feel sort of guilty, which is why I now sort of made sure I have days where I’m not doing anything and I take some holiday time

Clearly, Chloe’s parents tried to instil in Chloe that it is not favourable to put yourself under too much pressure, which she somewhat enacted by making sure to take sufficient time off. This seems essential to a healthy work-life balance, the importance of which was outlined in the literature review. Noticeably, Vicky seemed to have an outstanding intersubjective understanding of Chloe, because as outlined in the first subchapter, regarding the *nature of their relationship*, I pointed out that Vicky seemed concerned about Chloe taking on too much. This was evident via fieldnotes like “*Chloe outlines that she is also working on a book review. Vicky says that’s great, but also voices her concern that Chloe might be in danger of taking on too much*”. This again demonstrates the successful interpersonal relationship Chloe and Vicky shared, as Vicky’s insight enabled Chloe’s effective participation. Another characteristic of Dom’s participation, working with manageable tasks, was shared by Andrea. She showed me her refined system.

Andrea [1]: Erm, yeah, but I’m very organised, like I’m very, very, very, very organised, if you ask anybody, so [chuckles] I have like a system that works quite well

R: *What is the system?*

So, erm, like I could show you

R: *Yeah, go on*

[A gets calendar out of her bag and shows R]

So, this is my month of August [chuckles]

R: *Okay, looks busy [chuckles]*

So, yes, I basically write everything down, so if I want to do, for instance, so every Sunday, on the morning, I’ll do meal-prepping for the week, so that I don’t have to worry about what I’m gonna be eating [...] and then whilst it’s all cooking I have a look at my calendar and what I’ve got to do and what I’ve (.) like what task I’ve got to accomplish before my next supervision meeting, and I’m gonna write it down in little steps and every day I’ve got to do a little step, I can’t go to bed until my little, I’ve done my little step and it’s been ticked, so whether it’s reading an article and loading it onto [inaudible] or it’s, I don’t know, writing down some methodology or analysing a text or, every day I’ve got to do something

R: *So you break it down?*

I break it down into little steps so that it looks manageable and then overall I do achieve the same thing as if I was just gonna spend two days at a computer, so it equals at the same thing but it's more manageable and I can actually do it overall, and it's worked quite well so this way, I've got like a colour-coding system, because obviously like I still have a personal life, so sometimes you've got to do laundry, sometimes you've got to go have coffee with somebody, sometimes you've got to go to a conference, so I've got colour-coding and I know that whatever is pink, which is university-work is always at the top of the list before anything else

R: Oh, so you prioritise it accordingly

Yeah, so there we go, that's how it works [closes calendar]

Andrea's organisational abilities were nothing short of impressive, as she adapted a similar system when working in school, she explained to me in detail how she uses her time in school to get as much school-work as well as PhD-work done as possible. Surprisingly, she shared that *"it doesn't come across like it, but I feel like my life is still quite balanced [both chuckle] it could be worse, I could be working on the weekend"*. Through her skilful negotiation of her full-time studies and 32-hour per week job, she managed to keep her evenings and weekends free, which seemingly made this way of working sustainable for Andrea. However, considering the well-documented struggles of PGRs who are working alongside their studies (Castello et al., 2017; Leijen et al., 2016), Andrea's capability is likely not the norm. Yet, despite the negative aspect of Andrea's professional work constituting a time constraint to her studies, there were also positive aspects.

Andrea [2]: when I made that [prototype model] [chuckles] I was thinking I need to prep my 16-year-olds for their GCSE exam before Easter, let's draw something easy that they can remember, and then I drew that and then I went "Maybe I should type it up, see what it's..." [chuckles] basically that's what I did

R: because you thought about, how will it work in practice

Yeah, it needs to be, like obviously my thesis is for academics, but at the end of the day, who uses [this specific stylistic] on a daily basis, teachers and students, not academics

Andrea's multi-membership in terms of being a certified teacher as well as a PhD student, and the concomitant link through her project, enabled her participation. Andrea's professional expertise in terms of understanding her students' needs facilitated the creation of a model she knew would be useful in practice. This is somewhat similar to Burgess et al.'s (2011) professional doctorate graduates and their suggested disseminating role, which was clearly an aim of Andrea's. As outlined in the conceptual chapter, one way to resolve conflicting demands concomitant to multiple identities, may be through finding a way to view them in a complementary way (Choi et al., 2021); which Andrea seems to have achieved through making use of her professional knowledge within her academic context. In contrast, Emily's and Ted's negotiation of multi-membership saw them more separate, similar to Dom, akin to Choi et al.'s (2021) suggestion of compartmentalisation. As indicated in their

stories, they seemed to view their doctoral studies as a means to gain a qualification, which Skakni (2018b) referred to as 'professional quest'. The author suggested that students' emotional attachment to the process was not as strong. But, considering the nature of Ted's novel as well as him describing the guilt he felt as unbearable, there seems to be a strong emotional attachment indeed. This reaffirms the importance of considering PGRs as individual persons. The author's suggested reduced identity involvement would translate to Ted's case in terms of his negotiation of multi-membership being strongly influenced by being a father and husband; in other words, students on a 'professional quest' were less likely to centre their lives around their academic life aspect (Skakni 2018b). Clearly, Ted's familial identity impacted his academic participation – an instance that demonstrates this would be that Ted's participation in academia seemed underpinned by his experienced responsibility to provide for the family; he aimed to create a novel that he hoped to "make something out of", that he would be able to market. As mentioned above, Ted benefited from the contextual flexibility "because I've got a small girl and a life that is, erm, outside of academia and outside of the university". Similarly, Emily had a life that did not involve her PhD.

Emily [1]: that's the thing, like I don't ever feel like [the PhD] is the main – it obviously is, it is the main thing, but it's not, it sounds really bad, but I always prioritise other things over it, but I don't ever feel like I'm drowning in work, I'm sure it will come to a time where I'm drowning in work, but yeah, I always think (.) like I have my job and stuff and I've been looking after my boyfriend's dog and I've been prioritising the dog over the PhD [both chuckle] I was like "should we go on another walk?" [both laugh]

Emily's underpinning identity negotiations seemed to be guided by the importance she ascribed to her personal life aspect, such as her relationship with her boyfriend and friends. Indeed, Emily's case is in support of Skakni's (2018b) 'professional quest' in terms of Emily ascribing less importance to her academic life-aspect, according to the author this is based on viewing the PhD as means to improve employment prospects for example, which is the way Emily described it: "as a means to get somewhere else".

4.5.3. Conclusion

Concluding this theme, it has been established that PGRs interpret their experiences individually. But almost all PGRs experience some kind of aloneness, seemingly a contextual requirement due to the idiosyncrasy of their projects and the notion of independence. My participants balanced such experiences via engaging with peers in their academic or non-academic context. Further, the way they experienced themselves through participation – in other words their identity negotiations – not only contributed to their reasons for engaging in PGR studies, but also influenced their individual ways of

working. This theme demonstrated the value of this non-traditional ethnographic study as understanding PGRs' experience is not only contingent on understanding the context they are situated in, but also on the way they interpret their experiences.

5. Thesis Review

This final chapter firstly reflects on the limitations of this research project, followed by evaluating the extent to which my research aims have been met as well as the quality of my research project. Secondly, the overall conclusions and recommendations are presented, and lastly suggestions for further research.

The aims of my research project were:

1. To explore contextual practices and their concomitant impact on PGR participation.
2. To provide insight into the lived experience of being a PGR.
3. To explore humanities students' shifting identities through participation in their research programme.
4. To understand PGRs' experiences through the socio-cultural lens.

5.1. Limitations and evaluation

Firstly, it is important to consider that due to the limited size of this thesis, I had to necessarily focus on certain aspects. As outlined in the methodology chapter, the interviews I conducted amassed to over 26,000 lines of verbatim transcripts, the documents I chose to analyse accumulated to over 300 pages. Thus, some aspects of themes were only briefly indicated, such as *lacking understanding of non-PGRs* in the second theme, while other aspects of the PGR experience were omitted, others may have been overlooked. Nevertheless, I have aimed to represent my participants' accounts faithfully, which is illustrated via my use of quotes for example, specifically my effort in providing sufficient context, and by utilising direct quotes as part of my participants' stories.

Secondly, the way I have conceived and analysed my data was underpinned by my theoretical and ontological stance, as outlined in the first chapter and the beginning of the methodology chapter, respectively. Thus, my interpretations are bound to notions like learning being distributed in context, and individual meaning-making. As a consequence, it seems likely that another researcher with differing theoretical and/or ontological positions might analyse the same data differently and come to different conclusions. However, this does not render my work (or another researcher's work) useless, but rather seems to echo my symbolic interactionist stance that everyone, including you, the reader, will interpret my thesis individually. What my expressed positions have enabled me to do however, is to make meaning of my data and to deepen my understanding of PGR education. The symbolic interactionist stance I have taken clarifies that participants negotiate meaning and their selves individually, thus their ways of participating as well as their identity development will vary from

person to person. Consequently, the way relationships may function to enable learning (which I will detail below) will vary from PGR to PGR. One instance exemplifying this was within the discussion of peer engagement following Emily's and Chloe's stories. Emily's participation was not enabled via her supervisor organising supervisee-meetings, or via her progression-examiners' suggestions of networking – however, her supervisor did enable her to participate in a way that Emily deemed suitable participation, for instance by having her back. In contrast, Chloe appreciated that Vicky recommended to her presenting her work at conferences, as this was not only appropriate for PhD students, but also for master's by research students like Chloe was at the time. This example clarifies the value of my approach in terms of the in-depth understanding it enabled, yet also revealed one shortcoming of my approach, specifically with regard to my symbolic interactionist stance as well as the reciprocity of the negotiation of meaning and of the self: it is not possible to formulate generalisations of how to enable PGRs' identity development, as this is conceived as individually negotiated, as well as an effortful, complicated process.

Thirdly, this project is not only a function of the underpinnings of the interpretative work I undertook, but also of that from which the meanings were generated: my data. The analysis of documents represents a particular position as I was only able to access documents of the regulatory kind whereas access to, for example email-communication between the institutional as well as the departmental level with their PGRs would have potentially proven insightful, based on my experience of being a PGR within my institutional and school context. As the documents constituted a substantial part of the data-input regarding the qualitative content analysis, which was deemed particularly well-aligned with the first research aim, this constitutes a particular representation. However, it must also be acknowledged that the first research aim was further addressed by the fieldnotes concomitant to observations of several settings within the humanities PGR context and staff interviews which underwent qualitative content analysis. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that the PGRs I recruited for interviews were PGRs who actively participated in their academic environment, for instance by utilising the PGR study space or by attending departmental seminars or conferences. Thus, this project reflects the experience of PGRs who are somewhat successful in their educational pursuit, as manifested through their participation. In contrast, PGRs whose participation is less successful, for instance, due to being marginalised, is a perspective which was not reflected in my participants' accounts, yet this does not mean that it is not experienced by any PGRs. This limitation is based on my participant recruitment strategy, as well as the small sample size of this project.

Due to these reasons, I would argue it is only ever possible to claim that my research aims were met partially, but I would also argue they were met satisfactorily. The concept of crystallising for example data sources and methods (Tracy, 2010), as mentioned in the methodology chapter, served as useful

in meeting my research aims. The aim of crystallisation is to provide insight into, in this case PGR education, from different perspectives (Tracy, 2010). Throughout this thesis, I have aimed to do so. Firstly, the crystallisation of data sources enabled me to gain a contextual perspective on PGR education via the documents, observations, and staff interviews (addressing research aim 1), while the PGR interviews allowed an insight into how they negotiated their experience (research aim 2, 3). Combining these data sources enables the meeting of the fourth research aim. Secondly, the multiple methods of data analysis also allowed me to gain several perspectives on PGR education. The qualitative content analysis, which I utilised as descriptive tool, focused on how the context constructs the PGR experience (research aim 1), the construction of the PGR stories provided perspective on their experience as a whole, including contextual influences, as well as over time (research aim 1, 2, 4). The reflexive TA enabled me to generate meaning across the data set, considering contextual practices as well as PGRs' interpretation of their experience (research aim 1, 2, 3, 4). Thirdly, I would argue that my understanding of PGR education being underpinned by socio-cultural ontology in combination with symbolic interactionism allowed a nuanced perspective, which is reflected in the four research aims.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the concept of crystallisation improves a study's rigor (Varpio et al., 2017) and credibility (Tracy, 2010). These are two of Tracy's (2010, p. 9) eight criteria assessing the quality of qualitative research, each of which are "*necessary but not sufficient*", and proposed to be more flexible, less universal than criteria such as generalisability or reliability. The remaining criteria include the topic being worthy, in terms of its relevance and significance for example, which was addressed in the literature review, for instance considering the typically high attrition rates of PGR students. Further, via the provision of contextual quotes to enable the reader's insight into my interpretative work, I have sought to encourage reader scrutiny of my analysis. In addition, I have tried to transparently outline ethical decisions I made, for example about the 'luncheon club', further indicating my engagement with the criterion regarding ethical considerations. I hope to have meaningfully addressed the criterion of resonance, for example by constructing participant stories, and thus providing an in-depth insight into PGRs' experiences. The penultimate criterion refers to meaningful coherence, the consideration of which I hope to have demonstrated throughout this project, for example via rejecting concepts such as member checking. The last criterion calls for research to provide a significant contribution. At a minimum, my project has contributed to the typically scarce literature on the learning experience of master's by research students. Although each PGR experienced and negotiated their learning individually, the findings spanned across study programmes, implying that the learning experience of doctoral and master's by research students is rather similar than different. This criterion will be further addressed in the

following, via outlining my contribution to the literature, as well as my theoretical contribution regarding interpersonal relationships and the negotiation of meaning and the self.

5.2. Conclusions and recommendations

The contribution of this research project has at its core the theoretical and ontological stance I have outlined in detail. By relying on these underpinnings, I have been able to gain and thus offer an in-depth understanding of PGR education, which the extant literature frequently investigates descriptively, on the surface level.

Firstly, various facets of the findings seemed to relate to the structure that underpins PGR education. For example, issues around the notion of not knowing, such as regarding structuring one's time, and judging one's progress, seemed to be rooted in the lack of structure and feedback, in comparison to previous educational endeavours. These findings were frequently particularly apparent to continuing students and provide evidence that directly oppose the assumption of expertise, which is in line with Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013b). Further, the aloneness that most of my participants experienced, whether that may be in the form of academic isolation, or on a more social level, seemed to derive from the idiosyncrasy inherent to PGR education. Of course, it would be unfeasible to suggest a change of this very nature of PGR education, especially since it has been established that one PGR's struggle due to the lacking structure is another PGR's facilitator of participation due to flexibility. Instead, my recommendation seeks to encourage institutions to create contextual practices which may enable PGRs' participation. The participating institution has put some practices in place, such as the opportunity to attend conferences at the cost of the institution, and the provision of research seminars. The organisation of the research seminars was enacted in closer proximity, such as the school or departmental level. Such contextual practices were largely appreciated by my participants, who conceived them as valuable opportunities to engage with their peers. Especially the participants belonging to the English department seemed to have not only participated in such opportunities but also created them, via enacting such practices. As my data has demonstrated however, PGRs' needs are individual; Emily did not want to connect with her peers due to not being on the same page, Dom preferred to engage with peers who he shared subject expertise with, Melissa, Jen, Chloe, and Marcus appreciated their departmental community academically and socially. Thus, it is recommended that on the departmental as well as supervisory level, staff provide opportunities for peer engagement, that can be seized by PGRs who want to and are able to partake. For example, Chloe reported of the consortium practice involving a week-long introduction, which fostered peer connection, as they stayed in contact, and she felt like she knew them. Also, despite Emily not finding the supervisee-

meetings her supervisor organised particularly useful, to other PGRs this may represent a valuable opportunity to engage with peers who are likely somewhat connected based on their shared supervisor. Ultimately, it seems PGRs would benefit from a structure, which facilitates peer interaction, a space to form successful interpersonal relationships, which may translate to opportunities for PGRs to further organise their individual structures, for example akin to the PGRs' 'breakfast Wednesdays', or via writing groups as exemplified in the literature review. Such relationships would most likely benefit the PGRs in terms of their participation in the CoP, and would likely manifest in fewer experiences of aloneness and isolation.

Secondly, there is a point to be made with regard to successful relationships, and the mechanisms through which they enable the negotiation of meaning and the self. In reference to Tobbell and O'Donnell's (2013a) theorising of successful interpersonal relationships as precursor of learning relationships, it became apparent that successful interpersonal relationships with PGRs' supervisors were characterised by the enactment of basic social behaviour, as the authors suggested, which I coded in various ways. Such relationships were of a friendly nature, the PGRs for example reported getting on with their supervisor, or said that they were nice, supervisors asked PGRs how they were doing, demonstrated interest, were encouraging, and supportive in terms of having the PGR's back. These facets seemed to demonstrate supervisors' consideration of PGRs' beyond their studenthood, which was at times reciprocated by PGRs via considering supervisors beyond their supervisorhood. With regard to relationships with fellow PGRs, they were perceived as successful when the parties understood each other as being in the same boat, typically based on their shared experiences. The facets of successful relationships in the academic context were considered as such when they fostered an intersubjective understanding between the parties. What seemed to indicate success in such relationships was the establishment of a safe space, in other words of an environment where PGRs were able to share personal matters, or reveal experiences of hardship, as well as openness and trust. However, these indicators are most certainly developed concurrently and are in a reciprocal relation, thus proposing an order or causal relationship between these qualities as they contribute to the formation of a successful relationship would be void. And, as aforementioned, Tobbell & O'Donnell (2013a) expressed that outlining definitive characteristics of what makes 'good' relationships would be impossible due to the idiosyncrasy of such relationships, and people.

Instead, as demonstrated across the previous chapter, successful relationships in the PGR context may be conceived as relationships that enable the negotiation of meaning and of the self. One noticeable instance reflecting the enabling qualities of peer relationships was expressed by Matteo. Through the open sharing of difficulties by both parties, Matteo found out that his 'negative moment', as he referred to it, which was characterised by him questioning his PhD, was part of what it means to be a

doctoral student, according to his peers. This allowed him to shift his identity towards that of a doctoral student once again, which in turn, enabled his participation in the academic CoP. As outlined in the conceptual chapter, identity development is not a smooth or temporally bound negotiation, rather it is a back and forth, as reflected in this example. Regarding successful supervisory relationships, Emily's story is applicable, as it became apparent that her supervisor enabled her participation via having her back in terms of being approving of her part-time position as well as of her refusal to teach within the module proposed by the department. Noticeably, her supervisor enabled her to be the PhD student Emily conceived herself to be (underpinned by her view of the PhD as a means to something else). Although he did encourage her to connect with other PGRs through supervisee-meetings, he ultimately enabled her to participate in the way she perceived as suitable, and not necessarily in a way that he may have deemed the most successful. Also Vicky enabled Ted to participate in his academic CoP in the way he deemed suitable, allowing him to negotiate his nexus of multi-membership. Lastly, as outlined in the first theme, Chloe and Matteo both benefited from their supervisors' expertise in terms of gaining an insight into what community-membership entails, in other words, which practices they were required to enact if they want to be successful and remain in academia post-PhD. Their enactment of these valued practices – their successful participation – allowed them to conceive themselves as PGRs, and to negotiate a possible future professional identity in academia.

These examples make explicit two ways through which successful relationships enable the becoming of PGRs, and potentially beyond. One way is to provide insight into the CoP; peers or supervisors who are – relative to the PGR – oldtimers, introduce the PGR to the CoP's practice. Without such relationships this knowledge about how to be and what to do, which is essential for PGRs to participate effectively, may otherwise not be acquired (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013a). The other way, which cannot be strictly separated from the previous one, is when peers or supervisors allow the PGR to conceive themselves as such (Choi et al., 2021; Cotterall, 2015), most explicit in Matteo's example. These are the mechanisms which underpin how successful relationships enable PGR learning. They are reflective of the inextricably intertwined processes of the negotiation of meaning and of the self. When relationships enable these processes, it is an indicator of a successful relationship, whereas – as demonstrated throughout the fourth chapter – an absence of such relationships, or indeed unsuccessful relationships, likely impede the identity development that would be considered successful within the context of their PGR studies.

5.3. Further research

As mentioned within the findings of the qualitative content analysis, a consideration of wider documents, beyond institutions, thus on the national or European level, may enable a more detailed understanding of the context in which PGR education is situated. Further, despite aspects of *not knowing* being prevalent across the whole data set, issues around the lack of structure and feedback seemed particularly apparent to continuing students. They seemed less hindered by negotiating identity aspects concomitant to professional responsibilities, or familial responsibilities (like Ted), but instead their participation seemed impeded by the negotiation of their transition from undergraduate to postgraduate research studies. Additionally considering the lack of research exploring the experiences of students on the master's by research level, further exploration would be deemed insightful. For example, it may be that specific time-management issues such as Melissa's are more prevalent across this group of students. It is also noteworthy that the departmental structures of the participating university were rather facilitative of peer interaction, enacted by members of staff as well as PGRs. Further research may be able to concentrate on such contextual impacts on PGRs' participation, for example via exploring the roles and perspectives of staff members as well as PGRs. Research at a different department and/or institution may also elucidate the consequences of less facilitative structures and/or staff members, towards which for example Chloe and Ted expressed concern. Lastly, this study conceptualised relationships in the PGR context as successful when they enabled the negotiation of meaning and of the self, through providing insight into the CoP and through allowing the PGR to conceive of themselves as such. Further research may explore whether non-academic relationships, for instance with one's family, partner, or non-academic friends, contribute to PGRs' identity development in a similar, or dissimilar, fashion, which may be relied upon as a facilitator of PGR learning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Anonymised ethics application, including information sheets, consent forms, and interview schedules

THE UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD
School of Human and Health Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel

PROPOSED REVISIONS TO PREVIOUSLY APPROVED APPLICATION

(Attach separate sheets as necessary)

Applicant Name: Regina Osterauer

Title of previously approved study: students' transition-experience to and throughout their postgraduate research studies within the field of Humanities: An ethnography.

Ref: SREP/2017/108 – approved

Date approved: 06.02.2018

(please also give details here if the title is to be revised):

Revised title: Humanities students' shifting identities throughout their postgraduate research studies: An ethnography.

Issue	Please clearly identify below revisions made to previously approved SREP application.
Researcher(s) details	Regina Osterauer, full-time research student (PhD).
Supervisor details	Dr Jane Tobbell. Dr Paige Davis.
Aim / objectives	Rationale: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research has increasingly focused on students' transfer between study programs and institutions within the last decades (Borgen & Borgen, 2016). • It is well-established that transitioning from one educational context to another is a complex and multi-faceted process (Hughes & Smail, 2015), however, a paucity of research has investigated students' transition as such. • Especially students' transition to their postgraduate study has received scarce attention within the transition-literature, which might be due to assuming that the transfer to postgraduate level represents a continuity from students' undergraduate studies, rather than a transition to a novel study environment (Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zammit, 2008). Despite similarities between transitioning to a postgraduate context and other educational transitions there are also clear differences which require exploration (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). • It is well-established that postgraduate research students within the field of Humanities take longer to complete their studies and also drop out at a higher rate (Park, 2005, Hersey, Calhoun, Crowley, Krentz, & Grafe, 2015). However, there is a scarce research exploring these trends.

	<p>Aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To holistically explore students' transition-experience to and throughout their postgraduate research course within the field of Humanities. • To explore participation and learning in postgraduate research students within the field of Humanities. • To understand postgraduate research students' transition-experience via employing a socio-cultural theoretical framework which addresses the complexity of this multi-faceted process. <p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To conduct an extensive review of the literature • To recruit participants (postgraduate research students and staff within the field of Humanities) and collect data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To interview (and transcribe) 15-20 students and 5 members of staff <p>Revision:</p> <p>A longitudinal design will be employed, aiming for an advanced understanding of students' progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ all PhD students will be interviewed twice (9-12 months apart). MA students will be interviewed twice, or at the end of their study. ➢ In total, 20 student interviews (and transcripts) will be conducted, as well as 5 interviews (and transcripts) with members of staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ To observe participants ➢ To conduct document analyses (of university-wide policies and school-specific regulations) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To analyse and discuss the data • To write up the thesis
<p>Research methods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured 1:1 interviews → in-depth exploration of students' subjective experiences). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Participants will receive an information sheet and a consent form before the interview begins ➢ The duration of each interview is approximately 60 minutes. This estimation is based on interviewing undergraduate students, considering their university-experience within my undergraduate final year project. Few interviews were longer than 60mins. In case interviews are ongoing at 70minutes, participants will be made aware of the time and asked whether they would prefer to continue or finish the interview. <p>Pilot interviews will be conducted. The participants will match the recruitment criteria (postgraduate student/member of staff within the field of Humanities). If, after the pilot interview, it will not be necessary to make changes to the interview schedule/s, then this data will be considered within the analysis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ The location of each interview will be pre-booked rooms at the participating university (as this location is familiar to the participants, and this also involves no safety issues) ➢ All interviews will be audio-recorded once participants give their consent to do so. • Observations → exploration of actual activities (that may lie outside participants' subjective awareness) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Participants will receive an information sheet and, if they decide to participate, a consent form ➢ Researcher will take field notes within the agreed context (exclusively containing information of people who decided to participate in this research project) ➢ Those field notes will then be transcribed into electronic data in a timely manner and securely stored within the

	<p>researcher's K: Drive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Settings that will be observed: ➤ <u>The school's postgraduate students' space</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ All present students will be handed information sheets. ❖ If they wish to participate, they will be provided with consent forms ❖ If they do not wish to participate, they will not be included in field notes ❖ Then, the researcher will take field notes for one hour. (Nobody will be asked to specifically do anything, for an observation it is sufficient to watch the setting. (i.e. if there is no interaction between students, that is sufficient data for an observation.) ❖ These observations will last one hour and will take place once a week (for ten weeks) and take place on different days, during different times. ➤ <u>Supervision sessions</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Upon the consent of the postgraduate student as well as of the member of staff, supervision sessions will be observed. ❖ Both will be handed an information sheet (general outline of the project will be provided during recruitment) and consent forms. ❖ The researcher will sit in the room and take notes of the session (the researcher will not interfere with the session) ➤ <u>Networking activities</u>: the researcher will explore (via asking students, i.e. within other observation-settings or/and interviews) whether there are regularly organised meet-ups and inquire whether it is possible to observe those. If so, procedures will be similar to the above; information sheets and – in case they decide to participate – consent forms will be handed to present participants of the meet-up. Subsequently, the researcher will take field notes without interfering with participants. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analyses → exploration of school-specific and university-wide regulations and policies which govern students' experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Course handbooks ➤ University guides • Analysis → merging of all data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Themes that best represent the postgraduate research experience ➤ Discover whether there is a consensus among students
Permissions for study	Staff responsible for postgraduate education in the humanities school of the participating university → Approved.
Access to participants	<p>Recruitment procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An email will be sent to all postgraduate students and members of staff, explaining the research project. The information sheet will be attached. Students are asked to email the researcher (or supervisor) if they decide to take part in an interview. • With regard to the observations, the researcher will go to the school's postgraduate students' space. Everyone in that space will be handed an information sheet (and a consent form regarding the observation if they decide to participate). <p>Those participants also will be asked whether they would like to participate in interviews, and if other networking activities are taking place, which the researcher could observe.</p>
Confidentiality	All electronic data will be kept within a password-protected account on the

	<p>researcher's K: Drive, which is accessible to no other person, but the researcher.</p> <p>All handwritten data (i.e. field notes) will be transcribed electronically by the researcher in a timely manner. The physical data will then be destroyed and the electronic data will be stored within a password-protected account, as mentioned above.</p> <p>The likelihood of participants revealing information that would lead to a breach in confidentiality (i.e. undisclosed criminal activity) is minimal. That is due to the nature of topics covered in the interview.</p>
Anonymity	<p>All participants' names will be changed and instead pseudonyms will be used.</p> <p>Any information which could lead to the identification of a participant (e.g. in case they talk about their hometown) will be omitted during the process of data transcription if possible or otherwise altered.</p> <p>As outlined on the consent form, participants agree to the disclosure of their status (student or member of staff), and the course they are participating in. Also, students' current phase of studies (e.g. 1st year of PhD; 4months into Master) will be disclosed upon their consent. Furthermore, participants are informed that there is a possibility a member of the participating university could recognise their identity due to the use of quotes. Therefore, they are given the option to receive their interview transcripts in order to review it and check if there are any parts the participant wishes not to be quoted.</p>
Right to withdraw	<p>As outlined on the consent form, participants have the right to decline answering any question. (This is only outlined on the consent form regarding interviews, because the researcher will not ask questions during observations, therefore it is not applicable.) Moreover, participants have the right to withdraw from this research project (via email) without giving any reason until 01.06.2020.</p> <p>In case of withdrawal after the process of data collection, the data belonging to the participant who wishes to withdraw will be identified via the researcher's 'Participants Sheet' (attached). This document contains the participants' names, their respective pseudonyms and any other changes made in order to protect the participants' identity. This sheet is electronically stored within the researcher's password-protected university-account (K: Drive), which only the researcher can access. There is no physical copy of the Participants Sheet.</p>
Data Storage	<p>All electronic data will be stored within a password-protected University-account (K: drive), which only the researcher has access to. Any physical data will be transformed into electronic data in a timely manner. All physical data will subsequently be destroyed.</p> <p>The interviews will be audio-recorded upon participants' consent. The recorder has a data-encryption function, and data will thereby be protected. Audio-recordings will be transferred to the researcher's password-protected University-account (K: Drive) in a timely manner. The audio-recording will subsequently be deleted off the recorder.</p> <p>The data will be stored for 10 years within a password-protected computer at the university of Huddersfield.</p>
Psychological support for participants	<p>The emergence of psychological unease within participants during their interview is unlikely, considering the nature of the study.</p> <p>However, taking into account that this research project aims to explore participants' in-depth experience necessitates investigation into social and personal facets of their lives. Therefore, during the interview, talk could turn to experiences, which are distressing to the participant (for example, if a loved one has passed away). If a participant feels distressed, the interview</p>

	<p>will be discontinued. The researcher will talk to participant and ask if there anything she can do, i.e. whether the participant would like to go to the University's Wellbeing Drop in. In addition, the information sheet includes opening times and the phone number of the University's Wellbeing Drop in.</p> <p>Generally, if participants are concerned with what was talked about during the interview, or with something that occurred during observations, they might prefer if certain information were not disclosed. Accordingly, they have the opportunity to review their transcript and omit certain parts of their interviews, or to fully withdraw from the research project (as outlined on the consent form).</p>
Researcher safety / support (attach revised University Risk Analysis and Management form if there are changes to this)	The risk assessment is attached.
Information sheet	The information sheets are attached. There are different information sheets for students, and members of staff who participate in interviews. A third information sheet was developed for observations, which clearly outlines that the person receiving the information sheet is free to decide whether they wish to be observed within the relevant context. If they do wish to participate, they are subsequently provided with a consent form.
Consent form	The consent forms are attached. One consent form is for participants taking part in the interviews. The second one is for participants taking part in the observations.
Letters/ posters/ flyers	N/A.
Questionnaire / interview guide	The Interview guides are attached. One interview guide is for interviews with research students, whereas the other one is for interviews with members of staff.
Debrief	N/A.
Dissemination of results	Academic conferences, journal articles.
Potential conflicts of interest	None anticipated.
Does the research involve accessing data or visiting websites that could constitute a legal and/or reputational risk to yourself or the University if misconstrued? If so, please explain how you will minimise this risk	No.
The next four questions relate to Security Sensitive Information – please read the following guidance before completing these questions: http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2012/oversight-of-security-sensitive-research-material.pdf	
Is the research commissioned by, or on behalf of the military or the intelligence services? If so, please outline the requirements from the funding body regarding the collection and storage of Security Sensitive Data	No.

Is the research commissioned under an EU security call If so, please outline the requirements from the funding body regarding the collection and storage of Security Sensitive Data	No.
Does the research involve the acquisition of security clearances? If so, please outline how your data collection and storages complies with the requirements of these clearances	No.
Does the research concern terrorist or extreme groups? If so, please complete a Security Sensitive Information Declaration Form	No.
Does the research involve covert information gathering or active deception? Please explain.	No.
Does the research involve children under 18 or participants who may be unable to give fully informed consent? Please explain.	No.
Does the research involve prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)? Please explain.	No.
Does the research involve significantly increased danger of physical or psychological harm or risk of significant discomfort for the researcher(s) and/or the participant(s), either from the research process or from the publication of findings? Please explain.	No.
Does the research involve risk of unplanned disclosure of information you would be obliged to act on? Please explain.	No.
Other revisions	N/A.
Requirement for application to external body e.g. NHS REC	N/A.
Please supply copies of all revised documentation electronically. If this is not available electronically, please provide explanation and supply hard copy	

Signed: Regina Osterauer
(SREP Applicant – electronic signature acceptable)

Date: _____ 12.04.2018 _____

K\SREP\SREP_RevisedApp(previously approved)\Sept 16

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET – Interview

Research project: Humanities students' shifting identities throughout their postgraduate research studies: An ethnography.

Information for postgraduate research students in the field of Humanities

In the course of my doctoral studies I am conducting a research project focusing on the postgraduate research experience within the field of Humanities. Therefore, it would be greatly appreciated if you could spare a few moments to read this information sheet and consider whether you would be willing to participate in this project.

The aims of this research project are

- To get an in-depth insight into the postgraduate research experience within the field of Humanities.
- To explore participation and learning in postgraduate research students within the field of Humanities

To achieve these aims I would like to interview postgraduate research students belonging to the field of Humanities. The interview will be about your postgraduate research experience – including everything that influences your experience. The interview will be audio-recorded upon your consent and this data will be securely stored for 10 years. You have the right to withdraw from this project without giving any explanation until 01.06.2020. Your identity will be protected and all data will be anonymised. However, your status (Master/PhD student), the course you are participating in, and the present phase of your studies (e.g. 1st year of PhD, or 4months into Master) will be disclosed.

The interview will take place on the university campus, likely a library room, and will take approximately 60minutes. In order to gain an advanced understanding of your experience and your progress, it would be fantastic if you would consider to be interviewed again in 9-12 months.

If you have any questions or complaints, feel free to contact the researcher via Regina.Osterauer@hud.ac.uk or the supervisor Dr Jane Tobbell via j.tobbell@hud.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time!

If at any stage of your participation in this research project you would like to contact the University's Wellbeing Drop-In; it is located at [the location], you can also reach them by dialling [the number]

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET – Interview

Research project: Humanities students' shifting identities throughout their postgraduate research studies: An ethnography.

Information for members of staff in the field of Humanities

In the course of my doctoral studies I am conducting a research project focusing on the postgraduate research experience within the field of Humanities. Therefore, it would be greatly appreciated if you could spare a few moments to read this information sheet and consider whether you would be willing to participate in this project.

The aims of this research project are

- To get an in-depth insight into the postgraduate research experience within the field of Humanities.
- To explore participation and learning in postgraduate research students within the field of Humanities

To achieve these aims I would like to interview members of staff belonging to the field of Humanities. The interview will be about your experiences as a member of staff with regard to postgraduate research studies – including everything that influences your experience. The interview will be audio-recorded upon your consent and this data will be securely stored for 10 years. You have the right to withdraw from this project without giving any explanation until 01.06.2020. Your identity will be protected (i.e. via the use of pseudonyms) and all data will be anonymised. However, your status (member of staff) as well as the course you are involved in will be disclosed. The interview will take place on the university campus, likely a library room, and will take approximately 60minutes.

If you have any questions or complaints, feel free to contact the researcher via Regina.Osterauer@hud.ac.uk or the supervisor Dr Jane Tobbell via j.tobbell@hud.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time!

Regina Osterauer

If at any stage of your participation in this research project you would like to contact the University's Wellbeing Drop-In; it is located at [the location], you can also reach them by dialling [the number]



RESEARCH PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET – Observation

Research project: Humanities students' shifting identities throughout their postgraduate research studies: An ethnography.

Information for postgraduate research participants in the field of Humanities

In the course of my doctoral studies I am conducting a research project focusing on the postgraduate research experience within the field of Humanities. Therefore, it would be greatly appreciated if you could spare a few moments to read this information sheet and consider whether you would be willing to participate in this project.

The aims of this research project are

- To get an in-depth insight into the postgraduate research experience within the field of Humanities.
- To explore participation and learning in postgraduate research students within the field of Humanities

To achieve these aims I am conducting interviews with postgraduate research students and members of staff belonging to the field of Humanities. In addition, I am also undertaking observations, in order to get a broader, more in-depth insight to the overall postgraduate research experience. This is the reason I would like to observe and take field notes within a context you are involved in. You are free to decide whether you would like to participate in this research project or not. In case you would like to participate, field notes might include your involvement and therefore might be part of my thesis. If you would prefer to not participate, the field notes will not involve your participation to any extent.

After the observation, the hand written field notes will be transcribed into electronic data in a timely manner. This data will be securely stored for 10 years. You have the right to withdraw from this project without giving any explanation until 01.06.2020. Your identity will be protected (i.e. via the use of pseudonyms) and all data will be anonymised. However, your status (student/member of staff), the course you are participating in, and the present phase of your studies (e.g. 1st year of PhD, or 4months into Master) will be disclosed.

If you have any questions or complaints, feel free to contact the researcher via Regina.Osterauer@hud.ac.uk or the supervisor Dr Jane Tobbell via j.tobbell@hud.ac.uk.

Thank you for your time!

If at any stage of your participation in this research project you would like to contact the University's Wellbeing Drop-In; it is located at [the location], you can also reach them by dialling [the number]

CONSENT FORM – Interview

Research project: Humanities students' shifting identities throughout their postgraduate research studies: An ethnography.

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information sheet dated 10.04.2018.		
I have been given the chance to ask questions about the research project.		
I have had my questions answered satisfactorily.		
I agree that my participation is voluntary.		
I understand that I have the right to decline answering any question.		
I understand that I can withdraw (via email) from the study at any time without having to give any reason until 01.06.2020.		
I agree to the researcher audio-recording the interview.		
I agree to the collected data being used in this research project.		
I understand my identity will be protected.		
I understand that all data will be anonymised via using a pseudonym.		
I agree that my status (student/member of staff), the course I am participating in, and also the present phase of my studies will be disclosed (e.g. 1 st year of PhD, or 4months into Master).		
I understand there is a possibility that a member of the university could recognise my identity due to the use of quotes in this thesis.		
Therefore, I would like to receive the transcript of this interview, in order to review it and check if there are parts I do not wish to be quoted. (Send transcript to _____)		
I agree to the data (in line with conditions outlined above) being securely stored for 10 years and used by other researchers with agreement of the researcher.		
I understand that the researcher will possibly contact me in 9-12 months to arrange a second interview.		

Signature of Participant: _____ Print: _____ Date: _____	Signature of Researcher: _____ Print: _____ Date: _____
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If you have any questions or complaints regarding this project, contact the researcher or supervisor via the following details:

Researcher: Regina Osterauer

Regina.Osterauer@hud.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Jane Tobbell

j.tobbell@hud.ac.uk

CONSENT FORM – Observation

Research project: Humanities students' shifting identities throughout their
postgraduate research studies: An ethnography.

	YES	NO
I would like to participate in this research project via taking part in an observation.		
I have read and understood the information sheet dated 10.04.2018.		
I have been given the chance to ask questions about the research project.		
I have had my questions answered satisfactorily.		
I agree that my participation is voluntary.		
I understand that I can withdraw (via email) from the study at any time without having to give any reason until 01.06.2020.		
I agree to the researcher taking notes of my activities in agreed contexts.		
I agree to the collected data being used in this research project.		
I understand my identity will be protected.		
I understand that all data will be anonymised via using a pseudonym.		
I agree that my status (student/member of staff), the course I am participating in, and also the present phase of my studies will be disclosed (e.g. 1 st year of PhD, or 4months into Master).		
I understand there is a possibility that a member of the university could recognise my identity due to the use of quotes in this thesis.		
Therefore, I would like to receive the transcript of the field notes that contain information about me, in order to review it and check if there are parts I do not wish to be quoted. (Send transcript to _____)		
I agree to the data (in line with conditions outlined above) being securely stored for 10 years and used by other researchers with agreement of the researcher.		
I consent to taking part in this research project.		

Signature of Participant: _____ Print: _____ Date: _____	Signature of Researcher: _____ Print: _____ Date: _____
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If you have any questions or complaints regarding this project, contact the researcher or supervisor via the following details:

Researcher: Regina Osterauer

Regina.Osterauer@hud.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr Jane Tobbell

j.tobbell@hud.ac.uk

Interview schedule – Members of staff

'Ice-breaker'-questions

- Participant's age
- Which course are they involved in?
- For how long involved in course?

Main interview

- What does it mean to teach PGRs? (rather than undergrads?)
- What is the RS (relationship) like to PGRs (compared to RS with undergrads?)
- What does it mean to be a PGR?
- What systems are there? → School / → university
→ What could the university do to enable students?

- What practices? Personal/ organisational actions?
→ (What happens if you realise a PGR is struggling?)

- Academically
 - Do you think PGRs' course is well-organised?
 - Facilities? (e.g. library → space and availability)
 - What would make the course overall better?

- Professionally/personally
 - Feel like you as member of staff receive enough support from the university?
 - Do facilities (e.g. office space/assigned time for students, i.e. seminars) enable students as you would like?
 - What is most disabling/hindering for you? (i.e. budget, time constraints, etc.)

- What do you think students could do better?

- What do you think PGRs struggle most with?

- What enables PGRs the most?

- If you could, what would be the one thing to change about postgraduate research?

Interview Schedule – Students

'Ice-breaker'-questions

- Participant's age
- Which course are you studying? Programme? (PhD/Master)
- Start date of course?

Interview themes

- Before course?
 - Coming straight from education? (i.e. undergrad) → if so, previous education at participating university?
OR been working in between?
OR something else? (i.e. travelling?)
- Access to course
 - Why this course?
 - Why participating university?
 - Application process easy? Enrolment?
- Experiences to date:
 - Academically
 - Seminars?
 - Happy with overall organisation?
 - Enough support? (from staff/university/ overall?)
 - Facilities? (e.g. library → space and availability)
 - Materials? (e.g. course handbook)
 - Professionally
 - Employed?
 - Feeling as member of the field?
 - Socially
 - Family (support? Their education? Etc.)
 - Living arrangements
 - Feeling as part of the university?
 - Work-life-balance
 - Support via course mates? Or else?
 - Personally
 - Feelings about course?
 - Future career
- If you could, what would be the one thing to change about postgraduate research?

Interview Schedule – Students

Follow Up Interview (9-12 months later)

- Any major changes since last interview you'd like to mention?
- How have the last months been...
 - ...academically?
 - ❖ easy or some difficulties?
 - ❖ Enough contact time? With other PGRs/staff? (different to first interview?)
 - ❖ Uni-work-life-balance?
 - ❖ How's progress monitoring going?
 - ...socially?
 - ❖ Do you feel as part of community at uni? (has this improved or not since last time?)
 - ❖ Do you feel isolated?
 - ❖ Often meet friends from uni/outside uni?
 - ❖ Family?
 - ❖ Activities outside of uni?
 - ...personally?
 - ❖ Do you find you manage to cope well?
 - ❖ How have you been during last months? Up and downs (if so, when?) or "all normal"?
 - ❖ Want to comment on mental health?
 - ...economically?
 - ❖ Easy to 'live' whilst being a PGR?
 - ❖ Money-worries?
 - ❖ Full-time/part-time employment? (if so, work-life balance?)
- If you could tell your '9-12 month-ago-you' something/give advice, what would it be?
- If you could, what would be the one thing to change about postgraduate research?

PARTICIPANTS SHEET

No	Participant's Name (status)	Pseudonym name	Other changes
1	EXAMPLE Katherine Smith (student)	EXAMPLE Lilly	EXAMLPE Born in Liverpool → Born in Glasgow
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
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10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			

Appendix 2: Overview of the study space observations

Weekday	Time	No. of Ps* (in total)	Hum** / Non- Hum***	"new" Ps	Ps who are known from previous observation
Thursday	11:19 – 12:19	8	8 / 0	P1 – P8	N/A
Tuesday	09:20 – 10:20	7	5 / 2	P9 – P14	P3
Monday	13:10 – 14:10	19	12 / 7	P15 – P28	P5, P7, P8, P11, P12
Saturday	09:08 – 10:08	3	2 / 1	P29	P17, P18
Wednesday	09:38 – 10:38	5	3 / 2	P30 – P31	P11, P12, P19
Friday	13:06 – 14:07	18	14 / 4	P32 – P35	P5, P7, P8, P11, P12, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P23, P28, P30, P31
Tuesday	13:43 – 14:43	19	14 / 5	P36 – P38	P3, P5, P11, P12, P15, P17, P18, P19, P20, P23, P24, P26, P28, P30, P31, P32,

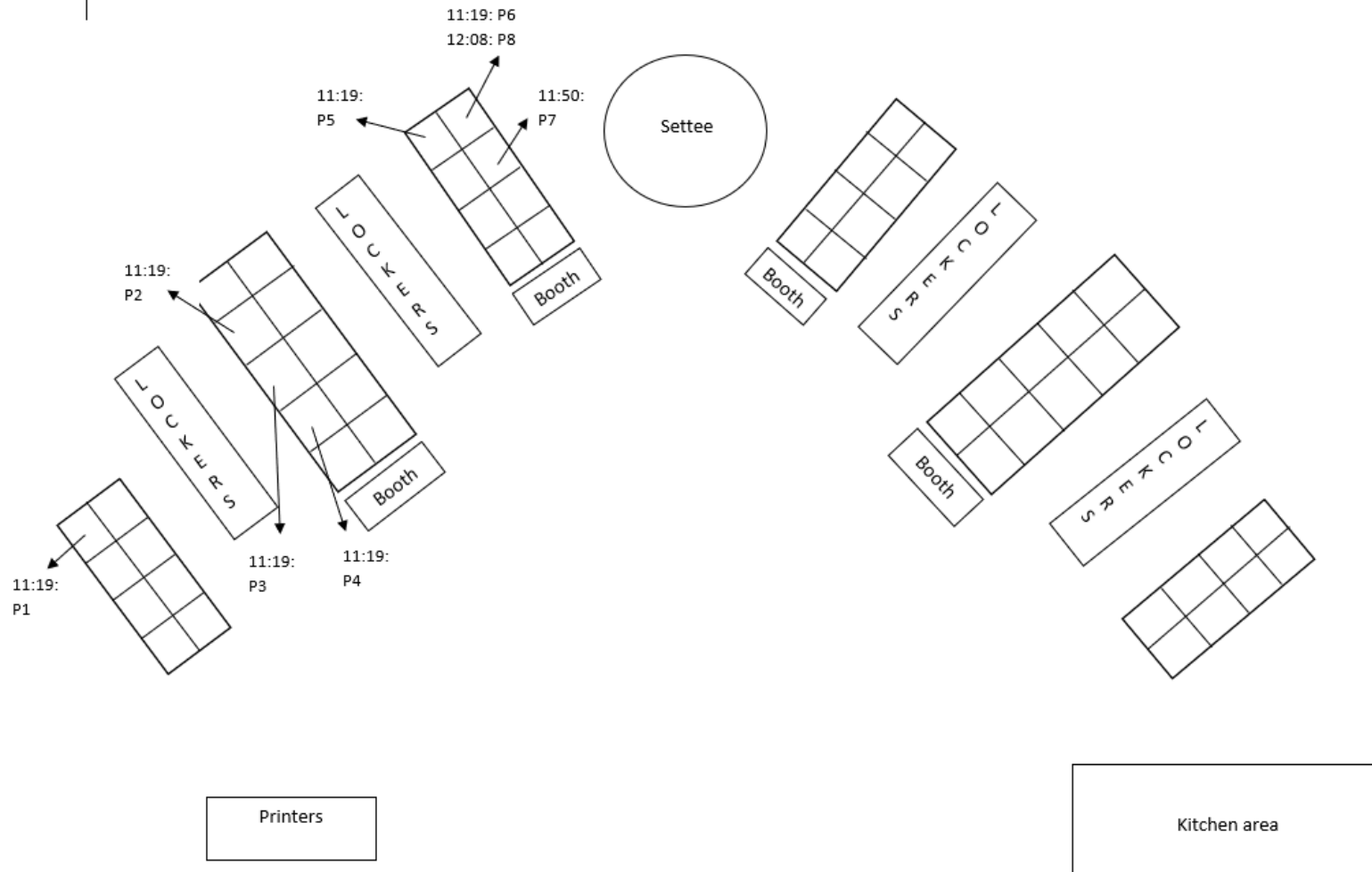
*Ps = Participants

**Hum = PGRs belonging to the Humanities school

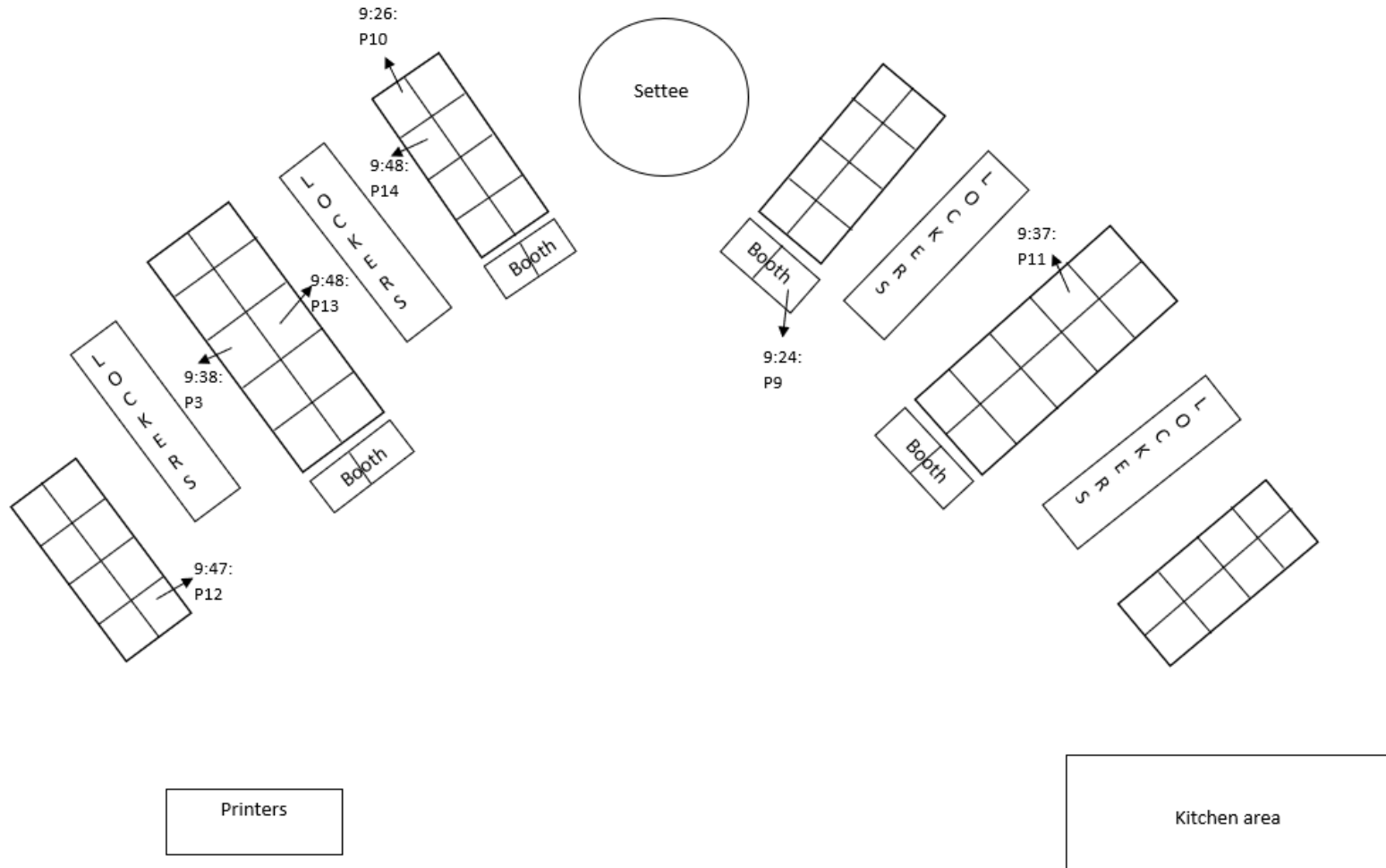
***Non-Hum = PGRs not belonging to the Humanities school (study space was shared with one other school)

Appendix 3: Floorplans

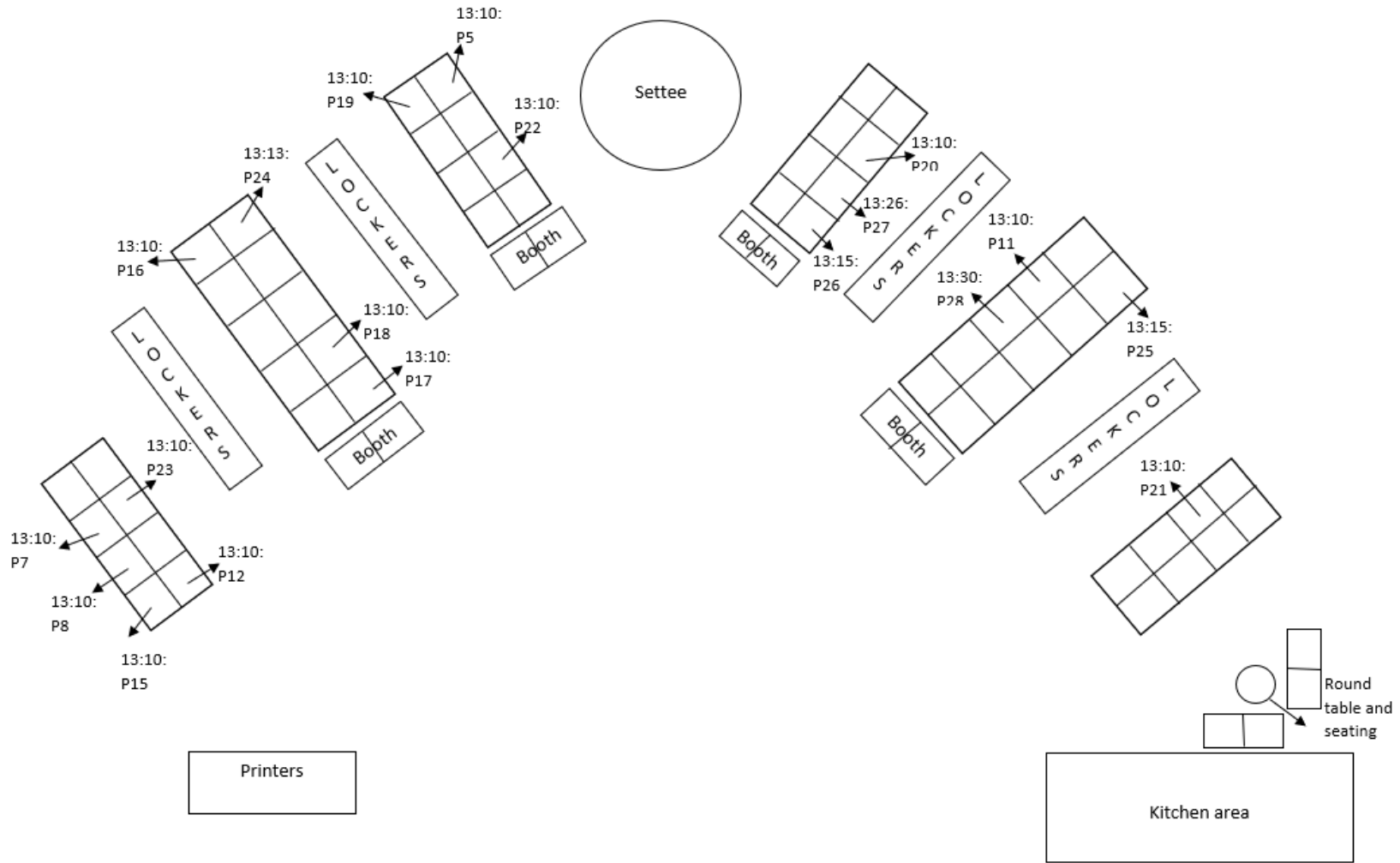
Humanities PGR study space. Observation 1: Thursday, 11:19-12:19

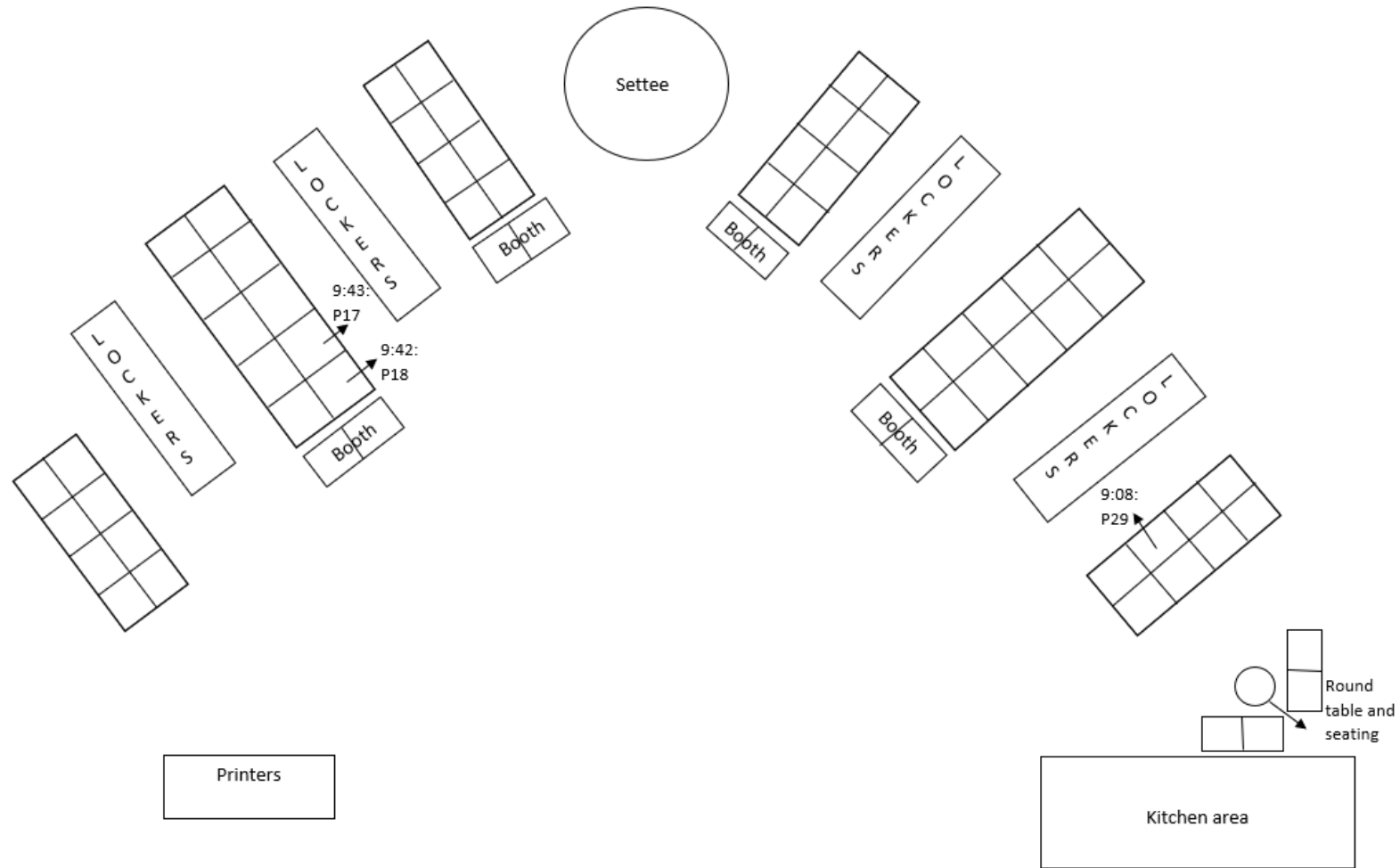


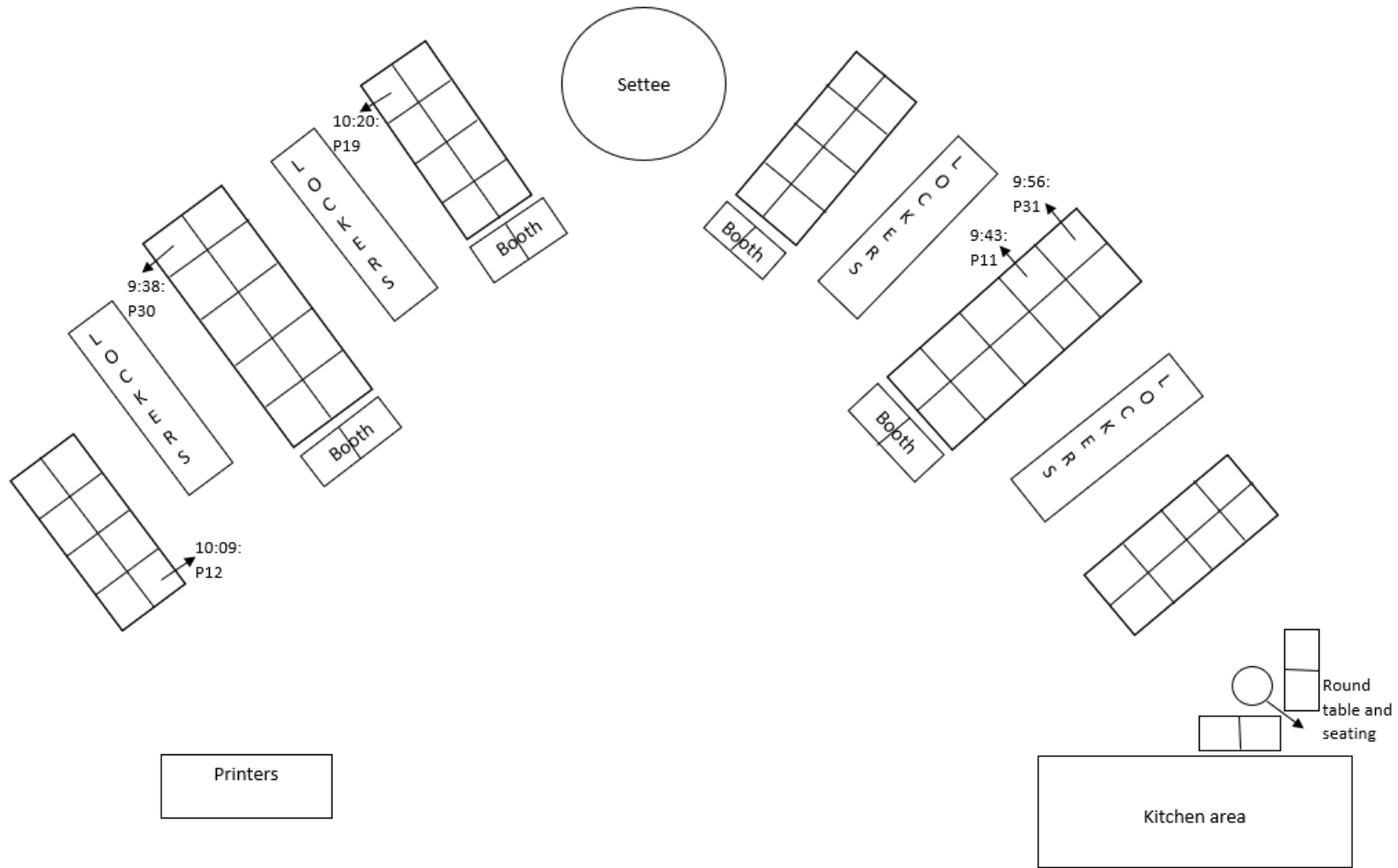
Humanities PGR study space. Observation 2: Tuesday, 9:20 – 10:20



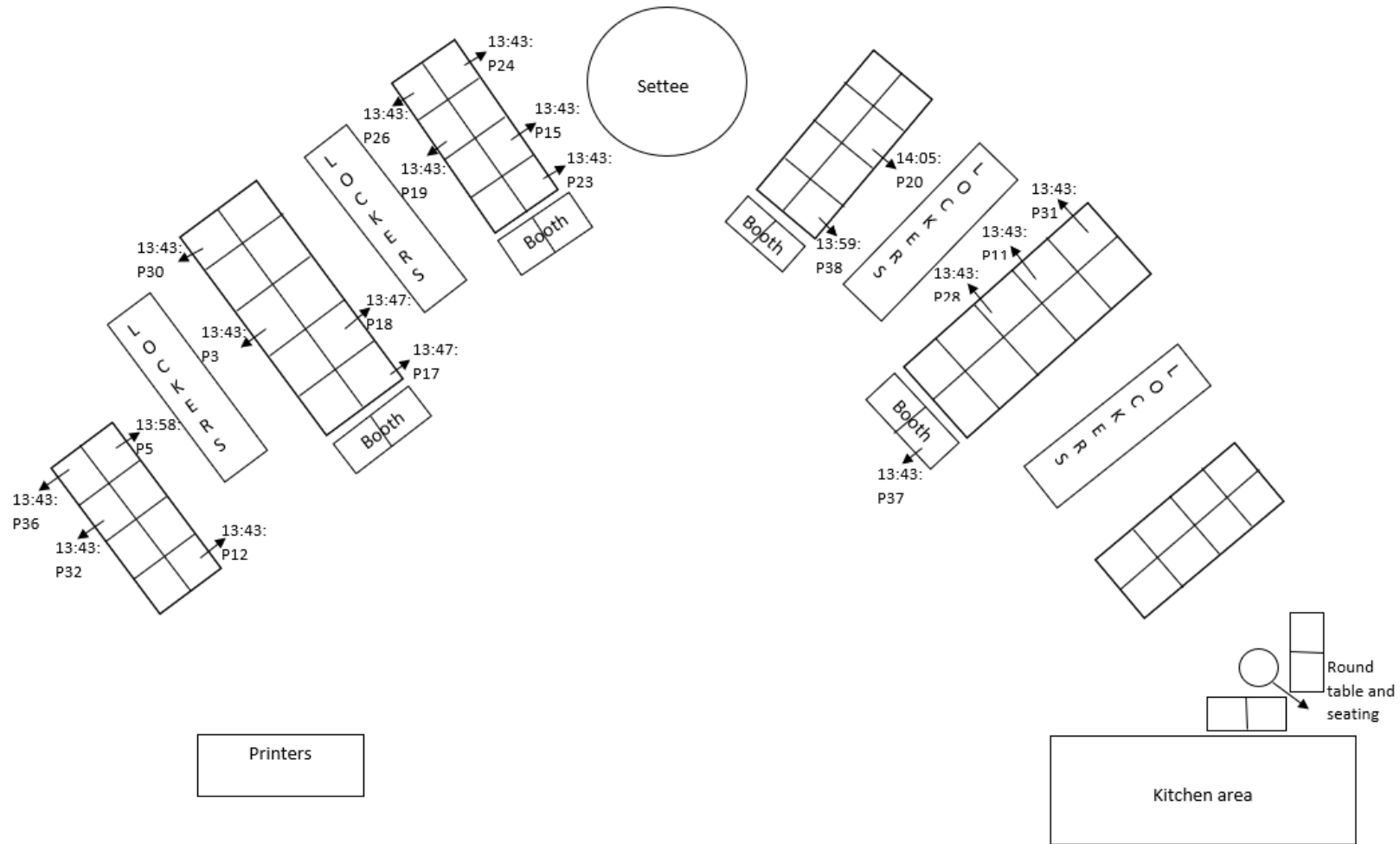
Humanities PGR study space. Observation 3: Monday, 13:10-14:10







Humanities PGR study space. Observation 7, Tuesday, 13:43 – 14:43



Appendix 4: Overview of interviews and supervision observations

	Participant and programme	Interview 1: study point	Interview 2: study point / Observation (of a supervision session)	Duration (in mins) Interview 1 + 2
1	Melissa MA by research	Month 2	Month 13 (8-month extension) / Observation*	76+79
2	Jen MA by research	Month 2	Month 13 (4-month extension) / Observation (Month 3)	61+65
3	Dom PhD	Year 2	Y3 / Observation	75+66
4	Chloe MA → PhD at different institution)	Month 9	PhD Y1 / Observation (PhD Y1)	57+86
5	Emily PhD	Y1	Y2 / Observation	67+85
6	Ted PhD	Y1	Y2 / Observation	70+59
7	Andrea PhD	Y1	Y2 / Observation	61+63
8	Matteo PhD	Y2	Y2 / Observation (Y2)	74+81
9	Leo MA by research	Month 20 (part- time)	-	93
10	Marcus PhD	Viva few weeks ago	-	86
11	Chris PhD	Y4	-	70
12	Tim MA by research	Month 11	-	67
13	Staff – school-level	N/A	-	43
14	Staff – institutional level	N/A.	-	57

*~~Observation~~: observation of supervision session was declined.

Appendix 5: Coding frame

Main category	Subcategory	Definition (incl. category name, description, positive example, optional: decision rules)
Different ways of addressing PGRs	→	Documents refer to PGRs in different ways, which connotes varied consideration of PGRs, as apparent in the subcategories.
	Considering PGR as person	Where the rules of being (for example via regulations) allow for individual differences. For example, acknowledging that a PGR may find oneself in circumstances that will disrupt their academic progress (Regulations for Awards).
	Contract-like consequences of non-adherence to rules	Instances where not following the rules is met with contract-like consequences. For example, not following the institution's code of conduct may lead to disciplinary proceedings (Students' Handbook of Regulations). This subcategory is applicable when consequences are referred to or signposted to, whereas detailing such consequences would fall under <i>procedures in case of non-ideal occurrences</i> . "Contract-like" connotes a formal relationship, there seems little or no space for considering the PGR as a person in individual circumstances (opposed to the above example).
Institutional provisions	→	Instances that refer to rules and structures that the institution provides in the context of PGR education. "Provisions" is rather loosely defined, as apparent in the subcategories. This is not limited to the institutional level but encompasses school-level provisions as well. For example: under the topic of attendance monitoring, specifically fraudulent use of student ID cards, there are procedures in place that first deal with such an issue on the school level, and may subsequently be escalated to the institutional level (Students' handbook of regulations).
	Opportunities for academic engagement	Reference to concrete opportunities for academic engagement, such as research seminars, public lectures, or academic skills development activities. These opportunities are arranged by the institution, whereas under <i>signposting to services or material providing advice and support</i> the PGR would have to get in touch to arrange an appointment, or to seek advice.
	Procedures in case of non-ideal occurrences	"Non-ideal occurrences" connotes anything that ideally does not occur in a PGR education lifecycle. There seem to be two dimensions: "non-ideal" from the point of view of the PGR, and of the institution. When the procedures that take effect following such a non-ideal occurrence are clearly detailed, this subcategory is applicable, for example complaints procedures, or research misconduct procedures, respectively. Distinguishing this subcategory from <i>contract-like consequences of non-adherence to rules</i> : one may argue that research misconduct constitutes the PGR not following the rules and thus consequences (such as research misconduct procedures) may fall under <i>contract-like consequences of non-adherence</i>

		<i>to rules</i> – this is applicable where contract-like consequences are signposted or referred to, whereas a detailed outline of procedures implies applicability to this subcategory.
	Signposting to services or material providing advice and support	When the document contains information referring to services (such as IT, the library), or material (for example via a link) that a PGR may refer to, which will enable them to access (further) advice and or support. Engagement with these services is contingent on the PGR initiating the contact. In contrast, activities that are or will be arranged by the institution, fall under <i>opportunities for academic engagement</i> .
	Supervisor provisions	University provisions, for example guidelines, governing the supervisory team. For example, it is institutional responsibility to ensure that supervision is adequate (Students’ handbook of regulations).
PGR responsibilities →		Instances outlining what a PGR must or should do. This includes expectations of PGRs, as an expectation (for example voiced by the institution) frequently connotes responsibility to meet said expectation.
	Communication	The imperative of communication lies with the PGR. For example, if they need support, or experience difficulties, receiving support is contingent on them initiating communication. For example, when experiencing an IT problem or mental health difficulties.
	Knowing and performing the rules	Instances that connote that PGRs are responsible for knowing the “rules”, such as guidelines, policies – overall knowing how to be and what to do in the PGR context. For example, according to institutional policy, PGRs are required to record their attendance via regularly swiping their ID card in a school-level office (Humanities PGR handbook). This subcategory encompasses different aspects, such as rules about attendance and absence, <u>progression</u> and examination processes, as well as their academic development. Knowing (this is frequently implied), adhering to, and performing the rules is included here. When the rules are not followed, text may be coded under <i>contract-like consequences of non-adherence to rules</i> when the consequences are briefly referred to, or under <i>procedures in case of non-ideal occurrences</i> when procedural consequences are detailed.
Programmatic characteristics →		Such characteristics, typical of PGR programmes, may be school-specific, or on the institutional level.
	Programme rules	The “rules” governing the programme. Instances that connote that there is one way of being, or one way of how things may proceed. If there are various options, it would fall under <i>flexibility</i> . There is a seeming connection with <i>knowing and performing the rules</i> (under <i>PGR responsibilities</i>). <i>Programme rules</i> is applicable only when there is no reference to the PGR, for example, the outline of the maximum length of theses (Students’ handbook of regulations). In contrast, an example directly involving the PGR and thus falling under <i>knowing and performing the rules</i> would be the expectation of candidates being

		based at their institution (Students' handbook of regulations). Yet, others' responsibilities (who are not a PGR) may be included, for example: examiners having to create a joint report (Regulations for awards).	
	Flexibility	Serving as contrast to <i>programme rules</i> , this subcategory connotes that there is more than one way of how things may proceed. For example, after the end of the standard enrolment period there are several options: providing one's notification of intention to submit; applying to enrol for submission pending period; applying for an extension of the standard enrolment period (Students' handbook of regulations). But, possible outcomes following one's submission (for example of progression monitoring) do not fall under this subcategory, as it is not an active choice made by the PGR, thus the outcome options and consequently necessary actions fall under <i>programme rules</i> .	
Specific school context	→	Information that is specific to the school that the participants belong to: the humanities. Thus, instances in the regulations for example, where there may be general references to school responsibilities, are not included in this main category.	
	PGR study space	All matters regarding the humanities school's PGR study space.	
	Available facilities	Facilities that are available in the study space. Also encompasses PGRs using the facilities during study space observations. For example, if they use kitchen facilities to make a coffee, or use the printer.	
	Dedicated workspace	According to the humanities handbook, the study space is defined as dedicated, and quiet shared research office environment, connoting the purpose of working and studying. This subcategory encompasses the notion of silence in that space.	
	PGRs have 'their' space	Indications that PGRs 'reserve' a space, for example, they leave papers or personal belongings in that space, connoting <u>that things</u> would be left in place.	
	Space for peer interaction	When PGRs talk to each other, whether conversations are about academic or non-academic matters.	
Supervisory relationship	→	Instances that refer to the supervisory RS. For example, the way that regulations impact the way of being of supervisory teams.	
	Supervisor positioned as 'in charge'	Instances where the supervisor is positioned as superior. For example, annual leave has to be authorised by the supervisor.	
	Relationship rules	"Rules" is loosely defined, broadly referring to the way of being within the supervisory team. Instances are coded to this subcategory when text refers to general rules that govern the supervisory RS in general, for example: minimal supervision (usually every other month) during the submission pending	

		period (Students' handbook of regulations). Rules that must be upheld by either party are further subcategorised.	
		PGR requirements	For example, sending work for review to supervisors in good time (Regulations for awards).
		Supervisor requirements	For example, at least one member of the supervisory team has supervised a PGR to the appropriate level before (Regulations for awards).
	Three observations (Jen & Vicky; Chloe & Vicky; Matteo & Adam)	Constructive conversation	Discussions about, for example, an emergent issue, or sources. Such conversations often feature the supervisor providing advice, which may be general (Chloe asked Vicky for advice regarding a conference funding application) or specific ("the introduction is not really an introduction [...] the final sentence says what Jen will do, but not really what she'll argue"). Advice may be with regard to the PGR's work, or their wellbeing
		Sent work	The PGR sent work to the supervisor prior to the meeting, which may structure the meeting.
		Nature of the relationship	Instances that seem to capture facets of the RS, such as the supervisor demonstrating concern for the PGR, or genuine interest in their work. It may also include the PGR <u>opening up</u> about an issue.
		Talking positively about PGR and/or their work	For example, praising PGR and/or their work, for example: Jen's "overall approach is really clear."

Appendix 6: Example of coding

To provide context, at this stage of the interview, Melissa (M) had just explained to me (R) that she was able to get a double-extension for her master's degree, elongating the 12-month study time by an additional eight months. That is what Melissa was "offered".

The screenshot displays a coding software interface. On the left, a transcript of an interview is shown with speakers M and R. On the right, a 'CODE STRIPES' panel lists various codes with lines indicating their application to specific parts of the transcript. The transcript text is as follows:

M Yeah, yeah
R It's really good
M that's why as soon as it happened, it got offered, I was like, my instinct is saying "Do it"
R Yeah
M "no matter what situation, I have eight months to write"
R so was that like kind of negotiated by the staff, by the sounds of it?
M Yeah, erm, my supervisor basically, I think (.) 'cause he didn't reply to me for the first week after I'd got, well first I'd say five days following the email saying it got declined
R Yeah
M and erm, I was kind of avoiding him, 'cause I knew he was gonna try and like persuade me (.)
R to do it in four months?
M like "Oh, do you wanna just try it? If you don't do it..." but I thought I don't even wanna hear him say those words, I just know I'm not gonna do it in four months and if I do it's gonna be like third year again, where I'm surviving on one hour sleep, sleeping on the couch, living in the library and I thought; I'm not doing it again, 'cause it drained me so much
R Yeah
M and I think I had him for my dissertation as well, so he knows the extent (.) to which that caused, erm, so yeah, I've got the 1,000 and then erm I have to apply for the £100 one,
R Mhm
M which I do pay
R Yeah
M erm, as soon as possible basically, to see if I can...

The 'CODE STRIPES' panel on the right contains the following codes:

- Supervisory R5 - positive, academically
- Supervisory R5 - regularity of meetings
- Paid work - positive aspect
- Supervisory R5 - positive, organised
- Being in the same boat
- EIAC - peers, interpersonal
- EIAC - departmental seminars
- EIAC - publishing
- UG-PGR difference - lacking structure
- Non-academic commitments
- Disciplinary differences
- EIAC - thesis-related work, difficulties
- Paid work
- Not knowing
- Supervisory R5 - negative, unorganised
- Uni process not working from PGR POV
- Individual ways of viewing things
- EIAC - thesis-related work
- Individual way of working
- Post-PGR prospects
- Supervisory R5 - negative
- Emotional toll
- Previous influence - way of working
- Supervisory R5 - interpersonal RS
- Knowing each other
- Funding

R Mhm

M which I do pay

R Yeah

M erm, as soon as possible basically, to see if I can...

R Alright, so you don't wait until these four months are over and then

M No, no no

R Okay

M So, erm, but [*chuckles*] I know I'm praising my supervisor right now, but he is not, well, so this started back up – when did we sort it out? End of January,

R Mhm

10

R: Researcher M: Melissa 79:23

M we sorted all the forms out for this four-month one, and I told him straight "I need to meet you every two weeks at least"

R Yeah

M "I need to be in better contact with you, I need you to give me more deadlines", because I

CODE STRIPES

Coding Density

- Post-PGR prospects
- EIAC - thesis-related work
- Emotional toll
- Individual ways of viewing things
- Uni process not working from PGR POV
- Not knowing
- Supervisory R5 - negative
- Supervisory R5 - negative, unorganised

- Supervisory R5 - positive, academically
- Knowing each other
- Supportive
- Supervisory R5 - regularity of meetings
- Funding
- Paid work - positive aspect
- Supervisory R5 - positive, organised
- Being in the same boat
- EIAC - peers, interpersonal
- EIAC - departmental seminars
- EIAC - publishing
- Previous influence - way of working
- Supervisory R5 - interpersonal RS
- UG-PGR difference - lacking structure
- Supervisory R5 - not on the same page
- Non-academic commitments
- Disciplinary differences
- EIAC - thesis-related work, difficulties
- Paid work
- Supervisory R5 - negative

- Individual way of work

M we sorted all the forms out for this four-month one, and I told him straight “I need to meet you every two weeks at least”

R Yeah

M “I need to be in better contact with you, I need you to give me more deadlines”, because I am self-motivated but if the pressure’s on, I will do it, whereas if I know I can get away with it, that’s when I’m like “Oh, I could just not meet him, I could just say I’ve not finished” whereas if he says “I want this by this”, then I’ll do it

R So with a bit more pressure

M Yeah, ‘cause it’s alright, I do, I have my own deadlines, but if no one’s there to read what I’ve done

R or to make sure you meet the deadlines

M Yeah, then (.) it’s just pointless, erm, so yeah I met him end of January and we organised to meet two weeks later (.) and, but I said to him “I don’t need a time on the day, just” well, no, we’d organised a meeting for the week after we’d done the forms,

R Mhm

M and erm, I said “Can you just tell me a day so that I know when to do this task by?”

R Mhm

M and he was like “Alright, we’ll meet on Thursday” and I was like “Right, that’s fine” and I messaged him on the Monday before to say “Oh, have you managed to find a time on Thursday to meet?”

R Mhm

M and he didn’t reply, and then I messaged him, I didn’t message him on Thursday, but I thought “Oh, I’ll see him about, ‘cause I’m at the uni”

Coding Density

- CODE STRIPS
- Supervisory R5 - positive, academically
 - Knowing each other
 - Supportive
 - Supervisory R5 - regularity of meetings
 - Funding
 - Paid work - positive aspect
 - Supervisory R5 - positive, organised
 - Being in the same boat
 - EIAC - peers, interpersonal
 - EIAC - departmental seminars
 - EIAC - publishing
 - Previous influence - way of working
 - Supervisory R5 - interpersonal R5
 - UG-PGR difference - lacking structure
 - Supervisory R5 - not on the same page
 - Non-academic commitments
 - Disciplinary differences
 - EIAC - thesis-related work, difficulties
 - Paid work
 - Supervisory R5 - negative
 - Not knowing
 - Supervisory R5 - negative, unorganised
 - Uni process not working from PGR POV
 - Individual ways of viewing things
 - Emotional toll
 - EIAC - thesis-related work
 - Individual way of working
 - Post-PGR prospects

messed him on the Monday before to say “Oh, have you managed to find a time on Thursday to meet?”

R Mhm

M and he didn't reply, and then I messaged him, I didn't message him on Thursday, but I thought “Oh, I'll see him about, 'cause I'm at the uni”

R On that Thursday?

M Yeah, so he still didn't reply and he still hasn't replied, so it makes me think something's wrong (.) with him

R Did you see him on the Thursday when you thought you might run into him?

M No, no no

R Oh

M but he must be in because he's teaching

R Yeah

M so, I emailed him yesterday, I've not checked my phone yet to see if he's emailed back, but (.) I'm hoping it's just something as simple as we got the days wrong or he's accidentally not seen my email or something, but

R Why what do you think? It seems like you think something else is happening?

11

CODE STRIPES

Coding Density

- Supervisory R5 - positive, academically
- Knowing each other
- Supportive
- Supervisory R5 - regularity of meetings
- Funding
- Paid work - positive aspect
- Supervisory R5 - positive, organised
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- Supervisory R5 - negative
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- Supervisory R5 - negative, unorganised
- Uni process not working from PGR POV
- Individual ways of viewing things
- Emotional toll
- EIAC - thesis-related work
- Individual way of working
- Post-PGR prospects

M No, it's not, I'm hoping it's not the fact that he's just not doing it, he's not keeping committed to meeting, because I need to meet

R Okay, yeah

M 'cause I need him to be more organised, he is organised, this is why I'm shocked that he's not replied, 'cause he's usually the lecturer that replies

R Yeah

M every like couple of days or whatever

R Mhm

M but the fact he's not, I'm like either something's seriously wrong

R Yeah

M personally, with him

R Yeah

M or, he erm – what you call it – he's just

R not taking it...

M not taking it seriously, and I'm like "I need this" [*chuckles*]

R Yeah

M but, 'cause when you think about it, the extension only runs from the date of when it was originally due in, so I've got 'til May for this one

R Mhm

M start of May,

Coding Density

- Supervisory R5 - positive, academically
- Knowing each other
- Supportive
- Supervisory R5 - regularity of meetings
- Funding
- Paid work - positive aspect
- Supervisory R5 - positive, organised
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- Individual ways of viewing things
- Emotional toll
- EIAC - thesis-related work
- Individual way of working
- Post-PGR prospects

R: Researcher M: Melissa 79:23

R Yeah, that you can go through it kind of?

M Yeah, 'cause I need it clarified what I'm doing and then, 'cause it's like a Eureka moment where it just snaps and as soon as I've got the argument I'm like "Yeah, this is it", because I'm not sure if I mentioned it in the first meeting [interview] – oh no, I wouldn't have, I wouldn't have because at the start

R it was at the very start yeah

Both chuckle

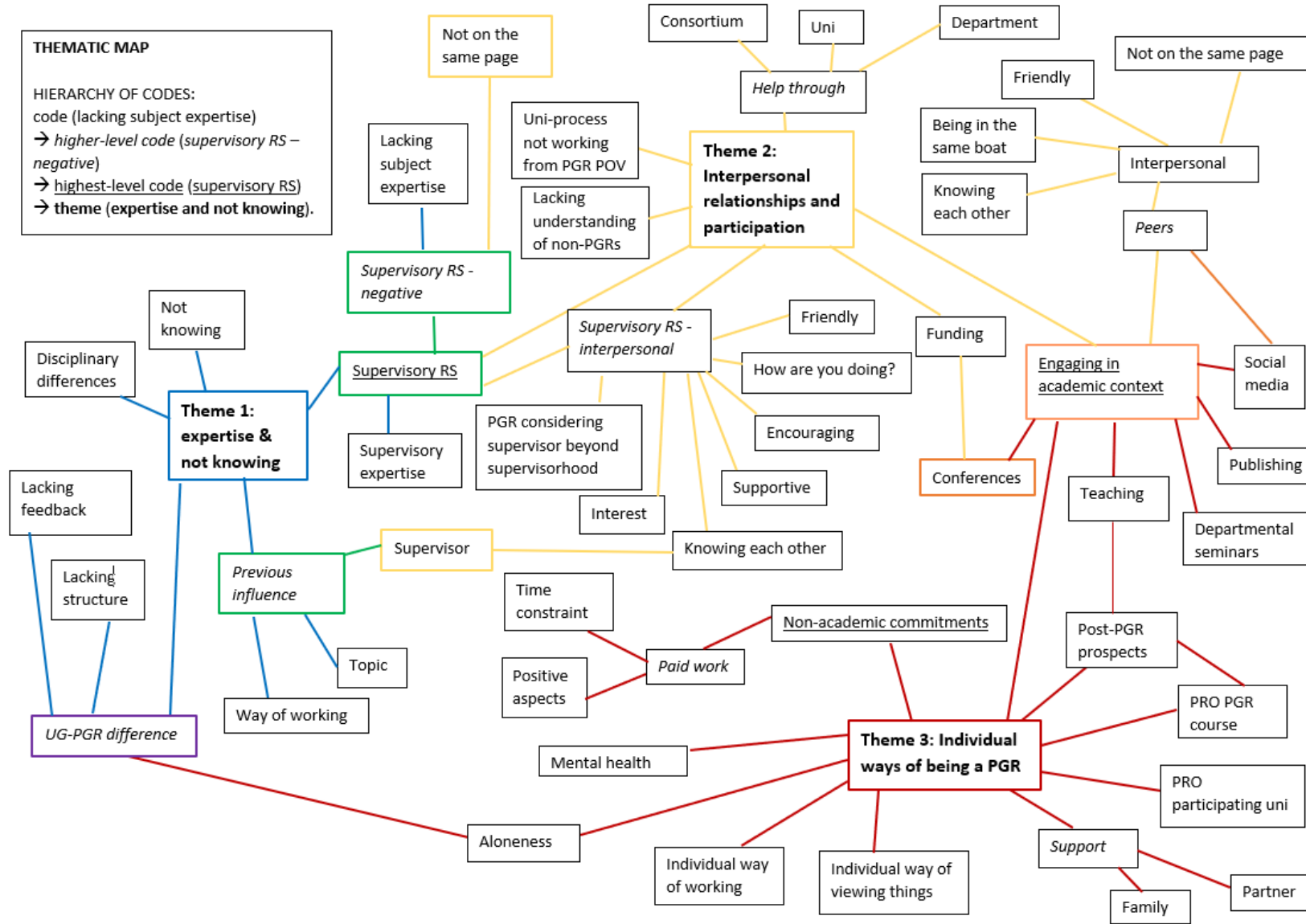
M so, just before summer, so this was like June/July, I met with my supervisor, and was talking about the second chapter and the arguments, and came up with this really philosophical idea, about the idea of voice for the second chapter, and I was like "This is amazing, right, I'm gonna research it" and that's when it got to the point where I was like "But this can't be the argument for the whole chapter – it can be my argument for the importance of the literature, but it's not..."

CODE STRIPS

Coding Density

- Supervisory R5 - positive, academically
- Knowing each other
- Supportive
- Supervisory R5 - regularity of meetings
- Funding
- Paid work - positive aspect
- Supervisory R5 - positive, organised
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- EIAC - peers, interpersonal
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- Supervisory R5 - interpersonal R5
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- Supervisory R5 - negative
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- Supervisory R5 - negative, unorganised
- Uni process not working from PGR POV
- Individual ways of viewing things
- Emotional toll
- Individual way of working
- EIAC - thesis-related work
- Post-PGR prospects

Appendix 7: Thematic map



Appendix 8: Table of codes

Theme	Higher-level codes	Code	Meaning ascribed to the code by the researcher.
Expertise & not knowing	Disciplinary differences		Specific to PGRs who are within a discipline for their PGR studies different to previous educational engagements. Encompasses ways of writing, doing research, etc.
	Not knowing		Rather broad code. Instances where PGR doesn't know what to do. May involve instances where PGR talks about finding out about something, as it implies previously not knowing.
	<u>Previous influence</u>		Typically related to the academic context. Encompasses instances where previous educational experiences have had an impact on their PGR experience.
		Way of working	When previous ways of working (typically in the academic context) influenced the current PGR way of working.
		Topic	Thesis-topic being influenced by previous engagement with topic.
		<u>Supervisory RS (relationship)</u>	Instances encompassing the supervisory relationship.
		Supervisory expertise	The supervisor provides knowledge, advice, guidance, etc. to the PGR, based on them being oldtimers.
		<i>Supervisory RS – negative</i>	Negative aspects of the RS.
		Lacking subject expertise	Instances of supervisor lacking knowledge regarding the thesis-topic.
		<u>UG-PGR difference</u>	Aspects that reflect different experiences typically between undergraduate and postgraduate experience, but also encompassing master's-PhD differences
		Lacking feedback	Lesser feedback, for example compared to regular feedback on essays, exams, etc.
		Lacking structure	Lack of structure previously provided through lectures, seminars, etc.
	Interpersonal relationships and participation	<u>Engaging in academic context - peers</u>	
		<i>Interpersonal – Not on the same page</i>	Not necessarily “negative”, could also be indicating a lacking connection with one's peers.
		<i>Interpersonal – Being in the same boat</i>	Being able to relate to one another (typically among fellow PGRs), but further encompassing for example a senior PGR providing advice to junior PGR, also venting.

		<i>Interpersonal, friendly</i>	Polite interaction between peers, for example, being welcoming to PGRs new to the participating institution.
		<i>Interpersonal, knowing each other</i>	Frequently indicating an established RS that goes beyond the “friendly” level. Knowing each other personally, and about one’s projects for example.
	Funding		Instances such as accessing conference funding, or institutional fee waiver.
	<i>Help through</i>		“Help” conceived as for example a process, provision, practice, rule, also encompassing people, that benefits the PGR in some way.
		Consortium	This is rather specific to Chloe, whose PhD was with the NECAH consortium.
		Department	On the departmental level.
		Uni	On the institutional level.
	Lacking understanding of non-PGRs		Typically family members, partners, friends, who lack understanding of PGR’s experience. Somewhat opposing “Being in the same boat” regarding peers.
	<u>Previous influence</u>	Supervisor	When there was a continued relationship to one’s supervisor, for example PGR already knew their supervisor from their undergraduate degree.
	<i>Supervisory RS – interpersonal</i>		<i>Interpersonal</i> in the sense of Tobbell & O’Donnell’s (2013a) theorising.
		Friendly	Typically, PGRs referring to supervisor as nice, lovely, friendly, etc., or that they “get on”.
		How are you doing	Typically, supervisor asking PGR asking how they are doing.
		PGR considering supervisor beyond supervisorhood	Connection to the findings outlined in the qualitative content analysis, that outlined importance of considering PGR beyond their studenthood.
		Interest	Supervisor demonstrates interest in PGR, typically their work, thesis topic, etc.
		Supportive	Conceived as the supervisor having the PGR’s back, or approval of potentially non-thesis-related things.
		Knowing each other	Different to this code with regard to peers, this rather relates to knowing how each other work, but similarly indicating that some RS has been established.
		Encouraging	Typically related to the academic context.
	<i>Supervisory RS – negative</i>	Not on the same page	Somewhat of a disconnect between supervisor and PGR, for example having differing views on how things should be done.
	Uni-process not working from PGR POV		Somewhat in opposition to “ <i>Help through</i> ”, as it refers to processes, practices, provisions, etc. that are not working from the PGR’s point of view (POV).

Individual ways of being a PGR	Aloneness		Instances of the PGR referring to being or feeling alone. This encompasses experiences of loneliness and isolation (participants used these terms somewhat interchangeably) as aloneness is understood to encompass all these concepts which have in common being alone. For example, feeling lonely understood as one facet of aloneness, in terms of being alone and being unhappy/sad about it.
	<u>Engaging in academic context</u>		Rather broad conceptualisation of PGRs engaging in many different ways in the academic context. Encompasses engagement with one's thesis, but also engagement with other people. About being in the academic context.
		Conferences	Reference to attending or participating in conferences, also encompassing the attendant peer engagement.
		Departmental seminars	Instances referring to departmental seminars, often referred to as "research seminars"
		Publishing	When PGRs talk about aiming to publish or working on publications.
		Social media	Instances referring to social media enabling engagement, for example creating a group message for PGRs to stay in touch.
		Teaching	PGRs referring to teaching opportunities or obligations.
	Individual way of working		Specific outline of how PGRs conduct their academic work, for example what a typical day looks like.
	Individual way of viewing things		PGRs outlining their point of view on typically academic-related things, for example their opinion on academia in general.
	Mental health		PGR referring to mental health issues or contributors to good mental health.
	Post-PGR prospects		What PGRs anticipate, plan, or desire to do after gaining the qualification.
	PRO PGR course		Reasons for enrolling on PGR course.
	PRO participating uni		Reasons for enrolling at the participating institution
	<u>Non-academic commitments - Paid work</u>		PGRs who engage in work alongside their studies, which they are paid for.
		Positive aspects	Benefits concomitant to their engagement in work.
		Time constraint	Engagement in paid work means less time is available to dedicate to studies.
	<u>Support</u>		Instances where PGRs felt supported in various ways.
		Family	May serve as source of distraction, away from studies, emotional support, such as encouragement.
		Partner	Similar to the above, also including financial support.