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Doing Feminist Text-Focused Institutional Ethnography in UK Universities

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PhD in Sociology

The University of Edinburgh

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, entitled *Doing Feminist Text-Focused Institutional Ethnography in UK Universities*, has been composed solely by myself, not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and, except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed

Órla Meadhbh Murray

September 2018

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Abstract

My thesis concerns how to do feminist sociology using Dorothy Smith's ideas about Institutional Ethnography (IE), exploring the textually-organised relations of ruling focusing on UK higher education. How and in what ways do texts organise UK higher education, and what can a feminist research approach add to understanding this?

The first part of the thesis charts the development of Smith's ideas and how they have been received and used by others. From this, I develop a typology of IE approaches and commit to doing text-focused IE, alongside considering whether and how IE can retain its feminist roots. This requires consideration of what makes research feminist and how to do it in practice, resulting in feminist epistemological discussions and a consideration of how to do reflexive and accountable text-focused IE. This sets the scene for a methodological experiment in the second part of the thesis, in which three different IE text analysis methods are developed, based on Smith's work. These are then used to investigate in detail key texts which help organise UK higher education: (i) a close-reading of one specific text, the National Student Survey; (ii) an analysis of the Economic and Social Research Council's research funding application process as a textually-mediated process; and, (iii) an investigation of the Research Excellence Framework as a discourse. These later chapters explore different but intertwined ways in which UK higher education is textually-organised through how teaching and research activities are assessed and funded. By focusing on the ways in which the accountability processes involved are negotiated at a local-level, I explore how much agency people have in interpreting texts into activity and the translation involved in fitting their work into textual forms for evaluation purposes.

In answer to my overarching question, how do texts organise UK higher education, while texts help organise and regulate people's everyday activities within an institutional framework, authors and readers have interpretative agency in negotiating and translating the meaning of institutional texts. This applies to the researcher as an authoritative reader and as a writer of texts concerning academic working processes. Interpretative agency also differs depending on someone's role and associated authority, which also has to be inscribed in the process of textualisation. The 'moment' of textualisation is important because texts often stipulate who or what is legitimate and who and what has authority

within a particular context. In this sense, people are always behind and in front of the texts, both as authors and readers and as the collective weight of people's interpretations in producing 'correct' readings of authoritative texts becomes solidified into further texts within a web of institutional texts. Thus, an authoritative individual or collective readership can give weight to and popularise unintended interpretations of texts, as has been the case with some key UK higher education regulatory texts. The interplay between textual requirements, interpretations seen as authoritative, and agency in reading and writing texts, comes out in all three of my focused investigations as an ongoing and cumulative negotiation of institutional power through textual gaming. Although in Smith's sense the textually-organised relations of ruling are present and have impact, this occurs differently regarding the three different textual organising processes investigated, and interpretative presence continues to be exercised through the agency and translation work involved in reading and writing organising texts in UK higher education. The thesis concludes by returning to the question of how and in what ways a feminist approach, and in particular a more text-based way of carrying out Smith's IE, can aid in understanding these processes.

Lay Summary

My thesis explores how to do feminist sociology using Dorothy Smith's ideas about Institutional Ethnography (IE), specifically on how texts organise institutions, focusing on UK higher education (HE). Texts are taken to mean replicable material objects which carry messages across multiple locations, for example, bureaucratic documents, books, and digital texts. How and in what ways do texts organise UK HE, and what can a feminist research approach add to understanding this?

The first part of the thesis charts the development of Smith's ideas and develops a list of the different ways people have used Smith's ideas around IE to do research. I commit to doing a text-focused IE alongside considering whether and how IE can retain its feminist roots. After thinking through feminist discussions of how to do research, specifically reflecting on the role of the researcher, research methods, and how to be accountable to readers.

In the second part of the thesis I try out three different methods of analysing texts, focusing on the key texts which organise UK HE: (i) a close-reading of one specific text, the National Student Survey; (ii) an analysis of the Economic and Social Research Council's research funding application process as a textually-mediated process; and, (iii) an investigation of the Research Excellence Framework as a discourse. These chapters explore different but intertwined ways in which UK HE is textually-organised through how teaching and research activities are assessed and funded. By focusing on the ways in which the accountability processes involved are negotiated at a local-level, I explore how much agency people have in interpreting texts into activity and the translation involved in fitting their work into textual forms for evaluation purposes.

In answer to my overarching question, how do texts organise UK HE, while texts help organise and regulate people's everyday activities within an institutional framework, authors and readers have interpretative agency in negotiating and translating the meaning of institutional texts, including academic researchers. Interpretative agency also differs depending on someone's role and associated authority, which also has to be inscribed in the process of writing a text, because texts often identify who or what is legitimate and who and what has authority within a particular context. The thesis concludes by returning

to the question of how and in what ways a feminist approach, in particular, a more text-based one, can aid in understanding these processes.

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Introduction- A Methodological Experiment

Feminist sociology and the politics of knowledge production are the underlying issues discussed in this thesis, specifically exploring these by using Dorothy Smith's alternative feminist sociology, institutional ethnography (IE) and the textual organisation of UK higher education (HE). Such discussions have long been of interest to me. From my early teenage exploration of the feminist riot grrrl music scene online to studying A-Level Sociology at school, feminist reflections on power and knowledge production have been a constant in my research interest. Through the activist and academic feminist texts that I encountered as a teenager, such as the first edition of *Gender* (Connell, 2002) or the now defunct riot grrrl blogs online, I began to find a way to describe my experiences and beliefs around gender, sexism and misogyny. The feminist and sociological texts I read provided an important antidote to living in the socially conservative environment of Northern Ireland. However, these texts were primarily drawn from the US, Australia, and Britain and thus needed some translation to apply to my local context. Alongside this feminist awakening, the sociological education I was receiving at school was fundamentally challenging a lot of received 'truths' including around the primacy of the natural sciences as truth tellers and more valuable than other academic subjects, which got me interested in the political nature of knowledge production and the importance of methodology.

When I was sixteen, I chose to study sociology A-Level, which was largely considered by teachers and other students in my school as not difficult, not serious, not a good choice for university applications or future career considerations. There was a lot of encouragement from teachers to continue studying natural sciences and maths, which were perceived as 'good' A-Levels and therefore more likely to ensure a place at university and a desirable career. I did not enjoy science or maths and so dropped them as subjects in school as soon as possible. Part of my dislike of science in particular was the way in which 'science' was used to justify things I disagreed with – such as biological essentialist ideas of gender and the primacy of heterosexuality. While the science I learnt in school involved disconnected rote-learning to pass exams in biology, physics, and chemistry, the discussion

of 'science' in everyday life was pseudo-science often bluntly used to justify a reductive biological determinism around women and LGBT people's roles and value in society.

In A-Level Sociology we spent a lot of time discussing methodology and the sociology of knowledge, such as Popper's theory of falsification and Kuhn's ideas about paradigms shifts in science, both of which I found very interesting; if science had to be falsifiable to be considered scientific, and scientific claims were only contingently true, subject to the scientific paradigms of the time, then it opened up the possibility that science could be wrong. By exploring the backstage of research methods and the philosophical discussion underpinning them, I was being provided with a way to counter the science arguments and rote-learning engagement with knowledge production, confirming my suspicions that science could be wrong and that it was not inherently more valuable than other subjects because knowledge production of all disciplines was subject to similar epistemological questions.

During my undergraduate degree in sociology and politics at the University of Edinburgh, my interest in these discussions continued, especially since the perception of sociology not being a difficult or valuable subject was also present in informal conversations with other students, media portrayals and the apparent valorisations of statistical methods within the social sciences themselves. My academic engagement with these discussions did not properly begin until my third year when studying abroad at the University of California San Diego. I took three classes which transformed my engagement with the politics of knowledge production: Sociology of Science; Feminist Science Studies; and, Feminist Theory. The feminist theory course introduced me to many women of colour discussions about the intersectional nature of identity and oppression (for example: Anzaldúa, 1981; Collins, 2008 [1990]; hooks, 2000; Smith, 2006; Lorde, 2007), alongside providing a more nuanced understanding of feminist epistemological concerns, in particular challenging whether or not neutrality or objectivity are possible. Alongside this, reading in the sociology of science, particularly feminist criticisms of science (for example: Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Harding, 1986; Laqueur, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Shapin, 1988; Schiebinger, 1989; Martin, 1991; Schiebinger, 1991; Keller, 1992; Wolffensperger, 1993; Haraway, 1996; Fox, 1999; Schiebinger, 2000; Martin, 2001; Oudshoorn, 2001) was revelatory as it put together two of my key academic interests that I had not yet fitted together – the hierarchical valuation of different forms of knowledge and academic disciplines and gender – which laid the

groundwork for my undergraduate dissertation, *Degrees Away from Femininity: An Autoethnographic Study Examining How Gendered Hierarchies of Knowledge are Re/Produced* (Murray, 2012), when I returned to Edinburgh for my final year.

The dissertation involved interviewing ten undergraduate students, five astrophysicists and five performance literature students, chosen to represent two ends of an ostensible hierarchy of value; the objective, hard sciences on one end and subjective, soft arts/humanities subject on the other. I asked them about how and why they came to study their subject, and the value and general perception of the two subjects of physics and literature. What emerged from these discussions, alongside my observations and reflections, was the prevalence of a gendered perception of the 'typical' student in both disciplines – men in physics, women in literature – frequent reference to biological essentialist ideas of gender and subject suitability, and a gendered language of valuation setting up physics as masculine and more valuable than literature, which was emotional, subjective and thus feminine and less valuable. The importance of identity, both the student's own identities, and the identity of the 'imagined student' of each discipline, was central to perceptions of different disciplines and the implicit valuation of subjects and particular students' places in them, for example, how women negotiate men-dominated 'masculine' physics and the double bind of being both invisible and extra visible (Bagilhole, 2002; Bagilhole, 2007; Gillies & Lucey, 2007; Connell, 2009). All of this fitted in with the feminist science studies and feminist theory in which my research was couched. However, the focus on careers and expected financial rewards of different disciplines was not something I had anticipated being such a large part of the discussion, despite it mimicking the kinds of discussions present in my school around the negotiation of A-Level subjects. Thus, my interest in feminist sociology of knowledge developed into an interest in the impact of different valuations of academic disciplines within the context of UK HE, specifically what has been called the marketisation or neoliberalism of UK HE (UCU, 2010; Bailey & Freedman, 2001; Collini, 2013; Holmwood, 2014).

While my exploration of these matters thus far had focused on interviews and observational data, the theory I used and the analysis I did highlighted the importance of language to structuring hierarchies of value and legitimacy; the language used to describe disciplines was gendered and value-laden. Off the back of this dissertation, I applied to do a Masters and PhD, also at the University of Edinburgh, to continue studying universities,

identity, and valuations of knowledge. When I started my Masters, my supervisor suggested that I read the work of Dorothy Smith because much of her work fitted with my interest in gender, academia and the exclusion of women. In addition, Smith's development of IE might provide a coherent sociology that could integrate many of my interests: feminist sociology and the politics of knowledge production and universities, and therefore be a structured and internally consistent way for me to explore these interests. I had referenced Smith (1975) in discussing how women academics are excluded by the ideological structure of academia in my undergraduate dissertation, but had not engaged with the rest of her work at this point.

And so I read all of Dorothy Smith's substantive books, which at that stage (2012-2013) consisted of five key books and one edited collection, alongside some journal special issues including discussions of her work or exchanges between her and other academics. This culminated in my deciding to pilot a text-focused approach to IE in relation to a topic very close to home: feminist activism in Belfast.

The Masters dissertation - *Female Trouble: An Institutional Ethnography of Contemporary Feminist Activism in Belfast* (Murray, 2013) - involved me making sense of Smith's ideas and trying to put them into practice. This research involved using informal interviews and discussions with feminist activists in Belfast to inform my analysis of texts in order to explore and map out their activities and how they were organised by institutional frameworks and dominant political discourses in Northern Ireland. This experience of using Smith's IE sociology was interesting as it redirected my researcher gaze towards the importance of texts, whereby my interviews were used to help me understand how to 'correctly' read texts in the way the feminist activists did themselves. This focus on the texts and the language used in organising people's activities provided me with a clearer way to explore the structuring of people's activities and to centre language use in my research approach, without generalising from particular people, times, and experiences. Relatedly, one of the main points Smith makes about the organisation of contemporary Western capitalist societies is that texts have become centrally important to their organisation, providing material manifestations of institutions and organising people's activities across time and place. Since my interests were concerned with how UK HE was organised and how power and structural inequality operated in it, I decided to continue using a text-focused IE approach for my PhD research.

This involved a return to topics I had engaged with in my undergraduate dissertation, namely UK HE, with a focus on universities due to their important role in knowledge production and legitimisation. Universities produce academic knowledge, which often carries weight in public discussions and can be used by governments, businesses and other bodies to legitimise decisions by citing 'the experts'. Whilst universities are not the only producers of knowledge and are often ignored, criticised, or countered by calling on other 'experts', academic knowledge and universities still carry an authority that is often sought after by non-academic bodies. Whether a government wishes to add weight to a policy decision by citing academic evidence, or a business wishes to counter academic research by citing their own rival experts, universities are viewed as important bodies to engage with, and thus are key players in the governing of society. As Smith (1987) argues, sociology and academia are part of the larger ruling relations of society, in which institutional texts are powerful organisers of people's doings.

As a PhD student, I began reading about the organisation of UK HE whilst also being involved in it as a postgraduate student and a sociology tutor in my own department. I also became involved in my trade union, the University and College Union (UCU), as a postgraduate representative, while through my research topic I was constantly discussing what was happening in UK universities and academia with other postgraduates and staff. This provided an interesting in-between position as a postgraduate student and tutor, whereby I was not a staff member, but was employed by the university and participating in the provision of teaching. In addition, through my active interest in UK HE and the trade union, I began attending meetings about the organisation of the university beyond just my own participation in tutoring.

These experiences began putting me into contact with the audit culture or new public management (Power, 1996 [1994]; Power, 1997; Strathern, 2000; Griffith & Smith, 2014) of the university and broader UK HE, namely the bureaucratic texts and accountability processes that define certain activities as work and thus worthy of payment and acknowledgement, or contribute to academic legitimacy and the potential to be promoted or appreciated within the field. While there is a vibrant discussion about the high-level policy development in UK HE, which sets the overall direction of the sector, the specifics of how these are put into practices are often not researched in detail or are discussed in a very local way.

In the policy discussion, many of the current reforms to UK HE have been dubbed commercialisation, marketisation or neoliberalisation by media commentators, academics and activists (UCU, 2010; Bailey & Freedman, 2011; Collini, 2013; Brown & Carasso, 2013; Holmwood, 2011a; 2011b; 2014). The roots of recent changes can be traced back to the turning point of the Robbins Report of 1963, which marked a huge expansion in student numbers but provided little discussion of how to fund this expanded sector (Gibney, 2013; Barr, 2014). The funding question has characterised many of the landmark governmental reforms since the '60s, including the 1997 Dearing Report and subsequent 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act which introduced tuition fees, the 2004 Higher Education Act which introduced variable fees (HEFCE, 2009: 40-41), the 2010 Browne Review and the subsequent 2011 white paper, 'Students at the Heart of the System' (BIS, 2011). UK higher education involves a mix of institutions, including universities and colleges, however, the thesis focuses on universities due to their central role in UK HE, the prestige associated with the university title, and the centrality of both teaching and research to many universities. In short, universities in the UK are primarily categorised by when they were founded or gained university status: from the oldest, elite Ancients¹ to the 19th/20th century civics² or 'red bricks', then after the 1963 Robbin's Report the 'Plate-glass' universities³, followed by the post-1992 or former polytechnics⁴ (UKuni, 2013). However, there are other distinctions, including the Russell Group association of 24 research-intensive universities⁵ (Russell Group, 2017), and increasingly placement in university rankings as will be discussed more in Part II.

Alongside these changes to the funding and scale of UK universities, audit practices have also been changing, mostly recently the shift in assessing research, teaching, and monitoring international students and staff. Research assessment has shifted from the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), last conducted in 2008, to the Research Excellence Framework (REF), first conducted in 2014 (REF, 2018a); teaching has become subject to the

¹ Oxford; Cambridge; St. Andrews; Glasgow; Aberdeen; Edinburgh; and Dublin (Trinity College) in Ireland.

² Including: Birmingham; Liverpool; Manchester; Leeds; Sheffield; Bristol; Queen's University Belfast.

³ Including: East Anglia; Essex; Kent; Lancaster; Sussex; Warwick; York; Bath; Ulster; Heriot-Watt.

⁴ Including: Anglia Ruskin; Brighton; London South Bank; Manchester Metropolitan; Nottingham Trent.

⁵ Birmingham; Bristol; Cambridge; Cardiff; Durham; Edinburgh; Exeter; Glasgow; Imperial; King's College London; Leeds; Liverpool; LSE; Manchester; Newcastle; Nottingham; Oxford; Queen Mary London; Queen's Belfast; Sheffield; Southampton; UCL; Warwick; and, York.

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), primarily in institutions in England beginning with 2017 results (THE, 2017a); and there is an increased monitoring of international students and staff by universities at the behest of the UK Home Office and Department of Visas and Immigration (Pells, 2018; Swain, 2018).

This has produced discussions related to and intertwined with critique of neoliberalism, which also focus on university audit and accountability culture and discuss the changing purpose and organisation of UK universities (e.g. Collini, 2018; Docherty, 2018). Alongside this, there have been an array of discussions on how structural inequality and identities factor into the organisation of UK HE, both as a workplace for staff and as an education space for students, alongside a discussion of the increasing casualisation of academic work and widespread use of precarious contracts (UCU, 2016; Lopez & Dewan, 2015; Wånggren, 2018). Many of these discussions focus on the ideal worker or student being gendered, classed, raced (Ahmed, 2010; Addison, 2012; Bridger & Shaw, 2012; Ahmed, 2017), leading to a number of autoethnographic and small-scale research projects concerned with the experience of precarious and challenging contract positions in UK academia (Warner, 2014; Warner, 2015; Thwaites & Pressland, 2017; Murray, 2018), including as experienced by black women and woman of colour academics (Mirza 2006; Rollock, 2012a; Rollock, 2012b, Ahmed 2012; Mirza, 2015). Increasingly these discussions have turned to academic and activist calls to decolonise the university with a focus on changing the white Eurocentric nature of curricula (e.g. Bhabra et al., 2018) and acknowledge the historic contribution of universities and academic knowledge to racist and imperialist endeavours, for example, the University of Glasgow report on how it benefitted from slavery (McKenna, 2018).

This UK HE literature provides fascinating insights into how UK HE is organised, and it includes some with explicitly feminist or decolonial approaches. However, very little of it focuses on the organising power of texts and also very few use Dorothy Smith's work or IE as an approach. In general, there are very few IE researchers in the UK,⁶ with only one recent collection of IE studies from UK-based academics (Reid & Russell, 2018), a recent

⁶ The only formal UK-based IE network is the Institutional Ethnography Network, launched by me in May 2014 to host events as part of the University of Edinburgh Sociology department 50 years conference and Dorothy Smith receiving an honorary degree. Since then I have received infrequent emails from interested UK-based PhD students using IE in their research and now have an email list of around 20 current or former PhD students and researchers.

PhD completed using IE to study UK HE primarily through interview data (Dent, 2015), and a book on Smith and feminist sociology with IE a residual concern (Stanley, 2018). As a consequence, by using Smith's work on IE, which largely focuses on how institutions are textually organised, and doing so through the lens of feminist sociology approach I am able to use a feminist text-focused approach to offer a different perspective on UK HE discussions.

As a result, this thesis has two closely interconnected aims: to reflect on and understand Dorothy Smith's alternative sociology, institutional ethnography; and, to use this to explore how UK HE is textually organised, how boss or regulatory texts organise other texts and people. Smith's work provides a coherent framework for exploring how UK HE is organised by texts, as it covers knowledge production, specifically academic knowledge production, as well as providing a framework for doing feminist sociology. The thesis provides a contribution to feminist sociology and the sociology of education and knowledge by exploring the development and usage of a key feminist sociologist's work – that of Dorothy Smith, and specifically her work on IE - and investigating how a centrally important site of legitimated knowledge production – UK universities – is organised and coordinated by texts.

The thesis is organised into two parts: Part I focuses on the work of Dorothy Smith, the development of IE, and my reflections on how to do feminist text-focused IE, which sets the scene for; Part II in which I develop three different IE text analysis methods based on Smith's work as a methodological experiment into how to do feminist text-focused IE. These are used to investigate in detail key texts which help organise UK HE: (i) a close-reading of one specific text, the National Student Survey; (ii) an analysis of the Economic and Social Research Council's research funding application process as a textually-mediated process; and, (iii) an investigation of the Research Excellence Framework as a discourse. These later chapters explore different but intertwined ways in which UK higher education is textually-organised through how teaching and research activities are assessed and funded. By focusing on the ways in which the accountability processes involved are negotiated at a local-level, I explore how much agency people have in interpreting texts into activity and the translation involved in fitting their work into textual forms for evaluation purposes. I finish with a short conclusion focusing on the three concepts that come out of my analysis –

agency, translation, and making myths material – before answering two questions: how do texts organise UK HE; and, how feminist is my feminist text-focused IE approach?

PART I
THE DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL
ETHNOGRAPHY

Chapter 1- Dorothy Smith and Institutional Ethnography

When I began reading Dorothy Smith's books they were captivating and transformed my understanding of how to do feminist sociology, specifically how to think about institutional texts and how they organise people. Over a period of more than 30 years, Smith developing a feminist alternative sociology – which she terms institutional ethnography (IE) - from her first substantive book *The Everyday World as Problematic* (Smith, 1987) to her most recent 2014 edited collections *Incorporating Texts into Institutional Ethnographies* (Smith & Turner, 2014a) and *Under New Public Management* (Griffith & Smith, 2014). An IE analysis begins in people's everyday lives but then extends beyond that, into the institutional textual reality, in the hope of better understanding how the social world is organised beyond direct experiences. As such, IE provides an interesting and useful feminist text-focused approach through which to explore how UK higher education is organised and the role of 'texts in action' of different kinds in this.

However, when I did my first IE project through the Masters dissertation (Murray, 2013), it was very difficult to conceptualisation how to actually do an IE study. Smith's development of IE clearly identifies texts as centrally important, however, many IE studies do not focus on texts at all and the variety of approaches make it hard to work out what IE means. In addition, Smith tries to avoid "methodological dogma" (Smith, 2006a: 2) and so does not clearly outline methods of text analysis, but rather presents more general discussions of how texts work and examples of her doing text analysis. And, as will become clear later in the chapter, many responses to Smith's work set up a "straw Smith" (Smith, 1992: 89), which further confuses understandings of her work. Therefore, in order to fully understand Smith's work on her own terms, this chapter will provide a detailed overview of Dorothy Smith's work, tracking the development of her ideas and discussing the key concepts relating to IE. This will form the ontological basis and methodological framework for my own research and also ensure I understand Smith's ideas before bringing in other people's criticisms and mounting my own.

Enter Dorothy Smith

Through a sustained critique of established or traditional 'malestream' sociology, Dorothy Smith has developed concepts and an approach to research that aims to provide an alternative: a sociology for people, rooted in their everyday/every night experience. This has taken place through her eight key books. Five of these are substantive volumes – *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Smith, 1987), *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (Smith, 1990a), *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* (Smith, 1990b), *Writing the Social: Critique, Theory, and Investigations* (Smith, 1999), and *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* (Smith, 2005). Three are edited collections – *Institutional Ethnography as Practice* (Smith, 2006b), *Incorporating Texts into Institutional Ethnographies* (Smith & Turner, 2014a), and *Under New Public Management: Institutional Ethnographies of Changing Front-Line Work* (Griffith & Smith, 2014). Smith's ideas about what the IE research project consists of have developed over the course of these book and various related articles. The main conceptualisation of IE was put forth in her 2005 *Institutional Ethnography*, with key methodological discussions in the subsequent 2006 collection, and then the two 2014 collections providing more up-to-date studies and further cementing the central focus on texts in IE investigations (Smith & Turner, 2014a; Griffith & Smith, 2014).

The later work of Smith (e.g. Smith & Turner, 2014b) emphasises the centrality of texts for IE research, arguing that these provide the link or bridge between the local and the translocal, as a material connection between, and organiser of, people and events in different locations. Smith explains the central importance of texts to her particular understanding of the historical development of social relations. The invention of moveable type and the printing press enabled mass production and dissemination of texts and this created "objectified forms of consciousness and organisation, constituted externally to particular people and places, creating and relying on textually based realities" (Smith, 2005: 227).

This body of work represents a number of intertwining sociological concerns vital to my development of an understanding of the textual organisation of higher education. These are Smith's early work of critiquing established sociology and highlighting women's exclusion from the organisation of knowledge; her work on texts and language; her

ontological discussions developing Marx and putting forth a conceptualisation of how the social world works; her methodological discussions and case studies developing IE into a broad sociological approach; and her firm return to text-focused work, and specifically how to integrate different sorts of texts into the institutional ethnography project.

Whilst Smith draws on a number of academic traditions, including ethnomethodology, the work of Marx, and theorists such as Bakhtin, in addition to feminism (Smith, 2005: 2), the focus on people's experience and everyday knowledge of their activities is key to IE research. People must be seen as experts of their own lives and as competent readers of the texts that they interact with daily. If people can successfully navigate the social world, interact with institutions, and do their daily work, they must understand how to do it in a way that is institutionally recognisable. The IE researcher's job is to track the institutional processes that people are involved in through focusing on texts and peoples' related activities, including asking people who use them how to understand them in practice. And so, the emphasis in IE research is on discovery, not "testing of hypotheses or the explication of theory as analysis of the empirical" (Smith, 2005: 2).

The term institutional ethnography is not meant to refer to traditional ethnographies of institutions, but rather it indicates a particular method of inquiry that focuses on the organising power of texts within contemporary corporate capitalism. By institutional, Smith refers to her conceptualisation of the ruling relations, the 'powers that be', which are "translocal forms of social organisation and social relations mediated by texts of all kinds (print, film, television, computer, and so on)" (Smith, 2005: 227). The ruling relations are organised in different institutions, which are multiple organisations, texts, and people's activities and arranged around a specific function e.g. the institution of education, mothering and in this thesis, the institution of UK HE (Smith, 2005: 225).

The term ethnography in IE does not refer to a particular methodology or method but rather a commitment to people and to actuality: a "commitment to discovering 'how things are actually put together', 'how it works'" (Smith, 2006a: 1). Thus the overall aim of IE research is to explore the institutional 'powers that be', which are interconnected and embedded in texts and through texts organise people's activities translocally, across time and space. While researchers might know how things work through their everyday observations, experiences, discussions with people, and reading, the focus on textually-organised ruling relations means that texts are central to understanding how things work

using an IE approach. Smith (2005: 225) argues that IE research maps institutions and the ruling relations to show how people's lives are caught up in institutional processes extending far beyond their immediate locale.

While the term mapping is used extensively as a metaphor by Smith and many of her followers and users of IE, the specifics of what this might mean methodologically are not explored in detail by Smith. Instead she identifies the work of Susan Turner (1995; 2006; Smith & Turner, 2014a) as having produced a mapping method within IE, which involves tracing institutional processes and events and then explaining them visually through diagrams and charts alongside extended explanations of how texts and work knowledges fit together into extended sequences of activity. Thus, while I begin by exploring Smith's ideas in detail, I move on to the reception and different uses of her work to develop an understanding how IE has been put into practice and which approaches might be useful for my research into UK HE.

IE emerged primarily from Smith's experiences in the women's movement and as a woman academic entering her PhD training at Berkeley during the late 1950s and 1960s. Smith explains her issues with sociology at the time:

"I wanted sociology to tell the truth, but I came to think that it didn't know how. The realities of people's daily lives were beyond anything sociology could speak of."

(Smith, 1994: 54)

This sociology, what is called established, traditional, or mainstream sociology throughout her work, is explained as one in which "people were the objects, they whose behaviour was to be explained" and which proceeded from "a theory-governed discourse" rather than from people and their actual activities (Smith, 2005: 1).

IE is not a method but a sociological approach that involves an "ontological shift" (Smith, 2005: 4). This involves the researcher rejecting the Cartesian mind/body split and acknowledging that what people think is not separate from what they experience, alongside accepting that where they are situated or positioned as people is inescapable and key to exploring the social. By viewing the social, not as a distinct entity above individuals, but rather as something emergent and constantly brought into being through people's activities, Smith provides a means to acknowledge the complex ways that people's lives are organised, balancing an acknowledgement of the weight of textually-mediated institutions

but also recognising the existence of agency, giving possibility to challenge and change in the ways our lives are governed.

One of Smith's main criticisms of 'traditional sociology' is that it has not moved beyond Enlightenment ideas of an objective social science, "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere" (Haraway, 1988: 581), in which the researcher provides a seemingly neutral and true account of the world as though standing above and looking in on society. In contrast, Smith (1987; 1990a; 2005) encourages sociologists to acknowledge that they are insiders in the social world, and rather than lament their inability to stand above and play the 'god trick', to embrace this and stand with people to explore the social relations involved from the inescapable 'insider' position. Rather than focusing on people and attempting to generalise from individuals' experiences, IE researchers are encouraged to look at things that are already 'objectified' and generalised, namely, the textually-mediated processes and discourses which Smith sees as central to institutions and their ruling relations.

For Smith (2005: 166), institutions coordinate and organise people's activities through texts, materially replicable objects that exist in the local but also connect the reader to people, places, and texts elsewhere and elsewhen; for example, books, films, musical scores, databases, websites, and bureaucratic forms. The replicable nature of texts is key – they are or can be reproduced many times, such as through a printing press or by digital means – bring the 'same' message to different people in different places and at different times (Smith & Turner, 2014b: 5). Its replicability means that a text is recognisable as 'the same' in each location, which gives it a particular translocal organising power – connecting people across time and place and organising their activities through texts. However, replicability does not mean that every copy or occurrence of the text is read in exactly the same way, because each time the text is read/or watched/or listened to it might be used or interpreted in different ways and these readings/hearings occur in different contexts. Crucially, institutions and ruling relations are embedded in texts (Smith, 2005: 213; Smith & Turner, 2014b: 4), thus producing the stability and replicability of institutions. Institutions and the ruling relations come into being through people's reading of texts in multiple locales and any subsequent coordinated activity, and therefore texts are not discrete and separate from social relations, and thus must be explored in use rather than in the abstract (Smith & Turner, 2014b: 5).

In her early work, Smith (1974b: 13) began *from* women's experience, not exclusively for women or done by them, but still a sociology *for* women, from the standpoint of their shared exclusion (Smith, 1987: 142). This then becomes a sociology for people (Smith, 2005) in order to explicitly acknowledge in the language of IE that women's standpoint is not just about women, nor does it assume that women are a homogenous group. But, she does not explicitly advocate a sociology *with* people; this is because Smith (2005: 24) acknowledges that people are experts of their everyday lives, but not of how their lives are organised beyond the local. The implication is that the sociological inquirer has privileged ways of knowing beyond the local, and thus will do IE research for people, but not with them. While the most recent discussions and incarnations of IE provide a sociology based more in experience and actuality than in the theoretical or textual realm, they are still firmly written from the perspective of the researcher, with little to no involvement of the people for whom she is supposedly writing it. In addition, because of the academic language and framing of Smith's work and many other IE studies, a process of translation would be necessary to convert academic IE research projects into useful maps or guides for the people for whom it is supposedly designed, which has been done by some IE researchers (e.g. Pence & Smith, 2004).

There is a necessary process of translation in order to make IE terms and language clear to the uninitiated. While the use of technical language and referencing is vital to being accepted as academic and authoritative, it may be off-putting for readers outside the academy and even those inside the academy who come from different disciplinary backgrounds. Strathern (1987) has discussed this in relation to anthropological research, arguing that the researcher is never 'at home' in the field or with the subjects of her research, because she has to write for a different audience as an academic; and the 'home' readership style (academic) involves particular writing styles, jargon, and referencing, which she embraces. But it is clearly not just a matter of disciplines, but of particular approaches within them as well.

With institutional ethnography, the process of translation is twofold: there is the traditional translation between the academic 'home' audience and the 'public'; and there is also the translation between the IE language and approach and more traditional sociological approaches. This is exemplified by G.W. Smith et al.'s (2006) chapter in *Institutional Ethnography as Practice*, which provides an excerpt from an IE research

proposal. G. W. Smith's proposal translates IE into more traditional sociological terms in order to secure a funding application. His explicit intention is to write for an audience which is unfamiliar with IE, alongside fitting IE into the particular criteria necessary to secure funding. This is a clear example of academic translation, in this case from IE into more traditional sociological language.

But of course, this is not just a concern for IE, but for academic disciplines and approaches generally, and their specialist languages are not necessarily a bad thing as long as things are sufficiently explained and it is possible for 'outsiders' to learn how to read and work with the concepts and terms being used. Smith's (2005: 223-229) glossary is an attempt to do this translation work, alongside the extensive efforts she makes to explain her ideas with lots of specific examples, case studies, and also through developing the same body of ideas across her career, making them clearer and more conceptually robust over time.

This brief summary of IE glosses a complex and evolving approach to research and so I will now explore the development of Smith's ideas through a focus on what I consider to be three key aspects of her approach:

- Development of standpoint
- Ontology of the social
- Texts

Standpoint provides an important understanding of the feminist roots of Smith's approach, which I will take up further in Chapter 2. Ontology of the social provides the overall framework for an IE approach and explain why texts are so important to this. And then, due to their centrality to the approach, texts will be explored in more detail. These three foci largely follow the structure of *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* (Smith, 2005), the book in which Smith summarises her conceptualisation of IE and many discussions apparent in her previous books.

Each of the sections following will begin with Smith's definition of the concept from her glossary of key IE terms (Smith, 2005: 223-229), which I will then contextualise through discussing the development of the concept across her work. This will be followed by discussing how other researchers have engaged with, criticised and used Smith's work, arguing that few IE researchers actually follow Smith's text-focused approach, with the

consequence that many IE studies are more like the ‘traditional sociology’ Smith began by criticising. Indeed, some of Smith’s own work departs from a focus on texts, raising questions about whether or not it is possible or desirable to conduct an IE study that strictly abides by Smith’s conceptualisation.

Women’s Standpoint: A Place to Begin

“Women’s standpoint - A methodological starting point in the local particularities of bodily existence. Designed to establish a subject position from which to begin research – a site that is open to anyone – it furnishes an alternative starting point to the objectified subject of knowledge of social scientific discourse. From women’s standpoint, we can make visible the extraordinary complex of the ruling relations, with its power to locate consciousness and set us up as subjects as if we were indeed disembodied.”

(Smith, 2005: 228)

Women’s standpoint provides ‘a place to begin’ IE research (Smith, 1977; Smith, 1993: 183), whereby researchers start in people’s lived experiences rather than abstract theory or concepts. Unlike some critics’ assumptions, women’s standpoint does not assume a homogenised women’s experience, but rather Smith and other IE researchers use the term standpoint to refer to an orientation towards experiential knowledge. In addition, standpoint can also be used to indicate a particular group who are similarly positioned by an institution, for example, the standpoint of single mothers in *Mothering for Schooling* (Griffith & Smith, 2005). I will discuss Smith’s conceptualisation of women’s standpoint, how an IE researcher might take a specific standpoint, and how Smith’s idea of standpoint has changed over time.

While initially dubbed women’s perspective (Smith, 1974b), Smith later adopted the term standpoint⁷ and defined it as “a method that, at the outside of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday

⁷ While Smith (2005: 10) cites Sandra Harding as the person who had much earlier adopted it, standpoint was being used by many different feminists at the time, and thus has a wider origin and usage. For example the various responses to Hekman’s (1997a) discussion of feminist standpoint also included Hartsock (1997) and Collins (1997).

worlds” (Smith, 1987: 107). So while women’s experiences are specifically named as an important basis for knowledge production so as to acknowledge the exclusion of women from legitimate knowledge production, Smith’s version of standpoint was always conceptualised as a position that was open not just to women but was “open to anyone” (Smith, 2005: 10). From early on, many users of Smith’s work were taking the standpoint of men, specifically G.W. Smith’s (1995; 1998) work, which focuses on the experiences of gay men. And while taking women’s standpoint might be open to anyone, still as the language of the majority of IE studies indicates, the preferred candidates are the oppressed (for example, women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, the working class, people from the global South).

In her first book, *Feminism and Marxism: A Place to Begin, A Way to Go*, Smith (1977)⁸ discusses the women’s movement and the importance of sisterhood, arguing that “it is in sisterhood that we discover the objectivity of our oppression ... as something which is indeed imposed upon you by the society and which is experienced in common with others” (Smith, 1977: 10-11). In using the term objectivity here, Smith is not arguing that women’s experiences of oppression are some sort of universal Truth, but rather they must be taken seriously because they are real and thus should be acknowledged in public discourse and engaged with. Prior to the consciousness-raising of the women’s movement and the collective naming of oppression, experiences such as domestic violence, rape, and harassment were invisible and not seen as ‘real’; individual women might experience them, but were not able to name them in a language that was politically or publically available and therefore such experiences were not publically acknowledged (Smith, 2005: 7). These changes meant that women, and other oppressed peoples, could collectively name experiences which had not yet been publically acknowledged as existing, rather than having to begin in theory or texts, most of which had been produced by and for men.

Smith’s (1974b; 1987) early work criticised sociology as ‘malestream’ in using men’s experiences as the basis for knowledge production, with most academics being men and theorising based on their own observations and experiences, focusing on men’s issues or concerns, and then generalising to all people. Because of this, men’s standpoint and view of the world became the sociological view of the world in which

⁸ This short book is an edited version of a talk Smith gave at University of British Columbia during Women’s Week in 1977.

housework/childcare/'women's issues' were not studied, and instead men's viewpoints became abstracted and universalised, becoming the ideological standpoint of the discipline. This conceptual silencing of women as legitimate knowers and of 'women's issues' as relevant to sociology, meant that sociological research generalised from samples of certain (often) elite men and made pronouncements about society without engaging with women or their lives. People were seen as objects to be explained, and when sociology began in theory, this was based on an abstracted men's standpoint, thereby continuing the discipline's focus on men and men's lives. However, this process was made invisible, presenting it as objective academic knowledge, as 'fact'. For women, historically excluded from knowledge production, this supposedly universal objective knowledge had no connection to their experiences. And because of their exclusion from legitimate knowledge-producing spheres, such as the academy, women were unable to challenge such objective knowledge and therefore their experiences when not seen as a legitimate basis for knowledge production within 'traditional sociology', being viewed instead as subjective or irrelevant to academic study (Smith, 1974b; Smith, 1987).

Smith calls women's standpoint a "concealed standpoint" (Smith, 1999: 43) within the ruling relations of the academy, because women's everyday experiences do not fit into the conceptual world already created and are thus "situated outside textually mediated discourses" (Smith, 1987: 107), however, women are inextricably involved in work process and activities that reproduce the social world. This provides an interesting position from which to look at the organisation of the social world, and it was this strange position in which women academics found themselves, working "inside a discourse that we did not have a part in making" (Smith, 1987: 52). When women such as Smith entered the male-dominated world of sociology, the discipline's practices subordinated their experiences to theories and concepts developed off the back of the narrow experiential basis of the discipline – elite men (Smith, 1990a; Smith, 1994). And thus Smith experienced a bifurcation of consciousness⁹, a disjuncture between her own experiences and the masculine sociology she was learning:

⁹ This concept is Smith's articulation of a more general way to think about oppressed peoples experiences of having a dual identity, as popularised by discussions of 'double consciousness' by W.E.B. DuBois (2008 [1903]) and Frantz Fanon (2008 [1952]) in relation to black people's experiences of living in white racist society.

“two modes of knowing, experiencing, and acting – one located in the body and in the space that it occupies and moves into, and the other passing beyond it.”

(Smith, 1987: 82)

She highlights that it is mainly men who operate in the second mode of knowing - the abstracted, conceptual mode of knowing, based on supposedly objective knowledge – and that the place of women has been to “facilitate men’s occupation of the conceptual mode of action” (Smith, 1987: 83). This important gendered division of labour involves things like household labour, childcare, emotional, sexual and social labour, hands-on healthcare such as nursing and care work and administrative labour. Smith argues that this labour allowed knowledge-producing men to be alienated from their bodies and localities. Thus off the back of the largely invisible and un(der)appreciated work of women, men were able to believe that they could do objective, neutral, ‘birds eye’ research because they do not have to worry about the material, embodied world of experience. When elite knowledge-producing people – academics, civil servants, politicians, media moguls, and so on – have their needs taken care of, it is easy to believe the Cartesian mind/body split and believe oneself capable of transcending the local situated positions from which all knowledge is actually produced.¹⁰

In *The Conceptual Practices of Power* (1990a) and *Texts, Facts, and Femininity* (1990b), Smith provides detailed explanation of how objectified knowledge produces ‘facts’ which erase people, place and researchers in order to appear objective, and thus alienate the readers/hearers of these ‘facts’ from their experience. Objectified knowledge teaches people to reject their experiential knowledge and instead bow to proclaimed facts. Throughout her work, Smith identifies and criticises some sociologists for ascribing agency to concepts and leaving out people and activities from accounts of the social world (Smith, 2005: 56). And so the point of women’s standpoint in IE is that through it Smith is centring experience as the site to begin research from in order to avoid “conceptual imperialism” (Smith, 1990a: 15) and knowledge-production based just in texts and theory.

In order to avoid a bifurcation of consciousness, a split between conceptual and experiential worlds, and in order to include those who have not yet spoken, Smith calls for

¹⁰ While it is not the focus of this thesis, it would be interesting to explore how such divisions of labour work now, whereby many white middle-class women are now academics and other elite knowledge producers and such labour is often taken care of by working class and migrant workers, often people of colour.

researchers to start in people's everyday lives. In being attentive to where people's bodies are in a particular time and place, this reminds the researcher of the partial and limited nature of knowing and challenges the supposed objectivity and neutrality of some sociology research. By acknowledging an embodied knower in a specific locale, Smith (1990a) argues that there is no bird's-eye view outside the social from which to produce knowledge: "We can never stand outside it [the social]" (Smith, 1990a: 22). Thus, Smith (2005: 23) rejects the Cartesian mind/body split, and instead emphasises that what we think is not separate from what we experience – in short we cannot be all-seeing, neutral gods, assessing society from the sidelines. The social is not some entity above people, but rather is constantly created and re-created through people's activities, and as she later discusses, through texts.

This move away from 'objectivity' does not mean that people cannot know anything, but rather that Smith's sociological project strives for a different sort of knowledge, a more partial and modest attempt to understand how things work. Smith (2006a: 3) advocates a different kind of sociology, one that takes people as experts of their own lives and aims to extend rather than replace their everyday knowledge of how things work. She argues that while people do not understand how the whole social world works, they are experts of their everyday lives, because they ongoingly and successfully participate in them and (re)create them. And so the researcher's aim should be to expand people's knowledge rather than impose 'expert' knowledge on them.

Smith does not argue that researchers can produce some sort of universal Truth, but she does argue that there is an actuality, and thus some sort of 'real world' even if she mostly avoids using the word reality. For example, when discussing mapping as part of the IE approach, Smith argues that "maps are always indexically related to actual territories. Analogously institutional ethnography's project of mapping institutions always refers back to an actuality that those who are active in it know (the way the phrase YOU ARE HERE works on a map)" (Smith, 2005: 226). Thus, while Smith is challenging the privilege of the researcher's perspective as an expert and advocates using standpoint to begin experience rather than in the institutional 'textual reality', there is a de facto privileging of the researcher's perspective in producing knowledge as the researcher producing the overall narrative of the project; choosing what to include and exclude and producing partial

results; taking women's standpoint in and of itself does not fundamentally challenge or change this. I will explore this in more detail in Chapter 2.

Standpoint is also used more specifically as a methodological device to help IE researchers focus their research. In using standpoint in this way to identify a group of people to focus on, IE researchers can highlight how institutional forms of thought differentially position people and the assumptions inherent in such categorisations. Rather than accepting that categories record essential characteristics or the 'same' experience, it acknowledges that people are positioned by institutions in a particular way that imposes a commonality of experience. For example, Griffith and Smith's book *Mothering for Schooling* (Griffith & Smith, 2005) provides an exploration of how single mothers are positioned by schools in Canada, and thus provides a guide to how single mothers might reconceptualise their mothering work in relation to the organisation of schools in Canada. This is an interesting example to explore as it is the only instance of Smith producing a book-length discussion of an IE study and it provides detailed exploration of standpoint. Smith and Griffith take the standpoint of single mothers, reflecting on their own experiences as single mothers alongside speaking with other women (both single and coupled mothers). They argue that invisible mothering work is expected by schools, which requires time and resources that are often not available to single mothers, and this presumes a middle-class heterosexual nuclear family unit, what Smith (1999) calls the Standard North American Family (SNAF).

This conceptualisation of group membership and standpoint acknowledges that people's specific experiences might be different but that they are organised similarly by the ruling relations and specific institutions. For example, if the institution of schooling is organised around the assumption that families are the SNAF, as in Griffith & Smith's study, then single mothers' circumstances are not considered by the institution's supposedly neutral procedures and expectations; thus, the 'mothering work' required by schools is not possible for some mothers.

The idea of the 'small hero' (Smith, 2006a: 3) is used by Smith to articulate this single mother standpoint position. First shown in a diagram (Figure 4.1, Smith, 1987: 171), but not yet called the 'small hero', Smith shows a stick figure looking up into the ruling relations that she is caught up in – complexes of textually-mediated processes, discourses, and expected work. The small hero is caught up in the ruling relations that she knows from

her own experience, but she cannot fully see how what she experiences fits in with broader processes, discourses, and institutions. Therefore, the IE researcher begins by standing with her and then explores the ruling relations from this point, beginning to follow and map textually-mediated processes and the people and activities they organise.

The central methodological point to take from this aspect of Smith's conceptualisation of standpoint is that researchers should not objectify individuals' experience and falsely generalise to all people 'like them', but instead explore how people are positioned as 'the same' by institutions and understand how such positions happen in practice. While the researcher can only ever see the social from her own situated position, taking a specific standpoint can helpfully focus the research project on a particular aspect of the institutional organising of people. If the IE researcher is part of that group of people, as Griffith and Smith were as fellow single mothers, they might already have work knowledges – “descriptions and explications of what people know by virtue of what they do that ordinarily remain unspoken” (Smith, 2005: 210) – and can reflect on these to help think through how the institution positions them as part of a particular group. If the researcher is not part of the group whose standpoint she is taking, she will have to speak with people who are in order to develop such work knowledges.

This begins to highlight the methods used in IE research; Smith comments that IE researchers can use observations, interviews and focus groups in order to build an understanding of a particular situation and develop work knowledges, but that this is only the beginning of the inquiry (Smith, 2005: 31). In order to shift the focus from one particular locale to how a situation is organised and fits into broader social relations, texts must be examined in order to travel “sequentially deeper into the institutional relations in which people's everyday lives are embedded” (Smith, 2005: 38). For example, from the single mother's experiences to the teacher's and textual organisation of the school, to the policy documents, textually-mediated political processes, and discourses which organise and inform how schooling works. And so how to interview in an IE study?

Smith (2005: 129) advocates that IE interviewers should look for how people's activities are socially organised and connected with others and places that are not immediately visible or clear; rather than taking interviews as “accounts of what happened or what was really going on” an IE researcher uses interviews to understand how the interviewee's life is coordinated by texts and discourses. What is central to this interview

process is that the interviewer tries to understand the ordinary everyday expertise of the interviewee - their work knowledges - which may seem mundane or overly ordinary to them but that are essential to understanding how things are put together and organised in their locale (Smith, 2005: 139). In taking a specific standpoint, the IE researcher aims to explore how such people's everyday experiences are coordinated by textually-mediated processes and discourses into sequences of institutional activity. The specifics of each person's experience is not as important as the way in which they are coordinated by texts and discourses. And so, standpoint is about working out how people are positioned by institutions, rather than about essentialising women's experiences as many critics have often incorrectly assumed about Smith's conceptualisation of standpoint (discussed later in the chapter).

There has been a significant shift in how standpoint has been conceptualised by Smith and used by IE researchers over time. From beginning with women's experiences as a critique of sociology and the conceptual practices of power, to a sociology for people (Smith, 2005), and thus acknowledging that IE researchers might take the standpoint of anyone, not just women. However, standpoint as a position open to anyone was already written into it from the start and so this shift in language is more about acknowledging the confusion that many critics had when trying to understand Smith's standpoint, which I will discuss more in the section on the reception of Smith's work. While Smith's general conceptualisation of standpoint is explicitly feminist, the methodological use of any specific standpoint as a place to begin research is not necessarily political. If the very political rooting of standpoint has shifted to something that non-feminist researchers can use without having to attend to the politics of institutional marginalisation and exclusion, this begs the question: is IE, a sociology for people, still a feminist approach? Is it inherently feminist to take the everyday world and people's experience as the starting point for research without attending to the feminist roots of this approach?

During an IE Masterclass with Smith in 2014,¹¹ I asked her if she was happy with how standpoint was currently being conceptualised and used by institutional ethnographers. Smith replied that she did not use it anymore because it had become a bit dogmatic and seemed to get in the way because IE researchers felt that they had to have a

¹¹ This was a closed-event which was audio recorded for participants but not for wider distribution. Therefore while I produced a transcript, I do not have permission to share it more widely and cannot include it as an appendix.

standpoint rather than just focusing on what is happening to people and beginning from their everyday. Smith emphasised the importance of IE researchers going into the field, acknowledging their ignorance, and trying to learn from people, such as front-line workers, about their everyday experiences of an institution. However, she warned that this should not mean focusing on individuals, because the focus is on finding out how things are put together.

While Smith (1987) began by arguing for a feminist sociology that takes the everyday world as problematic,¹² beginning in experience and embarking upon “a project of research and discovery” (Smith, 2005: 24) without predetermining the result or end point. This was radical at the time due to both the exclusion of women and the tendency of sociology to begin in the abstract world of theory or simplified categorical renditions. Thus, the exclusion of women in academia and their subsequent bifurcation of consciousness leads Smith to articulate the standpoint of women and later the standpoint of people as a good place to begin research, one that takes the everyday world as problematic. While this does not provide a clear pre-defined ‘object of study’ for the researcher to focus on, it does create a space for exploration beginning with what people actually do and experience and know. And so when the IE researcher finds a disjuncture or gap between people’s lived experience and the way it is institutionally organised, then an IE study takes this situation as a problematic and begins to explore, using texts to move from the local site into the translocal institutional and ruling relations. However, in order to understand how to do so, a clearer conceptualisation of the everyday world, Smith’s ontology of the social world, is needed.

The Social and Institutions: Smith’s Ontology and Object of Study

“The Social – People’s ongoing activities viewed under the aspect of their coordination with the activities of others.”

(Smith, 2005: 227)

¹² Smith (2005: 227) defines a problematic as “a project of research and discovery that organizes the direction of investigation from the standpoint of those whose experience is its starting point”.

“Institutions – I am using the terms institutional and institutions to identify complexes embedded in the ruling relations that are organized around a distinctive function, such as education, health care, and so on ... they generalize and are generalized. Hence, in institutional settings people are active in producing the general out of the particular. The institutional is to be discovered in motion, and its distinctive modes of generalizing coordination are themselves being brought into being in people’s local doings in particular sites and at particular times”

(Smith, 2005: 225)

The previous section has highlighted a place to begin IE research – in people’s experiences – and this section explores what IE researchers then focus on as the ‘object’ of research as this is constituted within Smith’s ontology of the social, her theory of what exists. While ontological commitments are often left untheorised or taken for granted, Smith centres this discussion in her conceptualisation of IE, demonstrating that IE is an approach and not a method, and establishing a commitment to discovery and ongoing revision of the approach (Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006a). By explicitly explaining her position, it seems as if she is making her initial conceptualisation of the social world clear in order to allow readers to decide on how much they agree or disagree with her, although I would propose that this is insufficient to be held accountable, as I will discuss more in Chapter 2.

The social, as the above definition explains, is an ongoing situated process of people’s activities which Smith (2005: 209) argues cannot be seen as a “discrete phenomenon or theoretical entity that can be treated as external to people”. People and experiences are different but through texts are coordinated across time and place, ongoingly (re)creating the social world. Rather than exploring people as individuals, IE focuses on how people experience the world relationally (Smith, 2005: 59). Therefore, while people’s experiences are central to IE research as the place to begin, people’s experience is not the object of IE research. Consequently, the IE researcher cannot generalise from people’s experiences in one site at one time to another site and/or another time, instead she must look for the intersections and points of coordination between people’s experiences, which Smith (2005: 94-95) argues occur through language and are made material through texts.

Smith (2005: 65-66) argues that language coordinates or organises rather than determines to acknowledge the ongoing active participation of people in (re)producing the social world through their utterances (speech or writing). Smith (2005: 65) using Bakhtin's discussion of language and utterances as dialogic to explain how such ongoing coordination of people works: "Language is an ongoing and developing complex within which people's intentions are realized in utterances; at the same time, each utterance both reproduces and elaborates language". This Bakhtinian dialogue between language and utterance is an analog of Smith's understanding of how structure and agency work as an active process that brings into being and projects into the future "a past that is not concluded" (Smith, 2005: 66). Rather than using the terms structure and agency, Smith focuses on process and relational interaction which focuses on local language practices and the organising of material texts rather than abstract or separable structures.

Thus, language is described by Smith (2005: 80) as both "an activity and as coordinating those dimensions of activity that are ordinarily described as consciousness or subjectivity". This acknowledges that people have different experiences of the world and nobody can see the world as another sees it, and yet the use of language to speak of what we know in common bridges solipsism. Smith (2005: 7) uses the example of consciousness raising in the women's movement to explain how naming experiences as "oppression" or "rape" helped to identify what was experienced in common in seemingly individual happenings. Thus, language generalises multiple different experiences into words in which the act of speaking and naming objectifies and generalises and thereby allows workable communication across differences between a speaker and a listener. These ideas develop throughout her work into a conceptualisation of institutions and the ruling relations, with texts being centrally important to such organisation.

In developing her understanding of the social, Smith (2005: 209) draws on Marx and Engel's work, utilising their "ontology of a social science that sets asides [sic] concepts, speculation, and imagination in favour of engaging with actual people's actual activities", as explored in the previous section on standpoint. However, Smith (1990b) argues that they operated with a double ontology – the material world of the body and the ideological world of the mind – meaning that ideas could not be concretely examined by researchers, only theorised about. In contemporary capitalist society, Smith (2005: 209) argues that things have changed and ideas are now routinely embedded in texts, making them material and

thus observable; ideas have become “people’s doings, their activities ... they are observable ... in talking or writing”. In other words, Western contemporary capitalist societies, such as those in North America and Europe where Smith’s life and work have been situated, have developed into a heavily-bureaucratised and text-mediated corporate capitalism, which I will discuss more in the next section on texts. Smith argues that such shifts could not have been captured by Marx and Engels as they had not yet occurred, although this shift to corporate capitalism is present in Weber’s work (Smith, 2005: 69). While language has always provided a point of convergence between people’s activities, under corporate capitalism Smith argues that ideas have been objectified into texts providing material points of convergence (Smith, 2004; Smith 2005). This allows IE researchers to concretely explore ideas, which Smith (2004: 457) succinctly describes as “the historical development of the relations of production themselves creat[ing] the conditions of their own explication”. This objectification of social relations into texts provides a material object of study for social researchers to examine, namely, giving access to the ruling relations.

The process of objectification into texts is explained by Smith (1974a: 43) as an ideological ‘three-step’,¹³ whereby actuality is written up by someone into a text; this text is taken as a stand-in for actuality and is used by an institution in place of actuality to formulate policies, course of action and theories, which are then imposed back on actuality; and, actual experiences are framed by, fitted into, and subordinated to this textual reality, experience being written up into more texts to support the distorted actuality present in texts. This ‘three step’ occurs in government policy-making decisions, in academic theorising, in medical record-keeping and other institutional text-mediated processes.

This process of objectifying social relations into texts is central to Smith’s understanding of institutions and how the contemporary corporate capitalist societies organise across space and time. As discussed earlier, institutions are conglomerates of multiple organisations, texts, and people’s related activities; “complexes of relations and hierarchical organisation that organise distinct functions” (Smith, 2005: 206). Institutions are interconnected and this overall mix of institutions is called the ruling relations, what could be described as ‘the system’ or the ‘powers that be’: “objectified forms of consciousness and organisation constituted externally to particular people and places, creating and relying on textually based realities” (Smith, 2005: 277). For example, while the

¹³ This idea stems from Marx & Engel’s idea of the ‘three efforts’ that produce ideology in *The German Ideology* (Arthur, 2007[1867]: 67).

University of Edinburgh would be called an organisation in IE language, it is part of a larger thing called an institution, organised around a specific function – the institution of higher education. The institution of higher education in the UK involves multiple organisations, such as many universities, also parts of the government such as the Higher Education Statistical Agency, government policy departments related to higher education, and aspects of the media that report on higher education. The boundaries between different institutions are blurry: where does the institution of higher education end and the institution of government or media begin? In IE, the interconnectedness and messiness of the organisation of institutions is acknowledged and rather than agonising over the absence of fixed boundaries, this concept of institutions helps identify a sufficient sense of boundary to focus the research without pre-determining limits.

Where are institutions in a material sense? With universities in UK HE, one answer might be that a particular university building is where the materiality of the university exists. But this does not capture the diffuse, complex bureaucratic entity that is the contemporary UK university, particularly since universities do not always exist in one physical place. Indeed, it is a practical problem to organise such an organisation across diffuse places and times, hence the importance of language and its material manifestation in institutional texts, as Smith (2005: 94) argues “the distinctive forms of coordination that constitute institutions are *in* language”. Texts thus stabilise the linguistic coordination of people and provide the physical manifestations of institutions, organising people’s activities across time and space and thus connecting them to people and texts elsewhere and elsewhere. This translocal organisation of people’s lives through texts is how institutions exist across multiple locales simultaneously.

The implications of this for IE researchers is to begin in experience somewhere and somewhere, but in order to fully understand how things work there must be an appreciation of how that local site is inextricably linked by texts to other sites, other people and their activities. For example, my research into UK HE began in the University of Edinburgh, where I was based, but by looking at the institutional texts, I inevitably ended up in other universities, crossing institutional boundaries and reading government policy documents, media reports, and bureaucratic guidelines and forms, which originate in other locales and yet become part of the web of texts organising people’s daily work activities across multiple universities in UK HE.

Smith's ontology of the social therefore breaks the binary distinction between macro and micro, and instead acknowledges that everything happens in the local, with texts translocally organising and providing the bridge from the researcher's locale to other sites and times (Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006c; Smith & Turner, 2014). Through analysing texts, the IE researcher can explore the organisation of people's activities because ideas have been materially embedded in texts and these organising local-level activities across multiple locales. This allows the IE researcher to "make visible the forms of ruling that are largely not observable from where we are" (Smith, 2005: 226) by following "textual trails" (Smith, 2005: 215) to explore how the ruling relations work. Sometimes texts lead to regulatory texts or discourses that work across multiple institutions, providing a logic or ideology that filters through many organisations and people involved as "the governing frame (sometimes called a boss text)" (Smith & Turner, 2014: 10).

In order to piece together this larger picture and identify regulatory texts or discourses, Smith advocates 'mapping', which is used as a metaphor for what IE researchers do in exploring institutions and the ruling relations. Smith (1987: 175-176) briefly uses the language of mapping in her first book to explain that the researcher is trying "to map an actual terrain ... work processes and other practical activities as these are rendered accountable within the ideological schemata of the institution". She identifies 'textual communication' as central to such terrain, and this use of mapping as a metaphor does help explain how IE moves from one place to others elsewhere and elsewhen, by following the traces and trails of textually-mediated social relations, in order to make visible the processes people are caught up in. However, she does not provide more detail about how mapping might work in practice until *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* (Smith, 2005). In this book she identifies mapping as part of the overall aim of IE – to create "something like maps of how things work beyond the scope of our everyday knowledge" (Smith, 2005: 206) – and she specifies that this involves "mapping institutions" (Smith, 2005: 3). I will explore the specifics of how mapping might be taken up as a specific method in the next section on texts.

In summary, Smith's ontological approach and the concepts of the ruling relations and institutions provide a clear focus for the IE researcher, encouraging her to begin with people, but rather than objectifying their experiences, to instead take the ruling relations, objectified in text, as the object of study. Texts provide an objectification of ideas and can

translocally organise people. Because institutions exist in texts and people's reading of texts and subsequent activities, the text is both a translocal organiser of people and a manifestation of institutions and the ruling relations for the researcher to read. Texts make material the world of ideas, which mends the traditional social science break between the macro and micro, or in Marx's double ontology between the world of the body and the world of the ideas. However, IE research cannot, and does not, claim universality or generalisability because it is based on an ontological view that the social is constantly in flux. Rather, it aims to provide indexical maps of how the social works, which need to be open to change and constantly updated to reflect the actuality they map.

Texts

“Text - Unlike some theorising of ‘text’, the term is used here strictly to identify texts as material in a form that enables replication (paper/print, film, electronic, and so on) of what is written, drawn, or otherwise reproduced. Materiality is emphasised because we can then see how a text can be present in our everyday world and at the same time connect us into translocal social relations. Texts – printed, electronic or otherwise replicable – produce the stability and replicability of organisation or institution. The capacity to coordinate people's doings translocally depends on the text as a material thing, being able to turn up in identical form wherever the reader, hearer, watcher may be in her or his bodily being. Institutional ethnography recognises texts not as a discrete topic but as they enter into and coordinate people's doings, and, as activated in the text-reader conversation, they *are* people's doings.”

(Smith, 2005: 228)

Texts have been central to Smith's work over time, with examples of textual analysis in *Texts, Facts, and Femininity* (Smith, 1990b) and *Writing the Social* (Smith, 1999). Smith (2005) extensively details the centrality of language and texts to IE as an approach and her most recent edited collection focuses on how to incorporate texts into IE research (Smith & Turner, 2014a). I start with what is meant by texts and why they are so important

to IE and will then focus on Smith's three key discussions about texts: the text-reader conversation; text-act-text sequences; and discourse. I will then comment briefly on mapping and the status of researcher-produced texts (e.g. interviews transcripts) to bring up some important epistemological questions about Smith's IE approach which will be further explored in Chapter 2.

Texts are replicable material objects which carry messages and can appear as the same in different places, for example, printed documents, mass produced images or films, and the internet (Smith & Turner, 2014b: 5). Of course, the 'sameness' of replicable texts does not mean that they will be read in exactly the same way, and indeed Smith argues that "the very possibility of different interpretations or readings of a single text pre-supposes the constancy of the text" (Smith, 2005: 107). Smith (2005; Smith & Turner, 2014b) argues that contemporary corporate capitalism is characterised by the ubiquity of texts, marking an important shift in societal organisation associated with the invention of printing technology and the rapid reproduction of texts.¹⁴ The spread of standardised texts meant that "new forms of consciousness and organization emerged, progressively independent of particular speakers or hearers connecting face to face" (Smith & Turner, 2014b: 6), with the social coordination of people through language becoming objectified (and objectifying) through the institutional or ruling relations. Thus the IE focus on mapping and analysing texts becomes the means through which researchers can explore institutions and the organisation of society.

Smith (2005: 103) argues that traditional approaches to research – for example, interviewing or ethnographic fieldwork without a focus on texts - will not allow researchers to explore institutional social relations, the object of IE research. Texts provide both the material basis of institutions and the ruling relations and act as a bridge between the local and the translocal, connecting the local site to the rest of the social world. By following the textual trails from one locale into the translocal institutional realm and/or into other locales, Smith argues that IE researchers can *show* rather than theorise the connections between different times and places (Smith & Turner, 2014b: 3-4). Rather than abstracting texts from their usage, Smith encourages IE researchers to see texts as activated by people through what she calls the 'text-reader conversation'. People and their activities are then

¹⁴ Smith identifies the shift to widespread standardised texts beginning with printing in 14th and 15th century Europe (Smith & Turner, 2014b: 6).

organised around text-act-text sequences – for example, bureaucratic processes - which coordinate around institutional logics, temporalities and specialist language.

Texts are different from oral language because they objectify and appear to exist outside bodily sites, as if factual rather than situated accounts. They standardise across sites, giving them a distinct organising power over experience. However, it is vital that texts be seen as active and relational despite their apparent “inertia” (Smith, 2005: 102) as books on a shelf, printed documents, or digital images on a screen. In IE, texts cannot be understood in isolation from other texts or people’s reading of them and subsequent actions, because without people activating texts they would sit on a metaphorical bookshelf with the potential to organise, but not able to do so until read.

Smith (2005: 105) describes reading as a text-reader conversation a dialogue in which the reader “plays both parts” due to the text being fixed and unresponsive; it must be activated by the reader. The text-reader conversation is an active process, which can be easy to forget because reading is often silent and unobservable, going on in the reader’s head (Smith, 2005: 106). However, Smith (2005: 108) argues the reader cannot avoid becoming the agent of the text; by understanding what the words mean, the reader is organised by the text, informing her future thinking and activities, her ongoing understanding of the text and other texts and events. Smith argues that “the reader’s consciousness is coordinated with the words of the text” and while “activation may be selective” and the reader may resist the text’s instruction, even resistance is organised by the text (Smith, 2005: 108). The activeness of texts is always to be balanced with the activeness of readers, hence why Smith uses the term *organise* rather than determine, control, or even structure, which imply more a static imposition than a dynamic conversation. However, the nature of this dynamic and how much interpretative agency the reader has will be extensively explored in Part II of this thesis.

Smith’s (2005: 120) conceptualisation of the text-reader conversation acknowledges that reading is a situated practice (happening in a specific time, place, and by a specific reader). Alongside this, Smith (2005: 106-108) conceptualises the text as active in two ways: (i) by providing instructions about how to read it properly, namely the text organising the reader’s interpretation itself; (ii) by providing frames of reference or instructions which organises future work or action, including reading other texts. For example, in ‘K is Mentally Ill: The Anatomy of a Factual Account’, Smith (1990b: 12-51)

analyses an interview transcript which focuses on the 'discovery' of K's mental illness; the identification of K as mentally ill sets up an "instruction for reading what follows" (Smith, 2005: 109). Smith (2005: 110) calls frames that guide the reader's reading "a socially organising grammar" which provides a focus to read for, or a "shell" (Smith, 2005: 116) into which 'evidence' can be placed and made sense of. By identifying a focus, the text orientates the reader towards this idea and even if she reads against it, she is still being organised by the frame; "even resistance adopts the standardizing agenda, if only as a foil" (Smith, 2005: 108).

Such textual instructions draw readers into the spatio-temporal rhythms of the textual realm; "extra-temporal modes of meaning are created by the written or printed form" (Smith, 1990b: 210). In other words, texts detach meaning from the ongoing transitory process of meaning-making in talk and in the moment, and instead create "petrified meaning" (Smith, 1990b: 223) which has an organising power that stretches across time and place and displaces local, situated meaning. For example, a person might be written into a case file or bureaucratic form which objectifies them and then becomes a textual representation of them that can move through different institutions. As a text travels through an institutional sequence, it "initiates a new action on its arrival at someone's work site; the product is then passed on, transformed or not, to the next site, where it again initiates an action" (Smith, 2005: 173). Smith draws on Pence's (2001) concept of the 'processing interchange', which acknowledges that in these occurrences texts are checked against other texts to see if they fit in with institutional mandates or codes. Each processing interchange engages with textual representations of a person's experience rather than the person themselves and so the textual processing becomes disconnected from people and actuality, and instead becomes part of the working lives of many different people along the institutional act-text-act process. The workers who interpret texts at processing interchanges become agents of regulatory texts and representatives of institutions. The hierarchical web of regulatory texts and lower-levels texts that make up institutions become a bureaucratic straitjacket into which workers must wrestle actuality through objectifying people and experiences into texts and then processing these texts, which might involve more texts and other workers along the way.

By objectifying experience and appearing as facts rather than as situated accounts, texts remove people from the particularities of their bodies and locations and enter them

into the textual realm, which Smith (2005: 119) calls “institutional capture”. In other words, people and their experiences or experientially-based accounts are subsumed into institutional frames which organise what can and cannot be included. These ideas are explored by Smith (1990b: 120-158; 2005: 114-117) through an analysis of two different accounts of the same incident – a conflict on the street in Berkeley, where Smith compares a witness account and the official police account which is then included in a mayoral public report on the event. Smith (2005: 115) explains that the witness account came first, accusing police of inappropriate behaviour – specifically roughing up a teenager – and the police/mayoral account was in response to this text. The first text is very much experience-based and temporally stays in that experience (even though it has been objectified into a textual account). However, the second official account sets events in a longer timeline, explains “the full story” – bringing up the prior criminal history of the teenager - and provides the reader with implicit instruction for how to re-read the first witness account in light of new information (Smith, 2005: 115). Thereby the official account frames the interpretation of police behaviour by placing it within a ‘legitimate’ institutional process and reframes the original ‘victim’ as a ‘criminal’.

This textual timeline situates the witness account within the ‘shell’ of the official account, which provides institutional rationale for police behaviour that otherwise might be read as inappropriate and ensures that the particular experience-based witness account is re-read in the context of the institutional text. The official police/mayoral account already has a particular institutional weight, but it also uses specific textual devices to subsume the experience-based account into institutional temporality and thus re-organise the public interpretation of witness accounts of the event. The temporality of these processes overrides local time and meaning-making, whereby local events and accounts are framed by texts that describe events that happened elsewhere and elsewhen. For example, the arrest, charging, and subsequent suspended sentence of the teenager occurred over different sites and times and yet is used to explain and justify the initial way in which the police office behaved towards the teenager (Smith, 1990b; Smith, 2005).

So while the text-reader conversation happens in particular place and time and with a specific reader, the text draws the reader into act-text-act sequences of institutional activity that extends beyond the local into the translocal and draws in other people, sites, texts, and institutions (Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006c), specifically other aspects of the criminal

justice system in this example. This shows how local events and people are “governed extralocally” (Smith, 2005: 170) depending on how texts are brought into being in text-reader conversations.

Such institutional organising of people’s reading often involves texts interlocking (Smith, 2005: 118), whereby they produce institutionally recognisable processes; for example, the process of being arrested positions people into different roles, such as police officer, and around certain institutional logics or ideologies embedded in texts. The interlocking nature of such processes means that texts are both active in organising interpretation and are relational in that they can only be properly understood in relation to other texts. For example, an arrest follows particular textually-mediated process which might also make intertextual references to other legal or procedures texts that are necessary to understanding meaning (Smith, 2005; Smith & Turner, 2014a). Intertextuality in IE means that texts are interdependent and organised hierarchically; not that texts at the top of the hierarchy are more important, but that the boss/regulatory texts “establish the frames and concepts that control and shape lower level texts” (Smith, 2005: 226). Thus, intertextuality is not abstract, but rather “activated in the moments of text-reader activities: practices of remembering, noticing, looking out for, passages that bear upon it, that it bears upon” (Smith & Turner, 2014a: 226). In the above Berkeley example, the official police account becomes a regulatory/boss text (Smith, 2010; Smith & Turner, 2014b: 10), providing guidelines for how to read the witness account; the experiential situated account is displaced in favour of the temporal institutional reality of the police process.

As I explore in detail in Part II, in UK HE regulatory texts provide powerful frames into which academic experiences are fitted. Such understandings of how texts organise readers demonstrate how reading is a social activity that joins people and their activities into act-text-act or text-work-text sequences; textually-mediated processes that coordinate people’s everyday work (Smith, 2005: 184). This helpfully reminds the IE researcher not to focus exclusively on texts in the abstract or exclusively on experience without texts, but instead on their intersections. By following these textual trails, IE researcher can explore how texts coordinate people’s actions.

In institutional act-text-act processes, front-line workers engage in text-reader conversations, making sense of texts in reference to other texts including boss or regulatory texts such as guidelines, rules, codes of conduct, and laws that explicitly instruct workers on

how to interpret texts. Smith (2005: 149) calls this work knowledges, “participants’ experiential knowledge of the work involved” (Smith, 2005: 149), which provides important information for IE researchers, who will use such experiential knowledge to make sense of texts. This is a form of institutional literacy, which workers may take for granted and use unthinkingly every day, but is something they will have been taught how to do through formal and informal education, particularly basic literacy and institutional training, alongside on-the-job training and vocational or professional courses (Darville, 1995; Smith, 2005; Smith & Dobson, 2011).

There are consequences to being insufficiently institutionally literate, for example, incorrectly completing a bureaucratic form might mean having one’s welfare benefits cut or removed, not receiving a passport or visa, or being fined for incorrect tax returns. Such penalties heavily organise people’s interpretations of texts, specifically workers who activate regulatory texts at processing interchanges, who themselves might face penalties for misreading, such as dismissal, fines, re-training or other informal punishments like shaming or exclusion in the workplace. Incorrect readings of texts mean that readers cannot successfully fit into the institutional process; they become unrecognisable to the institution (Smith, 1990b; Smith, 2005).

The idea of work knowledges also uses an expanded or ‘generous’ conceptualisation of work, in which Smith (2005: 151-152) draws on the Wages for Housework¹⁵ definition of work as much broader than paid work, including the unpaid and often unappreciated household work of (traditionally) women: “anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about. It means much more than what is done on the job”. While this is quite vague, it acknowledges a broad array of activities that contribute to the reproduction of workers and institutions. This helps orient IE researchers towards everyday tasks that people do but which are often glossed over or not considered ‘proper’ work, and yet are essential to sustain institutional processes; the shift is from institutional categories to actual experiences, reminding IE researchers of how central experiential knowledge is.

¹⁵ For example, Silvia Federici’s (2012) discussions about the Wages for Housework campaign and related feminist theorising around reproductive labour.

Smith (2006c: 68) discusses two possible ways to explore act-text-act sequences: interviewing people about their work activities at each stage in a textually-mediated sequences; or, if interviewing is not possible, looking at the temporal sequencing of texts and analysing the “traces *in the text* of how it was produced and ... explicating what it projects as organization for what comes next”. Researchers may also be workers in the institutional processes they are investigating, which is common in IE research and means that the researcher already possesses some work knowledges. However, as discussed earlier, to move beyond on locale and see how texts organise people translocally, other points in text-act-text sequences and other people’s work knowledges are also necessary to understand more than just one moment in the textual chain.

I will now explore Smith’s conceptualisation of discourse. Discourse for Smith means the translocal ruling relations, the “complex of relations based in texts ... a ‘field’ in which relations and courses of action are mediated by symbolic forms and modes” (Smith, 1990b: 162). However, this must not exclude people’s active participation in reproducing and remaking discourse through their speaking, reading, and writing (Smith, 2005: 224). While Smith draws on Foucault’s concept of discourse, which she argues “located systems of knowledge and knowledge making independent of particular individuals” (Smith, 2005: 17), a balance must be struck between the weighty textual organisation of our lives and our agency as readers and doers to subvert, challenge, and misinterpret texts. Smith (2005: 127) comments that those who use Foucault’s conceptualisation often “accord discourse an overpowering role”, hence why she uses Bakhtin’s understanding of discourse to counteract this; experience is a dialogue, in which people find the ‘resources’ to express themselves, actively negotiating what is available while simultaneously being constrained by it (Smith, 2005: 127).

As mentioned before, the women’s movement naming collective experiences of oppression through consciousness-raising is a useful example of how this occurs; Smith (2005: 127) explains that, it was a “struggle to force the lexical givens of discourse, made in masculinity, to speak what they were not prepared to do ... we could make them speak ... language can be changed” (Smith, 2005: 127). By recognising that language and discourse can change, Smith acknowledges that utterances are creative moments in which there is a balance between discourse as structuring and people as agentic alongside the focus on local-level activity: discourse is “among people’s doings, it is of the actualities of people’s

lives; it organizes relations among people; and while it speaks of and from and in people's activities, it does not exhaust them" (Smith, 2005: 25).

Smith defines two specific types of discourse – institutional and ideological - which are regulatory frameworks used to guide interpretation of other discourses and institutional life. Ideological discourses are “generalized and generalizing discourses, operating at a metalevel of control other discourses, including institutional discourses” (Smith, 2005: 224). Institutional discourses then act as ‘lower-level’ regulatory frames which guide interpretation of texts and organise the textualisation process; the translation of actuality into something that is institutionally recognisable. However, it is important to think about discourses as happening through the activities of actual people, particularly front-line workers who translate people's experiences into institutional texts and ‘check’ these against regulatory/boss texts which are the material form of ideological and institutional discourses, providing specific instructions about how to read and interpret in line with the institutional frame.

Ideological and institutional discourses are about the organisation of interpretation as a reading and writing activity; they provide the guiding frames, with the former acting as a higher-level discourse, organising multiple institutional discourses around certain ideological principles. Smith (2005: 217) identifies two examples – neoliberalism as an ideological discourse in North America since the 1980s, and also new public managerialism as a discourse “mediating neoliberalism and institutional discourses”. These are best thought of as a sort of institutional literacy that informs the ‘correct’ reading of institutional texts, which is often unthinkingly done by front-line workers for whom it is merely part of their everyday work knowledge. However, the distinction between ideological/institutional discourses and regulatory/boss texts is unclear; they both perform similar organisational functions – informing interpretation of institutional texts. When making sense of Smith's work I found it useful to think of discourse as that which is known-in-common, the literacy, which is based on multiple texts and perhaps is not coherently laid out in one regulatory text, but instead expresses the collective mesh of multiple regulatory texts and how they work together.

This distinction between powerful texts and ideological or institutional discourses is blurry. For example, front-line workers may be participating in, and thus reproducing, certain discourses that they have learnt through other employees' talk and activity, which is

based on a regulatory text that they have not read, or may not have even heard of. Are they responding to a discourse, or is this an indirect interaction with a text? Indeed, people's everyday knowledges of regulatory texts often are vague and presumptive, based on received knowledge from other people and experience rather than reading the actual texts. But perhaps making this distinction clear is not necessary because the organisational power still comes back to the institutional texts, even if indirectly. I will explore these discussions around text and discourse more in Part II specifically in relation to UK HE and the REF.

As previously mentioned, mapping is a central part of Smith's articulation of IE, but how to do mapping as a method is often unclear. Smith (1992: 94) largely uses mapping as a metaphor or an analogy that describes what IE research is supposed to produce – namely, accounts of how things work. In her glossary of IE terms, Smith (2005: 226) states that mapping involves assembling “different work knowledges, positioned differently ... [and] where relevant, an account of the texts coordinating work processes in institutional settings”. Thus, when taken up as a method, mapping can involve producing visual or diagram-based version of one's analysis that shows the reader how an institutional process is put together, or a more traditional written description of institutional processes. However, Smith does not clearly articulate what mapping specifically means as a method, apart from her reference to Susan Turner's work. Smith (2005: 177-178) identifies Turner as having developed a mapping approach within IE that focuses on institutional processes coordinated primarily in texts. In order to do an IE mapping study similar to Turner's, Smith argues that one must “learn how to read the texts from those whose work it is to read and write them; she must learn the institutional speech genres and discourse; and she must be able to recognize as work what people do with texts and talk to complete the sequence” (Smith, 2005: 180), in other words, develop work knowledges of a whole institutional text-act-text sequence.

Smith further positions Turner's mapping work as *the* IE mapping approach in her edited collection (Smith, 2006b), with Turner (2006) providing the chapter on mapping. They also co-edit *Incorporating Texts into Institutional Ethnographies* (Smith & Turner, 2014a), which marks the most recent explication of an IE focus on texts. Smith (2006a: 9) argues that what Turner produces is “a map that is a *schematic representation* analysing an institutional process, showing how it operates and its institutional properties”. This is

interesting as it acknowledges that such maps are produced for a purpose – to convey Turner’s analysis and understanding of how things are put together and what is most relevant – and thus implicitly acknowledges the partiality of such a representation. An acknowledgement of why and how she has decided to include or exclude certain elements in a map is I think important for holding the researcher to account for her decisions about relevance and importance of certain parts of her analysis.

When discussing mapping more generally Smith (2005: 29) makes very clear that she considers producing maps a technical process, but that the map produced “should be ordinarily accessible and usable, just as a well-made map is, to those on the terrain it maps”. This raises two questions: (i) what are the technical mapping skills in IE; and, (ii) does this mean that only researchers, or specifically IE researchers, have these technical skills and thus have some epistemic privilege in being able to map processes that other people do not? Smith draws a distinction between researchers and people, arguing that IE researchers extend everyday knowledge “into regions we have not been to, and perhaps could not go to, without the explorer’s interests and cartographic skills” (Smith, 2005: 2). While Smith does not explicate what the specific skills are, deferring to Turner’s work, the metaphor of mapping has been very popular amongst her followers and users of IE, which I will explore more in the next section, including details of Turner’s approach to mapping.

As previously discussed, interviews and observations are often used by the IE researchers to build an understanding of work knowledges from a particular standpoint in order to begin the process of inquiry in people’s everyday lives. But how can IE researchers use the subsequent texts produced by these processes? Smith (2005: 142-143) argues that in an interview or observation there are two dialogues; first the primary dialogue, in which the researcher is in conversation with the informant, developing an understanding of their everyday experience of a particular part of a sequence of institutional activity. Then the secondary dialogue, in which the researcher reads the material produced from the first, namely an interview recording or transcript and fieldnotes. This secondary dialogue involves trying to work out “connections, links, hook-ups, and the various forms of coordination that tie their doings into those of others” (Smith, 2005: 143). And of course, as Smith’s ontology of the social makes clear, texts are central to the organisation of people and their activities, and also allow the researcher to move beyond one location into the ruling relations (Smith, 2005: 165). Thus, the use of interview and observational data by the

researcher should be orientated towards how texts are used and how they organise people's work (Smith, 2005: 170).

In summary, IE uses texts to explore the institutional and ruling relations, by piecing together text-act-text sequences and considering how text-reader conversations occur at different moments in these sequences. The identification of such sequences allows the researcher to move beyond one locale or specific experiences, in order to highlight how people's activities in different locales are organised in concert. The focus on texts rather than people avoids objectification and therefore falsely generalising from specifics to other people, places, and times. The concept of discourse, as defined by Smith, recognises that people's interpretations of institutional texts are informed by institutional and ideological discourses, or forms of literacy, that operate across sequences and organisations, and sometimes across institutions. Overall, Smith's understanding of discourse tries to hold the balance between the structuring effects of texts and discourses, and the agency of people whose work and negotiation of language and texts create a dynamic ongoing process rather than a static or overly determined organisation of society. However, in order to explore discourses or any other part of the ruling relations, Smith advocates some form of text-focused analysis, as texts provide the materiality of ideas and the organising power of institutions and the ruling relations.

Key Points in Reception of Smith's Work

Having taken Smith's work on her own terms, I will now highlight some key points in the reception of Smith's work by sociologists and feminists in other disciplines. As my thesis is partially concerned with the development of Smith's work and her conceptualisation of IE, I think it is important to consider how her work has been received and critiqued, as this has informed how her work has been taken up and the changes over time. In addition, these discussions of her work have informed my own criticisms and helpfully highlight some points of tension with Smith's conceptualisation of IE as an alternative feminist sociology.

I will focus on three high-profile exchanges between Smith and other academics because they are frequently referenced by people who use Smith's work, and so they have

provided an influential frame within which her work has often been read. These three exchanges are: the exploration of Smith's work in *Sociological Theory* in 1992; an exchange between Patricia Clough and Smith in *Sociological Quarterly* in 1993; and, Susan Hekman's critique of Smith's conceptualisation of standpoint in 1997 in *Signs*. After this, I will provide a brief timeline of how IE has become the central legacy of Smith's work and the process and effects of IE becoming institutionalised.

The discussion in *Sociological Theory* (Collins, 1992; Connell, 1992; Laslett & Thorne, 1992; Lemert, 1992; Smith, 1992) provides a sympathetic and interesting exploration of Smith's work up to 1990. This symposium focuses on Smith's role as a feminist theorist, noting her considerable influence and yet the lack of interest from sociological theory towards her and other feminist theorists. Laslett and Thorne (1992: 61) ask in their introduction, "Is this another example of 'the peculiar eclipsing of women's experiences' that Smith has so insightfully discussed?" In response, Lemert (1992), Collins (1992), and Connell (1992) reflect on Smith's contribution and highlight some of their queries with her work, followed by a response from Smith (1992). They focus on Smith's conceptualisation of women's standpoint, asking whether it can acknowledge both differences between women and other forms of oppression. They also situate her work within a broader sociological canon and highlight her important contributions to sociology and feminist academia. While Smith's response appreciates the discussions of her work, she points out very firmly that each contributor "constructs her or his own straw Smith", arguing that Lemert's and Connell's criticisms "seem both to be correct and to miss the point altogether" (Smith, 1992: 89). This is partially why I have explored Smith's work on her own terms so extensively, and with this in mind, I will briefly outline some of the key points made in these special issue contributions.

Lemert (1992) focuses on Smith's ideas about subjectivity and women's standpoint, arguing that her focus is on "actual, local, subjective experience" (Lemert, 1992: 70) but that this form of subjectivity goes beyond personal experience, to make more general points about how women's experiences are organised by the social world (Lemert, 1992; 65). However, he seems stuck on the topic of wondering whether or not Smith's use of subjectivity can say anything beyond 'women' and how it can acknowledge the differences between women. His discussion provides no firm answer but highlights a question that is

taken up by Collins (1992) and Connell (1992): can Smith's women's standpoint provide a sociology for everyone and acknowledge the fractured nature of identity?

Connell (1992: 83) argues that Smith provides an insightful critique of sociology and the ruling relations more generally, and this is based on her dual position as an insider – a sociologist – and an outsider – a woman. Connell (1992: 82) argues that Smith's conceptualisation of standpoint provides a nuanced and social account of difference due to being based on a gendered division of labour argument – men do the ruling, and women serve these men – but also that there are problems with “the notion of a *singular* standpoint of women” due to the differences between the experiences of white women and those of women of colour. Collins (1992: 78) also argues this in her article, stating that Smith “underemphasizes diversity created by race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and age”. Collins goes on to argue that Smith's overall approach could benefit from drawing on the knowledges found in marginalised communities that are often not textualised, as these could provide useful ideas of how to resist objectified knowledge and strengthen Smith's exploration of how knowledge structures power relations under capitalism.

In response to Connell and Collins' discussions of her conceptualisation of standpoint, Smith (1992: 91) makes clear, “My notion of standpoint doesn't privilege a knower. It does something rather different. It shifts the ground of knowing, the place where inquiry begins. Since knowledge is essentially socially organized, it can never be an act or an attribute of individual consciousness”. And thus her emphasis is on doing – beginning in actuality, rather than in text-mediated discourse, namely social theory or the ruling relations. She asks that sociological inquiry begins from particular examples rather than abstract notions. An important distinction is thus made, the difference between beginning with identities in discourse, as compared with beginning with actual experiences in particular locations, is an important one. It is also one that Collins (1992:75) has expressed in her article, that sociology should begin in people's actual experiences “rather than in the ideological constructs of theory inherited from sociological traditions”.

Then in response to the criticisms of her focus, Smith argues that she has a particular, limited project – to map ‘the system’, beginning in everyday life, and thus providing maps of how it works and how it might be changed. Smith explicitly distinguishes this project from that of Collins, who she argues “is concerned to transform the

consciousness of the oppressed. My concern is with what we confront in transforming oppressive relations” (Smith, 1992: 96).

This raises some broader questions about Smith’s approach to sociology, with both Collins and Connell providing interesting reflections on whether or not Smith’s work does what it sets out to do; to criticise ‘traditional sociology’ and create a sociology for women (and now people). The crux of Collins’ (1992: 79) overall criticism of Smith is that, while she does an important job in interrogating the ‘inner circle’ of sociological theory on their own terms, in doing so she moves closer to them and participates in the very ruling relations which she set out to criticise. Collins (1992: 74-77) argues that Smith presents five key challenges to sociological theory: (i) her nuanced use of multiple sociological traditions and theories depending on their usefulness to her purposes challenges the tendency for segmented following of particular sociological traditions; (ii) her bridging of objectivist and constructionist ways of thinking in sociology; (iii) her beginning in people’s actual experiences rather than theory; (iv) her exploration of dominance through objectified knowledge practices; (v) her use of empirical research to develop her theorising. However, Collins (1992: 77) then goes on to argue that while Smith has successfully completed the first step here, the second step involves creating new approaches to sociology by “rejecting the circle and starting in a new place”. While Smith’s work has not become part of the ‘malestream’ social theory canon, she is doing the difficult (and perhaps misplaced) work of justifying the use of experience as the basis for knowledge production on the terms set by the ‘theory boys’, in negotiating access to social theory for feminist sociologists who base their work on experiential knowledge.

Smith’s simultaneous criticising of the academy whilst arguing on its terms is a difficult thing to do. Indeed, reading all her work, there are surprisingly few references to feminist academics or even other women’s texts, apart from by IE colleagues, with her work otherwise firmly situated within the sociological ‘malestream’ canon. This seems to be part of her negotiation with the ‘theory boys’ for a place at the table and can be seen as an example of (intentional?) institutional capture (Eastwood, 2006),¹⁶ to put it in IE terms.

¹⁶ Lauren Eastwood (2006: 193) coined the term ‘intentional institutional capture’ in her research on the production of UN texts on forests. Intentional institutional capture refers to a strategy for influencing institutional processes whereby people acknowledge that “in order to be effective in the process, they must work within the process and the conceptual frames of the organisation”, and therefore they translate their experiences or aims into an institutionally recognisable language and format.

Smith's use of self-reflection, observation and theorising alongside her lack of feminist – and other – referencing does seem problematic when criticising mainstream sociology for much the same thing. While I remain convinced that Smith's approach provides a better alternative to 'traditional sociology', it seems that in conducting a firmly sociological project in the academy, she may have overestimated how much of a bridge IE can provide between this and activism outside the academy. At the least, her reluctance to acknowledge the privilege of the researcher in IE as well as other academic knowledges is curious.

Connell (1992: 87) also picks up on this point, arguing that Smith's sociology for women does still seem to be based on problems "defined by the academics concerned" without much engagement with who the research is for, citing participatory action research as one alternative model. While Connell highlights Smith's lack of engagement with the role of the researcher and her epistemological privilege in choosing and defining the foci of research, the answer need not be participatory action research. The question of how best to deconstruct academic epistemological privilege will be discussed more in Chapter 2, focused on accountability in research.

Connell (1992: 82) provides a broader discussion of Smith's sociology, arguing that while the 1960s radical sociologists criticised the conservatism of sociology and complicity with the ruling relations, Smith's approach provides something more fundamental; an "epistemology of power" that sees sociology as part of the ruling relations through the process of abstracting from the local. But beyond this, Connell (1992: 86) seems to misunderstand Smith's approach, arguing that Smith's criticisms of sociology categorisations means that she rejects all abstraction and instead "assert[s] the absolute priority of individual experience and the agency of individual people". Smith (1992: 90) responds to Connell: "I'm not arguing against abstractions ... I'm concerned with examining and explicating how 'abstractions' are put together, with concepts, knowledge, facticity, as socially organized practices ... I am concerned also with redesigning them". Connell (1992: 83) also argues that Smith's conceptualisation of power is more anarchist than Marxist, which misunderstands that Smith's use of Marx is focused in his ontology, and thus is relevant to her discussion of standpoint – beginning in actuality with people's lives - rather than about her conceptualisation of power.

As Smith (1992: 88) argues in her response to the other contributors, the foundation of her women's standpoint discussion was the women's movement – a

collective movement – and that this then became “a *method of inquiry* ... relevant to the politics and practice of progressive struggle, whether of women or of other oppressed groups”. Smith’s emphasis is on women learning to speak as a collective from consciousness raising in the women’s movement and how this is a method of discovering and opening up a collective positioning, even if experiences of this position are also specific and individual. She argues that standpoint has been theorising by other academics, which “displaces the practical politics that the notion of ‘standpoint’ originally captured. The concept is moved upstairs, so to speak, and is reduced to a purely discursive function” (Smith, 1992: 89). This seems to be a theme in criticisms of Smith’s standpoint – it is seen as overly theoretical or as totalising, rather than being treated as Smith sees it, which is as a way of letting women speak back to ruling relations rooted in the historical moment of the women’s movement. Perhaps the declining importance of standpoint to Smith (as discussed earlier) signifies how much thinking has moved on from there – women’s voices and feminist standpoint discussions have helped shift traditional sociological practice, whereby beginning from experience and specifically that of the oppressed is not necessarily as radical as it once was, or at least there is more accommodation for this approach in contemporary sociology.

However, Connell (1992: 84) does more accurately state that Smith is “an epistemological realist of the deepest dye” when discussing her engagement with textuality, going on to argue that while Foucault does not identify the site of resistance to power/knowledge, Smith identifies this as the standpoint of women, a place prior to textualisation. Smith does not often use the word real, preferring actual, but in her response she does seem to agree: “if we’re talking about actual people, and the actual ongoing concerting of activities, there’s a common ground – a real world, if you like – to which we can refer” (Smith, 1992: 93). This discussion of reality is one that is extensively criticised by Clough (1993a; 1993b), which I now turn to consider.

The debate between Smith (1993) and Patricia Clough (1993a; 1993b) focuses on Smith’s understanding of text, discourse and women’s standpoint as a place outside discourse. It raises a key question; can IE produce something less problematic than ‘traditional sociology’? Clough (1993a; 1993b) focuses on two issues: whether ‘actuality’ and ‘experience’ are organised by discourse; and, the privilege of sociologists as writers and readers of texts. The crux of this discussion is essentially that Smith believes in some sort of

reality, whereas Clough does not, and their intellectual projects are entirely different. Some of the discussions touch on similar points to the *Sociological Theory* special issue already discussed, and again Smith (1993: 184) argues that she has been misrepresented as a 'StrawSmith' by Clough.

Clough (1993a: 172) does indeed misunderstand Smith's use of actuality and experience in seeing them as the object of study in Smith's analysis. However, this is not the case; Smith (1993: 183) argues that actuality is "a place to begin", but not to conclude, sociological inquiry. Smith (1993: 183) argues that this is better than beginning an analysis in theory or in institutional frameworks, because it allows people, particularly oppressed people, to challenge institutional textual realities and expand the realm of what appears in institutional discourse: "The notion of a standpoint outside discourse holds a place in discourse for she who has not spoken". Clough (1993a: 172) draws on Althusser's discussion of Marx and ideology to challenge Smith's concern with 'actual experience', arguing that actuality can only be got at through texts and discourses, which are ideological practices, implying that Smith cannot therefore use actuality to ground her research: "She [Smith] refuses to argue that actual experience is always constructed discursively and that accounts of actual experience are part of a labyrinth of intertexts". This is perhaps why Smith spends quite a lot of time discussing this in her 2005 book, in which she explains in detail her understanding of language, experience, and how these relate.

In relation to texts, Clough (1993: 175) highlights the activities of the reader and the writer, arguing that their "subjectivities are ... constituted in unconscious desire and ... whose activities as reader and writer is necessarily unconscious". Clough's identifying of the unconscious as the focus of subjectivity is unhelpful, for while the subject and experience are "subject to and of discourse" (Clough, 1993a: 176), this is methodologically separate from considering texts and the relations of ruling in IE. Smith's point is that the ruling relations are the focus of IE, as they are pre-objectified organisers of everyday life and can be accessed through texts. There is a difference between institutional realities and everyday realities, even if both are created by and through discourse and textuality, including the ability of institutional texts to organise and shape subjectivity and experience. However, Smith's focus is not on the unconscious but rather the institutional organising or people's activities, which are observable to the social researcher.

Largely Clough (1993a) seems to think that Smith is attempting to produce objective knowledge based on women's experiences. This misunderstands Smith's conceptualisation. Women's standpoint is not about a unitary experience, a gendered shift in authority, or objectivity, but rather that by beginning with experience, standpoint can provide an important challenge, in exposing invisibilities and challenging the supposed universality and neutrality of 'objective' institutional knowledge. This is not to say women's experiences are more real or superior, but that they have been more excluded from knowledge production. Smith is not trying to produce 'objective knowledge', but instead to extend people's everyday knowledge of how their world works (Smith, 1997: 396).

What it comes down to here is what sort of 'truth' one is engaging with: Smith argues that postmodernism and Clough are engaging with "big 'T' truth ... [which] gets read, improperly I would hold, into what I am putting forward" (Smith, 1993: 187). Instead Smith strategically brackets 'reality' under the term actuality, using this as a methodological tool rather than to abstractly debate what constitutes actual experience. Rather than be trapped in the "solipsistic universe of discourse reflecting on discourse" (Smith, 1993: 186), Smith advocates getting on with doing social research that provides maps to social processes people are involved in but cannot easily see, thereby making social relations visible.

In her reply to Smith, Clough (1993b) focuses on how the unconscious constructs women's experiences, without providing an explanation of how one might methodologically explore the unconscious. In doing so Clough occupies an expert position, reading from theory without acknowledgement of her own position, something she criticises Smith for: "what authority it [Smith's discourse] constructs for her in displacing the question of authority on to experience in a way that makes experience appear as beyond her reading and writing it, putting her authority beyond a critical rereading of her writing experience" (Clough, 1993b: 194). Clough does highlight that Smith does not attend to the researcher's expert position and its epistemological privilege, which I will explore more in Chapter 2 as this is centrally important to my consideration of how to do feminist research in an accountable way.

In general, however, there is a fundamental sticking point between Smith and deconstructionists. Smith accepts the need to deconstruct notions of overarching Truth, but retains the idea of world known-in-common or reality even if she linguistically side-steps

this with discussions of actuality. Connell (1992: 84) refers (not entirely positively) to Smith as an “epistemological realist” because of this. A key part of the debate with Clough concerns how different Smith’s alternative sociology actually is. Smith advocates a starting point in everyday lives rather than the textual realm or in theory, in order to move away from a tendency to “substitute the expert’s knowledge for our own” (Smith, 2005: 1). For Clough, this is just a slightly different sociology in which the researcher’s privileged perspective remains, replacing rather than fundamentally challenging existing sociological discourse.

Similar discussions are taken up in the next key reception of Smith’s work, Susan Hekman’s (1997a; 1997b) discussion of ‘feminist standpoint theory’ in *Signs*. In this special issue, Hekman conflates and criticises the work of Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding, and Smith, all of whom respond (Hartsock, 1997; Collins, 1997; Harding, 1997; Smith, 1997). Hekman argues that feminist standpoint is an important contribution to feminist theory and that it has focused on two central points: “knowledge is situated and perspectival and that there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced” (Hekman 1997a: 342) and that there are two big questions to answer: how situated knowledge can be ‘true’; and, how to acknowledge difference? In her response, Smith first takes issue with Hekman categorising her women’s standpoint approach as a feminist standpoint, arguing that “it is not at all the same thing and has nothing to do with justifying feminist knowledge” (Smith, 1997: 393) and then goes on to articulate the many ways in which Hekman has misunderstood her approach.

In Hekman (1997a: 347) discussing the first conundrum she identifies with feminist standpoint about ‘truth’, she argues that Smith “posits an absolute dichotomy between abstract concepts on the one hand and lived reality on the other” and also advocates a shift from concepts to reality. From this, Hekman (1997: 348) makes a similar criticism to Clough, in arguing that Smith “refuses to acknowledge ... that ‘reality’ is also discursively constituted”. Smith’s (1997: 393) response insists that she is not rooting her version of standpoint in reality, but rather is advocating that researchers should begin in actuality, in a place “where we live and where discourse happens and does its constituting of ‘reality’ ... to recognize that concepts are also in actuality”. Thus, this is not an absolute reality in the sense of being True, but rather that it avoids beginning in abstract theory or concepts. In redirecting researchers to look outside the already constituted text, Smith’s approach is

about a commitment to everyday experience as an important basis for knowledge, and she situates this approach in the women's movement in which the category of 'woman' is "non-exclusive" and "open-ended", a place from which to speak, a position open to many different women (Smith, 1997: 394). Thus, Smith's concepts are not about whether or not experience is discursively constituted, but whether or not it provides a better place to begin social research than theory.

In her broader criticism of 'feminist standpoint', Hekman (1997a: 359) argues that in taking the multiplicity of standpoints and acknowledgement of difference to its logical conclusion, then "every woman is unique ... systemic analysis is obviated". Smith (1997: 394) sharply responds here by pointing out that "experience is a method of talk, a language game ... experience gives direct access to the necessarily social character of people's worlds; it is in *how* people talk, the categories they use, the relations implicitly posited among them ... [this] makes nonsense of Hekman's notion that standpoint ultimately dissolves into the endless idiosyncratic consciousnesses of unique individuals". In short, there are differences that matter, which we know through our experiences of being differently positioned and by speaking from these we can identify the system, as discussed in relation to Smith's conceptualisation of standpoint. Rather than abstractly theorising and reducing the nuances of standpoint to their 'logical conclusions' as Hekman does, Smith is instead arguing for a method of inquiry and a way to begin in experience and thus discover social life as it is and how people experience their structural identities in relation to the textually-mediated organising of institutions and the ruling relations.

Hekman (1997a: 351-352) goes on to address the issue of how to deal with difference, and argues that Smith 'gets around' this problem by defining women's lived experience as a category that acknowledges the diversity of such experiences. But then she misleadingly claims that Smith privileges women's knowledge, seeing it as "superior to the abstract knowledge of the sociologist" (Hekman, 1997: 352). To this Smith responds unequivocally that she does not believe this, but rather wants sociologists to begin with where people are as participants in the social world and extend this knowledge; her method of inquiry is about "developing investigations of the social that are anchored in, although not confined by, people's everyday working knowledge of the doing of their lives" (Smith, 1997: 396). These discussions are really important to consider as these shaped the direction of standpoint and how Smith's conceptualises it and its usefulness for IE

researchers. The widespread misunderstanding of Smith's conceptualisation of standpoint as one that privileged women's knowledge or does not acknowledge difference is frustrating as it obscures the possibility of critique of Smith based on what she has actually argued.

In her reply to Hartsock, Collins, Harding and Smith's responses to her original discussion, Hekman (1997b: 401) comments that her differences with Smith are "the most fundamental" because she does not accept Smith's distinction between actuality and reality. This concludes an exchange that among other things highlights Smith's insistence on the differences of her version of standpoint from the others, primarily because it is conceptualised out of women's historical exclusion, thereby providing an alternative approach to research by highlighting a position outside institutional objectified forms of thought. And as she also points out, while based on women's excluded embodied experiences, the standpoint taken does not necessarily have to be that of women nor does it epistemologically privileged any group's experiences over others. In short, Smith's version of standpoint is not intended to answer epistemological questions about truth and reality, but rather to clearly situate where her approach has come from and how to produce a subject position from which people can 'know' from experience and explore how things work. The epistemological discussions that are under discussed in this will be taken up more in chapter 2 as they are complicated and central to discussions of what constitutes feminist research.

This discussion highlights the importance of taking Smith on her own terms and understanding her work before mounting criticisms of it, especially since much of the criticism that has been levelled at Smith is either a misrepresentation of her work, what she calls the 'StrawSmith' approach (Smith, 1992; 1993), or is asking Smith to do something different from what she has set out to do. Her project is clear: "to build an ordinary good knowledge of the text-mediated organization of power from the standpoint of women in contemporary capitalism" (Smith, 1992: 97). She does not argue that her approach is the only approach, or the best approach, or a total theory of society and as her focus is on working out a method of inquiry, its focus is on the doing of sociological research rather than abstract theorising. In part, this rather odd reception can be linked to the tendency in some of academia not to read in a 'generous' way that constitutes 'fair play' for theory (Anderson et al., 1985). Also in part there seems to be some genuine confusion and

misunderstanding, because what Smith is doing really is different from the established way. What is interesting to note here is that throughout all of these discussions, her basic ontology has not been criticised but instead largely embraced and seen as useful and illustrative of how the world has changed and become more dependent on texts, thus highlighting the importance of including texts in IE research and sociology more broadly.

So far I have explored the main trajectories of Smith's alternative feminist sociology, then focused on these critical discussions of Smith's early work in journal issues because of their impact on how Smith's work has been interpreted. Now I will move onto her becoming institutionally recognised as an important sociologist and the further development of IE as her proposed alternative sociology. It is important to explore the institutionalisation of Smith's work because it highlights how IE has developed beyond Smith's work, which sets the scene for my discussion of how others researchers have put IE into practice. In addition, this institutionalisation of IE and the recognition of Smith's work highlights the strange absence of her name amongst the sociological theory canon alongside the apparent depoliticisation of her approach and the detaching of it from its feminist roots over time, as I will discuss more in Chapter 2.

Smith has received numerous awards over the years for her work, including receiving both the Outstanding Contribution Award for contributions to Canadian sociology and The John Porter Award for *The Everyday World as Problematic*, both from the Canadian Sociological Association in 1990 (CSA, 2017a; CSA, 2017b). This acknowledgement of her importance within Canadian sociology was then followed by appreciation from the American Sociological Association (ASA), from which she received two major awards: the Jessie Bernard Award in 1993 (ASA, 2017a); and the W.E.B Du Bois Career of Distinguished Scholarship Award in 1999 (ASA, 2017b). The former focuses on 'the role of women in society (ASA, 2017a), clearly acknowledging Smith's central role in feminist sociology, and then acknowledging her for her significant contribution to sociology in a more general sense with the latter award (ASA, 2017c).

In the 2000s, Smith's focus became developing IE as a coherent sociology for people (Smith, 2005; Smith, 2006), and from this came the beginnings of the institutionalisation of her work as part of establishing IE as a distinct branch of sociology.

First, an IE division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP)¹⁷ was spearheaded by Paul Luken and Suzanne Vaughan in 2003 (IE Newsletter, 2004; SSSP, 2016), then an IE division became part of the International Sociological Association (ISA) in 2011 (ISA, 2017). In 2014, I launched an Institutional Ethnography Network (IEN) as part of the 50 Years of Sociology at Edinburgh to correspond with Dorothy Smith receiving an Honorary Degree from the University (University of Edinburgh, 2017a); we hosted events and I began tracking IE researchers in the UK. In 2016, the University of Oslo began hosting the Institutional Ethnography in the Nordic countries network (IEN) (University of Oslo, 2017).

The initial institutionalisation of IE in the SSSP produced a special IE issue of *Social Problems* in 2006, consisting of an introduction to the approach (Holstein, 2006), and articles by DeVault (2006) Luken & Vaughan (2006), Weigt (2006), and Brown (2006). I will briefly discuss this special issue to show how IE has been taken up by researchers other than Smith and how the focus of the approach begins to move away from Smith's conceptualisation. The focus of the special issue was on introducing IE as an approach, with Holstein (2006: 293) explaining that it is not merely an ethnography of organisations but rather an approach that focuses on "texts-in-use in multiple settings ... [and] examine[s] the actual activities that coordinate these interconnected sites". Holstein (2006: 293) also highlights that IE is not about generalising from people, but rather "to identify and explain social processes that have generalizing effects", and that most IE researchers have "critical or liberatory goals". This is an important special issue as it is the first collective articulation of IE to appear after Smith's (2005) book, with it helping to present IE as coherent approach to a broad sociological audience.

The focus on texts and processes rather than people themselves is clear, and is reiterated by DeVault (2006) in further articulating what IE is, outlining the development of IE by Smith and highlights some key elements. In particular, DeVault (2006) discusses the importance of thinking about work more broadly than just paid jobs, that in IE it needs to encompass the "field of unpaid or invisible work" and noting which activities are acknowledged as work in an institution and which are not. She also highlights how IE researchers often adopt "a rhetoric of 'mapping' to highlight the analytic goal of explication rather than theory building; the analysis is meant to be 'usable' in the way that a map can

¹⁷ The SSSP is a US-based sociology organisation, which hosts annual meetings alongside the ASA's annual conference (SSSP, 2018).

be used to find one's way" (DeVault, 2006: 294). Then the articles following offer examples of different types of IE research, which begin to demonstrate what I have observed with many IE researchers; they do not actually focus on texts.

While Luken & Vaughan (2006) analyse oral histories and archival data, using primary texts to explore their overall argument that this textually-mediated discourse was prevalent in organising ideas about housing and childrearing, Weigt's (2006) article involves a distinct shift away from using texts and instead discusses discourse based on a number of interviews about the way mothers talk about carework. While Weigt (2006: 335) acknowledges that the 'typical IE account' would focus on textually-mediated processes, she instead focuses on the interview data and applies two discourses from Smith's own research and another from a piece of a non-IE ethnographic work, arguing that this enables her to focus on "the practices of ruling at a discursive level rather than at the concrete textual level" (Weigt, 2006: 336). This misunderstands Smith's view of discourse as being textually-mediated and instead 'applies' Smith's previous work as a theory to her interview transcripts as in 'traditional sociology'. The last article by Brown (2006) provides the most coherent IE investigation in this special issue, beginning with those subject to a formal institutional position; how Canadian women in British Columbia (BC) are organised by the child protection system, specifically what sorts of work they are expected to do and how they are subject to certain textually-mediated processes and discourses around risk and mothering. Brown began by conducting interviews and a focus group with mothers caught up in the system before interviewing a front-line worker in a family services agency, and then analysing the agency's documents, including case files.

It is evident from this first special issue focusing on IE as an approach that it can be taken up and used in quite different ways, depending on the preferences and intentions of the researchers and the topic under investigation. While all the contributors in this special issue acknowledge the importance of texts to IE, this does not necessarily mean that they actually focus on texts in their research. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between different types of IE studies and different uses Smith's work to which I now turn.

Uses of Smith's Work

In order to develop my own approach to IE, I explored the varied ways in which researchers use Smith's work and how they do IE research. IE is not a straightforward approach to operationalise and has been taken up in a wide variety of ways, some of which are contradictory and depart from key principles outlined by Smith herself. Whilst Smith encourages "inquiry, discovery, learning ... rather than methodological dogma" (Smith, 2006a: 2), there are many different scholars calling their research approach IE, despite using methods which seem inconsistent with its central features, and which provide insufficient explanation of how they understand Smith's work, conceptualise IE, and sometimes do not even detail the methods they have used. This contributes to a lack of clarity about what IE research entails, and of what is good and bad of its kind. From my exploration of different IE studies, I developed a simple typology of approaches, which help to identify the type of approach I am using and find possible templates for my research.

Having reviewed a number of edited collections of IE studies at the beginning of my research – *Knowledge, Experience and Ruling Relations* (Campbell & Manicom, 1995), *Institutional Ethnography as Practice* (Smith, 2006b), *Sociology for Changing the World: Social Movements/Social Research* (Frampton et al., 2006), *Incorporating Texts into Institutional Ethnographies* (Smith & Turner, 2014a), *Under New Public Management: Institutional Ethnographies of Changing Front-Line Work* (Griffith & Smith, 2014) – and also various IE-themed special issues in journals – *Social Problems* (Holstein, 2006; DeVault, 2006; Luken & Vaughan, 2006; Weigt, 2006; Brown, 2006) – as well as some additional Smith-inspired research (Adams, 2009; Murray, 2011; Lund, 2012; Meuleman & Boushel, 2014), my conclusion is that four key trajectories drawing on Smith's work can be identified, which I have termed:

- Text-focused IE
- IE-light
- Political/activist ethnography
- Problematizing the everyday world

Included in these trajectories are people who form an 'inner circle'. Some of these researchers are former students or colleagues of Smith, with many having ongoing friendships and working relationships. Additionally, there are many committed 'followers' of Smith's work and avid users of IE, some of whom have contributions included in Smith's

edited collections, or have written supplementary material (for example, Campbell & Gregor, 2002) or organised special issues of IE studies (for example, DeVault, 2006).

Those who follow a text-focused IE approach are concerned with text and language in the ways suggested by Smith in *Institutional Ethnography* (Smith, 2005) and throughout her conceptualisation of IE. These text-focused IE researchers (such as G.W. Smith, 1995; Ng, 1995; Walker, 1995; Mueller, 1995; Griffith, 1995; Reimer, 1995; Darville, 1995; DeVault & McCoy, 2006; McCoy, 2006; Griffith, 2006; Luken & Vaughan, 2006; Turner, 2006; Eastwood, 2006; Matsau, 2012; Campbell, 2014; Eastwood, 2014; Meuleman & Boushel, 2014; Peet, 2014) explore the ruling relations from a particular standpoint or the standpoint of people, rather than beginning with the institutional perspective. They also focus on texts, using people's experiences to better understand those texts, rather than objectifying interviews, focus groups, and observations to generalise from specific people's experiences beyond their specific locale. This approach is closest to Smith's own expounding of IE, and it avoids Smith's key criticism of 'traditional sociology'; that 'traditional sociology' objectifies its subjects into texts, focusing on generalising from individuals rather than focusing on the pre-objectified ruling relations and institutions and how things are organised through texts. In addition, the focus on primary texts ensures that the reader can better 'check' the work of the researcher, destabilising the researcher's privileged position as expert, which I will discuss more in Chapter 2.

What is interesting about the text-focused IE approach is that some of these contributions do not necessarily call their work IE research, or may not identify as IE researchers, and instead they use Smith's ideas because they find her discussions useful in informing their own research. Some do explicitly identify themselves as IE researchers, many of whom have an active involvement in the institutional IE organisations, or are connected to Smith and constituting part of an inside group of 'IEers'.¹⁸

In the two most recent collections edited by Smith and her co-editors (Smith & Turner, 2014a; Griffith & Smith, 2014), text-focused IE studies are divided up into more specific sub-sections regarding method or focus. These include, for example, examinations

¹⁸ Jennifer Peet (2014: 110) discusses her attendance at an SSSP IE workshop in 2011 in which people referred to themselves as 'IEers'. She also comments that many people focused primarily on interview based data and that purely text-based IE studies were not prominent amongst those in attendance. Thus, the term seems to connote a dedication to IE and Smith's work rather than a particular approach as outlined in my typology.

of boss texts (such as policy documents and subsequent discourses around 'legitimacy') and how they set up accountability circuits (for example, Campbell, 2014; Eastwood, 2014). Another key focus is on how front-line workers negotiate fitting their work into institutional categories in order to be institutionally recognisable (for example, Kerr, 2014; Rankin & Tate, 2014; Corman & Melon, 2014; DeVault, Venkatesh & Ridzi, 2014; Rankin & Campbell, 2014). In addition, these studies include the negotiation of textually-mediated discourses that determine what is seen as legitimate work, what is not seen as work, thus setting up systems of value (for example, Wright, 2014).

As McCoy (2006) discusses, IE investigations usually happen in two stages, in which the researcher works back and forth between: (i) discussions with people to understand the field and direct the research, helping to identify active texts; (ii) mapping institutional texts, connecting them into sequences. As the project develops, the researcher then informs their reading of texts by explicitly discussing those texts with individuals who use them, whilst keeping their gaze on the institutional level rather than individuals.

This first step here involves developing work knowledges or institutional literacies in order to better understand how to read and fit together texts and people's work into sequences. McCoy for instance discusses how to use interview data while keeping a focus on the institutional, arguing that individuals and their experiences must be located "within a complex institutional field" (McCoy, 2006: 113). The second step, mapping, is shown in Turner (2006) focusing on local land development processes and decisions, beginning from her interest as a resident near a plot of land which was going to be developed. She articulates that IE mapping involves producing "an account of the day-to-day text-based work and local discourse practices that produce and shape the dynamic ongoing activities of an institution" (Turner, 2006: 139). She emphasises that the texts must be situated in action and seen as occurring in particular moments, which might be seen as routine reading and writing by those involved, but which are central to their coordinative power, focusing on how a text is "produced, circulated, and read, and where it has consequences in time and space" (Turner, 2006: 140).

As already explained, Turner's work is endorsed as the method of IE mapping by Smith, and provides a much clearer articulation of how to do text-focused IE mapping. However, Eastwood (2006: 187) comments that it was difficult to use this approach in her research on UN texts because the usages of the texts were too varied and therefore she

focused on the production of texts. Turner's (2006) work focused on a formalised and confined process, which she was able to map in its entirety, highlighting that it depends not just on access, but also the scale of the institutional processes under investigation. It may often be unfeasible to do a 'full' process map as Turner has done, but instead to focus on particular parts as Eastwood has done. Indeed, the fluidity of Smith's conceptualisation of institutions and the ruling relations means that there is no clear end to the mapping of institutional processes because they end up blurring into others and engaging with broader discourses and regulatory texts.

What is interesting is that despite the prevalence of mapping in discussions of IE, most IE studies that I surveyed did not explicitly provide visual representations of their research or specify their mapping processes and methods. For example, Campbell & Gregor (2002) provide a useful short guide to doing IE research called *Mapping Social Relations*, in which they make little explicit reference to mapping or maps and do not discuss maps as a specific method of data collection, analysis, or presentation of data. It is instead used as a general metaphor for what IE researchers do – explore social relations and explain how they work, thus providing a guide for people to use when navigating a complex social world (Campbell & Gregor, 2002: 61). While Campbell & Gregor's book is a useful and accessible overview of IE as an approach, it does not provide clear method suggestions or explanations of what to do with texts; reading and interpretation are a 'black box' and thus this part of research is unclear and must be taken on trust in the researcher. There seems to be an implicit belief that there is a factual interpretation of each text that can be got at by the researcher, rather than acknowledging the more complex understanding of text posited by Smith and the possibility of multiple interpretations and usages that might be deemed correct or might work within the institutional context.

However, most IE researchers do not focus their gaze solely on texts, and many studies are what I call IE-light; they focus on textually-mediated institutional processes using a mixture of primary texts and researcher-generated texts from observations, focus groups, and interviews (Bannerji, 1995; Manicom, 1995; Khayatt, 1995; Jackson, 1995; McCoy, 1995; Campbell, 1995; Turner, 1995; Pence & Smith, 2004; Wilson & Pence, 2006; Brown, 2006; Adams, 2009; MacLennan, 2010; Murray, 2011; Lund, 2012; Lund, 2015). This research does not focus on the institutions and already objectified ideas in texts, but instead looks at subjects, and in doing so objectifies their accounts and/or the researcher's

account of them into data for analysis. This falls foul of Smith's key criticism of 'traditional sociology'; that individuals' experiences should not be objectified by the researcher into texts from which to generalise as this focuses on specific locales rather than getting at the institutional or ruling relations embedded in texts.

It is also worth pointing out that a number of Smith's own studies do not have a text-focused approach. For example, *Mothering for Schooling* (Griffith & Smith, 2005) is an IE-light study, focusing on interview data and reflecting on Griffith & Smith's experiences as mothers to think through the school day as an organiser of mothering work. While the school day is presumably textualised somewhere – for example, in a particular school's written schedule and the connections it has to wider policy documents – but they do not explicitly discuss these texts but instead focus on interview-based accounts of mothering work. Thus, there is minimal textual analysis, with some critical discussion of academic texts and newspaper articles, but the method of textual analysis is unclear and not really explained. This is interesting because despite the persistent articulation of how central institutional texts are to the organisation of the social, Smith does not always follow through on this.

Some other IE-light approaches involve mixing Smith's concepts with other methodologies and approaches. For example, Wilson & Pence's (2006) research into the institutional processes surrounding domestic violence against Native American women in the US used an indigenous methodology alongside IE. This indigenous methodology specifies ethics and political commitments, which seems to lead to them primarily relying on interview data in order to provide an 'official' platform for the women's stories to be heard. Thus while the interviews contravene IE principles by objectifying people's accounts, these are explicitly done to fulfil a separate political purpose, alongside their exploration of the textually-mediated institutional processes. From this and other work, Pence has created an 'audit' approach, a simplified toolkit version of an IE-light approach to help researchers/activists outside the academy to highlight issues in institutional processes in order to change them (Pence & Smith, 2004). These sorts of methodological innovations are what Smith seemed keen to encourage when articulating that she did not wish for IE to become a methodological dogma.

The importance of providing a platform for the voices of participants is a key aspect of the third approach I have identified: political/activist ethnography. This originates with

the work of George W. Smith and emphasises the importance of doing explicitly political work that provides a platform for the voices of oppressed groups, e.g. gay men, alongside providing criticisms of institutions from their standpoint (Kinsman, 1995; De Montigny, 1995; G.W. Smith, 1998; Frampton et al., 2006). Whilst this political/activist ethnography is similar to other IE-light approaches in that it mixes analysis of primary texts and researcher generated texts, its explicitly political stance and emphasis on the traditionally oppressed and excluded standpoints has been significant. While political/activist ethnography is another version of IE-light, the name indicates a specific intellectual lineage from G.W. Smith and followers rather than just D. Smith, alongside the explicit political stance, which is often not as present in other IE studies.

The final approach I have identified is technically not IE at all, but rather a Smith-influenced exposé of 'invisible' work or of discourses that operate in the everyday. This approach uses traditional sociological methods to problematise the everyday world with little or no focus on texts, and usually involves doing either a traditional ethnography or uses Smith's work as a theory to apply to interview transcripts. In such research, the local is not explicitly linked to the workings of an institution or the ruling relations, and the research does not go beyond the local site because texts are not followed into the translocal. Rather, this is a sort of grounded theory approach which 'reads' for institutional traces in the local activities and talk of people through participation observation, interviews, and focus groups (e.g. Ueda, 1995; Diamond, 2006; Campbell, 2006; Weigt, 2006). This type of IE-influenced research provides a voice for people whose work is made invisible or is underappreciated by the institutions concerned, with many studies focusing on the caring professions such as nursing. However, by remaining at the first stage of IE research (McCoy, 2006) – discussions with informants – the informants' accounts are generalised from one locale and there is no exploration of other related sites or the translocal through mapping texts.

One example of this is Tim Diamond's (2006) work, in which he argues that IE almost always begins with participant observation, thus providing an explanation of where the researcher begins their project. However, he does not then explore texts and nor does he move beyond a single location, with the resulting work producing traditional ethnography rather than an institutional ethnography. However, Diamond (2006: 59) does raise some important questions about authorship, commenting that the IE researcher

should not be invisible in what they write, and that positionality needs to be acknowledged, one of the few acknowledgements of this issue by an IE researcher, although this is not developed. Another IE researcher to highlight this issue of researcher positionality is James Reid (2018), whereby he uses Bourdieu to explore the role of the researcher.

The major feature of IE and Smith's contribution in her ontology of the social is that while people's experiences are used as a beginning point for research, there is then an exploration of how texts organise people across different locales. The text acts as the manifestation of the institution and the bridge to elsewhere and elsewhen and, if this is ignored, it misses the crucial point of IE. Smith (2005: 220) argues that IE "aims to make visible the forms of ruling that are largely not observable from where we are", thereby extending people's understanding of how their work and lives are organised. If the researcher does not take the textual bridge to elsewhere and elsewhen, or show how texts assemble and coordinate people and their work, then the researcher is producing traditional and not IE research. As Smith (2005: 219) argues, generalisation is "an effect of the phenomenon of the ruling relations themselves", and so rather than generalise from particular people's experiences to other locales, the focus is on how social organisation is pre-objectified in institutional texts. Thus, Smith's conceptualisation of IE means that research should focus on primary texts as data, and uses people's accounts to understand how these texts are taken up and read in practice. However, the large majority of IE studies instead objectify their participants in an effort to provide voice for them and to justify their accounts of what happened (Khayatt, 1995; Jackson, 1995; McCoy, 1995; Campbell, 1995; Turner, 1995; G.W. Smith, 1998; Wagner, 2014; McCoy, 2014; Warren, 2014; Rankin & Campbell, 2014). While this is not 'bad', it does not constitute an IE project unless put into conversation with texts.

Smith emphasises that texts in research should not be used to "*illustrate* interpretations" (Smith, 1990b: 166), but rather to read through them in order to uncover how they organise and connect. Because the social organisation has already been objectified and embedded in texts, the researcher is provided with an entry point to the social, to the ruling relations, which can be read in the local site but extend beyond it. From this, the researcher can begin to follow the textual sequences and hierarchies that exist in the translocal sphere, the institutional and ruling relations. By visualising the social in Smith's ontology as a "web or cat's cradle of texts, stringing together and coordinating the

multiple local and particular sites” (Smith, 1990b: 167), the researcher can better see what she should be looking at, instead of gazing back at the people she is speaking with. However, when researchers find their gaze returning to people, rather than to the pre-objectified social relations found in texts and the ruling relations and institutions, then they need to re-direct their gaze to avoid the objectification of people. Smith’s criticism of researchers objectifying people in the research process has been a fundamental feature of her work from the beginning, indeed, much of her own research focuses on “naturally occurring texts that are constituent of or reflect on the social relations” (Smith, 1990b: 166), pre-dating her explicit centring of texts in the IE project (Smith, 2005; Smith & Turner, 2014a).

While there are many ways to realise the concepts and framework of IE, some approaches fall back into the traditional sociological vein that Smith has criticised. Smith may wish to avoid methodological dogma, but the term IE becomes less useful and confusing if it is used to describe everything from conventional interviewing and just listing Smith in the references to extensive mapping to textually-mediated processes. If researchers only conduct interviews, observations or focus groups without focusing on how different sites and people’s work are connected through pre-existing institutional text which organise people’s everyday lives, then I argue that this does not constitute IE in a meaningful sense. While some IE-light studies have provided platforms for oppressed groups’ ‘voices’ and a clearer understanding of how people are organised by institutions, other IE studies provide little more than the traditional sociological approaches that Smith critiqued at the beginning of her career. From this broad mix of IE and Smith-inspired research, it becomes clear that naming a piece of work as an IE study does little to guarantee the actually adopted approach.

Doing Text-Focused IE

In this chapter I have provided a broad overview of Smith’s work and of IE as an approach to research, focusing on three of its key features – standpoint, the ontology of the social, and texts - in order to take Smith’s ideas on her own terms and understand them before engaging with the reception and usage of them. While my discussion finished by

criticising the imprecise way in which some academics use the term IE, it is important to consider why this might be useful for the perpetuation of Smith's work and IE as an approach; namely, Smith wants her sociology to survive and has not tried to heavily control the usage of IE. In her speech after receiving an Honorary Degree from Edinburgh, Smith (2014a) explained that she wanted IE to become established but recognised that it did not fit into standard sociological frames very well and so there was a certain frailty to IE. However, she went on to say that IE was becoming established, through the establishment of a number of IE divisions in professional sociology organisations. During a closed IE workshop as part of these Honorary Degree celebrations, in response to a question about whether she disagreed with some uses of her work or would prefer not to be associated with them, Smith answered, yes, but that she had learnt that once that work is published, then people will do what they want with it and she cannot control this, nor does she express any major disagreements she may have. She also added that sometimes people's uses of IE have helped her rethink or develop certain elements of her work, sometimes to anticipate and avoid misinterpretations. This is not only interesting in terms of the development of Smith's work and the politics of knowledge production but also about the interpretation and usage of texts, which is centrally important to my analysis of UK HE texts in Part II.

My own use of IE to explore the organisation of UK academia as a feminist sociologist draws on the IE project as "both a form and critique of sociology" (Walby, 2005: 90), whereby Smith's work provides both an alternative sociology and an interesting reflection on sociology and the academy as an elite knowledge producing institution to analyse. My interests follow both these trajectories of her work, due to my focus on UK HE. I occupy a sort of double insider position; both inside the same social world in which there is no bird's eye view; and, specifically an insider in UK HE, the institution I am exploring from my position as a postgraduate PhD student and sociology tutor.

Having read widely and considered in detail both Smith's own work and also scholars who have taken up and used her work in different ways, my main concern is that Smith and almost all IE researchers do not clearly explain their methods of reading and analysing texts, which precludes replication of those methods and inhibits an effective assessment of the approach. For example, in her analysis of 'Femininity as Discourse', Smith (1990b) seems almost randomly to choose different texts to illustrate her argument. Her

examples are feminist work, historical texts, magazines, and romantic fiction; these are a hodgepodge of textual snippets without any explanation of why she chose them and how she went about analysing them. When I set out to do my Masters dissertation, an IE study of feminist activism in Belfast, I found it difficult to work out how exactly to put Smith's ideas into practice because there were no clear explanations of methods of selecting, mapping and analysing texts. So a central question that I am left with even after exploring Smith's work and the reception and usages of her work is: how does one actually analyse texts in an IE study? And how should my position as researcher be considered in such an analysis?

However, I am certain after this extensive discussion that a text-focused IE approach is the most useful for my project, as this will involve having a firm focus on texts which is appropriate for my work for four main reasons.

Firstly, a focus on texts and textually-mediated ruling relations will allow me to explore the institutional realm beyond the local, extending my project without making theoretical or generalising jumps from what I immediately experience or hear about. Texts provide the bridge between different locales, so by exploring how they are taken up by different people in different locales, I can begin to see what remains the same, and thus how texts organise across locales.

Secondly, texts are central to Smith's understanding of how ruling relations and power work in contemporary corporate capitalism: "Now we confront *objectifying* relations mediated by texts that stand over and against our local everyday worlds and lives and yet permeate, penetrate, and organise them." (Smith, & Turner, 2014b: 4). Replicable texts have a crucial organising power in these objectifying relations, which I want to explore in relation to UK HE.

Thirdly, I want to avoid objectifying informants and to situate myself firmly in the same world by avoiding writing up interviews or observations into texts in order to justify my claims or to falsely generalise from them. Rather, I want to focus on analysing and mapping pre-existing objectified social relations – texts - and use any discussions with other people or observations as a way to inform my reading and mapping rather than as bits of data to analyse.

Lastly, I wish to deprivilege myself as the researcher, by which I mean finding ways of allowing the reader to 'check' my interpretation of text, such as by using primary texts rather than focusing on researcher-produced texts such as fieldnotes and interview transcripts. By focusing on retrievable data (Stanley & Wise, 2006) - primary texts that I can link to or reproduce in the chapters following - my interpretation and conclusions can be more effectively evaluated by readers, who may come to alternative conclusions and challenge my interpretations. I will provide a more detailed exploration of being accountable and how this is an important consideration in feminist research in the next chapter, in which I will explore the important questions I am left with: once the IE researcher comes across institutional texts, the focal point of any text-focused IE study, then how best to organise the reading and mapping of these? And how to engage with the position of the researcher and the epistemological questions that have arisen in my exploration of Smith's work and IE?

Chapter 2 – Responsibilities of the Feminist Researcher: An Epistemological Journey

When asked to summarise my PhD topic, I have often responded: I do feminist sociology and I'm looking at UK higher education, specifically bureaucratic documents. Many people immediately ask me "so how does gender fit into that?" based on the assumption that feminist sociology means looking at gender, or specifically women, and thus it is unclear to them what connects these two elements of my research. If there is no specific focus on gender, is my research feminist? In Chapter 1, I stayed close to the work of Smith (1987; 1990a; 1990b; 1999; 2005; 2006b; Griffith & Smith, 2014; Smith & Turner, 2014a), so that I could provide an informed account of the development of IE on her own terms and a comprehensive overview of her work and some key IE literature. However, in doing so it often felt as if I had been 'institutionally captured', to use IE terminology, and thus it was difficult for me to mount substantive criticisms as I was fully immersed in the thinking, language and foci of IE. I began to realise that while I was using IE because it was intended to be a feminist sociology (Smith, 1987), Smith references surprisingly little feminist work, and so my overview of her work in Chapter 1 does not acknowledge the broad feminist academic context in which her work was generated and received. In addition, much contemporary IE research has very little, if any, focus on gender or women, nor is there any discussion of feminism or engagement with this aspect of Smith's work.

Now I will take a step back and engage with other feminist and critical approaches to sociological research in order to put perspective on and develop my text-focused IE approach. This chapter will provide an intellectual journey regarding key scholars whose work helped me assess whether or not IE is inherently feminist and work out how to do text-focused IE in a feminist way. This chapter is not a literature review of feminist epistemology or feminist research discussions, but rather an intellectual biography to show how various feminist and other critical scholars helped me answer the two questions I was

left with in the previous chapter: how to engage with the position of the researcher in a text-focused study; and how to actually read and map texts in a text-focused IE study. What underlies both of these questions is the question of how to put feminist principles into practice in research. I argue that feminist research is centrally concerned with power dynamics and politics in the research process, with discussions often focusing on reflexivity and accountability. However, many of these discussions focus on research that involves participants in interviews, focus groups, fieldwork, and specifically is concerned with how to negotiate power imbalance, representation and participant involvement in the research process. In a direct sense much of this is not applicable to my text-focused research, in which there are no participants 'answering back' and so the focus must be on addressing accountability and the power dynamics between researchers and readers in order to challenge the epistemological privilege of the researcher.

I began by reflecting on two key collections of contemporary IE research which demonstrate the depoliticisation of IE and a disengagement with the roots of IE as an alternative feminist sociology: one of Smith's most recent edited collections – *Under New Public Management* (Griffith & Smith, 2014) – and the most recent journal special issue focusing on IE studies (Luken & Vaughan, 2015; see also Breimo, 2015; Braimoh, 2015; Welsh, 2015; Williams & Rankin, 2015; Watt, 2015; Waters, 2015). Then I provide a brief discussion of what I consider feminist research to entail, before discussing how to put this into practice as a feminist text-focused IE approach in Part II.

Griffith & Smith's (2014) *Under New Public Management* is one of two edited collections of IE studies involving Smith as editor. Although interesting in elucidating issues of new public management in various public sector organisations, there is virtually no trace of the feminist sociology Smith originally set out to create through IE. There is no explicit focus on women or gender and there is very little articulation of the politics or ethics of research, although that seems implicit in some of the studies. Naomi Nichols (in her section of Janz et al., 2014: 212-223) explicitly uses standpoint and critically reflects on her role as the researcher and the politics of this position in her research with homeless youth. However, this engagement with the politics of research and use of standpoint is a short section of one chapter and is the exception in this collection.

Largely, *Under New Public Management* provides little reflection on the differential impact of new public management or other textually mediated institutional processes on

particular groups. For example, while there are a lot of studies focusing on 'caring professions' such as nursing and teaching, there is no engagement with the gendered nature of such work, particularly that it is often women-dominated and viewed as stereotypically or characteristically 'feminine'. Nor are discussions of invisible work connected to broader feminist discussions about the 'triple shift' or undervaluing of feminised work.

The most recent journal special issue focusing on IE in the *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* introduces 'new scholarship' in IE, with Luken & Vaughan (2015) explicitly connecting this issue to the first IE special issue in the same journal in 2003, discussed in the last chapter. Luken & Vaughan (2015: 3) describe what IE is, but instead of discussing women's standpoint or its feminist origins, they gloss over this in stating that Smith's alternative sociology "begins from the standpoint of the experiences of particular, active subjects and sets out to discover and describe the social relations shaping those experiences". The shift in language around standpoint, from women to people, means that these political feminist roots are erased unless explicitly brought up by the researcher themselves – it has become an optional element rather than integral to the approach.

Many of the articles in this special issue focus on the 'ruling relations' and take a critical role regarding institutions, some engaging with broader discussions of 'new public management' and implicitly anti-capitalist or anti-bureaucratic critiques, but the political edge is more muted and produces a detailed but apolitical critique of institutional processes. Luken & Vaughan (2015: 7) liken this special issue collection of articles to Griffith & Smith's (2014) edited collection on new public management and explain that these institutional practices "operate to exclude those who are already marginalized and in need of services" (Luken & Vaughan, 2015: 8). They go on to state that the articles included "suggest that these same standardization and accountability processes help organize class relations that transcend more familiar notions of race, class, and gender differences used in other methodological approaches" (Luken & Vaughan, 2015: 8). This class-first approach ignores the intersecting nature of other structural identities and does not acknowledge that institutions might appear to standardise but that the actual operation and translation of such categories work differently for differently situated individuals. The organisation in texts is different from the experience of such organisations by people, something that does not appear to be appreciated by Luken & Vaughan.

Many of the contributions do focus on topics which could be described as feminist, even though none of the authors explicitly discuss their own politics or the political nature of such research. Contributions from both Watt (2015) and Welsh (2015) focus specifically on women and constructions of motherhood/parenthood, while Braimoh (2015) focuses on young people and their access to social service support. Both Welsh (2015) and Braimoh (2015) work with organisations and carry out interviews with marginalised people and make some acknowledgement of intersecting identities as part of how institutions differently treat people and erases certain experiences, which they do by putting their participants' experiences in conversation with institutional practices. Watt (2015) begins with her own experience and puts this into conversation with textually-mediated schooling policies, highlighting parenting work required by school support policies for diabetic children. Thus, while they make effort to begin in experience and engage with marginalised peoples' experiences, there is little acknowledgement or reflection on these practices as political and/or specifically feminist ones.

However, other contributions have no specific focus on women or gender and other intersecting identities, even if they are focusing on marginalised people. For example Williams & Rankin (2015) reflect on reconstruction of the tsunami hit areas of Thailand, and Breimo (2015) focuses on Norwegian rehabilitation processes. Both analyse how institutional practices and ruling relations impact on marginalised people's experiences, but there is little engagement with intersecting identities or much engagement with reflexivity in practice. Breimo (2015) also acknowledges having no lived experience or background in rehabilitation but does not explain how this actually impacted the research – it is just an abstract statement of positionality. There is little engagement with positionality in Williams & Rankin's (2015) discussion, despite this clearly affecting their understanding of the field and their initial inability to find texts to analyse. They very briefly consider how their Western lens narrowly focused them on bureaucratic documents and textually-mediated processes that were not immediately apparent in this context. However, they frame this as an issue with applying IE to a new context, rather than acknowledging that they initially lacked sufficient insider knowledge to identify the appropriate texts.

What is lacking in most of these IE accounts is an engagement with reflexivity and the politics and ethics of research. Rather than explicitly stating political positions, specifically the feminist root of IE and the feminist imperative to use women's experience

as the basis of feminist research, these recent IE accounts have shifted from a feminist standpoint to a depoliticised people's standpoint and a more general sociological approach to texts and institutions. Reflexivity has never been a central part of IE, but at least with standpoint there was an engagement with structural inequality and the differential positioning of people by institutions. In addition, the lack of reflection on the positionality of the researcher in IE research more broadly, as mentioned in the previous chapter and acknowledged by Diamond (2006) and Reid (2018), brackets the important feminist concern with how the researcher influences the research through her role as the chooser, reader, and writer of texts.

This connects to the ethics of feminist knowledge production, as discussed by Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1994) who explicitly challenges Dorothy Smith's lack of engagement with her researcher position. Addelson argues that Smith's (1987) standpoint is rooted in a historic moment of feminist women first entering the academy and challenging 'malestream' academia and thus provided an oppositional or liberatory approach committed to the women's movement at the time. Addelson goes on to argue that feminist academics of the day often had a sense of responsibility and connection to 'the movement', but that things have shifted with the increasing representation of feminist women in higher education and other professions. This picks up on Connell's (1992) questioning of who the research is for beyond the academic, but Addelson explores the point in more detail beyond suggesting participatory action research as the answer. Thus, the question is: how can contemporary feminist researchers be responsible knowledge producers and who will hold them accountable?

Whilst Addelson (1994) agrees with much of Smith's feminist standpoint thinking, she suggests Smith does not sufficiently discuss her position as a professional, as a knowledge producer in academia, an institution, and the privilege this brings. She argues that Smith's position is a sort of professional ethics approach rather than challenging the epistemic privilege of the researcher, largely because she does not see knowledge production as an everyday activity but as a professional endeavour that involves certain professional languages, methods, skills and so on that only some people have. This creates an access issue to the position of the "authoritative knowledge makers" (Addelson, 1994: 182), namely, can ordinary people do IE research?

Whilst Addelson (1994), Letherby (2003) and others have focused on the disparity of privilege between researchers and everyone else in terms of access to information, time, money, credentials and resources to do research and legitimise knowledge claims, this is not something that can be easily solved by the doing of specific research projects. Stanley & Wise (1983; 2006) instead focus on changing the conventions concerning the reader and their position so they can better evaluate the claims that researchers make, thus identifying methods of challenging researcher privilege within a research project. A lack of time, money, and institutional resources on the reader's part are important, but so too is the way in which the conventional research accounts hinder or prevent detailed evaluation. Stanley & Wise (1983; 2006) argue that by giving the reader as much information as possible to make up their own mind, the possibility then exists for a reader to challenge, reject, or accept a research claim; thus, readers should be taken as seriously as participants and given as much information as possible about how the researcher has come to know what they claim. Stanley & Wise (2006) comment that there is no reason why 'ordinary women' cannot do Institutional Ethnography too, and many IE researchers, most notably Campbell & Gregor (2002) and Pence (2004), provide methodological instructions for practitioners and activists to conduct IE studies outside academia.

The researcher is both a reader and writer of texts in a text-focused IE study, but when these practices are not clearly explained or explicated in such studies it renders these activities invisible and erases the work of the researcher from the research account. This is particularly important to make visible when embarking upon an IE project because, as Jennifer Peet (2014) discusses, many IE studies (those she calls 'common IEs' and I call 'IE-light') ignore the position of the researcher, particularly in the mapping process. This erases much of the work done and eclipses things that would make the researcher more accountable to the reader. It is particularly interesting to consider that Smith's own expanded notion of work - "anything done by people that takes time and effort, that they mean to do, that is done under definite conditions and with whatever means and tools, and that they may have to think about. It means much more than what is done on the job" (Smith, 2005: 152) - is intended to recognise the invisible work done by women and other marginalised peoples which is not reflected in textual realities. This broad definition of work has been useful to my thinking about UK HE as an institution and the work underlying institutional texts, but it also highlights the work done by the researcher in knowledge-production. However, Smith and other IE researchers do not apply this idea explicitly or

even implicitly to the role of the IE researcher, which is an odd and rather revealing omission.

What Constitutes Feminist Research?

Much like definitions of feminism, definitions of feminist research are varied and much disputed. While much feminist research focuses on women, gender, and sexism as topics of research, alone this is insufficient to constitute feminist research. As intersectional feminist approaches argue, single-axis engagements with oppression that consider gender in isolation from race, class, sexuality, disability, nationality and citizenship, and so on, erase difference and do not reflect the nuanced complexity of people's lives (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2008 [1990]; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2011; Lutz et al., 2011). And so feminist researchers need to be specific about *which* women (and men and non-binary people) they are basing research on, which perhaps necessitates a shift from women or gender-specific research to a more general engagement with structural inequality, power, and justice for oppressed groups. However, this is also insufficient; researchers may identify as feminists and choose to research some aspect of structural inequality, but not put feminist principles into practice in their actual approach to research and knowledge production. Letherby (2003: 4) argues that feminism is both theory and practice, or praxis, and thus there has to be some consideration of *how* research is done that makes it feminist, not just who does it (a feminist) and who (oppressed peoples) or what they research (feminist topics).

Two key political imperatives of feminist research have been to do research on women and to reposition women as legitimate knowers and knowledge producers, due to the historical exclusion of women from mainstream knowledge production. As discussed in the previous chapter, Smith's (1987) initial articulation of IE is as a feminist alternative sociology challenged this lack of representation, highlighting that women's experiences of the world were systematically ignored, excluded, and glossed over by 'malestream' academia. Many feminists, such as Ramazanoğlu & Holland (2002: 25-39) also highlight the important legacy of the Enlightenment in constructing men as rational knowers and women as irrational, thus not legitimate knowers. One of the roots of this critique is the feminist challenge to Cartesian dualisms – such as mind/body, culture/nature, male/female,

rational/irrational, objective/subjective – which encourage binary thinking and disconnect the knower or the subject (who is assumed to be a white Western man) from the object of research (which is assumed to exist independently of the knower).

Ramazanoğlu & Holland (2002: 37) argue that the Enlightenment discourse on a rational knower producing objective knowledge is actually “the imperial, western male masquerading as humanity, and transforms the ‘rational’ male into an emotional patriarch defending his illegitimate privileges”. As this quote highlights, the ‘rational man’ idea does not just exclude women, but also non-elite men, such as indigenous and racialised men. Hence indigenous researchers, scholars of the Global South, and scholars of colour also call for a transformation of Western knowledge production. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) *Decolonizing Methodologies*, for example, provides an explanation of how Western research and Enlightenment ideas were central to European imperialism and colonialism. In particular, the misrepresentation of indigenous peoples was central to the justifying of imperial and colonial genocides, with ‘science’ providing the ‘evidence’ upon which decisions were made about who was considered human or not, rational or not.

This highlights a third imperative of feminist research: to challenge the belief that knowledge production is a neutral and objective process and that the researcher is a privileged knower. As Haraway (1988) argues, there is no ‘view from nowhere’ from which to do detached and neutral knowledge production, and so instead we must acknowledge the situated and partial nature of knowledge production. A feminist approach to research cannot just add women and stir, but rather must fundamentally challenge the presumption of an objective, detached researcher whose epistemic privilege is unable to be challenged by those he researches.

Narayan (2004: 219) emphasises the importance of this point from a non-Western perspective, arguing that some Western feminists might challenge the dominance of elite men in knowledge production but still assume universality for their feminist perspective and so participate in “the dominance that western culture has exercised over nonwestern culture”. Such an approach reproduces the epistemic privilege of the researcher rather than challenges it, for example, the argument for a form of feminist ‘successor science’ from some, such as Sandra Harding (1993). And so I instead argue that feminist approaches to research should follow Stanley & Wise’s (1997) advocacy of accountable knowledge production which does not aim for generalised truth or objectivity, but maintains an

openness to alternatives and the acknowledgement of the partiality and situatedness of research claims.

And so, while attempts to rectify the historic exclusion of women and other oppressed people from knowledge production is central to feminist research, this is but one part. The topic of research is less important than a more general commitment to feminist moral and ethical principles and working out how to put these into practice in research. In particular, feminist researchers are attuned to the politics of knowledge production, specifically the power dynamics between researchers and researched, alongside issues of ethics, particularly around representation. These concerns are often discussed in terms of reflexivity and accountability, which I will look at in more depth as they are centrally important to many feminist research practices.

Reflexivity is centrally concerned with “the relationship between the *process* and the *product*” because “*knowing* and *doing* are intimately related” and thus what one does as a researcher and how one does it affects the data produced (Letherby, 2003: 3). How we do research, including the frameworks we use to think about our research, alongside who we are and our beliefs, all influence the data we produce and our analysis, thus influencing the resulting knowledge. Mauthner & Doucet (2003) distinguish two strains of reflexivity discussions amongst feminists: the researcher-researched relationship; and, epistemology and theory. While the previous chapter and this one articulate my epistemological and theoretical positions, the researcher-researched relationship is something I have not explicitly discussed yet. While many contemporary IE studies ignore the importance of the positionality of the researcher, necessitating this reflection on the role of the researcher, there is also the danger of going too far the other way, and becoming self-absorbed or deterministic about how positionality affects the research, which I will explore in this section.

The relationship between the researcher and the researched is often discussed in terms of the dynamic between participants and researchers, for example, the feminist negotiation in an interview setting might engage with emotions and rapport between interviewer and interviewee alongside negotiations of the interviewer/interviewee power dynamic (Hesse-Biber, 2006). Reflecting on the influence of political beliefs, interpersonal dynamic, power imbalance, and the possibility of shared (or not) identities and experiences, acknowledges the importance of these elements of researcher-researched dynamics.

Sometimes sharing identity categories or political beliefs can help gain access to certain groups alongside helping to establish trust and rapport.

For example, when I did my Master's dissertation piloting a text-focused IE approach in exploring feminist activism in Belfast (Murray, 2013), I conducted some observations and interviews to develop my work knowledges of the contemporary feminist activist scene in the city. I shared many identity categories with my participants (gender, race and often sexuality and class) alongside also being from Belfast and identifying as a feminist, which meant that I found it easy to gain access to feminist circles and developed good rapport with some of the activists. In addition, my having a lived experience-based understanding of the broader socio-political context was helpful to contextualise my observations, interviews, and reading of texts. My engagement with reflexivity at the point of doing my Masters research was a much more confessional and abstract understanding of how the researcher's identity affects the research process. I presumed that researching a topic to which I had personal connection and having 'similar' identities to my participants would produce 'better' research, because I could avoid issues of misrepresentation and my knowledge claims would have the added legitimacy of my experience-based knowledge. However, this did not mean that I was exempt from being reflexive or accountable for my knowledge claims, nor did this mean I was 'the same' as my participants. This highlights a centrally important tension in how to apply feminist ideas of experience-based knowledge and positionality to research, and how to reflect on the importance of researcher's identity vis-à-vis those she researches with or for, which I will go on to explore further. And, as my text-based research involves no clear participants, my engagement with this discussion must focus on the dynamic between me and the reader of my research. Thus, my focus is on my positionality and how open, analytically reflexive, and accountable I am to the readers throughout the writing of this thesis.

The negotiation of feminist researcher positionality is a thorny and emotive issue because of the imperative to acknowledge experience-based knowledge and the importance of representation for oppressed people who have been historically excluded from academic research. For example, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) discusses the importance for Maori and other indigenous peoples to take control of production of knowledge about themselves, given the history of researchers misrepresenting them. She argues that this does not preclude non-indigenous researchers from doing research on indigenous peoples,

but rather this heavy history and the politics of knowledge production should be taken into consideration when working out whether one is an appropriate researcher for a particular project and how one's positionality will help or hinder doing effective research. Narayan (2004: 220) also discusses this point, arguing that "Our commitment to the contextual nature of knowledge does not require us to claim that those who do not inhabit these contexts can never have any knowledge of them. But this commitment does permit us to argue that it is *easier* and *more likely for* the oppressed to have critical insights into the conditions of their own oppression than it is for those who live outside these structures".

Such reminders of the politics and history of knowledge production can sometimes be interpreted as an imperative for more privileged researchers to avoid researching topics that they have no lived experience of. An example of this is provided in Jennifer Peet's (2014) thesis, which is a text-focused IE study of 'The Stolen Generation' of Aboriginal children in Australia. Peet (2014: 114-116) provides an account of attending an IE workshop in which a 'seasoned IEer' criticises her choice of research topic on the basis of her identity. Peet (2014: 115) recounts that this researcher "was 'disturbed' that I was investigating the documents of the child removal history narratives when I did not have any immediate connection to them or Australia (although apart from being Australian, her own connections seem equally removed)". This idea that researchers should not research certain topics is rooted in important discussions about misrepresentation, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) discussion of how colonial researchers' inaccurate portrayal of indigenous peoples was used to justify the dehumanising elements of imperialism. However, concerns about misrepresentation are not overcome by only doing research about 'people like us'.

The fundamental assumption that underlies the logic of abstract identity-based critiques of research is that lived experience of structural inequality means someone is a more legitimate knower of issues of inequality and injustice. Therefore in my Master's I thought it was more legitimate for me to research 'people like me', because I cannot and should not represent people or explore issues outside of my experiential knowledge and identity categories. However, this understanding of identity and structural inequality is insufficient for it assumes identity to be the uncomplicated basis of knowledge and treats reflexivity as abstract. Identity is intersectional, situated and relational and therefore one cannot simply 'confess' privileged identities and use oppression as the basis for knowledge

production, especially if the impact of position is not considered in practical terms. Andrea Smith (2013) helpfully discusses the tendency to confess one's privileges in activist spaces, arguing that confessional statements do not, in and of themselves, challenge structural inequality but rather set up a dynamic of confessor and absolver in which those with more privilege ask for forgiveness from those with less privilege. I think this can be usefully applied to my understanding of being reflexive about my positionality in my Master's research, in which my underlying logic was to forefront my shared oppressed identities as a legitimising of my claims, and confess my privileges.

In addition, identity is so complicated that having 'the same' position as one's participants becomes difficult or impossible. As previously argued, using women's experience as a legitimate basis for knowledge production cannot be done solely through the single-axis of gender. But as Raju (2002) observes, even if two people with exactly the same positionality represented 'their group', they might focus on different things and come to different conclusions. Hence the experience and impact of intersecting identity is not constant and fixed, but rather different identities may come to the fore differently depending on time, place, and relationships, alongside being cross-cut with people's ideological beliefs. In research, considering how one's positionality affects the process is also considered alongside epistemological or theoretical framings, which add further considerations. Thus, epistemological questions around how best to represent a group or justify knowledge claims do not disappear if the researcher is a member of the group under discussion, and this does not automatically give the researcher more legitimacy without thinking through how such identities affect the research encounter and knowledge-production process in practice.

A final important point on this topic of identity is about the epistemological privileging of oppressed perspectives and whether or not those without certain experiences can understand other's experiences. While I have made very clear the importance of acknowledging and rectifying historic exclusion of oppressed people as knowledge productions, this does not mean that I think oppressed peoples' standpoints are more real, should be epistemologically privileged, or are impossible to understand by those who have not experienced such positions. I do not agree with the call for a 'strong objectivity' kind of feminist standpoint (Harding, 1993) as this has foundationalist underpinnings which sees truth as independent of the knower and advocates a successor science based on the

experiences of oppressed people. This gives oppressed people's experiences an epistemic privilege, seeing some experiences as more real than others, rather than less represented or less legitimised in dominant knowledge frameworks. I make this explicit because this is a very emotive discussion and a question that I grappled with at the beginning of my thesis, which contributed to my attempt to do an abstract confessional form of reflexivity. It also picks up discussions about standpoint that I explored in the last chapter.

In the more complex feminist standpoint approach of IE, rather than assuming an essentialist similarity between those who identify as members of a category, the focus is on these groups being socially constructed but with very 'real' consequences because of how such categories are positioned. It focuses on the shared experiences of people in relation to institutions and how they are differently or similarly positioned within categories. In particular, IE can acknowledge that people do not experience oppression in the same way but still focus on the collective experiences of oppression because institutions position and respond to different groups of people differently. Letherby (2003: 57) points out that as well as acknowledging difference and challenging the idea of an objective reality, feminist research should also recognise that "there is a common material reality that all women share which is characterised by inequality, exploitation and oppression, but women are not all oppressed in the same way". This follows Stanley and Wise's emphasis on experience as "ontologically fractured and complex" (Stanley & Wise, 1990: 22).

While there are important ethical and political questions about representation, these are different from whether or not someone's identity can be used as an indicator of the validity of their research. For example, a white male researcher might be criticised on the ground that as a white man he cannot understand racism and sexism. However, this is not that he is unable to see racism and sexism, but rather that because he does not experience racism and sexism he is less likely to notice incidents of racism and sexism and cannot understand it 'from the inside'. If he is researching these topics and is using a feminist and anti-racist framework he might notice racism and sexism more, but he will still not have lived experience of them. Thus, when researchers are criticised for not being able to 'understand' certain elements of structural inequality, it is their lack of experiential knowledge alongside the (often unexamined) framework through which they view the world that is of issue. And as Narayan (2004: 220) highlights, 'sympathetic' researchers who wish to understand the complexity of being oppressed, but do not experience that form of

oppression themselves, have to be open to the possibility of a failure to understand. While this is relevant for all research, it is emotionally charged regarding oppressed groups being researched by more privileged researchers because of legacies of exclusion, erasure, and misrepresentation in research.

An alternative way to engage with the politics of representation and power dynamics, including in my text-focused research, is by considering the politics of citation. This is a part of the discussions in southern theory (Connell, 2007; 2013; 2017) and epistemologies of the Global South (Santos, 2013), concerning who academics cite and the epistemological frameworks involved. Sara Ahmed (2017: 15-16) discusses citation as “feminist memory” and explains her decision not to cite any white men in her most recent book as a way to challenge the conflation of the history of ideas with canonical white men who have dominated knowledge producing institutions. While not taking such a strict policy here, I am trying to move beyond legitimising my work through referencing the ‘big boys’ of sociology theory.

The bottom line is that researchers should critically reflect on *how* their lived experiences contribute to understanding their research topics and affect their interactions with participants, considering what advantages and disadvantages this brings to their research and understanding. This should be an ongoing applied process rather than abstract assumption based solely on identity categories.

Therefore I want to move away from ‘confessional’ personal reflexivity and instead think about reflexivity in terms of my impact on the knowledge produced, in the context of the power dynamics at work in legitimising academic research and positioning the researcher as an ‘expert’. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) and Plummer (2001), among many others, provide a more holistic understanding of reflexivity, conceptualising it as an ongoing process of reflecting on oneself as a researcher and the context in which knowledge is produced. This is not limited to a particular researcher’s project but is part of being a sociologist and is something that should develop over an entire career, and also it should underlie the entire process rather than being just a tick-box or disclaimer at the start.

Gouldner’s (1971) much earlier discussion of what a reflexive sociology would look like takes up this point. He argues for a holistic approach to reflexivity as “a conception of how to live and a total praxis” (Gouldner, 1971: 504), which is similar to the conceptualisation of reflexivity by Smith (1987) and Stanley & Wise (1993), as remarked by

Hollands & Stanley (2009: 2.5): a “much more social and shared ... [an] inter-personal and interactional notion of reflexivity”. Gouldner advocates a reflexive sociology that acknowledges the limitations of the researcher’s efforts to self-critique and ‘being reflexive’, emphasising the social and interactive elements involved. The reflexive sociologist for Gouldner changes how she lives, focusing on developing a self-awareness of herself and her experiences and by extension her place and engagement in the social world she is a part of. Alongside this, by engaging with the political role of the sociologist in the social world, the sociologist seeks to transform herself and the world in line with her particular values.

Similarly, Hesse-Biber & Piatelli’s (2014: 5) view of holistic reflexivity encourages a process which “exposes the exercise of power throughout the *entire* research process”, including elements such as interpretation and writing. They go on to argue that this “questions the authority of knowledge and opens up the possibility for negotiating knowledge claims and introducing counter-hegemonic narratives, as well as holding researchers accountable to those with whom they research” (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2014: 5). This importance of being held accountable is also highlighted by Ramazanoğlu & Holland (2002), who argue that critical self-reflection is always limited and so it needs to be a collective and contested process.

By acknowledging the limits of self-critique, these more holistic understandings of reflexivity also highlight the importance of accountability, which is centrally concerned with challenging the privileged position of the academic researcher as a ‘legitimate expert’. Researchers do not exist on a different analytical plane to other people, but rather have privileged access to legitimising tools (academic credentials, a particular theoretical and methodological language, and ‘scientific’ ways of writing that erase their presence) (L.T. Smith, 1999: 125). Some methods of researching and writing implicitly maintain epistemic privilege by providing no clear route for readers to challenge their knowledge claims, as I will go on to discuss. Challenging the researcher’s epistemic privilege should be a central part of a feminist project, otherwise academics will maintain a monopoly on producing ‘legitimate’ knowledge.

The work of Stanley & Wise has established an approach termed feminist fractured foundationalism (FFF), which aims to make ‘grounded generalisations’ of a ‘middle order theories’ kind rather than abstract Theory (Stanley & Wise, 2006). Stanley & Wise (2006:

2.6) propose that the researcher “rejects epistemological privilege ... [and instead] all knowledge-claims should be evaluated on their specific merits”. For FFF, this is achieved by doing research that centres on analytical reflexivity, in making available to the reader everything that went into the researcher coming to the conclusions they did. This includes providing retrievable data for the reader to be able to consider whether or not they agree with the researcher’s interpretations. This involves key data that the researcher uses to evidence their argument, as for example in Thomas & Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant* in which they provide readers with the text of many letters and also an entire life history (Stanley, 2010).

To provide accountability for readers and in this sense to engage in responsible knowledge-production, feminist researchers need to give up epistemic privilege and claiming a monopoly on producing knowledge. The claims made by researchers are “necessarily temporally, intellectually, politically and emotionally grounded and are thus as contextually specific as those of ‘the researched’” (Stanley & Wise, 1990: 23). This does not mean researchers cannot generalise or produce theory, but that this should be the kind of theory that is reflexive, open to revision, grounded in experience, and is not only the possession of academic feminists but an activity people can engage in when making sense of their lives.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Smith utilises Marx’s materialist conceptual framework in proposing an experience-based knowledge that acknowledges the situatedness of the researcher. However, Stanley & Wise challenge its assumption of the epistemic privilege of the researcher and foreground accountability in a way that Smith’s work and related IE studies are reluctant to. What Stanley (1990) initially calls ‘unalienated knowledge’ and then later ‘accountable knowledge’ (Stanley & Wise, 1997), provides a useful framework for thinking through epistemic privilege and the lack of engagement with this by Smith and many IE researchers. In discussing IE, Stanley & Wise (1990) point out that women (and men and non-binary people) are actively involved in constructing and interpreting the social relations of which they are a part, and that researchers are in, and of, this same social world. They also comment that, whilst Smith’s approach is based on women’s standpoint, she does not give women a privileged epistemological position as discussed in Chapter 1 when exploring Smith’s conceptualisation of standpoint.

Accountable knowledge in feminist terms explores the academic mode of production and acknowledges the situatedness or located position of the researcher; theory and analysis are considered everyday material activities rather than distinct and arcane; and 'what is known' is produced through activity (Stanley, 1990: 12). Thus, accountable knowledge "should account for the conditions of its own production" (Stanley, 1990: 13). Once having acknowledged that someone producing knowledge is situated in time and place and has particular beliefs and experiences, it follows that the interpretations arising from research are partial and therefore the reader should be able to evaluate and disagree where appropriate. Relatedly, Stanley has criticised the construction of 'facticity' in auto/biographical writings and encouraged auto/biographers to view their work as "one competing version among others" (Stanley, 1992: 9). Instead, their work should be accountable by providing readers with "as much of the evidence, and of different kinds, that they work from as possible, but also an account of what facts, opinions and interpretations they find preferable and why: their 'intellectual biography' for this period of time" (Stanley, 1992: 9-10). By spending so long detailing my understanding of Smith's work in Chapter 1, alongside discussions of reception and usage of her work, I am providing a clear intellectual biography and journey through ideas in this thesis.

Stanley (1997) has also explored the interconnections of methodology, observation, description, and explanation, and pointed out that description is often analytically ignored and presumed to be a literal description of what was observed. However, literal description is not possible, it is always partial and what is included and how it is included is centrally important to the knowledge produced. Description is in fact a 'gloss' (Sacks, 1992: 93) that summarises or glosses over aspects of the events being described as self-evident or irrelevant to explanation, and so the rationale for including some things and not others indicates a particular epistemological position or understanding of what is relevant. The explanation is already beginning in the description.

Listening to the voices of 'the oppressed' is important; including in higher education. However, such inclusion rarely challenges the researcher's epistemological privilege. In research based on interviewing, the use of quotations might be seen as providing voice to participants, but says more about the researcher in a number of aspects. Interview data is a co-constructed narrative, whereby the researcher will have asked questions or given prompts, and their presence and the dynamic of the interaction will have

affected the participant's responses. From this co-constructed narrative the researcher sometimes produces an entire transcript and sometimes just selected passages, a process involving many choices about what is relevant and to be included or excluded in the resulting transcript. From the result, quotations are chosen to illustrate or justify the researcher's argument in an article or thesis, and as a consequence are decontextualised from the flow of the interview itself. To refer to this as 'the participant's voice' is misleading because it underestimates the amount of interpretation and framing done by the researcher. Whilst the power relationship between the researcher and the researched is complex and not as unidirectional as often assumed, the researcher almost always has the final say over the writing-up and presentation of the work. This is very difficult to equalise, and even if something is co-written, in an academic context the academic researcher is still frequently put into an authoritative position over non-academic co-researchers (Bancroft et al., 2014: 149-150).

In my research, where there are no participants in the ordinary sense due to the focus on text analysis, the acknowledgement of how framing can be exclusionary is particularly important to consider; the importance of epistemology and theory to reflexivity. This is extensively discussed in decolonial or epistemologies of the South approaches, which highlight how powerful excluding certain frames can be. For example, the concepts of modernity and modernisation discourses pre-suppose the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others, alongside particular conceptualisations of history and society, as discussed by Comaroff & Comaroff (2012) and Bhabra (2014; 2016). Bhabra (2016: 962) argues that sociology as a discipline has understood history in a particular way, an "implicit consensus on the emergence of modernity and the related 'rise of the West', as well as around a stadial idea of progressive development and the privileging of Eurocentred histories". Comaroff & Comaroff (2012: 114) argue that from a Western perspective the Global South is positioned as outside modernity or as needing to 'catch-up', as being behind in a linear development model. This means that certain things cannot be seen within the framing of the discussion, and Comaroff & Comaroff (2012: 122) argue that this perspective does allow the nature of North-South relations to be 'seen'. Bhabra (2016: 963) compares this challenge to the Western-centric consensus as similar to the feminist project concerning knowledge production. Thus, framing is centrally important to understanding the inclusions and exclusions of a research project, as all projects are necessarily partial.

In short, accountable research involves: “(a) the provision of retrievable data; (b) the detailed specification of the analytic procedures involved; and (c) the in-depth discussion of the interpretive acts that produce ‘findings’ and ‘conclusions’.” (Stanley & Wise, 1997: 216). The idea of using retrievable data stems from ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. While Smith too draws on ethnomethodology, she does not discuss using retrievable data in her writings and nor is it in any related IE studies, including those with a text focus. An accountable piece of writing however needs to be ‘open’, being “capable of detailed analytic interrogation by readers” (Stanley & Wise, 1997: 216) and access to the data is a key part of this. It is important to note here that it is not just feminist research that wants to produce accountable knowledge, although these are particularly important considerations for feminist scholars.

While experience is a necessary element of accountable research, this does not mean the researcher must have personal involvement with their research topic, but that they should reflectively discuss how their experience informs their choices, interpretations and the focus and direction of research. The focal issue for me is not whether or not I can represent a particular group, more that my readers can hold me accountable for my research, around the three elements just noted: retrievable data; the analytic procedures involved; and the interpretive acts that produce ‘findings’ and ‘conclusions’. Intertwining Stanley and Stanley & Wise’s ideas about accountable knowledge with a text-focused IE approach provides the basis from which I can make defensible claims while eschewing epistemic privilege, because readers will be able to critically evaluate research claims and hold me accountable for these.

The aim of the holistically reflexive and accountable researcher, I conclude, should be to produce work that is analytically reflexive, open to revision and that will provide the reader with the means to understand how claims are made and what they are based on, so that they are able to disagree with and critique the researcher’s account. Stanley (1991: 211) comments that experience is already first-order theorised. Relatedly, because intersubjectivity is possible – we all share experiences and create theoretical descriptions for our own experiences through language – people routinely theorise from their experiences, and researchers inevitably draw on this ‘first order’ theory as part of producing ‘abstract’ Theory. What makes research different is that our everyday ways of knowing become systematised into methods. This is important to make clear because, as Ramazanoğlu &

Holland (2002: 2) argue, feminist knowledge is susceptible to claims that it is “unscientific, biased and lacking in authority”. Accountable feminist knowledge production, as I have laid it out here, provides a clear and systematic approach that does not require the detached and abstract Enlightenment objectivity feminists have critiqued, but still enables feminists to make responsibly authoritative claims.

How I Conduct Feminist Text-Focused IE

So far I have committed myself to taking a text-focused IE approach focusing on institutional texts from higher education in the UK. I have also committed myself to a particular holistic approach to reflexivity that goes beyond reflecting on my personal positionality and confessing structural privilege and oppression or taking identity categories as legitimisers of my claims. Instead, I reflect on the impact of my approach to research and specific methods on my claims and the knowledge produced. I have also committed to challenging the researcher’s epistemic privilege, primarily through considering the readers of my thesis as participants in the process and giving them as much information as possible to make up their own minds about my claims, so they can disagree and challenge me rather than having to trust my account. This involves making available to the reader what went into coming to my conclusions, including: retrievable data (the texts I analyse); providing a clear outline of my theoretical framework and methods; detailing my decision-making process throughout my research; explaining my process of interpreting and coming to my conclusions; and acknowledging the limitations of my research by clearly situating it and not arguing beyond the retrievable data. Part of this involves acknowledging the invisible work of the researcher and clearly outlining my methods of reading and writing.

In Dorothy Smith’s work, for example her well-known ‘Femininity as Discourse’ (Smith, 1990b: 159-208), her choice of texts and methods of reading and writing are not explicitly explained, leaving the reader unclear about how to do a similar study or how to query and disagree with particular decisions and interpretations. It produces a closed text similar to many traditional theoretical pieces of writing, despite the many quotations and work referred to, because the focus is on developing a tight argument rather than doing close reading and analysing *through* particular texts. However, in some chapters from *Texts*,

Facts, and Femininity (Smith, 1990b) and in *Writing the Social* (Smith, 1999), Smith provides clear techniques for IE text analysis. And throughout all her discussions, including those that show how texts were chosen and analysed, Smith's discussions of being an 'insider' in the social world that she is explaining helps situate herself as a researcher in the process, and thus implicitly as a reader and writer about the texts.

As discussed in relation to reflexivity, negotiating multiple intersecting identities is much more complex than often considered and so too is the idea of being an insider or an outsider. My standpoint as a researcher researching higher education is one of a double insider. Firstly, I am an insider in the more traditional sociological sense (Hodkinson, 2005), in the sense that I am already involved in the institution I wish to explore –UK HE – and occupy many different positions within it: student, researcher, tutor, trade union representative. I am also an insider in the IE sense – an “insider's materialism” (Smith, 1990b: 206) – as I am a part of the social world I am exploring rather than researching from some outside point and looking in with my 'god's eye' (Haraway, 1988). Both of these insider positions provide clear situated subject positions from which to start my research, working knowledges of the institution gained from my different positions within it, and an everyday understanding of how to read and negotiate the texts that I encounter. It also gives me an everyday access to many different people and sites of activity that continuously inform my research. At times this insider status feels like how C. Wright Mills describes sociology: “You do not really have to study a topic you are working on; for as I have said, once you are into it, it is everywhere” (Mills, 1959: 211): I go into my office to read and write PhD chapters, have lunch or coffee breaks with others from my department, do my teaching, and wander about the university campus, which presents innumerable observations and discussions. Indeed, in explaining my research to other people in academia, I get surprisingly frequent offers of help, with people asking if I can interview them for it, providing me with links to articles, and telling me about important news in the institution.

While this puts me in a good position to write an autoethnography, as I did for my undergraduate dissertation,¹⁹ the IE approach opens up more room for discovery beyond

¹⁹ This focused on the gendered and hierarchical valuation of different academic disciplines which used self-reflections, observations, and interviews with fellow undergraduate students at time, focusing primarily on astrophysicists and performance literature students who represented the 'hard' and 'soft' ends of a spectrum of value that heavily connects to notions of objectivity.

this immediate experience through the incorporation of institutional texts. Texts are key to understanding how local activities unfold and how people are institutionally organised, and act as a bridge into the textual aspects of the ruling relations. By exploring the already objectified textual realm of the ruling relations, I can make more comments about how UK HE is textually organised, even if this is taken up differently in each local site (Smith, 1990a; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2005; Griffith & Smith, 2014).

Some autoethnographic studies provide useful meditations on how to situate the researcher as a writer in the researcher text and usefully contribute to making visible the work of the researcher. Davis & Ellis (2008) discuss a spectrum of autoethnographic approaches, some focusing more on the individual self and a personal narrative, others being more ‘multi-vocal’ and decentering the researcher as the central focus, but all having some sense of including the ‘I’ in the sociological account. In a thematic issue on analytic autoethnography in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* Anderson (2006) contrasts ‘evocative or emotional autoethnography’ with what he calls ‘analytic autoethnography’, which he describes as involving five key elements: the researcher being part of the group they are studying; engaging in analytic reflexivity; acknowledging their position in their writing; engaging with others participants than the self; and, producing analysis relating to broader social phenomena. The central point for my thesis is Anderson’s (2006: 385) comment that “analytic ethnographers must avoid self-absorbed digression. They are also constrained from self-absorption by the ethnographic imperative of dialogic engagement with others in the social worlds they seek to understand”. This highlights an issue in autoethnographic or other self-focused reflexive approaches – some studies focus on the self in a way that can obscure rather than elucidate analytic points.

One of the responses to Anderson’s article from Ellis and Bochner (2006) illustrates this very issue. Ellis and Bochner’s article is written in a story-like way, a conversation between them about writing the article itself, which illustrates this very self-focused autoethnographic approach to writing that Anderson argues analytic autoethnography should not follow. While such a style can be effective as a stylistic device in autoethnographic writing, I found Ellis and Bochner’s (2006) approach detracted from the clarity of the article. Ellis & Boucher (2006) focus very firmly on themselves as the writers of the piece, however, other forms of autoethnography can strike more of a balance between

the experience and positioning of the researcher(s) and the voices of others, alongside the analytic point of such self-reflection.

Holmes (2010: 91) argues in relation to her own autoethnographic reflections that “much methodology oversimplifies, over-rationalizes and over-personalises the social relations it [reflexivity] involves”, and so, similar to Anderson (2006), encourages more attentiveness to analysis or analytic reflexivity, rather than focusing too much on the researcher’s experience and positioning. Holmes (2010) keeps the lens firmly on other people’s experiences, using her own experiences in a reflexive way to acknowledge how these might influence the research process. However, she also acknowledges the importance of reflexive accounts not only focusing on researchers themselves, but also on participants and transcribers who contribute to the co-construction of accounts.

Thus, embracing the insider status and visible presence of the researcher in the account involves a balancing act; to reflexively acknowledge the presence of the researcher and her positionality, but not become self-absorbed or tangential. One example of using autoethnographic reflection in IE is Taber’s (2010) study, which uses a short autoethnographic narrative as an entry point to her IE study of gender in the military. She is a ‘double insider’, as I am in higher education, in that she has much experience in the institution she explores and begins by writing out a self-reflective autoethnographic account to explain her position and some of her initial reflections. While she describes autoethnography as essential to her self-awareness, the result seems no different from a pure IE approach except for some stylistic writing choices. This decision to provide an autoethnographic preface might be a useful stylistic decision or technique for self-reflection for some researchers, however, I wish to write the ‘I’ into the research text in a more ongoing way throughout, rather than as a standalone preface. My entire thesis is, after all, my account of the research process, including whatever self-reflection and observations I have made. While some autoethnographers might write up reflective diaries or fieldnotes from their observations and reflections (Chang, 2008), this begins to construct the researcher’s account as ‘evidence’. However, such evidence is not accountable as it cannot be verified by the reader and so must be taken on trust. And so, rather than writing distinct fieldnotes, in later chapters I write my autoethnographic reflections into the main body of my thesis so as to make clear that they are part of my argument rather than independent evidence.

I will now consider the role of the researcher as a chooser and reader of texts. As Smith & Turner (2014b: 5) argue, texts should not be separated from their context nor be “be treated as objects of research in and of themselves nor as separate from how they coordinate people’s doings”. So even in a text-focused IE context where the focus is on texts as data, they should not be dislocated from the institutional contexts and local activities from which the researcher has taken them. Rather than thinking of the text as a specimen that is taken into the laboratory and examined as a representation of the outside social world, the text pulls the threads of social organisation into the researcher’s reading, so she can read through the text to the textual realm and begin to explore the ruling relations.

In a text-focused IE study, this can be done by careful choosing of texts based on the researcher’s developing understanding of the institution she is exploring and then doing a close reading analysis of the underlying structure and devices used in the text, alongside working out what resources the reader is using to understand and interpret the text: other texts, their conceptual framework and experience (including discussions with other people) to explain how and why they are interpreting in a particular way. However, in keeping the focus on texts and the intertextuality of institutional texts, the feminist researcher as reader in my view should also keep the analysis focused on the retrievable data that her reader can then explore herself, and do the analysis of the institutional textual realm of the ruling relations she wishes to explicate.

The organisational capacity of the text is important and when reading texts the IE researcher should read them for how they organise people and their lives (G.W. Smith, 1990). Smith & Turner (2014a) cite three main ways that texts organise that can be mapped: concerning the work process or invisible work that goes into writing them and putting them into action in the local context; the texts themselves, their indications of how they are to be read and the textual chains they are part of; and, their use in extra-local broader institutional contexts and their function in relation to other texts. My text-focused IE analysis centres on the latter two, as these focus on the texts after they come into being, the retrievable data concerning them and close reading and mapping of related texts. They also situate the textual analysis around the ruling relations, from which more general comments can be made of the textual organisation of higher education in the UK. The first aspect that Smith and Turner (2014) mention focuses more on particular locales and how

specific texts are made and put into practice. While this is interesting and important and will be present in my research through conversations with many people in higher education in the UK, this is not its focus. My accountable text-focused IE focuses on the textual data and the ruling relations.

Reflexivity for me engages with the process of doing research as an everyday activity, producing situated and limited claims, which readers can fully interrogate through the explication of my theoretical and methodological framework, the methods of reading and writing I use. In this chapter I have explained how my thinking has changed and the reasons for this. By highlighting the process and keeping the 'I' of the researcher in the text, I am trying to make the often invisible work of the researcher visible and thus accountable to my reader. Stanley & Wise's discussion of accountable research alongside Gouldner's reflexive sociology come together in my developing a responsible researcher position within a text-focused IE approach, one that disavows epistemic privilege whilst retaining responsible authority to allow the researcher to make knowledge-claims. While this retains authority, it is in my view a defensible and responsible authority, in providing 'good' evidence and neither dominating the reader nor making invisible the activities of the researcher. In working in this way, I am not trying to produce the 'truth', nor wanting to centre marginalised 'voices', but instead acknowledging the everyday and social nature of knowledge-production. And, as cautioned by Gouldner, this commitment and political project should not close my thinking to 'bad news', things that do not support my ideas, but help make clear the problematic I am working within, which makes some things visible and, simultaneously, others less so.

Text-focused IE involves research focused on the textual sphere. While the position and location of the researcher, and thus the situatedness of her reading/writing, must be acknowledged, this is the case with all research approaches. The focus on retrievable texts/data in text-focused IE, however, permits the reader to agree or disagree with the analysis as they can be privy to all the data and reach independent conclusions as well as dis/agreeing with the researcher's analysis. Whilst the researcher might also explain how experiences or discussions with others have influenced her analysis, the reader must take these things on trust and cannot engage with them in the same way.

In reflecting on my own experiences as a double insider in UK HE, I can identify disjunctures that help formulate a starting point for my research: "The people who are

living the situation that is to be researched know it from inside. There is the moment of recognition that something chafes” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002: 48). For me, the disjuncture that exists between the stated purpose of higher education as an institution of education involving learning and teaching and research, and my experience as a student and tutor, is that HE places increasing emphasis on the ‘student experience’, employability, and other market-driven indicators of ‘value’. This feeling of disconnection has provided the place from which to begin thinking out my research focus: how is higher education textually organised? My text-focused IE investigation from this basis explores the invisible work and organisational activities that make higher education in the UK organised by texts, and how texts in practice organise people’s work.

In doing a text-focused IE of UK higher education, I need to begin with the University of Edinburgh and through my own experience start in mapping a small area of texts, beginning by focusing on the National Student Survey (NSS). In using my experiential knowledge and everyday skills as a reader within this organisational context of which I am already a member, I can gather and analyse appropriate texts, and pick up threads that extend further into the UK higher education organisational structure, doing so in a way that is accountable to the reader. I begin with Edinburgh and the local, but go beyond this one site to the extra-local. Throughout, my aim is to explicate my reasoning process in choosing and analysing the texts, and to ensure that my interpretations and conclusions are grounded in retrievable texts so that other readers can ‘check’ their interpretations against mine.

An Epistemological Destination and Three Analytical Directions

I will now summarise key points from this chapter, in order to outline my epistemological destination before outlining the three analytic directions that I will explore in Part II. Overall, I conclude that Smith’s work provides a useful and comprehensive ontology and methodological framework for my thesis. However, her lack of explicit engagement with the role of researcher as a reader and writer of texts and the epistemic privilege of this role means that her version of text-focused IE, and many of the

contemporary examples of IE research, do not follow some key feminist research principles – reflexivity and accountability.

Smith's (2005) shift from women's standpoint to people's standpoint means that contemporary usages of IE often ignore the feminist roots of the approach. While many IEers still do take the side of people, this is often without an appreciation of difference, as if institutions exclude and oppress people equally regardless of their intersecting identities. Smith's shift in language and acceptance of a wide variety of IE usages and approaches ensures her legacy and the use of IE continues beyond the original directly associated circle of 'followers'. However, this has resulted in a depoliticisation of IE, with many contemporary IE studies focusing on any group of people and on bureaucratic auditing or accountability processes without an explicit engagement with structural inequality, power, and feminism. In making IE more palatable to a broad non-feminist audience, it appears to have lost its political origins and is used by many in ways that are not necessarily feminist.

This necessitates these extensive reflections on whether or not my text-focused IE approach is, or can be, feminist. Despite Smith's articulation in her 2014 Masterclass at the University of Edinburgh that she does not see standpoint as essential to IE research now, standpoint does ensure that researchers engage with their own position and from which perspective they are arguing and so is often an important reminder of some key feminist research principles. Without articulating some sort of standpoint, IE researchers can avoid their own positionality and political perspective and avoid the feminist aspects of Smith's work.

In applying Smith's ideas about work, specifically regarding reading and writing texts in institutions, to IE research I realised that this particular kind of work was made invisible in almost all accounts of IE research. The role of the researcher as a chooser, reader and writer of texts contains much epistemic power, as such sampling choices and methods of reading and structuring impact on which data is used and how it is analysed, and obviously it impacts on the analysis and overall argument of all IE research. While researchers might be reflexive about how these choices and methods affect the data and analysis produced, there is a limit to this self-reflection and critique, which is done in a very descriptive and unlimited way. Consequently in order to be accountable, the feminist researcher needs to be open and explicit about her methods and analytic decisions. This is particularly important in text-focused research, whereby there are no participants to be

accountable to and with whom to negotiate the ethics of the research and representation. Instead, the readers should be able to hold the feminist text-focused researcher accountable, but to do so they need to have sufficient information and access to data (i.e. retrievable data) to assess claims made and thus make informed criticisms and challenges if they so wish.

A central part of this accountability is also tied up in how research, including this thesis, is written. Being autoethnographic in my writing style, or writing in the 'I' and the 'backstage' process of making decisions means I am providing as much information as possible to my reader for them to make an informed assessment, while avoiding a self-absorbed or overly 'confessional' engagement with my personal impact on the research. While my research focused on retrievable texts – the NSS, the ESRC funding guidelines, the REF documentation – I will also make clear where my ideas are coming from, whether they be from conversations with others, self-reflection and experience, or reading other texts. This acknowledgement of how I know what I claim to know ensures that I have not relied on the epistemic privilege of the researcher, in which my claims must be taken on trust. And equally, while my positionality might be relevant to the research process, I have avoided using this as an abstract legitimator of my claims, and instead focused on how explaining how I know something, outlining how experience-based knowledge affects the research process in practice. Thus, my commitment to feminist principles means that I have taken the politics and positionality of the researcher very seriously, in endeavouring to make visible the 'backstage' negotiations and decisions of the researcher, but without falling into a confessional or solipsistic trap of assuming that I cannot speak beyond my own experience or ignore the analytical and epistemological aspects of reflexivity. In short, my epistemological journey has been one of moving from a nervous personal reflexivity to a holistic and analytically focused reflexivity and having a clear plan for how to make myself as accountable as possible to the reader.

I will now outline the three analytic directions that will be discussed in Part II. In order to put into practice my feminist research ideas in relation to text-focused IE, I did a methodological experiment, using three different text-analysis methods used by Smith in some examples of text analysis, to analysis three key UK HE texts. While Smith does not provide step-by-step instructions for how to read and analysis texts – part of her not imposing "methodological dogma" (Smith, 2006a: 2) – she does use a range of textual

analysis methods that provide useful examples that I have tried out in my own analysis. I see three broad approaches in Smith's textual analyses and use these in the substantive analyses in the three following chapters of my thesis:

1. close analysis of text with focus on a single text or small array of texts – National Student Survey (NSS);
2. mapping a textually-mediated process – Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Research Grant (RG) application process;
3. identifying a textually-mediated discourse – the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

These approaches exist on a spectrum of closeness to the text.

One end of the spectrum is a close focus on a single text, in order to explore the structuring or organisation of the text itself, such as in 'K is Mentally Ill: The Anatomy of a Factual Account' (Smith, 1990b: 12-51). This exploration could also be expanded to a comparison between a small array of texts that are put into conversation with each other to explore how texts relate to each other, such as in 'The Active Text' (Smith, 1990b: 120-158), in which the construction of facticity is explored through two different accounts of the same event. In both, the exploration involves Smith reading and picking apart the ways in which the texts are each put together to achieve certain aims and thus to organise people and other texts.

In 'K is Mentally Ill', Smith focuses on one interview transcript which is reproduced in its entirety, the lines are numbered, and she provides a detailed reading of the text. The transcript is not taken as an account of what happened, but rather Smith's interest is in how the structure of the text constructs facticity, how the text identifies K as mentally ill regardless of whether she *really* is or not, which we cannot know from the text. This demonstrates what Smith means when she discusses texts being active and how researchers should 'read through' the text.

Similarly in 'The Active Text', Smith reproduces the entirety of two accounts of the same event on the streets of Berkeley (as discussed in Chapter 1), numbers the lines, and compares how the first-hand witness account is put together differently from the official mayoral account, particularly around their differing uses of temporality and spatiality.

Smith provides slightly more local context and begins to connect this situation to broader frame of reference about the criminal justice system, but again the focus is on these two specific texts and picking apart how they try to achieve particular purposes – the focus is not so much on the content but more on how the structure of the text is active in guiding the reader’s interpretation of these texts and subsequent texts or activities.

Smith (1990b: 48) identifies two elements in ‘K is Mentally Ill’ to look out for in analysing the text: (i) social organisation; and (ii) the analysis of textual structure and how this attempts to achieve certain aims. Smith begins with the social organisation of the reading of the text, providing some context and pre-text – what the ‘origin’ of the text is and how has she come to read it - before focusing on how people (including readers) are positioned by the text, and what sort of genre or instructions in the text indicate how it should be read. Then she moves onto more specific analysis of the structure of the text to achieve certain aims, which in ‘K is Mentally Ill’ involves identifying behaviours as evidence of mental illness. Smith discusses this largely through the use of contrasting statements to indicate perceived causal relationships between certain behaviours described in the text and how this connects to broader schema of mental illness. In ‘The Active Text’ example, Smith focuses more on how these accounts are differently situated in place and time and makes a broader point about organisational texts fitting into institutional sequences of action which have their own temporality and how this helps to construct certain causality and facticity, similar to the use of contrasting statements in the previous example.

In Chapter 3, I analyse the NSS using this first text analysis method, staying close to one particular text. The NSS was the first text I became interested in due to the frequency with which it was referred to in meetings, tutor training and in other official texts at the University of Edinburgh. Initially, I tried to analyse the NSS through developing a complex and detailed reading frame based on an array of non-IE discussions of reading, interpretation and text analysis, which I intended to fit into IE principles. However, this resulted in a huge list of things (see Appendix One), which became unwieldy and overwhelming. Thus, I decided not to continue using it as it was resulting in an overly rigid method of analysis that moved away from IE and was far too elaborate to support a focused analysis. The analysis of the NSS using Smith’s own textual analysis processes is the topic of the next chapter and the emphasis is firmly on reading through the text and

exploring how it organises the reader and tries to achieve its aims and is part of broader text-act-text sequences of activity in UK HE.

In the middle of the text analysis spectrum I have outlined, sits the mapping an organisational process approach, which is much more frequently taken up by users of IE. It involves exploring a specific, pre-existing, textually-mediated process; often a very structured bureaucratic process such as an appraisal form used in a graduate school admissions process²⁰ (Smith, 2006c: 68-72). Users of this approach often use interviews or observations to develop an understanding of how people read/write texts at each part of the process. However, Smith also suggests that such processes can be explored without interviewing but instead through reading through the intertextualities in texts to establish the textual sequences in which they are caught up. This might involve a close reading of a small number of texts involved in a process, similar to the first method discussed above, but in this case following a particular pre-existing process and explicitly looking for intertextual links or threads that draw them together into a sequence of institutional activity.

I use this second approach to explore the ESRC Research Grant (RG) application process, in which there is a heavily structured and textually-mediated process. The ESRC is one of the UK's seven research councils and the largest funder of UK research into economic and social topics (UKRI, 2017a). With individual academics being increasingly expected to 'bring in money' through successful grant applications to do research with few institutional responsibilities (such as teaching and administrative roles), funding opportunities have become central organisers of priorities and expectations of successful research and researchers. Much of the advice on how to complete the process is detailed in explanatory texts that make explicit how exactly the process should be followed, which I map in Chapter 4 alongside using interviews with ESRC-RG applicants to understand how they interpret and translate the regulatory texts and their research ideas into a completed application form. While I use interviews, they are focused on understanding how the text is interpreted by different readers and the analytic lens is kept firmly on the textually-mediated process and their associated activities.

²⁰ This example is based on research done by a student of Smith's – Edouard Vo-Quang – who explored the appraisal form process for a graduate textual analysis class run by Smith (Smith, 2006c: 68).

At the other end of the spectrum is a more discursive focus, which draws together different references to texts and ideas in a more diffuse way, such as Smith's discussion of 'Femininity as Discourse' (1990b: 159-208). In using this version of textual analysis, she argues that femininity is a textually-mediated discourse, not contained within one single text or one single process. Therefore the texts being analysed are read in a more surface-level way; assembling lots of different texts and connecting them together to explore how they constitute a 'web' that explains what 'we just know' as competent participants in social relations about such things as femininity. By pulling together diffuse examples, Smith (1990b) shows there is an underlying pattern or code that is being communicated widely but without there being one single source. The texts are drawn together to evidence something that the researcher knows as an insider in the social world, which she then names as a discourse.

However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this discussion of femininity as discourse (Smith, 1990b: 159-208) is based on a seemingly random array of different texts, in which she does not explain why she chose them or how she analysed them, which means it is an unaccountable approach to discussing discourse. Another approach to discourse that is more helpful for my purposes is "'Politically Correct": An Organizer of Public Discourse' (Smith, 1999: 172-194). In this, Smith discusses the 'ideological code' of political correctness in relation to a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio programme. Smith (1999: 174-175) discusses the historic roots of the neo-conservative idea of political correctness, identifying key texts that introduce and popularise this. She describes the sort of infectious self-reproducing character of political correctness, or ideological codes more generally, arguing that they "structure text and talk ... ideological codes operate as a free-floating form of control in the relations of public discourse" (Smith, 1999: 175).

This approach is helpful in thinking through how the Research Excellence Framework (REF) organises UK HE. The REF is the UK system of assessing the quality of academic research and it influences the allocation of funding alongside providing a more general ranking of research 'excellence' (HEFCE, 2017a). As such it is one of the key organisers of academic activity and interpretations of its guidelines heavily organise the work and publications that many academics focus on, along with acting as a source of concern about being 'REF-able'. I will explore how the REF works as an 'ideological code' that is rooted in the actual REF process and its published texts but has taken on a 'free-

floating form of control' aspect that organises people's activities locally in UK higher education. Ideological codes act as frames through which events and texts are read in particular contexts and thus give rise to a discursive order that positions people and activities differently, whether that be identifying activities as 'politically correct' (Smith, 1999: 172-194), or as in the case of the REF reordering academic research and publishing priorities in line with mythological interpretations of the REF. These local mythologies surrounding the REF process primarily exist in talk and become weighty organisers of people's everyday activities because of the importance of the actual REF process.

In order to analyse the REF, I will map the official REF process through the publicly available regulatory texts and compare this with local-level interpretations of the REF based on interviews with departmental REF facilitators in UK university physics departments. These specific discussions of how the REF is taken up and interpreted at a local-level demonstrates that the references to the REF in talk take on a life of their own far from the specifics of the actual REF guidelines. The negotiation of this process in different places shows how textually-mediated discourses can organise people differently depending on location, but can still be connected back to the 'same' thing – the REF – and its organising logic. However, by exploring this important element of how the REF organises I begin to move away from the accountable feminist research approach outlined in this chapter, which brings up the question of whether or not the accountable feminist principles outlined in this chapter can be used in conjunction with all three of my text-focused IE methods, which I then consider in the conclusion to the thesis.

Part II

Exploring Three Text-Focused IE Methods

Chapter 3 – Constructing Facticity and Its Results: The National Student Survey

The National Student Survey (NSS) is a yearly survey of final year undergraduate students in the UK, which has been used since 2005 to seek the opinions of students about their experiences of university (HEFCE, 2017b). This chapter will focus on the NSS to discuss surveys as a textual genre (which is how most people who complete surveys encounter them, and how most people complete the NSS) which produces a particularly ‘weighty’ textual reality in an epistemological sense. This is because surveys are often taken as reality – as fact – rather than as partial knowledge-claims with limitations and caveats, requiring context to understand. Rather than assume that the NSS results present the reality of student experiences and the quality of university services, I argue they produce a ‘legitimate’ representation of actuality that powerfully organises people’s activities in UK HE. The survey genre produces facticity - “the property of being factual” (Smith, 1990b: 10) - as in Dorothy Smith’s discussions of ‘K is Mentally Ill’ (Smith, 1990b: 12-51) and ‘The Active Text’ (Smith, 1990b: 120-158), both of which focus on the production of facticity in relation to other kinds of texts.

Even if a text is describing something ‘out there’, the account is always partial; but regardless of the accuracy of a textual representation, texts exist in hierarchies, with some, particularly official and legitimate texts like the NSS, producing facticity more than others. But this production of facticity extends beyond the text, hooking the text, reader, and other texts into the ruling relations and organising people’s everyday lives. In other words, the construction of facticity is a “social practice” and facts emerge through “processes mediated by textual forms” (Smith, 1990b: 211, 216). Texts become powerful factual accounts, which override unofficial accounts or non-textualised accounts and thus heavily organise peoples and other texts in organisations, resulting in actuality changing in line with the factual text.

This chapter will explore how the NSS constructs the facticity of its account of how things are within the University system from the viewpoints of students, and also examine the consequences of this occurring beyond the remit of the survey. The survey format produces quick and easy 'facts' for the reader of the results, but it also involves a much more difficult wrestling with actuality to shape it into the narrow confines of the survey format on the part of the reader-respondent of the survey when they complete it. The survey does not, and nor does it intend to, account for the complexity and nuances of the full range of students' actual experiences, nor difference across institutional cultures and locations, and it should not be taken as a full account of students' experiences or as a comparative marker of quality of service provision across different universities. Nonetheless, in spite of these caveats, it has begun to create new forms of work in UK HE, shifting expectations and dynamics between students and staff and identifying 'things' to be measured and improved upon, namely 'the student experience'.

The chapter begins by outlining my position as a reader, identifying my 'work knowledge' of how the NSS is used in ways that organise at the University of Edinburgh. I will then explain the different methods of text analysis used in how I came to produce this analysis, before exploring four analytic points that I see as central to how the NSS organises: (i) the NSS as a survey is a particularly restrictive and weighty 'legitimate' textual representation of reality and produces statistical 'facts' to facilitate easy comparisons between institutions and courses; (ii) absences in the survey demonstrate its partiality, specifically regarding its construction of 'student voice' as textual fiction that silences actual people and context; (iii) the temporality and spatiality of the NSS process removes the reader from particular times and places, and transports them into textual time which may not match local time; (iv) ideological codes emerge from the NSS, specifically on student experience and feedback and these create additional work through attempts to 'game' the survey, similar to wider discussions of new public management and audit culture. Overall the facticity of the NSS as an authoritative account means that the survey is an incredibly important 'boss' or regulatory text, with the NSS results haunting institutions and the priorities it sets up cropping up in UK HE texts beyond the remit of the survey.

During my time as an undergraduate student (2008-2012) and then a postgraduate student and tutor (2012-2018) at the University of Edinburgh, I have observed the NSS being increasingly discussed by the university's staff and students and used to organise

their activities in ways that seemed not to be the stated purpose of the survey. My aim in exploring the survey was to examine how it worked and to understand why so many staff members seemed preoccupied with the NSS results. I am interested in how the survey itself constructs 'the facts' and has been used to centre student concerns in UK HE discourse; introducing student satisfaction as a key marker in ranking UK universities in national league tables and also more recently in putting this into the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) system for assessing the quality or excellence of university teaching.

I read the NSS as a text from my position as a sociology PhD student and quasi-staff member as an hourly-paid tutor and lecturer (since 2013), and also drawing on my previous experience as an undergraduate student of sociology and politics (2008-2012) and Masters by research student in sociology (2012-2013), all at Edinburgh. Having entered UK HE in 2008, I have witnessed first-hand many of the shifting values and priorities of the university and the broader HE sector.

I became aware of the survey in 2012, when I was a final-year undergraduate student – the target population of the survey – and when I completed it, I critically reflected on the appropriateness of a survey which was largely perceived as a measure of satisfaction. There had been informal discussions about the NSS amongst social science students I knew, particularly those involved in student union politics. This included possibly boycotting the NSS because of the tick-box nature of most of the survey, which many felt provided little space to constructively criticise and thus facilitate improvement. While we were 'satisfied' with our courses, we had suggestions or criticisms that we wanted to submit to the university, but were unsure how best to include these in our survey responses. In the end, many criticised the survey itself in the open-text feedback, but completed it. In a limited and unsystematic way, my critical reflection on the limitations of the survey started as I completed it as an undergraduate student. However, when beginning to research it two years later, I realised I knew very little about the process which produces the survey, the results, and their uses.

As a result, when I began to investigate the NSS, I asked other University of Edinburgh tutors, lecturers, and students about their knowledge of it. I arranged a number of informal interviews and had some email exchanges with 'experts', i.e. staff who in their everyday work interact with the NSS through encouraging students to complete the survey, publicising the results, responding to 'bad scores' from the survey, and suggesting reforms

relating to their results. I also carried out informal interviews in July and October 2014 with six people who had some involvement in or knowledge about how the NSS works at the University: three with people who work in HE policy and politics in Scotland, all of whom studied at Edinburgh and were involved in student union politics and representation either during their studies or afterwards; one person who had been a sabbatical officer at Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA) who was also a graduate of the University; one interview with an early-career staff member in the School of Social and Political Science (SSPS); and one interview with a worker in the Student Surveys Team (now called the Student Surveys Unit) which is responsible for the NSS at the University. Aside from the Student Surveys Team worker interview, all interviews involved the people concerned telling me things behind the scenes, including commentary on university management, and therefore all interviewees are anonymised.

These discussions provided a wealth of information on the non-textual or invisible work that goes into producing official and unofficial responses to the NSS and how people's activities are organised by interpretations of the survey at this particular University. They also helped me understand that the NSS data was being differently interpreted by people in different parts of the university, and become more aware of the ways in which NSS results could be used as a tool in Communications between different branches of the university, and also of course across different universities.

The initial focus of discussions in these interviews was on the everyday work associated with the NSS, as I wanted to understand how it worked at the University of Edinburgh. However, I then realised there was not necessarily a clear and coherent process in which the survey was used in a uniform way. Putting differently positioned people's experiences 'in conversation' with each other, I came to see that there were multiple, sometimes conflicting views and uses of the NSS across the University and even within the same School. Of particular interest here is that some of the people I spoke to had not seen the actual survey itself or analysed the results, but had rather experienced the NSS in talk and as a brief, but weighty, reference in other institutional texts.²¹ The use of the NSS as a stick to discipline departments or schools who were not doing well was a central theme in my interview discussions. These interviews and what they said about people's experiences

²¹ This prevalence of non-readers' activities being organised by texts they have not read will be picked up in more detail in Chapter 5 on the REF.

provide the basis on which I identified the NSS as an important text, informing my reading of the survey and how it works.

As part of this, I developed a short reading frame based on Dorothy Smith's work, which involved asking the question 'How does this text organise the reader, other people, and other texts?', with five sub-points to focus my response:

1. Spatio-temporal position of the text and my reading
2. Positioning of people and objects in the text
3. Structuring of the text
4. Intertextualities
5. Text-act-text sequences

However, in trying to use this to analyse the NSS, the list of concepts proved too abstract to be effective and my analysis ended up being a 'gloss' rather than a close reading. By this, I mean that I drew conclusions without doing a systematic and detailed reading, and thus did not produce an accountable close reading as I intended. This demonstrated how difficult it can be to overcome engrained methods of reading that involve skimming a text with conclusions already in mind, rather than analysing it in depth.

My initial attempts to read the NSS involved a form of 'projection', as discussed by Jane Gallop (2000), whereby I read my ideological assumptions *into* the text, rather than learning *from* the text and doing a close reading of a kind that would involve "looking at what is actually on the page, reading the text itself, rather than some idea 'behind the text'". Such a close reading means noticing things *in the writing*" (Gallop, 2000: 7). The reader does not read neutrally, but rather brings ideological positions, work knowledges, assumptions, and methods of reading with her. As Straub (2013: 139) argues, all readings "are driven by concepts we bring to the text (whether or not they are formal, systematic theories)". This was definitely a feature of my initial reading of the NSS, with my starting point being that UK HE is undergoing a process of neoliberalisation or marketisation. By this is meant that universities are being run more like businesses and relations between staff and students becoming increasingly about service provision, as if education is a product and students are consumers whose purchases have to be satisfied. I was trying to find evidence of this, rather than trying to understand how the NSS worked in practice. As Straub goes on to comment, "while I still want to know where I am starting from when I create an interpretation, I would rather not know where I am going" (Straub, 2013: 140). And so, a

balance is needed between acknowledging that there is no neutral reading and clearly stating one's stance and reading or interpretative work, while also keeping the mind open to discovery.

In order to go beyond a superficial skim-reading of the NSS as either good or bad in line with my pre-existing assumptions or political engagement with the survey, I tried to re-focus on the 'surface' of the text in order to build an accountable argument, as discussed in the previous chapter. I tried to engage with the NSS in a way that suspended judgement, namely, a 'generous reading' (Bewes, 2010) and with 'fair play' in mind (Anderson et al., 1985) regarding what I was reading. In order to do this and to avoid another 'gloss' of the NSS text, I read more about textual analysis and reading and developed a more specific reading frame (Appendix One) to facilitate a closer, more detailed reading of the NSS.

It was helpful to frame such discussions about readings as being about different types of context, rather than about ideology. McHoul et al. (2008) discusses the importance of acknowledging different contexts: the immediate context of a phrase in the wording of a text, the talk or other non-textual context of its usage in a particular instance or setting, the 'member's knowledge' or background experiences of those involved which allow them to interpret 'correctly', and broader socio-political context. While McHoul (1996) also problematises the distinction between text and context, arguing both must be read and therefore context could be conceived of as part of the text, making such a distinction is in fact important for accountability reasons. This is because it shows where I am getting my evidence from when making claims. This is central to my accountable approach to text-focused IE, because staying close to the 'words on the page' of a retrievable text allows me to show what is 'in' the text, and thus replicable across sites. This is central to Smith's definition of texts, their organisational power, and how institutions come into being across sites.

Reading involves a reader making sense of the text by metaphorically running back and forth between the text and context. As Smith's (2005: 86) discussion of Bakhtin's speech genres helpfully illustrates, primary or secondary speech genres indicate whether language corresponds to direct experience or secondary, written/textual experience. So a reader might read a text and understand it based on other texts that she has read, or from previous experiences, and it is important for accountability to clearly indicate where such knowing comes from.

The more in-depth reading frame (Appendix One) was organised in a temporal way – before the text/pre-text, in the text/text, and after the text/post-text – drawn from Liz Stanley’s discussion of textual analysis of archival documents (2017a; 2017b). Stanley explains that she conducts a surface reading along the grain and then a re-reading against the grain, organised by:

- “context
- Pre-text
- The text and its meta-data, content & structure, and also its intertexts
- Post-text
- The new context that arises subsequently”

(Stanley, 2017a: 1.4).

This process involves zooming in from a wider lens of broad context and a discussion of socio-historical conditions at the time, to the pre-text and immediate circumstances that lead to the creation of the text, to the text itself, and then zooming out again to consider the post-text consequences, usages and broader context after the text. This acknowledgement of the temporal and spatial elements of textual production, reading, and use encourages researchers not to detach texts from their social contexts, while still attending to the details in the text. This helped to see how Smith’s ideas about active texts could be used in a close reading. It also helped to distinguish between my analysis of the text itself – the NSS - and my analysis of other sources related to the NSS, making clear what evidence there was for different knowledge-claims, which is essential for accountable knowledge production.

Using this detailed reading frame (Appendix One) helped in attending to the different contexts and words-on-the-page detail of the NSS survey, ensuring points were carefully evidenced. However, the resultant analysis was rather boring and repetitive, because the way I operationalised it involved going through line by line, rather than exploring how the text is used in practice and the key points of how the NSS organises readers, other people and other texts, which was what my first reading frame was concerned with. Therefore I re-wrote my analysis based on this detailed line-by-line analysis, whereby I tried to keep in mind the active interpretative process of reading that involves authors, the text and readers, and negotiation of the different levels of context.

For Smith (2005: 105), the moment of interaction with the text, or the text-reader conversation, involves the reader playing both parts in the conversation. This means that the reader activates the text, bringing it into action through her reading and response, even if this is “probably never quite as its [the text’s] maker intended”. The text-reader conversation is a process through which institutional frames and codes are used to understand everyday experience, alongside everyday experiences being translated into institutional language and framing (Smith, 2005: 105). This means that what is in the text, its manifestation of the institutional, has a powerful effect on people’s reading and subsequent activities. Thus, the third strategy I adopted begins with a focus on a close reading of the NSS survey, as a way to explore in detail the instructions in this powerful text that organise readers in UK HE, thinking about how the text organises readers in various ways.

While most students filling out the survey will do so online, when each question will come up separately and in order, as shown in the Good Practice Guide (IpsosMORI, 2017: 28), I am unable to access the survey as I am not a member of its target population and so cannot login to the survey itself. While I considered asking a final year undergraduate student if I could watch them fill it in, this would violate the Good Practice Guide and constitute inappropriate influence (IpsosMORI, 2017: 6). Additionally, my interest in the survey questions is about how the text organises people and their activities, and specifically in the construction of facticity. Consequently it is the overall experience of doing a survey, and the specific language and ordering of the questions, which are most important for my purposes, rather than the specific details of the formatting on the website.

And so I downloaded two pdf versions of the NSS survey as my texts: the 2014 sample survey pdf (Appendix Two) and the 2017 sample survey pdf (Appendix Three), both of which were accessed through the NSS website (NSS, 2017). The 2014 version was first accessed in in 2015 when I started analysing this topic, however, this is no longer available on the website, being replaced with an updated version from 2017. I have included line numbered versions of them in the appendices as retrievable texts against which to check my analysis. The 2014 NSS is a printed version of the survey, complete with formatting and branding; the 2017 version is a plain list of questions, which shows the changes to the survey questions beginning with the 2017 survey.

Survey as Genre

The use of the survey format in the NSS is restricting, requiring readers to squeeze their lived experiences into the specifics of the closed-ended questions and survey framing of 'the student experience'. Each student respondent must wrestle their individual experiences over their 3-4 year undergraduate degree into the structure of the survey, generalising and reducing actuality into a partial and institutionally organised textual representation organised by its questions. This translation of the respondent's specific experiences into succinct, general, quantifiable information is to facilitate the production of statistics in order to compare courses and institutions. These quick and easy 'facts' are easily read, understood and comparable, regardless of how statistically significant they are or how accurate this survey data is in portraying students' actual experiences or the real quality of university provision. I will focus on three key points: (i) how the NSS establishes itself as an authoritative survey, focusing on authorship and format of the survey; (ii) definitional confusions or decisions that survey readers must make in order to textualise their experiences at Edinburgh and fit them within the constraints of the survey; (iii) how the statistical results are used to generalise and compare across courses and institutions. What is central to these three points is that they are about establishing the facticity of the NSS process and results due to it being a survey.

The NSS is described on the official NSS website as "a widely recognised authoritative survey" that produces "a powerful collective voice" for students (NSS, 2018a). The website begins to construct the facticity of the survey by making pronouncements without a specific or individual author in favour of the collective institutional authorship of 'the NSS' and the disembodied 'neutral' voice of the survey text itself. And as I will go on to argue, the collective student voice it refers to is a generalisation based on a small, self-selecting sample of students each year, which is used far beyond the intended application of the survey to judge institutions against each other.

How do we know it is a survey? The name – National Student Survey – immediately identifies it as a survey. And as the name is included in the logo, this means that any mention of the text alongside all its branding repeatedly reminds the reader of its survey genre status. The texts themselves include the word survey numerous times: five times in NSS 2014 (Lines 1, 53, 54, Appendix Two) along with one mention of the word

questionnaire (Line 35, Appendix Two); and three times in NSS 2017 (Lines 1, 2, 37 - Appendix Three), and one mention of the word questionnaire (Line 2, Appendix Three).

How do we know it is an authoritative survey? The collective authorship or sponsorship implied by the list of logos (Line 2, Appendix Two; Line 48, Appendix Three) begins with Ipsos MORI, a well-known survey and market research company, who deliver the survey for HEFCE (NSS, 2018a), then HEFCE, who commission the survey and who presumably wrote it as indicated by the copyright symbol, appears (Line 58, Appendix Two). These logos provide institutional stamps of approval – this survey has the support of these organisations – and thus they confer legitimacy and authority to it as an authentic and important survey.

While authorship is an important consideration when reading texts, the details are perhaps less important for the NSS (and other surveys) due to its authority being based more on the collective anonymous organisational authorship, indicated by multiple organisational logos and no named author. The copyright of HEFCE at the bottom of the 2014 text (Line 58, Appendix Two), alongside the information on the NSS website, explains that HEFCE commissioned the survey and Ipsos MORI conducted it independently (NSS, 2018a). Atkinson & Coffey (2004: 88) discuss organisational authorships as “anonymous, even collective, products” which mask the individual ‘actual’ writer of the text, because their authorship does not carry authority and so is erased in order to make way for the institutional authority of the organisation.

This collective authorship is also conveyed through the language of the survey in the 2014 pdf (Appendix Two), in which the survey voice shifts between collective first person – “We may contact you again” (Line 6), “To help us validate your response” (Line 52) – and a polite, commanding and instructive third person removed – “Please write in your date and month of birth” (Line 3), “Thank you for participating” (Line 53). Both of these narrative registers imply neutrality, which helps construct the authority and supposed objectivity of the texts. As there is no named speaker, the respondent is in conversation with a neutral and institutionally weighty voice, which is typical of collective official authorship in that this is a disembodied, objective ‘voice from nowhere’. This fits with the research norms that characterise ‘malestream’ objective knowledge production which Smith (1987) critiqued in her early work. In the case of organisational documents and in research, particularly survey research, the anonymity of the ‘actual’ writers is “part of the

facticity ... the official production of documentary reality” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004: 89), and so the unknown ‘real’ author helps provide the authority through anonymity, alongside the known collective ‘authorship’, or perhaps more so sponsorship, of the institutions involved.

The majority of the survey questions are closed ones, involving twenty-three statements in the older version of the survey (Appendix Two) and then twenty-seven statements in the 2017 update (Appendix Three) with which the reader-respondents can agree or disagree along a Likert scale – Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (Line 10, 36, 50, Appendix Two; Lines 3-9, Appendix Three). While this heavily structured format implies a sameness to all the statements and are all aimed at the respondent, they are worded differently, and with a mixture of singular first person and third person forms. These shifts in register imply two different sorts of statements: opinions, and individual experiences – “I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.” (Line, 27, Appendix Three) – and supposed statements of fact – “Staff are good at explaining things.” (Line 12, Appendix Three). The ‘I’ statements emphasis the individual nature of the respondent’s experience, which is presumably subjective and highly varied depending on many factors in addition to institutional provision. However, the supposed statements of fact are written as if the student can provide objective facts and judge the provisions against standardised levels of quality or service that may or may not have been reached.

These two registers are fundamentally different – the survey is both implying students can provide factual statements about the university, while simultaneously asking them for their subjective opinions on their experience. Their ‘factual statement’ responses depend entirely on their understanding of what is fair, and also their unique experience of a course and of university. Would a student who did very well in assessments be more likely to judge these to be fair than a student who did very badly? Does an engaged student who attended all lectures and tutorials have a better position from which to judge the teaching of a course than a student who turned up occasionally and/or did not engage? The attendance and engagement of the student-respondent, alongside their specific expectations, circumstances and background, will all influence how they assess the university and its provision.

In the first section on teaching (Lines 11-15, Appendix Three), all statements are in the third person register, which implies that respondents can evaluate teaching against

agreed standards, or at least provide an 'objective' assessment of its provision, rather than give an opinion. This constructs the student's responses as proxy markers of quality, rather than as subjective opinions which are decontextualised from the student's engagement, marks and other factors. As Inge (2018) reports, while satisfaction surveys like the NSS are used to evaluate student learning, learning is not always happy or satisfying. Inge reports an Open University (OU) study that found higher student satisfaction on OU modules which involved lots of individual learning and lots of materials, however, whether or not students actually passed modules had more to do with collaborative learning and engagement in discussions. Therefore student satisfaction was not necessarily related to methods of learning that correlated with pass rates. This begs the questions, what is it that the NSS measuring, and is this a useful indicator of quality?

The survey-respondents from Edinburgh have to wrestle their local actuality into the survey definitions, which involves a process of translation. Firstly, the survey asks for summary answers that generalise across their experience and to answer the question in a way that "best reflects your current view of the course as a whole" (Lines 7-8, Appendix Two). The specification of 'current view' indicates that timing is key to the survey results, which I will pick up later in this chapter. But the overall premise of completing this as a general survey on a degree course, is confusing because it is by no means straightforward. For example, Edinburgh uses the term 'course' to indicate specific modules or single units e.g. Introduction to Sociology, which might run for one term or across a whole year. The term used locally is 'degree programme' or 'degree' – as in, I am in Chemical Engineering, I am doing Mathematics and Physics. Consequently the language of 'course' immediately requires a translation to the local context of Edinburgh, with the generic language of the survey not immediately locally compatible. This might cause confusion or uncertainty in the respondent and result in an overly specific or 'incorrect' answering of the survey.

Relatedly, what happens if a student has done a joint degree, how will their responses be allocated? Joint degrees, referred to as 'joint honours' at Edinburgh, mean that a student is primarily registered in one department, which takes responsibility for them and provides most of their pastoral and academic support, e.g. personal tutors, subject support officers, and often dissertation supervisors. However, if a student is doing half or almost half their degree in another department, then around half of their experience of the degree programme would be with them. What if the student enjoyed one more than

the other, or had serious issues with one programme but not the other? How will these survey responses be allocated when results are published? Does one department get punished for another's 'crimes' as considered by that student? How can the student convey this in a survey which asks for a general answer for their course 'as a whole'?

Respondents are asked to provide 'average' answers or to decide whether to go with their most positive or most negative experience. This lack of clarity in the survey could massively impact on results, in particular with joint degree programmes and the bureaucratic decisions around which department students are based in, regardless of which department they experience the most through courses. Incorrectly assigning results to particular departments is a major concern with regards joint degrees. However, this is also a concern even for single honours students, because across Scottish degree programmes students frequently take courses outside their chosen degree, particularly in the first and second year of their degree. And, as is common in many Schools at Edinburgh, final year students may take a course from another department even if they are doing single honours which might disproportionately affect their view of their whole degree and thus skew their NSS responses which will be incorrectly attributed to their 'home' department.

With the questions themselves, the language is again generic and is hard to apply to the specifics of student experiences. In particular, this includes the use of the term 'staff' when discussing teaching – all questions refer to 'staff' rather than specific roles. What if the lecturers were good and the tutors bad, or one tutor was excellent and the rest were okay? The variety of experience with 'staff' and the different levels and roles of staff are completely subsumed under this general term. This makes it hard to clearly attribute positive or negative scores to particular sections of staff, whether they be lecturers, tutors, administrative staff, personal tutors, or more indirectly to decisions taken by university management and the central university departments such as timetabling or room booking.

While the closed tick-box questions make up the majority of the survey, there is one open-ended section at the end in which the respondent can include "any particularly positive or negative aspects of your courses you would like to highlight" (Line 43, Appendix Two)²². This is split into two boxes, a binary of 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of the

²² While the 2017 survey pdf does not include this question, the NSS website specifies that students still have the opportunity to include "positive and/or negative comments in an open-ended question" (NSS, 2018a).

respondent's experience, emphasising a judgement of courses and/or the university rather than encouraging constructive feedback or more nuanced criticism or reflection. In addition, the instruction for 'correct reading' of how to use these open text boxes are still restrictive, asking a specific question – "Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects of your course you would like to highlight?" (Appendix Two, Line 43), alongside instructing the reader to "Please use the boxes below" and "Please ensure that your comments do not identify you individually" (Appendix Two, Line 44). These comments constrain how the respondent is 'allowed' to respond, even when freed from the Likert scale tick-box response. What if the respondent wishes to write constructive feedback for the university that does not clearly fit into 'positive' or 'negative'?

The overall restrictive structuring of the NSS survey questions facilitates clear cross-comparison between courses and institutions, which is typical of the survey genre as it allows for statistical analysis of the majority of questions and a clear collation of open-ended answers into 'positive' and 'negative' lists which can also be subjected to quantitative analysis by individual institutions (e.g. searching for frequency of particular topics in the positive and negative lists). This approach to data collection contributes to the neutral and objective register of the NSS and the particular sort of facticity that is being constructed for it. This highlights a more general issue with institutional texts, and specifically surveys, which seek to generalise across locales and experiences. Such approaches cannot gauge the nuances of actual experiences and so there is a process of translation in which something is lost. Or, more dramatically, the survey framework can be applied incorrectly or in a disproportionate way that focuses results on particularly negative or particular positive experiences rather than producing a view of the overall experience. These constraints of the survey format are particularly important to consider given the NSS prevalence in public rankings and comparisons of universities, in which the facticity of the survey is taken for granted and used uncritically, as I will now discuss.

On the Unistats website, the NSS results are used to compare courses between institutions. For example, if I chose the physics undergraduate degree at both the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow on the course comparison function, the results display the two course NSS results side by side for comparison:

Comparing 2 courses

[View results on a map ▶](#)

Your Measures Student satisfaction Employment & accreditation Continuation & degree results Entry information

Course	BSc (Hons) Physics ✘	BSc (Hons) Physics ✘
	Full time, Optional year abroad	Full time, Optional year abroad

Location	University Of Edinburgh 1 location: Central and King's Buildings	University Of Glasgow 1 location: Glasgow Campus
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Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course	53%	69%
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The teaching on my course ▲

Staff are good at explaining things	73%	77%
Staff have made the subject interesting	47%	62%
The course is intellectually stimulating	80%	92%

(Unistats, 2018a).

The first and most important result is the final question of the survey on overall satisfaction, then all other questions are grouped by topic, as on the survey form, and are accessible through drop down menus such as the first section shown above – ‘the teaching on my course’. While students may look through all these indicators, the overall satisfaction score is the primary indicator used and is displayed first on the course comparison function of Unistats, giving this result a disproportionate influence in how university courses are viewed on the Unistats website.

This presentation of the NSS results on the Unistats website contributes to how universities and specific courses are seen, specifically affecting the reputations with the intended readers – prospective students – who are encouraged to use this information to help decide which course to study. This has a potential financial impact on universities through the income generated through student fees, whereby higher ranking institutions may continue to attract students, whereas lower-ranking university may see their student numbers drop and thus their tuition fee income reduce.

Aside from the publication on Unistats, the NSS results are also used in university rankings or league tables. For example, they are central to the *Guardian University Guide*, which produces scores for each UK university based on a combination of: overall satisfaction; teaching quality; feedback score; staff-student ratio; amount of money spent on each student; typical UCAS score of current students; comparison between students' individual degree results with their entry qualifications; employability score. The first three indicators out of eight are based on the NSS, giving it disproportionate influence in this ranking system (Friedberg, 2016).

Another UK university guide, *The Complete University Guide*, also uses the NSS data for one of its ten indicators, student satisfaction, whereby the Guide averages the scores “for all questions except the three about learning resources” (*The Complete University Guide*, 2018a)²³. *The Times and Sunday Times* together publish *The Good University Guide*, which also ranks UK universities. This is behind a paywall and not freely accessible; however, according to *The Complete University Guide* website (2018b), *The Times/Sunday Times* survey includes a student satisfaction ranking, which is presumably also based on NSS data. The central role of student satisfaction rankings in UK national league tables adds a weight to the NSS scores as they influence university reputations and thus prospective student enrolment numbers and associated tuition fee income, alongside the possibility of being seen as less prestigious and therefore less attractive for other private investors and funders.

With world university rankings, such as the *Times Higher Education* (THE) World University Rankings, teaching is only 30% of their overall ranking, with a ‘reputation survey’ contributing 15% of that score – this survey measures “the perceived prestige of

²³ This uses the 2016 data, so prior to the change in questions between the two pdf surveys (2014 and 2017).

institutions in teaching” (THE, 2017a) and is an invitation-only survey that targets “experienced, published scholars” (THE, 2018). While this is not related to the NSS, the NSS may well influence perceptions of UK university reputations, especially since its information is widely available online and through UK based ranking systems such as the *Guardian* University guide, Unistats, and now its influence in the TEF, which I will discuss further in the next section.

Also, another world ranking system, the QS World University Rankings, uses a similar approach to the *THE* ranking in that academic reputation constitutes 40% of the overall score, alongside 6 other metrics, and is ascertained through an opinion survey of academics about the teaching and research quality of universities (QS Top Universities, 2017; QS Intelligence Unit, 2017). So while these international ranking systems do not directly use the NSS or other student satisfaction surveys to inform their league tables, the reputations of UK universities may be influenced by the NSS results due to their prominent use in UK national league tables and the TEF.

In short, the UK university rankings include the NSS results as an indicator of student satisfaction, and in the *Guardian* rankings they also include two additional NSS-based indicators for teaching quality and feedback scores. The statistical results of the NSS survey provide extremely succinct summaries of student experiences of university, which are taken as ‘the facts’ and to be read as accurately measuring what it is like to study at an institution as compared with other institutions. However, this is a misuse of the data, according to a review of the NSS (Callender et al., 2014: 53):

“Data from the NSS are often used inappropriately to compare student satisfaction at different HE institutions ... the NSS was not designed to compare HE providers. It was designed to compare the quality of programmes in similar subject areas in different HE institutions. The misconception may have arisen from the publication by HE providers and the media of overall HE institution results and the simplistic creation of HE league tables”.

The report acknowledges that, aside from providing instructions about responsible usage, there is little that the funders – HEFCE – can do once the data is made public. However, the creation of succinct ‘facts’ through the statistical analysis of the survey mean that they are easily comparable and the jump from comparing specific courses to comparing entire universities is entirely possible when the statistical data is released. While there may be a

correct way to read the survey itself and its results, people do not necessarily read it in such a way. Indeed, they do not necessarily read it at all but may rely on reports of it.

Statistics as a representation of reality allow the easy ranking and comparison of things (universities in this case), in which 1% of difference means a difference in rank despite it not necessarily corresponding to actual distinctions in student satisfaction or experiences. Statistics also imply that, through mathematical adjustment or weighting, comparisons can be made beyond what the dataset actually says.

While there are more in-depth investigative aspects of auditing quality in UK universities, these are much less influential than the NSS. For example, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) runs the Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) process, which produces a report and a judgement of whether or not the university's "arrangements for managing academic standards and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience ... are: effective; have limited effectiveness; or are not effective" (QAA, 2015b: 1). The 2015 ELIR report (QAA, 2015b: 3) on Edinburgh judged the University to be "effective", and clarified that this was a "positive judgement". A link to this report is available via the Unistats website listing of the University, which is the only external assessment of the University of Edinburgh as a whole, as the NSS results are not collated for entire universities by Unistats, this is only done by UK university league tables (Unistats, 2018b).

However, such institutional quality reports are not likely to be read or engaged with by prospective students and other readers of the Unistats website, as they are not high profile or easily digestible 'quick facts' like the NSS numbers, or the ranking system used by UK university league tables. The succinct numerical results produced by surveys are easier to skim through and compare across institutions, which is why these numbers are so important. The NSS representation of institutions and courses are more influential than the ELIR reports, despite the latter being more investigative and providing in-depth assessments and therefore being a better representation of institutional activities. While they still have their drawbacks and, as with all texts and descriptions, are partial accounts, they are more likely to measure quality than a survey, which is largely distilled into a student satisfaction rating when used to publically compare institutions, under the guise of assessing quality.

So the survey genre allows the NSS to establish itself as an authoritative means of cross-comparison between UK university courses and institutions, regardless of the intentions of the authorship and accuracy of the data in describing the teaching quality or student experience at particular universities or on particular courses. Once the NSS statistical results are released, their succinct numerical form makes it easy to decontextualise them from the context and caveats of the survey itself, providing a quick means of assessing a university's teaching and 'student experience' for prospective students and the media. The presentation of this information on the Unistats website and in university league tables means that the student satisfaction rates have become incredibly important metrics for universities. And so regardless of the issues I have highlighted concerning potential confusion about terminology and definitions, because of the generalising nature of the survey genre, its results are taken as facts which have become increasingly important in UK HE.

Absences and Partiality: 'Student Voice' as a Form of Textual Silencing

In addition to being a restrictive and generalising format, the NSS excludes many topics from the purview of the survey and provides little room for meaningful dissent or challenge. The facticity of the survey format relies largely on presenting information that is supposedly representative; in the case of the NSS it is representing student opinions about their universities and their experience at them. Discussion here will focus on how the NSS results construct a collective student voice that is assumed to be accurate and representative and thus carries a weighty clout in UK universities, often overriding or accompanying democratic processes or internal student feedback at each institution. Actual students' voices and the variety of student experiences and opinions are sometimes silenced, overridden, or ignored in favour of the collective student voice of the NSS results, which is a coherent whole that does not exist, namely the 'average student'. To explore this, I discuss who and what the NSS actually represents through discussing what is asked and what is not asked in the survey and how the 'student voice' is constructed.

The survey asks questions around eight topics in the 2014 questionnaire (Appendix Two) – teaching; assessment and feedback; academic support; organisation and management; learning resources; personal development; overall satisfaction; and, students' union/association/guild. In the 2017 questionnaire (Appendix Three), this becomes nine topics, with three new sections: learning opportunities (which appears to adapt the old 'personal development' section to more clearly connect to academic learning); learning community; and, student voice (which includes a question about the students' union/association/guild). This grouping of questions into different topic constructions areas of concern, identifying 'things' that a student might expect at university regardless of whether or not those are, or were, the aims of UK HE. Thus the list of topics and individual questions within them both construct the parameters of the survey and consequently of the NSS account of universities, while simultaneously setting up expectations of what universities must provide and be accountable for.

The inclusion of two totally new sections in the 2017 questionnaire – learning community and student voice (Appendix Three, Lines 38-45) – illustrate a shift in which university are now expected to take more responsibility for students around the repositioning of students as consumers to be appeased. While the learning community section identifies a pre-existing element of university life, namely that students might do group projects or work with each other in their courses and that they feel part of a community, it shifts the responsibility for creating or facilitating this more firmly on the university rather than acknowledging that this is highly varied depending on both demographic factors and personal student experiences and preferences. Of more concern is the student voice section, which assesses the ongoing provision of opportunities for students to voice their opinions and feedback through their degree, which is expected to be 'valued' and 'acted on' (Appendix Three, Lines 43-44).

A student raising issues throughout their degree becomes a matter of gaming the survey by appeasing and ensuring they are satisfied before they complete the NSS in their final year, rather than a response to the actual issues or a proper assessment of whether or not it is a problem or appropriate for such concerns to be acted on. This is not a democratic engagement with students' voices as an important part of the university community to be engaging with, but rather a positioning of them as consumers to satisfy who must be appeased due to paying high fees and having the power, through the NSS, to damage

universities' reputations with potential financial cost (through lost student fees, teaching or research grants, and other forms of revenue). This also undermines the autonomy and professional expertise of academic and front-line staff whose pedagogical decisions or practically constrained provision might be challenged by a 'student voice' that has become more powerful than their professional judgement.

For example, students may complain about courses because they do not like certain aspects of them, but academic staff may think these are important for their academic development. So the question arises: whether staff should concede to student concerns regardless of the academic or pedagogical rationale just in order to improve survey scores? This question arises because of the weightiness of the survey and its results, whereby staff may feel like they must appease student concerns or at least be asked to justify their academic decisions in response to such concerns.

Another example is students may complain about class sizes or room provision, which are increasing concerns in universities that are no longer operating with a student number cap and therefore are able to increase class sizes, often to the breaking point of staff and facilities space. If a student complains about class sizes or room provision these can be impossible to change over the course of their degree due to the long-term nature of these issues – building new classrooms or hiring more teaching staff to take smaller classes cannot happen overnight. Increasing student numbers alongside not having the capacity to increase room provision and staffing at the same rate means that these are hard to change and thus students cannot have this demand satisfied due to practical constraints and admissions decisions that are taken at a university management level rather than at individual department or school level. Yet, if these concerns cause student dissatisfaction which is expressed through the NSS, this cannot be clearly directed at management due to the lack of question or sections focusing on them as the source of dissatisfaction.

This highlights the biggest omissions from the NSS – university management and central administration, other university services such as counselling, careers, disability service, and accommodation, alongside larger sector-wide issues and the socio-political or policy context in the UK, specifically around visas and immigration, the Prevent agenda, and funding. However, these issues around funding are often the biggest issues facing students while at university (Minsky, 2016; The Student Room, 2016). While the focus of the survey is specifically on *academic* experience, the term 'student experience' has now expanded in

popular usage to mean a student's entire time at university, with increasing emphasis on additional non-academic services, such as the counselling service (Yeung et al., 2016; Marsh, 2017). In addition, if there are issues with the organisation and management of courses, these are often the result of institution-wide issues around timetabling, rooms, class sizes, and general buildings or campus estate problems. But by asking the questions in a way that erases the broader university, and which focuses on front-line staff through the attribution of the survey results to individual departments or schools, this mis-assigns whose work or whose responsibility the 'dissatisfaction' is with.

While there is room to bring up such issues in the 'positive' and 'negative' open-text boxes at the end of the survey, these responses are not used on the Unistats website and do not get published or used in the same way as the statistical results, which are 'the facts' for quickly and easily comparing rankings. The messiness and specificity of the open-text box comments are not translatable to the national-level institutional comparisons, and thus are used as internal feedback to the university to help contextualise student responses and highlight specific concerns rather than as the 'real' and weighty statistical results. Detaching the open-text comments from the tick-box responses, the qualitative from the quantitative, removes important matters of context. A student might specify that they are responding in relation to one course, or to one discipline and not the other, misunderstanding how the results will be used. They might say that overall they had a great time at the university, but that class sizes or funding issues meant that they were not as positive in all their responses, which would redirect such dissatisfaction at more structural factors rather than academic departments, front-line course provision and teaching staff.

Even when students do respond to the issues covered by the survey and answer as best they can within its remit, the NSS results construct a collective student voice, a coherent whole, which does not exist but rather is statistically produced out of the 'average' student experience/opinion from those who respond to the survey. These students' responses become the textual reality of the institution; the 53% satisfaction rate for the physics degree at Edinburgh and 69% for the physics degree at Glasgow *becomes* the student satisfaction rate through the survey. As a result, a particular construction of 'student voice' enters into institutional textually-mediated processes. This representation of 'student voice' becomes a proxy for democratic processes and constructs issues out of minor percentage point differences between former students at the end of their degrees.

The use of the NSS itself as a particularly powerful construction of ‘student voice’ means that regardless of internal student feedback and discussion, the weight of the NSS survey results becomes the real public reckoning. And yet, the ‘student voice’ is a construction of the NSS, representing an average response of some students. The principle of generalising from a (self-selecting) sample of students to the whole student body relies on an assumption that once a threshold is reached then the results are representative. The thresholds for publication of NSS results was at least “23 respondents and [a] 50 per cent response rate” (Callender et al., 2014: 47), this was changed in 2016 to institutions getting access to data once a headcount of 10 was reached, but still having to achieve the 50% response rate for the data to be made public (HEFCE, 2017c: 2). This is a very small number of people upon whose opinions universities act in responses to student ‘concerns’, and when such data are made public these small samples of students and responses become the basis of institutional reputations.

Regardless of the actual percentage results, when publicised the NSS results are turned into a binary of positive and negative results to produce final percentages. This is done by removing the middle option - ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ (Line 6, Appendix Three) – which is categorised as neutral in the results (HEFCE, 2017d), and then combining the ‘positive’ results (definitely agree and mostly agree) and the ‘negative’ results (mostly disagree and definitely disagree). These composite positive and negative results are then rounded to the nearest whole percentage point to produce the public results (HEFCE, 2017d), removing the moderate middle of student responses, and turning the discussion into just positive versus negative. This simplification of the results makes it unclear why a five point Likert scale is used in the first place, if the eventual use of the data involves merging results into a simple binary.

Another element of importance is demographic information, such as gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, and age. Students’ experiences of university spaces, the institution, their classes, and university life, are heavily influenced by who they are and whether or not they fit into certain institutional norms and the whole student population. As commented on in Tucker’s (2015: 1) report for HEFCE after a review of the NSS, both mature students and students from ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately part of the non-respondents to the NSS, meaning that their opinions are less represented within the satisfaction rates.

The 'Learning community' section (Lines 38-40, Appendix Three) includes two questions: "I feel part of a community of staff and students" and "I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course". A student's response to those questions is likely to be heavily influenced by their class and age, specifically around where they live and whether or not they commute to university. If students live at home, whether that be with parents or other relatives and commute, then they are likely to have a more distant or constrained engagement with university activities, particularly those that involve evenings or early mornings that might be more expensive or more difficult to get to and from. Their experience of the 'learning community' is likely to be very different from the student who has lived in university halls, then moved into a flat with their friends within walking distance of campus. Mature students, students with caring responsibilities, and students who cannot afford to move into halls or flats near a campus, are likely to be less involved in the university 'learning community', or be dissatisfied with it, due to its inaccessibility for them. While the university must be attuned to these different needs, the demographic information about the student is key to understanding why they might be reporting dissatisfaction on this question.

While demographic information – date of birth, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability – is collected on respondents (NSS, 2018b), the absence of this in the survey itself and in its results reporting means that 'student voice' is engaged with as if students are not gendered, raced, classed and so on, but merely 'a student' explaining their satisfaction distinct from any specific experiences based on particular materialities and identities. A student who feels systematically discriminated against by staff, curricula and other students on the basis of one or more of their identities is also given little space to express this in the current format, and yet many recent campaigns around 'decolonising the curriculum'²⁴ and associated discussions about institutional discrimination against people of colour show that this is a concern, and perhaps contributes to the lower satisfaction rates amongst students from ethnic minority backgrounds (HEFCE, 2014: 32; Tucker, 2015: 5).

²⁴ For example, a video from UCL, *Why is My Curriculum White?* (Richards, 2014) was part of a broader campaign at UCL and other UK universities highlighted the Eurocentric and White nature of the UK education system alongside a lack of engagement with diversity, equality, and discrimination. This campaign inspired Gurminder Bhambra (2015) to set up the *Global Social Theory* website, which hosts a free collaborative resource on theorists and theories from around the world. Similarly Toby Sharpe and Rianna Walcott (2016), two University of Edinburgh postgraduate students, set up the website *Project Myopia*, which aims to make academia more inclusive by hosting crowdsourced reviews of texts and media beyond straight White men and Euro-/US-centric literature.

The survey creates the parameters of the 'student experience' and what is and is not deemed relevant to that experience. These parameters exclude any engagement with university management or other university support services, meaning that they are excluded from being judged by the collective student voice. Students can include references to this in the positive/negative open-ended boxes, however, this data will not be statistically analysed and the reader is not led to suppose that this is 'relevant' to the survey.

Another interesting absence is the difference between the list of logos in the 2014 survey and the 2017 survey pdfs. Unistats and the National Union of Students (NUS) logos are present in the older version (Line 2, Appendix Two), but are removed in the updated 2017 one (Line 48, Appendix Three). Instead four new logos have been included – Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), The Department for the Economy, Scottish Funding Council (SFC), and the National College for Teaching and Leadership, alongside the continuing presence of the NHS Health Education England logo (Line 48, Appendix Three). While it is unclear why the Unistats branding has been removed, as the information is used by Unistats, removal of the NUS is perhaps due to the NUS organised boycott of the NSS from 2016 so as to protest its use in the TEF and plans to use TEF results to increase tuition fees (NUS, 2016; NUS, 2017b).

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is a HEFCE system of rating university teaching introduced in 2016 as a trial year, with the first results published in June 2017; it "aims to recognise and reward excellence in teaching, learning and outcomes, and to help inform prospective student choice" (HEFCE, 2017e). The TEF rating system involves ranking entire institutions as either gold, silver or bronze, or provisional if insufficient data is available to inform the ranking (HEFCE, 2017e; BBC, 2017). However, as BBC (2017) coverage of the first TEF results highlights, the assessment does not include actual visiting of lectures and tutorials, and instead is based on data. This is reiterated by Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute, who said that students needed to keep in mind that the TEF does not "accurately reflects [sic] precisely what goes on in lecture halls" (BBC, 2017). Interestingly, while the TEF is voluntary for Scottish universities, some opted to participate, which Robertson (2017) argues is for the "perceived reputational gain balanced with risk". This demonstrates how important the perception of universities has become,

whereby entire audit processes are willingly opted into in order to garner public recognition of 'excellence'. I will explore this more in Chapter 5 on the REF in relation to league tables.

The BBC (2017) also reported the chair of the TEF assessment panel, Professor Chris Husbands, saying that while universities are ranked gold, silver, or bronze, they may have elements of other ratings, e.g. a bronze-rated institution might have gold-standard departments. This highlights the problem with institution-wide rating systems; it flattens differences between departments, generalising in a way that becomes meaningless when one is unlikely to study beyond one or two departments. The alternative – department-specific ratings – has been announced and will be in place for students to search on by 2020 (BBC, 2018). In this new rating system, the TEF assessment of teaching quality as gold, silver and bronze will be broken down into degree course or subject-specific rankings, rather than just the rankings for the entire institution, supplementing current TEF data with information on graduate careers, salaries, and drop-out rates (BBC, 2018). Student union representatives expressed concern over the TEF in a collective letter to the *Guardian Letters* (2016), arguing that "The TEF aims to link tuition fees to an assessment of teaching quality according to questionable metrics" and that such changes would discourage widening participation due to fear of increased debt from tuition fees.

As the NUS endorsement of the NSS is now absent from the survey itself, this raises questions about whether or not it is representative of students or if its widespread usage in UK HE is seen as appropriate by the students it supposedly represents. The NUS (2017a) discussion of the NSS highlights that twenty-five students' unions took part in the NUS supported boycott of the NSS and this led to twelve dropping below the 50% threshold required for results publication, rendering those results invalid. However, it also discusses the questions on students' unions, highlighting that low scores in this question were used by different students' unions to lobby universities for more funding to 'fix' this issue, which results in improved scores. This presents an interesting picture of how democratic student bodies, like individual student unions and the NUS, use the NSS as leverage with universities, using the constructed collective student voice of the survey to advocate for better funding for democratically elected student voices such as themselves.

This was also evident in my interviews, in speaking to former student union employees and sabbatical officers about how Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) engaged with the NSS. One former sabbatical officer commented that low NSS

scores in particular departments were strategically used to get them to engage with EUSA and accept their assistance in improving support for students. The NSS 'student voice' was used to advocate for taking student concerns seriously, allowing EUSA to position itself as the solver of a supposed problem that had been publically exposed by survey results. So while the NUS, student activists and student unions might be critical of the NSS and have withdrawn support for it since the call to boycott, they have sometimes successfully used it to negotiate a larger role for students and students' unions within departments and university decision-making.

There are issues with using the NSS results as a blunt indicator of the 'student voice' as one homogenous collective entity, as this erases differences between students, does not represent all students, and as discussed here does not provide accurate or clear information about who or what is to be blamed for a particular issue. The examples of student unions strategically using low-scores in the NSS to advocate for students within the decision-making of the university has been successful as a short-term approach to more democratic decision-making. However, this can quickly become a simplistic appeasement of student concerns, treating them as consumers and encouraging universities to automatically bow to all and any student requests for fear of negative results in the NSS and backlash from students' union who represent indebted students increasingly concerned about getting their money's worth from their degree.

The significant absences and partialities of the NSS and its results undermine the supposed facticity of the survey and suggest its results should be considered with a large pinch of salt. In particular, these various limitations add up to a spurious student voice, showing how it is a construction rather than a representation of some coherent entity that exists. As I have discussed, the survey questionnaire itself leaves no room for meaningful dissent about larger sectoral and socio-political issues about funding, marketisation of UK HE, and decision-making within universities. Hence, the NUS and students' union boycott of the NUS highlighted that one of the most effective uses of the survey as a collective student voice is to boycott it. This demonstrates how the partiality and restrictive nature of the survey format and the focus of the NSS means that, while students have been able to 'weaponise' the survey in the short-term to encourage universities to listen to students, the NSS is not a sufficient proxy for democratic processes within universities and is unable to provide a meaningful and nuanced student voice.

Temporality and Spatiality: Textual Time as Neutral

As with most institutional texts, the NSS and its statistical results take the reader out of real time and place and into textual time and place. This draws the respondents and other readers into the yearly cycle of advertising, conducting, analysing, and publishing the survey. The NSS's particular textual temporality and spatiality is decontextualised from larger socio-political discussions and the actual events and timelines of individual universities and students, throwing into question its representation of actuality. Dorothy Smith (1990b) discusses in 'The Active Text' two accounts of an incident in Berkeley which highlight the ways in which textual timelines, representing official institutional standpoints, have a 'facticity' that is often understood as overriding direct experiential knowledge. This indicates how institutional texts and the framings they impose on everyday activities are often very powerful and override people's experiential knowledge, or else these have to be fitted into such framings. This is part of the particular organising power of textual reality, in that the actual is overridden by the textual, whereby the facticity of institutional texts such as the NSS present institutional or official accounts as the most authoritative.

The survey produces results which are attributed to a single year – for example, the 2017 NSS results – and yet the survey is not actually evaluating a single year of student experience at a particular university or on a particular course. Rather, the survey asks students to comment on their entire degree, which is usually 3-4 years of study, and specifically asks them to provide their “current view of the course as a whole” (Appendix Two, Line 8). So more specifically the 2017 survey results are actually representing a self-selecting sample of students' opinions on their entire degree at a particular moment in time. And as the actual survey is open for five months (January-April of the student's final year) (NSS, 2018a), the 2017 results cover students' viewpoints of their entire degree at some point during January to April. Thus the particular moment of response, of textualising student experiences within the framework of the NSS, is hugely varied as it could be completed at any time during the five month window the survey is open. The assumption that different student responses are comparable is a construction of the survey and actually

represents a very varied array of times, both when students actually respond, and also what they are responding about.

It is significant that the survey is conducted during the five month period at the end of a student's degree, which can be a busy, stressful and rapidly changing environment due to potential job offers, places on additional courses, and working out what their likely degree classification will be. It matters at what point the student responds in their final year; whether they respond before or after doing their dissertations, before or after getting first term results and perhaps mid-term results from their second term. For example, have they got an offer from a graduate scheme and are on course to get a 1st class degree? If so, then perhaps they will be more likely to positively respond to the NSS. However, if someone already knows it is difficult or impossible for them to get the 1st or 2.1 degree classification they were aiming for due to getting back low mid-term marks, or if they have just heard they did not get a graduate job, then they are probably more likely to answer negatively on the NSS.

In terms of the temporality 'within' the survey questionnaire itself, it is important to think about how it is structured, particularly the sequential ordering and grouping of questions. For example, the survey used to have three questions about 'personal development' (Lines 37-40, Appendix Two) which came prior to the all-important overall satisfaction question, with a single students' union question at the very end, almost as a separate afterthought. But since 2017, the survey has a section on 'learning community' and then 'student voice' (including a student union question) (Lines 38-45, Appendix Three), and these are placed before an overall satisfaction question. Does this influence student responses, with how they feel about student voice overly influencing the 'overall satisfaction' question and intertwining the two ideas more closely than previously?

In addition, the survey yearly cycle occurs without much acknowledgement of the socio-political context in which the NSS can be, and has been, a big player. The broader socio-political context of the times, for example, the recent history of UK HE around neoliberalism, alongside older discussions of 'audit culture' and 'new public management',²⁵ are central to understanding the significance and usage of the NSS.

²⁵ Referring to increased fees, the encouragement of competition between institutions for students and funding, the increased use of casualised contracts, and various forms of audit and accountability processes.

However, students are not often aware of such matters and so fill it in as if it is a disconnected and neutral standalone survey, rather than part of a highly contentious process of ranking universities each year. While this has been the context in which the survey has been completed since its inception, recent changes have made it even more contentious and highly politicised, namely the TEF and the associated NUS-supported boycott of the NSS. The stated aim of the survey and its actual weight and usage in UK HE are quite different, as my explanation of the NSS usage in league tables and Unistats has shown, and this is an important context for students to consider when filling out the survey. If they wish to give constructive feedback to inform future students' experiences or to let off steam about particular issues they had, the NSS is not the best forum for this. The impact of such survey responses will be taken seriously, but in a more blunt and over-generalised way than many students might realise.

Universities participate in a variety of accountability and auditing processes. Some of these are formal and required, such as those surrounding Visa sponsorship, in which the UK Visas and Immigration Agency requires universities to comply with various measures in order to retain their ability to sponsor visas. Whereas others, such as the NSS, are a more informal or indirect form audit. The NSS is not an official requirement of universities themselves, but rather students choose whether or not to complete the survey, and universities often encourage students to complete it.

While the stated aim of the NSS for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), who commission the survey, is to get student opinions on "the quality of their courses" (HEFCE, 2017b), it is often framed as a student satisfaction survey due to the final 'overall satisfaction' question, which asks students to respond to the statement "Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course" (Line 46-47, Appendix Three). The stated purpose of the survey is "to contribute to public accountability, help inform the choices of prospective students and provide data that assists institutions in enhancing the student experience" (HEFCE, 2017b). Yet it is also used in UK university rankings, in some university marketing campaigns, and now in the TEF to help judge the quality of teaching at different universities. This widespread usage of the survey results in it being a proxy measure for quality. This means that the survey has become a particularly weighty regulatory presence in UK HE, particularly for those institutions who are lower down the rankings or whose scores do not increase year on year, despite efforts to fix supposed

problems indicated by the survey. What this regulatory power of the NSS illustrates is how some texts are taken as factual, as reflective of reality. However, textual representations are never the full picture, and with extremely restrictive textual formats like surveys, the institutional framing and intentions of the author(s) structure the textual reality. Thus, when textual reality is taken as a stand-in for actual experience, as with the NSS being taken as a measure of the real problems and issues in universities or on particular courses, then the textual representation becomes more important than what is actually going on. Regardless of the problems themselves, gaming the NSS survey²⁶ has become part of the process because it is the textual reality that must be changed.

This is evident from the new guidelines against ‘inappropriate influence’ on the NSS, which is one of main sections of information about the NSS on HEFCE’s website (HEFCE, 2017b). ‘Inappropriate influence’ is defined as “any activity which may encourage students to reflect anything other than their true opinion of their experiences during their courses in their NSS responses” (IpsosMORI, 2017: 6). Listed examples include, “Explicitly instructing students on how to complete the survey, such as explaining the meanings of questions or the NSS scale ... Linking the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students’ degrees” (IpsosMORI, 2017: 6). Perhaps students would be unwilling to mark their institution down if they realised that the NSS results were used in league tables which influence the perceived value of an institutional qualification and thus their own degree. These guidelines appear to encourage staff to avoid explaining the wider significance of the NSS, instead encouraging students to fill it in ‘cold’ and ‘objectively’, that is, without knowledge of the context.

The final question, which remains unchanged between the two surveys, is “Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course” (Line 42, Appendix Two; Line 47, Appendix Three). Measuring student satisfaction is very different from measuring the quality of a course. Students may have had disproportionately high (or low) expectations, or expectations that were very different from what was being offered, alongside many other personal and circumstantial factors beyond the control of the university or department.

²⁶ For example, Kingston University London staff were audio recorded encouraging students to inflate their positive responses on the survey alongside highlighting that doing badly in the survey would devalue their degrees through lower positioning on national league tables (BBC, 2008). More recently, an anonymous academic discussed similar practices of their university and others pressuring students to complete the survey or influencing their answers (Guardian Academics Anonymous, 2018).

Similarly, student expectations are changing due to paying large fees. The discourse of students as consumers and universities being expected to function as total institutions and an extension of school, rather than an independent space, means there are higher expectations of what a university should provide. Paying £9000 a year means that student may feel they do not get their money's worth, or that they are entitled to receive a particular outcome. For example, two court cases in which former students sued UK universities for insufficient or bad teaching and supervision, which they argued meant that they did worse than they 'should' have (McDonald, 2010; Taylor & Sandeman, 2016).

The understanding of the NSS results each year is also not contextualised by local happenings at specific institutions. There is no room for the results to be qualified or contextualised, either in the respondents' completion of the survey or the publication of results on Unistats or in league tables. And this very structure of a yearly cycle to the survey and publication of results, structures how universities respond around small yearly fluctuations – up or down 1% point from one year to the next is not necessarily significant, and yet these often become the basis for the naming of 'problems'. Such 'problems' identified by NSS results are often statistically insignificant and might be linked to unavoidable one-off events, such as a key administrator going on maternity leave, course organisation temporarily given to someone less experienced, a group of students unhappy about one particular lecturer, or building works at a department temporarily removing a communal study area. Thus, when universities respond to such 'problems' the temptation, and often the practice, is to put a sticking plasters on the problem or attempt to manage student responses to the NSS, rather than addressing a real underlying issue.

For example, students might think feedback is insufficient because they do not get enough one-on-one discussion time with lecturers or tutors, and this is connected to whether or not the lecturers and tutors have sufficient time to provide office hours and in the case of tutors if they are paid for these. The institutional response is organised around a yearly cycle of the NSS results and is unlikely to fix the more basic matters of time and money which are heavy organising of teaching provision at UK universities, and instead might focus on one-off campaigns or tokenistic measures to manage the NSS responses in preparation for the next survey cycle.

The negotiation between the actual time and place and the textual time and place encourages a gaming of the survey in order to ensure that institutional actualities fit into

the NSS timings and survey in order to maximise scores. As discussed earlier, while the textual timing of the survey is the same across all institutions each year, it might come into conflict with local timings at each university or particular one-off events which skew results or disproportionately affect some institutions more than others. The weight of this survey in organising reputations and associated funding streams in UK HE means that such mismatches between textual timing and actual timing encourages universities to shift their priorities, provision, or timings of final year activities to better suit the survey. That is, actuality can become re-shaped to reflect textual reality in order to game the survey. This would involve something akin to Smith's (1974: 43) discussion of ideological circles or the ideological 'three-step': institutional texts approximate reality through general categories, actuality must be translated into these categories, the textual representation is taken as actuality, and subsequently actuality begins to change to better fit the textual reality in order to better fit with the textual categories and the institutional texts, namely the NSS. Regardless of what they do, however, the weighty NSS account means that the yearly NSS cycle and the topics it identifies as 'things' for universities to be concerned about means that it organises local activities around a similar function and timeline, which is that of the survey text and process.

The Student Experience: An Ideological Code Emerging In and from the NSS and Resultant Work

The survey and its results have thus become a powerful organiser of UK HE, as discussed previously, and this has produced 'the student experience' as an ideological code that refocuses UK HE provision towards the perceived experiences of students as framed and understood through NSS representations of this, conforming to a service provision model with students as consumers of an educational product. Ideological codes "operate as a free-floating form of control in the relations of public discourse" (Smith, 1999: 175), and act as frames through which things are seen, heard or read and understood. This idea of 'the student experience' as something to be judged as satisfactory or unsatisfactory has emerged along with the NSS, in which students assess their university experiences through their survey responses, which are then taken as a weighty collective 'student voice' that

must be listened to and responded to. However, 'the student experience' as something to worry about and to fix has started to operate more independently of the NSS itself, in organising talk and activity in UK HE beyond the remit of the NSS survey. Indeed some of my interviewees spoke of the NSS as a central part of the commercialisation of universities in the UK, in positioning students as consumers to be satisfied, a neoliberal way of thinking about HE.

University attentiveness to 'the student experience' predates the discussion of 'student voice', and at the University of Edinburgh this has increasingly coalesced around the 'problem of feedback', something apparent since 2014 when I started my research. While initially this was based on the survey results, 'feedback' as part of 'the student experience' became disconnected from particular texts or processes and grew into a public discourse, which has had an effect beyond the source through talk and other texts. In this section, I will discuss how this code is present within the NSS and also heavily organises people's everyday activities, beginning with the survey and focusing on how NSS questions and topics become actioned in this local setting around feedback. Then the discussion will examine how other texts begin to use the ideological code of 'the student experience'.

The NSS's grouping together of questions into topics constructs different 'things' which become matters of concern for universities. The 'thingness' of these did not necessarily exist prior to the NSS, but due to the ways in which the results are used and taken seriously by institutions, the importance of 'student voice' has become very important as a marker of student satisfaction to be understood and fixed. In addition, 'Assessment and feedback' (Lines 16-21, Appendix Two; Lines 20-24, Appendix Three) also became a huge cause for concern as a result of the first incarnation of the NSS (Appendix Two).

The largest section in the 2014 survey was that on 'Assessment and Feedback' (Lines 16-21, Appendix Two). It involved five questions, as opposed to the four about teaching, and three in most other sections. In the 2017 survey the emphasis shifted, with three sections having four questions: 'The teaching on my course' (Lines 11-15, Appendix Three), 'Assessment and Feedback' (Lines 20-24, Appendix Three) and 'Student Voice' (Lines 41-45, Appendix Three). In comparison, the other sections have between one and three questions. This implies that there is a greater complexity and/or importance to teaching, feedback, and student voice, due to the increased focus on these topics; and this

displaces feedback as the most asked about section in the older version of the survey. Perhaps a shift is in process from the feedback-focus of previous NSS results, to one that centres feedback alongside teaching quality and student voice.

Throughout my time at Edinburgh I have witnessed many conversations, meetings and other occasions in which the NSS scores have been mentioned, including tutor training events, staff meetings, and teaching programme review meetings. The NSS has also appeared as an agenda item in staff meetings, with 'feedback' routinely mentioned in tutor training events as 'to be improved' and kept in mind when interacting with students and marking essays. A notable change has been the requirement to change the term 'office hours' to 'guidance and feedback hours'. This has been to match the language of the NSS, with the 'feedback' problem showing how the survey has at points reframed local language-use in an attempt to improve results, something I was told by an interviewee had stemmed from an external consultancy firm recommendation. Regardless, the term feedback has become a shorthand buzzword for what needs to 'fixed' and therefore a concern for teaching staff. Whilst the specific questions, language, and percentage scores from the NSS are not explicitly used or referred to, there is an institutional discourse of the NSS being a threat; if staff do not do well, then students will mark down the institution. Whilst it is often true that front-line workers are unaware of the specifics underlying institutional texts, they do know the relevance to their own position, and tutors realise that they need to ensure feedback is effective and students feel supported.

According to University Court documents and data produced by the Student Surveys' team, School of Social and Political Science (SSPS) has pulled down the University average satisfaction score because of its large size (University of Edinburgh Court, 2014: 21). Attention to 'bad scores' on the NSS in recent years at Edinburgh has focused on SSPS and subsequently on measures to facilitate the improvement of scores. An example concerns how much attention is given to feedback, changing from my first two years of undergraduate study (2008-2010), when some courses provided individual feedback (of varying quality and quantity) and sometime collective class feedback, to more extensive feedback from tutors and lecturers in the final year of my undergraduate career (2012). Currently the expectation is that tutors will provide more written and verbal feedback on undergraduate assignments, a much more standardised and extensive activity than previously. The process consequently now involves providing skills training in essay writing

and understanding feedback in the first and second year. This alongside dedicating lecture- and tutorial-time to explaining assignments and marking criteria, and emailing and meeting with students to discuss their essay plans and ideas, or sometimes to explain feedback to them. There is a standardised feedback form for essays which has a tick-box format to grade different elements – thinking skills; comprehension; writing skills – alongside open-text boxes to write summative comments – strengths; weaknesses; ways to improve – alongside sometimes also including in-text comment boxes and tracked changes to the essay itself. The feedback process has become so extensive that there is now discussion that there is too much feedback and there should be a refocus on quality over quantity to ensure that students are not overwhelmed and also to ensure consistency across courses and markers.

This shift has been facilitated by ‘bad marks’ in the feedback section of the NSS. For example, Edinburgh’s most recent review from The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) highlights the NSS results, specifically assessment and feedback scores, as “lower scores than the University wishes” (QAA, 2015a: 4). The report goes on to explain what measures have been taken in relation to improving NSS scores and explains “The University has invested significant time and effort in initiatives aimed at improving students’ experiences of feedback on assessment, and has expressed disappointment that this work has not yet had a significant impact on the NSS scores, although small positive changes were seen in the 2014 NSS results.” (QAA, 2015a: 13). The NSS is mentioned eight times in this report, with a whole section on ‘feedback on assessment’ (QAA, 2015a: 13-14). In the ELIR follow up report (QAA, 2017: 1-3), there is also a section on assessment and feedback, which highlights one of the main issues being inconsistency of feedback, which is brought up in the NSS open-text comments.

The Student Surveys Unit has analysed these comments to try to work out how to improve the scores, but this qualitative data is analysed quantitatively in order to identify trends or non-individual problems. The University also mentions many other projects and sources of information, demonstrating an intensive process of trying to understand and change this ‘feedback problem’. The clearly influential role that the NSS plays in informing and guiding the University’s ‘strategic priorities’, as discussed in these ELIR reports, is something that can be seen playing out at lower levels in generating new work and

sometimes entirely new job positions, which I will explore more in the next section. But is it addressing a real problem?

While originally the identification of this as a problem helped rectify feedback that could sometimes be unclear or insufficient, the ongoing concern about improving NSS marks means the actual quality of feedback becomes less important than the perception by students that they are receiving 'good feedback'. In other words, it is not students' actual views on actual feedback that are being taken into consideration, but rather the generalised NSS results, which act as a proxy for this. Thus the focus is on changing the NSS results, rather than changing the underlying problem, which sometimes is impossible or at least out of the hands of individual departments or Schools. Indeed, the 'feedback problem' is one of the major national results from the NSS, as SurrIDGE's (2008) report on NSS findings from 2005-2007 has highlighted; the assessment and feedback section received the lowest satisfaction scores, specifically on the questions of promptness and usefulness (Line 19 and 21, Appendix Two), which both had lower than average satisfaction scores.

The Higher Education Academy report on assessment and feedback issues in the NSS (Williams et al., 2008) outlines media commentary on 'low scores' alongside exploring institution-specific attention to feedback from the 1980s onwards. They found that many institutions were already aware of the feedback problem and were attempting to rectify it, that satisfaction was improving over time, but that some of the underlying problems might take a longer time to identify and fix, particularly promptness and usefulness of feedback: "The fact that these issues routinely score less well than other items suggests that this situation is unlikely to be rectified without a combination of effective action and a change in student expectations." (Williams et al., 2008: 20).

While highlighting this problem seems to have been helpful in refocusing university attention on teaching and listening to student concerns, the feedback 'problem' seems out of synch. In my experience, there have been dramatic changes to feedback provision, which is now extensive, and yet the NSS-related anxiety about feedback and appeasing students does not seem to have changed. These major year-on-year changes did not herald major shifts in feedback scores on the NSS, making such efforts seem insufficient or futile. What can universities do if they implement changes and their scores do not change?

In my informal interviews about the NSS and my observations in tutor training and staff meetings, I encountered much talk about the NSS which was disconnected from the actual results or the survey itself. Instead it was discussed as 'an important thing', a metric that 'we' were doing badly at and therefore needed to improve in different ways. The interpretation of Edinburgh 'doing badly at feedback' has persisted despite the actual scores of the university, and has become an ideological code that organises university front-line teaching work. This is to focus on readers/hearers of the NSS as active participants in reproducing particular ideological codes, like those around feedback, and it highlights how active the text can be *as an idea* rather than as an actual text and its details. Prior (2003: 18) considers readers of texts as performers in which readers can produce new meanings, and reinvent the text each time they perform a reading. While this is discussed by Prior specifically in relation to musical or theatrical performances of texts, it applies to the ways in which regulatory texts are performed in everyday life, whereby for instance referring to the NSS in talk at work can popularise particular interpretations that are different from what the actual text says or was intended to say.

While Smith (2005) argues that there are 'correct' interpretations of institutional texts and that readers who 'incorrectly' read them may be disciplined, this is often about front-line workers at different organisational levels, whereby someone more senior would reject their interpretation of a text. However, at the local level in UK universities, the interpretation of NSS feedback scores popularises an interpretation of them as 'bad' in a way that is disconnected from the actual survey, the results and the context of NSS data in general. At Edinburgh, this reading may be 'incorrect' in a broader sense, but its popularised retelling at a local level through second- and third-hand understandings of it means that it has become a local ideological code that uses the weighty authority of the NSS text to justify responses based on such an interpretation.

The wide extent of the NSS being used by those who have never seen or read it (both the survey itself and the full results) is notable. Overwhelmingly it is known through second-hand distilled readings by management who report on the results through mentions in meeting minutes, emails, policy documents, conversations and so on, and this trickles down the staff hierarchy into tutor training sessions, teaching meetings, and administrative and student service workers' engagements with students. In these situations, the NSS becomes a carrot, a stick, and something in between, as well as a legitimator of

membership by knowing the institutional lingo. However, the imperative to improve the results changes the dynamic between actual students and teaching and student services/administrative staff, because a generalised 'student' must be responded to.

The results are also utilised by student union representatives and this does not subvert the NSS, but instead plays into attempts to 'game' the results and appeal to students. This puts increasing pressure on front-line staff and redirects efforts and money, rather than tackling underlying issues about overworked staff, casualised contract teaching staff, job insecurity, rising tuition fees and cost of living. It also contributes to shifting attitudes towards seeing education as a product to be consumed rather than a process of learning. The union has thereby helped the NSS become an unintended boss text, an important organiser of teaching provision and student support, being regularly referred to in meetings, training sessions and institutional texts, and casual talk.

These performative uses of the text as a disciplining, regulatory tool has created much new work in universities. This involves both responding to the 'student voice' constructed by the survey results, and also encouraging student participation in other feedback mechanisms to 'catch' problems before students complete the NSS. However, this extra work is not necessarily written into workload models, as in the case of the Student Experience Officers, but just added onto the administration roles that teaching staff must complete. For example, while SSPS has had end-of-course feedback forms since I was an undergraduate, there are now also mid-term feedback cards half-way through each course in order to get student feedback and respond to it before the end of the course (if possible). It is important to think about the cumulative time being added to staff workloads to process such feedback and enact it, which adds to an environment already increasingly characterised by overwork (Gill, 2009).

The official institutional processes around the NSS at the University of Edinburgh were explained to me in an interview with a Student Surveys Team (now called the Student Surveys Unit) worker, which I contextualised and updated with information from the University website. This interview was more formal than others but it helped me to better understand the official ways in which the NSS survey and results move around the University. At the time, the survey unit was relatively new, being funded through the student experience project, which initially received three years funding 2012-2014. At that point the Student Surveys Team administered surveys, then analysed and communicated

their results across the university. They prepared reports for staff, and took requests for tailored analysis, for example by Schools. They also were able to access local-levels of data, as long as the response rate was sufficient for it to be released.

It was through this that I first heard about the Edinburgh Student Experience Survey (ESES), an internal student survey conducted between 2013 and 2016 (Student Surveys, 2017). The NSS results are public and used to rank the university, whereas the ESES was internal and completed by non-final year students, with the topics and questions largely following similar topics to the NSS. It interlocks with the NSS, as it was set up directly in response to bad NSS results in order to catch issues early before students complete the NSS. As it gathers opinions from non-final year students about their experience of the university, the idea is that there would be sufficient time to solve any problems before students completed the NSS. This survey allows students to record their responses and provide feedback earlier, and thus might help avoid the NSS being used in a negative way, with the idea that it might increase scores. During this interview, I was told about the ‘You said ... We listened ...’ poster campaign that was part of the university’s attempts to “close the feedback loop”. In other words, it was intended to let students know what was being done about their concerns and therefore ‘satisfy’ them that they are being listened to. This poster campaign involved using different quotes to highlight student criticisms and the university’s response to these, for example, the assessment and feedback poster, posted in public locations and publicly available online, is shown below:



(University of Edinburgh, 2014).

Other similar efforts as part of 'You said, We did ...' are available in different parts of the University (University of Edinburgh, 2017b; University of Edinburgh, 2017c). This illustrates how the NSS begins to create new areas of work in the University, with the creation of the Student Experience Project (2012-2016), creating jobs called 'Student Experience Officers', whose job descriptions included responsibilities explicitly for student surveys. For example, a job description for one Student Experience Officer details 30% of the job as 'enhancing student experience' with 5% of this dedicated to "working with the Year coordinators in advertising the National Student Survey and Edinburgh Student Experience Survey, organising events to coincide and encourage students to participate" (Appendix Four).

That 5% of a job is dedicated to facilitating the NSS and a survey designed to catch problems before they reach the NSS shows how seriously the NSS is taken, and it shows that the attempts to improve results are about managing the survey, for example, by matching ESES questions to the NSS questions, as much or more than dealing with 'actual' problems. Such problems may or may not exist, but it is their textual existence that must be changed. This is testament to both how much work is being created as a result of the NSS, and how powerful it is in constructing problems and structuring the ways that universities respond. The term 'student experience' as an ideological code guides how a university must engage with students and their needs and wants. This term has become an oft-used phrase to summarise something that needs to be managed. The 'Student Experience' officer positions have been created as part of an overhauling of student support in response to low satisfaction scores in the NSS. Usage of this terminology, the new staff positions, the repeated use of the term feedback, and the change of the name of office hours to guidance feedback hours are all part of rebranding to better fit the language of the NSS and thus to get higher scores.

In discussing the NSS with teaching staff in various Schools, its discursive existence is clear in mentions of it as a reminder of the importance of teaching and student perceptions of teaching. Many of these references were not to the actual survey or its specifics, because most of the people I have spoken with have not actually seen it, but concerned the results and how these are used in national rankings in UK-wide university league tables and locally. The NSS is largely perceived as a 'stick' used by the university management to pressure Schools into implementing changes. For example, where a

School's NSS scores for feedback or overall satisfaction has dropped and this is thought to be due to a lack of 'academic community', this would be used to pressure Schools to engage more with students or to implement schemes targeting the low scoring areas.

The NSS acts as the 'reality' against which staff activities are judged, with the language and structure of the survey organising responses and beginning to structure actuality to better fit the survey. Since the NSS is being used beyond its intended role and produces a hierarchy of value between different courses and universities, the desire to maximise funding streams or to engineer higher placements in rankings certainly encourages universities to 'play the game'. In addition, while members of university managements understand the need to improve scores, there is not always an appreciation of how good or bad the NSS is at highlighting real issues. In terms of feedback, an institution is implementing many schemes to respond to student expectations, in listening to their concerns, making appropriate changes, and feeding information about these changes back to them. 'The student experience' has emerged as a major way of summarising the purpose of the survey; being satisfied or dissatisfied with this has become a focal point of a university's response.

Facticity and Bossiness: The NSS as an Organiser of Actuality

This chapter has closely focused on the NSS as a text, particularly regarding the 2014 and 2017 NSS pdfs of the survey. While I have provided a detailed analysis of the two pdf surveys, I have also extensively referenced other primary documents, such as the NSS and HEFCE websites and associated policy documents and reports, alongside other websites such as Unistats, media reports, league tables, and documents specific to the University of Edinburgh. These were essential to contextualise the NSS pdf surveys under analysis, as they provide the instructions for how to 'correctly' read and understand the NSS, most importantly identifying the key text-act-text processes in which it is tied up. The pdf example surveys I have focused on when discussing the NSS are not the actual survey filled in by students. But nor are the actual results referred to in media coverage and management meetings, nor is it the actual survey that is discussed by teaching staff. However, the pdf survey text has provided the questions themselves, which have

influenced the broader language used at Edinburgh and more broadly how universities engage with students.

This analysis of the NSS both says something about how UK HE is organised, and also about how powerful institutional texts can be when used to legitimise processes and events, regardless of the relevance of the text to these uses. This well-known national survey provides a lightning rod for lots of different anxieties, concerns and patterns in UK HE, which may have little to do with the intended meaning and usage of the survey itself. The criss-crossing of political projects and influences can be read in other organisational texts like the NSS, but only when read in relation to other texts, usages and the broader context. It is important to read texts in relation to their contexts in order to understand both how they were produced for particular purposes, and also how they act as sites of contested meanings and usages by active readers and performers.

Of central importance to my analysis has been my role as a “competent reader ... [able to] command the interpretive method of the relational process being investigated” (Smith, 1990b: 223), namely that I am an insider in UK HE, was recently part of the intended readership of the survey (as a final year undergraduate student) and now am organised by the results (as a staff member in UK HE). What makes me confident in my interpretation including the widespread nature of similar approaches to negotiating the NSS beyond the University of Edinburgh is the work of Duna Sabri (2011; 2013). Sabri has analysed the NSS and ‘the student experience’, primarily through interviews and focus groups, alongside exploring the broader policy framework in which the NSS was produced and operates and concludes (2013: 3.3-3.4) that many UK university responses to the survey use the specific format of ‘You said, we did’, just as I highlight happened at Edinburgh. This was alongside the increasing NSS-related workload, listing numerous UK universities who have created jobs which focus on ‘student experience’, as at Edinburgh. However, times have changed since this research and even since the beginning of my own research, and very recently the significance of the NSS seems to be waning slightly, overtaken by discussions of the TEF, which expands the array of metrics for universities to be concerned about.

When doing this analysis, I drew on an example of Smith analysing a single text - ‘K is Mentally Ill’ (Smith, 1990b: 12-51) - and of comparing two accounts of the ‘same’ event - ‘The Active Text’ (Smith, 1990b: 120-158) – both of which focus on the production of facticity. However, these approaches analyse quite different texts from the NSS. While

those texts produce facticity, they are oral or narrative accounts, and thus their structuring and instructions for how to 'correctly' read them are often implicit or draw on conceptual frameworks about, for example, mental health. However, with the NSS instructions for how to correctly read it are often made very explicit through specific written guidance in the text about how to complete the survey, and about how to read the results. Another difference is the weightiness and facticity of the survey genre, as a version of representing reality this is widely regarded as factual, accurate, and generalisable. This appeals to scientific discourse and the weightiness of statistics as facts. Interestingly, this belief in statistics as factual overrides the specific instructions for reading the results issued by HEFCE, for example, in not generalising results to whole institutions.

Smith (1990b: 24-25) argues that "for any set of actual events, there is always more than one version that can be treated as what has happened", meaning that we must also investigate the problem of whose account to believe, "who is allocated the privilege of definition". This discussion is underway with the recent TEF results, with commentators asking if it is to be believed; could it possibly be accurate that supposedly 'excellent' universities only achieved 'bronze' ratings in the exercise? When presented with conflicting accounts, how do we assess which if any is accurate? Such questions are central to my epistemological negotiation in Chapter 2, and the answer here is similar, in asking how accounts have been constructed and on what evidence, and whether this is convincing.

Smith (1990b: 216) explores how the facticity of institutional texts can begin to alter actuality in line with textual priorities and representations of actuality: "actualities are converted into the conceptual and categorical order of organizational or discursive courses of action". Thus, the ideological 'three-step' mentioned in the previous chapter occurs, in which the NSS representation and framing of 'the student experience' through different categories like feedback, student voice, learning opportunities and so on are the ways in which students must textually represent their experience. This requires student respondents to translate actuality – *their* student experience - into such categories, which are then taken as representative of '*the* student experience' through the results of the survey. This is then responded to by universities, whereby actuality – student experiences - begins to become more like the textual reality – 'the student experience' as in survey questions and categories - to ensure actuality fits into the survey format in the hope of facilitating better NSS scores.

The NSS becomes the source of a factual collective student voice, given substance through the survey format, a dominant version of knowledge production apparently producing transcendent ahistorical and 'neutral' representations. Smith (1990b: 216-217) argues that facticity may be solely a product of textual processes, and that it is a central part of ruling relations due to it allowing an objectification of social relations or social consciousness. A text can exist across place and time and can masquerade as objective and neutral, hiding authorship and the historical specificity of being produced in a time and place by a writer; thus texts provide the perfect vehicles for successful transcendent representations which then dominate non-textual, unofficial 'subjective' accounts, being seen as factual.

There are two important temporal points: the moment of inscription or textualisation, when students complete the survey; and, the release of the results. Both are moments of reading, for student respondents read the text and respond, and then the results are read in different contexts and framings – the Unistats website, the league tables, in policy reports. The point of textualisation – students translating their actuality into textual reality – has become incredibly important for universities, as they cannot control how the results are distributed or framed, but they have a semblance of control over the moment of textualisation, in trying to ensure that students are 'satisfied' and primed to answer positively in that hope that the NSS results cannot come back to haunt them. This dynamic rests on the facticity of the survey, which produces a supposedly true and accurate factual account of 'the student experience', which overrides other less weighty textual representations and individual or non-textual accounts.

This highlights how ruling relations have become textually mediated in contemporary corporate capitalism, including UK universities, as discussed by Smith in explaining her ontology of the social. Thus an attention to texts and their organising power is centrally important to understanding how power works in UK HE, but alongside this must be an acknowledgement that active readership is also involved, one that is socially organised but not determined.

Through closely analysing the NSS and associated texts, I have focused on replicable texts which act as vehicles for language that organise people and activities, highlighting how the NSS process frames and organises people across UK HE, even if this is manifest in slightly different ways across different universities. As Smith (1990b: 220) argues,

“unveiling the textual process displays relations between the local social order and the larger social structure as practices in language that can be directly investigated”. The focus on texts in my analysis is key, as this is both more accountable, a central part of my feminist ethics, and also shows how the NSS organises not just at the University of Edinburgh or other specific examples I have cited, but carries the same organising language, frames, and categories to all UK universities in a way they must attend to, even if their negotiations of the NSS are different.

From this exploration of the NSS, I have shown how the survey has become a powerful organising text in UK HE, with my key example being the University of Edinburgh but it could have been any other, and this is why I call it a boss text. In the *Afterword* to a recent IE edited collection, Smith & Turner (2014c: 306) discuss how institutional procedures are “prescribed in, or at least authorised by, governing or ‘boss’ texts”, but there is work involved in translating local actualities into the categories identified by the boss texts. Explanations of how the terms are used in the NSS do not necessarily fit the local language of each university and therefore a translation occurs, in which respondents wrestle their actual experiences into the narrow confines of the survey questions, and departments may then respond to problems that may be unavoidable or are based on a tiny number of ‘dissatisfied’ students.

However, the NSS is both very powerful in some senses, but also widely interpreted and taken up differently in different locales, so its regulatory effect is not dictated by the survey. This is perhaps in part because of its largely unintended regulatory status. While the NSS is very ‘bossy’, this was not its intended status by the official authors of the survey. The intentional bossiness of the survey was perhaps, as the NSS website states, limited to providing “a powerful collective voice to help shape the future of their course and their university or college” (NSS, 2018a) alongside adding student’s feedback to broader ‘quality assurance’ processes. The guidelines from HEFCE also provide explicit advice against simplistic league tables, decontextualised results, and comparing institutions on their overall satisfaction ratings. These are seen as going beyond both the intent of the survey and appropriate usage of the results in its eyes. And yet, universities continue to include their NSS scores or references to them and the league tables they inform on their marketing materials and websites, caught up in a competition for students and fees.

And so the importance of readership and usage, of examining texts-in-use, becomes clear: the authors did not intend, nor does the survey itself dictate, the level of regulation that has resulted from the NSS. It is only when looked at how the text is taken up by different readers and performers, and is actually used, that this unintentional boss text status becomes clear. The NSS relatedly challenges the idea that boss texts get their bossiness from being at the top of a vertical institutional hierarchy, e.g. a governmental body imposes a system on universities and all they can do is comply in a specific way. The NSS shows that some of the most powerful organising texts impacting on front-line workers might not be those expected, and that boss texts can be found by looking at which texts generate more translation work or are mentioned more at the local level, rather than looking at the intended boss texts that come from the top of organisations. I will further explore the centrality of readers and their interpretative agency and translation work in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 – The Agency of Readers and Translation: The ESRC Research Grant Application Process

Having focused on a single text in the previous chapter, I now zoom out slightly to map a textually-mediated process – the Economic and Social Research Council’s Research Grant (ESRC-RG) application - through reading the guidance texts and interviewing participants. This is the second of three different IE text-analysis approaches I am using to explore how texts organise UK HE alongside how to do text-focused accountable IE research. IE researchers commonly use this mapping approach, often highlighting the disjuncture between actuality and the institutional textual reality of the process and describing how the process *actually* works alongside identifying where the process is unjust or unworkable. However, such studies often focus on observational and interview data, focusing more on how the process happens in a specific time and place rather than how the texts translocally organise. I will focus on the retrievable ESRC-RG texts and use my interviews to inform my reading of the guidance texts, specifically to identify whether the ESRC-RG process works as it is described or if there are invisible elements involved which work across multiple sites. While institutional processes such as this appear to be heavily structured without room for interpretation, I focus on the interpretive leeway of the reader in order to show that the process can work in many different ways and thus readers have more agency than Smith often acknowledges.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the largest funder of social and economic research in the UK (UKRI, 2018a), with their Research Grant (RG) scheme providing the key research funding application mechanism. This chapter will explore the ESRC-RG as a textually-mediated institutional sequence, through the lens of Dorothy Smith’s (2006c) discussion of how to incorporate texts into IE projects. My analysis began with in-depth reading of the five ESRC-RG guidance documents (ESRC, 2017; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d) and the blank application form itself (Appendix Seven). I used three concepts

from Smith (2006c) - discourse, regulatory texts, and intertextual circles – to think through how these texts worked together to organise the application process. Following this, I discussed the process with a number of recent applicants to ESRC research funding calls to understand how these documents were interpreted in writing actual applications.

As I argued in the previous chapter, texts should not be analysed in the abstract but instead be used as an entry point into the textually-mediated ruling relations. Smith (2006c: 67) proposes that texts should be analysed as occurrences in time and place as part of an ongoing sequence of connected activities rather than abstracted objects. In exploring the ESRC-RG process, in this chapter I continue to use Smith's (2006c: 66) idea of material replicable texts that can be read by many different people as "the same text" and thus as actively organising those people into institutional chains of activity. However, it seems to me that Smith does not sufficiently acknowledge the importance of readers' interpretations. From discussions with recent grant applicants, I realised that the agency of readers and their active, and often strategic, translation of actuality into text was centrally important, yet underdiscussed in Smith's work. In the ESRC-RG process, academics translate their actualities and interests into the language of institutions, highlighting the importance of readership and the variety in 'acceptable' interpretations. This is what the detailed discussion in the chapter will demonstrate.

In carrying out my investigation, I analysed the ESRC-RG guidance notes; the initial webpage providing an overview to the grant (ESRC, 2018a), which then links to four call documents - the call specification (ESRC 2018b); the Je-S²⁷ Guidance (ESRC, 2018c); the FAQs (ESRC, 2018d); and, the general Research Funding Guide (ESRC, 2017). I also accessed the application form via the Je-S system and use a blank pdf version to act as a reference point (Appendix Seven). While the application form and the guidance notes are in different documents, this does not fundamentally separate them as 'a text' or an occurrence in the process, because they function together to provide the full explanation of how to read and complete the application process. Thus, my conceptualisation of 'the text' under discussion is this array of documents, which function together – the application and the instructions. Other interlocking texts in this process are mentioned in the guidance and the application

²⁷ Je-S is the Joint Electronic Submissions website used to submit many research council funding applications, including ESRC applications (Je-S, 2018).

form, providing explicit and implicit intertextual links to ESRC and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)²⁸ policies which govern the ESRC-RG process.

While I followed some of these intertextual links, I did not produce a map of the entire ESRC-RG process nor how it fits into the ESRC and UKRI, as Susan Turner (1995; 2006; 2014) does with her IE mapping approach. Instead, I chose to focus on one moment in the textual process, similar to Lauren Eastwood's (2006; 2014) IE research on UN texts, in which she focuses on the production of institutional texts. I focused on the "moment of textualisation" (DeVault, 2008: 7), whereby the applicant reads the guidance and writes the application. This 'textualisation moment' involves the applicant negotiating how to translate themselves and their project into the institutional process. The later part of the chapter will show the extent of invisible work that goes into imagining, researching, planning, reading, getting advice, writing up, going through internal university peer review and research office processes, editing, and then finally submitting a completed application. This 'moment' in the process, may in fact be months or years of work from an applicant and their advisors.

I read the ESRC-RG texts as a first-time, uninformed reader; an insider in UK HE and social sciences but an outsider in terms of the ESRC-RG process itself. While my Masters and PhD were funded by the ESRC through a 1+3 studentship, and I knew many colleagues who had applied for and received funding from the ESRC, this did not give me any actual familiarity with post-PhD funding processes, such as ESRC-RG. While my insider position in the social sciences did mean that I understood how important the ESRC was as a funder, and made it easier to find applicants to interview, it did not make me any more informed as a reader of these funding application texts. My familiarity also meant that I had to be much more attentive to disentangling my assumptions about the process from my initial analysis, in order to avoid projecting any pre-conceptions onto this (Gallop, 2000).

I discussed the application process with six post-PhD ESRC funding applicants to understand how actual applicants interpreted the ESRC-RG texts and to move beyond my own experience-based reading and the specifics of how the process is handled at the University I am located in. I was interested in how they negotiated the process and any translation strategies they had for fitting their intended research into the regulatory texts

²⁸ Formerly known as Research Councils UK (RCUK); some of the guidance still bears RCUK branding as the transition to UKRI has happened this year (2018).

and how the process worked in different disciplines and Universities. I recruited these participants through personal and professional networks, interviewing three participants (two via Skype, one in-person), and sending a questionnaire version of the interview questions (Appendix Six) to the other three with their recent responses being sent back to me. Half were early-career researchers (ECRs)²⁹ – Dr. PL, Dr. SK, and Dr. MV - and half were senior academics, specifically professors or readers – Professor FK, Dr. RM, and Professor BL.³⁰ They came from five different UK universities and their disciplinary backgrounds and current appointments spanned sociology, politics, human geography, development studies, education, anthropology, economics, with one applicant having a natural sciences background but now working in social sciences. They had a mixture of successful and unsuccessful application to the ESRC to draw on, specifically to three main schemes: the ESRC-RG itself; the New Investigator Grant (NIG) (ESRC, 2018f) or its earlier incarnation the Future Research Leaders (FRL) scheme (ESRC, 2016a); and various calls from the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (ESRC, 2018g).

To contextualise the ESRC-RG process, I will now briefly explain the ESRC and its role in UK HE. The ESRC receives and distributes UK government funding as one of the UK's seven research councils.³¹ These seven research councils are managed by UKRI which distributes their funding from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Science Budget (UKRI, 2018b). As its name suggests, the ESRC focuses on social science disciplines, stipulating that a project must be at least 50% focused on social sciences to fit within their funding remit and not that of a different funding council (ESRC, 2018a). They list the social sciences as: demographic and social statistics, methods and computing; development studies, human geography and environmental planning; economics, management and business studies; education, social anthropology, and linguistics; law, economic and social history; politics and international relations; psychology and sociology; science and technology studies; and, social policy and social work (ESRC, 2018e). Some of the social science disciplines (e.g. history and linguistics) are explicitly covered by both the ESRC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), with the

²⁹ I use a broad definition of ECR, in line with the ESRC (2016a), which identifies three parts of the ECR stage: doctoral, immediately postdoctoral, and transition to independent researcher.

³⁰ All initials based on pseudonyms.

³¹ The other six research councils are: Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC); Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC); Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC); Medical Research Council (MRC); Natural Environment Research Council (NERC); Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) (UKRI, 2018a)

specifics of each project, alongside the disciplinary focus of the researcher, determining which funding council's remit the project falls into and thus which council the applicant should apply to for funding.

The ESRC funding pools are divided up by career stage, grant size, and sometimes by topic. It provides postgraduate studentships, then an array of research grants and fellowships for post-PhD researchers and in-post researchers and teams. There are fellowships, including a Postdoctoral Fellowship for those within 12 months of finishing their PhDs (ESRC, 2018h) and Professorial Research Fellowships (ESRC, 2014: 15), of which the latter scheme is not currently operational. There are also knowledge exchange grants, impact grants, and other research grants which focus on specific topics, research questions, or collaborations with non-academic or international partners, for example, the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (ESRC, 2018g). There are also the larger grant schemes, for projects of over £1 million, for example, the Large Grants competition (ESRC, 2018i) and the Trust and Global Governance Large Grants (ESRC, 2018j).

However, the main open grant call is the Research Grants (RG) scheme providing £350,000 to £1 million (ESRC, 2018a), and its accompanying ECR version, the New Investigator Grant (NIG) scheme providing £100,000-£300,000 (ESRC, 2018f).³² The RG and NIG schemes are very similar open rolling calls (ESRC, 2018a; 2018f). While they have no specific closing dates, the Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs)³³ only meet three times a year, usually March, July and November (ESRC, 2018d: 6), thus providing de facto deadlines that applicants can aim for. The RG award is open to all in-post researchers, or if for some reason they are not an “established member of a recognised research organisation (RO)” they must be accommodated by the RO as an established member of staff would be (ESRC, 2018b: 5). The NIG, which replaces the old Future Research Leaders scheme (ESRC, 2016a),

³² The Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI) runs alongside the RG and NIG, funding projects of up to £300,000 which analyse secondary data and being assessed by a separate grant assessment panel (GAP) (ESRC, 2018k). I will not be focusing on this scheme as I did not find any recent applicants to interview and it has a slightly narrower remit.

³³ There are four GAPs – three subject specialist GAPs, and one covering proposals to the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI). Each GAP is made up of a Chair (who represents their Panel at the Grant Delivery Group) and around 15 members from across the ESRC-covered disciplines, including academics and ‘users’ of research (ESRC, 2018d:7). The GAPs consider all proposals with an average score of 4.5 or above from reviewers and agree a prioritised list of all proposals which they recommend for funding to be considered by the Grants Delivery Group who agree the final funding decisions (ESRC, 2018b: 7).

specifically targets ECR applicants with a maximum of four years postdoctoral experience and the support of an eligible research organisation (RO) (ESRC, 2018f).

As the main ESRC open funding call, the RG scheme is the standard process, and other research funding calls are slight variations. While other research funding calls have more specific remits and limited application windows, the overall processes are similar enough to discuss them together. Thus, I focus on the ESRC-RG in what follows, but acknowledge other grant variations when relevant.

Analysing Text-Act-Text Sequences with IE

I began with Smith's (2006c: 65-88) discussion about incorporating texts in IE research, in which she argues that texts organise people and other texts into institutional sequences in two main ways: (i) as coordinators of sequences of activity; and, (ii) as regulatory hierarchies of texts, i.e. intertextual hierarchies. Smith (2006c) uses three key concepts: discourse, regulatory texts, and intertextual circles, discussed in relation to examples, which I will discuss here in detail alongside her other work focusing on texts. I will also explain my methods of reading and interviewing, provide an overview of the ESRC-RG process and discuss the work of Lauren Eastwood (2006; 2014), whose work on intentional institutional capture was central to my analysis.

Firstly, discourse. As discussed in Chapter One, Smith (2005) discusses discourse as a regulatory framework which guides interpretation and organises people's activities. Or, as discussed at the end of Chapter Two, discourse can also be understood as an ideological code which structures how people talk about and read texts (Smith, 1999: 175). While Smith (2005: 127) draws on Foucault's work on discourse, she argues that those who use his conceptualisation often give discourse an overly agentic role, rather than acknowledging that people have agency. Thus, she uses Bakhtin's conceptualisation of discourse as a dialogue which balances the structuring of language and the negotiations of people. In her later work, Smith (2014b: 226-227) discusses discourse "as social organization ... itself a sphere of activity", arguing that discourse happens through people reading texts, and so understanding discourse as a form of institutional literacy or sometimes as a broader

regulatory frame which operates across multiple institutions and only happens through people's doings.

As an example, Smith (2006c: 76-78) analyses a psychological evaluation text, in which a woman is being evaluated for a custody court case. Smith (2006c: 79) argues that the psychologist is seen as a more reliable witness of the woman's situation than the woman herself through the discourse of clinical psychology which positions them in a hierarchy of roles; the expert and the patient. Smith argues that the text involves a "pathologizing sequence" (Smith, 2006c: 78), which seems to be a version of the ideological three-step: the psychologist puts forward a pathologising interpretation of the woman; he then provides a partial description of her which fits this interpretation; and finally, he tells the reader to interpret the description of her behaviour as evidence of the pathologising interpretation. The text is written as if the psychologist's statements are 'objective statements' about the woman, when in fact much 'evidence' in these statements concern emotions and behaviours consistent with the stressful and high-stakes situation the woman is in – being assessed in a custody case. This context, and the possibility that her explanation and experience of reality could be accurate, are not acknowledged by the psychologist in his text.

Taking the discourse of clinical psychology as a sphere of activity means that reading this text involves thinking about how it came to be and how it will be used. The way the text has been written presents the psychologist's interpretation of the woman's behaviour; however, the authority of the psychologist comes not solely from the text, but also from the context of a readership who use the discourse of clinical psychology in understanding the text. Through this discursive framework, the psychologist is accepted as an expert whose opinion has been asked for by the court and thus his assessment of the woman is accepted as the authoritative account of her behaviour.

Secondly, regulatory texts. Succinctly, regulatory texts are "higher-order texts" which "regulate other texts" (Smith, 2006c: 79). They operate in intertextual hierarchies, providing clear lines of command and identifying higher- and lower-level texts. Lower-level texts must fit into the framework set out by the regulatory text, which makes the process recognisable as one that is authoritative and permissive within the institution, i.e. an application can be accepted as an ESRC-RG application if it ticks all the necessary boxes set out in a higher-level regulatory text.

In her later work, Smith also calls regulatory texts “authoritative or ‘boss’ text[s] (law, policy, managerial objectives, frames of discourse, etc.)” (Griffith & Smith, 2014: 12), which complicates the distinction between regulatory texts and discourses. Discourses and regulatory texts may have different levels of ‘bossy-ness’, whereby a regulatory text might function as a frame within one institutional process, or might function across multiple processes. The line between powerful regulatory texts and discourses begins to blur in terms of their functional power. Thus, as discussed in Chapter One, the distinction between Smith’s conceptualisation of authoritative/boss/regulatory texts and discourse seems to be that discourses are not clearly traceable back to an origin text or one specific text, operating instead as interpretative frameworks which cannot be clearly traced to particular texts but instead have become powerful as forms of literacy.

Smith (2006c: 79-86) discusses an example to show how regulatory texts work; this is a graduate grade appeal procedure based on an unpublished paper by her former student Katarzyna Rukszto. Smith (2006c: 82) argues that regulatory texts impart authority onto specific bodies, organisations and specific roles, and so in this procedure appeals must go through particular committees and categories of person, such as ‘the appraiser’, the ‘Executive Committee’. Thus, the regulatory texts set out roles which give interpretive authority to those that inhabit those roles. Once a reader is in such an authorised position, they might not read in line with the institutionally-mandated interpretation, or they might have a lot of leeway in how they interpret in each case; such is the agency of the reader, particularly a reader who is in an authoritative position.

As Smith (2006c: 83) puts it: “institutional ethnography treats texts not as prescribing action but as establishing the concepts and categories in terms of which what is done can be recognized as an instance or expression of the textually authorized procedure”. And so, while texts provide the ‘textual bridge’ (Smith, 2006c: 85) between different people and places involved in the process, these must be read and negotiated by people and translated into lower-level texts and actual practices. Thus, while intertextual hierarchies provide webs of regulation to attend to, the actual interpretation and implementation of such texts must be done by an actual person who has agency.

Smith’s discussion of regulatory texts and intertextual hierarchies does not explicitly acknowledge that such textual hierarchies also create hierarchies of readers, in which some readers are in more authoritative positions than others. Thus, an authorised

reader's interpretation at one level may not be accepted by another high-level reader; such is the prerogative of authorised readers in the textual chain. While Smith's discussion seems to imply a horizontal institutional sequence of authority, it is not always this clear-cut, as reader agency means that each reading and stage in a process relies on the readers making interpretive decisions. Discourses, other texts, and influential people, might inform someone's interpretations of texts and activity at each stage, which may not be officially sanctioned or 'correct' but nonetheless still guide them.

Smith (2014b: 225-226) calls this the reader engagement with the text 'the text-reader conversation', and it involves the reader playing both parts in a dialogue between the text and her own experience or reading of other texts. While Smith (2005: 107-108) acknowledges that the 'same text' can be interpreted differently and that "activation may be selection; perhaps, it often is", she ultimately argues that the text "exerts significant control". Even if one disagrees with the text, such resistance will "work with and from the text's agenda" (Smith, 2005: 111). Thus, Smith's engagement with interpretation is that it is heavily organised by the text, focusing more on the activeness of texts rather than the activeness of readers. However, later I shall show that this underestimates the agency of readers, especially those authorised readers and writers of texts who get to write regulatory texts or interpret what fits within them and how it does so.

Thirdly, intertextual circles. Smith (2006c: 85) discusses the "characteristic circularity" of institutional hierarchies, in which lower-level texts, such as application forms, are seen to be 'correct' when they are "interpreted/understood as a proper instance or expression of its regulatory categories and concepts" (Smith, 2006c: 85). Thus, regulatory texts both provide the framework through which actual experiences are interpreted, similar to discourses, and then actuality must fit into these same boss texts to be institutionally recognisable. Smith (1974a: 43) initially described this as the 'ideological three-step', whereby regulatory texts set out perimeters for lower-level texts to fit into and then also provides the criteria against which they are assessed as 'correct' or 'acceptable' – a circular interpretive process. In later work (Griffith & Smith, 2014: 12) she calls such processes 'institutional circuits'.

Smith (2006c: 72) argues that institutional forms are textual representations of applicants that transport them across place and time, but simultaneously in writing themselves into the form "the particularities of that experience disappear". This highlights

that in institutional textually-mediated processes people are represented by texts, such as application forms, making such texts a crucial representation to get 'right'. However, such representations are always partial and must fit into pre-existing institutional guidelines to be institutionally recognised and accepted, which often involves aligning oneself with institutional aims and concepts. This is especially prevalent in a subcategory of institutional circuits, which Griffith & Smith (2014: 340) call 'accountability circuits' whereby textually-mediated processes attempt to make certain people and their work accountable to specific institutional aims and concepts. However, as I shall show, the interpretation of such categories and aims is still done by active readers who do not passively accept and apply categories, but instead interpret and negotiate them in relation to their own aims. While Smith's discussion of this emphasises how the institution and regulatory texts manage what is deemed acceptable and correct, I think the agency of readers is likely in many situations to remain significant, whereby authorised readers and writers of texts within institutions have powerful roles as both the creators of such institutional texts and interpreters of what fits into these texts. These are not fixed decisions, but rather moments of interpretative agency, showing the power of specific readers' interpretations in textually-mediated processes.

While Smith (2006c: 87) argues that texts have a "deeply rooted and functional disposition to precipitate the reader out of time", temporality and particular readers are essential to how texts are interpreted and assessed in intertextual hierarchies. The importance of when texts are read, alongside who reads them, and what they are read in relation to, is centrally important to the interpretation and what is seen as 'correct' or 'acceptable' within a regulatory framework. This highlights the importance of temporality and understanding reading texts as moment in a process, as specific occurrences. 'What counts' as an acceptable interpretation of a text within an institutional process changes over time and depending on the interpretative climate, including prevailing discourses, regulatory texts, and who the authorised readers are at different points in the process. Thus, these three concepts from Smith (2006c) are not three distinct topics, but as my discussion has shown, work together to make sense of how texts work in textually-mediated institutional processes. My analysis of the text-act-text sequences involved in the ESRC-RG process has been informed by these concepts and so I will now discuss what I actually did when analysing the texts in question.

Similar to my approach in the previous chapter, Smith (2006c: 72) argues the IE researcher can focus on a text and look at “traces of how the substance of the text is assembled, that is, where it came from, how it was put together, and how it projects organization into what follows”. And so with the ESRC-RG process, when reading the text, I made note of things that were confusing or that struck me as analytically interesting and followed intertextual links in the guidance documents and on the ESRC website to other ESRC and UKRI texts in order to understand the broader context and obtain more specific guidance on particular points.

Smith (2006c: 68-72) discusses a graduate admissions process analysed by a former student of hers, Edouard Vo-Quang, using two interviews. Vo-Quang interviewed both a referee who filled in the evaluative form and an admissions officer who assessed the completed form. Smith (2006c: 70) highlights that Vo-Quang’s process allowed disjunctures to be identified between the two interpretations of the form, identifying conflicting interpretations of the categories by the two interviewees. In short, there can be different interpretations of the ‘same text’ by readers at different points in the process, but this can only be understood by speaking to those who use the text. My interest too is focused on the textualisation moment and so I asked the people I interviewed about this aspect of the application process, which allows me to explore the invisible work involved in people reading the guidance and writing their applications and the different interpretations between the six of them. While it would have been interesting to also speak to academic reviewers and members of the GAPS, this was not feasible due to the anonymity of peer review and the sensitivity of such assessment decisions.

From my initial text analysis, I produced a list of interview questions, used to interview Dr. PL, the first ECR applicant, who was still waiting to hear the result of her NIG application to conduct research, at a post-1992 university with an excellent teaching profile. I then sent a questionnaire version of the interview questions (Appendix Six) to another ECR applicant – Dr. SK, who was based at a research-intensive, long-established university. While beginning to write up my analysis of these participants’ discussions and put them into conversation with my text analysis, I completed interviews with two senior academics – Dr. RM, who is based at a research-intensive long-established university and Professor FK who is based at a research-intensive plate glass university. Finally, I sent the questionnaire to another senior academic – Professor BL, based at a research-intensive red

brick university - and an ECR - Dr. MV, who is based at a plate glass university which has recently been undergoing restructuring and resulting job cuts.³⁴

From reading the guidance, I pieced together an overall sense of how the institutionally mandated process was supposed to occur and what was expected from applicants. Based on reading the ESRC website and documents, particularly the ESRC-RG FAQs (ESRC, 2018d), I concluded, not entirely accurately as I later realised, that the publicly stated ESRC-RG application process follows the following stages:

- 1) Reading - Applicant reads the ESRC-RG call webpage (ESRC, 2018a) and the 'call documents' (ESRC, 2017; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d) to understand what is expected of them, and discusses initial proposal ideas with academic mentors and/or peers;
- 2) Planning - Initial ideas are drafted and a more formal conversation might happen with the employing host organisation to receive their support for the application before submitting the application;
- 3) Writing - The applicant writes and re-writes their application and may go through an informal or formal process of peer review and institutional feedback and support before finalising the application and submitting to the Je-S portal;
- 4) Submission – Proposal gets sent to their research organisation to go through internal processes before being approved, and then is formally submitted to the ESRC;
- 5) ESRC basic checks – The application is checked against basic criteria and may be rejected if ineligible or incomplete; if accepted it is allocated a case officer who identifies and contacts reviewers;
- 6) Review - Application goes to reviewers who assess application on a six-point scale against four criteria: "originality, potential contribution to knowledge; research design and methods; value for money; outputs, dissemination and impact" (ESRC, 2018b: 7) alongside open-text comments. Proposals must receive an average score of 4.5 or more to be sent onto the GAPS, if below 4.5 it is rejected;
- 7) Responses to Reviewers – Applicants with a score of about 4.5 receive reviewers comments and have 5 working days to write a response, which is sent on with the reviews and application to the GAPS;

³⁴ See Introduction for a brief explanation of these different types of university.

- 8) GAPs priority list - two members of the GAP provide a further review in light of the reviewers and response to the reviewers before being considered by the full GAP who list proposals in order of priority;
- 9) Grants Delivery Group (GDG) decides – The lists from all GAPs are considered by the GDG who make the final funding decision;
- 10) Decisions – final decisions are conveyed to applicants along with feedback.

However, it became clear once I began speaking to actual applicants that they received a very high level of institutional and informal academic support prior to submitting an application, obviously something not evident from simply reading the ESRC-RG explanation of the process. For all of my respondents, writing the ESRC-RG application involved extensive input from other people and multiple re-drafts in order both to finalise their own ideas and to do a 'translation process'. This was on top of the already extensive planning and prior research that went into developing their initial proposal ideas. Throughout this process, the back and forth between applicant and other people and the texts was central: they might begin by reading the guidance, but then, after writing initial drafts, there was an extensive consultation: getting feedback from mentors, peers and colleagues, internal peer review in their department, consultation with other international or third-sector partners, and other informal advice, which involved some extensive re-drafting over a long period of time.

Thus, my ten-point summary based on the ESRC-RG text does not 'see' the important and time-consuming nature of points 1-3. In particular, point 3 – writing the application – was a process which took a huge amount of time, with most of my participants taking between a few months and a year to write their application, depending on the complexity of the project and funding call deadlines (or lack of). This highlights the central importance of speaking to those actually involved in the textually-mediated sequences under discussion, to show the disjuncture between the textual presentation of the process in institutional texts and actual practice.

I was also surprised by how extensive the process of writing was because of the under-discussion of writing in Smith's discussion of analysing texts and text-act-text sequences. While she discusses reading and the text-reader conversation in detail, she underestimates the agency of readers and the act of writing texts is underdiscussed.

However, one of Smith's followers – Lauren Eastwood (2006; 2014) – does use IE to discuss the writing of texts.

Eastwood's (2006; 2014) research into the writing of UN forestry policy texts is a helpful exploration of the textualisation moment, specifically "how governing texts are brought into being" (Smith & Turner, 2014a: 65). While Smith (2005: 119) uses the term institutional capture to describe how "institutional discourse overrides and reconstructs experiential talk and writing", her use forefronts the activeness of the text and does not engage with reader/speaker agency. Eastwood (2006: 183) explores how practitioners' use their insider knowledge to strategically engage in institutional policy-making processes, conceptualising the deliberate use of institutional language and concepts to translate practitioners' experiences into an institutionally recognisable format as 'intentional institutional capture' (Eastwood, 2006: 189). Eastwood's term, in contrast to Smith's approach, explicitly acknowledges the agency of readers and writers of texts and highlights the invisible work involved in negotiating and producing UN texts.

Eastwood (2014: 66) argues that "effective practitioners are savvy about how to deploy the conceptual currency, or strategic language, relevant to the particular negotiations". The idea of a competent reader/writer using 'conceptual currency' within an institutional process is helpful in understanding the ESRC-RG application writing process, as it highlights the agency of applicants who actively negotiate the process and centres the translation work involved in such reading/writing. While Smith (2006c: 70, 76) uses the term 'translate' three times, the word glosses over whether or not the reader is intentionally translating and how they know how to translate. However, Eastwood (2006: 192) explicitly discusses 'translation' as "several layers of work". I use the term 'translation' throughout this chapter, doing so to refer to this process of doing intentional institutional capture and to recognise this work of reading and writing as an explicit negotiation by agentic people. Therefore the textualisation moment I am focusing on in this chapter is not merely a temporal moment, but also involves extensive invisible work in producing and submitting an application.

Smith's discussion of how to analyse text-act-text sequences has provided the basis for my analysis, however, as I have argued here, she underestimates the interpretive power of readers and their explicit negotiation of institutional texts and discourses. Thus, I draw on Eastwood's work to centre the translation work involved in an applicant writing the

ESRC-RG form to forefront the active reading and writing by people. The following analysis uses IE concepts to discuss the disjuncture between textual analysis and discussions with participants, highlighting the interpretive leeway academics have in writing ESRC-RG applications. The analysis is arranged around four analytic points: (i) the technical translation of applications into the language of the ESRC-RG process, specifically around 'impact, has been professionalised in UK universities; (ii) the standardising application form can be differently interpreted by academic readers in line with disciplinary and field-specific discourses; (iii) applicants use fictive devices to perform valuable social science, writing 'ideal' representations of themselves and their projects on the application form; and, (iv) in the context of increasing audit and accountability processes in UK HE academics have increased bureaucratic work but still exercise considerable interpretive leeway in putting such processes into practice.

Professionalising 'Impact'

'Impact' is a vitally important part of the conceptual currency of the ESRC-RG process, as it is part of the criteria against which applications are assessed and is extensively discussed in the guidance. Grant-holders must complete a short 'impact summary' (Appendix Seven: 2) alongside a two-page attachment explaining their 'Pathways to Impact' (ESRC, 2018c: 14) as part of their application. The guidance straightforwardly explains that impact statements must show how the proposed research will benefit or influence society beyond academia. However, when speaking to interviewees about how they put this into practice in their applications, they frequently had extensive support from university professional research officers, some focusing on impact, in translating their proposed projects into impact activities.

Thus, similar to my analysis of the NSS in Chapter Three, the 'impact agenda' has produced new professionalised areas of technical translation work in the UK HE sector, as part of a general trend in public sector accountability processes. Research funding officers, some specialising in 'impact', facilitate the translation of applicants' proposals into the bureaucratically recognisable format required and implicitly desired by funders to textually evidence the impact, and thus the value, of research funded by public money. This technical

institutional literacy often involves reproducing what has previously been assessed as 'excellent impact' in each university, based on previous successful applications. However, as the academic and user reviewers are different each time, this institutional literacy is primarily about interpreting the publicly available documents and aligning this with ESRC administrative staff expectations about impact, along with the discourses circulating in UK HE which might frame reviewer interpretations of the impact guidelines.

The ESRC-RG guidance texts briefly explain how to interpret and include impact in the application form and link to other more detailed ESRC and UKRI discussions of impact to aid 'correct' interpretation of the concept. An explicit intertextual hierarchy is set out in the ESRC-RG call specification (ESRC, 2018b: 3), connecting the impact requirements in the application form to RCUK (now UKRI) policy from 2011 and identifying the ESRC specific guidelines by linking to their 'Impact Toolkit' webpage (ESRC, 2018m). By citing these two policy documents, the ESRC is showing where the impact agenda comes from - broader UKRI policy – and what the regulatory text is for ESRC applications – the 'Impact Toolkit', which provides extensive explanation of what constitutes impact.

The Je-S guidance for the ESRC-RG (ESRC, 2018c: 7) also explains that impact must go beyond the normal academic publishing and presenting, to reach a wider audience. In the 'Pathways to Impact' document, applicants have to describe the specific activities that the applicant has planned to produce this impact (ESRC, 2018c: 14). While the guidance says it is technically possible for a research project to be funded without the potential for impact, they also specify that "it is expected that applicants will have considered impact in its broadest economic and societal terms before coming to this conclusion. Applicants should note that while we recognise the value of this type of research, reviewers may comment on the applicant's reasoning during consideration of the proposal" (ESRC, 2018c: 15). Thus, it seems extremely unlikely that such a proposal would be funded, especially given the centrality and lengthy explanation of the importance of impact in ESRC guidance texts.

However, ESRC's definition of impact is very broad and asks for *potential*, rather than actual, impact because the application is planning and speculating on what will happen, so applicants have a lot of leeway in interpreting this criteria. As with the whole application, the discussion of potential impact is speculative, and so the exercise is a textual performance, whereby researchers must demonstrate that they have thought about impact

and fit their ideas into the regulatory text guidelines. Even if it is technically possible to successfully apply to the ESRC-RG without ‘obvious or immediate’ impact, the researcher must still play the game and textually perform by speculating about how they *might* generate impact.

Searching ‘impact’ on jobs.ac.uk shows that an array of research impact positions are available. I conducted a search on the 26th May 2018 which returned tens of university- and department-wide or project-specific impact officers. Looking at the first four job advertisements I came across, the main duties were about facilitating related impact work, e.g. evidencing activities relating to the REF as well as for writing impact into research applications. An advertisement from Birkbeck (Appendix Eight) specifies that the Impact Officer would work with researchers, managers of research and those working on the REF to help facilitate impact and knowledge exchange work on research applications and projects, alongside establishing systems of evidencing impact. A University of Glasgow advertisement (Appendix Nine) discusses their officer supporting the knowledge exchange and impact ‘agendas’, specifying that part of this was about research publications and proposals. A University of Sheffield advertisement (Appendix Ten) was for an impact officer on a specific project where they would do ‘impact tracking activities’ to help evidence impact, and it also explicitly mentions the importance of understanding the REF. An Alan Turing Institute advertisement (Appendix Eleven) explains that the officer would be helping to demonstrate the ‘outputs and achievements’ alongside helping monitor, evaluate and demonstrate impact to maintain “a record of evidence to demonstrate to funders and others that the Institute is meeting funders’ requirements and expectations”.

What these various job advertisements show is that there is a proliferation of impact officer roles in UK universities, which facilitate impact work relating to both the REF (to be discussed in Chapter 5) and research funding applications, but most importantly to be able to evidence such impact work. The impact officer role seems primarily to create a convincing paper-trail of evidence, that is, to textualise ‘impact’ activities, whether speculative or based on things that have already happened. The importance of such roles goes beyond just research funding applications and connects to Research Excellence Framework (REF) requirements, explored in the next chapter. Thus, when applicants are writing about impact for the ESRC guidelines, they are not just writing in the technical bureaucratic language of the ESRC guidelines and the front-line ESRC administrators, but

also writing in reference to a broader UK HE discourse about 'impact'. But why is impact so important in UK HE and specifically to the ESRC?

The ESRC's (2018n) yearly 'Celebrating Impact' prize has been running since 2013 and explains impact on its webpages as: "the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, of benefit to individuals, organisations and national and international communities" (ESRC, 2018n). While this is quite vague and all-encompassing, the word 'demonstrable' is significant. This is a central aspect of what is being asked for in the ESRC-RG guidelines; textual representations of 'impact' which can be used as evidence of impact having happened. The ESRC Celebrating Impact prize webpage (ESRC, 2018n) explains why impact has to be demonstrable: "Impact helps to demonstrate that social science is important – that it is worth investing in and worth using." This implies that the impact agenda is in response to a lack of belief in the value and importance of 'investing' in the social sciences from the government which funds the ESRC through UKRI and the BEIS science budget.

This desire to demonstrate social science research value through impact is evident in the ESRC-RG Je-S guidance, whereby it states that the impact summary section of the application "may be published to demonstrate the potential impact of Research Council-funded research" (ESRC, 2018c: 7). These processes and textual performances of value to maintain funding is a classic example of accountability processes in the public sector, which is a central theme of Smith's edited collection *Under New Public Management* (Griffith & Smith, 2014). This helps explain why the ESRC requires researchers to demonstrate impact, as a way to justify the use of public funds for social science research within the context of UK government austerity and reduced public spending, alongside longer-term audit or accountability cultures in public sector management.

Smith (2006c: 86) explicitly identifies intertextual circles as central to such new public management, whereby there is a circular textual performance of 'impact': the 'Impact Toolkit' and other guidance on impact in the specific call documents are used to set out what is expected of applicants when writing the Pathways to Impact text. The 'Pathways to Impact' text is then assessed against the same guidance to see if it *really* does constitute such a pathway by reviewers and GAP members who are 'authorised readers'. They may agree or disagree with whether a project design fits within a category, but either way are participating in a circular interpretative process with the impact guidance texts.

The circular use of categories and referring back to the regulatory text makes text-act-text processes centrally about authorised interpretations of key texts, with such interpretations dependent on the specific reader and the circulating discourse on what constitutes impact.

The professionalisation of the technical bureaucratic translation of funders' expectations has become widespread in university academic-support. These roles were discussed by most of my respondents, including Professor BL, who explained that research funding officers in her faculty circulate funding calls to academics, alerting them of current opportunities. Additionally, Dr. RM and Dr. PL both mentioned extensive institutional support from research officers in ensuring applications fitted with the format of the ESRC guidance, specifically around budgeting. While the specifics of these roles differ in each university, and the participants had different levels of support from such officers, the presence of these jobs is a broader phenomenon in UK HE.

When speaking to senior academic applicant Professor FK about impact, he said that research having no impact was not an option when applying for research funding. He explained that writing the impact part of his recent ESRC-RG application was the most difficult aspect, as it was purely to fit in with funders. He wanted to do research, not impact work, but stressed that he had to include it. He therefore sought advice from his university's impact officer, an individual hired solely to advise researchers across the university on how to 'do' impact in their research and funding applications. Professor FK said after working with the impact officer he realised how much impact potential there was from his research and ended up getting quite excited, despite his initial pessimism. The impact officer helped Professor FK draft his 'Pathways to Impact' document, giving feedback on multiple drafts and advising on the sorts of language to use. Professor FK was particularly anxious not to promise things that would not be do-able within the grant, and the impact officer was able to advise on a realistic plan.

The impact officer was an important part of Professor FK's ESRC-RG application writing process, as they offered a conceptual currency that he did not have and helped him translate his ideas into the language of 'impact'. Professor FK saw this process as him being advised on what was allowed or not, as he did not have this tacit knowledge and what was required was unclear from the guidelines in the ESRC-RG application guidance. The research and impact officer would sometimes tell him that "the ESRC won't like that" or "that won't pass, that won't be convincing", with such feedback delineating the boundaries of this

officer's interpretation of the guidance. But how did the impact officer know this? Since the ESRC assessment processes are confidential and the reviewers anonymous, presumably such knowledge is built from a mixture of being literate in the ESRC public guidance, alongside having helped other researchers write applications and learning from the successes and failures of these. While a really good research funding officer might help do some of this translation work for the researcher and increase the possibility of them getting funded, they cannot guarantee success, nor can they accurately anticipate how specific reviewers or GAP members will interpret the criteria. It is impossible to check impact or research funding officer interpretations against the interpretations of ESRC administrators, GAP members and reviewers except through the success rate of applications. But if applicants are successful, the impact officer advice can be presumed to be 'correct' or at least correct enough.

Thus, while the impact officer can cut down on the technical translation work required by the applicant, it also puts them in powerful interpretive positions, whereby they can set the interpretive limits of what constitutes impact in their institutions. Research funding officers can reify certain 'correct' interpretations and perpetuate their circulation as 'facts' within their institution. Such circulating 'facts' are often very powerful, as with the professionalisation of impact in UK universities, in which applicants are spared the burden of learning the technical language of the ESRC-RG. The result is that the interpretive power on topics such as impact is increasingly deferred to research funding officers, but who may have no academic literacy in the discipline and field of the applicant. If applicants believe such officers are correct, then they will defer to them and thus abide by technical interpretations, which may not fit within their disciplinary and field-specific expectations.

This demonstrates the agency of authorised readers in the process, whereby their interpretations are the ones that count; and while there can be some attempt to anticipate how they might interpret this, it cannot be known in advance. While research officers help produce a technical translation, with many building up a university-specific tacit knowledge from previous applications, their primary role seems to be ensuring that applicants follow the technical guidance to ensure an application fits ESRC-RG guidance as they understand this. But this only gets the application accepted into the review process, and beyond that other conceptual currencies and literacies are required.

One Size Fits All? – Academic Positioning within a Standard Form

The specific guidance around impact is part of a broader standardising requirement of the ESRC-RG process, which requires researchers to produce similar applications so as to be able to compare and assess applications alongside each other. Such generalising standards provide a one-size fits all outline which can apply to the ESRC's broad remit of the social sciences, in which there is huge plurality of topics and methodology. The ESRC-RG webpage (2018a) and call specification (2018b) explain that the call is open to “standard research projects, large-scale surveys and other infrastructure projects and for methodological developments ... any subject area or topic providing that it falls within ESRC's remit” (ESRC, 2018b: 1). But within, what constitutes the ‘standard’ research project and by extension, upon what assumptions is the standard application process based? Quantitative-heavy experiment-focused disciplines, like psychology, have quite a different stance from, for example, social anthropology, usually focused on ethnographic fieldwork, yet both are funded by the ESRC. How does one research council manage to cover such a diverse mix of disciplines and conflicting ideas about what constitutes ‘good knowledge’? Since there is one application process covering all disciplines, these translatability issues are written into the process from filling out the application, through to it being assessed by reviewers and a GAP. Thus, I argue that the ESRC-RG process requires applicants to negotiate the conceptual currencies of two assumed academic readerships: the positivist language of ‘standard’ social science research accessible to a general audience, and, the expectations of their specific disciplinary and field-specific readerships.

The ESRC-RG guidance text and interlocking additional ESRC guidance use scientific language that at basis presumes a positivist research project, despite social science being a broad church with different types of research coexisting. In the ESRC's video guidance on writing a good application (ESRC, 2016b embedded in ESRC, 2018o), two senior academics discuss writing an application for a lay scientific audience, specifically identifying experiments as a possible method and describing research as ‘science’. This immediately brings up the difficulty of translating language and methodologies across different disciplines as experiments are common in psychology, but they are virtually non-existent in

sociology and anthropology. Relatedly, while some ESRC-funded disciplines might consider themselves scientists doing science, this language is not applicable or used in others.

This assumption that social science research works in a similar way to the natural sciences seems to stem, not just from disciplines within the ESRC itself, but also from the intertextual hierarchies that the ESRC-RG application process is tied into by the ESRC being one of the seven UKRI-managed research councils. In the ESRC (2017) Research Guide, the general ESRC regulatory text for research funding calls, there are multiple direct references to higher-level regulatory texts from UKRI. The Research Guide (ESRC, 2017: 40) also includes a disclaimer about being subject to general UKRI terms and conditions (UKRI, 2018c), which apply to all the research councils, introducing an even broader array of disciplines, topics, and approaches to research to contain within standardised guidance.

When looking at the ESRC-RG application form (Appendix Seven), some sections use the generalising language of positivist understandings of research and data. Specifically, the distinction between the language in the 'Timetable' section, which discusses "fieldwork or material/information/data collection phase", and the 'Data collection' section, which discusses "data collection or acquisition ... datasets" (Appendix Seven: 7). This phrasing implies data is a pre-existing object rather than constructed through the research and then again in the writing process and is sometimes more exploratory than what ends up being named as 'the data'. However, the Timetable section includes a translation of 'data collection' into an array of social science terms, which go beyond thinking of research as involving 'collecting' data in a positivist way, doing some of the translation work for applicants so as to acknowledge the broad church of social science research.

In contrast, the 'Data collection' section focuses on whether or not datasets can be submitted for archiving unless there is an exceptional reason not to do so. The underlying assumption about what constitutes research 'data' here is also evident when looking at the expectations of the ESRC Data Management Plan (ESRC, 2018c: 16): "Using standardised and interchangeable data forms ensures the long-term usability of data". This takes a positivist approach to data as an object that can be decontextualised from a particular project and used satisfactorily by others. While this might be possible for some projects and is helpful in terms of being accountable and contributing to knowledge production beyond a specific project, it is not possible in all cases. In particular, reuse of data is problematic if it has been obtained after sensitive negotiations around access and anonymity in which the

researcher gains participants' trust and commits to certain specific usages of the data; once they realise it, they no longer have control over how it is used and thus break such negotiated trust. The ESRC (2017: 12) states that it "can withhold the final payment of a grant if the data have not been offered for archiving to the required standard at the UK Data Service within three months of the end of the grant, except where a modification or waiver of deposit requirements has been agreed in advance".

While archiving data is not appropriate for all research projects, such a resource provides clear evidence of the value and usefulness of social science research beyond one funded project. If impact officers are being tasked with producing textual evidence of the impact of social science beyond academia, these positivist assumptions about what constitutes standard research presents the ESRC as a scientific organisation to trade on the conceptual currency of this term within scientific discourse. The 'scientific' is seen as more valuable and therefore is the 'best face' the ESRC can present to the public to be seen as legitimate and valuable within the epistemological hierarchy of disciplines.

While this natural science-rooted language is present in the guidance texts, applicants have interpretive leeway to try to fit their projects into these guidelines, alongside strategically positioning their projects in disciplinary and sub-disciplinary fields which are more open to and accepting of methodological plurality or innovation. While a positivist scientific discourse permeates the discussion of presumed research in the ESRC-RG documents, the ESRC and individual readers within the process are able either to translate their projects into this interpretive framework or to strategically position them so they are read by people more sympathetic to their approach.

When discussing data archiving with Professor FK, he explained that there was a lack of clarity around how the data management guidelines should be applied, especially to qualitative data. He had asked numerous colleagues if the ESRC *really* required archiving of qualitative data; he was intending to archive his quantitative survey data but was unsure if he was expected to include his interview transcriptions or notes of observations and fieldnotes. After asking numerous people he concluded that he should keep it vague about how much he would make available, as the ESRC policy was not very clear. As Professor FK has both quantitative and qualitative data, he was able to commit to some being archived and therefore fulfil the requirements without having to apply for a waiver or to provide the rest of the data that actually exists. This demonstrates the interpretive leeway applicants

have in keeping things deliberately vague to avoid having to negotiate more complex aspects or provide things that they do not want to. However, this relies on his reviewers and GAP members accepting this as a legitimate specification of the data management requirements, as they also have interpretive leeway as the assessors of applications. One way to make it more likely that the assessors will agree with applicant interpretations is to strategically position an application in a methodology-friendly discipline.

On the ESRC-RG application form (Appendix Seven: 9), applicants must specify the project research area, alongside 'qualifiers' which indicate "approach or geographical focus" and 'free-text keywords' to provide more specific indication of the project focus. These help to identify which GAP the project should be assessed by and which reviewers will be best suited to provide feedback (ESRC, 2018c: 18). This is the space to negotiate which readership the applicant wants to read their application, and thus broadly which disciplinary assumptions they will be assessed against. When looking at the ESRC-RG application on the online form, this provides a list of potential research areas with drop-down menus of potential sub-areas, and then further sub-areas.

Dr. RM discussed the negotiation of disciplinary boundaries in the ESRC, explaining that she had been advised by her mentor to avoid a particular GAP because the panel members from her discipline were "really brutal" and so she would be less likely to succeed. As her proposal straddled multiple research areas, she was able to strategically avoid this research area by classifying her proposal as a different discipline. Similarly, Professor FK said that reviewer criticism of his first unsuccessful application to the RG call involved very technical comments about methodology, and he concluded that perhaps they were by economists due to the specific focus on sampling and methodology. When he rewrote and resubmitted the project for a different GCRF call, he submitted to a different GAP with more social scientists, who he said were much more positive towards qualitative research and the proposal was successful.

However, this option is only open to those whose work fits into multiple areas and can be framed in different ways; for others, their work might just need to be translated for that particular audience. Dr. PL, an ECR applicant to the NIG, discusses this when explaining that her topic is unusual in her discipline, and so while her methodology is standard, she said she had to translate her theoretical approaches and topic into discipline-friendly language. This involves her negotiating the conceptual currency of her field and using

intentional institutional capture within her discipline to ensure her topic is understood by that disciplinary readership.

Another ECR applicant, Dr. SK, explained that while she felt her research project and previous work fitted into the GCRF call that she applied for, she strategically chose a reputable research centre with a track history of attracting major funders as she was advised by academic mentors that this would be attractive to the ESRC. However, this meant that she partnered with a research centre with a different academic focus to her research and so she then used a new language to linguistically position herself in a slightly different field in line with this. She describes this as not playing into the stated ESRC criteria, but rather attempting to cloak her application in the prestige and prior funding successes of a particular research centre. Hence, it involved anticipating the hidden criteria of the reviewer or GAP readership, who she hoped would respond to the prestige of the academic positioning and institutional affiliation.

Other important elements of negotiating the conceptual currency of disciplines and specific fields are politics, ethics, and publication practices. Such issues were discussed by Professor FK, who explained that it was essential to include international partners in his research in the Global South as in his discipline it was politically and ethically necessary to include local partners. While including such partners involved additional application work, which I had initially assumed would discourage applicants from including such partners, this was necessary within Professor FK's disciplinary readership as he stated that reviewers would not accept it otherwise. Dr. RM also discussed how she had tried to 'tone down' the radical politics of her application to the Future Leaders Grant in 2008. This was a strategy to remould herself and her project as less political, to produce what she called "credible research" to fit in with a more general positivist discourse, which presumes a more objective and unbiased researcher.

With regards to publication practices, Dr. RM discussed her recently unsuccessful RG grant application as a Co-I, with feedback from the GAP assessment stating that the project was not good value for money (one of the four assessment criteria) as the applicants did not plan to write a book from the project. This criteria of 'value for money' is intertwined with disciplinary expectations about what sorts of publications are expected and 'valuable', as Dr. RM explained that writing books was not a priority in her discipline and that she assumed that this comment came from an anthropologist on the GAP, who

was applying one disciplinary criteria to another. Of course, she cannot know this due to anonymity, but the active negotiation of different disciplinary expectations is at work in the value for money criteria, and demonstrates the malleable nature of such categories when interpreted by authoritative readers in the GAPs.

Based on the positivist language in the ESRC-RG guidelines, I initially assumed that more positivist or quantitative approaches to research would be seen as better and thus treated as 'good' research by the ESRC. However, this conceptualised the ESRC as if a coherent and agentic entity, rather than a web of texts and individual readers who may have different ideas about what constitutes 'good' research, alongside the array of disciplinary backgrounds and the different GAP panels involved in its organisational processes. And, as discussed in relation to impact, the ESRC's texts are not only written to organise the funding application processes that applicants are involved in, but also to 'demonstrate' the value of social sciences for their funders – UKRI and the UK government. Thus, while applicants must negotiate the positivist language of the application, this is often a simple process of translating research into the technical-bureaucratic requirements of the ESRC. Of much more importance is anticipating the assumed academic readership of an application, which is dependent on the GAP and specific reviewers. My participants discussed disciplinary and field-specific expectations, which meant that applicants could strategically position themselves in 'friendly' disciplines or translate their research into more general positivist language to ensure their topic, methodology, politics, ethics, and publication ideas would be understood and valued. The authoritative readers within the funding application process - the reviewers and the GAP members – have interpretive leeway to assess applications against the ESRC criteria in ways which suits their specific disciplines and fields. However, what is considered 'excellent' by specialist reviewers may not be 'acceptable' for the more general social science reader, and so there is a negotiation of how to balance these sometimes competing academic readerships.

Using Fictive Devices to Write Fundable Representations

The negotiation of sometimes competing technical, disciplinary, and field-specific literacies involves writing for different audiences in the same text. Thus, while applications

are intended to be 'factual', they are in practice partial and speculative representations which strategically use 'fictive devices' to tell more convincing stories about the proposed projects and the researchers themselves. In addition, the ESRC-RG application process as part of the textual apparatus of the ESRC as an organisation also involves 'fictive devices' to tell a more convincing story about the ESRC as a 'valuable' organisation. I argue that applicants write ideal selves and research projects to fit into the process, engaging in intentional institutional capture to achieve funding in an accountability process intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of the ESRC's distribution of public funds through 'excellent' research projects.

The application as a textual representation of the research project is necessarily speculative, as it has not happened yet, and so applicants have to balance realistic projects of what they can do with an idealised version in order to get funded. This telling of the research story involves using fictive devices, which Stanley & Dampier (2008: 61) define as "narrative devices which are deployed so as to make tellings or narratings 'more telling' ... more pointed and convincing ... include[ing] neatening events and plot, re-working characterisation to fit actions and vice versa, denoting causality, and allocating or avoiding agency". Such fictive devices are commonplace in application writing and rather than being "lies or deliberate misrepresentations", they are often a way "to better convey the facts" (Stanley & Dampier, 2008: 61). For example, Dr. PL explained that one of the key difficulties with her whole application, specifically the impact statement, was writing with authority while also sounding flexible, due to her not actually knowing what would happen once the research started. Her academic mentor advised her to write in a more specific and certain way; Dr. PL was writing 'I *want* to do X', he advised her to write 'I *will* do X'. This linguistic performance of authority involved a strengthening of her authoritative tone, despite being unable to actually guarantee that such impact activities would happen, because many of them needed the agreement of others, for example, of media outlets to publish her work. Her shift in language involved using a fictive device to tell a more authoritative story.

However, these fictive devices are expected to come true if funded, and so applicants are in essence writing their own future boss texts if they are granted funding for the proposed research projects. The research objectives will be used to evaluate funded grants when they are completed (ESRC, 2018c: 6) and so the research must fulfil the stated aims and objectives or explain why. This is assessed through the key findings report after a

grant ends (this must be completed within three months of the final date of the grant period) and the narrative impact report (12 months after end date of grant), which must be completed and accepted by the ESRC or else the grant holder will not be eligible for future ESRC funding (ESRC, 2017: 38). Thus, there is a balance to be struck between writing successful applications and not overclaiming, because the applicant must be able to produce convincing final reports in order to demonstrate that they have successfully completed the grant. This demonstrates how important this textualisation moment is, and the high degree of agency that academics have as the readers and writers of their own regulatory texts around research funding.

Two parts of the ESRC-RG application involve writing about the applicant themselves – the two page CV attachment for each researcher (ESRC, 2018c: 18), and the Pathways to Impact attachment which asks for evidence of prior work with potential users to outline their “track record” (ESRC, 2018c: 15). This writing of self is for a particular purpose, to convince an audience/reader – the ESRC reviewers and GAPs – of the researcher’s competence and to assess if they are likely to deliver the grant. I had anticipated that the researcher would be more prominent in the application text, as had Dr. MV, who made an application to the NIG. She had been looking for more opportunities to ‘talk herself up’, especially because the call is specifically aimed at ECRs and linked to career development. Dr. MV said that she felt that representations of the researcher seemed secondary to representation of the project, and while she was looking for opportunities to textualise her ‘best self’ into the application, these were quite limited.

While these autobiographical elements of the application were limited, Dr. MV’s comments highlight that the application involves writing the research self up in an idealised textual representation to achieve funding. As Eakin (1985) argues in relation to autobiography, the writing of oneself is a process of self-discovery and self-invention, using fictive structures and devices. Applicants write a work-autobiography through the CV and the minor element of the ‘Pathways to Impact’ to write themselves as successful academics who can deliver the grant, specifically to convince the ESRC reviewers and GAP members to fund them. While Eakin (1985: 9) argues that fictionalising often makes people uncomfortable because “We want autobiography to be truth”, this is commonplace in supposedly ‘factual’ genres of writing.

However, most of an application does not involve autobiography, but instead an ideal representation of the research project. The ESRC (2017: 24) general funding guidelines explicitly state that “The content and quality of the proposal you submit to the ESRC will determine whether or not you are successful”, in other words, track record and having a ‘big name’ is not supposed to feature in the decision. Indeed, it is mentioned in the ESRC (2016b) guidance video on writing a good research proposal that sometimes senior academics “rest on their laurels” by not fully explaining what they will do. Thus, as Smith (2006c) argues, application forms as a textual representation of the applicant represents them in the institutional process. Again, this shows how crucial the textualisation moment is, as writing a ‘good’ application text will get one funded, rather than relying on name or academic position.

The concept of fictive devices can also be applied to the ESRC itself, for as Savage et al (2017) argue, organisations themselves can be discussed as ‘fictions’. This fits with Smith’s (2005) discussion of institutions existing and organising through texts. However, organisational texts generally do not admit their own fictionality (de Cock & Land, 2005: 524), instead seeming as if factual and true without caveat. If institutions exist in their texts and related activities, the stories that an institution tells and the practices associated with these are central to the construction of the institution. This is particularly important for the ESRC when it is representing accountability processes to justify public funding of social science research, as it must appear legitimate under the dominant valuation discourse of what constitutes good research. The ESRC guidance thus constitutes a sort of textual performance of accountability, through which it is seen by the UKRI and UK government as funding legitimate and valuable research. This in large part explains the positivist nature of the application forms, as this is seen as more valuable within scientific discourse, which organises all the research councils through UKRI’s distribution of government funding.

The ESRC-RG process involves extensive use of fictive devices to construct researchers, projects, and the ESRC itself in the form of ideal and fundable representations. As discussed in Chapter Three, Dorothy Smith’s discussion of the social construction of facticity challenges the notion that ‘facts’ are fixed and objective, showing that supposedly factual textual representation are authoritative constructions of facticity, which are partial and often serve institutional purposes. Thus, discussing facticity as an *achievement* of texts and their authors/readers is a challenge to the presumed epistemological status of those

texts as pure and complete representations of reality. However, when exploring the ESRC-RG process, the institutional texts seem to be constructing more of an authoritative ‘ficticity’ in order to maintain the image of the ESRC and social science as producing valuable research, under scientific discourse and within government accountability processes. The ESRC-RG application text provides auditable evidence that the ESRC is a ‘valuable organisation’ that merits government funding thus performing legitimacy and value through texts and ensuring the continuation of ESRC funding.

New Public Management in the UK? The Importance of Context

While this discussion has largely focused on the agency of readers as a counterbalance to Smith’s approach, which largely focuses on the activeness of texts, I want to end by emphasising the importance of context in relation to Smith’s discussion of new public management (NPM) (Griffith & Smith, 2014). Academics as a group are quite powerful interpreters of the ESRC-RG guidance, whereby the specific ‘correct’ reading in line with UKRI and UK government policies and agendas on research funding become stretchy and malleable when being interpreted and put into practice by academic readers – reviewers and GAP members. As Smith’s (1990b: 218) discussion about job descriptions helpfully explains, texts or specific descriptions act as shells into which ‘cases’ or, in the ESRC-RG process, applications can be different but recognised as ‘the same’: “The question is not whether this job describes this person or this task allocation, but whether work *can be* described by, or subsumed under, the assigned job description and is thereby organizationally authorized” (Smith, 1990b: 218). Thus, what is deemed ‘correct’ is actually a negotiable and contested decision and highly dependent on who is the authorised reader of such interpretations. And therefore, it is helpful to think through how far Smith’s approach to NPM applies to UK HE and how academics respond to local audit culture.

Despite the increased bureaucratic work associated with audit and accountability processes in UK HE, I have shown here that academics still have considerable interpretive leeway in putting such processes into practice, and thus want to query the assertion that NPM necessarily reduces professional autonomy. As discussed so far, while the ESRC-RG processes require academics to translate their work into the guidelines, my participants

were able to do this without compromising their academic aims. Beyond writing an 'acceptable' text, academics had control over how the assessment categories and application specifications are applied to each project. This places the collective responsibility on the academic community to wield this interpretive power in line with academic values, rather than kowtowing to government requirements which contradict or compromise the professional autonomy of academic research.

As already discussed, the ESRC attempts to textually construct itself as a valuable organisation through using fictive devices to write an authoritative and legitimate ESRC-RG process. In this, researchers are asked to write up idealised researcher selves and projects within the general forms and policies of the ESRC, which take a positivist approach to social science as standard, and part of this to demonstrate value through participating in the impact agenda. This is in response to the contemporary audit culture in UK HE, which largely fits with what Griffith and Smith (2014) describe as new public management (NPM). NPM involves neoliberal managerial approaches being imported from the private to the public sector, such as more disciplining of front-line workers, attempts to reduce costs, 'hands-on' management, and "more *explicit and measurable* (or at least checkable) standards of performance" rather than trusting workers and accepting professional autonomy (Griffith & Smith, 2014: 6-7). It also involves increased institutional circuits and accountability circuits, whereby front-line work is standardised through textual representations that fit institutional boss texts and allow work to be counted and assessed. As Darville (2014: 44) notes, "what is counted becomes what counts".

A key theme for contributors in Griffith & Smith's (2014) NPM edited collection is the increased bureaucratic work that accountability processes involve, which takes away time from doing the 'actual work' of one's profession. NPM is exemplified by a requirement to be seen to be doing valuable work, rather than actually doing it, thus spending more time doing the audit work than doing the professional work. These discussions are applicable to UK HE with regards to the increased work involved in completing competitive accountability processes, such as competing for research funding as in the ESRC-RG process. After all this work they might not end up achieving the funding; and for some ECRs, this work was done when on teaching-only contracts without research time built-in.

The overall grant writing process involves a lot of work. Professor BL explained that one of her successful applications to the RG process took three years to write, although this

was exceptional in that it included multiple country case studies and numerous Co-Is. More commonly, she said that preparing an application would take her a few months. This was the case for the other respondents in writing funding applications. Dr. MV spent six months preparing an application for the NIG, which was unsuccessful. Dr. RM explained that she took around two-three months to actually write her successful application to an ECR call in 2008, based on a new research idea that involved her drawing on former work contacts with an international organisation as a named partner. However, when she submitted a RG grant in 2015 as a Co-I, the application took around a year to write. Professor FK had just submitted an RG application and explained that this large project had been in the pipeline for years, whereby the research team had been working on the topics for the last five years, had been mulling over the specific idea for two years, and had already received two smaller grants (one from his university, and one from another funder) to do initial research and scoping work. Off the back of this extensive planning and researching, the work on the actual application took seven months.

The only applications that took less time were those constrained by a specific deadline, such as the GCRF, which had a quick turnaround time of around two months between call and deadline. Dr. SK submitted an application for the GCRF based on her recently completed PhD thesis, spending around a month preparing this. Her application was for an award focused on knowledge exchange and impact, rather than doing new research, and so was different from those focusing on primary research. Regarding the GCRF research funding calls, Dr. RM said she was thinking about rewriting an unsuccessful application submitted to the RG call to a GCRF call. Because there were usually only two months between the GCRF call going out and the deadline, applying was only possible for those who had already written proposals which could be adapted to the specifics of the call, as a full research funding grant was too time-consuming to write from new. This was reiterated by Professor FK, who rewrote an unsuccessful RG application for another ESRC closed call. While the initial writing of the application took a year to conceptualise and six months to write, he only spent a month rewriting it for the second specific call, which had a tight turnaround time of some two months.

For those ECRs not on contracts with paid research time, this time-consuming application process was done outside of contracted activities. Dr. MV and Dr. PL both explicitly commented on the difficulty of doing much preparation on top of their contracted

teaching commitments. Dr. PL applied unsuccessfully to the NIG in 2017 just after finishing her PhD, mostly while working on a fixed-term teaching fellowship at another post-1992 university which does not build research time into its teaching fellow contracts. She began by preparing her initial two-page proposal developed with a former supervisor/mentor and input from friends and colleagues, before researching potential host universities and sources of funding. She contacted and got support letters from third-sector/governmental organisations that would support the project and work with her. Then, after securing support from a host university and a new mentor from this institution, she began an extensive writing process. Working over several months with her new mentor and the host university research office, alongside going through their internal peer review process, was a lot of application work, which was done outside of her full-time teaching commitments.

Dr. MV applied unsuccessfully to the NIG grant after finishing her PhD and spent six months writing the application. She prepared the application while a visiting fellow, whereby she did not get a salary but instead received an expenses-only grant to conduct a research project. As noted earlier, this was at a plate glass university which has recently been undergoing restructuring resulting in job cuts; in this context, the institutional support did not include any paid research time. She had also just had a baby and so her paid academic job hunt was on hold while taking maternity leave. Her application process involved reading the ESRC-NIG guidance documents, meeting her department's internal deadline three months prior to the ESRC submission in time for a particular panel; then getting institutional support in writing the application from the department's research administrators who helped with budget costing, from a senior lecturer who provided internal peer review, and the university impact officer providing general and impact-specific feedback. While this institutional support is present, the actual work of writing the application is not paid unless the applicant is on a contract which has time to do such work in it, which was not the case for both Dr. MV and Dr. PL, who were both ECRs negotiating other casual contracts when applying for the NIG. This is important to consider given the increasing use of precarious contracts in UK HE (UCU, 2016; Lopez & Dewan, 2015; Wångren, 2018), whereby ECRs are required to do more and more academic work outside of their contracted employment in order to get a more permanent job or continue doing research.

Another key theme that runs through contributions to Griffith and Smith's (2014) collection is that the disjuncture between actuality and textual reality means that something is lost in the process of making one's work accountable, with Janz et al.'s (2014) chapter highlighting that professional standards are often at odds with the audit boss texts to which they are held accountable, which involves negotiating a difficult tension. Thus, professionals might end up playing a bureaucratic game to fit into funding expectations rather than trying to do the job well, or sometimes even compromising their professional values. However, in the ESRC-RG process this does not seem to be the case. In my discussions with academics they successfully negotiated the technical requirements while still managing to pitch for projects they wished to do, and indeed this was necessary in order to appease the academic readerships who ultimately assessed their applications as reviewers and GAP members.

And as discussed in Rankin & Tate's (2014) chapter on nursing educators and Wright's (2014) chapter on academics in Denmark, NPM systems often involve professionals being subject to audit processes which are contradictory to their professional values. This writes in a tension which often results in the applicant textually performing compliance while pursuing their own professional aims 'underneath' that textual performance. This is evident in the ESRC-RG process whereby some textually performed compliance is facilitated by the professionalised research officers who translate the projects into language of audit. However, what is different from these NPM discussions is that ESRC applicants are not just accountable to the audit processes or their own professional values, but also to their academic readerships who assess applications. Thus alongside the formal government-focused audit process filtered through UKRI and the ESRC into the specific ESRC-RG process, there is also a more informal aspect to being held to account by academic peers against disciplinary and field-specific discursive guidelines.

And so, while the increased bureaucratic work associated with NPM is certainly the case in UK HE, all of my respondents acknowledged that there was a retention of (at least partial) autonomy. They all had strategies for negotiating accountability processes in order to circumvent things they disagree with and retain their academic or disciplinary values, including toning down their politics, translating their work into a particular terminology to appeal to disciplinary or general positivist expectations of 'good' research, and by working with impact officers to fit their research projects into the impact agenda. However, all this

requires additional bureaucratic work done to appease the auditing process, which in turn re-shapes what is depicted as doing research itself.

Centring the Agency of Readers and Translation

I began this chapter by identifying Smith's (2006c) three concepts – discourse, regulatory texts, and intertextual circles – as helpful framing concepts for analysing text-act-text sequences, and use this in my analysis of the ESRC-RG process. However, I came to realise that these concepts underestimate the agency of readers in their reading and writing of institutional texts. Much of Smith's discussion of institutional texts and textually mediated institutional processes explores how to read 'correctly' to fit into the institution. However, what caught my attention was how stretchy and malleable the ESRC-RG process is and thus how much agency applicants have.

Smith (2014b: 232) acknowledges in her more recent work that "Reading is not entirely in the text, for at the point of reading, the reader both activates the text and is responding to it", but at the same time she has only rarely explored the specifics of reading or the agency of the reader, instead focusing on the institutional organising and activeness of texts. Through analysing the ESRC-RG, I had to acknowledge the centrality of the active reader, negotiating the process and playing a discursive game with accountability processes in which there is more of a push and pull dynamic, rather than a structurally-heavy organising of passive academics. Academics are both the readers and writers of these applications, as the process involves peer review and academics making decisions through the GAPS, hence academic readers are able to negotiate how to apply categories to each specific project and how successfully these are seen to fit the criteria set out. This retains interpretative power among academics rather than to government officers or non-academic managers, even if they might put pressure on academic practice at a local level.

Of particular importance in this active reading is the intentional translation work done by applicants in the ESRC-RG process. Eastwood's (2006) discussion of intentional institutional capture was very helpful as she acknowledges the active reader/writer as intentionally translating their work into institutional language to access the process. Academic readers engage in an active translation of their ideas and selves into

institutionally recognisable textual representations to access ESRC funding. However, what became evident when using this idea regarding the ESRC-RG process was that multiple institutional languages were being negotiated simultaneously and in the same texts, which considerably complicated the idea of intentional institutional capture.

A single-axis understanding of intentional institutional capture would only capture the basic institutional literacy needed to successfully participate in the ESRC-RG process, what I have called the technical literacy. This technical literacy has largely been professionalised in UK universities through the introduction of research funding officers who facilitate the translation of project proposals into the language of the ESRC. This involves making applications institutionally recognisable and acceptable to the ESRC-RG process, using the language of the institution and fitting in with the presumed aims and objectives. However, as I began to focus on the reading and writing translation work done in order to produce an ESRC-RG application I realised that applicants were actively negotiating, not just the technical requirements of ESRC-RG, but also their position in relation to different academic literacies, specifically disciplinary and field-specific expectations.

The ESRC-RG guidance explicitly lays out the institutional process and intertextual hierarchies into which an applicant must fit themselves and their application to successfully produce a recognisable ESRC-RG application and successfully enter into the assessment part of the process. However, for the application to be considered 'fundable', applicants must also be literate in the slightly more 'hidden' and nebulous academic literacies of their discipline and field. This involves having an understanding of current academic conversations and disciplinary expectations, which requires applicants to be tapped into academic networks and actively engaged in such conversations, or indirectly understand these through getting advice from other academics in the know.

These academic networks might be sub-disciplinary areas (e.g. sociology of emotions), or might be interdisciplinary (e.g. feminist), methodological (e.g. Bayesian statistics), or political/ideological (e.g. Marxist). In addition, networks might develop around minoritised or oppressed identities such as LGBTQ+, BME, or women's networks, which might be university or discipline specific, or operate across institutions. Such networks help develop tacit knowledge, those things that are 'just known' or informally advised to negotiate academic demands and particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary expectations.

This might result in an applicant signalling their networked allegiances or understandings through referencing particular scholars or specific works, decisions around terminology and language, and methodology. This anticipates that particular criteria or specific people will be involved in the ESRC-RG decision-making, whether through academic reviewers or the academics who sit on the GAPs, and thus involves applicants anticipating and learning to speak to particular academic readerships.

Thus, readers/writers of ESRC-RG applications are actively negotiating multiple institutional literacies and writing for multiple assumed readerships, which can be located in two main areas: (i) technical requirements of the institutional process; (ii) academic positioning. And the second here involves managing disciplinary expectations around ethics, politics or methodology, alongside signalling knowledge of specific 'big names' in the field, and the ongoing academic conversations involved in particular areas of research.

This interpretive negotiation involved in reading and writing applications within the ESRC-RG process exemplify a much larger trend in UK academia, of fitting one's work into institutionally accountable formats suitable for competition and audit. On one level this involves ticking all the boxes and following the guidelines, but on a more conceptual level it involves participating in what Smith calls 'institutional circuits': "sequences of institutional action in which work is done to produce texts that select from actualities to build textual representations fitting an authoritative or 'boss' text ... in such a way that an institutional course of action can follow" (Griffith & Smith, 2014: 12). I conclude that the first step of this institutional circuit is not always followed in a straightforward way by academics, because the formal boss texts might be ignored or strategically used, and the actual boss texts might be something quite different. There may be, for example, a counter-institutional boss text or discourse, which might operate at the level of the discipline or a sub-topic or methodology, or a much broader valuation discourse, such as positivist science.

As part of this translation for multiple readerships, the 'factual' applications contain fictive devices, which are used by the applicants to present convincing 'ideal' representations which may differ from what actually happens. This writing strategy ensures that the applications fit within the broader context of new public management in which the ESRC must demonstrate the value of social science research, for example, through 'impact', in line with government policy and UKRI implement of such policies. The public accountability circuits which the ESRC is part of requires ESRC-RG applicants to perform

such value and impact in their textual representations of their research selves and their research projects to ensure the continuity of social science funding.

The ESRC-RG guidance explicitly lays out the institutional process and intertextual hierarchies into which an applicant must fit themselves and their application in order to successfully produce a recognisable ESRC-RG application and successfully enter into the assessment part of the process. This organises people's activities around institutional aims and assumptions and asks researchers to fit themselves and their projects into particular moulds of good and fundable research. However, this largely involves a textually performed compliance with the auditing, and a translation of a proposed research project into auditable language. However, as academics have retained their role in the assessment of the ESRC-RG funding applications, they are able to interpret and apply guidelines in line with academic expectations and retain professional autonomy while still participating in the audit process. What emerges is a collective textual performance of legitimacy through demonstrating the value of social science research facilitated by the ESRC process. And so, while there are many issues with such audit and accountability processes, for example, the amount of time it takes to prepare applications and additional bureaucratic involved, nonetheless academics retain an interpretive agency as authoritative readers and writers and as proficient translators of their ideas into different institutional languages.

And so, while the ESRC-RG text provides the 'sameness' of the process organising across time and place, a key finding is that agentic readers have a lot of interpretive leeway so long as they have sufficient institutional literacies to translate their ideas into institutionally recognisable texts. However, throughout this analysis I found myself trying to find the 'truth' of the ESRC-RG process, treating the statements of participants as 'facts' about the ESRC-RG process, and so having to actively remind myself that they were interpretations, couched in particular institutions, disciplines, and academic networks, alongside individuals' beliefs and assumptions. I had to re-write my initial discussions of the interviews to forefront the contingency and specificity of such interpretations, rather than generalising them as if a truth about the process. This perhaps says something about how text-act-text sequences are often discussed in IE research, whereby reader agency and variety in interpretation is often sidelined for a more practical engagement with 'how does this process usually work' to help people navigate complex institutional process by providing a blueprint.

As discussed in Chapter 2, my understanding of feminist research involves appreciating the partial and situated nature of knowledge claims and thus my description of the ESRC-RG process acknowledges that my participants' interpretations are context-specific and thus not necessarily generalisable beyond such a context. Without acknowledging the variation across different sites, my description would not only fall into the generalising and objectifying sociology that Smith initially sought to challenge, but also reify particular interpretations as if true, similar to my concerns about impact research officers and their interpretations of what constitutes impact.

As a first-time reader of the ESRC-RG process, I was trying to quickly develop working knowledge of the process alongside doing the analysis. This proved difficult and often meant that I got caught up in the minutiae of ESRC-RG technical requirements rather than zooming out to make larger analytic points. This may be a consequence of being cautious about evidencing my statements to be accountable, perhaps demonstrating why many IE researchers focus on processes they are already involved in and thus already have working knowledges of before beginning the research. But more importantly, my focus on accountability becomes difficult to maintain when zooming out from one single text and trying to look at a process and also including participants' accounts as well.

I have provided extensive explanation of my methods to be accountable, specifically through identifying how Smith analyses text-act-text sequences, adding IE concepts from Eastwood, and by clearly distinguishing between which data my claims are based upon. However, the increased focus on interview data when discussing how applicants interpreted the process and wrote applications is less accountable, as they are not available in the form of transcripts so as to maintain the anonymity promised to participants as part of them discussing specific detail. However, the interview data is not the focus of my analysis, rather it is the retrievable ESRC-RG text and interlocking texts. The interviews are accounts of different interpretations which I have used to make a larger point about reader agency in interpreting texts and which have also helped me to understand how the process worked in practice as I was an outsider to the ESRC-RG process.

While I have ensured an analytic reflexivity by discussing my reasoning, methods, and use of Smith's concepts, I have not situated my reading and analysis in my prior assumptions and political positioning. Initially, this was because I was unwittingly trying to

produce a description of the general and 'true' ESRC-RG process, but also as a first-time reader I did not have much idea of the process and so did not have many *a priori* assumptions to project into my analysis. However, this proved not to be the case when writing about new public management in my fourth analytic section, whereby I initially tried to focus on casualisation and working conditions. This section did not work as I was not focusing on the ESRC-RG process, but instead trying to write a more general critique of working conditions across the UK HE sector. I felt compelled to include it because of my position as a feminist and trade unionist who wanted to include the current context of precarious and casualised working conditions in UK HE, which is a centrally important discussion. However, the points I wanted to make were beyond the focus of this chapter, and to do a discussion of casualisation justice I would have needed to do much more extensive research. In short, my attempts to include it in this chapter said more about my political beliefs and my take on the broader context of UK HE than about the ESRC research funding process and what was 'in the texts' and participants' accounts of this.

Thus, in order to avoid ideologically reading into the texts or making claims I could not evidence within my research timeframe, I focused on exploring the institutional process without much discussion of how inequality and injustice feature in the ESRC-RG process or wider NPM and audit processes. And so while my methods of researching and writing this chapter utilise analytic reflexivity and accountability, two key elements of doing feminist research as discussed in Chapter 2, this analysis seems to fall into the apolitical trap of many recent IE studies; focusing on describing institutional processes as if neutral rather than providing a feminist analysis. While it is inherently feminist to discuss the power dynamics of interpretation in institutional processes and explore how the ruling relations work, this mapping approach to text analysis did not lend itself to a more political or explicitly feminist analysis. This is something I wish to think through in my next chapter on the REF as a discourse.

Chapter 5 – Alternative Facts? Making Mythologies Material: The Research Excellence Framework as Discourse

REF-able – “one has enough publications of sufficient quality within the REF period ... to be included in the department’s submission to the REF”

(McCulloch, 2017).

“Interviewee 13 – the implications of what looks like a technical decision – those people go in and those people don’t – has implications for the day-to-day fabric of how people relate to each other, how people see themselves, what their working lives are like”

(Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 72).

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) has become a central concern in UK academia with huge amounts of energy and money³⁵ poured into conducting the official research quality assessment exercise every six to seven years. However, the REF is not simply a quality audit process. As the results are used by the four UK funding bodies³⁶ to decide the distribution of quality-related (QR) government research funding, alongside their influence on university research reputations through unit of assessment (UOA) rankings, universities take the exercise very seriously. Academia experiences institutional attempts to ‘game’ the process through selective inclusion of staff, hiring new staff on fractional and/or temporary contracts, and selective inclusion of outputs based on internal mock REF exercises or external consultant recommendations (Stern, 2016: 12-14; Sayer, 2015: 53-82;

³⁵ An independent review of REF 2014 (Stern, 2016: 6; 11) discussed the increased cost of the REF – from £66 million for the RAE 2008 to £246 million for REF 2014 – highlighting that part of this rising cost included institutions hiring consultants and running mock REF exercises to attempt to improve REF results.

³⁶ Research England (formerly, Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)), Scottish Funding Council (SFC); Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW); and Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (DfE) (DfE replaces the Department for Education and Learning (DEL) which had responsibility for higher education funding in Northern Ireland during REF 2014).

Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 65-67). Universities and departments end up trying to make marginal gains and avoid marginal losses in order to maintain or increase their ranking in the crucially important university league tables, which requires huge amounts of work, money, and infuses the process with stress despite the often insignificant levels of differences that exist. However, these decisions are often made on the basis of mythologised understandings of the REF, which are passed around academic and management circles through word of mouth and then made material through writing them up into various textual forms: internal memos, emails, sometimes published media commentary pieces by academics on the REF, and ultimately the REF submissions themselves. As such, the REF functions not just as an official audit process, but more importantly as an ideological code, a “free-floating form of control” (Smith, 1999: 175) organising academic activities through perceived notions of ‘REF-ability’ which are often totally detached from the actual guidance.

The official REF process operates through a 0-4* rating system of “the quality of **outputs** (e.g. publications, performances, and exhibitions), their **impact** beyond academia, and the **environment** that supports research [bolded in original]” (REF, 2018a). It was first carried out in 2014, replacing the prior system – the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) – last conducted in 2008 (REF, 2018a). There are four main panels, which cover broad academic areas – Main Panel A: medical or biological sciences; Main Panel B: natural sciences and engineering; Main Panel C: social sciences; Main Panel D: arts and humanities. Each main panel is divided into sub-panels which broadly represent discipline-based UOAs, of which there are 34 in REF 2021.³⁷ The UOAs sometimes maps neatly onto discrete departments or research centres within university structures, but often do not. Thus, I will use the term UOA throughout the chapter to mean a collective group making a REF submission, as distinct from departments, which refer to more permanent university structures. The sub-panels conduct expert peer review of each submission, producing an overall quality rating composed of sub-profiles for each element of the submission (outputs, impact, and environment). According to HEFCE, now Research England since 1 April 2018 (REF, 2017c: 2), who run the REF on behalf of the four UK funding bodies, the three main purposes of REF 2021 are:

³⁷ In REF 2014, there were 36 sub-panels; engineering was split into four sub-panels; Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology was one panel rather than two (REF, 2014a; REF, 2018c).

- “To provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment.
- To provide benchmarking information and establish reputation yardsticks, for use within the HE sector and for public information.
- To inform the selective allocation of funding for research”

(REF, 2018a).

While the REF sub-panellists conduct their assessment of submissions independently from decisions around funding allocations, the REF has financial consequences, both directly through distribution of government research money through funding bodies, and indirectly through establishing research reputations and rankings for each university unit that submits.

Aside from the official aims and consequences of the REF process, it has produced a language which is more broadly used in UK HE. The adjective ‘REF-able’ or ‘REF-ability’ has emerged as an indicator of people’s perceived eligibility to be included in a REF submission, specifically focusing on their perceived ability to deliver 4* and 3* publications, alongside becoming used as shorthand to describe career status and to inform hiring and promotions decisions in universities (Sayer, 2015: 5; McCulloch, 2017). The official REF process might define academics and outputs as eligible for submission to the REF, but discursively ‘REF-ability’ only refers to those who are seen as achieving the top 3* and 4* ratings, which Sayer (2015: 46-50) argues is due to the removal of QR funding from 2* ratings. The most recent QR formula from the four UK HE funding bodies show that 2* ratings received no QR funding, with differences in the weighting for 3*/4* ratings; the weightings are 4* - 3 and 3* - 1 in Scotland and Wales (SFC, 2018: 15; HEFCW, 2015: 1) and 4* - 4 and 3* - 1 in England and Northern Ireland (HEFCE, 2017g: 29; NIDFE, 2018), which financially de-incentivises universities from submitting anything perceived to be 2* or 1*. Thus, while ‘REF-ability’ is rooted in the REF process itself, it refers more to the REF as discourse, which takes into consideration the context and how the REF results are used, specifically the implications for funding.

Mathieson (2015) argues that “the REF’ has become a byword for a wider culture shift in academia”, and thus functions as a way to describe broader practices. Mathieson (2015) analyses her survey results of early-career researcher (ECR) experiences of REF 2014, highlighting the “huge amount of pressure and anxiety” that ECRs associated with the REF,

specifically due to it intersecting with issues regarding casualisation and hierarchies between research and teaching, with reduced mobility for many on teaching-only contracts due to the importance of having REF-able publications but no dedicated research time to produce them. This links with broader media discussions of the REF, discussing its use as a “fairly brutal management tool” and linking it to poor mental health (Fazackerley, 2018), thus demonstrating how the REF is understood as something beyond the official process, as an organising logic and way of discussing certain management practices in universities. Interestingly, Mathieson (2015) defines ECR in a broad popular sense to include PhD students, postdoctoral researchers, and those on casual or teaching-only contracts who research and publish outside of their contracted hours in the hope of securing future contracts which are permanent and/or specifically include research time. This is different from the official REF definition of ECRs as staff who have been employed for at most four years on at least a 0.2FTE contract, with research responsibilities, who are independent researchers (doing their own research, not solely another researcher’s project, i.e. not research assistants) (REF, 2018d: 40; 46). However, Mathieson’s broader definition of ECRs is becoming common in UK HE (e.g. Thwaites & Pressland, 2017; Taylor & Lahad, 2018) and indicates how the REF is organising beyond the scope of those who can be included in submissions in anticipation of hiring committee expectations of ‘REF-able’ publications.

The REF began from a 1982 pilot scheme, the Research Selectivity Exercise (RSE), then became the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), before becoming the REF, which Docherty (2018: 35-36) argues “was to find an acceptable way to reduce state funding for University research by limiting the provision of state funds to a small number of selected institutions” making universities “complicit with the establishment of the new ‘realism’ of hierarchical selectivity”. From its inception the exercise was connected to funding and thus has been an important process to get right, but as Sayer (2015: 4-5) argues “What began back in 1986 as a ‘light touch’ periodic appraisal has spawned internal university bureaucracies that *continually* monitor and increasingly seek to manage individuals’ research”. This gets to the heart of many critiques of audit and accountability processes, namely that the process requires excessive time and effort, taking front-line workers away from the work which is supposedly being audited and producing a proliferation of new forms of audit work and workers. For example, David Graeber (2018) states that 1.4 euros is spent by European universities a year on failed grant applications as part of academics spending “more and more time measuring, assessing, discussing, and quantifying the way in

which they study, teach, and write about things” rather than doing the actual academic work.

However, as discussed in Chapter 4, experiences of the REF vary massively depending on institution and discipline, so the interpretation and use of the REF process can hugely vary. For example, Sayer (2015: 78-80) contrasts institutional responses to academics not being included in REF 2014 as ranging from “hawkish” universities who threatened redundancy or contract changes away from research, to those who explicitly sought to reassure their staff that such measures would not be taken. And so, while the official process is badged as “the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions” (REF, 2018b), it has far-reaching consequences at a local-level depending on how university management and local-level faculties, schools and departments engage with the exercise, with institutions having varying levels of ‘professionalisation’ when it comes to preparing for REF submissions.

Having approached text-focused IE analysis through a single text – in Chapter 3 – and through a textually mediated process – in Chapter 4 – I now focus on analysing discourse in relation to the REF. Building on previously discussions about reader agency and translation, this chapter focuses on how the REF operates as a discourse at a translation moment: the release of initial guidelines for REF 2021 in July 2018 and how/if these impact on local-level preparation work for REF 2021. Work for this chapter occurred as the REF 2021 draft guidelines were released (July 2018), so my focus was to discuss them with REF facilitators³⁸ who had just read them (or heard about them) and were beginning to work out how they might be put into practice at a local level in their units. I wanted to see how the REF functions as a discourse that organises work at a local levels at this key translation moment, and how the REF facilitators translate between the official guidance texts of the REF, the university management, and their own academic colleagues. While it would have been interesting also to explore the REF 2014 process, I concluded this was too heavily impacted by the results and consequences of that process in the four years since the results were released. As much of my thesis has focused on social sciences, this chapter focuses on a natural science discipline. I chose to focus on physics because I had already done some

³⁸ I use this term to mean any academic with departmental-level responsibility for REF preparation including, understanding the guidelines, contributing to writing the submission, liaising between management, professional REF staff, and the department. While different terms may be used in each university, I am using a generic term to ensure anonymity of institutions and individual interviewees.

research on physicists for my undergraduate dissertation about gendered hierarchies of value between disciplines. In this, physics was taken as the ‘hard’/‘objective’ end of a spectrum of disciplines and thus an interesting example to compare with the supposedly ‘softer’ social sciences. As with other STEM subjects, there is also a gender imbalance in those studying physics and becoming academic physicists, which was recently highlighted by Jocelyn Bell Burnell, former president of the Institute of Physics and award-winning physicist, donating prize money to funding minority groups getting into physics (Ghosh, 2018).

I will now explain my methods and how I have used Smith’s conceptualisation of discourse and ideological codes to analyse the REF, then explore three key points in my analysis. These are: myths and local-level (mis)interpretations of the REF; the distribution of interpretative agency in institutional REF hierarchies; and lastly, the usage of REF results and how they contribute to a marginal gains approach to the REF by institutions. Overall, I argue that REF myths are made material through the local-level REF practices organised by mythologised understandings of the REF, which are often totally disconnected or antithetical to the actual process and function as alternative facts within institutions and sometimes beyond.

The REF as Process and Ideological Code

Following from discussion in Chapter 4, the local-level translation of official REF regulatory texts illustrates the level of reader agency in interpreting and putting them into practice. While the official process is the actual assessment process for research quality in UK HE, the REF as an ideological code is often a more powerful organiser of everyday academic activities due to many academics not knowing the specific details of how the REF process works and the varied approaches to it across different universities. Thus, ‘the REF’ refers to both: (i) the official REF - a very weighty textually-mediated process, whereby UK universities prepare to submit their institutional- and unit-level texts for this quality assessment exercise with its implications for QR funding, reputations, and funding relating to reputations; and, (ii) the local-level REF – the REF functions as an ideological code that organises academic activities around publications and ‘impact’ (but may not actually align

with the official REF process) and varies across locales. Thus, while the guidance texts are important, they can become almost irrelevant when institutions organise their submissions around a largely mythologised understanding of the REF, which is detached from the guidance and circulate through the impact of word of mouth and more informal texts, such as emails, blog posts, or internal memos.

The concept of an ideological code is part of Smith's (2014b: 227) larger discussion about discourse; it is "a sphere of activity" in which there is a dialogue between organising texts and agentic people, whereby discourse works as a form of institutional literacy or a regulatory frame which influences how people read, write, and act. As discussed in Chapter 1, Smith's ontology of the social identifies the massification of texts as producing textually mediated social relations in which the replicability of such texts allows them to organise across time and place. This has led to "'codes' which have no particular local source" and provide "a common discursive standpoint" (Smith, 1990b: 168), whereby someone can assess themselves or others by reference to a discourse which is commonly known and participated in, rooted in texts but organising beyond their specificity. The concept of 'REF-ability' demonstrates how the REF functions in such a way, in being treated as a discursive point from which competent academics and HE professional staff know how to assess academics as 'REF-able' or not, which influences whether or not they get hired, are made permanent, promoted, or maintain research responsibilities. Thus, while such notions may be based on fictionalised interpretations of the REF, these are treated as factive, particularly since they operate as though fact within institutions at a local-level.

Smith's (1990b: 159-208) 'Femininity as Discourse' conceptualises discourse as social relations, and so as actual practices situated in place and time but embedded in texts. Crucially, Smith (1990b: 161) conceptualises women as "active as subjects and agents" in the textually-mediated discourse of femininity and emphasises that "discourse is not limited to the text, though it is organized by and in relation to the text" (Smith, 1990b: 162). Thus, the official REF texts organise but do not determine the process, people still have agency and are active in their usages and responses to texts, and this plays out in the ways in which the REF is translated into activities at a local-level.

Smith (1990b: 163-164) proposes that the texts provide an entry point to the social organisation of discourse and so should not be taken out of context, and instead researchers should take note of how the texts organise and mediate people's activities and

relations to each other, with the researcher being able to identify relevant texts through her “ordinary knowledge” of what these texts might be as an ‘insider’ in society. As a double insider – in society, and in the institution of UK HE – I knew that the REF was a key organising process in UK HE, having heard/read discussions of the REF, most of which were very negative and focused on how the REF affected publications. However, when I began reading the actual REF regulatory texts and speaking to those involved in the process, I was surprised that many of the ‘facts’ I had heard about the REF were not the case, which I will go on to discuss when exploring REF myths in my analysis. This disjuncture between the way in which the REF was discussed and the actual practices of the REF meant I needed to have a working knowledge of the official process before exploring how it worked at a local-level.

I began by reading in detail all the publicly available reports and guidance documents relating to REF 2014 and REF 2021 through the REF website (REF, 2018b) to get an overall sense of how the process worked and what was required of institutions and UOAs. Most of the official process is publicly documented, due to the commitment to transparency and demonstrating the legitimacy of the exercise so it is ‘bought into’ by those involved and by those using it as a measure of research quality. Some elements of the process are necessarily kept confidential to ensure panellists feel able to fully discuss and assess the submissions, however, Neyland & Milyaeva’s (2017) report provides a detailed overview of in-depth interviews with 2014 REF managers, main panel members, sub-panel members, and impact assessors across numerous disciplines. This report gives a rare sight of what is behind the closed doors of the confidential official process and through this I am able to read the various views of panellists from REF 2014 and counter-balance some of the speculation from REF facilitator interviewees about what happens in the (sub-) panels.³⁹

Neyland & Milyaeva’s (2017) interviewees echo many concerns discussed by other commentators (e.g. Sayer, 2015; Docherty, 2018) about how the REF functions and affects academic culture. However, alongside this is an appreciation of it being “the worst system except for all the others” (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 21) whereby if research money is to be selectively distributed, then at least the REF process keeps the process in the hands of

³⁹ While Neyland & Milyaeva’s (2017) report is not an unadulterated view into the workings of the REF (sub-) panels, the anonymity afforded to the interviewees and the range of viewpoints discussed including some very critical ones, make me confident that the panellists gave frank accounts of what they actually thought of the process at the point of being interviewed.

academics and quality assessment through peer review as opposed to blunt metrics. Some interviewees also acknowledged that the exercise helped provide evidence of the value of academic research and thus had a strategic use purpose for the academic community (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 83-84). For example, impact case studies show the broader value of academic work (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 50). Additionally, some interviewees discussed the impact of the REF and RAE exercises on gender equality, whereby the 'old boys club' of academic had been disrupted by the blunt measure of how many publications someone had, alongside the broader acknowledgement of equality issues through reductions in requiring outputs for specific circumstances such as maternity leave or disability (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 22; 71). Overall, what was apparent from their report was that REF guidelines had to be, and were, stuck to because of the multiple levels of having to justify assessments to sub-panels and main panels to sign off on the results. This is particularly significant given the high-level of scepticism expressed by my interviewees and other public commentators, which I will come back to when discussing REF myths.

There are four levels of textuality in the REF process: the formal statements about the REF by HEFCE and the government; the draft guidelines and consultations on these guidelines; the initial decisions from the main panels and, for some parts, the sub-panels; the sub panels' reading and assessments of the submissions and subsequent results. While there is interpretive leeway, this is heavily constrained by the published detailed guidelines and the collective nature of the decision-making. As the process is solidified at each level with more specific details and rules, any decisions must be justified in relation to the guidelines with the knowledge that such decisions will be publicly transparent through the publication of all decisions and information about the REF process. While the very specific details of main- and sub-panel discussions are kept confidential to allow panellists to assess submissions without fear of consequences from or for individual academics, the overall process is otherwise very transparent.

The publication of all documentation of the REF process, the visibility of the panellists, and the inclusion of observers and participants from the funding bodies, users of research, international academics, alongside the UK-based panellists, means that the process is 'watched' and thus must be seen to be sticking to the published guidelines. As the draft assessment criteria and working methods explains, "Panels will not be permitted to depart from the final criteria once published, other than in exceptional circumstances

that cannot be accommodated within the published framework. In such cases, we will publish the reason and details of the change as an amendment” (REF, 2018e: 4-5). So while there is room for main panels, and to a lesser extent sub-panels, to interpret the guidelines through developing their specific working methods and criteria, this must fit within the overall framework which has already been set. Thus, the decisions made at sub-panel level are already constrained by those made at main panel level, which are in turn already constrained by REF managers’ systems and working practices, and governmental and funding bodies’ decisions about the process.

The Official REF 2021 Process

Based on Neyland & Milyaeva’s (2017) report alongside the publicly available official REF 2014 and 2021 texts, I pinned down the official process. The first part of the following timeline had already occurred at the point of writing, and the later part is a description of what is projected to happen in the guidance documents for REF 2021:

1. Reflections on REF 2014
 - Government and HEFCE reflections on REF 2014 and initial decisions on what to change, what to add, and what to maintain, and consultation period on this
2. Recruitment and Appointment of Panel Chairs, Sub-Panel Chairs and Publication of Initial Documents
 - Call for main panel chair applications (HEFCE, 2017f) alongside appointments to REF Equality and Diversity and Interdisciplinary panels and subsequent announcement of main panel chairs (REF, 2018g)
 - Call for sub-panel chair applications (REF, 2017a) and publication of REF consultation summary of response (REF, 2017b).
 - Call for panel member nominations from organisations with an interest in research, such as subject associations, alongside details of expert panel roles and responsibilities (REF, 2017c: 1).
 - More guidance documents released – specifically decisions on staff and outputs (REF, 2017d)

- Appointments REF sub-panel chairs announced (REF, 2018g) and first stage of sub-panel members announced.
3. Criteria Setting Stage
 - Main panels and sub-panels produce criteria and methods to specify how the overall framework will work
 - Publication of consultation documents (REF, 2018d; 2018e; 2018f) alongside guidance to panels (REF, 2018h; 2018i).
 - Consultation on criteria
 4. Finalised criteria to be published early 2019 (REF, 2018e: 2)
 5. Application process begins in 2019 with HEIs being asked to submit codes of practice to be confirmed by equality and diversity panel (REF, 2018f) and then indicating intention to submit, specifically which UOAs they will return, and the volume and nature of work they intend to submit to inform further recruitment (REF, 2018e: 8-9)
 6. Recruitment/appointment of additional sub-panel members and impact/output assessors to ensure sub-panels have enough members to deal with anticipated workload and sufficient breadth of expertise to deal with all submissions (REF, 2018e: 8)
 7. Submissions made by November 2020 (REF, 2018e: 2)
 8. Sub-panels assess submissions throughout 2021
 9. Results published by December 2021 (REF, 2018e: 2)
 10. Publication of submissions, panel reports, REF manager report, full panel lists
 11. Results inform UK funding bodies' allocation of funding from 2022-2023 (REF, 2018e: 2)

However, this official process intertwines with another, local-level process, in which universities prepare to submit applications, whereby institutions prepare their documentation, choose units of assessment, and then facilitate, manage, or control local-level preparation of submissions.

Institutional/Local-Level REF Process

In order to explore how the local-level process worked, I formally interviewed unit-level REF facilitators in UK university physics departments about their role as REF facilitators, their understanding of REF 2021 guidelines thus far, the dynamics between REF facilitators and university management or professional research staff, and local level strategies in place for preparing their REF 2021 submission. From the 41 universities who submitted to the REF 2014 physics sub-panel, I tried to find publicly available email addresses for their physics heads of department,⁴⁰ heads of research, or those who were publicly listed as having REF responsibilities at the physics department level. I contacted academics from 21 physics departments and received 7 replies:

- 5 people agreed to be interviewed:
 - 2 heads of department - Professor N. and Professor F
 - 3 academics with departmental-level REF responsibilities or research responsibilities including REF - Professor D., Professor R. and Professor S. - of these three, 1 asked for my interview request to be agreed by higher-up university management, due to it being a competitive process and them being uncomfortable discussing preparation with someone outside their institution, and after an email exchange management okayed my request to interview
- 1 head of department responded with their REF facilitator's contact details but subsequently the REF facilitator did not respond
- 1 emailed an apology because busy and unable to be interviewed but also highlighted that my request was difficult because the REF is a sensitive process

Drawing on these interviews, I was interested in how different physics departments are preparing for REF 2021 and translate the guidelines into action, how much university managements control or manage the process, and what impact the REF process is having on academic life in the discipline of physics.⁴¹ The five interviews I carried out illustrate the

⁴⁰ I use the term head of department to discuss those in charge of the physics department in each university. Sometimes these would be classed as 'schools' or 'faculties' depending on the structure and language of the university, but I use the generic term department to avoid accidental identification of individuals or institutions.

⁴¹ For a full list of questions see Appendix Twelve.

variety of local-level interpretations of the highly standardised REF process, alongside showing the kind of discursive manifestations of the REF in everyday academic life of physics departments, and act as a counterpoint to my discussions focusing on the ESRC and therefore social sciences in Chapter 4.

As indicated by two of the email responses, the REF process is seen as sensitive. I presume that some of those whom I contacted were reluctant to respond due to the sensitive and competitive nature of the process, particularly if their institutions were punitive towards staff members or departments during the REF 2014 process. While these sensitivities meant that some of the answers received in my interviews seemed slightly edited to avoid discussing things that were controversial or inappropriate, overall I was surprised how candid the interviewees were. Perhaps this is in itself indicative of these five institutions being less punitive towards their staff when it comes to REF, or, regardless of their institution, perhaps these individuals felt comfortable speaking to someone outside their institution under the cover of anonymity. Regardless, maintaining anonymity is essential, hence why I am deliberately non-specific about institutional, departmental, and individual details throughout this discussion.

Based on Times Higher Education (THE) (2014a) overall REF 2014 rankings by subject, three of the interviewees came from departments/units from the top half of the rankings and two from departments/units from the bottom half. I checked the REF 2014 results of subject rankings by intensity (THE, 2014b), which showed the percentage of eligible FTE staff versus the submitted FTE staff, adjusting the scores and ranking depending on how selective the submissions had been. In physics, the submissions were largely inclusive, with no department/unit submitting fewer than 65% of their staff, and three quarters submitting 80% or more of their eligible FTE staff (THE, 2014b). From my five interviews, these concerned a range of selectivity approaches, with one very selective, one not very selective, and the other three in the middle. What is important to note here is that the size and selectivity were less important regarding the relative rankings of my interviewees' departments than the level of professionalisation they described.

By professionalisation here, I mean how well-organised and funded the REF preparation process was in terms of central university management and support, professional services staff with REF responsibilities, informed academics with REF responsibilities, and use of external reviewers, all of whom take the REF preparation

process very seriously. Such practices are discussed by Neyland & Milyaeva (2017: 66), who quote two sub-panellist interviewees explaining how universities wanted them to review outputs as part of their preparation for REF 2021, with interviewee 11 saying “institutions are prepared to put loads of money into paying external assessors”.

From these five interviews with physics REF facilitators, alongside the REF guidelines, and informal conversations with academics in social sciences, I conclude that the institutional/local-level process is broadly as follows:

1. Strategising – institutions begin to work out strategies of staff recruitment, funding and restructuring and management of different departments based on REF 2014 results to prepare for REF 2021 submissions. This is based on assumptions of continuity from REF 2014, alongside snippets of information from consultation discussions and rumours due to the official guidance for 2021 not yet being fully released
 - a. The specific REF preparation will involve initial identification of potential impact case studies and mock/internal REF processes to identify individuals and specific outputs to include in submissions; these processes vary widely in terms of how influential they are, and whether or not they use external consultants/reviewers to assess outputs and case studies, or if this is internal then whether it is controlled by the unit or faculty/college/school level REF facilitators
 - b. Some impact case studies will need still to be ‘evidenced’ and therefore events or other methods of producing impact evidence will be organised alongside initial drafting of the documents and longlisting
 - c. Staff are encouraged to continue work developing publications, impact, and research environment indicators
2. Influencing - HEIs might unofficially encourage individual academics to apply to be sub-panel members alongside officially participating in the REF consultation process to influence the set-up and decisions made around how REF 2021 will work
 - a. Those who have been involved in the REF process before, either as unit REF facilitators or academics who were REF sub-panellists, might offer insight into the process and how ratings operated at a sub-panel level

in 2014 and so having REF sub-panellists can help with interpretative and strategic decisions

3. Responding to initial decisions and guidance – institutions begin to hone their understanding of REF 2021 based on initial publications and may respond to the official consultation on draft guidance on submissions, main and sub-panel criteria and working methods, and codes of practice
4. Focused strategising - HEIs read guidance and hone their REF strategies, begin advocating this at local level through REF facilitators and professional research staff in departments
 - a. This results in meetings between staff at unit/departmental, college/faculty level, and university level, through which REF strategies and general information is filtered down the university hierarchy through the REF facilitators alongside professional research/impact staff, heads of department or heads of research, alongside other all-staff meetings or workshops focusing on the REF
5. Codes of Practice and Submission Intentions - HEIs submit draft codes of practice to the equality and diversity panel and indicate intention to submit UOAs
6. Decisions will be made at both a unit/departmental and institutional level around inclusion of staff and specific outputs and case studies, often on the basis of mock/internal REF exercises and external consultants' advice
7. Production of the final submission documents
 - a. These documents may be drafted by local-level REF facilitators, alongside professional research staff, and higher-level university management and bureaucrats, going through multiple iterations of comments and editing. Impact case studies may be written by the academics whose research the impact is based on, in conjunction with impact officers and REF facilitators or other academics who are seen as 'good at impact', or may be outsourced to professional staff or impact writers, especially if the academic whose research is being used is no longer at the institution
8. Submission and waiting

9. Results released and universities and departments managing or promoting the results and the reputational/PR fallout

Both the official and local-level processes are initially exercises in reading and writing, leading up to an important textualisation moment: firstly, reading the staggered publication of the guidance documentation by REF/Research England, and then the specifications by the panels and sub-panels; and secondly, the production of institutional-level documents (such as the Code of Practice) and then, importantly, each unit's submission. The official process produces heavily organised boss texts – specifically the Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions (REF, 2011b), and the Panel Criteria and Working Methods (REF, 2012)⁴² - which are detailed and publicly available so that HEIs and UOAs understand what is expected of them and how they will be assessed. Then each institution takes this information, alongside rumours, gossip and sometimes paid consultants' advice, and strategically applies it to their local setting, with some running mock REF exercises to inform their final submissions.⁴³ These institutional-level processes are variously negotiated by each UOA, depending on the institutional context and managerial style, alongside previous performance in research assessment exercises. What is centrally important here is that the REF becomes used in local contexts in various ways that may align with the intended purpose of the REF, or may fundamentally challenge or contradict it but still 'game' the exercise. Consequently my analysis focuses on exploring the local-level preparation process, focusing on the unit-level experience in the five UK physics departments, and the interpretational agency and translations involved in this.

⁴² At the time of writing, the REF 2021 versions of these documents had not yet been finalised yet, so I use the REF 2014 guidance alongside the updated consultation documents for REF 2021 (REF, 2018d; 2018e; 2018f).

⁴³ The REF guidance acknowledges that institutions conduct mock REF exercises, and suggests they use them to try out their draft code of practice and include an equality impact assessment (REF, 2018f: 13). However, as Sayer (2015: 54) notes about REF 2014, most staff members were less worried about discrimination on the basis of protected characteristics and instead worried about "the university's ability to come up with informed and fair assessments of their research", as mock REF exercises were used by some institutions to choose which staff members were included and excluded from REF 2014 submissions.

How to Analyse Ideological Codes

But how to actually analyse the REF using Smith's concepts of discourse and ideological codes? Smith's (1990b: 167) discussion of femininity as discourse demonstrates her conceptualisation of discourse as "a web or a cats-cradle of texts, stringing together and coordinating the multiple local and particular sites of the everyday/everynight worlds of women and men with ... market processes". Her analysis draws on what 'we just know' as competent participants in social relations, showing how discourse can be detected in diffuse examples with the same pattern or code organising interpretation and activity in similar ways. Through reading various texts, Smith is demonstrating how femininity operates as evidenced through these. However, her discussion does not provide a recipe or blueprint for how to analyse discourse in an accountable way, for there is no clear articulation of the methods of text selection and/or text analysis. Smith (1990b) uses a wide array of seemingly unconnected examples to show that a textually-mediated discourse is not contained within one single text or one single process but rather cuts across and through textual genres, institutions, and contexts. Her approach to text analysis is a surface-level reading of multiple texts, similar to what is discussed by Cheng (2009) and Sherman (2013) about piecing together multiple surface readings rather than reading fewer texts in depth. In addition, the REF is a more specific and localised discourse than femininity, located within the institution of UK higher education, rather than organising more broadly across the ruling relations.

Thus, Smith's (1999) later work on discourse provides a more directly useful exemplar of how to analyse the REF in an accountable way, specifically by using her concept of ideological codes: "schema ... constant generator[s] of *procedures for selecting syntax, categories, and vocabulary in the writing of texts and the production of talk and for interpreting sentences*, written or spoken, ordered by it" (Smith, 1999: 159). Smith (1999: 175) argues that ideological codes become "self-reproducing" as people pick them up and use them, passing the code onto others as the codes ongoingly structures talk and text in an infectious way that is often connected to ideological "master-frames". The REF operates in a similar way, producing language and categories such as 'outputs', 'impact', and 'research environment', which supersedes the language of 'publications', knowledge exchange, or department/workplace culture. It is also distinct from market language such

as 'products', instead perpetuating the language and structuring effect of audit and accountability processes and the need to evidence the value of academia alongside a more general neo-liberal encouragement of competition for funding. This language helps organise how academics represent themselves, how institutions discuss academics' work, and the sorts of areas of work which professional staff must cover. As discussed in the previous chapter, the impact agenda has created new areas of work in the form of impact officer positions, which relates to both elements of government funding; the research council competitive funding calls and the QR funding distributed on the basis of REF results.

Ideological codes coordinate across time and place at the intersection between textually-mediated public discourses and institutions, not necessarily reproducing the same content but instead the same organising aspects across local sites. The use of ideological codes is often so routine that they are operate without people consciously intending to use them. Thus, Smith (1999: 171) argues that such codes carry "a peculiar and important political force, carrying forward modes of representing the world even among those who overtly resist the representations they generate". While people have agency, ideological codes are the schema through which we normally make sense of particular situations, including such things as academic success or employability through 'REF-ability', and so are easily used without realisation of what is being reproduced or, even though resisting the codes can still be represented as the norm.

In "Politically Correct': An Organizer of Public Discourse', Smith (1999: 172-194) analyses a Canadian radio programme and identifies ways in which the ideological code of political correctness organises the broadcast through analysing the structure of the programme. This example is particularly informative about how to analyse talk more effectively, focusing on the structuring element of discourse, which is useful for analysing the REF facilitator interviews alongside the texts. Smith's (1999: 180-181) analysis of the radio programme structure names three layers:

- (i) the surface, which identifies: the type of text – a documentary – which authorises it as commentary on what is actually happening in the world; the reporter as the authoritative voice of the programme; and, the theme of the programme which sets up the schema of the discussion – political correctness;

- (ii) the reporter's commentary, which creates a narrative coherence and in which she adds description and comments whereby she "assigns or withdraws credibility";
- (iii) how participants speak about events, which is then edited to fit into the overall narrative and interpretive frame.

Smith (1999: 187 drawing on Bakhtin, 1981) argues that these layers are often blended into 'hybridic sentences', in which different speech styles are mixed as if one. She gives an example of the radio programme reporter mixing her own interpretation with the reported speech of those about whom she is reporting – student protesters – thereby merging them as if all part of what the student protesters said in order to better fit with the interpretive frame of the story. With the REF, this happens when myths and mis/interpretations are reported by authoritative people involved in the local-level REF processes as if factual statements about the official process, making very little distinction between the very specific official process rules and the interpretations made. These create mythologised local realities of the REF, which organise people and their activities around a REF code, but in a way that is somewhat detached from the official process.

Smith (1999: 184) argues that political correctness is the schema into which the collection of instances under discussion fit, whereby the programme identifies the schema and uses the examples to exemplify the schema, and then the telling of these examples is done so as to fit the schema: "a circular procedure". The ways in which the examples are fitted into the schema of political correctness involves removing events from their local contexts and presenting them against other events as if a dialogue, but in selective ways whereby some people get to speak for themselves and others are spoken about, some deferred to as legitimate or authoritative and others as not (Smith, 1999: 185). In this radio programme, Smith (1999: 189) argues that those who are 'politically correct' are positioned as 'other' to the taken-for-granted and authoritative interpretation of events, and the ideological code presents an interpretative paradigm through which the listener understands the overall message. While listeners might not agree, insufficient information or context is provided about the examples for them to make up their own minds, which is similar to researchers producing unaccountable knowledge claims, as discussed in Chapter 2, in which there is no way to check their interpretations against evidence and the reasoning employed to come to them.

Importantly, Smith (1999: 190) argues that the code is a device that listeners can use again when presented with similar events, because they now have an interpretive framework through which to understand and criticise them. The code provides a template for structuring future narrative, as a logic or coherence for listener/readers to fit other instances into, and which brings with it an ideological position they may not realise or agree with, hence the self-reproducing character of ideological codes. What has happened with political correctness as an ideological code is that it is used so frequently that it “comes to have a discursively constituted reality” (Smith, 1999: 192) – an alternative reality, which is not an accurate representation of actuality but a slant that makes sense when using the interpretative framework. This alternative reality means that alternative ‘facts’ organise REF-related activities as a local-level and thus fictions are treated as factive and are made material through people’s practices.

With REF, once it is known that it is important in UK HE, then ‘the REF’ begins to organise people’s understandings of how academia works and what is valued. Certain activities become reframed as potential impact case studies or publications that are admissible to REF but not others, which begins to influence what academics put their time and effort into. The resultant REF representation of UK HE becomes a textual reality of HE organised by the logic and preferences of the REF, which is distinct from actuality of UK HE everyday activities. For example, as discussed earlier, publications which rate as 2* outputs are devalued by the QR funding formulas of all four UK HE funding bodies, and yet as the Sociology sub-panel noted in their overview report (REF, 2015: 93): “This work contributes to incremental and cumulative advances in knowledge in the field and such ‘normal’ science is evidence of the maturity of research in a range of specialisms. It provides the foundations on which important and essential points of reference can be built and critical breakthroughs can be made.” Thus, the REF as an organising schema leaves out certain important academic research practices, which are being textually acknowledged here by the sociology sub-panel. While this quote does not change the overall organising logic (and associated funding) of the REF, it does demonstrate that readers and writers of REF-related documents still have some interpretative agency.

This discussion of ideological codes is helpful in understanding the REF in two ways: (i) it provides clearer methods of analysis for analysing the REF as discourse, focusing on how ideological codes structuring text and associated activities; (ii) it acknowledges the

self-reproducing 'free-floating' nature of how talk and text are organised together beyond specific 'origin texts'. While the REF is a specific process with very clear text-based guidelines providing explanation of how it works, alongside this, the textually-mediated discourse about the REF operates in complex and diffuse ways and can take on a life of their own beyond the specifics of the actual process. While the REF organises people across multiple sites in relation to the 'same thing', the actual practices are often different although treated as similarly weighty. Discussion now moves on to how 'the REF' acts as an ideological code that structures academic activity around particular schema, some aspects of which are present in the official process, and some of which are more about discipline-/unit-/departmental- or institutional-specific practices and logics.

Myths and Cumulative Misunderstandings: Hybridic Interpretations of 'the REF'

Throughout my academic career I have heard talk about the REF and often what people have said is contrary to what I now know to be the case through reading the documentation. For instance, I had heard that co-authored papers could only be submitted by the first named author, which is not true; the REF guidelines explain that broadly co-authored papers can be submitted by all who made a substantial contribution (REF, 2018e: 51-52). More frequently such discussions of the REF were not wholly false but instead would present hybridic statements containing interpretation as well as reporting on specifics from REF regulatory texts, but mixed together in a confusing fashion. Such hybridic statements then become the rules that people follow and the organising logic at a local-level as if the official rules of the REF.

People may believe REF myths as factual information about the official process or know that the reality is otherwise. Regardless, such myths heavily organise people's academic activities and can circulate at a local level amongst networks or departments in an anxiety-inducing way. More worryingly, such myths can influence local level decisions around who or which research outputs are included, and also around hiring, research and publication strategies, and promotion. Such myths and their effects are so prevalent that the REF 2021 Director wrote an article to dispel some myths just after the publication of

draft REF 2021 guidance for consultation (Hackett & Firth, 2018). However, as stated in the comments section below this article, the myths can organise more than the actual process in some institutional contexts and thus academics are still compelled to follow them by university management.

A good example of this is about publication outlets, specifically the impact factor of journals. While the REF guidance specifically explains that this is not to be taken into consideration (REF, 2018e: 55), it is still often seen locally as an indicator of which star rating an article is likely to get. While of course it is possible that the reputation of a journal may influence how some REF sub-panellists engage with an article, they are explicitly not allowed to use this in their decision, and yet this is often treated in university internal mock REF processes as a proxy quality marker. As Professor N. explains when discussing colleagues potentially sending articles to the journal *Nature*, “I know [it] will score us some points in the REF” (Interview 1: 8), and going on to comment that having a publication in *Nature* or *Science* would look good in the annual appraisal process within his university. This hybridic comment mixes local-level expectations around appraisals with a suspicion-based interpretation of the actual rules (i.e. expecting the physics sub-panel to take note of publication venue despite explicit rules against this).

When checking this suspicion against Neyland & Milyaeva’s (2017: 44) report, one sub-panellist interviewee acknowledged that their professional knowledge of journal reviewing processes meant that they believed certain journals had strong reviewing processes and if presented with a paper from that journal they would “know that paper is a good quality paper”. This acknowledgement of pre-existing assumptions based on things like journal impact factors is of course unavoidable, but this does not guarantee a higher score, especially given the calibration exercises between reviewers and sub-panels in the official REF process. However, these sorts of subjectivities in the assessment process are anticipated by local-level REF facilitators who apply their discipline-specific knowledge to work out what might sway a potential reviewer one way or another in order to maximise the potential of getting 3* and 4* outputs.

The myths and hybridic interpretations that combine rules with assumptions about how the sub-panellists assess the papers can cumulatively produce behaviours which are not in line with the guidelines, or which actively ignore these, due to the belief that the guidelines do not tell the full story or are actively misleading. For example, all five

interviewees I spoke to discussed the 'fact' that the sub-panellists do not actually read all the papers or do not read them properly. Professor R. stated "it's clearly obvious that the referees can't possibly read all these papers that they say they're going to read right? So essentially it's just a game now, right, when they say that they're going to read them all it's provably a lie" (Interview 4: 7). This understanding feeds off, and into, a discursive understanding of how the REF works that misbelieves the written guidance, and underpins other strategic decisions taken by institutions.

With citation data, the REF guidance (2018e: 59-60) states that it is used on some sub-panels including physics, but only as one part of the assessment of academic significance and with the acknowledgement that citations are not always reliable. For example, a journal article might be highly cited because everyone disagrees with it. In Neyland and Milyaeva's (2017: 43-49) interviews, there were questions raised about the usefulness or not of citation data and other metrics like impact factors, but most interviewees argued that metrics alone would be insufficient, or at least metrics should be used in context. From the guidance and sub-panellists interviews citation data this does not seem to be very important nor will it be used as a blunt measure. However, in the context of REF facilitators not believing that sub-panellists read all the papers, citation data seemingly takes on an increased significance as a potential way to quickly and uncritically ascertain the significance of an output.

This sort of cumulative myth building around citation data is exemplified by Peter Coles' (2013) blog post prior to REF 2014, in which as a Professor of Physics he argued that the physics sub-panel's volume of work meant that "citation statistics will be much more important for the Physics panel than we've been led to believe". Coles (2013) goes on to argue that "we were told before the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise that citation data would emphatically *not* be used; we were also told afterwards that citation data *had* been used by the Physics panel" and so concludes that the REF guidance is not to be trusted and that citation data will be more important than they were indicating in the lead up to REF 2014. This sort of 'factual' claim may be believed and therefore become the organising logic for academic behaviour towards 'the REF', but is based on a misunderstanding of the divisions of labour in REF sub-panels for reading outputs and the shifts in research assessment exercise rules over time, something evident across my interviews.

Professor N. told me that “any physicist will sit down and think about how many publications a member of the panel is going to have to go through, how little expertise they’re going to have in some of the things they are looking at ... clearly people are going to be using impact factors and citation data and all those kinds of things ... we all know that the reality is that that data will get used” (Interview 1: 7). This is a hybridic statement bringing together that REF 2021 guidelines acknowledge that citation data will be used, but conflating this with journal impact factors, which are explicitly not used and then misbelieving the caveats about citation data usage. Professor N. thus reads the REF guidance through an assumption about the perceived volume of work and the variety of expertise of sub-panel members, namely that sub-panellists will be unable to sufficiently assess the publications and so will rely on quantitative measures as a shorthand proxy for quality. Such beliefs then begin to organise local-level activities regardless of the official guidance because they inform the advice given and decisions made, specifically that citation data and/or impact factors can be used to work out the quality of publications and thus filter outputs at a local-level.

Professor S. discusses similar assumptions about volume of work and potential lack of expertise amongst sub-panellists – but comes to a different conclusion. He states that shorter publications are likely to get higher marks because “if it’s easier to read people will be happier giving it higher marks ... there’s really no getting away from the psychology of having to read hundreds and hundreds of papers” (Interview 5: 6). In this statement, Professor S. is not doubting that all the outputs are read, but he queries whether they can “read every word of every paper” (Interview 5: 6) and thus the strategy is to avoid submitting longer outputs. Professor S. explained that his unit’s output review committee sets a short time limit per output based on their estimate of how long a sub-panellist would have, which ends up meaning that longer outputs are skim-read. Here, the imagined ‘psychology’ and limitations of sub-panellists are used to inform the internal process of reviewing outputs, which makes sense but seems to be reliant on suspicions and assumptions rather than knowledge of how the process works.

Interestingly, Professor D. presented me with the complete opposite myth: “there’s more advice about length being more important [than journal impact factor] and that hefty papers seem to count more, whether that’s true I don’t know” (Interview 2: 9). When I asked Professor D. where this advice came from, he explained that it was unclear,

describing it as “a perceived or a received wisdom that builds up” (Interview 2: 9). This demonstrates how the REF functions as an ideological code which has no clear single source, but organises academics’ activities around a logic that is related to but not specified by the official text-based REF process. While local-level interpretations of what sub-panellists did and how to strategically engage with this differed, what does remain the same is the underlying assumption; that the sub-panellists do not read all the outputs or read them properly and so by anticipating their proxy measures for quality – citation data; impact factors; length of outputs – one can find strategies for getting higher ratings.

Another widespread belief amongst my interviewees was that sub-panellists would have insufficient expertise to adequately assess outputs. Professor D. argued that one had to be an expert in the particular field of study to be able to understand “the most influential thing and the highest impact thing in the field” but that “with 8 panellists and 15 sub fields you don’t get experts” (Interview 2: 5). Professor S. also commented that more specialist outputs would be less likely to get the highest 4* rating because “if you are not familiar with an area you’re going to regress to a mean” (Interview 5: 8). There was some support in Neyland & Milyaeva’s (2017) interviews for the idea that sometimes niche outputs were more difficult to evaluate: one interviewee stated that their sub-panel was inadequate and that some members did not understand unconventional or experimental work, arguing that the basic premise of the REF as a national audit was flawed as it was a generalised approach to evaluation (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 31); another mentioned that they were happy with evaluating “99% of them but I had some which were more on the margin of the profession that I wasn’t sure how to evaluate” (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 34) .

However, despite many sub/panellist interviewees discussing the very high workload of reading (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 33-34), none said they did not read them all. One interviewee (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 38) commented that their scoring of papers became somewhat formulaic as they got further through their batch, explaining their thinking near the end as “Read the abstract. Look at the results, figures, and tables and give it a score”, confirming an approach that some of the REF facilitators anticipated in which sometimes outputs were skim-read. However, the interviewees discussed this issue of how much time to spend reading outputs and had differing opinions on what was sufficient. One sub/panellist interviewee explained that the REF process was about assessing publications which had already been peer-reviewed and that assessing where

published work sat on a spectrum of quality was different from doing peer review prior to publication (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 35). Thus, while some assumptions about the process may be accurate for some sub-panellists, the prevailing beliefs that sub-panellists cannot provide expert review and that sub-panellists do not read all the outputs or do not read the full output are not evidenced. Instead, these are suspicious interpretations of the guidelines which build cumulative mythical understandings of the REF.

It is on the basis of these cumulative understandings that another circulating myth is believed; that interdisciplinary work is more risky and therefore should be sifted out of REF submissions. The risks of interdisciplinary papers were discussed by the media around REF 2014 (Shaw, 2013; Hall, 2014); and seemingly to assuage these concerns, the REF 2021 guidelines introduced new measures around fairly assessing interdisciplinary research (REF, 2018d: 30-32). However, this belief that interdisciplinary research was risky was still prevalent amongst my interviewees. For example, Professor N. explained that “no assessor is ever really going to understand it in its entirety because the chances of an assessor having both sides of your interdisciplinary research as something they’re a real expert in is almost zero” (Interview 1: 8) and reviewers without sufficient expertise would hedge their bets with a 3* rating rather than a 4*.

While Professor R. believed interdisciplinary outputs would be assessed fairly, he argued that there was a problem for interdisciplinary researchers who published across disciplines and thus had some outputs in, for example, physics and others in chemistry. He argued that they would be unfairly assessed because researchers had to submit all their outputs to one UOA and therefore some outputs would be assessed within the wrong disciplinary framework. However, when I looked at the REF 2021 guidance (REF, 2018e: 90-91), the mechanism for cross-referring outputs to other UOAs allowed for this problem, whereby institutions could highlight specific outputs as needing to be cross-referred or sub-panels could suggest cross-referral themselves to ensure outputs were assessed by those with appropriate expertise. Thus while Professor R. believed interdisciplinary researchers would be disadvantaged, the official REF process did make allowances for such instances. However, unless such mechanisms are read, understood and believed, the perception of interdisciplinary researchers or outputs as risky will remain and continue to organise REF facilitators and institutions when preparing submissions, for example, by sifting interdisciplinary work or researchers out of unit submissions.

While some of these elements of interpretation are nothing to do with REF but instead about disciplinary assumptions and institution-specific systems, they are attributed to the REF as an ideological code organising the UK HE research norms and play out at a local-level. Interestingly, these hybridic ways of discussing the REF are an unaccountable way of discussing the process, and so similar to my epistemological discussion in Chapter 2. The question ‘how do you know that?’ is centrally important to ask when faced with REF ‘facts’ in order to sift out myths, misinterpretations, and be able to distinguish between the different elements of hybridic statements. While people might account for their claims – Professor X told me – these may still be alternative ‘facts’; local-level interpretations made factive through their use by REF facilitators and university managers. Instead of merely accounting for one’s REF beliefs, it is essential to go to the source and read the official REF texts themselves and speak to those who actually run or are involved in the official REF process – (sub-) panellists or the official REF managers. Thus, one clear advantage in the process of interpreting the REF discourse is having access to (sub-) panellists, to help to cut through rumours and misunderstandings. Such insiders can reassure from a position of authority and intervene when myths become organising logics to the detriment of local-level REF preparation, and thus are key figures in local-level negotiations within university interpretative hierarchies.

Authoritative Roles and Interpretations in the University REF Hierarchy

Local-level interpretations of the REF guidelines involve trying to fit departmental activities in the REF schema alongside working out which publications, activities, and statistics are ‘the best’ based on both the official guidance and the unofficial ‘advice’. REF facilitators are explicit translators between the official process, the institutional context, and unit-level negotiations with colleagues. However, some of my REF facilitator interviewees had not read the guidelines, but instead were given succinct summaries by other higher-up management or professional staff with REF responsibilities. This higher-level interpretation was often indistinguishable from the REF strategy of the institution, again using hybridic statements whereby official REF rules are intertwined with institutional

interpretations. Additionally, many professional services staff members (at all levels) were tasked with keeping on top of REF guidance updates, thus playing an important interpretative role similar to discussions in Chapter 4 about research officers' interpretations of ESRC impact guidelines. Even those REF facilitators who had read the official REF texts did not have total interpretative control, but rather had to fit into university-wide strategies. This results in a local-level tussle for authoritative interpretations of the official REF process, which frequently resulted in units having more control over outputs due to the necessary disciplinary-specific knowledge and impact case studies being managed further up the REF hierarchy, and different levels of professionalisation and intervention evident in different institutions.

In the institutional REF process, individuals are assigned roles imbued with interpretative authority: the head of department and/or research, the REF facilitators, the REF-specific/research professional staff, and academics who are seen as 'good' at particular aspects, for example, academics who have produced impact case studies which are perceived to have done well in REF 2014.⁴⁴ This negotiation between different parts of the hierarchy within an institutional is mediated by the official REF process, whereby the guidance texts can be used as evidence to prove or disprove REF myths and those who have been sub-panellists can provide authoritative interpretations of what goes on behind the scenes.

Based on my five interviews, departmental-level REF facilitators primarily interact with faculty-level⁴⁵ management who filter through central university management guidance and strategy. While some REF facilitators or heads of department had contact with central university management, it was more usual for them to interact with faculty-level staff or professional research/REF staff who had responsibilities across the institution. It was between faculty- and department-level management that decisions were often taken around which UOAs to submit and which researchers to submit within each UOA. As UOAs do not always map neatly onto distinct departments, translation work is required to fit

⁴⁴ While academics may claim they have produced 4* REF outputs or impact case studies, these are assumptions based on a mixture of internal mock REF results and the overall REF 2014 results. The official REF results do not specify individual output or impact case study scores so it is impossible to know for sure what result one's output or impact case study received in 2014.

⁴⁵ I use the term faculty-level to describe the level between central university management and departmental-level, what is sometimes called school- or college- level. As terminology and structures differ across universities and may inadvertently identify institutions, I will use the term faculty-level to describe this in-between management level throughout the chapter.

people into appropriate UOAs, which creates room for gaming and strategising in order to improve the university's scores overall.

Professor F., a head of department, explained that the heads of different departments would work out which division of researcher staff between UOAs would be "strategically optimal ... to lead to the highest overall scores" (Interview 3: 7) across the university as per their institution's overall strategy. He repeatedly referred to the REF as "a game" in his interview and explained his institution's highly professionalised strategy, which his department were actively participating in. However, as discussed by Professor R., a REF facilitator in another institution, there were issues around whether or not the REF-associated funding and prestige would then be attributed to a department that the researcher was not actually located in. He described this as "a problem in that departments are competing against each other for the same submission, and there's no, at the moment, central policy about how to resolve that" (Interview 4: 5).

These different approaches to the same disjuncture between REF textual reality and actuality of institutional structure demonstrate the variety in institutional interpretation of the guidelines and highlight the types of negotiations that can take place between different levels of the institutional hierarchy. I will now consider the REF responsibilities of each of my five interviewees, how they fitted into broader REF hierarchies in their institutions, and the dynamics between these different levels of the institutional REF process to highlight where interpretative agency or key translation points occurred in these five different institutions.

Professor N. is head of his department and spoke to me at a point when a new REF facilitator was being appointed. He explained that his job involved delegating REF tasks to other colleagues, and that that the REF team would consist of three people: an overall REF facilitator responsible for writing and editing together the whole submissions and coordinating other academics acting as the impact facilitator and the environment facilitator. This team was supported by a small number of professional staff who had research support responsibilities, with one being solely dedicated to the REF, specifically impact. This highly-ranked department was very professionalised in their engagement with the REF, with the university managing the whole institution's process, having completed two entire mock REF processes since 2014 and then having rolling assessment of publications to modify existing lists of publications to submit as outputs. The institution was

investing in specific research and REF-focused support staff and IT infrastructure to facilitate the working out of optimum submissions and support academics taking on REF responsibilities at a departmental-level, alongside looking to use external reviewers to assess submissions before the 2020 deadline. While the REF facilitators had some interpretive agency, this was heavily managed by the broader university process.

Professor F., another head of department in a highly-ranked institution, also described a highly professionalised process. He explaining that he managed the process, with two colleagues in management positions being responsible for the process and organising the impact case studies and environment statement, alongside numerous professional service staff who support the compiling of information for their REF submission. The outputs are reviewed by a team of academics, with representatives from all the main research groups, who compile and review publications internally before sending them out to external reviewers. This group output assessment⁴⁶ was chaired by one person, and had already completed one mock REF process since 2014. Professor F. explained to me the top-down university guidance and strategy, including that faculty-level management monitored the process of departments in line with a university-wide timeline or schedule which heavily structured the institution's REF requirements.

The REF processes described by Professor N. and Professor F. both involve their central university management facilitating a high-intensity process. It is possible that because Professor N. and F. are heads of department they are more engaged with their institutions' broader REF strategies than my other three interviewees REF facilitators who are academics taking on REF facilitator roles as part of their administrative responsibilities. But the local-level preparation they described within their physics departments was more labour-intensive than those described by my other interviewees. For example, department-specific professional services staff assigned to REF responsibilities, numerous academics at a departmental-level with REF responsibilities, and routine use of external reviewers to assess outputs, all organised and facilitated by the central university management and administration. These two departments have the most professionalised processes among my five interviews, and are the two most highly ranked departments, which may mean that

⁴⁶ The group output assessment approach is similar to one described by Professor S. and another process I had informally been told about at another physics department where I was unable to organise an interview, and helped provide representation of different research specialisms or organisationally separate research centres covered by the physics UOA in the respective institutions.

such professionalisation does work in improving REF scores and/or it may indicate a better resourced university which helps produce better quality research and better quality REF submissions.

I considered whether such high-intensity processes could be a feature of particularly large university departments and/or submitting larger UOA submissions, and checked all five interviewee UOA data from REF 2014, specifically the THE (2014b) ranking of physics' UOAs in REF 2014. This indicates the size of the submission and takes into consideration the percentage of eligible FTE staff versus the submitted FTE staff giving an indication of when UOAs have been selective in submitting staff.⁴⁷ Having taking this into account, the level of professionalism was more important than size of department or level of selectivity in the five interviewees' departments I focused on. Of course information from these five interviewees may not reflect how other physics UOA submissions are managed or how other physics departments engage with the REF process, but they do demonstrate that such professionalisation of the process does appear to make a difference to REF result rankings, even if in actuality this is only a proxy for better resourced and well-organised departments and institutions. What does seem to be constrained is their ability to exert interpretative agency, whereby local-level REF decisions are more heavily scrutinised by management and informed by external reviewers, thus diminishing the level of agency in translating the REF guidelines into practice at this local-level.

My other interviewees - Professor D., Professor R. and Professor S. - were all academics who had taken on REF facilitator roles as part of their administrative/research management responsibilities in their departments. All three had specific responsibilities for outputs, with Professor D. and Professor S. also having responsibility for writing the environment statements. These three REF facilitators were not heads of department, and thus were slightly less plugged into the overall university management as Professors N. and F. However, all three described very different dynamics between their department-level REF processes and the faculty- and university-level management, indicating a variety of local-level interpretations of how best to prepare for REF 2021.

⁴⁷ However, it is important to note that physics UOAs and departments of physics in universities are different and thus the discrepancies between eligible staff and submitted staff may not accurately reflect the university staffing at the time and the reality of departmental life. Unfortunately I am unable to check this data against publicly listed departmental staff lists because this refers to staffing in 2013 when the REF 2014 submissions were made.

Professor S. described how his university's REF approach had become more professionalised since 2014 due to the perception that they had not done as well as they should have. This meant that the central university management provided more guidance and had formulated a university-wide strategy, with more advice and support from university-level professional services staff and faculty-level meetings and information events. Professor S. described this shift in taking it more seriously as happening across the university, and involved the central university interpreting the guidance texts for the local-level REF facilitators and keeping them updated on changes. While this reduces the workload of REF facilitators by doing the reading of official REF texts and advice for them, it also diminishes local-level interpretative agency and means the department takes the university's interpretation as fact rather than negotiating with them based on their own interpretations of the guidance.

Things were very different for Professor R., who was more blasé about his REF administrative responsibilities, reflecting a much less professionalised or centrally-controlled process in his institution. Professor R. explained that as far as he knew "they haven't got any central strategy or what we're going to be doing about picking which papers go forward" (Interview 4: 3); it is possible, but perhaps not very likely, that there may have been a higher-level strategy he was not aware of. While Professor R.'s department had done one mock REF since 2014 involving external reviewers, they were debating whether or not to do another one due to the cost at the departmental level, and this seemed to fit with the relative lack of intervention by central university management, whereby the decisions was taken at department level rather than by university- or faculty-management. While Professor R. acknowledged that there might be a higher-level strategy he was unaware of, this in itself would indicate a less tightly controlled process than what my other interviewees described.

Despite being similarly ranked to Professor R.'s unit in REF 2014, it was a different atmosphere again for Professor D., who anticipated more intervention and attempts to game their department submission by university management. While they had also had one internal mock REF since 2014, Professor D. was resisting demands for more frequent updating on publications, explaining that he saw his role as REF facilitator as minimising hassle and disruption for his colleagues and to act as "a bit of a bulwark against silly demands [from management]" (Interview 2: 6). Professor D. seemed to be most worried

about the university's anxious attempts to manage the process, while he wanted to protect colleagues so they could get on with their actual work, explaining that "it seems that the powers that be above the departmental level seem to want to have a constant sort of panic-stricken assessment, to have a live ticker or papers running past them. I don't think that's helpful for anybody including them" (Interview 2: 1). This distinction between the atmosphere at a departmental-level and amongst university management for Professor D. was something I had heard a lot of informally and also in my interviews with the two heads of school, Professor N. and Professor F. Both of them commented that faculty- or university-level REF facilitation could be helpful but would also have to be managed to ensure it fitted with their department work and expectations of the physics sub-panel.

What was evident throughout my interviews was that while the REF facilitators had specific jobs to do around outputs, impact, research environment, and/or bringing the whole submission together, the final submission and tactical decisions were largely taken by higher-up management at a faculty/school level or university-wide level. Among the people interviewed, while the output element of each UOA REF submission was largely deferred to the department, often with the input of paid external academic reviewers, nonetheless universities would still intervene in the lists of outputs suggested by departments, querying the 'risky' nature or the 'suitability' of some publications due to the 'fact' that short outputs do better (or not as well depending on the advice being listened to), interdisciplinary is more risky, and other circulating rumours and myths about the REF. Sometimes departments would have to argue their case, which would often involve having to appeal to someone or something outside of their department and their own expertise, which was considered suspect (i.e. they would overrate their own outputs or overestimate their own successes). Thus, negotiations often took place in which appeals were made to the ratings from external academics who independently rated work, to the REF documents to show that certain things were acceptable within the guidelines, and to the expertise of sub-panellists who could provide authoritative interpretations of how specific sub-panels worked.

It was clear throughout the interviews that the documents were but one part of the negotiation and interpretative process, and that rumour and advice were relied on, often to the detriment of the submissions. Indeed, Professor D explained their department had been given advice by someone for REF 2014, but which proved to be false and resulted in

them submitting something that was not acceptable within the guidelines, thus affecting their overall ranking. This example highlights the high-stakes nature of the interpretation; a misinterpretation over the eligibility and quality of a publication, one rule misunderstood, could mean genuinely good work is inadmissible, or rated less than it 'should be' if the advice was accurate. Such things can mean a unit of assessment falls in the rankings, a large consequence for misunderstanding due to believing the circulating myths about what 'the facts' are.

Authoritative REF advisors are taken very seriously, with their advice often being applied regardless of the official guidelines, the actual regulatory texts. These REF advisors might be paid consultants (academics or professionals), paid external academic reviewers, former panellists or sub-panellists who have become consultants, or professional service staff who specialise in impact or the REF and facilitate the process at a local level. Professor N explained that having colleagues on the sub-panel for REF 2014 or 2021 helped ensure their department was focused on developments in published REF guidance, especially since the university management and science faculty-level discussion did not deal with the discipline or sub-panel specific guidelines. This is also articulated in Neyland & Milyaeva's (2017: 8-9) report in which two interviewees said that they participated as panellists/sub-panellists in REF 2014 at least partly so as to have an insider understanding of the process that could help inform themselves and their institution, with some debriefing their institutions after the process.

Sub-panellists roles also carried some authority in negotiations with university management, which helped retain interpretative authority at UOA/departmental level for those with access to sub-panellists. An informal interview with a social science REF facilitator raised an instance of using a sub-panellist's comment to convince university management of a particular interpretation of the REF 2014 guidelines, thus utilising this sub-panellist's authoritative interpretation of the REF guidance and demonstrating that what management and REF facilitators are often doing is approximating the most likely interpreting of the guidance by the sub-panellists who will ultimately assess their submissions. Similar to the previous chapter, this involves having both an understanding of the bureaucratic rules as well as the disciplinary assumptions and norms in each discipline and specific sub-field.

When it came to impact, decisions were often deferred to professional impact research officers and/or university management. The reasoning here was that, because most academics do not have 'expertise' in impact specifically, this element of a UOA's submission should be referred up the hierarchy or given to specific professional staff thus professionalising this element. Additionally, the lack of discipline-specific knowledge was interpreted as management being better able to 'game' impact more than the outputs, by hiring consultants, or getting professional services staff to write them, or edit them to sound more impressive, alongside organising evidencing activities to improve the perceived impact.

All of the interviewees discussed the importance of impact. Impact is now a central part of the UK research requirements with it playing a central role in both the research council funding based on funding future quality research and 'pathways to impact' (discussed in Chapter 4), alongside the QR-funding based on REF to reward quality work already done and impacts already made. Impact was a new requirement in REF 2014, and at 20% of the submission, which has now gone up to 25% of the REF 2021 weighting, it is important to get it right. Professor R. discussed there being an incentive to return fewer staff to avoid having to submit more impact case studies as the number required is dependent on number of full time equivalent (FTE) eligible researchers in a UOA's submission. He explained that because his department had not done well on impact in 2014, they were discussing "how many FTEs do we have in the department ... to be quite careful about not going over a threshold to require another impact statement" (Interview 4: 9), which meant they had to think very carefully about the timing of recruiting new staff. Professor S. discussed impact case studies as being worth '10 publications' due to the relatively larger weighting given to a smaller number of impact case studies. Four of my interviewees commented on impact being the "deciding factor" in the 2014 rankings for physics, whereby there was a narrow distribution for outputs and environment and a broad distribution for impact. As Professor N puts it, "people didn't quite know what they were doing and some people guessed right and some people didn't" (Interview 1: 4). He predicted that, due to the availability of all the impact case studies from REF 2014, everyone would be "raising their game" in impact.

However, Neyland & Milyaeva (2017: 51-54) highlight issues with the lack of evidence underpinning some claims to impact and the rules dictating that sub-panellists

were not allowed to independently fact-check claims, alongside some confusion about how best to write the case studies. One interviewee stated that “some of them read like they’d hired a PR manager to come and write a brilliant advertising slogan for their ... output” (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 52). However, such tactics might in fact have been appealing in relation to the involvement of non-academic impact assessors, who were discussed by some interviewees as being “more generous scorers” (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 58) or being less involved in the process due to having a lesser knowledge-base than the other sub-panellists, who had also assessed the outputs.

This, however, introduced the possibility of ‘gaming’ impact more during REF 2014, whereby the way the texts were written and the lack of checking around evidence gave leeway for boasting, overclaiming, and sometimes outright misrepresentation. However, use of consultants and professional impact officers to write or edit the impact case studies requires money and investment in such specialised roles, contributing to the creation of a distinct expertise within UK HE around impact, also discussed in Chapter 4 regarding research council funding applications. For example, the company Fast Track Impact (2017a), which provides training for individuals and organisations around impact, with specific packages relating to REF 2021 (Fast Track Impact, 2017b). Interestingly, they acknowledge in a disclaimer at the bottom of their website (Fast Track Impact, 2017b) that they “cannot predict how REF panels will grade case studies in REF 2021, nor can we judge how the submitting institution will treat case studies. We cannot guarantee that case studies for which we provide advice will be submitted to REF 2021 or, if submitted, will receive the predicted/desired scores in REF2021, even if all advice has been implemented.” This acknowledgement that of course no training or expertise can guarantee the expected or desired star ratings begs the question of why institutions would pay thousands of pounds for training events, particularly if, as this website suggests, most competitor universities would also have taken the same training.⁴⁸ The answer is marginal gains and losses and the competitive nature of the process meaning that everyone feels like they have to ‘keep up’ to ensure they do not fall behind.

⁴⁸ The Fast Tract Impact website (2017a) advertises the institutions who have taken its courses by listing university logos, which include many UK universities.

Marginal Gains and Prestige: the REF as a Professional Sport

When discussing different approaches to ‘gaming’ the REF with the physics interviewees, there was much discussion of ‘optimising’ REF submissions through internal processes and mock REF exercises in which a pseudo-scientific precision was pursued by university managers and some academics. While the interviewees did not explicitly name the process in terms of marginal gains and losses, the approach described was remarkably similar to this concept, which has been popularised through professional cycling, with British cycling coach David Brailsford citing marginal gains as the root of the extensive successes of British Cycling and Team Sky (a professional cycling team) under his coaching (Harrell, 2015; Syed, 2015). The idea of marginal gains in elite sports such as cycling focuses on continuous improvement through many small changes over time, which are believed to collectively and cumulatively make marginal gains and thus win. Such a logic also means that an aggregation of marginal losses is seen to produce a similar but negative effect (Clear, 2014). This idea of continuous improvement is rooted in business, and makes sense when applied to professional sports where milliseconds can make the difference between rankings or positioning in a race.

With the increased prominence of university league tables in the UK HE environment, a logic of marginal gains becomes almost inevitable. Such an approach is driven by the importance of the rankings, whereby the difference between 1st and 10th in a league table might be minute in terms of actual scores, but the rank order has huge implications in terms of reputation and associated funding. Thus, some departments’ and universities’ marginal gains and others’ marginal losses end up producing large effects on how they are ranked and seen. For example, Professor R. discussed the results of their internal mock REF, and stated that “we’re overestimating the quality now by about .3 units per paper” (Interview 4: 4). The mathematical specificity is perhaps partly due to the nature of physics as a discipline; however, it also indicates how fine-grained the internal REF processes can end up being, which is a difference from the actual official 4* rating system, which does not deal in such marginal differences. This is articulated in Neyland & Milyaeva’s (2017: 37) report, whereby some interviewees call the precisions around tabulation of REF scores spurious, with one advocating “clustering institutions into bands”

because “the precision that separate grade-point averages to two or three decimal points is spurious precision”.

Despite the strict rules around REF submissions and the assessment process, any very minor increments made by marginal gains which then affect the rank order of UOAs or institutions will have major repercussions when it comes to reputation and associated funding and prestige, which can attract donations, industry funding, and more fee-paying students. Professor R. described the advice his department had been given by mock REF reviewers (recruited from outside the university) about how to write publications so they would be more highly ranked: make impacts points clear in an abstract and at the end of the discussion, and avoid “any phraseology that might imply the paper is a bit of a review” (Interview 4: 7). However, as he went on to state, it is difficult enough to get published in the first place and if such advice conflicts with journal editing and peer review comments then academics would do what the editors/reviewers require in order to get their work published. They were being given additional advice about publication specific to the REF as a way to try to game the REF based on the premise that the sub-panellists do not read all the outputs properly, mixed with a statement of ‘fact’ that the REF does not accept review publications and therefore it is best to avoid writing in a way that implies one’s work is a review.

However, the marginal gains approach was more prevalent in the more professionalised universities, which often tried to facilitate or micromanage a ‘marginal gains’ approach to the REF by encouraging or forcing departments to pay attention to minute details of their submissions in order to maximise the possibility of getting higher scores, for example shifting researchers between UOAs to maximise the institution’s score overall rather than just focusing on each UOA submission. More professionalised universities seemed to take a more ruthless marginal gains approach, whereby incremental increases in the perceived quality of a submission was not balanced against potential harm to individuals or departments as much as in less professionalised institutions. For example, Professor R. discussed the balance to be struck between the REF ‘game’ and the way to put fairness into practice in the department, and he seemed to challenge the extreme marginal gains/losses engagement from other departments. He explained that if two academics have very similar quality of publications, working out whose are marginally better does not gain very much for the department but can be very harmful for the individuals who have fewer

outputs submitted: “you can split the papers however you want, there are a number of configurations which would give you exactly the same return, but individual people come off better or worse from it” (Interview 4: 12). This departmental fallout was not readily discussed by my other interviews, even if it lurked in their appreciation that people would be unhappy if their outputs were not chosen for inclusion.

However, much of the strategy and impetus around marginal gains seemed to stem from management – whether university management or the two heads of department I interviewed – whereas academics who took on REF facilitator responsibilities seemed less concerned with practicing marginal gains approaches. Part of this seemed to be academics themselves acknowledging that in the short-term quality cannot magically be improved, it can only be well-presented or ‘spun’, which is largely the job of management rather than academics. To ensure a higher quality of research, they just wanted colleagues to get on with their academic work rather than dedicate any more time to the REF process than was strictly necessary.

Regardless of the institutional response, amongst academics impact has become an organising schema that groups previously disparate academic activities; what was knowledge exchange, outreach, events, policy work, consultancy, industry contact, activism, public engagement etc, become ‘impact’ and therefore subject to and valued in relation to the REF framework. While many activities can be written up into a narrative which suits the ideological code of the REF, those which get through university sifting processes and are submitted begin to set the interpretative limits. For example, if everyone only submits policy-related impacts for the social sciences sub-panels and they are perceived to do very well, this begins to incentivise similar behaviour in subsequent REF submissions because it is seen as a surer option than something untested. This potentially begins to further incentivise what kinds of research is done, with researchers and institutions encouraging what which fits more easily into the discursive REF schema. Considering impact in detail demonstrates how the REF works as an ideological code which begins to organise academic activities. And even if people are resistant to impact, they still have an understanding that it is valued in UK HE.

However, the REF is not just about assessing research quality and distributing funds, but also about distributing and performing prestige through the results. These sorts of textual performances of value are done at the local-level with the REF results providing

evidence of the value of entire universities when trying to attract funding and students by advertising their successes in the REF alongside other metrics. As commented on by one of Neyland & Milyaeva's (2017: 84) interviewees: "It's amazing how many people said they were ranked top in research according to the REF they were finding a particular narrow definition of what they were first in". This is evident when looking at UK university and departmental websites, many of which boast their top rankings in various league tables, TEF, REF, and NSS results, alongside successful accreditations by organisations such as Athena Swan. Alongside this, specific departments within universities can use high scores in the REF to lobby for continued or increased funding for their department. Thus, while the purpose of the exercise is also to distribute research funding, even this is secondary to the performed value of institutions and specific departments through REF league tables which provide reputational merit, which is seen to lead to more students (and thus money from fees) alongside potential external funding from industry and donations.

But this performance of value and prestige through the REF is also done at a national level. This is most clearly demonstrated through the impact requirement, which plays this dual role of policy implementation and value performance through texts. As discussed by many interviewees in Neyland & Milyaeva's (2017: 50) report, the impact case studies are "a national asset" which explicitly send a message to government about the value of research. One interviewee argued that while the impact agenda was partially government incentivising researcher behaviours, it was also HEFCE attempting to provide evidence of impact to prove to the government that academic research already has impact (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 83). Another goes further, to argue that sub-panellists realised that they needed to help HEFCE demonstrate this value of research and disciplines for fear of future cuts to QR or potentially worse assessment exercises (Neyland & Milyaeva, 2017: 83-84). Similar to discussions in the Chapter 4, the important of demonstrating the value of research beyond academic knowledge production is particularly important as a tactic to preserve government funding for research in the often undervalued arts, humanities and social sciences, which are more at risk of government de-funding due to their perceived lower value than sciences.

Concluding Thoughts: Feminist Analysis and Making Mythologies Material

While I will go on to discuss more general conclusions from this chapter, the most fundamental question I am left asking myself and want to consider at the outset is: how feminist is this approach? In Chapter 2 I outlined two key principles of feminist research – reflexivity and accountability - which would guide my research in this thesis alongside Smith’s IE framework. In line with that discussion, I have provided explanation of the backstage of my choosing and reading texts, my methods of reading and analysing to acknowledge the role of the researcher, detailed my overall interpretative process in analysing the REF, and have used retrievable texts - the publicly available REF guidance texts. However, my analysis is interwoven with the REF facilitator interviews, which are not retrievable. These interviews need to be taken on trust because they cannot be provided in full and checked due to the cleared demand for anonymity by the individuals and institutions under discussion. Therefore there is little room for the reader to hold me accountable for my interview-based claims, which are central to my analysis in this chapter, other than by recourse to their own knowledge-base.

My central argument is that the REF as an ideological code organises local-level REF preparation around mythologised understandings of the process, which then operate as alternative REF realities and facts, being made material through the local-level submission preparation. While there will be texts circulating within each university which detail the local-level REF process – internal memos, emails, meeting minutes, strategy documents, and so on - these are not publicly accessible. In order to access these local-level understandings of the REF process and thus highlight this fundamental disjuncture between the official REF process, and how the REF works as an ideological code locally, I used the interviews to gain an understanding of this backstage. This ‘fix’ helped me make the argument that most accurately represented how I understand the REF to be functioning as a discourse in UK HE at this point in preparing for REF 2021 submissions. However, it does not effectively fulfil my commitment to being accountable in line with feminist research principles.

In addition, I am a feminist researcher, using a feminist approach to research, and explicitly trying to enact feminist research principles, and yet feminist topics such as

inequality or gender and other intersecting identities are not very present in this chapter. While feminist research does not necessarily have to address topics such as these, it is interesting that they are so absent. The REF official process has an equality and diversity panel and requires institutions to engage with these discussions through producing an institutional level Code of Practice to show their practices a non-discriminatory. Two interviewees in Neyland & Milyaeva's (2017: 71-72) report argued that the RAE and REF had been good for women academics being promoted on the basis of their research outputs, disrupting an 'old boys club' style of promotion. However, such considerations were not very evident at a UOA level in my interviews. I asked interviewees about whether or not the REF raised equality and diversity issues, with some interviewees mentioning the possibility of reduced outputs on the basis of parental leave and disability or illness, and that Athena Swan could be presented as part of a positive research environment statement. However, Athena Swan was being done as part of larger efforts to 'look good' on equality issues, rather than specifically for the REF.

This absence of equality discussions at a local-level is perhaps telling of the faux neutrality of institutional processes, which discuss categories that are apparently neutral – staff; unit of assessment; institution. These seemingly neutral categories erase individual academics and their identities, which is something that Dorothy Smith highlights in her discussion of the disjuncture between textual reality and actuality. However, an IE approach does not necessarily bring such discussions back into view, except potentially through standpoint if taking an 'oppressed peoples' perspective. For example, if I had considered the REF from the perspective of women specifically, then this may have brought up more issues around how the process is differently experienced and the equality implications for different groups. Instead, my focus on REF facilitators – a role, rather than an identity – meant I was focusing on the different authoritative roles within university REF hierarchies, rather than the identities of people holding those positions.

This all begs the question, how feminist is this text-focused IE approach if it does not easily bring up feminist points in the analysis even despite my explicit feminist commitment as a researcher? Could the methodology help make these things visible if explicitly taking the standpoint of 'oppressed peoples', particularly given Smith's own ontological appreciation of how institutional texts erase people and their identities and generalise? I will address these points more in the overall conclusion to the thesis,

alongside a more general consideration of whether or not my three text-focused IE methods have fulfilled my feminist principles of reflexivity and accountability.

Otherwise, this chapter has provided an exploration of the REF as discourse, exploring the 'sphere of activity' which surrounds the official REF guidance texts, and highlighting that the REF also functions as an ideological code which produces alternative facts about the REF disconnected from the official process. This demonstrates how texts are sites of contested meanings and usages by active readers, writers, and performers of texts who negotiate which interpretations will organise activities at a local-level. As Smith's (1990b: 197) comments about texts and discourse, "all texts are indexical, in the sense that their meaning is not fully contained in them but completed in the setting of their reading. Texts are read or seen in context; they are articulated to the readers' relevancies and practices of interpretation in definite local settings". Local-level REF translators translate the official process into preparation activities through suspicion-based mis/interpretations of the guidance documents, often infused with mythologised understandings. These myths are sometimes skewed interpretations and sometimes very fictionalised interpretations of what happens, but they powerfully organise REF preparation in institutions, being often treated as entirely factual. The result is that 'the REF process' is not homogenous and varies considerably in different universities even though they produce the 'same' REF submission texts and are organised by the 'same' REF regulatory texts.

The sameness of the official REF texts constrains the interpretive agency of the sub-panellists through the publicly known rules, alongside the collective oversight of the sub-panels and the main panels, who ensure the rules are followed. However, this official documented process is not fully believed in by many in the academic community, with many suspicious dis/engagements from academics. This is often fuelled by the prolonged consultation process, which delays finalising the rules until late into each REF cycle. In this period, circulating myths and disciplinary mis/assumptions begin to organise how individuals, departments, and universities play the REF game, rather than the rules themselves, which in some cases are not believed. While institutions must produce 'the same' submission texts in order to have their submissions accepted into the assessment process, there is interpretative leeway in how the rules are applied and this translation brings in the alternative mythologised understandings of the REF, which filters outputs and

impacts in and out of submissions, alongside organising how submissions are written and what is foregrounded in them.

I set out to analyse what I considered to be a key translation moment: the release of initial guidelines for REF 2021 in July 2018. However, these guidelines seemed to have little initial influence on the local-level preparation work for REF 2021, which was already underway from immediately after REF 2014 results were published. Thus this was not a key translation moment for the physics REF facilitators, who were guided by more general principles from REF discourse and their own institutional processes. They made virtually no reference to these July 2018 guidelines in the interviews, broadly stating that things were not finalised yet. But regardless, the general preparation would continue with 'REF-able' work being gathered and reviewed internally, impact case studies further developed and evidenced, and research environment information collated. Thus, the REF as an ideological code operates by organising local-level REF preparations around broad brush interpretations of the process, with the final tweaking and 'gaming' only seeming to happen in relation to the finalised guidelines, which will be released later in the process.

It was also notable that many of my interviewees had not read the official guidelines and some did not intend to, due to limited time and energy alongside stating that it was done for them by university management and professional staff. This is similar to the NSS, whereby there is widespread discussion of the texts by 'non-readers' who only know the regulatory texts indirectly through other texts or people's talk. Non-readers are therefore particularly susceptible to myth and rumour as they are unable to disentangle these from the actual rules when only hearing or reading hybridic statements made about regulatory texts. Consequently, while departmental REF facilitators may not play a central role in translating the official guidance for their institutions, reading the actual texts gives them an independent working knowledge of the process and thus the ability to distinguish between institutional interpretation and strategy and the actual rules. In addition, when negotiating the translation process between REF texts and their local context, if REF facilitators have access to sub-panellists or others involved in the official REF process, they can draw on their expert status to check interpretations and use them as authority to dispute institutional interpretations.

While REF facilitators do have some interpretative agency when adapting institutional processes to their specific academic discipline, the interpretational power is

more firmly with management and professional staff. Similar to Chapter 4's discussions about the professionalisation of impact in ESRC-RG applications, the focus on technical literacy of the REF process by managers and professional staff mis/understands that academics are still the primary assessors of the submissions, and thus specific academic literacies are important to take into consideration. Departmental-level REF facilitators are often better placed to anticipate the specific readerships of sub-panels to which they are submitting. However, in many institutions their interpretative power is curtailed by those higher up the university hierarchy, particularly around impact case studies.

In addition, while the ESRC-RG process discussed in Chapter 4 involves an acknowledgement from all involved that the research proposals necessarily use fictive devices due to the speculative nature of proposals, in the REF, fictive or partially fictive claims are treated as factive and sometimes used unknowingly. The hybridic statements about the REF that bring 'fact' and 'fiction' together often organise things 'as if fact' at a local-level and create mythologised understandings of the REF process. These myths are made material through people's practices, including reading and writing about and for the REF in ways organised by these mythologised understandings, as alternative REF realities. In order for those involved in local-level REF translation to distinguish between information from the REF texts – the source of data – and interpretations of those texts, it is surprising that the REF facilitators do not respond to this as researchers and operationalise an approach that is something like an informal IE investigation in which they assess the facticity of REF claims: read the actual regulatory texts; speak to those actually involved; and accurately and accountably convey information.

Conclusion- Agency, Translation, and Making Myths Material: Feminist Text-Focused IE?

This conclusion focuses on the overall intellectual contribution of my thesis, having provided summaries of each chapter throughout. This concerns, firstly, contemporary UK HE, and specifically how audit and accountability processes organise the everyday working practices of academics and the textual negotiations that ensue; secondly, feminist sociology, specifically my development of text-focused methods for IE analysis and whether and to what extent these constitute feminist research; and thirdly, how these have come together in the substantive investigations carried out to inform my thinking about agency, translation and making mythologies material.

My research focuses on the textual relations of ruling in UK HE between 2013 and 2018, exploring an academic life replete with audit and accountability processes. While this thesis could have focused on students, or administrative and professional staff, or university management, the focus on academic staff has allowed me to show the different ways in which the central activities of teaching and researching are being organised by seemingly mundane administrative work. And yet, these daily practices of reading and writing bureaucratic forms and administrative processes are where the institution and the ruling relations are confronted and negotiated. Instead of *doing* teaching and research, more time is spent negotiating the bureaucratic organisation of these activities and *accounting* for time and effort: gathering and responding to student feedback in various forms; applying for funding to do research; and, ensuring research fits into assessment criteria. These practices organise teaching and researching in different directions, as audit language and market speak filter down into everyday interactions between academics. Being 'REF-able'. The impact agenda. The student experience. These are terms that did not exist when I began my undergraduate degree in 2008, but by 2018 as I finish my PhD they have significant organising power in contemporary UK HE, bringing with them an array of

cyclical accountability processes and associated logics of what constitutes 'good' teaching and research and good practices in accounting for this.

Part II of the thesis presents a methodological experiment, exploring how UK HE is organised by texts using three IE text analysis methods drawn from Smith's work, explored in depth in Part I. This methodological experiment develops useful tools for analysing texts and the different ways they function in institutions and how to research them. These methods exist on a spectrum of closeness to the text: the close textual analysis of the NSS; the textually-mediated process of the ESRC-RG; and, the REF discourse. The chapters in Part II also map out different moments in the process of textualisation, considering readers, non-readers, and writers of texts, alongside highlighting the different levels of ficticity and facticity in institutional textual practices. Chapter 3 highlights that readers have interpretative agency and that how they use texts influences their regulatory power, specifically regarding the NSS which, through readers' treatment of the survey, constructs facticity about the quality of teaching provision at universities. Chapter 4 shows how readers participate in translation work when reading application guidance and fitting their writing of funding applications into institutional constraints and anticipated readerships, with the ESRC-RG process involving collective use and acceptance of fictive devices to write research proposals. Chapter 5 demonstrates how non-readers are receptive to mythologised understandings of regulatory texts, making those myths material through their textual practices of reading and writing, with the REF involving fictional accounts of the process being treated as if factive in many universities.

This complex role of factive and fictive devices in reading, writing, and speaking styles when encountering texts explains the existence of varied experiences of the 'same' regulatory texts and thus the possibility of local-level translations and interpretative agency when putting regulatory texts into practice. However, the 'sameness' of texts only organises across locales when people have actually read the texts. Otherwise discursive understandings of 'the text' organise, with at times very little relation to what the actual text says. Thus, while Smith's conceptualisation of the textually-organised relations of ruling are present and have impact in these processes, this occurs differently regarding the three different textual organising processes that have been investigated, and interpretative presence continues to be exercised through the agency and translation work involved in reading, writing, and speaking about organising texts in UK HE. There is an interplay

between textual requirements, interpretations seen as authoritative, and agency in reading and writing texts, in an ongoing and cumulative negotiation of institutions and the ruling relations through textual gaming.

It is odd and interesting that often academics do not often turn their analytic eye and researcher rigour to the institutional processes of which they are a part. Instead of investigating things heard about audit processes and going back to the sources, it seems that many people just assume what is said to be true. Sometimes this is the result of 'how it is done' locally, and the behind-the-scenes processes such as told me by the REF facilitators, but perhaps it is also the perceived mundanity and everyday nature of these audit and accountability processes that mean they are largely unexamined. Rather than looking inward to people's own institutions (which can be risky if seen as too critical) or engaging critically with the bureaucratic form that must be routinely completed, most academic staff collectively participate, albeit with grumbling, in the reproduction of the structures of the institution of UK HE.

Of course, many people I have informally and formally discussed these processes with do the opposite; they do read the regulatory texts in detail, ask those who produce the texts or read them how it actually works, and try to strategically negotiate these constraints to enact certain practices. This everyday form of institutional ethnography, carried out in brief and focused ways to address specific problems, demonstrates that anyone can do IE and need not have read Dorothy Smith's books or know the lingo, but instead use their everyday insider understandings of how contemporary institutions such as universities work.

How Do Texts Organise UK HE?

I argue that while texts help organise and regulate people's everyday activities within an institutional framework, authors and readers have interpretative agency in negotiating and translating the meaning of institutional texts. Texts solidify the weight of history, organising everyday activities and moments within an institutional and societal framework that organises what people do and how they do it. Authors and readers are in a constant negotiation over the meaning and significance of institutional texts, but

interpretative agency differs depending on someone's role and associated authority, which is then inscribed in the process of textualisation. This also applies to the researcher as an authoritative reader and writer of texts concerning academic working processes. Thus, the 'moment' of textualisation is important because texts often stipulate who or what is legitimate and who or what has authority within a particular process or context.

The three concepts which have come out of my analysis – agency, translation, and making myths material – highlight how readers and writers can, and often do, strategically and intentionally negotiate the textually-organised relations of ruling in UK HE. This demonstrates that while texts have considerable organising power, it is not uniform or dominating, but instead highly varied and context- and reader-specific. Texts make ideas material and replicable which means they can organise across locales, and this is particularly powerful if they are authored or authorised by institutions or those in institutionally sanctioned roles, for example, REF sub-panellist, ESRC-RG reviewer, institutional author. However, even if someone is the author of a text, once it has been released into the world as a text they cannot control the changing readerships and contexts in which it might be interpreted and used differently. While authors cannot control how readers interpret and use the text, certain textual practices or performances convey greater prestige, particularly those which indicate objectivity, for example, surveys and statistics, or collective or unnamed authors. Thus, certain textual practices and authoritative readers and writers help to produce convincing texts in anticipation of future readers. Agency means that the moment of reading and/or writing becomes an important interpretative act in which 'the same' text may end up producing very different textual practices. In this sense, people are always behind and in front of texts, both as authors and readers, negotiating what gets put into the text at the point of textualisation, and then how to interpret texts and to fit actuality into them.

Agency is demonstrated by this translation work done by readers and writers, which often involves using intentional institutional capture to stretch the perceived interpretive limits of institutional texts and processes. While the materiality of the text might present a solid front, people's negotiations of texts are active and ongoing, leaving room to collectively re-write and re-interpret the ruling relations through reading and writing in an endless text-act-text process. The collective weight of people's interpretations, particularly people with authoritative roles, produce 'correct' readings of authoritative

texts, which become solidified into further texts within a web of institutional texts. Thus, an authoritative individual or collective readership can give weight to and popularise unintended interpretations of texts, as has been the case with some UK HE texts and also with some interpretations of Dorothy Smith's work.

In short, UK HE is saturated with texts which function in highly varied ways that go beyond passive readers and active institutional texts, and operate as ongoing textually-mediated negotiations of the ruling relations between readers and writers in different contexts and positions. Feminist concerns about power and inequality in institutions are refocused in text-focused IE on people's reading and writing activity as the moments in which the institution and the ruling relations are encountered. This can veer into mythologised understandings of texts, which can become textual practices which discursively function in a completely separate way to actually regulatory process. However, this serves as a useful warning to read the regulatory texts and take seriously the powerful everyday reading, writing, and speaking about texts, which serve to (re)produce the ruling relations which we are all caught up in.

Recognising the importance and consequences of these textual negotiations in UK HE is important in challenging the supposed neutrality of textually-mediated institutional processes, whereby texts are often believed and trusted in institutional processes. It is a necessary practicality in institutions to use texts to organise people across different locales and also to standardise processes which might otherwise be open to nepotistic and discriminatory practices. However, textually-mediated processes are not neutral and are not as standardised as might be expected, as demonstrated through my discussions of interpretative agency, translation and the organising power of mythologised understandings of texts. Texts do not surmount issues of subjectivity and the necessity of negotiating which accounts to trust when working out what is going on in UK HE or in trying to assess the quality of teaching or research. Texts may seem static, but Smith's work encourages us to take seriously the activeness of texts and of readers/writers, seeing through to the negotiation and interpretation of wrestling everyday life into textual constraints and then considering how central these negotiations are to the exercise of power in institutional life.

Smith's IE framework provides a very useful approach to sociological research, centring texts in institutional contexts and helping the researcher attend to the vital work

of reading and writing that goes on beneath the publicly available textual representations of institutional life. Despite the seemingly static nature of texts, they are still produced, read, and spoken about by people who have interpretative agency and who must translate texts into actuality or actuality into texts. By acknowledging the materiality of ideas in texts, but also encouraging the researcher to think of how texts are actually used, Smith's work does not reduce or trap the sociologist into any material/ideas, structure/agency, binary, but instead focuses the very active textual negotiations around which much institutional life rotates. Institutional literacies, strategic reading and writing, and the ways we talk and use texts in everyday institutional life, all provide opportunities to push and pull activities down particular paths; academic staff in universities may be organised by texts but there is still much room for individual and collective dissent and challenge, reinterpretation and misinterpretation. By attending to the mundane text-based processes in everyday academic and institutional life, IE reimagines how power works and how to use it.

My text-focused IE approach helped in making sense of how UK HE works, providing the methods for detailed explorations of how different ideas and logics about what constitutes 'good' research and teaching organise academic practices through national audit and accountability processes. While many discussions of the neoliberal academy and audit culture in universities are discussed in broad-brush terms, or begin in policy, my approach has begun with the local-level experience of textually-mediated processes which assess academic work and organise it around these neoliberal or audit principles. I have shown how these ideas filter down into local-level practices and the variation, and also the interpretative agency or translation, involved between the regulatory texts and the actual practices. By focusing on the texts, which are the bridge between the local and the translocal, I have shown, rather than assumed, how ideas organise beyond one locale.

However, while the three Chapters of Part II provide detailed explorations of how institutional texts differently organise readers, writers, and non-readers in UK HE, and I am happy to defend the ways in which that textual methods within an IE framework has enabled me to produce new insights concerning agency, translation and material mythologies, I am still left with the question raised at the end of Chapter 5: to what extent and with what limitations is this feminist research? I certainly started out with feminist politics, methodology and ethics, but where have I ended?

Standpoint and the Role of the Researcher: How Feminist is this Approach?

My discussion of texts and how they organise UK HE is centrally concerned with how power operates in institutions and therefore where resistance or challenge can be manifested, which I believe to be a feminist topic. As discussed in Chapter 2, feminist work does not necessary only focus on women, gender and sexism, with intersectional considerations highlighting the importance of shifting towards a more nuanced acknowledgement of difference within feminism and thus the focus being on exploring structural inequalities, power, and justice for all oppressed groups. This effectively expands the feminist remit to every aspect of the social world, with an eye to power and how it affects people differently depending on their positioning in the world, both as people and as role-enactors.

Due to the historic erasure and misrepresentation of oppressed peoples, feminist research has often aimed to centre oppressed experiences. Standpoint, as part of Smith's overall ontology, acknowledges that institutions are and have historically been made by and for more privileged groups – elite men – and thus oppressed peoples experience the disjuncture between institutional textual reality and everyday life. Smith's standpoint provides an important non-essentialist ontological explanation for why structural inequalities and oppressions exist and persist. Identity is materially rooted and persists through textually-organised relations of ruling, but people's reading and writing of texts still involve spaces for agentic re-reading, re-writing, re-telling, challenging, and strategic engagement with the existing texts. Thus, by turning the researcher gaze to that which has already been generalised – the institutional - Smith's standpoint explores how people are positioned in relation to texts and discourse by their roles and identities, and the IE researcher can present a non-essentialist, material and accountable understanding of why people might have similar experiences based on similar roles or identities. However, over time and by other IE researchers, standpoint has become more simply about taking the position of certain people in an institution and considering it from their position. Thus, an IE standpoint need not (although it often does) explicitly take the standpoint of oppressed

people, but instead can focus on how institutions work, beginning with particular groups or roles.

My own use of standpoint involved beginning with the local-level experiences of people encountering regulatory texts and focusing on particular points in the process and roles to try to understand how they processes worked. Rather than taking concepts like neoliberalism or structural inequality from discussions of UK HE and beginning with these, I drew on my own experience and that of some groups of other people in UK HE, and focused on the texts and textually-mediated processes that most heavily organise front-line teaching and research staff – the NSS, ESRC-RG, and REF. Given my explicit interest in structural identity and a feminist approach, my analysis makes relatively little reference to these topics. Unless I had explicitly focused on the absences in texts or tried to work out who the presumed user was, which would begin to move further away from the text itself and more into interviews with authors, or specific standpoints of readers of the texts, my choice of texts and the text-focused methods made it difficult to explore identity-based differences in how texts organise.

However, some institutional texts might more easily bring up structural inequality, highlighting the importance of researcher's choice of texts. For example, if I have chosen to look at things like Athena Swan, student and staff visa application processes, and diversity and equality statements, structural inequalities might more easily have come up. And it is interesting to note that texts which do highlight structural inequalities and identities are more marginal in organising everyday academic life than those which ignore identities. The NSS, ESRC-RG, and the REF generalise rather than acknowledging how people experience institutions differently based on their structural identities, and this absence reiterates and further evidences what Smith's ontology says; that textual reality erases identities and people. And so while a text-focused IE approach does not necessarily lead researchers to highlight how people experience these institutions differently based on structural inequalities due to the focus is on these seemingly neutral texts, it does demonstrate just how effectively they are erased from the institutional texts.

However, standpoint and the impact of choice of texts on analysis does bringing up another central element of feminist research, which is the role of researcher. My text-focused IE methods were operationalised in line with the feminist research principles of reflexivity and accountability, as covered in Chapter 2. This involved discussing specific

methods of reading and analysing, highlighting key concepts used, explaining how I came to choose certain texts, exploring my experience of the texts and pre-existing assumptions, and providing discussions of the readings which informed my interpretative decisions. This reflexive and accountable process allowed me to forefront my feminist research position that knowledge production is not neutral and objective, and to challenge the assumption that the researcher is a privileged knower who need not account for her claims. Writing my thesis in this way has put into practice an analytic and holistic reflexivity and enabled readers to hold me accountable for my claims. By using retrievable texts and clearly referencing or providing in appendices my key texts, I am enabling readers to read these same texts and potentially come to a different conclusion.

This was sometimes not fully possible, particularly in Chapter 5 in which much of the discussion was based, for reasons explained, on non-retrievable interview transcripts. This chapter demonstrates an interesting tension between the accountability of some of my claims and the text-focused IE approach developed to explore how discourse works. The ways in which REF texts are discussed and alternative 'facts' about them circulate are hard to research in a fully accountable way because much of these discussions are happening through non-retrievable texts or talk. While initially the plan was not to use interviews or fieldnotes as data, the REF facilitator interviews were necessary to get at the discursive elements of the REF, which are distinct from the texts. While the REF myths may exist in institutional texts, they would have been private and not accessible to an outside researcher, for example, internal memos, emails, and institutional strategy or policy documents. I decided to use unaccountable interview data in order to access these useful reflections on how discourses organise non-readers, which is centrally important to understanding how the REF functions in UK HE. And while the content has to be taken on trust, the points made from these interviews can be compared to readers' own experiences of the REF.

Returning to standpoint and the importance of reflexivity, these considerations have made me consider my own position as reader and writer of texts in the research process much more critically. In order to account for my claims accurately and ensure they are not mere assumptions or projections of ideological beliefs, I have constantly come back to the question, 'how do you know this?' My reading practices have become much more diligent as a result, which has been particularly important due to my double insider

position. I began researching with many beliefs and assumptions about UK HE, and if I had merely researched REF discourse without exploring the official REF texts themselves I would have been unable to distinguish between the myths and local-level interpretations, and the texts themselves. My attention to the details of the regulatory texts means that my exploration of discourse is still rooted in an accountable and clear exploration of the REF. And my interviews demonstrate the variety of potential interpretations and misinterpretations of the REF guidance, which is clearly and accountably outlined prior to exploring local-level processes.

Having now developing and tried out these three feminist text-focused IE methods I am more sympathetic to the apolitical IE studies discussed in Chapter 2, which provide interesting explorations of how textually-mediated institutional processes work but without much acknowledgement of power and inequality and therefore less focused on feminist topics. The text-focused approach makes it very difficult to highlight differential engagement with institutions based on identity unless this is explicitly mentioned or addressed in the institutional texts. However, the reflexive and accountability feminist approach to research is one must be taken more seriously as part of IE studies, otherwise its feminist roots are completely removed from the approach. While Smith's engagement with standpoint does begin to bring in feminist elements to text-based IE investigations if researchers explicitly take up the position of oppressed peoples, this does not constitute enacting feminist research principles. When this also incorporates the reflexive and accountable principles I have discussed, then IE research can put into practice the feminist imperative to challenge objective neutral knowledge production and eschew researcher epistemic privilege.

And so, the feminist text-focused IE approach which I have developed involves exploring institutions and the ruling relations with a focus on how texts and language function and organise people and their activities. By beginning in experience and from a particular standpoint, rather than with abstract theory or an institutional perspective, text-focused IE focuses on how textually-mediated relations actually work. Rather than taking specific examples and generalising from these, text-focused IE focuses on the already objectified institutional texts which provide the bridge between locales and are the ways in which different people are organised across time and place. Similar to traditional ethnographic work, the researcher might reflect on her own experiences, observe,

participate, interview, and read to inform her understanding of how things work, but this ultimately is focused on identifying, mapping, and analysing institutional texts. While discourse discussions might also bring in talk about texts, the focus is still on how people talk about texts and how these understandings contribute to further textual practices.

The exploration of textually-mediated relations of ruling gets at important feminist topics about authority and agency within institutions; by explaining how things work, text-focused IE can identify potential sites of resistance and challenge problematic audit and accountability practices. However, text-focused IE is not neutral or objective and so in order to do feminist text-focused IE, researchers must also attend to the role of the researcher throughout the research process. This involves thinking holistically and ongoingly about how researcher positionality and methodological choices affect the choice of text and the analysis produced. These negotiations should be discussed in a self-reflective analytic way in the writing up of analysis, alongside providing clear and comprehensive explanation of where ideas have come from, so as to acknowledge that this affects the knowledge produced. By providing these discussions about the analytic procedures and interpretative acts underlying knowledge claims alongside any retrievable texts, the researcher opens herself up to being accountable to her reader. In short, doing feminist text-focused IE fundamentally involves turning the lens back onto the researcher as a reader and writers of texts, someone who has privileged epistemological status, and trying to undo this through reflexive and accountable research practices.

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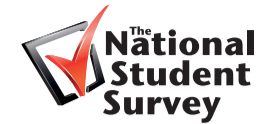
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Appendices

Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad socio-historical context • Institutional context, i.e. UK higher education • Organisational context e.g. the specific university • Situating my choice and reading of the text
Pre-Text Or Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did I get it from and where is it stored/accessible? • Origin story of text – what text(s) lead to production of the text under analysis? Was there an organisational process that lead to its creation? • Authorship – if known, is it a single/multiple/group/institutional author? If more than one author, what are their different roles and responsibilities in producing the text? • What impact might the authorship or origin have on intended readership if known? For example, through media coverage and other discussion of the text, prior to production.
Text Or During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content/message of the text – what is it and how is it conveyed? • Authorship – how is it configured? E.g. Stated/unstated/implicit? • Narrative tone/voice • Positioning of people in the text • Readership: is an intended readership implied or stated? What activities are required or asked of readership by the text? What knowledge is needed to interpret the text? • Structure: format; genre; use of colour and images • Language use, specifically things that all attention to themselves, e.g. unusual vocabulary; repeated words. • Intertextualities: regulatory or boss texts referenced; interlocking texts mentioned
Post-Text Or After	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official institutional processes: e.g. text-act-text sequences such as storage, archiving, circulation and origin of text • Interlocking texts and other texts that are regulated by this text • Unofficial or unintended textual uses and misuses: performances or invocations of the text • Absences/silences – reading different ideologies into the text, who and what is excluded or side-lined?
Context 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader context of usage and commentary on text • Organisational context • Institutional context • My interpretation of broader impact of text

National Student Survey



2 Ipsos MORI



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- 3 Please write in your date and month of birth.
 5 This information is essential to validate your response.
 6 We may contact you again if your date and month of birth are missing or incorrect.

4

DD	MM
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- 7 For each statement, show the extent of your agreement or disagreement by putting a cross in the one box which best
 8 reflects your current view of the course as a whole. If you need to change your answer obliterate your cross by
 9 completely shading the box then place a cross in the correct box. Please use black or blue ink pen.

10

	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable
11 The teaching on my course						
12 1. Staff are good at explaining things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 2. Staff have made the subject interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 4. The course is intellectually stimulating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 Assessment and feedback						
17 5. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19 7. Feedback on my work has been prompt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 8. I have received detailed comments on my work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21 9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22 Academic support						
23 10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24 11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25 12. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26 Organisation and management						
27 13. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28 14. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29 15. The course is well organised and is running smoothly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30 Learning resources						
31 16. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32 17. I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33 18. I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities, or rooms when I needed to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

34

13-026656-01/V1

35 Please turn over to complete the questionnaire



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36

Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable
------------------	--------------	----------------------------	-----------------	---------------------	----------------

37 **Personal development**

38	19. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39	20. My communication skills have improved	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40	21. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

41 **Overall satisfaction**

42	22. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
----	--	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

43 Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects of your course you would like to highlight?
44 (Please use the boxes below.) Please ensure that your comments do not identify you individually.

45 **Positive**

46 **Negative**

47 **Students' Union (Association or Guild)**

48 Thinking of all the services, including support, activities and academic representation provided by the Students' Union (Association or Guild) at your institution, to what extent do you agree with the following statement:

Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable
50					
51	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

52 To help us validate your response please can you provide the first four characters of your email address.

53 **Thank you for participating in the National Student Survey 2014**

54 You may also complete this survey online at: www.thestudentsurvey.com

56 HUSID

Serial No.

55 Scan here to complete online



1

2 **National Student Survey 2017 - Core Questionnaire**

3 **Scale:**

- 4 Definitely agree
- 5 Mostly agree
- 6 Neither agree nor disagree
- 7 Mostly disagree
- 8 Definitely disagree
- 9 Not applicable

10 **Questions:**

11 **The teaching on my course**

- 12 1. Staff are good at explaining things.
- 13 2. Staff have made the subject interesting.
- 14 3. The course is intellectually stimulating.
- 15 4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work.

16 **Learning opportunities**

- 17 5. My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth.
- 18 6. My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics.
- 19 7. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt.

20 **Assessment and feedback**

- 21 8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
- 22 9. Marking and assessment has been fair.
- 23 10. Feedback on my work has been timely.
- 24 11. I have received helpful comments on my work.

25 **Academic support**

- 26 12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.
- 27 13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.
- 28 14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course.

29 **Organisation and management**

- 30 15. The course is well organised and running smoothly.
- 31 16. The timetable works efficiently for me.
- 32 17. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.

33 **Learning resources**

- 34 18. The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well.
- 35 19. The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well.
- 36 20. I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to.

37

38 **Learning community**

39 21. I feel part of a community of staff and students.

40 22. I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.

41 **Student voice**

42 23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course.

43 24. Staff value students' views and opinions about the course.

44 25. It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on.

45 26. The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests.

46 **Overall satisfaction**

47 27. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.

48





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Vacancy Details

Student Experience Officer

Vacancy Ref : 036270 **Closing Date :** 06-Jun-2016
Contact Person : Nicola Crowley **Contact Number :** 0131 242 6546
Contact Email : Nicola.Crowley@ed.ac.uk

Edinburgh Medical School wishes to appoint a Student Experience Officer for the MBChB programme. The post-holder is a member of a team providing a professional administrative service in support of all aspects of Student Support for the MBChB programme.

Effectiveness in this role critically requires someone who can work well with others, is flexible and open to change and can meet all deadlines with a friendly, approachable manner. Experience with handling sensitive and confidential information is beneficial.

This is a full time, open-ended appointment, available immediately.

Closing Date: 5pm GMT on Monday 6th June 2016

1. Job Details

Job title: Student Experience Officer
 School/Support Department: Medical Teaching Organisation
 Unit (if applicable): Edinburgh Medical School
 Line manager: UG Manager, CMVM

The Edinburgh Medical School is delighted to offer this post located in the Medical Teaching Organisation in the Chancellor's Building, adjacent to the Royal Infirmary at Little France.

2. Job Purpose

The post-holder will play a key role in ensuring that students on the Edinburgh Medical School MBChB programme have access to well organised personal support and that the administrative systems needed to deliver this are effectively run. The post-holder will also be involved in a range of activities to enhance the experience of medical students, their personal support and sense of community. Proposing and implementing improvements will be key to the role.

The post holder will be responsible for the development of the administrative systems and the provision of support to key staff in the Personal Tutor Scheme (NHS and UoE staff) and for the organisation of the Student Support Management Group (Dean of Students, Dean of Pastoral Care, Senior Tutor(s) and UG Manager).

3. Main Responsibilities Approx. % of time

Personal Tutors and Support for Students 50% Total
 Responsible for supporting the Senior Tutor and Student Support Group to enable them to advise on routine and complex cases whether regulatory or pastoral and ensure that the advice is consistent. S/he has a crucial liaison role involving daily contact with students and staff at all levels and requiring a detailed knowledge of the student support services available enabling help and advice to be given as required. 10%
 Manage the administration of MBChB Hardship and internal and external Bursary and scholarship awards. Monitoring progress of these students and ensuring students meet the requirements of the awards. 10%
 Secretary to the MBChB Special Circumstances Committees – collating paperwork, communicating with both staff and students, minute meetings and manage outcomes. Liaising with Year Coordinators, Year Directors, Course Organisers and Exam Board Chairs to; ensure consistency of operation and decision making at Special Circumstances Committees, audit and track outcomes through the curriculum and gather Board of Examiner information to audit and analyse assessment statistics, feedback methods employed and their timescales agreed and achieved. Collaborate with colleagues within the College and university to streamline processes in line with university policy and share best practice. 10%
 Work with the MTO Assessment Team and University Fees Management Section to ensure students and their Personal Tutors are aware of any re-assessment issues (including the payment of fees). 5%
 Liaise with the members of the Student Support Group, providing support and direction for their Group and student meetings and events. Ensuring that all student information relating to the Student Support Group remains confidential. Build effective working relationships with EUSA and across the university to facilitate effective communication with the Student Support Group, and develop the Student Representation System within the MBChB programme. Plan and contribute to the induction/orientation for student reps and assist in producing the guides and materials they will require. 15%

Enhancing Student Experience 30%

Working closely with the Year Coordinators to further develop peer support mechanisms and social events across the MBChB programme. 20%

Working with the Year Coordinators in advertising the National Student Survey and Edinburgh Student Experience Survey, organising events to coincide and encourage students to participate. 5%

Work closely with the Year 1 Coordinator and the UG Manager in the delivery of the MBChB student 'Welcome Week' arrangements, attending the University's Induction Coordination Group as the MBChB representative. 5%

Student Records 10%

Work with the Coordinator of Adjustments to ensure the information received via the Student Disability Service (RADIUM) is correct and implemented by the Year Coordinators and assist in an annual review of students with learning profiles. 5%
 Liaise with the CMVM Admissions Team, Year Coordinators and Academic Services to ensure an accurate student record is maintained throughout the programme. Ensure there is an induction link for new students and consistent experience and information for every year of returning students (those who have been off course as well as those experiencing a straightforward progression). 5%

Strategic Projects relevant to student support and experience 10%

4. Planning and Organising

The post holder prioritises his/her own workload (with reference to the UG Manager when appropriate) within the framework of the academic year including peak periods such as Welcome Week, Special Circumstances Committees, Boards of Exams etc. The ability to respond to unexpected events and be flexible and organised is key.

The MBChB programme falls out with the normal university academic year so the post holder is responsible for ensuring that the academic year is planned well in advance with colleagues across the university to ensure effective service delivery, resolving conflicting issues and priorities independently.

5. Problem Solving

The post holder must be aware of problems that are likely to arise and be able to foresee and avert difficulty. S/he is also expected to use initiative to deal with more complex problems by fully understanding the support services available and signposting students and staff appropriately or making contact with the appropriate service to ensure support is in place. The jobholder is expected, wherever it is reasonably possible, to provide a response or solution or where necessary suggest an alternative approach.

6. Decision Making

Most decisions on a day-to-day basis are made independently on the basis of extensive knowledge of University regulations and continually updating knowledge. Using their judgement to manage the workload. Making decisions about the most efficient means of administering and collecting data regarding student support for the MBChB programme. Identifying the best solutions to often complex problems.

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7. Key Contacts/Relationships

The post holder will establish and maintain good working relationships with a range of internal and external contacts. These include: academic, administrative and clerical staff within MBChB, Biomedical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine programmes, MBChB students and honorary NHS staff with teaching commitments; and with administrative colleagues within the wider University, including Academic Services, EUSA, Disabilities Services and University Counselling.

The post holder is expected to keep skills up to date and develop a working knowledge of the medical programme and student support available, through learning from more senior/experienced colleagues and exposure to university wide initiatives.

8. Knowledge, Skills and Experience Needed for the Job

- HNC/HND or equivalent level qualifications plus a minimum of 3 years' relevant work experience OR broad experience (minimum 5 years) acquired through a combination of job-related training and on-the-job experience, demonstrating development through involvement in progressively more demanding work/roles.
 - Proven Experience in a Higher Education environment, with a knowledge of undergraduate student management and quality assurance, as well as experience of co-ordinating student networks.
 - Demonstrable ability to interpret and synthesise complex policy and regulations.
 - Ability to assess situations and circumstances with respect to student requests, queries and issues and to decide on the most appropriate action.
 - Understanding of confidentiality and how to handle sensitive information.
 - Proven experience of working/responding independently and dealing with unforeseen problems or circumstances. Ability to work under pressure and to deadlines.
 - Experience with databases, email and the internet, spread sheets, and word processing. A proven ability to interpret and rearrange large datasets. An ability to present the pertinent points from data accordingly.
 - Strong interpersonal skills, including excellent written and verbal communication.
 - Must be flexible, approachable and helpful, with proven customer service skills and the ability to deal with people firmly but tactfully.
- Desirable
- Experience of university student-centred systems, such as EUCLID and VLEs.

Salary

The role is grade UE06 and attracts an annual salary of £26,537 to £30,738 for 35 hours each week. Salary is paid monthly by direct transfer to your Bank or Building Society account, normally on the 28th of the month. Salaries for part-time staff are calculated on the full-time scales, pro-rata to the Standard Working Week.

Pension Scheme

This role is grade [insert grade] and therefore the post holder is automatically included in membership of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), subject to the USS membership criteria, unless they indicate that they choose not to join the Scheme.

For further information please visit our pensions website [Pension scheme details USS](#)

Eligibility to Work

In accordance with the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 the University of Edinburgh, as an employer, has a legal responsibility to prevent illegal working and therefore must check that all employees are entitled to work in the United Kingdom (UK).

To do so, the University of Edinburgh requires to see original documents evidencing right to work in the UK before commencement of employment and this is normally carried out at interview. Details will be provided in any letter of invitation to interview.

For further information on eligibility to work please visit our [eligibility to work website](#)

In the circumstances where the vacancy does not meet the Home Office and Visa Services advertising, salary and/or qualification level criteria for sponsorship the successful applicant must have the existing right to work in the UK.

Application Procedure

All applicants should apply online by clicking the "apply" button at the foot of this page. The application process is quick and easy to follow, and you will receive email confirmation of safe receipt of your application. The online system allows you to submit a CV and other attachments.

Closing date: 6 June 2016 at 5pm.

The University reserves the right to vary the candidate information or make no appointment at all. Neither in part, nor in whole does this information form part of any contract between the University and any individual.

The College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine

The College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine traces its origins back nearly 500 years (Darwin, Simpson and Conan-Doyle were students here) and is internationally renowned for its research and teaching. Headed by Professor Sir John Savill, the only conjoint Medical and Veterinary Medical School in the UK employs over 2300 academic and support staff. The College has two Schools, the Edinburgh Medical School comprising 3 Deanseries; Biomedical Sciences; Molecular Genetic and Population Health Sciences and Clinical Sciences and the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies.

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/medicine-vet-medicine/about/medical-schools/biomedical>

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/medicine-vet-medicine/about/medical-schools/molecular-clinical-med>

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/medicine-vet-medicine/about/medical-schools/clinical-sciences>

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/medicine-vet-medicine/about/medical-schools/vet-school>

The undergraduate medicine teaching programme in the College enjoys a high reputation nationally and internationally, with over 1,300 students enrolled on the MBChB and Intercolated courses and nearly 1000 on the Veterinary Sciences BVS and related programmes. In addition, approximately 2000 students are currently enrolled in the College's taught and research post-graduate courses, including an extensive range of online distance learning diplomas and degrees. They are trained by over 1000 outstanding academic staff. Details of PhDs, research programmes and studentships are available through our interdisciplinary research institutes and centres (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/medicine-vet-medicine/research/institutes/centres>).

The academic disciplines within Medicine are largely concentrated in the two teaching hospital campuses, the Royal Infirmary at Little France and the Western General Hospital. Both have extensive new infrastructure with major research institutes and state of the art research facilities on clinical sites. Edinburgh hosts a number of prestigious MRC and BHF Research Centres. The approach is interdisciplinary, with basic and clinical researchers working together at the laboratory bench and in our clinical research facilities to address major themes in basic, clinical and translational medicine.

The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Science on the Easter Bush campus houses outstanding teaching and clinical facilities as well as the splendid Roslin Institute, one of the world's leading veterinary research centres. The College offers outstanding opportunities to address 'One Health' and Global Health problems of the highest international priority.

Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014

The College's reputation as one of the world's leading centres of medical and veterinary medical research has been reaffirmed by its UK REF2014 results. Medicine, the University's largest submission, was ranked in the top 5 in the UK. Veterinary Medicine came 1st in the UK, and retained its position as the UK's top Vet School. It made a joint submission with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). Neuroscience was ranked 3rd in the UK out of 82 submissions, representing a major advance. Overall, 289

Appendix Five: Interview Programme

This Appendix provides information about the interviews I carried out, arranged by the chapter to which they pertain, with dates and broad details. All of my interviewees are anonymous due to the sensitivity of some of the processes they discuss and because the focus is not on them as individuals, but on their roles and experiences which give them an insight into particular processes in UK HE.

Chapter 3 – NSS

These interviews were informal and unstructured. I let the interviewees take the lead in telling me what they knew about the National Student Survey, specifically how it worked at the University of Edinburgh, although I had a list of topics I wanted to have covered and kept an eye on these. I took hand-written notes and did not audio record the interviews due to the sensitive nature of some of the discussions.

1. University of Edinburgh graduate, had been involved in student politics, working in higher education policy and politics in Scotland – 9th July 2014
2. University of Edinburgh graduate, had been involved in student politics, working in higher education policy and politics in Scotland – 9th October 2014
3. University of Edinburgh graduate, had been involved in student politics, working in higher education policy and politics in Scotland – 13th October 2014
4. University of Edinburgh graduate, involved in student politics as a sabbatical officer at Edinburgh University Student Association (EUSA) – 15th October 2014
5. Early-career staff member in the School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh – 16th October 2014
6. Student Surveys Team (now called Student Surveys Unit) worker, University of Edinburgh – 23rd October 2014

Chapter 4 – ESRC

These interviews were more formal, semi-structured interviews with a set list of questions which each interviewee was asked. Due to the sensitivity of the ESRC application process, I am not providing either the questionnaires or interview transcripts as I gave assurance that I would ensure that interviewees and departments are not recognisable. Instead I include the questionnaire and consent form in Appendix Six. I emailed an overview of interview data used in the thesis to each participant in advance of submitting in order to give them the opportunity to check whether or not they were sufficiently anonymous in my discussions.

All interviewees were recent applicants to one of the ESRC research funding programmes, from five different UK universities, and with a wide array of disciplinary backgrounds and current appointments (sociology, politics, human geography, development studies, education, anthropology, economics, and natural sciences). The names given are their academic titles and initials based on pseudonyms.

1. Interview 1 – 19th April 2018 – Dr. PL – early career researcher – applied to the New Investigator Grant to be based at a post-1992 university with an excellent teaching profile
2. Interview 2 – 30th April 2018 – Dr. RM – senior academic at a research-intensive long-established university – various previous applications including Future Research Leaders Scheme and more recently the Research Grant
3. Interview 3 – 9th May 2018 - Professor FK – senior academic at a research-intensive plate glass university – various previous applications and more recently applied to the Research Grant
4. Questionnaire 1 – 21st April 2018 – Dr. SK – early career researcher – applied to a Global Challenges Research Fund call at a research-intensive long-established university
5. Questionnaire 2 – 6th May 2018 – Dr. MV – early career researcher based at a plate glass university which has recently been undergoing restructuring and resulting job cuts – applied to the New Investigator Grant at the same university
6. Questionnaire 3 – 7th May 2018 – Professor BL – senior academic at a research-intensive red brick university – various previous applications and recently applied to the Research Grant

Chapter 5 – REF

These interviews were similar to Chapter 4 in being more formal and semi-structured. I audio recorded these interviews and fully transcribed them. Due to the sensitivity of the REF process, I will not include full interview transcripts as I gave assurance that I would ensure that interviewees and departments are not recognisable. The interview questions are provided in Appendix Eight. Interviewee names are identified by their academic titles and initials based on pseudonyms.

1. 7th August 2018 - Professor N. – head of department/REF facilitator
2. 13th August 2018 - Professor F. – head of department/REF facilitator
3. 13th August 2018 - Professor D. – REF facilitator
4. 16th August 2018 - Professor R. – REF facilitator
5. 29th August 2018 - Professor S. – REF facilitator

ESRC Post-PhD Research Funding Application Questions

As part of my PhD research - an institutional ethnography of how UK higher education is organised by texts from an intersectional feminist perspective – I am doing some interviews to inform my text analysis.

These questions focus on research funding in UK academia, specifically the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding processes for post-PhD researchers/research teams. I am interested in your experience of producing and submitting an application to any post-PhD research funding call with the ESRC, regardless of whether it was successful or unsuccessful. In particular, I am interested in the process of translating your idea into a finished application, including any advice or guidance you received. I am also interested in how much 'translation' had to be done to ensure that your idea and yourself as a researcher fitted into the ESRC and the specific funding application remit.

1. Name
2. List of degrees (degree-discipline-location e.g. PhD – Sociology - University of Edinburgh)
3. When will you finish/when did you finish your PhD?
4. Current job/position (if outside academia, are you intending to return to academia/continuing to do academic work?)
5. List of any ESRC funding applications you have done or are doing (please indicate: the specific funding call; when you applied/will apply; whether they were successful/unsuccessful/pending decision).
6. List any other post-PhD research funding applications you have submitted.

Please answer the following research questions in relation to your application to the ESRC (either Research Grant/New Investigator Grant, or other most recent post-PhD ESRC research funding application).

7. How did you find out about this research funding call? (For example, ESRC website/social media/word of mouth)

8. How long did you spend preparing the application?

9. Explain your process of preparing the application form. Specifically, did you read ESRC guidance documents (which ones) for this research grant call? Did you read any other ESRC information about applying? Did you read any other advice on research funding applications? Did you get advice from anyone, from a university/institution, or have any help with writing the applications (who and how much support)?

10. Please identify and explain any aspects of the application process which were unclear and required advice to understand.

11. Did you feel that your final application was an accurate representation of the research project you wanted to completed? If not, what had changed?

12. Did your project easily fit into the application process? If there was a process of 'translating' or changing your project ideas to fit into the application form, please explain how and why you did this.

13. Did you feel that your final application was an accurate representation of you as a researcher?

14. Did you as a researcher easily fit into the application process? If there was a process of 'translating' yourself to fit into the application form, please explain how and why you did this.

15. How long did it take to get a response after submitting the application?

16. What feedback/comments did you receive on your application? If you feel comfortable doing so you can describe them here and/or copy and paste any feedback or reviewer comments here.

17. Did you understand all the feedback you were given? Were there any points of confusion or lack of clarity in the feedback?

18. Why do you think your proposal was successful or unsuccessful?

19. Did your project neatly fit into the ESRC remit (social sciences) or did you think about applying to another UK Research Council (e.g. the AHRC)?

20. Did you consider applying to other ESRC funding pools, if so why did you choose this one?

If you have completed other post-PhD research funding applications with the same project or a similar project to your ESRC funding application, please answer this additional question:

21. Please explain how that experience/those experiences compare to applying to this ESRC funding process? In particular, how well did you and/or your project fit into the remit and guidance for the process.

And lastly, if you have anything else to add, please include any further reflections on your experience of applying for post-PhD research funding.

ESRC Research Funding Application Experiences – Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my PhD research - an institutional ethnography of how UK higher education is organised by texts from an intersectional feminist perspective.

This interview is to inform my text analysis of research funding application guidance and forms in UK academia, specifically the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding processes for post-PhD researchers/research teams. I am interested in your experience of producing and submitting an application to any post-PhD research funding call with the ESRC, regardless of whether it was successful or unsuccessful. In particular, I am interested in the process of translating your idea into a finished application, including any advice or guidance you received. I am also interested in how much 'translation' had to be done to ensure that your idea and yourself as a researcher fitted into the ESRC and the specific funding application remit.

The interviews will be audio recorded and will be transcribed in order to include fully anonymised quotations or sections in my PhD chapters and/or as an appendix. Any discussion of interview data or transcripts used will be fully anonymised by giving pseudonyms given to each participant and removing any identifying information about the participant or their application. Some characteristics deemed important for analysis, for example, discipline, career stage, year of application, and the funding call to which the application was made, will be included. If these are overly specific and could identify the participant, they will be discussed in more general terms.

An overview of how the interview data is being used in the thesis will be emailed to participants in advance of submitting the thesis to get feedback on whether or not anonymity is sufficiently protected.

If you understand the information above and consent to take part in this research project please sign and date below.

Date:

Signed:

If you need to get in contact with me please email me at:

orlammurray@gmail.com or s0807012@sms.ed.ac.uk



ESRC

Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon, Wiltshire,

United Kingdom SN2 1UJ

Telephone +44 (0) 1793 413000

Web <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/>

COMPLIANCE WITH THE DATA PROTECTION ACT 1998

In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, the personal data provided on this form will be processed by ESRC, and may be held on computerised database and/or manual files. Further details may be found in the **guidance notes**

Research Grants PROPOSAL

Document Status: With Owner

ESRC Reference:

Research Grants (Open Call)

Organisation where the Grant would be held (mandatory)

Organisation		Research Organisation Reference:	
Division or Department			

Project Title (mandatory) [up to 150 chars]

Start Date and Duration (mandatory)

a. Proposed start date

01 January 0001

b. Duration of the grant (months)

0

Applicants (mandatory)

Role	Name	Organisation	Division or Department	How many hours a week will the investigator work on the project?

Classification

International in nature?

Please give details

Objectives (mandatory)

List the main objectives of the proposed research [up to 4000 chars]

Summary (mandatory)

Describe the proposed research in simple terms in a way that could be publicised to a general audience [up to 4000 chars]

Academic Beneficiaries (mandatory)

Describe who will benefit from the research [up to 4000 chars].

Staff Duties (mandatory)

Summarise the roles and responsibilities of each post for which funding is sought [up to 2000 characters]

Impact Summary (mandatory)

Impact Summary (please refer to the help for guidance on what to consider when completing this section) [up to 4000 chars]

Ethical Information (mandatory)

Has consideration been given to any ethical matters raised by this proposal ?

Please explain what, if any, ethical issues you believe are relevant to the proposed research project, and which ethical approvals have been obtained, or will be sought if the project is funded? If you believe that an ethics review is not necessary, please explain your view (available: 4000 characters)

Summary of Resources Required for Project

Financial resources

Summary fund heading	Fund heading	Full economic Cost	ESRC contribution	% ESRC contribution
Directly Incurred	Staff	0.00	0.00	80
	Travel & Subsistence	0.00	0.00	80
	Other Costs	0.00	0.00	80
	Sub-total	0.00	0.00	
Directly Allocated	Investigators	0.00	0.00	80
	Estates Costs	0.00	0.00	80
	Other Directly Allocated	0.00	0.00	80
	Sub-total	0.00	0.00	
Indirect Costs	Indirect Costs	0.00	0.00	80
Exceptions	Staff	0.00	0.00	100
	Other Costs	0.00	0.00	100
	Sub-total	0.00	0.00	
	Total	0.00	0.00	

Summary of staff effort requested

	Months
Investigator	0
Researcher	0
Technician	0
Other	0
Visiting Researcher	0
Student	0
Total	0

Other Support

Details of support sought or received from any other source for this or other research in the same field.

Awarding Organisation	Awarding Organisation's Reference	Title of project	Decision Made (Y/N)	Award Made (Y/N)	Start Date	End Date	Amount Sought / Awarded (£)

Related Proposals

Proposal is related to a previous proposal to ESRC

Reference Number	How related?

Previous Proposals

Enter the ESRC reference numbers of any support sought or received from ESRC in the past five years.

Staff

Directly Incurred Posts

Role	Name /Post Identifier	Start Date	EFFORT ON PROJECT		Scale	Increment Date	Basic Starting Salary	London Allowance (£)	Super-annuation and NI (£)	Total cost on grant (£)
			Period on Project (months)	% of Full Time						
Total									0	

Travel and Subsistence

Destination and purpose	Total £
Total £	0

Equipment

Description	Country of Manufacture	Delivery Date	Basic price £	Import duty £	VAT £	Total £	Amount Sought £
Total £						0.00	0.00

Social Survey

Description	Survey Date	Basic price £	VAT £	Total £	Amount Sought £
Total £				0.00	0.00

Other Directly Incurred Costs

Description	Total £
	0
Total £	0

Other Directly Allocated Costs

Description	Total £
	0
Total £	0

Research Facilities/Existing Equipment

Description	Total £
	0
Total £	0

Project Partners: details of partners in the project and their contributions to the research. These contributions are in addition to resources identified above.

	Name of partner organisation	Division or Department	Name of contact		
Direct contribution to project			Indirect contribution to project		
	Description	Value £		Description	Value £
	cash			use of facilities/equipment	
	equipment/materials			staff time	
	secondment of staff			other	
	other			Sub-Total	
	Sub-Total			Total Contribution	

Total Contribution from all Project partners

£0

Timetable (mandatory) estimates of the number of months after the start of the project to reach the following stages:

Stage	Number of Months
Completion of all preparation and design work	

Commencement of fieldwork or material/information/data collection phase of study	
Completion of fieldwork or collection phase of study	
Commencement of analysis phase of study (substantive phase where research facilities are involved)	
Completion of analysis phase of study	
Commencement of writing-up of the research	
Completion of preparation of any new datasets for archiving	
Completion of writing-up	

Data Collection (mandatory)

<p>If the research involves data collection or acquisition, please indicate how existing datasets have been reviewed and state why currently available datasets are inadequate for this proposed research. If you do not state to the contrary, it will be assumed that you (as principal applicant) are willing for your contact details to be shared with the affiliated data support service (UK Data Service) working with the Research Councils.</p>	
<p>Will the research proposed in this application produce new datasets?</p>	No

OTHER INFORMATION

Academic Reviewers

1	Name	Organisation	Division or Department	Email Address

User Reviewers

1	Name	Organisation	Division or Department	Email Address

Classification of Proposal

(a) User Involvement (mandatory)

The nature of any user engagement should be indicated

Design	
Execution	
Dissemination	
Training	
Not applicable	

Proposal Classifications

Research Area:

Research Areas are the subject areas in which the programme of study may fall and you should select at least one of these. Once you have selected the relevant Research Area(s), please ensure that you set one as primary. To add or remove Research Areas use the relevant link below. To set a primary area, click in the corresponding checkbox and then the Set Primary Area button that will appear.

Please select one or more Research Areas

Qualifier:

Qualifiers are terms that further describe the area of study and cover aspects such as approach and geographical focus. Please ensure you complete this section if relevant.

To add or remove Qualifiers use the links below.

Free-text Keywords:

Free-text keywords may be used to describe the programme of study in more detail. To add a keyword, you first need to search existing Research Areas by entering the keyword in the Search box and selecting the Filter button.

If the keyword is adequately reflected by one of the terms displayed below, click in the corresponding checkbox then select Save. If no potential matches are displayed, or none of those displayed are suitable, select the Add New button followed by the Save button to add it as a descriptor.

To add or remove those previously added use the links below.



Impact Officer

Birkbeck, University of London - Management & Professional

Location:	Bloomsbury	Placed on:	23rd May 2018
Salary:	£37,169 to £42,483	Closes:	20th June 2018
Hours:	Part Time	Job Ref:	12531
Contract Type:	Permanent		

Purpose and Main Duties

We are looking for a versatile individual to a) facilitate the impact and knowledge exchange work of researchers in the School and b) provide support to embed impact and knowledge exchange in research applications and the conduct of research. You will build strong working relationships with and offer support to those responsible for the development of impact and knowledge exchange – the Assistant Dean for Research, Head of Research Strategy Support, Departmental Research Leads, and, when appropriate, Research Excellence Framework Unit of Assessment Leads. You will also help to establish systems for recording and gathering evidence and data about impact activities.

Candidate Requirements

You will have a good understanding of different kinds of academic research and the diversity of impacts they encompass, as well as an understanding of the UK higher education sector. You will have knowledge of social science and humanities research areas, and of policy developments concerning impact and knowledge exchange. You will be able to work creatively and collaboratively across the School and you will therefore need to be able to manage a varied and wide-ranging portfolio of work and to prioritise demands.

About the Department

For further information about the School, please visit the following website: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/sshp/about-us>

Further Information

Salary: Grade 7 of the College's London Pay Scale which is £37,169 rising to £42,483 pro rata per annum.

This post is part-time, 28 hours per week (0.8 FTE) and open-ended. The salary quoted above will be pro-rata for this part time post and is on the College's London Pay Scale and includes a consolidated Weighting/Allowance which applies only to staff whose normal contractual place of work is in the Greater London area. The initial salary will be dependent on the skills and experience of the successful applicant. The appointment is subject to a probationary period of 6 months. Birkbeck also provides a generous defined benefit pension scheme, 31 days paid leave, flexible working arrangements and other great benefits.

The closing date for completed applications is midnight on 20 June 2018.

Interviews are likely to be held on 3 July 2018.

Informal enquiries on the role can be made to the Assistant Dean for Research, Professor Rosie Cox, r.cox@bbk.ac.uk.

Birkbeck welcomes applicants from all sections of the community. The College is committed to improving the gender and cultural diversity of its workforce, holding an Athena SWAN award and membership of WISE, operating the Disability Confident and Mindful Employer schemes, is a Stonewall Diversity Champion and is working towards the Race Equality Charter Mark.

Apply

Advert information

Type / Role:	Subject Area(s):	Location(s):
Professional or Managerial	PR, Marketing, Sales and Communication	London



Research and Impact Acceleration Officer

University of Glasgow - School of Social and Political Sciences

Location:	Glasgow	Placed on:	18th May 2018
Salary:	£34,520 to £38,833	Closes:	14th June 2018
Hours:	Full Time	Job Ref:	019908
Contract Type:	Fixed-Term/Contract		

Job Purpose

To make a leading contribution to Policy Scotland. Specifically, the job requires expert knowledge in public policy related research within the social sciences. The successful candidate will have a background in one or more of the following areas: Education, Economics, Health, Sociology or Political Science. The post-holder will also be required to contribute to the formulation and submission of research publications and research proposals and play a significant role in making connections across the College of Social Sciences and beyond to support knowledge exchange and impact agendas.

Standard Terms & Conditions

Salary will be on the University's Research and Teaching Grade, level 7, £34,520 - £38,833 per annum.

This post is full time and currently funded until 31 December 2022.

New entrants to the University will be required to serve a probationary period of 6 months.

The successful applicant will be eligible to join the Universities' Superannuation Scheme. Further information regarding the scheme is available from the Superannuation Officer, who is also prepared to advise on questions relating to the transfer of Superannuation benefits.

All research and related activities, including grants, donations, clinical trials, contract research, consultancy and commercialisation are required to be managed through the University's relevant processes (e.g. contractual and financial), in accordance with the University Court's policies.

It is the University of Glasgow's mission to foster an inclusive climate, which ensures equality in our working, learning, research and teaching environment.

We strongly endorse the principles of Athena SWAN, including a supportive and flexible working environment, with commitment from all levels of the organisation in promoting gender equity.

The University of Glasgow, charity number SC004401.

Vacancy reference: 019908, closing date: 14 June 2018.

Interviews will be held on 27 June 2018.

[Apply](#)

Advert information

Type / Role:

[Academic or Research](#)

Subject Area(s):

[Social Sciences and Social Care](#) [Social Policy](#) [Politics and Government](#)

Location(s):

Scotland



Research Impact Officer

University of Sheffield - Faculty of Social Sciences - Urban Institute

Location:	Sheffield	Placed on:	24th May 2018
Salary:	£30,688 to £38,833 pro-rata, Grade 7	Closes:	11th June 2018
Hours:	Part Time	Job Ref:	UOS019323
Contract Type:	Fixed-Term/Contract	★ View Employer Profile	

Contract Type: Fixed Term with a start date of July 2018 (or as soon as possible thereafter) and is a 9 month contract.

Working Pattern: This post is part-time working 0.8 full time equivalent.

Location: The Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, Interdisciplinary Centre of the Social Sciences, 219 Portobello, Sheffield, S1 4DP

We are seeking to appoint a part-time Research Impact Officer (80% FTE) on a 9 month contract to join a research team working on the project, *Jam and Justice: Co-Producing Urban Governance for Social Innovation*. You will work under guidance and supervision by Professor Beth Perry, Urban Institute, and will carry out impact-tracking activities in Greater Manchester.

You will co-ordinate evidencing of impact across the Jam and Justice project. You will be required to work in close collaboration with the Jam and Justice research team in order to develop standardised frameworks for evidencing impact, including:

- Identifying opportunities to generate and gather evidence of impact;
- Tracking and recording impact;
- Managing and monitoring impact, including eliciting and chasing for specific information;
- Analysing and evaluating impact;
- Reporting on impact to our respective institutions and funders.

You will play a co-ordinating role evidencing impact beyond higher education and so we are seeking someone with relevant experience in working collaboratively, with good communication skills and the ability to form good relationships with collaborators, users and beneficiaries. You will have an appropriate degree in a field relevant to the research area (or equivalent experience) and should have experience or detailed understanding of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the role of research impact.

You will be part of a cross-institutional team including the Universities of Sheffield, Manchester and Birmingham, and the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation. You will work closely with the wider research team to ensure effective coordination of impact activities across the project. You will also liaise and foster relationships with a range of external partners and stakeholders across different scales, sectors, networks and organisations.

The Urban Institute (UI) is a major new research initiative which draws together world class researchers from a wide variety of academic disciplines in science, technology and the social sciences in a mission to stimulate new thinking and action about our shared urban future. If you are passionate about making cities work better for people, we would love to hear from you.

We are committed to exploring flexible working opportunities which benefit the individual and University.

We're one of the best not-for-profit organisations to work for in the UK. The University's Total Reward Package includes a competitive salary, a generous Pension Scheme and annual leave entitlement, as well as access to a range of learning and development courses to support your personal and professional development.

We build teams of people from different heritages and lifestyles whose talent and contributions complement each other to greatest effect. We believe diversity in all its forms delivers greater impact through research, teaching and student experience.

Follow @sheffielduni and @ShefUniJobs on Twitter for more information about what makes the University of Sheffield a remarkable place to work.

[Apply](#)

Advert information

Type / Role:

[Academic or Research](#)

Subject Area(s):

[Architecture, Building and Planning](#) [Urban and Rural Planning](#) [Social Sciences and Social Care](#) [Sociology](#) [Social Policy](#) [Human and Social Geography](#) [Other Social Sciences](#)

Location(s):

Northern England

The Alan Turing Institute

Evaluation and Impact Officer

The Alan Turing Institute

Location:	London	Placed on:	25th May 2018
Salary:	£32,000 per annum (negotiable dependent on skills & experience)	Closes:	10th June 2018
Hours:	Full Time	★ View Employer Profile	
Contract Type:	Permanent		

The Alan Turing Institute

Launched in November 2015, the Alan Turing Institute is the national institute for data science and artificial intelligence. Our mission is to make great leaps in data science research to change the world for the better.

The Institute is headquartered at The British Library and brings together researchers from a range of disciplines – mathematics, statistics, computing, engineering and social sciences, – from thirteen leading universities and industry partners.

The Role

The Institute's public funding comes with specific responsibilities to account for the investments made, and to demonstrate the outputs and achievements. The Institute is also accountable to its other funders and, as it grows and further funding (public, private and charitable) is sought, we wish to appoint an evaluation and impact officer with responsibility for supporting the Institute in developing capacity and resources for monitoring and evaluation, and for demonstrating impact.

A significant component of the work will be to ensure the Institute keeps track of its progress and achievements on all fronts and maintains a record of evidence to demonstrate to funders and others that the Institute is meeting funders' requirements and expectations.

Some of the ground work this has been done in relation to the core investment from UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), but the responsibility for monitoring and responding to external expectations (ranging from individual questions to formal reviews) will continue and change as new investment comes on-line.

How to Apply

Further information about the Turing, the role, duties and responsibilities can be found on the Turing website and person specification [here](#)

If you consider that you meet the criteria set out in the person specification and would like to apply for the role, please email your CV and cover letter to jobs@turing.ac.uk.

If you have questions or would like to discuss the role further with a member of the Institute's HR Team, please email HR@turing.ac.uk or call 0203 862 3375.

Applicants who would like to receive this advert in an alternative format or who are unable to apply online should contact us by telephone on 0203 862 3375

Closing date for applications: 10th June

Interview dates: 26th June

The Alan Turing Institute is committed to creating an environment where diversity is valued and everyone is treated fairly. In accordance with the Equality Act, we welcome applications from anyone who meets the specific criteria of the post regardless of age, disability, ethnicity, gender reassignment, marital status, pregnancy, religion or belief or sexual orientation. Reasonable adjustments to the interview process can also be made for any candidates with a disability.

Please note all offers of employment are subject to continuous eligibility to work in the UK and satisfactory pre-employment security screening which includes a DBS Check.

Full details on the pre-employment screening process can be requested from HR@turing.ac.uk.

[Apply](#)

Advert information

Type / Role:

[Professional or Managerial](#)

Subject Area(s):

[Administrative Fundraising and Alumni PR, Marketing, Sales and Communication](#)

Location(s):

London

Appendix Eight: REF Facilitator Interview Questions

1. What is your role in the preparing your department for REF 2021? Were you involved in preparing for REF 2014? Were you involved in previous RAE 2008?
 - a. Is there a REF committee or board who prepare the submission for your department? Do you sit on this/actively participate or is it more a managing role, signing off on their drafts?
 - b. Are there professional non-academic staff or administrators assigned to REF duties? E.g. specific impact officers or research officers? How involved are they from early on in the process?
2. How do you find out about the REF?
 - a. Do you read the official REF guidance documents?
 - b. Do you look for news about the REF from Times Higher Education other media sources, social media or blogs?
 - c. Does your institutional run information events/send out information about the REF/have meetings about the REF?
 - d. Do you informally ask colleagues both in and outside your institution? Within physics or other disciplines?
3. How does the process work at your institutions? Who is in control of the departmental REF preparation?
 - a. How involved is the central university management in the departmental REF process? Is this different across university departments or similar?
4. Has this changed since REF 2014? Has the university management get more or less involved? Has the department negotiated more autonomy or sought out more advice from the central university management?
5. Did your department or university run a mock REF exercises prior to 2014? Will you be running one prior to REF 2021? How does this work?
6. Has the REF affected academic publishing strategies?
 - a. Where people publish, for example, only publishing in highly-ranked journals? Publishing articles as opposed to books?
 - b. Is citation data seen as important to the REF by you and your colleagues?
 - c. Has it affected interdisciplinary work? Do people feel it is good for the REF to do interdisciplinary work?
7. Has the REF affected how researchers engage with impact? How is impact engaged with by your department?
 - a. Now that impact is up to 25% of overall profile has that become more important?
 - b. Role of impact officers?
 - c. Written by academics or other staff?
8. Has the REF affected how researchers engage with research environment?
 - a. Is there more active recruitment of PhD students?
 - b. Is there more pressure to get external funding?

- c. Are there any other elements of the REF research environment requirement that have resulted in REF preparation in your department, for example, gaining Athena Swan accreditation or other accreditation schemes?
- 9. Do you think the REF has any issues around diversity and equality?
- 10. Are there any specific strategies being employed to succeed in the REF either in your department or at a university level?
- 11. How have the REF 2014 results been used in your department or in your university?
- 12. How does the REF affect academic life in your department and in your university?
- 13. Any other comments or things you'd like to tell me about?