

**CAN THE LIFE STORIES OF ADULT LEARNERS OFFER
INSIGHTS INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERSTANDING
AND KNOWLEDGE FOR CRITICAL ADULT AND COMMUNITY
EDUCATION?**

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENTIAL REFLECTIONS OF
FOUR ADULT LEARNERS IN IRELAND**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the life stories of four adult learners in Ireland who tell of their difficulties and how they successfully overcame those difficulties. Through interviews I have conducted with each of them, I hope to provide an opportunity for the reader to gain insight into the experiences of people who have been marginalised. Each of the respondents spoke of their experience of marginalisation and its effect on their lives, highlighting the contention that societal structures work to marginalise people, those who are perceived as different. Using Human Scale Development theory (Max-Neff, 1991) I will discuss the possibility of human needs when not fulfilled, may be viewed as both a deprivation and a potential; a positive and a negative.

My research hopes to determine if these life stories can offer insights into the development of 'An Understanding and A Knowledge' that will be of benefit for Critical Adult and Community Education. I hope to show that the experiential reflections of Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma will lead to a greater understanding of the marginalisation of people who are perceived as different by society and its structures, which appear to work towards reproducing inequality.

The research was conducted using narrative inquiry and Feminist - Marxist lens to examine and draw meaning from the cited experiences. The research highlights the continued marginalisation of people who do not fit into the 'norms' of society, those who are viewed as *Others* (Beauvoir, 1989).

These people are excluded through domination and control to prevent a challenge to the status quo. The research further identifies the imperative of understanding a problem through experience – our own, or that of another human being. Theory alone cannot provide understanding of an issue, the addition of lived experience allows for a more meaningful understanding and ‘really useful knowledge’ (Thompson, 1997). Using both theory and lived experience when addressing a problem provides an opportunity for change.

The insights provided by the Four Respondents together with the theories of Max-Neff, Beauvoir, Marx, Freire and hooks combine to inform social conscience, and social activism that, if taken up, will work towards social change.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
ABSTRACT	3
Chapter One	8
Reflections on Life	8
Introduction	8
Understanding	12
Education	13
Chapter Two	17
Theoretical Concepts	17
Offering an alternative	17
Who is the <i>Other</i> ?	22
Power and the Powerful	27
The Colonising of Education.....	32
Hope and Possibilities	39
Chapter Three	42
A Sense of Place	42
Awareness.....	42
Different Ways of Knowing.....	45
Narrative and Life go Together	47
Method	49
Chapter Four.....	54
Experiential Reflections	54
Looking Back	54
Adult Education.....	56
<i>Othering</i> and Power	62
Poverties and Needs	64
Power in the Classroom	67
Dark clouds.....	70
Escaping the Self	74
Considering Difference.....	76
A Different Way of Being	77
Epiphany Moments	80
The Respondents Now	83

Chapter Five	85
Conclusion.....	85
Realisations and Discoveries.....	85
For the future.....	90
Summary	93
References	96
Appendix One.....	100

Chapter One

Reflections on Life

“A freedom cannot will itself without willing itself as an indefinite movement” (Beauvoir, 1948, 31)

Introduction

Story telling is a part of everyday life. It is our way of highlighting the significant and insignificant moments as we try to see meaning in how we have lived and not lived our lives. The telling of stories helps us to make sense of these episodes of our lives, Davies (as cited in Ryan, A. B., 2015, 35). As we reflect back through stories we are tracking our development, marking the points in our lives and expressing how we felt at that time. We describe these points in terms of ‘our sense of being’ how we felt protected, when we felt loved, moments when we understood what was happening and the confusing moments when nothing made sense. These are the stories of our lived experiences that tell who we are, where we have been and where we are now. This thesis is about such stories; it looks at the stories of four people, their lived experiences and their movements through life.

This exploration of the experiential reflections of four adult learners in Ireland set out to determine if ‘insights’ can be drawn from their stories - insights particularly related to the development of an understanding and knowledge for critical Adult and Community Education.

The life stories of Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma (not their real names) detail their growth physically, emotionally and intellectually.

I hope to demonstrate how these individuals utilised their strength and resilience as they strove to overcome the difficulties that life presented to them.

In this thesis I will discuss the marginalisation of each respondent because of their perceived differences, where the 'norms' of society were not inclusive or accepting of them. In examining the connection between power and marginalisation I will offer arguments as to the source of the power and the motivations behind the use of power to divide and control society. In re-telling their stories I will consider the barriers they faced, throughout their lives, which interfered with their development process and, more importantly, how they overcame those barriers.

There are various ways of measuring human development, human growth, the one most widely known is 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'. This system, like others, sets out the elements necessary for human beings to flourish. Human Scale Development (Max-Neff, 1991) is a radically progressive alternative to previous development theory, an inclusive theory that looks towards an equal society. This is the one I will now examine.

Human Scale Development

In their discussion on human development Max-Neff, Elizalde and Hopenhayn (1992) offer an imaginative and viable theory which reappraises human needs. It is a system that classifies needs and the satisfiers of these needs; a system that influences the fundamental thinking on human development. This theory offers a progressive process that aims to change the approach to human development, from one based simply on economics to one that provides a holistic approach. This new approach to human development addresses all of the 'needs', of all human beings in society.

Max-Neff sets out thirteen 'needs' in a matrix (Appendix One), divided into two categories: Firstly, the existential needs of "Being, Having, Doing and Interacting" and secondly, the axiological needs of "Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Understanding, Participation, Creation, Leisure, Identity and Freedom" (Max-Neff, 1991, 32-33). The matrix then correlates suggested satisfiers; these are not exhaustive. An example of the 'need' for Subsistence is satisfied by food, shelter and work (Max-Neff, 1992, 199).

In the same way education is not a need, the need is for Understanding; to gain understanding there must be conditions that allow and support the development of critical capacity, creativity, curiosity and intuition. Understanding is developed in families, schools, communities and universities - these settings can help to provide the necessary conditions (Max-Neff, 1991). However these structures can also fail to create positive conditions for the development of understanding, resulting in the deprivation of 'needs'.

Within the family if the opportunity for play is denied this can negate the child's ability to develop their imagination and creativity. In state education where schools use the 'banking system', for example teaching by rote, this can negate the learner's ability to think critically (Freire, 2005). However Max-Neff (1991) does not see the denial of 'needs' simply as a deprivation, he believes it can also offer potential.

Deprivation and potential

If the fulfilment of a 'need' is missing in a person's life the deprivation can have consequences on their human development (Max-Neff, 1991). This deprivation may also be viewed as a source of potential; for participation and motivation; as a step towards change (Max-Neff, 1992). These potentials have the capacity to enrich the life of the individual as well as the lives of those around them.

If, for example, we are deprived of understanding we still nevertheless have the potential to help others to understand. A person, who, in school, was deprived of the opportunity to understand, still has the potential to help others to understand. As is the case of one respondent who went on to teach marginalised young people. She used her deprivation of the 'need' to understand as a potential; providing young learners with the opportunity to develop their capacity to understand. She is now enriching the lives of others, and while her teaching is rewarding and fulfilling, she is at the same time contributing to her own continual human development. This demonstrates Human Scale Development as a "process in constant motion", as we are in a constant cycle of development and change (Max-Neff, 1991, 12).

Understanding

The methodology put forward above has been applied to different groups, contexts and countries. The analysis results show that applying this methodology offers an 'in depth insight' into crucial issues which hamper human development. Max-Neff (1991) believes that one of the impediments to human development is as a result of social policy being based on describing and explaining a problem rather than really understanding it; his process allows for the creation of a 'greater awareness'. Human Scale Development theory allows societies to gain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of their issues (Max-Neff, 1991).

This process offers a new way of creating social policy where local communities work together with government, from a ground-up approach. In applying the matrix to the problems in local communities, policy can be informed by the experience of people who are affected by the problem. It is all about understanding, from which knowledge grows and from which in turn more effective policies can be put in place. For example in education there is a continuing issue of young people leaving school early. If the proposed method of understanding was used to identify the issues, and involved the young people in this process, I believe the resulting policies would be more effective. Max-Neff would argue that this is the only way to understand the essence of a problem, gaining a deeper understanding by involving the people who are living the experience (Max-Neff, 1991).

Education

The aim of this research is to demonstrate how the life stories, of four adult learners in Ireland, offer insights into the development of understanding and knowledge for critical Adult and Community Education. The learners' life experiences offer an insight into how inequality is perpetuated by structures in society. Their stories document their subjective experiences and understandings of societal influences in their lives. As their tales unfold we see how their marginalisation by societal structures influences how they are positioned in society and how indeed they position themselves (Ryan, A. B., 2015).

Critical Adult Education provides the environment where critical thought can develop and be utilised to motivate and advance social activism, in order to evoke social change. The respondents' stories highlight the importance of adult education for their individual development and for their involvement in social action. Their life experiences have influenced their desire to help others; adult education has also advanced their critical awareness emphasising the need to change a society that continues to perpetuate inequality.

Critical Adult Education is an essential element of social change as it leads the challenge on government and their policies that are based on 'individualism', thus making critical education part of the solution (Thompson, 2007). The research presented in this thesis validates the ethos pursued in critical adult education which combines theory with lived experience in order create a deeper

understanding of the need for social change. This research will offer further knowledge and understanding to the current body of knowledge in critical adult education. The continual development of knowledge and understanding, through research, is essential for the advancement of social change.

My research concentrates on the first element of this praxis, the raising of individual consciousness through life experience and critical adult education. The second part of the praxis must address social activism towards social change which will hopefully form the body of future research. As the reader navigates the stories of the four respondents it will become clear why it is necessary to relay their stories the way they are presented here. To present them in a condensed format would take away the essence of the meanings they took from their lives. This would have a negative impact on the research findings, but more importantly it would not fully honour their telling of their stories.

Conclusion

Conducting this research has broadened my knowledge and understanding through theoretical concepts and especially through the life stories of Marion, Ellen, Gemma and Paul. In the sharing of their life experience a deeper understanding emerged of how *Others* (Beauvoir, 1989) survive because of adversity not in spite of it. The deprivations they experienced in their lives had a hugely negative impact on how their lives progressed. However contained within those deprivations of needs, were potentials. The deprivations they experienced were turned into positives as they later strove to enhance the lives

of others. This demonstrates that the theory offered in Max-Neff's (1991) *Human Scale Development* has the potential to work on both a micro level and macro level. This thesis has, on a micro level, investigated the transformation in the lives of the four respondents; it has also demonstrated that the reflections of these adult learners offer insights into the development of understanding and knowledge for critical adult and community education.

The capacity to think critically offers the prospect of gaining a deep and meaningful understanding of ourselves; this leads to a process of self-realisation and self-acceptance. This self-knowledge and self-acceptance can lead to a greater awareness of society. Adult education offered Marion, Paul, Ellen and Gemma the opportunity to develop their critical thinking and their consciousness. Becoming more aware enabled them to search for meaning and eventually valuing both the positive and negative in their lived experiences. Adult education provided the space and skills that empowered them to combine their lived experience with critical thinking and in turn praxis, as they began to be involved in social change. The Respondents' life stories, in a reciprocal way, will now offer insights into the development of understanding and knowledge for future Critical Adult and Community Education.

The following chapters explore the theoretical concepts that inform this research, the methodological approach used for the collection of data and the research findings and analysis. The concluding chapter will discuss the themes identified and the future possibilities for this research.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Concepts

In focusing on the individual's possibilities, we will define these possibilities not in terms of happiness but in terms of freedom.

(Beauvoir, 1989, 37)

Offering an alternative

In this chapter I will discuss a range of theoretical concepts that inform the basis of this research. These theories form a conceptual framework of “concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories” that together inform the research presented in this thesis (Maxwell, 2015, 39). I will consider the relational connection between power and the lived experience, exploring the consequences of the power relations that manifest as *Othering*. I will also look at the acquisition of knowledge through critical reflection and praxis towards a greater understanding of the self and the world. In the final part of this chapter I will examine the influence of critical reflection and praxis, on the raising of consciousness; pertinent to development of self. In conclusion I will discuss if ‘transcendence’ is part of the process of a self-realisation development. In this instance transcendence does not have religious connotations of an afterlife; the use of the word in this context is from a cultural emancipatory viewpoint. It refers to the movement of individuals from a state of domination towards the raising of consciousness and so towards a freedom of will; “a freedom cannot will itself without willing itself as an indefinite movement” (Beauvoir, 1989, 31).

Human Development

When considering theories of human development over the previous fifty years the theorists at the forefront offering concepts of the necessary components for human development were Maslow, Sen and Nussbaum. They each explain the elements and systems that are crucial for human growth, which offer opportunity and capability for human beings to flourish through self-actualisation. Max-Neff a Chilean economist offers an alternative approach, a proposed praxis known as Human Scale Development, “a new way of conceptualizing development” (1991, 14).

During the 1980's and 1990's Max-Neff, Elizalde and Hopenhayn (1992) deliberated the need for “imaginative but viable alternatives” to find a development paradigm that is grounded on a reappraisal of human needs (Max-Neff *et al*, 1992, 197) From this proposal a taxonomy of human needs was created, a system that classifies needs and satisfiers that influence the fundamentals of human development. The aim of this proposed praxis is to generate conditions that focus on satisfying “fundamental human needs” towards greater self-reliance (Max-Neff, 1992).

Poverties, Inhibiting the Development of Human Needs

In *Human Scale Development* Max-Neff (1991) offers a reinterpretation of poverty away from one that is defined solely by economics. His new interpretation states that inadequate satisfaction of human needs “reveals a human poverty” (1991, 18). The human needs, proposed in this book are not hierarchal except for the need for subsistence. Living under conditions of

oppression and authoritarianism causes a deprivation of needs, for example limiting access to education denies the need to understand. When human beings are deprived of their fundamental human needs they can experience marginalisation and discrimination. When a human being experiences intolerance, bigotry and persecution these have the power to distort a person's identity, this in turn may lead to a development of pathologies.

When there is a sense that something is missing it can often be viewed simply as a deprivation, thus failing to recognise that needs have the potential to “engage, motivate and mobilize people” (Max-Neff, 1992, 201). The need to understand creates a potential for understanding, in the same way the need to create is a potential for creation. If, as human beings, we are deprived of affection we still have the potential to give affection. If we recognise human beings in terms of needs perceived as deprivation and potential we are creating the conditions for human beings to experience freedom (Max-Neff, 1992).

Human Scale Development

The Human Scale Development theory is an option, not a solution that is open to constant change a “process in constant motion” (Max-Neff, 1991, 12). This theory is a matrix (Appendix one) which divides the categories of human needs into two parts, firstly the existential needs of “Being, Having, Doing and Interacting” along with the axiological needs of “Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Understanding, Participation, Creation, Leisure, Identity and Freedom” (Max-Neff's, 1991, 34).

Using Max-Neff's (1991) classification, shelter and food are not regarded as needs they are considered as satisfiers for need for Subsistence. In the same way education is not a need, the need is for understanding and all human beings have a need to understand. Describing and explaining alone does not produce knowledge, authentic knowledge is produced from experience and critical reflection which allow for a deeper understanding of issues.

Max-Neff (1991) offers Human Scale Development as a new praxis, one that will create a space for critical reflection; this will in turn lead to the opportunity for new knowledge and greater understanding. A praxis that offers a way forward by creating conditions within society that can lead to critical awareness in the pursuit of knowledge. This is necessary to ensure that new concepts confront the ideas that have thus far dominated public policy. Ideas which concentrate on the economics of development, rather than development policy based on a person-centred approach.

Development policies based on economics that are dictated from the top down are led by policy makers with no experience of the issues they assume expertise in (Max-Neff, 1991). This assumption of expertise results in the adoption of policies that have failed to include the people affected in the policy development thus making them ineffectual:

Take the case of poverty, for instance. I dare say that if we have so far been unable to eradicate poverty, it is because we know too much about it, without understanding the essence of its existence as well as the mechanisms of its origins (Max-Neff, 1991, 102).

Political powers are still failing to understand the basics of human development, that food and shelter alone do not constitute well-being. The needs and satisfiers advocated by Max-Neff are essential in their entirety; not only for the development of individuals, but also for the development of an egalitarian society. “[A] healthy society should advocate above all the development of every person and of the whole person” (1991, 60).

Considerations

The theory of Human Scale Development offers an egalitarian approach to the creation of future development policy that is inclusive and transparent. However it is difficult to assess what impact if any this method has had on subsequent policy making, especially in the Northern Hemisphere. Influencing and changing governments approaches is difficult, complex and at times implausible. However I believe it is conceivable, if there is a will and the desire for change is driven from the ground up. Governments need to begin to listen to communities in order to realise and understand the impact public policies have on real people. Although aspirational right now, when this approach to human development does happen, the way will be paved for a more egalitarian society, a person-centred future, where people’s needs are satisfied.

Before Human Scale Development is adopted as the way forward it is necessary to deliberate and understand the social constructions that work to negate the development of human beings. Simone de Beauvoir’s (1989) examination of the complexities of women’s material situation in a patriarchal world offers an insight into the *Othering of Women*. The understanding of this

theory in relation to women, offers a lens through which to examine the marginalisation of people who are considered different in a patriarchal world.

Who is the *Other*?

Before we can consider Human Scale Development as offering an alternative praxis towards a more equal society, we must first identify those who are unequal within society? Simone De Beauvoir's examination of the complexities of women's material situation in a patriarchal world offers an understanding of why people are marginalised, why they are *Othered*. Her insights have made a huge contribution to the development of feminism providing a lens through which we might view the social construction of all marginalised human beings.

The Inessential and the Essential

Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* (1989) offers a feminist analysis of societal relations which maintained and still maintain barriers preventing an egalitarian society. Beauvoir presents a philosophical portrayal of the inequality experienced by women who are perceived as *Other*, second to man, in a patriarchal society. Beauvoir discusses the concept of Self and *Other* which, although it originated in primeval societies was not always categorised as "the division of the sexes" (2011, 1989, 26). However in contemporary patriarchal societies the subjugation of women is clear as they are seen as subordinate to man;

She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the *Other* (Beauvoir, 1989, 26).

Beauvoir's phrase Subject and *Other*, is based on Hegel's explanation of the master-slave dialectic, a more generalised theory of exploitation. This distinction is important because in Hegel's master-slave dialectic *Others* identify themselves as a group and therefore experience oppression as a collective. Consequently they can affirm their subjectivity and claim reciprocity. However women were not able to identify a historical and collective starting point of their *Otherness*. Instead of women identifying themselves as a cohort they relate to their origin of status in terms of class, race and religion. Until this standpoint is addressed the possibility of equality, of affirming their subjectivity and accessing reciprocity is undermined (Beauvoir, 1989).

Negation of Freedom

In exploring the concept of women as inessential, as *Other*, comes Beauvoir's phrase "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1989, 267). The meaning of this phrase is still debated however one interpretation is that it refers to the social construction of women by the gendered division of roles within society.

They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests, and social conditions to certain men – fathers or husbands (Beauvoir, 2011, 1989, 27).

In gaining an understanding of this concept we become aware of the way women are "victimized, exploited, and, in worse case scenarios, oppressed" by patriarchy (hooks, 1994, 7).

Here hooks supports Beauvoir's argument that man's perceived superiority is reproduced throughout the structures of society reinforcing women's status as inferior, negating their freedom. Although It is important to remember both men and women can take on the role of the oppressor "since patriarchy has no gender" (hooks, 2000, 229).

Women's freedom is negated because of the duality they experience when assigned subordinate roles that submerge who they really are, their authentic self: "In her function as wife, mother, and housewife, she is not recognized in her singularity" (Beauvoir, 1989, 756).

What singularly defines the situation of a woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as *Other* (Beauvoir, 1989, 37).

Smith (1987) describes this as a bifurcation of consciousness, the divide in one's consciousness between how one experiences the world and the way one is forced to submit to the oppressor's view of the world. Where the type of life lived is dictated by the oppressor imposing identities on the *Other* which goes against the authentic self, denying true identity (Smith, 1987). The duality women experience is a product of the dialogue of subordination which dictates who they are and how they should behave. Until women can cast off this false identity and reveal their authentic self they will not experience true freedom.

Considerations

Whilst some critics placed too much emphasis on Beauvoir's personal life, hooks (2000) provides an objective critique of Beauvoir as she debates the duality of a feminist striving to write in a male dominated world. hooks is critical of how "Beauvoir passively accepted Sartre's appropriation of her ideas without acknowledging the source" (hooks, 2000, 232) inferring male superiority. However this affirms Beauvoir's argument that women's subordination by a patriarchal system is so ingrained into society it is difficult to avoid. Demonstrating that even Beauvoir with her intellectual insights and strength of will was not immune to its consequences; she could also be *Othered*, she actually *Othered* herself.

hook's (2000) criticises Beauvoir's focus on class issues that leave her blind to the issue of race. This omission is certainly unfortunate as this narrowing of focus does not allow for a complete account of the experience of women. The same could be argued with regards to class as Beauvoir's perspective is middle class. The acknowledgement of race and class could have widened this perspective and offered further insights into the marginalisation of all people who are perceived different. However Beauvoir's philosophy has provided a foundation from which a feminist movement has grown; a movement that recognises and fights for all those who are *Othered*.

In spite of their differences hooks acknowledges the influence Beauvoir had on her own intellectual development; giving credit to Beauvoir's "feminist consciousness that empowered her to move beyond the dictates of male

thought and patriarchal boundaries” (2000, 233). Undoubtedly Beauvoir’s voice has proved a catalyst for equality and the prospect of freedom for all.

Beauvoir’s philosophy provides a feminist lens that allows for the examination and critique of the social construction of women and all *Others* who are considered different. From this platform we can scrutinise difference in an attempt to understand the marginalisation and on occasion, persecution of people who are considered deviant because they do not fit into societal norms (hooks, 2000). Once we recognise the oppressor in all his guises we can then begin “to challenge and change patriarchy” (hooks, 2000, 236).

What are the forces that contribute to the oppression of the *Other*? Why is subordination of women and other marginalised people necessary? The next section will examine power and the barriers power presents to the development of self and the accessing of individual potential. It begins with an exploration of Marx’s (2001) concept of power, alienation and control exercised by the dominant minority to maintain the status quo and in relation to the ‘threat’ posed by *Others*.

Power and the Powerful

Karl Marx (2001) in *The German Ideology* argues that power, alienation and control are exercised by the dominant minority to maintain the status quo through the subordination of the majority. In considering this we must first ask is Marx's conceptualisation of power still relevant today? Brown (2012, 1) contends that there has been a revised rise in interest in "Marx's critique of capitalism" in the twenty first century. Brown (2012) refers to Hardt and Negri and Holloway, who consider the continuing importance of Marx's concepts. She emphasises the continual significance of Marx in light of the global economic recession and a growing "anti-neoliberal movement" citing amongst others the 'Occupy Wall Street' protest and the Middle Eastern unrest as examples of challenges to the status quo (2012,1). It can therefore be argued that Marx's conceptualisation of power is still relevant in the twenty first century; as the continual use of power by the minority elite, to the detriment of the majority, is still evident.

Power, Alienation and Control

Karl Marx's (1970) concept of power states that the powerful in society can colonise all structures within society; that state institutions are used as instruments for the promotion of authoritarian ideals in order to maintain the status quo; this concept is known as the 'Superstructure'. The ruling elite who control the base, the forces and relations of production, work to control the 'means of mental production' by alienating the labour force. The bourgeoisie manipulate the environment reducing the proletariat to mere objects of production, the production of wealth for the ruling class.

Alienation of an individual is achieved through the division of labour which in turn separates men and women from their knowledge and creativity making them objects, things not beings.

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life (Marx, 1970, 68).

Once separation of intellect and labour occurs man is no longer in control of his own existence, negating his ability to realise a sense of self. This demonstrates the use of oppression to alienate the proletariat in both the work place and in society (Marx, 1970).

The workers who are now dependent on the capitalist for their livelihood sell their labour in order to survive “resulting in the loss of power” (Freire, 2005, 78). In removing individual’s power to make decisions those same individuals become “passive and receptive” to the demands of the powerful elite (Freire, 2005, 93). Althusser (2006, 4) explains how this dependence is maintained through the “reproduction of the production forces”. The wage earners are dependent on their income to maintain their livelihood, therefore they must remain submissive. This system ensures continued compliance enabling the elite to maintain their wealth and power to continue directing society at will.

Awareness of the power of the oppressor causes the oppressed to subconsciously accept the domination, resulting in a fear of freedom, not realising their right to autonomy. The superstructure has separated man from himself, it is then imperative that it fragments communities; dividing man against

man and woman against woman to prevent any challenge to the status quo (Freire, 2005).

A Radical View of Power

A radical view of power relations put forward by Steven Lukes (2005) offers the premise that power must be considered more broadly as “power’s third dimension” as opposed to one or two dimensional power. Lukes describes this power as having a capacity to impose “internal constraints”, as it “works against people’s interests by misleading them, thereby distorting their judgement” (2005, 13).

This imposition of power influences people’s beliefs and thoughts, preventing them from choosing what they want and what would be of most benefit to them. Lukes states that this issue has been presented for investigation by both Feminists and Marxists because of its ability to ensure compliance. This is achieved by influencing people’s thoughts and beliefs to the point where they internalise and adopt the vocabulary of the dominant. This dialogue is then internalised “imposing internal constraints” that affect the way people behave and the choices they make (2005, 144). Lukes refers to this as a state of “false consciousness” which has “the power to mislead” (2005, 149). The integral aspect of this type of power is that it is hidden; therefore people are unaware that they are being misled.

In his first edition Lukes (1974, 56) argues the importance of knowing and understanding the origins of power. It is for this reason that holders of power strive to remain hidden, in order to avoid responsibility and accountability for the consequences of their action. An unwillingness to accept responsibility for their action and inaction guarantees that the holders of power will endeavour to continue to protect their anonymity. It is therefore essential that consciousness is raised, first amongst individuals and secondly within communities. A greater awareness is a prerequisite to a challenge and exposure of the powerful.

Lukes' image of government's covert misuse of power is, in my opinion, a valid representation of the exercising of control. His *three-dimensional* view of power provides a deeper understanding of the concept of power and the way it is misused.

Considerations

There are many critiques of Marx's theory; feminist writers Hartmann (1997, 1981) and Hartsock (1983) are strongly critical of his gender blindness, arguing that Marx's predominant concern was the emancipation of the male proletariat giving little or no consideration to the emancipation of women. Brown (2012, 211), argues that whilst some areas of Marx's writing on gender and family are "quite abstract regarding the position of women" she believes there is potential for a "less gender-blind form of Marxism" (219).

Whilst Brown's argument is interesting I believe it carries little weight when placed against the innumerable critiques of his gender blindness; furthermore I would argue that Marx's gender blindness continues to contribute to the subordination of women. As class consciousness takes precedence in the fight for equality the awareness of gender inequality remains concealed.

Returning to the emancipation of the proletariat I take exception to Marx's assertion that his ideology was the only avenue to revolution; he remained closed to the opinions of the people who had the most to gain or lose as the case may be. His writing addressed a situation he was witnessing; he knew nothing of the experience of that situation. By failing to include the opinions of the proletariat believing that his truth was the only truth, he resembles the oppressor he was trying to overthrow.

Real change cannot occur until all those affected by government policy come together to challenge societal inequity. This involves being open to the concept that working class and middle class both experience the consequences of coercion and control exerted by the powerful elite. Therefore the structures used to reproduce inequality, such as education, must be identified. Once we both recognise and understand the oppressor and his political philosophies then we are in a position to challenge and replace the status quo. Only then will we be able to move closer to an egalitarian society one that supports the needs of all, towards a goal of self-realisation and fulfilment of potential.

The Colonising of Education

Power is a means of dominance used to maintain the supremacy of the ruling elite; formal education is an example of a structure that has been colonised by the ruling elite to reproduce inequality. Freire (2005) in *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* claims oppression as a culture of repression and control is used by the elite to maintain the status-quo thus ensuring their continuing domination and power over the oppressed. His philosophical model argues that this culture of repression can be challenged through radical education.

Freire explores the power of 'liberating education' and the 'potentiality' of radical education to benefit the development of human beings. This process leads to consciousness as described in Freire's theory of praxis, reflection and action, in relation to self-realisation and liberation. Whereby the dominance of the oppressor is realised through critical reflection and then challenged by intervention.

Formal Education

Freire describes education as a misguided system where the teacher, a replica of the oppressor, uses a banking system to reduce students to mere objects, receptacles to be filled by the teacher (Freire 2005, 71). hooks (1994, 5) defines the banking system as being one that assumes "that memorizing information and regurgitating it represented gaining knowledge" to be used in the future.

Teachers are the agents of power as their role places them in a position where they can “both wield power and authority” (Giroux, 1992, 141). Learners believe that domination is 'natural'; “that it is right for the strong to rule over the weak, the powerful over the powerless” (hooks, 1994, 28). In their position of power a teacher decides who can learn, what and how they are taught (Stuart & Thomson, 1995). Often what is deemed as knowledge is so far removed from the student’s concrete reality that what is taught has no relevance to them (Freire, 2005).

Misuse of power

Freire applies Marx’s concept of alienation to contemporary education, describing the ability of “banking education” to “annul the students creative power” as working on behalf of the oppressor to prevent students from seeing the reality of the world in which they live or the possibility of change (Freire, 2005, 73). The teacher therefore is instrumental in concealing the real intention of the oppressor which is to “preserve a profitable situation” and prevent the development of “critical faculties” (Freire, 2005, 73). Without the ability to think critically development of self and ability to flourish are negated.

Althusser (2006, 92) contends; education socialises students by teaching the “rules of good behaviour” the rules of how to remain dominated by the state’s ideology of “reproduction of submission” (Althusser, 2006, 97). Althusser (2006) interprets education as a state apparatus for repression, through compliance or consent which are necessary to maintain the system. Formal education

becomes a means of controlling the marginalised who pose the greatest risk to political, economic and social stability (Brine, 2006).

Education acts as an instrument of control by perpetuating and reinforcing societal inequalities and class difference: “Bourgeois values in the classroom create a barrier blocking the possibility of confrontation and conflict, warding off dissent” (hooks, 1994, p.178). Within education the ultimate purpose of exacting submission is to ensure those most at risk of rebelling against the status quo are deprived of the tools to think critically, question and challenge the system (Marx, 1970, Freire, 2005, hooks, 1994). Therefore formal education is a tool for subordination used to reinforce the oppressor’s language of inequality, denying *Others* an education and the opportunity to become autonomous beings.

The institutions that deny education to large cohorts because of their perceived difference are also negating their ability to develop critical inquiry and change to their material circumstances. This exertion of oppression and control is no accident; it is the deliberate action of the ruling elite to ensure they maintain power. However there is another way, there is an alternative that can relinquish control from the oppressor’s. Transformation of consciousness can occur when adult education is,

based on ‘really useful knowledge’ implies the development of critical thinking, the recognition of human agency, political growth and the confidence to challenge what is generally taken for granted as inevitable (Thompson, 1997, 145).

Education and Understanding, a Way Forward

Critical pedagogy seeks to transform consciousness, to provide students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better and live in the world more fully (hooks, 1994, 194).

Paulo Freire (2005) discusses the power of radical education and its influence on the process of emancipation. Initially one must understand the duality of the oppressor and the oppressed. This process described by Freire (2005) as a theory of praxis, reflection and action, in relation to self-realisation and liberation is a process where the dominance of the oppressor is realised through critical reflection, as part of radical education and then challenged by intervention.

Radical education is offered as an antidote for oppression, an alternative that allows for critical reflection that can lead to the development of consciousness. Freire's radical education is modelled on collaboration, problem posing and dialogue which lead to critical consciousness (Freire, 2005). Oppression and injustice are viewed as the two main impediments to humanisation in the education system; critical thinking and analysis through praxis leads to action challenges oppression.

Development of Consciousness and Praxis

Freire (2005) uses the phrase humanisation to describe the liberation of the self, communities and eventually all humanity. "Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process" (Marx, 1970, 69). Awareness guides *Others* towards an

understanding of their situation and assists them to confront rather than conform. This new level of consciousness can progress into a “pursuit of self-affirmation” (Freire 2005 54).

How can people who have been *Othered* by society achieve liberation from the oppressor’s reality that “acts to submerge human beings consciousness” (Freire, 2005, 51)? Human beings’ consciousness can be ignited and raised through critical awareness. Critical awareness is a means towards developing our understanding of oppression, in order, to confront our reality “by means of the praxis: reflection and action” these cannot be dichotomised (Freire, 2005, 51).

For objective reality to be challenged successfully awareness and understanding resulting from reflection must be followed by critical intervention; “the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality” (Freire, 2005, 52). This is the first stage of Freire’s Pedagogy whereby “the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation”. Praxis as the basis for liberation is cyclical; critical reflection leads to action and in turn the consequences of the action must “become the object of critical reflection” (Freire, 2005, 66).

Dialogue is a crucial element of the process of liberation. It cannot just be an exchange of ideas it must present challenges that can be analysed critically.

Once people learn to use critical reflection and begin to think objectively they develop a new and deeper understanding. People begin to realise the different dimensions contained in their reality perceiving the complexities of these dimensions and the symbiotic relationship between them. This critical analysis of the world and self has the potential to develop one's own consciousness towards becoming fulfilled human beings, allowing people to fulfil "their ontological vocation to be more fully human" (Freire, 2005 74)

Liberation

According to Freire (2005) the major impediment to liberation is the internalising by the oppressed of their oppressor's reality. It is encompassing, trapping them as it "submerges their consciousness" (2005, 51). Freire believes that the first step to emancipation is when the oppressed recognise their unequal status and view it as a consequence of oppression. Freire (2005) implies this can be achieved through education, both informal and formal.

Radical education enlightens students to their truth, the truth that all human beings are equal, committed to a "vocation of becoming more fully human" (Freire, 2005 66). hooks (2005, 8) describes radical education as an "open learning community" a pedagogical system where everyone is equal and everybody's contribution is valued. This yearning for freedom and justice provides the catalyst for development of the self. Everyone may not choose to take this path; no one should be denied the opportunity because of the existence of inequity in society and social institutions.

The Department of Adult and Community Education in Maynooth University advocates the nurturing of critical thinking, based on theory and lived experience, which has the potential to influence social change (Fleming, 2007). The research conducted within this department in Maynooth, recognises the importance of an individual's life story. In particular the ability of these stories shows how the marginalisation by societal structures, influences the way people are positioned in society and, how indeed they position themselves (Ryan, A. B., 2015). The type of Knowledge generated from this research combined with lived experience, is referred to by Thompson (1997) as 'really useful'. This knowledge has the potential to raise awareness and offer a deeper understanding of societal oppression, leading to social action aimed at change.

Considerations

Whilst the liberation of self within groups in education and communities is plausible, to a degree, the contention that eventually all humanity will be liberated seems improbable. Taylor in his critique and discussion of Freire's texts agrees that "Dialogue may provide the grounds for revolutionary action, should the need and circumstances arise" (Taylor, 1993, 72). However Taylor appears unconvinced, whilst Freire relies on nothing more concrete than inquiry asking; "What must we do to promote liberation? How? When? With whom? For what? Against what? And in whose favour?" (Freire, 1975, 19).

A discussion on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* cannot ignore the major criticisms of Freire (2005) in his use of sexist language throughout the text which is seen as a repression of women. Although by this 2005 edition this has been

addressed to a point; Freire defends himself stating that it was unintended and “agreed wholeheartedly that such old forms of writing should be avoided” (Taylor, 1993, p. V). The time for excuses has passed; male theorists must demonstrate their support for equality, by recognising women’s equal role in the transformation of society and stating it clearly.

Further criticism of Freire (2005) discusses the incompleteness of his arguments, for example his failure to name the oppressors and elaborate on the processes that make up praxis. It is however a disservice to view Freire’s (2005) philosophy in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as incomplete; as with all learning Freire’s ideas and theories did not remain static but continued to develop. As he explains his own praxis during the subsequent years “taught me to see things I had no opportunity to see before” (Freire, 1975, 15). He believes that educators have a part to play in building a new education system through radical social change.

Hope and Possibilities

Both Freire and hooks dispute the notion “of conscientization as an end itself”. Consciousness is only the beginning to be followed by “meaningful praxis” (hooks, 1994, 47). The first stage of transformation is where the individual becomes aware of the reality of their world. The second stage is critical reflection and action, praxis, as a collective in a movement towards transformation. (Freire, 2005). When the environment is right for

transformation, for awareness and realisation to flourish the possibility of harnessing potential becomes real. Thus providing the conditions for consciousness to be developed in the “pursuit of self-affirmation” (Freire, 2005, 54), consciousness as a means of emancipation from the oppressor.

Once aware of the reality of the world we live in, it is impossible to stop the process of realisation of self (Freire, 2005). The process of becoming conscious, as part of the process of becoming fully human, involves understanding the inequality we have experienced and its influence on our lived experience, our reality. However change cannot occur without praxis, the linking of theory to lived experience that leads to self-discovery (Freire, 2005).

The aim of this research is to demonstrate how the life stories of four adult learners in Ireland, offer insights into the development of understanding and knowledge for critical Adult and Community Education. The learners’ life experiences offer an insight into how inequality is perpetuated by structures in society. Their stories document their subjective experiences and understandings of societal influences in their lives. As their tales unfold we see how their marginalisation by societal structures influences how they are positioned in society and how indeed they position themselves (Ryan, A. B., 2015).

Chapter Three

A Sense of Place

Here you come upon the important fact that every revolutionary opinion draws part of its strength from a secret conviction that nothing can be changed. (Orwell, 2001, 142)

Awareness

The previous chapter detailed the theory and concepts that influenced the fundamental propositions at the core of this thesis; assessing the relational connection between power and the lived experience, exploring the barriers power presents to human development. This chapter will outline details of the methodology, methods and ethical considerations involved in this research study. The aim of this study is to provide relevant data to support the propositions put forward in this thesis. This research explores 'life stories' that offer an insight into the development of Four Human Beings who are placed on the margins of society. It is an investigation of the potential for the raising of consciousness which is an intricate and crucial component in the process of human development (Freire, 2005).

Consciousness is a prerequisite to the development of the self, of discovering our ontology as we critically reflect on our human condition and the structures that impede and advance our growth (Freire, 2005). It was an awareness of the structures of oppression in my formative years that influenced my view of the world. My ontological position developed during this time explicitly from a social

justice perspective. Growing up in a working class area in England and reading George Orwell, I became aware from an early age of a divide in society. Although I could not name this class consciousness at the time it was very pronounced, leaving me in no doubt that the inequity that surrounded me was unjust. During the subsequent years, through negative experiences and secondary school history lessons, I began to view the inequality in society as a product of the power held by the minority in society (Smith, 1987). At that time my perception of society was deliberately structured to prevent equity and ensure the minority elite maintained control (Marx, 1970).

Fatalism

I entered adulthood with the view that the status quo will never change, that marginalised people in society will always remain on the margins; that the inequality created and maintained by the powerful elite limits opportunities open to *Others* in society (Beauvoir, 1989). This created a sense of fatalism, that nothing could change this situation; this was my reality at that specific stage of my human development.

As a result of this standpoint a large proportion of my adult life was influenced by this fatalistic attitude that dominance would always prevail. The logical conclusion of this standpoint for me was that to challenge dominance would be futile as the ruling elite were too powerful. I carried this sense of fatalism into my research believing that oppression is a consequence of the power held by the minority elite. That the ruling elite in society use their power to colonise structures in society in order to reproduce inequality and maintain their position

(Marx, 1970). This created an impression, in my mind, that this power could not be challenged, therefore society would remain divided and inequity would be maintained. Critical reflection has been a major part of my research influencing my thinking and causing a fundamental shift in how I now perceive the world (hooks, 1994).

This caused me to look inwards, reflecting on my own experience of education and oppression. I came to realise that time and again my voice had been silenced, during my life, most notably in education. I began to deliberate on this questioning how we can access potential if we are excluded and silenced? I became aware of the influence societal structures have on the prevention or delay of the acquisition of self-knowledge, a sense of who we are in the world. This in turn led me to consider the possible confusion and crisis this could cause in people's lives and the consequences that may arise. These considerations informed the direction of my research (Smith, 2005). What became important was the need to provide a platform for people, who had either felt excluded or spent their lives on the fringes of society, to be heard. I wanted to give a voice to the silenced.

Different Ways of Knowing

In conducting this research I am using a post-positive approach to emphasise that theory and practice cannot be dichotomised, one supports the other providing a more authentic knowledge. This approach provides a place for the researcher within the research, making this a process of collaboration between the researcher and the respondent (Ryan, 2015). In adopting a feminist epistemology I am acknowledging the importance of a feminist lens when examining gender inequality and other marginalised groups. Using Feminist Standpoint as a methodology allows for the examination of the Hegelian and Marxist concept that the individual's awareness of their lived experience and material conditions influences how they understand their social world (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

Feminist Standpoint is a theory and a methodology, a perspective that helps us to identify and come to understand the world through the experiences of women who have been oppressed (Hesse-Biber, 2013). Standpoint theory is based on the concept that knowledge is affected by our subject position within society; that our starting point in the world comes from our actual experience of it and our knowledge of the world (Smith 1987). Smith adds that whilst no one can have complete objective knowledge, "our situated, everyday experience should serve as a 'point of entry' of investigation" (Smith, 2005, 10).

Marx's (1970) concept of 'Base and Superstructure' discussed in the previous chapter demonstrates how the powerful elite work to alienate the proletariat

reducing them to mere objects of production. In the same way the gendered division of labour, ascribed women's tasks to be those of Mother's and care givers (Beauvoir, 1989).

The critiquing of the notion of male supremacy provides us with an understanding of and a view of patriarchal structures and beliefs as the antithesis of more humane social relations (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). By exposing the injustice of gender subordination and the concept and process of patriarchy, one would hope that the implementation of a feminist standpoint can play an emancipatory role (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002); towards the freedom of *Others*.

Considerations

No methodology provides an absolute truth however, by using of feminist standpoint epistemology I hope that this research will provide, in some small part, a new way of understanding towards the goal of improving social justice and influencing change. Patriarchy exists throughout society on both a macro and micro level misusing power to marginalise and negate the development of *Others*. This oppression prevents or delays a person's ability to acquire a self-knowledge, a sense of who they are and how they view of the world.

Feminist standpoint theory is strongly debated by feminists including Hekman (1997), arguing that the complexities of women's lives do not allow for a concrete position from where knowledge can be constructed.

However, standpoint theory has evolved recognising other systems of oppression related to race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. In this way, standpoint as a methodology looks at the oppression of all marginalised groups in a relational way, aiming to confront the source of oppression. It is for this reason I have chosen a standpoint epistemological lens through which to analyse my research; with the intention of exposing oppression and identifying the sources of its domination.

Narrative and Life go Together

The title of this section “narrative and life go together” indicates why I have chosen to use narrative to conduct my research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 10). We have always told stories of our lives, using narrative as a methodology is a way of honouring this tradition. There are many approaches to narrative research. Initially, I considered using auto-ethnography until the direction of my research changed and this was no longer a suitable methodology. Narrative research offers a wide variety of methods to choose from, which allows for a creative approach to developing meaning through life stories. (Walsh, 2015). This approach allows for freedom of expression which makes it easier for the respondents to unfold their history in a way that it is true to them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

It is imperative that we listen to the experiences of exclusion and repression that *Others* have and provide an opportunity for them to speak of these experiences.

It is for these reasons I have chosen to use narrative for my methodology because of its ability to identify a deeper understanding of the lived experience. The respondents whose stories are told in the four case studies I present, have all experienced marginalisation. Narrative inquiry allowed them to tell their stories without any guidance from me as the researcher. My use of this approach enabled them to speak freely of what was important to them, their happy times, their sad times, their traumas and their transformations.

Using evidence from personal life stories can provide an awareness of significant areas that are not always transcribed. This raises the issue of validity, how worthy is the research claim to new knowledge? Polkinghorne (2007) suggests that in this instance, the plausibility of new knowledge claims should be decided in light of the arguments and evidence presented in the research. This gives credence to the truth of lived experience even if that experience is subjective, validating this use of inquiry.

As a narrative inquirer I am part of the process of inquiry as together, the respondent and I, work to gain a deeper understanding of being and our place in the world. Narrative inquiry is a “three-dimensional space” a space where the work is conducted between the respondent and myself, causing me the inquirer to encounter myself “in the past, the present and the future” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, 60). In doing so, we begin to illustrate our stories as we perceive them at that time, in the re-telling of our story and then in the reconstruction of our understanding of our story.

Narrative inquiry research provides a unique way of understanding both ourselves and the lives of our respondents.

Method

The process of story-telling is aided by the lack of structure in the interview process. An unstructured format is an essential aspect of my approach, as I believe that for the information to be as authentic as possible, it must come directly from the person's memories of their story. Nonetheless, I do acknowledge that it is never possible to measure authenticity as respondent's memories may not be reliable and they may choose to withhold information. However, the fundamental principle of my approach still remains; that removing as much researcher influence and bias as possible allows the respondent's voice and experience to be expressed without prejudice. It would be far easier to have questions, thus allowing myself as the researcher to remain in control of the direction and maintain a semblance of control over the responses.

In the same way Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 188) speak of their guiding principle "to focus on experience and follow where it leads". I believe that taking this leap of faith and trusting in the method is a more ethical way of gathering data. It provides the respondent with an opportunity to tell their story the they want it told; thus making the relationship between interviewer and respondent as equal as possible.

The Respondents

The four respondents were purposefully selected. I already knew each of them, however I was not aware of their pasts. One respondent volunteered to take part in the research and I approached the other three via email. I chose people whom I felt would be interested in taking part in this form of research. In the email I gave an outline of my research topic emphasising that the process would be as confidential as possible. The email also stated that every reasonable effort would be made to ensure that their anonymity would not be compromised. To conclude, I asked the prospective respondents to take their time considering their decision, giving them time to think of the possible consequences to their well-being if they agreed to take part. By taking part they would be disclosing very personal experiences, causing them to revisit memories and emotions that had lain dormant. Therefore, it was crucial that their consent was intentional and informed. I sent a further email containing a detailed information sheet which included a phone number to access a counsellor if needed and a copy of the consent form.

The Interviews

All interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed place following standard ethical guidelines. We talked informally before we started and it was at this point that they signed the consent form. Although the form stated that they could withdraw up until May Twentieth they were free to withdraw at any time. The interviews began with an opening statement, where I asked the respondents to talk about their lives, stating that they could start at any point and include whatever they wanted to talk about. In the main it was my intention not to interrupt. However, if during the interview the respondent became hesitant I

encouraged them with statements such as, 'take your time' or 'do you want to tell me more about that'. I took time at the end of each interview to talk to the respondent in order to minimise any residual effects of the interview. I also made myself available to them in the following weeks providing them with an opportunity to discuss the process if necessary. None of the respondents availed of this offer.

Ethical issues

I have discussed in the preceding sections how I addressed some of the ethical issues involved in this research project. However, ethical principles inform the whole process including details in the findings and discussions post submission. The maintenance of anonymity will be a continual process that will involve the respondents and I. Whilst I continue to do my utmost to protect their anonymity I also discussed with them their role in its maintenance. To talk about taking part in my research with friends would automatically identify them as respondents (Josselson, 2007). Living in small communities means that while we may try to think of every eventuality there can be no absolutes with regards to anonymity. I have quoted each respondent exactly as they spoke – hoping by doing so to honour their voice and truth.

Limitations

In this particular use of narrative inquiry the respondents were interviewed once only. It was not possible to carry out further interviews, this was due to a number of constraints. The main considerations were the availability of the respondent's and my own time constraints. All four of the respondents are

involved in Higher Education at varying levels and their availability was limited by their own study and course deadlines.

With regard to 'my own time constraints' this was caused by my research topic changing in January. At this point I feel it quite necessary to explain to the reader the reason for my change in direction:

For my own part my research placed me in a cycle of critical thinking and crisis that I found debilitating. I found myself in the midst of a collision of the past and the present, where fundamentally held beliefs were exposed and challenged. During the ensuing struggle familiar self-doubts were raised about my intellectual ability and the futility of a desire to influence change. This struggle went to the core of me affecting my ability to continue my work on this research project ultimately restraining me and delaying the process. As a result, I was prevented from conducting additional exploration of the respondent's narratives. Consequently the research findings may have been compromised. It will be left to the reader to decide if this is actually the case.

Chapter Four

Experiential Reflections

I learned about life
By paying its price,
By trying to stand up alone!
(Kavanaugh, 1982, 22)

Looking Back

The four respondents who took part in this narrative inquiry are; Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma all adult learners born between nineteen seventy five and nineteen eighty five, who returned to education during their thirties and forties. Their stories document their movements through life that culminated in a return to education; a place where they learned to critically reflect and where they began to think objectively as they developed a newer and deeper understanding. Through education they began to realise the different dimensions of their reality perceiving the complexities of these dimensions and the symbiotic relationship between them. Through this critical analysis of the world and the self, they accessed their potential to develop their consciousness, allowing them to fulfil “their ontological vocation to be more fully human” (Freire, 2005, 74). Their capacity for growth through the development of self-awareness and consciousness enabled them to achieve things beyond what they ever thought was possible.

Reaching this point in their lives had not run smoothly as each of them experienced turmoil and trauma from early childhood, that caused them to feel *different* or *excluded*. As adults some were able to verbalise a sense of exclusion and others alluded to marginalisation identifying areas where:

The concepts of the 'other' and 'othering' describe the ways in which, as individuals and communities, we make sense of and construct the identities of people who are different. (Stuart & Thomson, 1995, 3)

This chapter considers their life stories in an attempt to illuminate the societal influences that placed them on the margins perpetuating their experience of being *Othered*. Their stories were constantly about movement, physically and metaphorically. They demonstrated great strength and resilience in their development as they strived for something different, for a realisation of their potential, of their true authentic self. The following discussion and analysis draws on the spoken word of the respondents telling their life stories. The nine themes are: Adult Education, *Othering* and Power, Poverties and Needs, Power in the Classroom, Dark Clouds, Escaping the Self, Considering Difference, A Different Way of Being and Epiphany Moments.

Adult Education

All four respondents returned to adult education where they found a space that allowed them to think and reflect critically. It was a pivotal point in each of their lives as they searched for something in life that would help them to make sense of their past and give them a deeper understanding (Freire, 2005, hooks, 1994). Returning to education can be a frightening prospect even when one truly wants to improve one's life; bad memories of past experiences may be crippling and might not be too far away.

Marion felt strongly about getting the education she was denied as a child "I always knew throughout the whole of me life, I was thinking, I really want to go back and get an education":

I suppose what was stopping me as well was probably fear because the fear of failure was something that I always felt and then thinking, going back to my school days and the reason why I didn't really like school when I think about it that fear of failure do you know what I mean. So instead of trying and doing your best, like, you just drop out, but that's what I did, you weren't up to scratch or up to the mark.

Her fear was so intense she did not think she would be able to continue. This all changed with the support she received from her tutors "I kind of got a bit more confidence....my whole self-esteem developed and my confidence was a lot better". This is the positive environment that adult education provides when based on a philosophy of care and support as well as academic achievement. Then tutors understand that mature learners have a history that may make learning difficult for them, even the learning space can evoke traumatic memories as Marion attested.

This positive experience gave Marion a self-belief that increased her confidence increasing her self-esteem. Teachers recognising her ability praised her excellent work encouraging her to go further (Stuart, & Thomson, 1995). This urged her on so she applied to do a degree course as her thirst for knowledge intensified. Marion loved the;

stuff about being aware of your surroundings and being aware it's not the individuals fault for what happens it's more of a structural thing, you could blame yourself for things that happen but there's a lot of other factors that actually make things happen as well.

Ellen's return to education was such a positive move a place where she felt content and comfortable:

I was very happy in college, I loved college, I loved being there. I loved the course work [laughs] I was very content. I really enjoyed going in and hanging out, it felt that this is what I wanted, this is what I want to do.

Education provided the space for Ellen to produce her work in a format that suited her style of learning; her work expressed through a medium that was authentic to the way she thought. She received an award at her conferring in recognition of her creative accomplishments along with her First Class Honours Degree!

The thing that made it really special was because I was trying to be really true to me and the work that I was putting in I was trying - not trying but I was working on this creative side of me and to be acknowledged for that I was just like f***...absolutely blown away and like I could nearly cry.

Ellen became quite emotional as she talked. She was overwhelmed that she had received accolades for work that was a representation of her true self. Receiving the award affirmed who she was and what she had accomplished laying to rest a ghost from her past:

The degree was to tell me that I wasn't stupid like and that was evidence that I wasn't stupid, cos I would have been told I was stupid when I was younger and I believed it.

Ellen was vindicated she now had proof of her intelligence. She was no longer the stupid girl that her teachers had labelled and cast aside (Stuart, & Thomson, 1995). She went into employment believing that she was finished with education, that she had achieved all she wanted to, until a yearning began and she began to wonder was there more.

The possibility of going into further education began to grow. It was at this point her confidence began to falter. She decided however to trust her instinct and "just to go to college, just to see, who knows what will unfold".

Paul's return to education was very positive:

I had a massive interest in Sociology and Psychology so I thought I need to learn about this stuff instead of just reading about it. I need to learn about it first-hand the college had just started doing their lifelong learning and I was able to do an introduction to a psychology module. I remember the first night I was sitting in the room and sitting there just listening and suddenly everything started to make sense. It was like this kind of supposed hypothetical jigsaw started to piece together and I was ok. This is why this happens and this is why this happened and she started talking about social stresses and actor observer bias this or these kinds of things and it started to make a lot of sense.

It will become clear later in the chapter as Paul tells his story, how great the need for clarity and acceptance was for him. Adult education was a haven for him where he was accepted by his fellow students. He grew in confidence and in no time was able to contribute to group discussions. He went on to do a politics module and suddenly a whole new world opened up for him. He began to debate current events in class becoming quite passionate about gay rights:

I started arguing and putting across my point, how you know, because as a gay man my lifestyle was classed as criminal only a few years prior. College offered me a language and a skill to challenge ideas, verbalise my own feelings and most of all break free from a mould. I now see the world through a different lens. I see the cogs and gears shift and turn at all levels of policy, protest, lobbying and debating. We are all catalysts for change, no matter how small a cog we represent.

College played a huge part in Paul's transformation as he decided to make changes in his life that would have lasting effects.

Gemma's chosen college course proved very supportive giving her the trust and confidence to open up and view things differently "I had to write reflectively and talk about past experiences....and why I thought a certain way". This was a huge leap for Gemma who had grown up with the fear of being labelled:

Anyone one who was different were criticised and ridiculed at home. People with mental health problems have always been labelled 'they're not right in the head' is a great saying in our house.

This attitude prevented Gemma from opening up and discussing how she was feeling in order to develop an understanding of what was happening to her.

Education provided the space and support for Gemma which allowed her to develop her capacity to think critically and discover her sense of self, thus moving towards a more advanced consciousness (hooks, 1994):

I decided I'm not going to hide why I feel this way.... being able to talk about it openly it just gave me a great feeling that it's ok to have a mental health issue.

The use of discussion in the classroom allowed Gemma to learn from her colleagues that she was not alone in her difference. Opening up to other people was a big thing and the supportive environment gave them the courage to talk:

Yeah there were periods in our lives when we couldn't cope, em and it's ok to say that to you but then I wonder is that because we had, you know we had bonded

They all shared their experiences speaking of the difficult times in their lives and how they too were *Othered*; how *Othering* affected their lives and influenced their choices (Beauvoir, 1989). Through dialogue they were able to explore the social construction of their identity which was at odds with their authentic self. Gemma discovered that her fear of being labelled was not unique, that it was a part of a social process that was commonly both accepted and encouraged.

Recognising the influence that knowledge or in this case lack of knowledge has on societal attitudes spurred Gemma on to continue in education. Initially she needed to advance her own learning, to gain an understanding of her own life. Gemma also wanted to continue in education to develop her knowledge and theoretical thinking and to gain a qualification that would enable her to access

employment where she could really make a difference, where she could work to change people's attitudes towards mental health.

Considerations

These explorations and challenges encouraged the respondent's growing consciousness providing them with new insights into their lived experiences, helping them to understand the complexities of their lives. The most important aspect identified in this section is the importance of adult and community education which provides space that is both inclusive and supportive of the needs and aspirations of adult learners (Thompson, 1997). Although their awareness had begun to develop in their personal lives, as individuals they began to know and understand who they were; this process was accelerated on their return to college where they found a supporting community.

Freire's model of "humanist and libertarian pedagogy" (2005, p.54) is evident in the respondent's experiences of adult learning. It is a place where teachers "can teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a climate of free expression" (hooks, 1994, 44). It was in this space the respondents came to recognise the dominance of their oppressors, the people who considered them as *Others*. This was realised through critical reflection, which in turn enhanced their critical awareness allowing them to challenge their reality through reflection and taking action (Freire, 2005).

The respondent's experience raised their consciousness to a point where their self-realisation continued; once they began to question and develop new knowledge the cycle continued. The more they knew the more they needed to know, the more they needed to understand.

This is why they are still in education, developing their knowledge and aspiring to make a contribution to the world.

Othering and Power

At the age of six months **Gemma** and her parents came to live on the father's family farm, where her grandmother lived. At a very young age Gemma was singled out as her grandmother's 'pet'. On the surface this seems harmless enough. However from the start Gemma's grandmother was exerting her power in her household, dividing her son's family. "My grandmother was a very powerful woman and so from a baby I was a pawn" Gemma realised that being her grandmothers 'pawn' deprived Gemma of her place as a daughter and sister:

My grandmother planted a seed in me that my parents didn't love me....I suppose this started off a thing of yeah that I wasn't loved by my family.

This act of deprivation had a devastating effect on Gemma's development and a lasting impact on how she lived her life. The power relations Gemma experienced denied her a place in her family, family love and support. In this instance Gemma's grandmother was *the oppressor* (Beauvior, 1989, Marx,

1970, Freire, 2005) she exerted her power in order to control her son and his family. This was continuing the domination she had applied to her own children:

When she was younger she was always in control she was, like, my aunts and uncles they feared her you know in their forties and fifties they were always looking for approval from her.

The circumstance of Gemma's family life meant that from a very early age she had to cope with feelings of confusion and anger "I became very rebellious as a child I never listened to anything that my parents told me".

Her forced isolation by her grandmother left her feeling unloved and rejected by her parents especially her father:

I suppose because of that I craved attention, I craved I suppose male attention it was a big thing because I felt like I didn't have a father.

The deprivation of essential needs of protection, identity, affection and understanding seriously affected Gemma's development leaving her vulnerable and denying her happiness. At age eleven, Gemma was groomed by a man who did casual work on the farm:

In my head it was a relationship that happened between us, but I knew it wasn't right but I didn't think it was wrong, if that makes sense.

Gemma was devastated and confused by the actions of this man who exerted power over her, deluding her into feeling responsible for what was happening. Neither the school nor her parents detected the signals of Gemma's distress. The power of her male oppressor was demonstrated by his ability to make her accept his reality (Beauvoir, 1989). The effects of this horrendous experience were to prove severe and long lasting.

Poverties and Needs

When we think of poverty we initially think of lack of money that restricts one's living conditions, one's housing, one's nutrition and one's health. However poverty is not exclusively defined by economics "any fundamental human need that is not adequately satisfied reveals a human poverty" (Max-Neff, 1991, 18). Deprivations of other fundamental needs such as education, identity and affection also have a lasting impact on human development (Max-Neff, 1991)

Our respondents experienced many such 'poverties' throughout their lives seriously depriving them of their human needs. Marion and Ellen were marginalised from the start.

Marion felt marginalised by the poverty she experienced and the community she grew up in "I come from a family there are seven children and me mum and dad basically a disadvantaged area". She met with low expectations in her family, school and community "I wasn't aware that I was oppressed, say I was always aware that there was something trying to hinder your progress".

Ellen comes from a family of six where there were low expectations; where a big part of family life was "seeing my own Mum and Dad drinking and being unconscious". These were the initial things that made Ellen feel different and singled her out as *Other*.

Paul's father had to earn a living by working away so this affected the dynamics of his family. As the youngest he was left to his own devices "I was probably in the neighbour's house or else away fishing or down the field". Paul lost a very close friend in primary school which left him feeling bereft and confused about loss. Not being able to talk to his mum and his dad away working Paul was not given the support he needed at this time.

The respondent's each experienced deprivation of human needs by both family and school: Ellen's early memories were of her parents being unconscious from alcohol. Family life failed to provide them with the fundamental human needs of support and affection. The respondents did not understand the contradictions their lives presented, their reality was distorted and nothing made sense. This duality and neglect interfered with their sense of self, causing a state of; "contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression". (Freire, 2005, 54)

Considerations

The automatic response in a situation like this is to hold the parents responsible for not providing the conditions that satisfy the needs of their children. However parents are not always in a position to meet the needs of their children. They too were subordinated by the hidden power of the hierarchy that subjected them to inequality, negating their developmental needs (Lukes, 2005). They suffered the same deprivation of human needs leaving them without the skills necessary to cope with their children's emotional needs, perpetuating the cycle of human poverties (Max-Neff, 1991). Those who held the power, the hierarchal elite, had

ultimate control over the societal structures that reproduced oppression (Marx, 1970).

Their parents succumbed to these patriarchal demands, internalised the oppression and became complicit reproducers of inequality in the own homes (Lukes, 2005).

The lives of the parents of the respondents were constrained by alcohol, living with in-laws or the inaction of the government at the time, which failed to address the issues of poverty, unemployment and long working hours (Lukes, 2005). This was evident as fathers were forced to live away due to lack of employment and had to work long hours to provide for their families. In the meantime the impoverished mothers left behind had to live and deal with the consequences of these absences. Mothers who were left at home to cope with the everyday poverty, mothers who were denied their independence and mothers who were judged so harshly if they did not meet with the perfect standards of raising a good family. Women had little or no choice but to submit to the patriarchal indoctrination that they were subjected to; inevitably they internalised it and sublimely reproduce it in the home (Beauvoir, 1989).

The role of the respondent's mothers went unrecognised in the patriarchal society they were part of. There was no recognition of their material contribution as it was the accepted norm that women took the role of care givers, negating for them self-development opportunities and denying them freedom (Beauvoir, 1989).

The plight of Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma did not end; they continued to experience subordination and alienation from the people in positions of authority who worked to maintain the status quo (Marx, 1970). The next section discusses the reproduction of inequality in education, where the lessons learned are not necessarily found in the curriculum.

Power in the Classroom

Chapter two discussed Freire's (2005) analysis of formal education as a structure used to reproduce inequality, to ensure the hierarchy maintain their position and continue to hold on to their power and control. This colonisation was and is a deliberate action that serves to maintain the duality of the oppressor and the oppressed, preventing any attack on the status quo (Althusser, 2006). In this instance education acts as an instrument of control by perpetuating and reinforcing societal inequalities and class difference:

Bourgeois values in the classroom create a barrier blocking the possibility of confrontation and conflict, warding off dissent. (hooks, 1994, 178)

The experiences of Ellen and Marion in school highlighted the role education plays as a structure colonised by the ruling elite to reproduce inequality (Freire, 2005). They were both subjected to patriarchal domination because of their gender and class which reinforced their lack of self-worth. The relationship between subordination and self-worth is found in the language of the oppressor.

The language of the oppressor attaches labels to *Others*, when these labels are engrained into the sub-conscious they influence people's beliefs and thoughts (Lukes, 2005). **Marion** describes the resulting feeling "when you are young it's so engrained that you don't feel good enough".

Ellen's sense of inferiority was reinforced by secondary school teachers who continually barraged her with derogatory comments. They were "saying things like I was only fit for the factory" and other teachers saying "things like I was the worst O'Brien ever to enter secondary school". The school system failed to educate Ellen and made her believe the resulting inertia to be her own fault. "I really wanted to do well but for some reason I just couldn't, couldn't seem to move, there was always something holding me back". Ellen's experience of secondary education emphasises the idea that individuals are to blame for their lack of achievement. In actual fact the institutions fail to take responsibility for their own failures and their own role as it "differentiates and limits who can be a learner" (Stuart & Thomson, 1995). In this way educational institutions provide "success or esteem to those who fit the system and failure and shame to those who don't" (Scheff, 1990, 7).

Paul's experience in primary school was very positive, this changed in secondary school as at this time his confusion around his sexuality began to affect his life. "I started to kind of turn into myself, there was definitely more bullying directed more towards sexuality". He could not understand the way he was feeling causing him to lose interest in school "I just withdrew and stopped giving a sh** and my grades plummeted".

Paul's sense of identity was distorted by marginalisation and discrimination linked to the ignorance, intolerance, bigotry and persecution because of people's sexual orientation. Paul's experience of bullying and exclusion confirms how human development can be stunted when needs are not met. The existence of such 'poverties' can lead to the development of pathologies, "Isolation, marginalization.....destroy people's identity and break up families, destroying natural affection" (Max-Neff, 1991, 22).

Lacking in social development and family support Paul was left vulnerable, unable to cope when singled out as the *Other*. The bullying identifies the hetero-normative community Paul lived in; his sexuality had not been an issue in primary school, however once he reached teenage years and he was identified as different, this changed. The need to discover his true self became a big issue for Paul as he went in search of who he was.

Considerations

Subordination in the classroom denied the respondents an education as they were pushed to the periphery because they did not fit into the social system. Education conceals the real intention of the oppressor which is to "preserve a profitable situation" and prevent the development of "critical faculties" (Freire, 2005, 73). Without the ability to think critically development of self and ability to flourish is negated. Marx's (1970) concept of class relations, the structural reproduction of inequality provide insight in to the respondent's experience how their circumstances determined their choice and opportunity. The negative experiences in education, family and community life resulted in limited

opportunities and choices for the respondents as they tried to come to terms with the inequalities and discrimination that they suffered and could not understand or identify.

Dark clouds

Gemma struggled to fit into secondary school as she felt like an outsider “I would have been bullied a lot at school for being heavy”. She had an extremely difficult time as her experience of being abused resurfaced;

I suppose all these hormones started setting in and I'd started secondary school and everything kind of came to a head and I suppose I had all this stuff buried inside me.

During this time Gemma took her first over-dose, following her admittance to hospital Gemma received a therapy referral and attended her first session;

Mum and Dad came with me and I went in on my own into the room and I suppose, [pause] I can't remember what I said but I know that I gave indications that, that there was you know, that something sexual had happened with an older person.

When the session finished Gemma was taken out of the room and her parents were brought in. The therapist told them everything she had disclosed, Gemma could not believe this had happened she felt so angry that she was betrayed:

So when I got home my parents were furious, absolutely furious at me, they were mad at me, and you know they didn't believe what was being said. Em so I suppose that was just another nail in the coffin you know and another reason that you know this whole thing of they don't love me.

When telling her story Gemma consciously spoke of labelling and judging people, that home “was always very negative” where she experienced constant put downs. Her parent’s reaction had a devastating impact on her as they added the label of liar to the list of previous judgements against her. Feelings of rejection, distrust, anger and isolation, left Gemma overwhelmed “just like the world was against me”. Gemma’s pain continued as she was excluded by her peers on her return to school further adding to her anger. At this young age Gemma had been failed by her family, school and health professionals, losing her trust in adults she felt abandoned and alone. Gemma left school after third year and on her sixteenth birthday a month later left home.

As **Ellen** came near the end of school she was petrified that she would “end up in the factory”. She managed to do a one year sport course in college however when this came to an end it seemed she still only had one option, the factory. With her teacher’s jibes, “only fit for the factory”, ringing in her ears her anger increased and alcohol became an even bigger part of her life;

That was it my options was the factory and I remember getting ‘sooo pissed’ so drunk and I remember leaving this place drunk this pub in [village name] and I could hardly walk. I must have been 18 going into 19 and I was starting the factory the next day and I got so drunk I could hardly walk and I remember getting out of the car because I needed to go to the toilet and I punched a wall and I broke my hand.

Ellen eventually went to work in the factory and although she continued to play sport alcohol became an even bigger part of her life “but sure there was no control”;

Cos at this stage I'd progressed to where I drank for oblivion I drank to be unconscious and I for about 2 years I wanted to die solid just wanted to die and every day I woke up it was just like oh f*** another f***ing day of misery.

Marion left school “I dropped out at the age of 15” initially she went to work in a factory, “that was the thing to do work in the sewing factory, you get paid, you can contribute to the family and you can have your own money”. Marion despised the job but resigned herself to following the norms of her family “my mother left school when she was about 14 and my father left school when he is was 13 and he went straight into work.” This was the way in her family “I suppose they didn't really value education”. Marion submerged in class consciousness identified with family and community tradition which emphasised to her the importance of work and earning money in order to survive. The reality of the oppressed is distorted by the oppressor who “acts to submerge human beings consciousness” (Freire, 2005, 51).

The ruling elite in order to maintain their wealth needed a manual work force that did not have the mental capacity to challenge authority (Marx, 1970). Therefore the language of the ruling elite, education was for others and not for the working class, became ‘internalised and reproduced’ (Lukes, 2005). By identifying herself in terms of class relations Marion was in danger of being blinded, unable to recognise the objectification taking place within her family.

She was subjected to the role of care giver to her younger siblings, at an early age. This placed Marion in a position where she could easily have succumbed to the misconception that she was inferior to the men in her family and community. If this had been internalised and accepted she would have been subjected to subordination that would deny her freedom, negating the possibility of self-realisation. As presented in the theory of Beauvoir (1989).

Marion made up her mind that she was not going to conform to tradition “I wanted to live my life the way I wanted to live my life”. Marion chose freedom over servitude by leaving for England where she lived for fourteen years:

I knew inside me there was better, I didn't want to stay here I didn't want to just to get married the way people expect you to just get married have children be a home and I thought no I'm not doing that.

Escaping the Self

Gemma, like Marion, eventually went to England as all of the oppression and trauma she experienced in her short life took its toll:

I got into taking drugs and drinking just to suppress all the stuff going on in my head and the feelings I was going through and of course that brought me down an awful road.

Ellen's family life was in turmoil with everyone in the household drinking there was no stability or respite. When Ellen's best friend became engaged Ellen fell out with her; she felt abandoned and betrayed by her friend who was her only support. She applied and was accepted onto a college course in England, she left;

To be honest a part of me didn't want to go, but the other part of me, that part of me was so angry at life and at my friends and at my family and I just thought f*** yez I need to get away from here.

For Marion, Gemma and Ellen, England offered no reprieve from the life they had left behind. **Ellen** reflects:

I know I wanted to escape.....to have fun and to feel free but I never felt free there was always like stuff like bagged, that was sitting there and every time I drank it would come up like or I would be really angry and do really stupid things..... like, I don't know I found myself sitting on a bridge ready to jump over, stupid stuff and but that was all drink, drink related.

For Gemma, England was a complete blur "it was all drink, it was all drugs, it was all just you know a constant escapism".

Unfortunately there was no escape as past experiences continued to manifest themselves in the present as **Gemma** “went from one terrible relationship to another terrible relationship and always with older men”:

It was like a cycle every six months or so something would happen and I would get drunk - drunk to the point where I would crash a car or I would put myself in some sort of stupid danger where I would have a fight with somebody and it was just this anger huge anger.

Marion refers briefly to her years spent in England “cos it wasn’t all rosy in England I had my ups and downs” alluding to difficult times.

Paul’s last years in school were extremely difficult as he grappled with his sense of identity, which in turn affected his home and school life. Paul started to think about at getting away, seeing college as his only option he escaped to college. Paul like, Gemma and Ellen, could not leave his past behind. Lack of money meant he had very poor accommodation “weight and stuff just dropped off because I had very little money”. A combination of little money for food and stress contributed to Paul’s weight loss of two or three stone:

A lot of the time was spent in my room trying to understand who I was because I was so confused I didn’t know who I was to my friends I didn’t know who I was to my family.

Paul felt responsible for what was happening to him, as he insisted on going to college, even though he knew his family could not afford the expense. Paul also took responsibility for his sense of confusion with regards to his identity as he believed that there was something wrong with him. Because of his struggles he had become introverted and withdrawn.

Considering Difference

After one year away, college was not what **Paul** thought it would be, so he returned home. At this point Paul's sister asked had he anything he wanted to tell her, however he was not able to "I definitely lacked the vocabulary and the understanding to articulate the words of gay because I wasn't one hundred per cent sure". Paul was further hindered by family attitudes to the gay community "I have three gay cousins who were treated extremely badly by my wider family in terms of being ostracised".

Ellen's experience was similar, she started a relationship with a woman in England, however she was afraid to reveal her sexuality to her family "being catholic and being brought up to believe that you know homosexuality was wrong and was of the devil". Her brother-in-law's words were also in the back of her head "all gay people should be put up against a wall and shot".

When Ellen eventually came out to her family on the surface they seemed to be accepting even though:

The next day my Dad went up to my sister-in-law whose a nurse to ask her was there anything they could do for me to help me, I don't know what, to help me not to be this way.

Paul and Ellen's experience of *Othering* was a product of patriarchal oppression (Stuart. & Thomson, 1995). Both came from a traditional rural background with parents who held staunch catholic beliefs. Their parents internalised the norms and values of their time with regards to what is considered 'normal'. In this way people are closed to difference because they do not recognise or understand

difference. Society is so indoctrinated with hetro-normativity norms and values that Paul was unable to develop the awareness and language that would allow him to accept his homosexuality.

A Different Way of Being

As the years passed the four respondents began to feel differently, still being labelled as Other sustained their feelings of anguish, however glimmers of hope began to appear. Marion and Ellen spoke of knowing there was something else out there for them, **Marion** felt “there was something missing and you know, like, there was something out there for me”. **Ellen** in the same way spoke of “something in me was driving me forward there was something in me that wanted to push me forward”.

Gemma and Paul decided they wanted to take control of their situation by expressing what they wanted, in terms of an intervention for what they were experiencing. **Gemma** left England and lived aboard, on a farm, for three months where she had a very positive experience, after this she decided to go home to Ireland, back to her parent’s house. After experiencing years of being medicated and then dismissed from mental health services she decided:

The first thing I was going to do was register with the mental health services in [hometown] and I was going to tell them that I didn't want medication that I wanted to talk to somebody.

Paul returned to his doctors once again and this time said straight out “I need help in terms of my identity, in terms of being gay”. Paul knew that he needed to leave home, to get away and access intensive therapy; he withdrew his savings and went to a centre in Dublin. Paul spent a couple of months in the centre where he came to understand his condition described to him as “a personal identity disorder, there was a disconnect, who I was and who I was portraying myself to be”. This is an example of a patriarchal society that subordinates people who do not comply with their hetero-normative ‘ideal’. Repressed and isolated *Others* are forced into acting out parts in society that are fundamentally at odds with who they are, denying them their authentic self (Beauvoir, 1989). Once Paul came to understand ‘the disconnect’, he felt he was better positioned to act on this knowledge, giving him a sense of freedom.

Ellen after a particularly bad bout of drinking that left her hospitalised realised that she could not continue living that way. She was ashamed and embarrassed when her niece saw her just after her discharge:

It was like I was looking at myself back as a child [pause] I suppose seeing my own Mum and Dad drinking and being unconscious.

Ellen remembered thinking “I never want her to see me like this again”. Ellen was devastated that her niece whom she loved dearly had witnessed this. Retelling her story was extremely difficult throughout for Ellen, at points such as this her voice would become barely audible as she relived the trauma of challenging episodes of her life.

Although nothing happened immediately Ellen eventually arrived at the point where she knew she had to change, speaking quietly but with emphasis “I remember thinking I need to stop drinking, like, I need to stop drinking “.

Considerations

Marion, Gemma, Paul and Ellen’s life experiences were extremely difficult as they navigated political power structures that conspired against them expelling them to the periphery of society, confirming them as *Other*. This social construction is used to submerge one’s consciousness ensuring compliance and obedience ensuring the hierarchal order is maintained (Marx, 1970). Their experiences in formal education denied them the opportunity to develop their critical capacity that would enable them to understand the world and their place in that world. However their life experiences provided them with a different type of courage and hard earned insight as they navigated their lives. These unique resources became invaluable as they returned to education and the possibility of a different way of being in the world.

The capacity to think critically offers the prospect of gaining a deep and meaningful understanding of ourselves; this leads to a process of self-realisation and self-acceptance (Freire, 2005). This self-knowledge and self-acceptance leads in time to freedom, transcendence and personal freedom. Over the years the respondent’s self-awareness grew, enabling them to sense that life had something more to offer. Adult Education offered Marion, Paul, Ellen and Gemma the opportunity to develop their critical thinking and their consciousness (Freire, 2005. Hooks, 1994).

Epiphany Moments

Freire (2005) and hooks (1994) talk of the transformation that can occur through 'self-realisation' and through 'humanization'. The Respondents throughout their lives developed a capacity to think critically which empowered them to make changes to their lives. They spoke of different moments, in time, that highlighted where their self-realisation had occurred. These 'epiphany moments' happened unexpectedly at different points in each of their lives.

Describing how she felt as she began teaching **Marion** said:

I was like my god I can actually do this, *me*, people kind of say that you can touch a pinnacle or self-actualise or not even self-actualise, but go to a place that I was really happy with. I just say that the challenges that I faced were really challenging and that was when I really had to push myself, to get out of that self-doubt. Like positive affirmations I do every morning, I would do yoga, meditation to work on myself basically... [I now think] I can actually do this to put your mind to it you can do anything. So now I think I can actually, if I want to, do anything in life once I put my mind down to it, and determination, and persistence, and the whole lot I know I can actually do anything that I want to do.

Ellen's battle with alcohol, as described earlier, continued until one day she realised:

I remember thinking you know the film Shawshank Redemption 'get busy living or get busy dying' and that was my choice like either you're going to stop this or you're going to die.

However **Ellen's** struggle continued as she tried to stop drinking a number of times, then on one of these occasions:

I remember looking out the window thinking what's going on, what's happening, why do you want to drink, like what is it? And this thought just dropped into my head, this thought came out of nowhere like 'Ellen' it's

just a thought it doesn't mean you have to act on it. And since that day alcohol has no power over me whatsoever, cos I now know it's just a thought that I don't have to act on it. That the thought only has power when I act on it and then it has power.

Paul still unsure of what direction his life was taking, went away with friends for his thirtieth birthday. Whilst walking over a mountain range he top first:

There was this great expanse of mountains and scenery and I can just picture it vividly, and I had a spiritual moment that I have never been able to explain since. And I think for me spiritually it is definitely the only spiritual moment I have ever had but it allowed me to reflect very, very quickly in a short space of time as in, you are thirty this is a changing point.

Gemma, during her twenties, left England to work aboard on a farm and this was the first really positive experience in her life. The farm she lived on was a part of a community of farms, where work and produce were shared out. It was here that Gemma learned what it was like to have conversations:

Everybody, it was like one big family we would work all day in the fields in our bare feet and you know everybody would sit around a huge table, everybody would come together to make dinner ... it was so alien for me like it was just completely different em and it took me a while to open up you know and to become part of it but I em we would just sit and talk about just the world in general.

This experience highlighted for Gemma a different way of being where people supported and cared for each other. She realised the “power of people coming together, and how that can make a change and, it just opened up this whole new world to me”

These moments could be described as 'transformative'. They were actually 'transcendent occurrences', 'epiphany moments', that provided clarity and inspiration to the respondents, enabling them to see the world around them, see their place in the world and how the two are connected.

'Transcendence' in this instance is not a theological concept taught by religious institutions. It is actually a time, a moment of awakening for the human spirit or mind, which enables that human being to move forward - go beyond their previous limitations and realise what they never thought possible. They can actually surpass themselves. The Respondents began to sense that life had more to offer and that they too had something to offer society. Adult education offered Marion, Paul, Ellen and Gemma the opportunity to develop their critical thinking and their consciousness; as they became more aware they began to search for meaning in their experiences. Adult education provided them with the space and skills which empowered them to combine their lived experience with critical thinking and in turn praxis (Freire, 2005, Hooks, 1994).

The Respondents Now

Each of the four respondents is still in education, at various levels, continuing to develop their own understanding of their past lives and all that this entails. They all feel positive and motivated and now wish to give something back to their individual communities in the hope that they can make a difference in the lives of others. They each volunteer or work with organisations who are working to help change the lives of marginalised people, the lives of *Others*.

Marion is working in education helping to make a difference to the lives of early school leavers, by providing suitable learning methodologies, in an inclusive environment.

Ellen as a volunteer advocate for an addiction charity, offers support and advice to people dealing with addictions.

Paul is volunteering with members of a minority group, who are struggling to come to terms with their sexuality, in their community that does not always understand difference.

Gemma is a volunteer with a mental health organisation working to remove the stigma surrounding mental health issues. She contributes to raising awareness and educating people.

Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma empowered themselves and now they are working to empower other people thus hopefully, enabling them to also make changes to their lives. The Respondents now feel that anything is possible and want to share this conviction, this knowledge and understanding, with the people in their communities.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

(Cavafy, 1992, 36)

Realisations and Discoveries

This exploration of the experiential reflections of four adult learners in Ireland sets out to determine if 'insights' could be drawn from their stories, particularly in relation to the development of understanding and knowledge for critical Adult and Community Education. The life stories of Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma detailed their growth physically, emotionally and intellectually. These individuals demonstrated a great strength and resilience as they strove for something different, a realisation of their potential and of their true authentic self.

At the outset of this research project I had a very definite conception of inequality. I believed that the powerful elite used the structures of society to promote authoritarian ideals in order to maintain the status quo (Marx, 1970). I now believe that this has been confirmed. I discovered that those who did not conform, who did not submit to the authority, were expelled and expelled themselves to the margins of society.

The following discussion outlines the findings of my research. I hope to demonstrate and prove from the reflections of the adult learners I interviewed, that they provided insights into the development of understanding and knowledge for critical Adult and Community Education. The findings offer an opening to a discussion on the inequity in society and the harnessing of potential for growth and self-realisation.

Education

A significant aspect identified is the importance of Adult and Community Education which provides a space that is both inclusive and supportive of the needs and aspirations of adult learners. Although their awareness had begun to develop in their earlier lives, on their return to college the respondents, as adults, began to know and understand who they were, thus accelerating their self-realisation. Adult education provided the learning conditions that satisfied the requirements of the respondents; this was a setting devoid of a controlling hierarchy. Adult education provided a safe space where they could explore their lived experiences in a trusted community. Together they created a deeper understanding of their lives and the world in general. While accepting each other they began the process of accepting themselves. Self-development and the growth that this facilitated proved to be an essential element of their return to education.

Subordination of women

A further insight can be drawn from the role of the respondents' mothers who were not recognised in the patriarchal society that they were part of. There was no recognition of their material contribution as it was the accepted norm that women took on their many roles thus negating their opportunities for self-development and denying their freedom (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Women who had little or no choice but to submit to the patriarchal indoctrinations they were submerged in, internalised and subliminally reproduced the oppression in their homes (Beauvoir, 1989). The cycle of developmental poverties was thus maintained as they were unable to provide care, support and affection to their families because of the many demands upon them. This cycle was perpetuated by the structures in society that continued to subordinate women, children and all *Others* (Beauvoir, 1989).

'Othering' and Power

From this research I understand that structures in society act as agents for the powerful elite reproducing their authoritarian ideals to maintain the hierarchal order (Marx, 2001). These agents acting on behalf of the Patriarchy are to be found throughout society, in the home and throughout the community. However when people begin to develop and grow, they start to realise from the knowledge and understanding they have gained, that they do not have to accept the labels of *Othering* (Beauvoir, 1989), that they can move beyond it. I have come to realise that human beings have the power to overcome not only oppression, but realise that they have ultimate choice.

Deprivations and Potentials

Max-Neff (1991) discusses the identification of fundamental human needs as deprivations and potentials. The growth and development of the respondents up to the present moment indicates that the experience of deprivation in any stage of life does not predetermine the outcome of that life. From this I can now see that development is a continual movement, as defined by Freire (2005) and hooks's (1994), a progress that involves critical thinking and action towards liberation and freedom. The findings show that realisation of self is not a destination it is a continual motion through time.

Consciousness Raising; the Way Forward

The findings clearly show that Adult and Community Education play an integral part in the development of critical thinking, aiding learners to move towards self-realisation. While also supporting learners as they develop confidence and courage and dialogue with each other. The Respondents moved towards finding their identity, to know who they are and where they fit in the world; towards a freedom, a freedom where they could accept themselves instead of looking for acceptance from others.

The epiphany moments that lead to how they lived their lives indicated the contribution that education makes not just to the individual but also to the communities where the individual lives and works. The findings demonstrate the turning of deprivations into potentials, thus satisfying the respondents' needs and the needs of the community, strengthening communities in a reciprocal way (Max-Neff, 1991).

Considerations

It must be acknowledged at this point that the respondents and their siblings did not necessarily see or respond to the experiences of home or school in quite the same way. As is the case in the wider community how a person responds to a given situation is a complex matter. However it is clearly indicated from the respondents' stories and the theoretical concepts identified in chapter two, that structures in society contributed to their *Othering* (Beauvoir, 1989). It can therefore be argued that the powers behind these structures should be held accountable (Max-Neff, 1991).

For the future

Unexpected themes

There are some themes identified in the respondents' stories that it is not possible to discuss in this thesis due to the limitations of this piece of work. The respondents each continued to gravitate back to their family home. Whilst further investigation could explore the extensive theme of 'belonging', there were also other underlying issues – issues of seeking acceptance and also a need to develop their parents and families understanding of difference. The data suggested the respondents wanted to educate their families and wider community about tolerance and acceptance.

The theme of 'responsibility' ran throughout the stories of the respondents; not being responsible, being too responsible and resenting the responsibility forced upon them within and outside the family. It is difficult at

this time to identify the implications and source of this very complex theme.

There towards the end of the interviews it became evident that the real challenge to the status quo can come through community activism. Each of the respondents are now working within community organisations to make changes in the lives of people on the margins of society. However due to the amount of data gathered on the life stories of the respondents, I made a conscious decision to concentrate on individual realisation of self. The first step towards liberation is the raising of individual consciousness then, individuals can come together to take the second step toward social action for meaningful change (Freire, 2005).

I consider social action for change to be the future part of this research. It is too wide a topic to include in this thesis and would have compromised the exploration of individual consciousness raising.

Research

The findings from this research offer an opening for further exploration of social action for change. Once self-realisation is achieved people can come together and combine critical thinking with reflection and action towards achieving liberation as individuals and in communities (Freire, 2005).

I believe the results of this inquiry have a place in informing future policy, practice and research. As discussed my exploration provides a valuable insight for those working in Adult and Community Education offering practitioners a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the adult learners. Everyone has a personal story; when adults walk into a classroom they can be fragile and vulnerable. Therefore these learners need an educational setting that is supportive and inclusive, devoid of hierarchy. This research highlights how successful the practice of Adult and Community Education is. Therefore education policy should support the practice of adult education and should provide the conditions for its further development.

The findings support the existence of deprivations in society and their devastating consequences, not only in the past but also in the present. Whilst acknowledging further exploration of this is necessary, I believe that this thesis

can add to the discussion of policy in the area of inequality and human development. Further discussion and subsequent action is necessary in order to ensure future policy works towards a more inclusive and sustainable society. Future policy development should be based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs for all in society.

I believe it is important to continue developing and expanding this research as a more in-depth study is necessary, in order to provide a more informed contribution to the current body of knowledge. The field of post-positive research, in particular narrative research, offers the possibility of creating a deeper understanding (Ryan, 2015). This research has demonstrated human beings ability to overcome the barriers, constructed by society, in order to move towards a self-realisation. They have begun the process of working with communities to effect real social change (Freire, 2005). Further research, with the respondents could continue follow their lives and hopefully provide further insights into how an egalitarian society can be achieved.

Summary

Reverting now to the original question:

Can the life stories of adult learners offer insights into the development of understanding and knowledge for critical adult and community education?

I believe that the Respondents' stories provide conclusive insights towards understanding and knowledge for critical Adult and Community Education. These insights will further inform the movement towards social activism, in order to challenge current policy and pursue effective social change.

Whilst my initial concept of inequality remains, conducting this research has broadened my knowledge and understanding through the theoretical concepts, and the life stories of Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma. In the telling of their life experience a deeper understanding emerged of how they survived as *Others*, (Beauvoir, 1989) because of adversity - not in spite of it. The deprivations they experienced in their lives had a hugely negative impact on how their lives progressed. However, contained within those deprivations were potentials and in harnessing these potentials the respondents achieved what they never thought possible (Max-Neff, 1991).

The deprivations they experienced were turned into positives as they now, today, strive to enhance the lives of others. Looking at human beings in terms of their deprivations and then in terms of their potential, we begin to recognise the possibility of their achievement and freedom (Max-Neff, 1991).

Adult and Community Education provided Marion, Ellen, Paul and Gemma with the space to develop their capacity for critical thought. They then joined with others to help make changes within communities, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the power of the individual and the community, a power which offers an opportunity for change. Change that brings with it an offer of hope and possibility that oppression can be challenged and we can move forward towards a different future. A future based on equity which offers everybody the opportunity to move towards self-realisation and the opportunity to move towards freedom.

“A freedom cannot will itself without willing itself as an indefinite movement”

(Beauvoir, 1948, 31)

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Appendix One

Human Scale Development

(Max-Neff, 1991, 39)

Fundamental Human Needs	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
subsistence	physical and mental health	food, shelter work	feed, clothe, rest, work	living environment, social setting
protection	care, adaptability autonomy	social security, health systems, work	co-operate, plan, take care of, help	social environment, dwelling
affection	respect, sense of humor, generosity, sensuality	friendships, family, relationships with nature	share, take care of, make love, express emotions	privacy, intimate spaces of togetherness
understanding	critical capacity, curiosity, intuition	literature, teachers, policies educational	analyze, study, meditate investigate,	schools, families universities, communities,
participation	receptiveness, dedication, sense of humor	responsibilities, duties, work, rights	cooperate, dissent, express opinions	associations, parties, churches, neighborhoods
leisure	imagination, tranquility spontaneity	games, parties, peace of mind	day-dream, remember, relax, have fun	landscapes, intimate spaces, places to be alone
creation	imagination, boldness, inventiveness, curiosity	abilities, skills, work, techniques	invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret	spaces for expression, workshops, audiences
identity	sense of belonging, self- esteem, consistency	language, religions, work, customs, values, norms	get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself	places one belongs to, everyday settings
freedom	autonomy, passion, self-esteem, open-mindedness	equal rights	dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness	anywhere