

Abstract

The literature and research investigating why people choose social work as a career has tended to focus on motivational traits rather than on the choice experience itself. Whereas the vocational sector has moved to include a focus on the narrative processes involved with selecting a career, much of the social work research fails to capture the meaning-making processes individuals engage in to make sense of their career choices within their personal and social contexts. This research project describes the meaning-making processes two students participating in the social work program at Central Queensland University and I employ to understand our career choice experiences. Over a period of four years, using a research approach that combines Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry with Riessman's (2003) emphasis on social positioning within narratives, Geraldine, John and I explore the interplay between individual, community and professional agendas in our past, present and imagined career choice experiences – particularly focusing on the impact of gender. Identifying the importance of caring as a hallmark of the profession and what draws us to social work, this co-constructed research text highlights the agendas that predominantly support women's entrance into the profession and challenge men's participation. Drawing on the metaphor of a quilt to describe our career choice experience, this project draws attention to the importance for aspiring social workers to carefully choose, cut and join together bits of gendered narrative material to create a professional story that both legitimises their entrance into the profession and to position them within the larger career sector.

Quilting Professional Stories: A Gendered Experience Of Choosing Social Work As A Career.

Thesis submitted by
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in July 2005

In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts by Research in the School of Social Work and Welfare Studies, Faculty of Arts, Health and Sciences, Central Queensland University.

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Acknowledgements

There have been many people who have helped and encouraged me throughout the process of co-constructing this thesis. Like any defining experience, there are some who have played minor roles while others have had larger roles to play. While I wish to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed to my research experience (family, friends, the staff and larger student body in the School of Social Work and Welfare Studies), there are particular people to whom I wish to acknowledge particular indebtedness.

Very special thanks are offered to 'Geraldine' and 'John' – the students who participated in the study. Not only did they give of their time freely, they willingly immersed themselves in the narrative process providing honest insights into their experience of choosing social work. I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn more of their narrative worlds and have benefited both personally and professionally from their reflections and as a result of their challenges.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Michael Connelly, Associate Jane Maidment and the late Associate Professor Frances Killion. Without their support, advice and encouragement my research experience would not have eventuated or been as rich. Associate Professor Killion provided me with the opportunity and gave me the confidence to pursue a research approach that was not well recognised. Professor Connelly gave me the technical support, professional advice and personal enthusiasm I needed to see the project through to fruition. Associate Professor Maidment offered me

professional guidance and personal confirmation when and where it was needed.

My final thanks are offered to my sister, Christine, and to my partner and friend, Graham Chandler. Their confidence, tolerance and encouragement of and in me have been invaluable hallmarks that I will always treasure. They have contributed both a warmth and richness to a research experience that would have otherwise been missed.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is provided.

J.T. Mensinga
June 2005

Foreword: A letter to my readers

Dear colleagues,

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to read my research text. As I reflect on the process of writing this text, I am reminded that you have already, if only inadvertently, been a participant of sorts in this inquiry. All narratives are told with an audience in mind (Sawyer 1976). As such, I assume that like me you are either an academic and/or a social worker and that you have expectations of how this particular text will be written. However, because of the nature of the phenomenon being studied, and because I want to convey the experience I have had during the course of this inquiry, I have chosen to present the findings in a slightly less than conventional way.

Geraldine, John and I came together over a period of four years to tell and retell our 'stories of lived experience' in an effort to better understand what choosing social work entails. Whereas many texts describe career choice as a linear experience, for us choosing social work as our preferred career was a far more complex and 'patchy' process that involved revisiting and revising our stories as we became aware of impacting personal, institutional and social agendas. While some of these agendas were readily integrated into our 'stories to live by', others remained and continue to linger on the edge awaiting our attention at some later time. As you can imagine, representing this process has proved quite difficult to capture in a two-dimensional space provided by words on a page.

The research approach itself renders an assortment of data, academic deliberations, personal reflections and the like, which are difficult to separate into discrete sentences, paragraphs and chapters. While many research texts using narrative inquiry as method overcome this by interweaving these emerging features throughout the manuscript (Connelly 2002-2004), in the main I have conformed to accepted forms of writing. Nevertheless, there are occasions within each chapter where a separate story is presented seemingly with little introduction or warning. While I acknowledge this can be somewhat disconcerting for you as the reader, I employ this as a deliberate device. As such, I hope to continually remind you that although convention dictates that the inclusion of new pieces of material in a career story and research text should be made imperceptible to maintain a semblance of congruence and coherence (Linde 1993), when they are first encountered by the teller, they are experienced as separate and distinct events.

However, even though I have chosen to present ‘unlinked stories’ in this text, by the time you reach the end, I trust that you as the reader will be able to see that the stories do indeed form an emerging pattern – much like the separate pieces in a completed patchwork quilt do. I anticipate in presenting the text in the way that I have, I not only illustrate John, Geraldine and my own experience of choosing social work, but I also create a space for you to revisit and include career choice stories of your own. This way I hope that we will all continue to contribute to an evolving narrative that acknowledges and describes the passion and purpose that motivates and sustains social workers in the work that they do.

Oh yes, there is another thing I wanted to note before you started reading this account, the stories themselves are just that. While they are based on fact and collected field texts, the stories are also 'fictionalised'. That is, the order of events, names and overarching themes have been reconstructed to both maintain a level of confidentiality for the participants and to provide some narrative coherence for you the reader. Moreover, in writing the stories this way, I have attempted a departure from an engrained academic style to capture the genre of 'story making' that prevails in the everyday world of the social worker. Although this contributes to the resulting text appearing somewhat 'patchy', it is intended to reflect Geraldine, John and my experience of entering and performing our career choice stories in a number of different contexts. Once again, welcome.

Regards,

Joanna Mensinga (BSW, MAASW, IYTA)

Chapter 1:

The Identification of the Research Puzzle

Preamble

The impetus for this project grew out of my own reflections and experiences as a social work practitioner in the late 1990s when it appeared that the hopes and dreams I had for joining the profession no longer seemed viable. However, my interest in the area was nurtured and came to fruition when I joined the staff of the School of Social Work and Welfare Studies at Central Queensland University. The founding staff of the degree program adopted Problem Based Learning, later dubbed Community Focused Learning, as the dominant teaching and learning approach because of its emphasis on the exploration of experience as the key to education (Dewey 1938). While coming to terms with this approach, I discovered that although the existing literature did much to identify causal links and personality traits with career choice, it provided little in the way of describing students' actual experiences of choosing social work or providing an exploration of their narratives of career choice. Therefore, learning more about the place of experience, particularly with regards to what brought students to study social work at Central Queensland University, took on a level of importance that I wanted to address.

This thesis records the research experience in which I and others shared to better understand the phenomenon of choosing social work as a preferred career. The ensuing chapters describe the lived and told stories of two social work students; incorporate deliberations with university colleagues; encounters

with academic supervisors; and reflexive conversations my sister and I engaged in during the course of this inquiry. Like traditional research texts, these stories are explored in relation to other academic studies and are considered within the parameters of a chosen theoretical paradigm. Unlike these same academic records (although typical of research texts employing a narrative approach (Clandinin and Connelly 2000)), I begin this thesis by providing personal and contextual information that is drawn on throughout the remainder of the text. The first chapter not only highlights my perspective as a researcher, but also outlines my interest in, and preference, for adopting a narrative approach to explore career choice as a phenomenon. The chapter also serves to alert you, the reader, to the nuances of participating in a narrative inquiry and invites you to consider experience as a storied phenomenon.

The second chapter explores academic stories of other researchers' perceptions and experiences of what the phenomenon of career choice has meant to them. Stories and theoretical concepts from the vocational guidance sector and social work domain are considered, noting a preference for considering motivation in terms of personality traits. Acknowledging that there is a political dimension to claiming particular traits for specific occupations, in Chapter 2 I also explore the literature describing the 'creation' of a professional identity/character used to differentiate social work from other helping professions – particularly within the Australian context. The chapter ends with a story describing one of the student participants', Geraldine, reflections on her experience of choosing social work as her career.

Chapter 3 opens up a discussion about the development of academic and disciplinary perspectives on narrative as a meaning-making process people engage in when choosing a career. Drawing on the work of a number of researchers from the linguistic (Linde 1993), social sciences (White 1997; Mishler 1999; Riessman 2001) and education (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) communities, I describe the research approach I adopt for this project. In this process, I highlight the importance of the quilt metaphor in both guiding my research method and understanding the phenomenon of career choice. A detailed account of what I actually did during the course of this research project is also provided, before the chapter ends with a story describing the second student, John's, story of why he chose social work.

The next two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, are presented in the form of letters written to each of the student participants. In them I describe my own and our joint reflections on their 'stories of lived experience'. Revealing that gender provides an obstacle of sorts that each of us had to negotiate, the letters provide rich descriptions of the personal, social and professional agendas that impact on the career choice process – particularly in relation to the social work profession. In Chapter 6 I examine these stories highlighting the gendered career schemas present in John and Geraldine's communities, families and education and work arenas. The stories are also considered in relation to past academic studies, noting the contribution that this narrative project offers for understanding the experience of choosing social work.

In Chapter 7 I return to reflect on my experience of using narrative inquiry as a research approach. During the course of this research project, I recall being particularly excited by the growing recognition by social work academics (Hall 1997; Riessman 2001; Le Croy 2002) of the importance of exploring storied experiences in more detail. However, it became clear that there were many agendas within my own academy and the profession itself that impacted on my experience of using narrative inquiry as a research approach. In the concluding chapter therefore, I write a letter to my sister that reflects on my experience of using narrative by describing the challenges and insights gained. I also include my thoughts on caring as a defining characteristic of the social work profession and acknowledge its importance in attracting recruits to the profession.

Why career choice?

Because we are engaged in a day-by-day process of self invention – not discovery, for what we search for does not exist until we find it – both the past and the future are raw material, shaped and reshaped by each individual. (Bateson 1989:28)

A social worker's rationale for entering the profession is considered pivotal to how they will approach their work (Lishman 2002; O'Connor, Wilson and Setterlund 2003). Since social work and welfare practice involves the 'skilful, disciplined use of the self' (O'Connor et al. 2003:53), the prevailing belief is that identifying and learning how to channel the positive and empowering aspects of one's motivation and limiting their negative expression is a valuable and ongoing project for the responsible practitioner, conscientious educator and future employer alike (Rowe 1983; Christie and Kruk 1998; Lishman 2000; O'Connor et al, 2003). However, postmodern approaches to career choice

reveal that a focus on character traits alone has limited relevance in identifying the place a career holds in an individual's overall approach to life, nor is it appropriate in today's work environment where rapid change is inevitable (Hall 1996; Cochran 1997; McMahon and Tatham 2000).

A narrative understanding of career choice purports that the meaning-making processes an individual engages in to explain their career preference reveals more about their personal and social context, the time and the place the decision is made and then told about (Cochran 1997; Conle 2000; Chen 2002). In fact researchers taking a narrative approach claim that much is revealed about the interaction between personal and community agendas in the content and the way people tell their stories about a particular phenomenon (Personal Narratives Group 1989; Riessman 1993; Daiute and Lightfoot 2004). With this in mind, taking a narrative approach to explore what draws people to social work promises to provide a more holistic account of the personal experiences they encounter when making their choice of career and to shed light on the importance of creating a professional story that encompasses both personal and social influences to perform a particular professional role now and in the future.

Narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines. (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:121)

Both the topic and the method adopted for this project hold autobiographical significance. Therefore, this chapter provides parts of my life story that both expand on and contextualise my interest in exploring students' narrative

experiences of choosing social work as their preferred career. While my overall objective is to provide some insight into what drew me to the topic, the ensuing material also highlights my role as researcher and co-participant in this project. The specific narrative experiences I draw on highlight events prior to my training as a social worker, while practicing as a social worker and then as an academic. As such, this chapter provides me with the opportunity to emphasise what I regard as both the personal as well as the social significances of the project before I outline the parameters of my research puzzle. Traditionally this process would also include an explanation of the main terms that I will be using throughout the text, however, due to the narrative nature of the project, these are presented in Appendix A.

I end the chapter with a story describing my reflections on preparing a residential experience for first year social work students. I use this story to introduce you, as the reader, to necessary background information about the social work program at Central Queensland University. As mentioned in my opening letter in the Foreword of this thesis, it is the first of many stories that provide both context and content, as well as illustrate the processes of how this text was co-constructed by the participants and myself. While the stories may seem separate and disconnected, on the completion of reading the text they merge as a carefully constructed artefact that validates the gendered nature of the profession and the non-linear nature of choosing a career.

Autobiographical influences affecting my exploration of social work as a career choice

The past

My recollection of why I wanted to be a social worker was, like many others, based around wanting to 'help people'. Although I wasn't entirely sure what being a social worker entailed, I had notions of being involved with people's lives and changing the world so that 'being different' was a reason for celebration rather than for being ostracised. I was an immigrant child and I understood what it meant to be on the outside. As a white child who was born in Zimbabwe and had lived in Tanzania until the age of 10, I didn't have a profile that matched immigrants that were favoured in what became known as *The White Australia* policy. Moreover, I had had the experience of moving from an inner Melbourne school to a school in rural north Queensland at the age of 14. While this gave me a valuable taste of the rural-city divide, it also highlighted the importance and impact 'being different' has in terms of fitting in. In fact, from both experiences, I learnt that to be accepted into a community I had to assimilate and modify my identity – a process that highlighted that being different was not okay and that social positioning was an important social practice.

By refusing to construct or perform my identity in a way that I believed would allow me to be accepted by the local community, I chose a somewhat marginalised position. As a consequence, I searched for activities and people that would enable me to have a feeling of worth whilst not belonging to what I regarded as a harsh and patriarchal mainstream view. I found acceptance by

joining a local religious youth group. From my perspective nearly 30 years on, this group maintained a clear sense of difference by claiming and living Christian values that were at odds with the prevailing youth culture of the time. Although being a member was extremely important to my identity at that stage in my life, the group wasn't as liberal as I would have liked in terms of accepting people with alternate views. Inadvertently I also chose to work with other pieces of my 'self' by pursuing activities such as yoga and community service.

My first memory of being drawn to social work as a profession was as a young woman of 15. I remember clearly making the decision to pursue a career that would 'make a difference' while playing a ball game with a young man named Paul. It was during a sunny day in a small provincial town in north Queensland. I had gone with a few other students to interact with the 'subnormal' students (the commonly used label of the day for people with Down's Syndrome) at a Special School during our lunchtime. I had made the choice to be involved with the program with a bit of trepidation, but mostly I remember feeling noble because I had made the choice to do something worthwhile for others – for those who were generally closeted away from mainstream society.

I'd say playing a ball game with this young person was my choice of activity, which probably required a considerable amount of persuasion on my part. Whenever we arrived at the school, there always seemed to be a heavy atmosphere, best described as unwillingness, and it was our brief as friendly visitors to inject some enthusiasm to encourage participation in some form of 'positive' social interaction. The 20 or so 'subnormal' people at the facility were

of varying ages under the care of one teacher and a couple of teacher aides. The older people preferred to sit in the shade and talk while a few younger ones were willing to be involved in some physical activities. We were warned about the excessively affectionate nature of people with Down Syndrome and encouraged to direct activities that would emulate more 'normal' levels of sociability.

Being able to absorb Paul in a game of throwing a ball back and forth called on my personal skill and resourcefulness. He was physically about sixteen with a developmental age of around five. Experiencing all the usual hormonal imbalances and not having the social skills to manage these provided a challenge for me who, as a young woman, had a heightened awareness of social mores and expectations. Having successfully navigated a way to engage Paul in a 'normal' activity gave me a sense of achievement and highlighted personal skills that I wanted to develop further. I remember thinking and feeling that working with marginalised people was what I really wanted to do with my life. I felt comfortable and excited about my self in this role. Once again, I had great hope that I could be a member of a valued profession with a mandate to influence both individual and community practices to be less oppressive and more accepting of difference.

The next pivotal memory in my story of choosing to be a social worker includes an incident that I describe as beginning the task of constructing a professional identity. I use the word 'constructing' deliberately because I recall consciously completing a career aptitude test at school in a way that would confirm and

enable me to pursue an academic path leading to a career working with people. While sitting in the classroom doing this test under exam conditions, I remember being somewhat amused and amazed at the transparency of the questions that sorted what I was good at and whether I had characteristics suitable to 'helping' people. Maybe it was because I knew what I wanted to do, but for whatever reason, I knew that if I answered the questions a certain way I would have 'objective' confirmation for my parents, friends and the school that this was an area that I could and should pursue.

The not so distant past

It probably wasn't until I left the field and began working as a social work academic that I revisited the question of 'why' I wanted to become a social worker with any seriousness. Before that, I just 'was'. In the year preceding my move to the university, I had become extremely disillusioned with how the role of the social work profession itself was being perceived by the community. It seemed to me that the profession was no longer valued as a legitimate body to challenge and reconstruct oppressive community and individual expectations. This had been particularly evident in the United Kingdom where I had worked in the child protection field in the late 1980s, but was a trend that was becoming more evident on the Australian scene too. While I no longer worked in child protection, the bad press that social workers were receiving in relation to some highly publicised, mishandled cases of child abuse and the public perception that money spent on 'welfare' was money wasted, did not reflect well on the profession.

Two personal experiences also contributed to my growing feeling of impotence and dis-ease as a social worker. The first one developed out of difficulties in managing a small counselling agency. Changes in legislation and accepted managerial practices left me feeling very ill equipped to deal with events occurring in the agency. While the professional rhetoric of days gone past stated that social workers had skills that facilitated good management practices, my predilection for listening to and reconstructing dominant narratives with others seemed irrelevant to the role I was asked to play in bringing about organisational change – top down management was deemed the correct approach. This went against my perception that anti-oppressive management included bottom up decisions. At this time I didn't believe I had the necessary skills or motivation to fulfil this mandate, nor the fortitude to go against the predominant ethos of imposing predetermined stories on others.

The second incident arose once I re-entered direct practice in an agency that was ostensibly informed by feminist principles. It was a workplace which I perceived to work collaboratively with individuals, groups and the community to challenge and reposition women's' marginalised experience. One day a middle aged indigenous woman chased and attacked me with a pair of scissors. Except for the timely action of a colleague, I would no doubt have been another statistic in a mounting number of violent episodes occurring in the welfare field. The incident became an 'epiphanic event' for me that led me to question my motivations and the skills that I had once prided myself in having – the same ones I had deemed successful when playing the ball game with Paul. While in the past these skills had enabled me to reconstruct a situation into what I

considered a positive outcome, this time they had tended to exacerbate a situation that threatened my life. While the event in itself was distressing, I also perceived a reluctance on the part of the organisation to facilitate a revaluing of my skills and a reaffirmation of my motives – simply put, to provide some professional debriefing. As such, it seemed to me that I either had to reconstruct my social work identity to fit that defined by prevailing community expectations or choose another professional identity.

The past merging with the present

After a short break from the field, I joined the university to become a facilitator of professional learning. While this required a reconfiguring of my personal and professional identity of sorts, I felt that my skills and the reasons I had joined social work in the first place held more relevance in this environment. Although not fully aware of what the approach entailed, I was considerably heartened to discover that the staff of the School of Social Work and Welfare Studies at Central Queensland University had chosen Problem Based Learning as their pedagogical method. With its focus on the exploration of experience as the key to education (Dewey 1938), I felt that this approach matched my perceived skills and interest in 're-storying' toward a positive end (White and Epston 1990). I was very aware that the students entering this program were doing so at a different time and place to when I joined social work, and that the experience of study for them was very different from my formal social work education experience. In deciding to pursue postgraduate studies as a required strategy to reconstruct my professional identity, the question of career motivation as a

matter of experience for students entering the social work program at Central Queensland University became a relevant and pertinent topic to pursue.

Dewey's work was drawn on heavily when developing Problem Based Learning as a pedagogical approach (Neville 1999). Therefore, in the process of familiarising myself with Problem Based Learning, I found it necessary to read more about the life and work of John Dewey. Of particular interest to me was that Dewey (1859-1952), an educator and a philosopher in the pragmatist tradition, had considerable contact with and was influenced by pioneer social worker Jane Addams (1860-1935). It was exhilarating to discover that Addams, who is well regarded in social work circles, had provided considerable background information and inspiration for Dewey while he was developing his thesis concerning the social nature of inquiry in his 1986 work *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (Seigfried 1999:215). Addams co-founded Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago, 'as a way for some socially conscious members of the new generations of college educated women to use their recently acquired skills to alleviate the worst effects of industrialisation on the waves of immigrants crowding into the inner city' (Seigfried 1999:212). For Dewey, Addam's Settlement House provided a model of how theory and practice could be unified to create a self-reflective and a goal oriented community (Seigfried 1999).

For both Dewey and Addams, reflection on experience was central to the processes of understanding and learning (Seigfried 1999). Addams maintained 'we are under a moral obligation in choosing our experiences, since the results

of those experiences must ultimately determine our understanding of life (1902, cited in Seigfried 1999)'. Dewey claimed that it was our ability to learn from experience and to project that learning into future situations that made reflection on our interactions in everyday life both important and necessary. However, Dewey noted that the following aspects were essential for any experience to have any educative value:

- Experience is primarily an 'active-passive' occurrence and not a cognitive process; and
- The value of an experience is determined by perceived relationships and expected outcomes that result from it (Dewey 1938/1981:496).

With these views in mind, my interest in exploring 'experience' in relation to career choice grew.

Exploring career choice as an experience

'If we pay attention to our students and to ourselves, we can learn and enhance our own knowledge. (Connelly and Clandinin 2000:317)

Energised by the discovery of the link between Dewey and Addams, I was keen to build on research already exploring the experiences of those choosing social work as their preferred career. A cursory glance at the literature revealed that much of the research followed trends typical of the vocational guidance sector and focused on establishing causal links that were reductionist in their outcomes. While there have been an increasing number of studies examining the holistic development of professional expertise (for example, Harre

Hindmarsh 1992) and/or changing professional characteristics and attitudes over time (for example, O'Connor and Dagleish 1986), those exploring what draws people to social work proved more difficult to find. Most of this research has tended to be embedded in studies examining other issues. For example, Camilleri (1996a) explored practitioners' aspirations in the context of their use of theory and practice, whereas Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) report on the development of professional expertise, starting with students' aspirations, over a five year period. To my knowledge, there isn't a study that explores the narrative experience of choosing social work.

Reflecting on my account of choosing social work, it was evident that my stories of career choice included aspects pertaining to my identity, as well as demonstrating the skills and knowledge that I thought would deem me suitable for the job. Linde (1993) states that people's life stories, of which career anecdotes form a large part, are important 'venues' where people locate their sense of self and negotiate group membership. Other narrative researchers claim that rather than expose truths about the teller, told life stories are opportunities for the teller to perform an identity and reveal the nexus between social agendas and personal agency (The Personal Narratives Group 1989; Mishler 1999; Riessman 2001). Examining the same issues, but coming from a slightly different angle, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) establish that teachers' come in touch with and come to know of their own experience through story and note that they describe professional knowledge in terms of their own life history and who they are, rather than merely listing what they know.

Therefore, by taking a narrative approach it became clear that I would be tapping into how the students perceived themselves, the profession and their relationship to the profession and with the larger community, rather than identifying predictive factors. While I was not sure how this linked to my original concern with motivation, reflecting on the notions put forward by Addams and Dewey, I was beginning to see that acknowledging the students' perceptions had the potential to provide a new sense of meaning about the significance of the career choice experience – particularly in student's future lives as practitioners. Rather than reviewing motivational factors as an attempt to manage their influence (Lishman 2002; O'Connor et al. 2003), which some claim strips away the person (White 1997), I was beginning to get a glimpse of the importance of building on experience in an effort to acknowledge and support a more sustainable practice framework. Later I discovered that this view was being echoed in the vocational guidance sector, where attention to the meaning-making processes of individuals is understood to be more empowering in today's work environment (Hall 1996; Cochran 1997; Chen 2002).

The relevance of the research puzzle

Connelly and Clandinin, both educators of teachers, came to narrative inquiry through their interest in understanding teacher's knowledge. Having both been personally influenced by Dewey, I felt a resonance with their approach to understanding practitioner knowledge and felt that it strongly supported my desire to both tap into student's experiences of choosing social work as a career, and to better understand the empowering aspects of Problem Based Learning.

Over the years, we have studied teacher knowledge in various ways. We think of teacher knowledge in narrative terms, describing it in terms of narrative life constructions. We do not see teacher knowledge as something fixed and static to be replaced by something else, but something life like, something storied, something that flows forward in ever changing shapes. Teachers and students do not, in our view, come together as bearers of mature and immature knowledge, the immature to be replaced by the mature, Rather we see everyone, teachers and students, living out stories in which they feature as characters. What we or anyone else knows – what student and teacher may be said to know – are expressions of those stories. To understand what happens when teacher and student meet in teaching-learning situations, it is necessary to understand their stories. (Connelly and Clandinin 2000:318)

Consequently the goal of this research project was to conduct a narrative inquiry into the lived and told experiences of students choosing social work as a career. As such, I have been particularly interested in the kind of experiences the participants draw on when describing why they chose to join the social work profession, and how they use these same experiences to legitimise their entrance into the social work program and perceive how they will influence their ensuing practice. Ultimately the inquiry has included the experience of three co-participants – Geraldine, John and myself. Geraldine and John were first year students when the project began. However, due to their different life commitments, John completed his course as this inquiry drew to a close while Geraldine still has several years to go before finishing the degree. I am now the only remaining staff member of the original team that set up the social work program at Central Queensland University.

The remainder of this text is the co-constructed product emerging from the lived and told experiences John, Geraldine and I relate – not only of choosing social work as our preferred careers, but also of the research process itself. In it I

describe the meaning that we make of our choices and our negotiation through the various discourses associated with the field, particularly exploring the role gender plays in our decision-making experience. It also provides a keyhole through which the processes of creating a practitioner's sense of purpose and the 'use of self' can be examined – what Clandinin and Connelly (1999:4) describe as 'stories to live by'. Building on previous studies that have identified motivational traits for entrance into the social work profession, this work contributes to current knowledge by providing a holistic description of the career choice stories aspiring social workers create from their lived experience. By taking the view that these stories are constructed in a way that facilitate group membership and provide social positioning in the communities in which we all live, learn and work, a richer description that accounts for both personal and social agendas becomes much more evident.

While Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warn against focusing on the research approach itself to the detriment of the research puzzle, the academic struggles emanating from my choice of method have meant that narrative inquiry has become very much an integral part of this project. Maybe it's because the process incorporated the element of choice much the same as choosing the inquiry topic does, or maybe it was because it provided another opportunity for me to challenge the dominant discourse. Whatever the reason, needing to understand the method and explain it to others provided a further keyhole through which to examine the nexus between community and personal agendas impacting on choice experiences. Therefore, this written account incorporates a focus on the method acknowledging how it contributed to my understanding of

the topic and assisted the participants' and I to better understand the narrative construction of our personal and professional identities. It also becomes part and parcel of the process of examining our social positioning in our respective professional communities – an approach that has practical application as part of the social work project.

A further interest in both the research topic and method itself was my belief that they both explore how would be practitioners interact with the world, for instance, the topic and chosen method reflects, builds on and utilises social workers' predilections for knowledge and knowledge creation (Camilleri 1996a; White 1997; Saleebey 1999; Polkinghorne 2000). Polkinghorne noted that even though Psychology has been advocating that professional practice should be informed by theory and evidence-based research, practitioners' prefer to consult with peers; rely on their own knowledge and experience; and seek out practise based literature (Polkinghorne 2000). In response to this, he suggested that the profession and educators needed to research and explore how practitioners prefer to learn in order to improve ongoing professional education and practice. It is my view that Polkinghorne's analysis is applicable to the social work profession as well, and believe that this research project will go some way to addressing this.

For me then, it has been timely to pursue a narrative inquiry into students' choice experiences as they enter the social work profession. By collecting and exploring stories of experience I have personally gained a richer understanding of aspiring social workers' statements of 'personal purpose' (O'Connor et al.

2003) and their 'predilections for knowledge of a particular kind' (Saleebey 1999:652). This adds to the current understanding and the existing research around the choice of social work as a career in Australia. Having lived through this research approach, I believe that it has contributed to my understanding of experience and its relation to Problem Based Learning as a pedagogical approach. I also believe this project demonstrates that incorporating an ongoing activity of this kind is invaluable in developing reflexive practice as a part of the aspiring social worker's and educator's emerging skill base. Providing more than an awareness of the relationship between motivation and future practice as mooted in the introductory texts, using narrative inquiry invites students and educators to develop a practical understanding of how our experiences of choosing social work as a career are affected by and impacts on personal and social agendas.

Having described the impetus for this study, I now turn to providing you as the reader, relevant background material for the remainder of the research text. As I noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, this is the first of many stories interspersed throughout the text. These stories, some in the form of letters, not only provide contextual information, but also act as data and become a space where with my co-participants, Geraldine and John, I explore our lived and told experiences of choosing social work as our preferred career. The emergence of each story reflects the often discontinuous events that many of us are faced with and need to make meaning from as we pursue a career in today's world.

Story 1 – My reflections on preparing for the first year residential experience

This year I was course coordinator for the first year students. Up until now I had been coordinator for fieldwork and had been responsible for the course that exposed second year students to the varied theories that informed social work practice. Like the other staff, I had always been involved in the residential programs for all four years of the course, but due to a number of unforeseen events, this year I was responsible for the programming of the first year residential. This involved ensuring that the students gained a good working knowledge of what was expected of them while they participated in the course as well as orientating them to the rest of the university. I also had to introduce them to the School's learning approach, but I had always done that, so I felt comfortable in how that would go. Besides, even though the students were given a copy of the Community Focused Learning model to follow to facilitate their group learning experience, the majority of them failed to follow it and would need to encounter challenging events before they would begin to engage with model. In fact, over the last five years of using this pedagogical approach, I had noticed that no amount of preparation and warning seemed to cushion this process. While the introductory lecture was important, what had more impact was the debriefing of their experience at the end of the year.

I had not always enjoyed the first year group. I had often found myself cringing at what sounded as very idealistic, even sugary, comments from

students when queried about what social workers did and what they saw themselves doing as practitioners in the future. While I knew this would change in time, I was also impatient while waiting for them to move on from what I saw as a naive position. From experience I knew that by the second year, they were likely to have picked up 'professionally appropriate' language and would be able to engage in practice discussions at what seemed a more sophisticated level. Intellectually I knew that being idealistic was a useful characteristic to start a career with, but I also knew that unrequited enthusiasm could act as a barrier to engaging in reflective practice.

Still, I wanted to ensure the students would have a good experience of learning during this residential, something that would sustain them in their future encounters with the university and as a practitioner. Being so much more aware of the importance of experience as a strategy for learning, I wanted to provide an opportunity for them to feel valued and to fuel their own desire to learn and participate in reflexive and anti-oppressive practice. So, how was I going to engage the students in some reflective practice type activity that would be useful? Thinking about my question and my use of the word 'useful', I realised that I was still hooked into the idea that I had to pull something out of the bag that would add value to the students. However, I was aware that there were standards set by the professional body, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), which had to be met. I also knew that the students themselves would have expectations about 'a university education' that would have to be

addressed in some way – especially now they paid for their courses. However, the pedagogical approach was also dependent on shifting the focus away from the idea of having a ‘sage on the stage’ to impart knowledge, to the notion of ‘the guide on the side’ who facilitated self directed learning.

I knew that there would be between 50-70 students arriving, mostly women who were mature aged. Mature aged women were particularly drawn to this course because of its flexible delivery mode. This allowed them to both remain in their own communities and to fit their study around other life commitments. Despite the fact that many came from the Central Queensland area, in the past we had students come from as far away as Tasmania and Perth. Coming to terms with the tyranny of distance often became the greatest challenge for the students, particularly as they were required to do at least one major piece of group work assessment a year. Unless students quickly became familiar with using different forms of information and communication technology, they would flounder.

In first year, the group task required students to put together a public display at the University’s combined Multicultural Fair and Open Day. The purpose of the display was to explain to the public what social workers do in the community. Although not all the students had to attend the Open Day, they were required to participate in organising the display; this included investigating issues such as work place health and safety requirements and copyright laws. While a daunting task, the students in

past years had come up with some very creative and informative exhibits that included interactive puzzles, power point presentations and community art activities. Not only did the students learn a lot about the role of a social worker and what career opportunities were available to them once they graduated, they also received immediate public feedback and discovered what practical requirements need to be addressed if they were to organise a public display in their role as a social worker in the future.

At some point I needed to explain to the students that all their learning tasks were practice and community based. Not only did this give them an understanding of the content of the particular subject material they were studying, but it ensured they experienced some of the tasks and activities they would encounter as social workers in the field. Being community based, the assignment tasks encouraged the students to interact with social workers in the field in their own communities. Because of this, they needed to be aware of the time commitments practitioners had and consider coordinating any visits they may wish to make. Time management and networking were important professional skills that had to be learnt and implemented appropriately. There were many opportunities for learning professional skills embedded throughout the course, including things like signing time sheets while at the residential programs.

In each of the four years of study, the students were required to attend two one-week long residential programs. While the staff were responsible for organising the program, the students needed to organise their own

transport, accommodation and food requirements for themselves. Some of the students would stay on campus at accommodation provided by university, while others occupied motel rooms or would pool their resources and rent a unit for the week. On occasions, local students had billeted 'out of town students' in their own homes. Once again, this practical aspect of the course provided first year students with challenges they may not have anticipated. Although many had already had their questions answered and anxieties allayed by the School's secretary prior to arriving at the residential, leaving families to fend for themselves, often during school holiday periods, provided challenges only they could deal with. Even though I was aware of these impinging issues, I have to say that I was relieved that I didn't have to deal with these directly.

Refocusing on how I was going to capture the students' attention and provide an engaging learning experience, I remembered that one of the things often touted in the literature, especially for first year students, was the usefulness of exploring why they had wanted to join the profession. Although this hadn't been something that had been done in the residential setting before and was usually left to the students' private reflections in their journals, I wondered how they would respond to an open forum discussion on the topic. While it could be a bit threatening to be asked this question in public and so early in their professional training, my growing sense about the nature of constructing a sustainable professional identity made me think this was quite a legitimate thing to do. In fact, it could be the start of building a narrative identity that acknowledged important

people and events that had contributed to their career choice rather than stripping away the personal to be replaced by professional icons and theories. If I could think of an angle, I thought I would try the open forum idea out and see what happened.

While trying to find an angle for such a discussion, I came across a passage I had copied out. It read:

To craft a life is to engage in making art, the powers of imagination and metaphor are crucial ingredients for the process of sensitively crafting elements of a life – and the crucial meanings of it – for others to discover. How we do this is at once a beautiful mystery and a relational, rational act. To conceptualise representational possibilities is to be thoroughly alert to the various alternatives that resonate deep within our creative and epistemological frameworks. It is to be vigilant and responsive to the metaphorical cues that lives offer to onlookers. It is to be informed by that life or lives and to be open to the most “sensible” and resonate alternative (or many, presumably) with which to communicate about it. To embrace the potential of art to inform scholarship is to be open to the ways in which the literary, visual, or performing arts – and the inherent methods and processes of those various art forms – can inform processes of scholarly inquiry. (Cole and Knowles 2001:103)

Unfortunately I hadn't recorded the page number from the book I had found the quote in and thought it best that I didn't use it in the session. However, as my eyes drifted over the quilt hanging on my wall, I found that it had given me an idea to work with.

My mother was a great quilter and while I had dallied in a bit of embroidery and cross-stitch over the years, making a patchwork quilt had always seemed to me a far larger task that required much more precision and

personal commitment. Reflecting on the representational value of quilting after reading Cole and Knowles quote, I thought I could use it as a way to kick-start the discussion. After all, communities and individuals had used quilts to make political statements for a long time (for example, the AIDS quilt in Atlanta, Georgia, an ongoing arts project designed to both commemorate those who have died and to raise awareness about the disease itself (AIDS-Quilt 2003)). While quilting demonstrated the skill and purposeful action that is involved in choosing a career, it also captured the postmodern notion that constructing a story to explain the process provided more subjective information than the matching process so often associated with career development (Cochran 1997). I particularly liked the idea that this would add an aesthetic dimension to the week, something that Dewey and Addams saw as integral to a holistic education (Seigfried 1999). Besides, I associated quilting with women and I wanted to highlight the notion that social work was a gendered profession.

The more I thought about the session, the more links I could find between quilting and choosing a career in social work. I was sure the students and I could have a bit of fun with this and I hoped people would feel free enough to share their stories. I began to enjoy the prospect of engaging with the students at this level, but realised I had a few other things to sort out before I could indulge myself further with this session. For one, there seemed to be some difficulty about using the Harvard lecture theatre – the room we always used for the residential programs. It was such a good room to use for the formal parts of the program. It was friendly as far as

lecture theatres went. It wasn't large and looked somewhat like a Greek amphitheatre with about ten rows of seats gently sloping out from a central square. The acoustics in the room were not quite as good as one would expect of an amphitheatre, largely due to the muffling effects of the carpet that covered the floor and the gentle hum of the air-conditioning in the background, but it was conveniently located and had become a haven of sorts for both students and staff. It would be a nuisance if we couldn't use it. Where would the learning facilitators sit? We had all grown very accustomed to the set-up in the room and knew our places in it quite well. Still, the first years didn't know all this and wouldn't miss it yet, but I couldn't help but marvel at how space and place can have such a large impact on human perception and sense of being. Once again, I brought myself back to the practical tasks I had to organise in the next few days.

Chapter 2:

Career Choice as a Culturally Constructed Narrative

As stated in the introductory chapter, this chapter provides an overview of some of the research and written accounts I have come across while exploring the phenomenon of career choice in relation to social work. However, because of the narrative nature of this inquiry, significant 'pieces' of the literature/material have also been placed in other chapters to draw your attention to agendas applicable to the experience being explored at that time. In this chapter then, I present select ideas and themes that have emerged and impacted on me in my effort to situate this inquiry within a specific academic context. In particular, I focus on three areas of interest pertaining to career choice already highlighted in the preceding chapter: first, the literature focusing on career selection in the vocational guidance sector; second, an overview of the studies using a research approach pioneered by Pearson (1973) to ascertain students' motivation for choosing social work as their career of choice; and finally, some of the social work professions' written narratives to highlight the interrelationship between the profession's own agendas and those expectations held by the community concerning social work's role in the service sector.

As I noted in the previous chapter, the vocational guidance discipline has historically drawn on a linear, causal approach to assess and match people with suitable occupations. In this chapter I describe the main theoretical underpinnings that have evolved in vocational counselling and state why there

has been a recent acceptance and development of narrative approaches in the sector. Turning to the social work literature, I make mention that much of the existing research exploring career choice mirrors the approaches taken in the vocational guidance sector. Therefore, in this thesis I have chosen to focus on studies using a research method pioneered by Pearson (1973), establishing that this approach goes some way in providing useful contextual information associated with the career choice process. However, while these studies highlight both individual and social agendas that impact on the choice process, I observe that they continue to spotlight causal factors. Having noted a scarcity of studies exploring the narrative processes aspiring social workers engage in to justify their entrance into the profession, I turn to professional texts exploring the historical and cultural development of social work to try and ascertain why this has been the case.

Traditionally, social work has drawn on masculine and positivist approaches to knowledge creation as a way to establish itself in the professional sector (Shaw and Gould 2001; Fook 2002; Parton 2003). While arguably necessary to secure the professions' role in the community and to improve service delivery, it is clear that by minimising the feminine and qualitative nature of the profession in the career choice literature, the social work profession and subsequent research has missed a vital link in understanding what draws people to pursue a career in the field. Despite the fact that fewer men than women enter social work (Christie 2001), until recently little has been said about the cultural imperatives associated with gender that influence career choice in the profession. Drawing on Gilligan's (1982) work to highlight the different ways that men and women

understand the notion of care, I suggest that gender provides a necessary link in understanding the experience of those choosing social work as their career.

In the final part of this chapter I introduce one of the co-participants in this research inquiry, Geraldine. As in the first chapter, I do this via a descriptive story. The story builds on the account I began in Chapter 1 where I, in my role as a learning facilitator, consider what activity I will introduce to facilitate a discussion with the first year students about their choice of profession. Having taken up the idea of introducing the notion of a quilt to describe and represent the process of choosing a career in social work, I invite students to share their stories in an open-ended discussion. Geraldine responds to this metaphor and, by using storied pieces from her past life events, she constructs and shares a narrative that she believes will be acceptable in this forum.

Theoretical mandates within the vocational guidance sector

Vocational guidance and career counselling had its beginnings in the early 1900s. Since that time the profession has been largely dominated by an assessment ethos designed to facilitate the matching of people with suitable careers (McMahon and Patton 2002). The prominence of this 'test and tell' approach has resulted in a heavy reliance on the assumption there is a linear relationship between intrinsic individual characteristics and jobs people can 'perform' in the community. Demonstrating a preference for assessment tools that rely heavily on quantitative measures, it is of little surprise that much of the research in the sector has focused on this causal relationship and been concerned with developing instruments that would enhance a predictive

process, with an emphasis on objective, value free knowledge (McMahon and Tatham 2000).

A large number of career theories have evolved in the last century. In an effort to give a brief overview of their contributions to the field, I have adopted McMahon and Tatham's (2000) approach of classifying them according to their predominant focus on either: content, process or a combination of the two. Content career theories are those that claim to objectively and logically link traits an individual has with specific occupational requirements. Process theories, also referred to as developmental theories, describe premises that incorporate and apply an understanding of human development across the lifespan in relation to occupational choice. The final category refers to those theories that combine both content and process to focus on the manner in which the content variables interact with developmental variables when determining career choice.

Holland's Theory of Personality and Vocational Choices is typical of the content approaches. Holland devised a career assessment instrument (the Self-Directed Search (1985)) as a tool to support people's career choice decisions based on the assumption that gathering information about an occupation and utilising data collected from a psychometric instrument can predict and facilitate job satisfaction for people. While there is pragmatic evidence to sustain the use of content approaches with their associated instruments (Chen 1997), criticism has been directed at the impersonal manner in which they are used in practice. Moreover, the failure of psychometric instruments to accommodate a temporal

notion of change and to capture constructed knowledge associated with choosing a career has led other theorists to pursue alternate ways of understanding career choice (McMahon and Tatham 2000; Straby 2001).

Process theories, such as the developmental approach advanced by Super (1980), are based on the understanding that an individual changes throughout the course of their lifespan and that this needs to be accounted for when choosing a career at any given time. Therefore, process theories focus on changes in individual characteristics over the course of a person's lifetime and seek to understand and predict how these impact on the matching process in order to facilitate job satisfaction. While critics of process approaches welcome the notion of temporality, it seems that the extensiveness and lengthiness of the assessment processes have detracted from their widespread use in the sector (Straby 2001).

Krumboltz's Learning Theory (1979), a social learning approach, is an example of those theories that consider both content and process. Assuming that 'growth takes place as a result of learning and imitating the behaviour of others (Johnson 1998:1)', the focus of these approaches is on the interaction between the content and process variables noting the importance of learned behaviours in developing traits identified as useful to the pursuit of a particular career. Once again, critics of these approaches claim that the time required to gather the appropriate information during the process of assessment has proved these approaches to be less popular than the more easily administered methods of the content approaches (Straby 2001).

By all accounts, Holland's theory of vocational choice has been the most widely used, researched and influential in career counselling and assessment (Mobley and Slaney 1996; Straby 2001). However, while popular, Holland's approach along with the developmental and social learning approaches were severely criticised by minority groups, particularly during the 1980s. Minority groups asserted that the underpinning assumptions of these theories were embedded in white, middle-class, male culture and did not account for alternate 'cultural' views and social situatedness when exploring the phenomenon of career choice. While the research base broadened to include other groups, the theories and approaches that evolved maintained the content and developmental prototypes as described previously. This is surprising, as social psychologists in the late 80s had begun to consider a constructivist approach acknowledging that people create a reality based on a process of individual meaning making (Hoskins 1995; Crotty 1998) when exploring motivational precursors of action.

While George Kelly (1905-1967) introduced the notion of personal constructs into counselling psychology in the 1950s (Straby 2001), it wasn't until the 1990s that the constructivist view was pursued in vocational psychology (Hoskins 1995; Chen 1997). The move towards incorporating multiple viewpoints of career choice that focused on an individual's pursuit for meaning-finding and meaning-making in life has been an important development for the vocational guidance profession (Chen 1997). Based on the assumption that a career is a major part of a complete life story, the importance of investigating the way

individuals make sense of career in terms of their overall life plans and objectives has begun to receive greater acknowledgement in the career counselling sector (Chen 2002).

This shift in focus has been supported by the changing social context of work and career in the last decade. Returning to the work of McMahon and Tatham (2000), they claim that generally accepted understandings about the current employment market in Australia challenge the vocational guidance sector's assertions that identifying causal links between individual characteristics and career choice is a useful activity to pursue. These authors note that the job sector is both dynamic and in constant change. As a result, there are many permutations and combinations for paid employment with new work opportunities evolving from new combinations of multi-disciplinary skills, knowledge, understandings and technologies. Therefore, individuals not only need to assume greater responsibility for their own career development, but they are required to develop skills in lifelong learning in order to adapt to the rapidly changing society in which we live. As such, McMahon and Tatham argue that career theorists need to consider a more constructivist worldview that focuses on a qualitative acquisition of knowledge to inform their work if they wish to continue to be of use to those seeking their guidance (McMahon and Tatham 2000:8).

To shift the focus away from the process of 'matching' to the stories that those seeking job satisfaction in their lives tell, requires the vocational guidance counsellor to view the job seeker as the main character in a life-defining story

(Cochran 1997; Savickas 1997). This places the individual at the centre of the career building process and asks him/her to be an active agent in considering the meaning of a career plan within their own personal and social context (Chen 2002). By its very nature, the told story is a representation of the future, encompassing important features such as motives, goals, a context for performance, a plan, responsibility, a cast of characters and outcomes – all within an organising plot (Cochran 1997). Narrative then becomes a useful tool in providing necessary detail about how to support people in gaining job satisfaction in the current employment market while exposing subjective information about their orientation to living and future action. Whereas objective data such as traits describe the viability of a particular career choice, the story is a subjective future representation of action, based on the narrator's values, beliefs, knowledge, interests and strengths (Cochran 1997).

Research exploring career choice in social work

A long held tradition in social work has been to understand the somewhat circular interaction between the individual and their environment. However, when it comes to career choice and identifying associated motivational factors, researchers and practitioners alike have had a preference for focusing on causal/linear links. Until recently, the urge to identify individual traits that appear as reductionist explanations rather than holistic understandings has predominated research in the area. However, because of the particular focus I wish to take in this inquiry, rather than explore the social work literature pertaining to career choice in any depth, I have chosen to give a brief overview of the many studies that exist identifying the general trends that have emerged

from the research. I then turn to a more thorough examination of the studies using Pearson's (1973) approach. By addressing the work using Pearson's sentence completion method, I provide a foundation upon which I build my own argument and purpose for this inquiry.

Exploring why people are drawn to social work has been a popular choice of topic for many Masters theses in the United States of America. They, like other American research exploring career preference, has tended to focus on identifying causal traits for entering the profession – including the development of instruments such as the Social Work Career Influence Questionnaire, (Biggerstaff 2000). When researchers began to investigate career choice in social work, they adopted general exploratory/descriptive methods to explore the phenomenon (Kadushin 1958). Since the early 1970s however, researchers have focused on uncovering specific traits associated with such things as: family position (Lackie 1983)); the incidence of psychosocial trauma (Rompf and Royse 1994)); perceptions of power (Feld 1987) and individual value bases (Segal 1992).

Many American researchers agree that there have been few studies that have focused on the overall experience of why students choose social work as a profession (Rompf and Royse 1994; Hanson and McCullagh 1995). American studies that have captured a more holistic picture of career motivation/choice place altruism, social idealism and a commitment to social change as mediating factors between personal and professional agendas in the choice process (Hanson and McCullagh 1995:28). Having noted that these themes tend to

reflect general community attitudes and the profession's mandate to champion the needs of the oppressed, researchers in the 1980s questioned whether changed economic and social conditions that vilified welfare agendas would have an impact on participants' responses. While some studies (for example, Land 1987) believed that altruism was no longer a driving force, others claimed that it remained a strong impetus (Marsh 1988).

While career choice may have been explored as part of broader studies (for example, Fook et al. 2000), in Australia and Britain there appear to be few studies that directly focus on why students want to enter social work. Those that have tend to employ Pearson's sentence completion approach (Pearson 1973). Pearson himself stated he wished to investigate the 'choice of occupation in moral and political terms (Pearson 1973:217)'. In fact he proposed that students chose social work as a way to overcome the difficulties of modern society. He noted that while social work in Britain in the 1970s appeared to be organisationally trapped in a technical, managerial paradigm, new recruits would be drawn to the more utopian ideals presented by the profession. This, he argued, demonstrated that the very act of choosing social work as an occupation could be equated to a politically deviant act.

In his research, Pearson began by having informal discussions with 73 students. However, so as to adhere to accepted research conventions of the day, he chose to use results from a written exercise he administered on 36 students to satisfy his curiosity about students' motivation. He asked the students to complete two sentences asking: (1) 'Through entering social work, I

hope to achieve _____'; and (2) 'Through entering social work I hope to avoid _____'. Contrary to the expected norms regarding social research in the early 1970s, once Pearson collated the results and formulated an interpretation, he returned the results to the participants for comment. All participant responses were positive and concurred with his interpretations.

Pearson's main finding was that the students' responses appeared to have little to do with 'career orientation' (only 13% were looking for career advancement) and more to do with self-fulfilment (80%) or changing society (27%). When naming what they wished to avoid, 61% identified boredom; 67% saw choosing social work as a way to evade the rat race and formal, routine work; and 80% wished to avoid becoming something they would rather not be (Pearson 1973:214). In conclusion, Pearson argued that intrinsically students were drawn to social work to pursue a life that was different from the norm. He supported his position by critiquing predominant theoretical views and examining existing cultural perceptions of social work. He also highlighted the ongoing tension between the profession's prevalent technological approach and its contrary moral overtones in terms of meeting new recruits' expectations.

Holme and Maizels (1978), Uttley (1981), O'Connor, Dagleish, and Kahn (1984), Solas (1994), and Christie and Kruk (1998) all used Pearson's sentence completion method in subsequent studies they conducted exploring why people chose social work as a career. The studies present marginally different conclusions, but all consider the link between the existing social political mores and the students' responses. Holme and Maizels (1978) asked 1423 social

workers, employed by local authorities in the United Kingdom, to complete a questionnaire based on Pearson's questions. Their results supported Pearson's view that people in social work were on a quest towards self growth and were looking for a job that wasn't boring or routine. The results also showed that younger participants were much more likely to question the dominant values in the larger community.

Uttley (1981) carried out his research in New Zealand with 191 social work students. He concluded that neophytes were attracted to social work for professional status and monetary rewards as well as the possibility of working with colleagues with similar values. O'Connor and his colleagues (1984) used Pearson's sentence completion method to compare 54 first year and 49 third year social work students with 110 first year psychology students while completing their degrees at Queensland University. They concluded that while wanting to help others motivated all participants, social workers were more eager to bring about social change and pursue personal growth than their colleagues studying psychology. However, they also noted that social work students became more interested in social change later in their course, believing this to be a direct result of the training they received.

Solas (1994) also carried out his research at Queensland University, but chose to investigate a different cohort of students. He asked 10 undergraduate students who had prior welfare qualifications as to why they wished to pursue social work as a career. He found that these students were seeking personal and professional fulfilment and were not that interested in social change. In fact,

he chose to name his participants 'neutral technocrats' rather than describe them as political deviants as Pearson had done. Drawing on Pearson's observation that social work when '(e)stranged from its moral roots, ... has an over-technical sense of itself (Pearson 1973:223)', Solas suggests that this cohort chose to further their qualifications in order to improve their skill base rather than champion a moral position.

Christie and Kruk (1998) adapted Pearson's sentence completion method when they asked 52 students in Canada and 43 students in the United Kingdom to reflect on the incentives and disincentives they identified for joining the profession. In their study, students' responses tended to fall into four main categories based on the following themes: a concern with not knowing what social work really was and wondering whether they had the characteristics required to be successful; being aware that they were accruing a higher education bill while noting there may be minimal opportunities for employment; claims that other available careers, such as psychology, had entrance requirements or professional 'styles' that were not what the student wanted; and that the social work degree was a stepping stone to other programs or occupations. Christie and Kruk conclude that overall, their findings suggest that 'students make pragmatic and often ambivalent decisions about career in the context of their political and social locations (Christie and Kruk 1998:32)'.

While the research method pioneered by Pearson (1973) utilises theoretical underpinnings championed by constructivist research approaches and the ensuing results identify environmental factors as well as individual

predispositions, to my mind the approach still focuses on reductionist explanations. By failing to 'open up' the relationship between personal and social agendas, still little is known about the factors themselves that influence students' choice (Hanson and McCullagh 1995). Adopting a narrative understanding of career choice however, provides opportunities to explore the relationship between the personal and social agendas that the students themselves perceive to impact on their choice of profession (Personal Narratives Group 1989). As was alluded to in Chapter 1, and will be discussed in some detail in the following chapter, narrative approaches themselves seek complex patterns and descriptions (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:xii) which contribute to a more holistic understanding of the content and processes associated with choosing social work as a preferred career.

Researchers interested in narrative as a construction of reality as well as a methodological approach have noted that not only does narrative research expose the many different and overlapping forces that impinge on individual and societal expectations (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004), but it is itself an important variable that needs to be accounted for. That is, much like gender, race and class, being aware of how individuals perceive and utilise narrative knowledge/practices is necessary in understanding people and the choices they make (Randall 2002). Therefore, it could be argued that examining the narrative processes students employ to legitimise their entrance into the profession is as important to be understood as identifying personal traits. Not only does a narrative approach provide subjective information about aspirants' values, beliefs, knowledge, interests and strengths (Cochran 1997), it also offers

valuable information about how participants are likely to interact with, secure and maintain a position in the professional sector and larger community (Riessman 2001).

Discerning the social work discourse

Narrative is a cultural tool in several senses. Narratives are cultural forms often referred to as scripts (or dominant discourses, or master narratives) with embedded values and moralities. Tensions in the practices of cultural and personal narratives provoke the creation of and reflection about individual lives and about the society. It is in these milieu that symbol systems evolve ... These symbol systems are the building blocks of the higher order thinking that organizes identity and knowledge. (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:xiv-xv)

In a research culture dominated by quantitative methods, applying qualitative methodologies is a 'risky' business (Lincoln 2003). Despite the fact that there has been a growing research base in social work that uses a narrative approach (for example, Riessman 1993; Shaw and Gould 2001), there is still little to suggest that this trend is being applied to explore career choice. Recently social work academics have begun to use **practitioner** narratives (Le Croy 2002; Cree 2003) and fictional stories (Lehmann 2003) to engage readers in the process of understanding what draws people to social work and to explore what social workers do in practice (Lewis 2004). However, when I began this project, little narrative work in the area existed. In fact to date, I am yet to find a project that explores the narrative experiences of **students** choosing social work as their preferred career.

Akin to the vocational guidance sector, and no doubt other professions, research approaches adopted and supported by social work have been utilised

to strengthen its 'disciplinary character and location (Shaw and Gould 2001:4). Narrative researchers note that the process of choosing, which could equally describe how particular careers and/or research methods are selected, involves the consideration of issues pertaining to both identity and culture at any given time (Phillion and He 2003). In order to better understand the choice processes impacting on all those participating in this research project, it is necessary to consider the development of the social work profession and give thought to the cultural nuances that have emerged within its Australian ranks over time. Relying on written texts describing the development of the profession in Australia, in this section of the chapter I draw attention to particular thematic influences that I believe impact and/or interweave the 'stories of lived experience' that Geraldine, John and I tell in the following chapters.

Themes associated with the social work discourse in Australia

The process of locating and developing characteristics that correspond to a preferred professional identity have served both occupational groups and the individuals who wish to belong to them (Rowley 1997). In response to industrialisation, professional groups such as social work lay claim to knowledge and skills that they considered unique to their particular specialty in order to establish power over a socio-economic territory (Payne 1996; Rowley 1997; Fook et al. 2000; Fook 2002). Often associated with this process was the identification of suitable traits that pre-existed or would become embedded in the character of the person as a result of professional training. Ife (1997) notes that in Australia, social work has operated from a model of professionalism much more than in other countries. He also suggests that central to the

profession's claim for uniqueness has been its strong affirmation of social justice, rather than caring, as a value base.

Traditionally social work's origins in Australia have been linked to the development of the profession in Britain and America – particularly the Charity Organisation Society (COS) and the Settlement House movement (Camilleri 1996a; McMahon 2003). However, recent Australian scholars have begun to document that these movements were not as influential in Australia as stated and that social activists (especially women) and religious institutions had a greater impact on the establishment of social work as a profession (McMahon 2003). While not clear of its origins, there is agreement that training schools for social workers were established in Australia in the late 1920s (McMahon 2003). These were initially set up outside the universities, but after the Second World War the tertiary sector took over the training boards (Camilleri 1996a).

The goal of university training for social workers in Australia was to employ objective, empirically verifiable knowledge – a subscription to a scientific paradigm within a positivist/modernist view of the world (Camilleri 1996a). As such, much of social work practice was presented as being informed by objectified knowledge gathered via a linear and cumulative inquiry process (Fook 2002:33; Parton 2003). However, although social work academics in recent times have deliberately set about critiquing this modernist/positivist perspective (Ife 1997; Fook 2002), there has always been controversy about its suitability as an approach. However, this debate often emerged in the guise of

whether social work knowledge and practice was better understood as an art or as a science (Imre 1982; Goldstein 1999).

Moffatt (2001), contends disputes about whether social work was more of an art than a science, or vice versa, came from a deeper ontological problem. While his primary focus is on the Canadian context, Moffatt's observations about the links between 'technological knowledge' and the development of the production of social work knowledge reflect similar trends in Australia. Moffatt argues that because social work evolved within an environment where knowledge that connects 'making' with 'knowing' was and is still highly valued (for instance, in the English speaking, western, industrialised world), social work has always had to struggle with the expectation that there should be productive and/or measurable outcomes of any given action or research undertaken. Given that the profession's value base is steeped in social justice principles that champion personal worth over economic merit, the focus on outcomes has been an ethical quandary throughout social work's history.

Fook (2002) also draws attention to this dilemma, claiming that the social worker's professional status today has been undermined as a result of increased managerialism and changed funding arrangements for many welfare programmes. Because issues are being defined in economic terms such as outputs rather than in social terms, Fook contends that the profession can no longer assume power by claiming expert knowledge based on its value base. Ife (1997:35) also acknowledges this trend and asserts that unless social workers in Australia can come to terms with the decline of the welfare state and consider

repositioning themselves in 'other human service structures', the survival of the profession is uncertain.

A further issue that is related to social work's ontological and epistemological difficulties is that while it is generally agreed that social work is informed by an ethic of care that typifies women's approach to the world, the development of the welfare state has largely benefited men (Christie 2002). This is particularly evident in the social work profession where men as workers tend to move quickly into managerial and specialist posts putting them in a position 'to publicly monitor activities that were formerly undertaken by women in private' (Christie 2001: 27). Cree (1996) states that while men enter social work with qualities and abilities that are not stereotypically male they are likely to find rapid promotion, whereas women who have the qualities and abilities that are stereotypically female are unlikely to be promoted.

While contentious, this would be of little surprise to Gilligan (1982) who noted in her influential text *In a Different Voice*, that men and women have disparate ways of structuring relationships associated with their distinct views of morality and self. Drawing on the images of hierarchy and web to illustrate the different modes of assertion and response between the sexes, she claims that men are more apt to understand and pursue a position in the world according to a hierarchy, while women choose to focus on connections much like a web. These images go some way to explain the social positioning that often occurs within the ranks of the social work profession, for as Gilligan so clearly states:

As the top of the hierarchy becomes the edge of the web and as the centre of a network of connection becomes the middle of a hierarchical progression, each image marks as dangerous the place which the other defines as safe These disparate fears of being stranded and caught give rise to different portrayals of achievement and affiliation, leading to different modes of action and different ways of assessing the consequences of choice. (Gilligan 1982:62)

While there has been and continues to be much debate around the influence of gender, social work has by and large been considered a gendered profession. Many authors note that occupations generally associated with women, such as nursing, teaching and social work, are more likely to acquire semi-professional status while those traditionally associated with men, such as medicine and law, are considered professional (Hearn 1982; Hugman 1991). McMaster (2001) claims that social works' connection with 'women's work' grew from its historical origins within the voluntary, philanthropic sphere of community life. In fact, he observes that men did not enter the profession in any great number in either Australia or New Zealand until after the growth of the welfare state following World War II – particularly when financial rewards for doing so were evident. Lawrence (1965), in his historical overview of social work's development as a profession notes that the large number of women represented a liability for the profession (cited in McMahan 2003).

I have wondered if attitudes such as that put forward by Lawrence (1965, cited in McMahan 2003) goes some way to explain the lack of attention given to the role of women in the establishment of the social work profession in Australia. However, although the diminishing of the role of women and the contribution of religious institutions has been attributed to the male centric view of those recording historical events at the time (McMahan 2003), it could also be argued

that for the purposes of positioning the profession and creating a particular identity, many women in the social work profession (particularly in the 1950s through to the early 1970s) participated in concealing the importance of women's role. Reflecting dominant views about the role women played in the family and community at large, it seems both sexes actively supported the view that ignoring women's contribution and diminishing the notion of care would advance the profession's standing and therefore its social positioning in the community (Martin 2003). In order to further understand this phenomenon, I turn to literature exploring the development of both personal and collective identities.

Understanding a narrative social work identity

As the social work profession is wont to do, theoretical understandings of a phenomenon are often drawn from other social sciences (Payne 1997). The development of a self-identity and an identity's social purpose have been the focus of research both in sociology (Giddens 1991) and psychology (Erikson 1950; Gilligan 1982) for many years. While these studies provide useful background, for the purposes of this project I briefly explore the notion of identity formation as it is understood narratively and draw attention to the construction of collective identities as understood by Castells (1997). Before doing so, however, I turn to Ricouer (1991a) and his claims that it is a preoccupation with permanence in relation to time that has often led to misunderstandings about the nature of identity. Ricouer asserts that a 'narrative constructs the durable character of an individual, which one can call his or her narrative identity, ... It is primarily in the plot therefore that we must search for the mediation between permanence and change, before being able to transfer it

to the character (1991a:77)'. This is illustrated in the chapters that follow when Geraldine, John and I explore the plots that emerge from their 'stories of lived experience' that ascribes them an identity that enables them to successfully negotiate their entrance into the social work profession.

In their exploration of women's stories, the Personal Narratives Group (1989) note that women are apt to demonstrate an interaction between their understanding of cultural norms and their own identity claims. They observed that the narrative process of choosing and creating an identity requires an awareness of the social framework granting access and opportunity to become an established and reputable person. Baresi (1999) asserts, that without this awareness, the individual risks constructing a coherent identity (an internal sense of 'me') without any personhood (place in society). Ming Fang He (2002) explains this in a slightly different way. Drawing on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1994), she describes the circularity of her own and two colleagues' experience of developing a cross-cultural identity as being lived before it is told or labelled, and then 'shifting' as more is learnt about the changes and differences occurring in the new culture as well as the old (He 2002).

Moving away from the notion of a narrative identity to examine the concept of a collective identity, Castells (1997) claims that identities are a source of meaning and experience for people. As such, he distinguishes between them and the roles people assume. Roles, he says, sort out the functions a person performs while identities organise the meaning attached to their actions. Although I contest there is little difference between the process of creating an individual

and collective identity, Castells asserts that meaning for an individual is based around a primary identity (similar to the notion put forward by Erickson). This primary identity is 'self-sustaining across time and space', whereas a collective identity is typically constructed using material from sources such as history, geography, collective memory, and personal fantasies within a context 'marked by power relations'. Therefore:

... in general terms, who constructs collective identity, and for what, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity, and its meaning for those identifying with it or placing themselves outside it. (Castells 1997:7)

Based on this hypothesis, Castells' goes on to define three forms of social identities and their construction: first, a legitimising identity – an identity that is introduced by a dominant institution in order to continue their domination and to rationalise their sources of domination; second, a resistance identity – one initiated by those who are marginalised by the dominant identity to resist and survive oppression, often resulting in the formation of communes or communities; and finally a project identity – where people create a new persona that repositions them in society with the goal of challenging and transforming its overall structure (Castells 1997:8).

While the social work profession would have us believe that it is about constructing a 'project identity', the historical evidence does not support this image. For instance, through the process of pursuing professional status, social work has focused on building a 'legitimising identity'. Scholars concede that social work as a profession tends to define its purpose within the here and now, that is, in response to prevailing social conditions of the time (Bar-On 1994;

Gibelman 1999). Returning to Ife's (1997) comment that there has been a stronger emphasis on social justice than on the notion of caring in Australia, it could be argued that the underlining of the social justice agenda does more to justify the profession's need for status in the current economic milieu than it does to reflect the views of the profession's constituency. Based on personal experience and that of many of my colleagues (Mensinga 2001-2005), the diminishing of the notion of care does little to reflect our value base.

Lately there has been a notable decrease in the number of women and men entering social work in the United Kingdom (Harlow 2004a). Harlow states that with the economic and social benefits of feminism in place today, there are many more opportunities available to women allowing them to move beyond the gendered role of caring. However, it could also be argued that the emphasis on managerialism and economic outcomes in the welfare sector has led to a diminishing of the importance and role of caring, alienating both men and women from the profession (Fook 2002; Harlow 2004a). While this exodus from the profession may not be directly reflective of the Australian context, it demonstrates that as a profession, social work would do well to consider the discourse surrounding its narrative/collective identity if it is to survive. Rather than take on a 'legitimising identity', it may need to adopt a 'project' (or 'resistance' identity) that calls for the recognition of caring as a necessary task to be pursued.

Distinguishing between and/or integrating the social justice and caring discourses

The literature reveals that social justice and caring are both terms typically used in social work to describe relationships between the individual and the social order and that tension in establishing the importance of one over the other has been ongoing. Lyn (1999) claims that the separation of the two ideas and the subsequent debate about their relevance is tied to locating social work training within the university sector. Prior to that, caring and social justice were seen to be part and parcel of the same process. However, on moving to the academy, where vocational training was viewed with suspicion and derision, social work academics sought to gain credibility by championing social justice concerns. Because of the relative ease with which social justice could be made to fit accepted scientific and economic approaches addressing social problems, it was taken up as a focus while caring was left to the agencies. In fact, it wasn't until caring was put in the context of an ideology, Personal Care, that it was given any status within the university sector (Lynn 1999:942).

Returning to Gilligan's (1982) work, particularly concerning the differences in moral understanding between men and women, it is interesting to note changes in the application of the caring and justice 'absolutes' that she observed in early adulthood.

Though both sexes move away from absolutes in this time, the absolutes themselves differ for each. In women's development, the absolute of care, defined initially as not hurting others, becomes complicated through a recognition of the need for personal integrity. This gives rise to the claim for equality embodied in the concepts of rights, which changes the understanding of relationships and

transforms the definition of care. For men, the absolutes of truth and fairness, defined by the concepts of equality and reciprocity, are called into question by experiences that demonstrate the existence of differences between other and self. Then the awareness of multiple truths leads to a revitalising of equality in the direction of equity and gives rise to an ethic of generosity and care. (Gilligan 1982:167)

One wonders what implications this has and had in terms of understanding the differentiation between the values of care and social justice as purported by the social work profession. While not coming to any particular conclusion, given the importance of a strong moral and value base in the profession, this project highlights that by not acknowledging gendered views when exploring people's professional choice of social work, much can be missed. Many of the tensions in relation to social work's value base and practice (for example, science vs. art or the quantitative vs. qualitative debates), appear to originate from this gendered perspective.

Nevertheless, like all narratives, my review of the literature itself reveals temporal and cultural situatedness, for example, qualitative methods are now better appreciated and identity is now recognised as being more fluid (Flaskas 1999). While providing context to this inquiry, in the process of exploring the theoretical mandates that have informed much of the research into career choice and discussing issues related to the identity and culture of the profession, I have also drawn attention to possible agendas that the participants in this study take account of in their 'stories of lived experience'. Moving into Geraldine's re-storied narrative, I invite you as the reader to note her identity claims in relation to both her personal agendas and the social and professional

mores she takes into account as she contemplates her professional choice (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:xii).

Story 2: Geraldine's reflections during the 'Quilting Professional Identities' session

Having taken as the idea of using a quilt as the conduit for discussing what draws people to social work, Jo read a quote from Morwenna Griffiths' book. Jo said that the quote summarised why she had called the session, 'Quilting Professional Identities'. While some of the extract was a little over the top for Geraldine at this stage of her career, she could see why Jo chose it. Geraldine read the quote to herself again:

My argument about the construction of self shows that, like patchwork, making a self is relatively easy, though it always takes time and attention. However, again like patchwork, making a good one is very hard indeed, Understanding which pieces of old cloth will fit into the whole is a difficult and painstaking matter. Like patchwork, it is hard to say how many makers there are and where all the pieces come from.

Trying to reduce all our complexities of self-identity to relatively simple designs and simple stories, of the kind that mainstream philosophy tells, has resulted in inappropriate stories about ways in which to deal with our personal and collective dilemma. It is a simplicity which has contributed to sameness and oppression. Infinitely preferable is the variety, confusion, colour, hotchpotch, kaleidoscope, medley, motley, and harlequin of patchwork selves.(Griffiths 1995:191)

Geraldine's mind began to spin as Jo continued. It seemed to her that Jo's voice boom as she asked the question: 'Why did you decide to become a social worker?' Many images from Geraldine's past began to revolve before her eyes – each becoming a piece of material from which she had

fashioned her decision to join the social work degree. Yes, the experience was much like a patchwork quilt constantly in the making. Geraldine visualised the quilt she had crafted from all the material scraps carefully cut from the clothes that she had made for her children over the years. Yes, when she imagined that quilt, her mind spun in much the same way as it did now.

Well really I guess it starts back at the beginning doesn't it?

When you first ... with our family input? Yeah.

So I don't know where to start.

Well...when I was a child ... my mother was always saying, 'Geraldine always brings home strays.'

That was her opinion. I didn't feel I did, but that was a very big clue for my mother. So I think that might have a bearing on it, it was in my personality back then.

You always hear about the poor middle child. I didn't feel like that really, not in relation to my parents.

I left school at year 10. Was very low in self-confidence. Thought I had no intelligence. Oppressive things happened between my sister and I.

'You're not as good as your eldest sister.'

I just thought that was all so true because that's all that's ever been put into my mind.

I knew I wanted to be a nurse at some point. Preferably with children, but I ended in an aged care facility. Worked in a number of aged care places for seven or eight years.

Till I was married.

Being married and having kids was my ambition.

Now that the kids have grown up I think that I've redirected all my goals and ambitions. (Geraldine 2001)

Geraldine took a deep breath. She wanted to present a coherent story that revealed a clear historical progression to make sense of her decision to be sitting in this room. After all, she was being asked to tell her account to the lecturers (even though they called themselves 'learning facilitators') and her fellow students, so she wanted to show that she had given this careful thought – she wanted to convey the fact that she had not made the choice lightly. But where to start? She wondered about what was expected.

Geraldine was now 44, recently divorced with her three children all but grown up. Who would have thought that Jeff, her ex-husband, would have been so ready to look after the girls while she attended the residential school, he had been such a selfish man. This seemed to be just another sign that pointed her in the direction of social work. The need for a career change had come about when she found herself 'out of a job' after she and Jeff had divorced and the children no longer needed her fulltime attention. While she could fall back on her career as a nurse with the elderly, she realised at her age that this was no longer an option. Nursing was too physically demanding and she couldn't imagine being able to keep up the pace for more than 10 years. She wanted a career that she could continue in until she died.

Even though it felt like everything had happened so fast and she was still getting used to the idea of actually being here, Geraldine knew she had made a well-informed choice. Her interests in the social-community area had been verified by the career testing made available at a three-session

course she had attended at Centrelink. At the end of it all, the 'career counsellor lady' had recommended she complete the community welfare course at TAFE¹ because no one in her family had ever been to university. No longer being one to accept shortcomings, Geraldine investigated comparative job outcomes and made the choice to go to the top by applying for entrance into the social work course. Although she hadn't fully acknowledged it yet, it was also a decision that put an end to her sister's childhood taunts that she was not good enough. And now, how was she to answer this question.

There were a multitude of significant events and experiences that sprang to her mind, but which ones should she tell? Geraldine knew that it would have been most unlikely that she would have even been considering this question if she hadn't been exposed to the different courses and opportunities made available to her during her involvement with the local primary school. Getting involved with the school she had once attended as a child as a volunteer coordinator, was one of the best things Geraldine had ever done. There she had gained the confidence she needed to engage in a new career experience. She had been very fortunate that the new principal, Stephanie, was a real 'go getter' and had been keen to compensate her unpaid working hours by encouraging her to participate in the many professional development workshops that were available to the staff. These had been very beneficial and character building. Stephanie

¹ Technical College of Further Education

had certainly been a strong mentor, spurring her on to do bigger and better things.

On reflection, that episode in her life story had been an epiphanic one. It had certainly been where she had got her first taste of coordinating volunteer groups, whetting her appetite for this type of work, but more importantly Stephanie had inadvertently challenged her to re-evaluate her personal beliefs. Through her efforts Geraldine had come to trust that she was intelligent, overcoming the legacy of her sister's derision of earlier years. She had become more comfortable being herself, knowing that her sense of difference was not a bad thing. In fact, being drawn to the 'downtrodden, oppressed and badly treated', a trait recognised by her mother in her childhood, now stood her in good stead for a career in social work. The desire to do something with her life had sprouted then. Again, Geraldine reflected on what a great mentor Stephanie had been.

However, getting back to the question at hand, Geraldine recalled that it was only during the month prior to actually putting in her application for university entrance that she had really become conscious of different incidents that made her think that social work was for her. No doubt attending the career choice sessions had facilitated this awareness. Two particular experiences came to mind that she thought she could draw on to contextualise her motivations for joining the course. These highlighted skills she already possessed and showcased values that she felt sure would illustrate the soundness of her motivations.

Following her divorce Geraldine had taken up employment at a nursing home that had had a bad reputation. She hadn't agreed with what was happening at the home and had sought to right the situation. While there had been strong peer pressure not to rock the boat, she had continued with her endeavours until changes were introduced on the arrival of a new Director of Nursing. Geraldine had done a lot of soul searching during that time about the action she had taken, but her endeavours were finally affirmed gaining the respect from others who had also sought to have the situation addressed. Surely this incident showed commitment on her part to challenge unjust situations. Besides, she could also draw attention to the fact that the elderly in the home were not able to access any social work from the local hospital and had had to rely on the staff in the home. Being strong in the face of strong opposition from others was also a characteristic she felt portrayed a positive image of her commitment.

The other incident that came to mind when considering her skill base and interests was associated with her Grandmother's kidnapping by a 'strange' aunt. Geraldine had had to step in and sort out what was a complex situation. Geraldine's mother had had Power of Attorney in relation to her grandmother's affairs, but following her mother's admission into hospital from the stress associated with the event, Geraldine had found herself in the position of having to sort out the entire incident. This had involved contacting the relevant 'authorities' and negotiating with the different players to ensure that things were in place to resolve the matter in a

sensitive yet resolute manner. She had learnt a lot from that. It was an incident that not only demonstrated talents she already had, such as advocacy and negotiating a 'case plan', but she discovered that she enjoyed dealing with the various 'authorities'. The contacts she had made with the agencies during the whole affair proved useful too, it was they who had confirmed that they regarded community welfare workers more as volunteers and would prefer to employ social workers.

So, while Geraldine felt confident, albeit nervous, that she would be able to explain clearly why she was sitting here and had identified the experiential stories she would draw on to highlight her motivations for pursuing this profession, she was a little unsure as to how to proceed. Not only was the process of the discussion not what she had expected, but Geraldine also knew from experience that people often misinterpreted one of her defining behaviours. This was the third day of the residential and she was conscious that she had probably already been labelled as a 'left outer'. She knew that her deliberate choice to remain separate in any group, 'a floater' in her words, had its drawbacks. While she had always enjoyed mingling in groups, she had also been reluctant to belong. She liked people and was particularly interested in people of difference (this had been one of her attractions to social work as opposed to other professions that also had listed a prerequisite 'a liking of people'), but being categorised as a member of a group had always felt restrictive.

However in the past, and already in this group, people who were actual 'left outers' seemed to attach themselves to her, seeking out her company. While she didn't mind this and didn't go out to deliberately discourage them, she realised this might set her apart and 'go against her'. While Geraldine had a fleeting thought that this may actually be of benefit in her practice as a social worker, she was unsure how this would be seen in terms of belonging to the profession or the student context that she was currently negotiating. Still, she was really enjoying being here at the residential and had begun to feel like what she imagined a student should feel. Not only that, the Head of School had approved her doing a core social work subject ahead of time. This she took to be a further indication that she was a part of this cohort of students. Before she knew it, Geraldine took a calculated risk and began to tell her story. She heard her closing phrases ...

No one in my family's ever been to uni before. Before I signed up for my courses I thought I would do some exploring of job outcomes from different courses. I rang a lot of places in Brisbane that I knew of through my work. They seemed to always employ social workers above community welfare workers, so I thought, time for me to go to the top!

Yeah, and I couldn't believe it when I got accepted. It was just so exciting. I wanted to put it into the local newspaper. Nobody ... It was really exciting. I still haven't got over it. Yeah. And to be actually here, you know ... it all happened so fast.

Did I miss anything?

(Geraldine 2001)

Chapter 3:

'Thinking Narratively' – A Holistic Insight into Students' Choice of Social Work as a Career

In the previous chapter I described how using a narrative approach to explore career choice builds on the notion that choosing a career is more than entering a particular profession – it includes taking on an identity and a commitment to a cultural context. I also noted that much of the research into why people choose social work as a career tends to focus on identified traits (for example, Kadushin 1958; Hanson and McCullagh 1995; Csikai and Rozensky 1997; Christie and Kruk 1998; Biggerstaff 2000; Bowie and Hancock 2000) and disregards the context the information was gathered in and/or the time and place that the decision was made. From my perspective, this has resulted in limited information about the experience itself. Therefore in this chapter I aim to establish that narrative inquiry's focus on 'thinking narratively' facilitates the exploration of career choice within the context of the student's lived experience, promising to reveal more about the nuances of aspiring social worker's motivation for entering the profession.

Narratology as a research endeavour has become popular in recent times. Initially narrative was concerned with the examination of the structure of stories in relation to their function, form, generality and hermeneutic value (Kreiwirth 2000). More recently, stories have assumed a representational status and are being scrutinised in relation to their meaning – 'ontology, politics, epistemology,

ideology, cognitive status and disciplinarily (Kreiwirth 2000:296)'. Narrative inquiry, developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a method to explore teachers' knowledge and identity, proposes that narrative is a way of thinking, assuming ontological, epistemological and theoretical warrants. Adopting a three-dimensional lens (interaction, time and place), narrative inquirers form a partnership with participants to create a research text using a process of living, telling, reliving and retelling personal and social 'stories of lived experience'.

This chapter explores how researchers have sought to validate the knowledge derived from 'stories' and how I intend to use narrative inquiry to inform my investigation into the stories of experience relating to the choice of social work as a career at Central Queensland University. Assuming knowledge is created through the living and telling of experience with others (for example, Dewey/Addams), I demonstrate the process John, Geraldine and I engaged in to better understand the experience of choosing social work as a career. Using the metaphor of a quilt as a heuristic device, I illustrate how over a period of four years, field texts were collected, analysed and rewritten as a research text. I end the chapter with a story that introduces John. It describes his reflections as he participates in the 'Quilting Professional Identities' session during his first residential experience. While John doesn't actually tell his story, he engages in an internal dialogue that reveals much about his choice of career.

Experience as a cultural artefact for personal and professional practice, education and research

Researchers note that human service practitioners, in their professional practice, tend to refer to personal knowledge and experience more often than theoretical concepts and research information (Hudson 1997). While this has been considered a source of embarrassment for the professions (Polkinghorne 2000), for education philosopher John Dewey, experience was the basis for learning and knowledge creation (Dewey 1938). In my own experience as a social worker practitioner, I found the conceptual and thinking processes needed to engage with formalised research and theoretical constructs very different to those required to listen to and understand my own and other people's lives. In particular, the language used and the notions to be grasped often appeared outside the experiences of the practitioner and seemed to have little relevance to my day-to-day work.

I realised that when engaging with the experience of others, the telling of and listening to stories stood out as an important activity. I, like many others (for example, Bruner 1986; White and Epston 1990; Cortazzi 1993; Riessman 1993; Hall 1997; Lieblich et al. 1998; Clandinin and Connelly 2000), contend that human beings have always had a predilection for stories as a source of knowledge. Based on my own reflections, First Nation cultures have myths and legends that relay tales about their origins and how to relate to their environment. The media and entertainment industry exploit stories to earn money and create heroes. Each of us has a story that explains why we did things a certain way or about someone who has had an impact on our lives.

Stories are also endemic in the whole of social work practice – both spoken and written (White and Epston 1990; Hall 1997; Taylor and White 2000).

It is interesting to note that while pioneer social worker Jane Addams saw life as being ‘lived as an organic, contextually embedded whole (Leffers 1993)’ and knowledge being created by reflecting on lived experience (Seigfried 1999), objective knowledge continues to be privileged by the social work profession with little credence given to knowledge and skills learnt in the contexts of people’s own lives (White 1997). At Central Queensland University, one of the few schools of social work using Problem Based Learning in Australia, this trend has been reversed placing an emphasis on experiential learning in the whole of curricula (de Warren and Mensinga, 2004). As a learning facilitator in the program, I once again encountered the role of experience and found myself reflecting on what meaning it held for the individual as a conduit for learning and knowledge creation.

Of course, social workers interact with people’s lived experiences all the time. Nevertheless, how experiences are understood and utilised in the change process depends on the worker’s practice framework, including their underpinning values and the theoretical lens they use to examine life (Hudson 1997). As a social worker in the field, I preferred to see people and their problems as an interactive process between personal and social influences. Adopting a Humanist philosophical view, I chose to see human beings as wanting to make sense of their world and the experiences they had while in it – particularly when experiencing difficulties. Therefore, for me, my role as a social

worker was to facilitate this meaning-making process for people and to increase their 'ability to enhance their own well being' (Payne 1997:175). The theoretical approaches that I have used and have come to use to inform my research framework include: Communications theory; Systems theory; Feminism; Critical theory (Marxism); and Narrative Therapy. These theories have contributed to my understanding in the following ways.

Communications theory

Communications theory highlights the importance of recognising communication as a mediating influence both within the person and between people. As a theory, it has provided me with insights into the impact of verbal and nonverbal interactions and how they link to and impact on human behaviour. Concepts such as 'feedback', 'selective perception', and 'operating rules' not only describe and clarify the complexities of human interaction and behaviour, but they become tools by which to identify and rectify ineffective communication strategies that prevent people from attaining their identified needs (Payne 1997).

Systems theory

Systems theory, originally based on biological premises, evolved in the 1970s as a response to the predominance of psychological theories in social work. For me, systems theory provides a non-linear approach to assessment – a framework to map the different interconnections between personal, family and community systems (Payne 1997:137-156). While not providing me with any

direct intervention strategies, it has enabled me to gain a greater appreciation of the impact that family and social systems can have on an individual's understanding of their world and whether sustainable change can be achieved.

Feminism

Feminist theory presents a gendered view of the world and highlights the need to understand women's perspectives (Featherstone 2000). It also seeks to address the 'subordinate position of women in society' by acknowledging and legitimising the 'different voice' of women (Gilligan 1982). Being a woman myself, I have found feminist theory useful in helping me make sense of many of the experiences I had found confusing while growing up in a small rural town and when participating in a gendered education system which didn't allow girls the opportunity to pursue 'technical' subjects. While Feminism gave me the courage to challenge the systems that impacted on the women I worked with, it also confirmed for me the importance of acknowledging the expertise of the client in providing meaningful and sustainable change both at the personal and community level (Payne 1997).

Critical theory (Marxism)

Critical social work is a term encompassing a number of radical and emancipatory approaches, including feminism. Derived from Marxist political philosophy, critical theory emphasises a commitment to the oppressed, identifying the role of social and political systems in shaping people's experiences and transforming structures and processes that continue

oppression in society (Healy 2000). Central to this approach is the recognition that dominant discourses privilege elitist groups in the community and if left unchallenged, disadvantage and impact negatively on both individuals and communities (Payne 1997:214-215). Introducing the notions of praxis and reflexivity, critical theory encourages practitioners to continuously review the impact of their actions and to recognise the importance of ensuring theory is relevant to practice (Fook 2002). For me, critical theory reaffirms the need to accept the expertise of those seeking support and provides me with a structure by which to review my own professional practice.

Narrative therapy

Prior to moving into the academic sector, I participated in a workshop led by Michael White – a renowned narrative therapist in Australia. Drawing on Foucault and Derrida, White and his colleague Epston (1990) highlight the inherent oppressiveness of language in relation to culturally accepted knowledge and mores and challenge its use in the therapeutic sector. Narrative therapy, as a change strategy, recognises the importance of understanding how people story their experiences so that they can reposition a presenting problem in a less influential place. Among other things, this workshop introduced me to the idea that ‘working narratively’ provided a practical and respectful approach to engage with people’s experiences.

Moving from practice to research

Having encountered the notion that stories were a useful way to encapsulate people's experience, it was a small step to accept that this concept may be useful as a research method to explore the nuances of why students' choose social work as a career. I found few texts or papers in the social work literature (apart from Riessman (1993)) that examined narrative as a research approach. However, in time, I became aware that there were many different viewpoints about how to implement a narrative approach in the 'production of knowledge'. Much like a social worker's practice framework informs their approach for working with clients and their experiences, I could see that how a researcher used narrative as an inquiry strategy was determined by their understanding of the nature of social reality (ontology), how they thought humans came to know about that reality (epistemology) and their chosen theoretical assumptions (Crotty 1998).

Locating experience in narratology

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of studies that have come under the umbrella of narrative research (Mishler 1999; Johansson 2001). In the social sciences narrative research is situated at the constructionist/constructivist end of the epistemological continuum (Gergen 1985; Riessman 1993; Josselson and Lieblich 1995; Hall 1997; Crotty 1998). Rather than claim an objective view of knowledge as positivist inquirers do, narrative researchers privilege the role of meaning making processes of both the researcher and/or the participants within a changing socio-historical context (Phinney 2000). Thus, it is said that narrative research is generally taken up by

inquirers who are comfortable with ambiguity and have a willingness to change and re-change interpretive conclusions based on new material gained from further reading (Lieblich et al. 1998:10). However, this is not to say that researchers are without theoretical parameters to guide their interpretations during their investigations.

Where the individual narrative researcher positions their approach theoretically depends on the purpose of their exploration (Linde 1993; Josselson and Lieblich 1995; Gergen 1999a). As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, initially the narrative project was largely concerned with the **structure** of stories, where they were examined in relation to their function, form, generality and hermeneutic value. However, in recent times, stories have taken on a more **representational** status and are being studied for their meaning (Kreiwirth 2000:296). While it is not within the scope of this thesis to fully describe the different approaches to narrative that have evolved (texts such as Cortazzi's (1993) provide a comparative analysis), for you as the reader, it is important to note that for the purposes of this research project I conceive narrative as a way of both conceptualising and representing the storied nature of human development and experience – akin to the narrative inquiry approach conceived by Clandinin and Connelly (1999).

As a particular narrative undertaking, narrative inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin 1990) can be summed up as an approach to explore experience. It uses methodological strategies that emanate from both ethnography and phenomenology (Connelly and Clandinin 2004). Ethnography is described as a

research approach that explores social settings in an effort to describe the perspectives and social practices of the existing culture and its way of seeing the world (Hammersley 1985). Phenomenology seeks to explore experience and the meaning it holds for individuals (van Manen 1990; Creswell 1998a; Crotty 1998; Barnacle 2001). The word phenomenology itself comes from the amalgamation of the Greek words *phenomenon* and *logos* to mean the 'study of phenomenon', as such researchers using this approach are not only concerned with the study of human subjects, but of any object in relation to what meaning it holds for the observer in its 'most original state' (Barnacle 2001). For Connelly and Clandinin (2004) then, lived and told experiences become objects that represent phenomenon and are cultural artefacts that are there to be explored.

Researchers' experiences of narrative as a research approach

Narrative approaches are useful in addressing the complexity and diversity of life systems – particularly in facilitating an understanding of the intersection between culture, person and change (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:vii). The aim of narrative researchers is not to reduce the diversity and variation when exploring topics of interest, but to expose these in order to find greater meaning in their subject matter. Therefore, there are usually no a priori hypotheses, but rather a general research interest or direction that guides the selection of participants and procedures for obtaining the data/field texts. While this has led to questions about the truth and validity of research projects using this approach, narrative researchers (for example, Riessman 1993; Lieblich et al. 1998) don't expect to discover or claim conclusions that can be generalised across populations. Rather, life stories are understood to be constructs that are used subjectively by

people to provide a 'narrative truth' that accounts for culture, person and change. As such, the emphasis is on exploring meaning rather than discovering a truth.

While narrative researchers tend to position their projects according to their perceived purpose and the emergent benefits of the approach, as a novice inquirer, the plethora of narrative approaches to be negotiated can be overwhelming. Building on the notion that narratives can be understood as structural entities or as representational constructs (Kreiwirth 2000), Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998:11-14) provide a more detailed framework to understand narrative projects. They claim that narrative researchers tend to interact with narratives along two dimensions, that is, somewhere between a 'holistic' or a 'categorical' approach along one dimension and somewhere between a focus on the 'content' or the 'form' of the narrative along the other.

Where a researcher places themselves along the holistic versus categorical dimension is largely determined by whether the purpose of their project is to explore a particular phenomenon across several texts (category) or to provide a holistic understanding of a person's development over time (holistic). The level of analysis the researcher wishes to engage in to reveal 'hidden' aspects of a participant's narrative identity determines the position the researcher takes along the content versus form dimension. How a story is told is considered harder to manipulate than the decision about what can be included as content, therefore analysis of the narrative's form is said to be more revealing of a participant's analysis. The resulting intersection of the two dimensions provides

a framework for understanding narrative material, which is presented visually in the following table:

Table 3.1: Summary of the ways researchers can interact with narrative material (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber , 1998)

Holistic-Content	Holistic-Form
Looks at the whole story (or many stories over time) and focuses on content	Looks at the whole story and focuses on the form/structure (for example, narrative therapy)
Categorical-Content	Categorical-Form
Focuses on the content in selected/separate parts of the story (content analysis)	Focuses on the structure of separate parts of the story (narrative reading)

Narrative inquiry, as an approach, encourages researchers to adopt a three-dimensional attitude (temporality, interaction and place) when they engage with narratives (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). However, while it would be a 'tidy' act to locate the approach in one of the above cells, from my perspective this is difficult as the approach tends to move between categories at different times of the research process. In general terms, however, I would position narrative inquiry as a holistic approach that addresses both content and form aspects. Before positioning this project, I wish to turn to a number of projects that have utilised a narrative approach to explore life stories/field texts and their links to professional experiences. By identifying a number of theoretical assumptions derived from these studies, I hope to highlight the underpinnings of my approach and where this project sits in the matrix presented in Table 3.1.

Researchers' experiences of narrative and its links to career choice

To situate my narrative approach in this inquiry, I look at the theoretical underpinnings associated with five texts exploring narrative projects and their relationship to professional identity and career choice. There are many similarities between the pieces of work, yet they provide a historical overview of the developments and subtle nuances associated with narrative research. The works reviewed are from a number of disciplines and can be located in various cells of Lieblich and her colleagues' (1998) framework describing their methodological approaches. The studies reviewed attend to: the purpose of professional life stories (Linde 1993), an exploration of therapists' professional stories (White 1997), understanding craft artist's stories of identity (Mishler 1999), the significance of social positioning in stories (Riessman 2001); and shaping and understanding teachers' professional identities (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

The purpose of professional life stories (Linde 1993)

Linde, a linguist, uses the choice of profession as her focal point when investigating the role of life stories in western cultures. Employing a largely textual analytic approach, she delves into the linguistic structure of participants' life stories to reveal their psychological and cultural importance as a social practice (Categorical-Form (Lieblich et al. 1998)). Linde claims that in western society, a person's occupation is considered public property and is therefore, a readily available unit of discourse for research. The professional life story is also seen as a means of expressing a sense of self and defining group membership, hence it is subject to a number of culturally defined social demands. For

instance, in western cultures ‘... we expect our degree of intimacy with a person to correlate with our knowledge of their life story (Linde 1993:7)’.

Linde also draws attention to the elements that contribute to a ‘successful’ professional life story stating that coherence and causality, rather than factuality, are aspects to be looked for. There is a strong expectation that there is a reasonable sequence and chronology of events and if this is not possible, then an explanation or at least an admission to their absence should be available. Moreover, the account offered must support, wherever possible, the listener’s own life story. In the case of the choice of profession, character and richness of account are also seen to be necessary in providing an influential story.

Transferable assumptions:

Linde’s (1993) work confirms that the narratives collected about student’s choice of career are likely to contain cultural norms that include coherence and causality. Moreover, as they are also considered a means to negotiate group membership, the content will reflect social and professional expectations about what traits are necessary to become a social worker. Of comfort to me was the realisation that asking about career choice experiences is a socially accepted practice which should result in less ethically troublesome interactions when asking students’ about their career choice experiences.

An exploration of therapists' professional stories (White 1997)

Rather than employ orthodox psychological and counselling theories to examine aspects of human behaviour, Michael White turned to critical philosophy, literary theory, cultural anthropology and postmodern ethics to inform his theoretical approach to psychotherapy (White 1997:ix). Once deciding on a poststructuralist position, White set about deconstructing client's narratives about their presenting problems in an effort to reveal ways of thinking that, while valued by society, devalued and oppressed clients. By focusing on the narrative's form rather than the content (Holistic-Form approach (Lieblich et al. 1998)), White aimed to re-story the client as the hero rather than the victim.

Applying this approach to examine the professional lives of therapists, White concludes that the move into a professional culture results in people describing their lives in more narrow terms often leaving out significant others and important events. This, he believes, results in feelings of 'burden, fatigue, and exhaustion, and *leads* to circumstances that establish a vulnerability to despair and to burn-out' (italics my words, White 1997:3). Drawing on the work of Geertz (1973) and Myerhoff (1982), White recommends 'practices' that encourage therapists to include personal and contextual knowledge to create a 'thicker' description of their lives. Myerhoff (1982) noted that the 'thickening' of people's stories came about through the telling and retelling of preferred stories. She noted that this process revealed links to shared values, hopes, purposes and viewpoints. Therefore, through the practice of 're-membering' (White 1997), therapists are encouraged to privilege their own history and associations with

significant others in order to recognise and value their own knowledge and skill base.

Transferable assumptions:

For the purposes of my research inquiry, White's (1997) approach validated the use of stories as both a research approach and as a practice to sustain social workers and therapists. This eased some of the ethical dilemmas I had about interviewing students in the course in which I am a 'gatekeeper', but more importantly it reaffirmed that the practice of presenting 'thin' stories (often what evolves from reductionist methods of research) contains ways of thinking and living that, while venerated in the wider culture, don't necessarily reveal the deeply held values, hopes, purposes and viewpoints acquired in aspiring social workers' 'non-professional' lives.

Understanding craftartist's stories of identity (Mishler 1999)

In his study of the formation of an 'adult artistic identity in a world of mass production and standardisation' Mishler, like Linde (1993), uses methods grounded in sociolinguistics to interpret the psychological, social and cultural functions of the stories craftartists' tell (Categorical-Form (Lieblich et al. 1998)). However, while his conclusions differ from Linde's in as much as he recognises the individuality of stories rather than their universality, Mishler acknowledges the importance of the psychological, social and cultural functions of narratives about career choice. He advocates that professional life stories should be understood as reflexive actions that represent identity performances that are socially situated and a synthesis of form and content (Mishler 1999:18).

Naming narrative as praxis, Mishler (1999:18) claims narratives should be seen not so much as predetermined structural entities or merely developed in relation with others, but rather as products that evolve from human reflexivity. Mishler argues that as human beings conscious of cultural norms, we 'adapt, resist, and selectively appropriate' cultural mores when storying our own lives. Thus, coherence in stories is not necessarily the result of adherence to linguistic forms and meanings alone, but is a negotiated product of an interchange between all participants within a mutually understood social and cultural framework.

Transferable assumptions:

Mishler's (1999) work reveals that the emergent professional life stories that the participants in my inquiry tell can be seen as purposeful 'identity performances' revealing much about how the individual perceives their audience and how they want to be seen – a site for reflexivity. As such, the themes and processes that emerge may not necessarily be 'factual', but reveal personal and socially constructed norms that are negotiated during the course of an interaction. It could be reasonable to assume then, that over time, the stories participants' tell may come to reflect what they believe the researcher's biases are as much as changes they attribute to their own development, thus reinforcing the notion that the stories told are a co-construction that reveals perceived personal, social and professional agendas pertaining to the choice of social work as a preferred career.

The significance of social positioning in stories (Riessman 2001)

Riessman also explores the construction of identities in personal narratives. As a social worker she claims her particular interest is in the nature of social positioning that occurs in personal stories. Building on Mishler's notion of 'narrative as praxis' (1999) Riessman claims to unite research and practice around the values of social justice and equality.

A participant's understandings of her 'troubles' contain the seeds of her social analysis that, in turn, can be interpreted for the ways it supports and/or undermines larger systems of domination. The approach attends to contexts (local, cultural, and historical) in the interpretation of personal narratives. (Riessman 2001:75)

In this particular study (2001), Riessman presents a case study of an infertile married Indian woman in Kerala. Using a sociolinguistic approach to analyse the text (akin to Categorical–Form analysis (Lieblich et al. 1998)), Riessman pays particular attention to the 'proximate interview context' that the story is told in. She builds on the notion that we perform our identities (Mishler 1999) and looks for the social positioning that occurs in the telling of a story by drawing on information gained or known about the local, cultural and historical contexts the story is being performed in.

Riessman's conclusions about life stories are similar to Mishler's (1999) and cautions researchers to consider the following premises: first, stories should not be taken at face value, but rather should be subjected to interpretation, expansion and analysis; second, stories need to be understood as 'situated utterances' that take into account cultural mores in relation to a particular listener; third, the teller of the story doesn't reveal an essential self, 'but a story

that shines light on certain aspects of identity, and leaves others in the shadow (Riessman 2001:81)'; fourth, narratives are open to subjective interpretation, therefore different readers are likely to read different meanings into the stories; and finally, being situated in cultural and historical time, stories expose a participant's analysis of the relationship between social agendas and individual agency.

Transferable assumptions:

One of my underlying interests in aspiring social workers' narratives of careers choice is in the information they can reveal about the relationship between social agendas and individual agency. Riessman's study affirms that this can be gleaned from students' narratives by taking into account the local, cultural and historical contexts in which the story is being performed in.

Shaping and understanding teachers' professional identities (Connelly and Clandinin 1990; Clandinin and Connelly 2000)

Many of the observations Clandinin and Connelly make about the link between teachers' narratives and identities mirror those made by the researchers already cited in this chapter. However, what Clandinin and Connelly provide is a holistic description of teachers' experience, in all its complexity, of acquiring a professional identity. Using metaphor as a linguistic device, experience for Clandinin and Connelly becomes a 'three-dimensional space' in to which the researcher enters to appreciate the facets of interaction (personal versus social interfaces), time (past, present and future) and place associated with the area of

interest they are exploring (Connelly and Clandinin 2004). However, because experience can't speak for itself, narratives (for example, journals, photographs, interviews, conversations, letters) are collected and examined as represented artefacts.

Describing this process in another way, Connelly and Clandinin call on researchers to adopt both a phenomenological and ethnographic approach to the told 'stories of lived experience' (field texts), examining them both as by-products of the culture/environment they are told in and as aesthetic objects in and of themselves (2004). Having collected as full a description of the experience as possible, the researcher re-stories the experience so as to offer the reader an opportunity to enter that same 'three-dimensional space' of the experience both the participant and researcher occupied. Typically this involves the use of metaphors, but not always, because they are able to convey the experience of a phenomenon in ways that reach beyond the logical mind to capture emotional overtones (Tompkins and Lawle 2004).

The goal being rich description, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) in their inquiry into teacher identities, build on a previous image of a 'professional knowledge landscape' used to describe teachers' experience in developing knowledge in context (both personal and social), by coining the term 'stories to live by'. This term is presented as an intellectual thread to explain the even more complex link between knowledge, context and identity. As a term, it not only provides a richer description of the elements and processes involved with shaping a professional identity, but when the 'stories to live by' are also described as

'shifting stories' (stories made in context), the term reveals an inherent political nature. Other metaphors developed by Connelly and Clandinin include: 'secret stories' representing stories teachers tell of actual practice behind the classroom door; 'sacred stories' depicting theoretical and other stories thought sacred to the practice of teaching; 'cover stories', those stories used to give a culturally acceptable picture of what happens in the classroom; and 'funnel stories' representing the official edicts and policies that are fed down from governing bodies (Clandinin and Connelly 1996).

Transferable assumptions:

As already noted, many of the assertions that Clandinin and Connelly make about the links between narrative and professional stories are the same as those cited by previous researchers, however they provide an accessible model to engage with and then report on experience – something I wanted to do in my study. By conceptualising narrative inquiry as a process (experience) and a phenomenon (object), the possibilities of engaging with and revealing more about the practices and elements associated with choosing social work as a career increase. Table 3.2 below, summarises the transferable assumptions I have gleaned from the studies reviewed.

Table 3.2: Summary of assumptions underpinning the exploration of career choice stories

Assumptions about career choice stories	
Linde (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking about career choice is a socially accepted practice • Stories are a means to negotiate group membership • Career choice stories portray accepted cultural norms around coherence and causality • Stories content reveals cultural and professional expectations
White (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After professional training, stories are 'thinly' described using theoretical constructs as characters rather than significant people and events • 'Thickly' described stories reveal shared hopes, values, purposes and viewpoints • Including 'thick' descriptions sustains professional practice
Mishler (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career stories are purposeful identity performances • Stories provide a reflexive site for the teller to review the creation of the self in relation to society, etc. • Career choice stories are not 'factual', but are a constructed project between the teller and listener accounting for personal and social norms • Stories reflect how the teller perceives the listener and how they want to be perceived by the listener (a political act)
Riessman (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career stories provide a reflexive site where the nexus between social agendas and personal agency is revealed • Stories reflect local, cultural and historical contexts that it is being performed in • Career choice stories reveal the teller's social analysis which can either support and/or undermine larger systems of domination
Clandinin and Connelly (1990–2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience can't speak for itself, it's representation is in the form of text • By way of the three-dimensional space metaphor (to capture experience), the researcher can enter and describe the experience of creating career choice stories • Career choice stories are both a phenomenon to be valued aesthetically and represent a cultural practice that needs to be understood • Stories reveal a complex process that links the development of knowledge in context with identity ('stories to live by') • Career choice stories need to be 'restoried', as a co-construction of the teller and listener, to reflect the experience of the research itself in a way that will resonate with the reader (use of metaphors)

Positioning myself in the narrative template

While my assumptions underpinning this research project incorporate aspects of the above studies, my position as a learning facilitator at Central Queensland University drew me primarily to narrative inquiry as coined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Clandinin and Connelly's foregrounding of Dewey's notion of experience being a conduit for education resonated with my own professional practice and interest in exploring the career choice practice of social workers. Moreover, for me, their holistic/content form (Lieblich et al. 1998) approach to narrative research captures the nuances of the social worker's approach and experiences in the world and utilised many of the understandings and skills I had acquired in my professional background.

Nevertheless, as a social work educator, I also wanted to incorporate a social justice agenda and examine the way that student's position themselves within the experience itself (Riessman 2001). Moffatt and Miehl's (1999:69) claim that social work students assume a stance of privilege by defining clients as an 'other' who has been 'pathologised' and by adopting a position of 'worker neutrality' by way of a 'non-judgemental attitude'. Having wondered how this is in keeping with the social agendas set by the community and profession in Australia, Riessman's (2001) approach offered me an additional conceptual tool to explore how students positioned themselves and are positioned in field texts. Therefore, while I use narrative inquiry as the prime methodological focus, I also pay attention to this aspect – in effect, taking up all four quadrants of Lieblich et al's (1998) narrative model at different stages of the project. My next task in

conceptualising my research approach required me to consider how this could be applied in practice.

Using the quilt as a heuristic device to link theory and method

Denzin and Lincoln (2000), used the notion of *bricoleur* to illustrate the different aspects of the role the qualitative researcher – the methodological *bricoleur*, the theoretical and the interpretive *bricoleur*. As for others, this metaphor evoked a relevant image for me when I reviewed my experience in conceptualising and undertaking of this research inquiry. So far in this chapter, my focus has been on being the theoretical *bricoleur*. This has required choosing bits of material and creating a research template from a wide array of information. It has also meant making sure that the pieces, when cut, fit together as well as complement each other to form an acceptable article in the eyes of the academy, the profession and myself. This process has led me to identify a variety of approaches under the umbrella of narrative (with particular reference to studies linking narratives and career) and my positioning within that framework – the result, a template demonstrating a preference for the narrative representing experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) with a focus on social positioning (Riessman 2001).

By describing the actual process of this project, I now take on the role of the methodological *bricoleur*, and some of the role of the interpretive *bricoleur*. As my intention in this study is not so much to focus on the structural textual analysis of stories as such but to capture the holistic experience of the participants and the research event as well, I used the quilt as a heuristic device

to conceptualise my experience of 'the doing' and to link the research inquiry to my evolving understanding of the phenomenon of career choice itself (Dexter and La Magdeleine 2002). As will become clear, not only did my growing understanding of the methodological approach influence the parameters of the project, but the administrative processes I encountered also impacted on its progress. As a result the research experience itself could be described as discontinuous and 'patchy'. However, as the pieces have been joined in the writing of this research text, I am much more aware of a unified artefact of personal and professional value.

Before entering the domain of the doing, however, I wish to briefly explore the links between my choice of metaphor and the inquiry topic. As highlighted in Chapter 2, career theorists in response to changing work conditions are rethinking the importance and the nature of career. There is general agreement that the career choice process is not a purely objective process, but is also a 'subjective and affective domain' of human activity (McMahon and Tatham, 2000). Therefore, based on the premise that metaphor's fundamentally affect our conceptual system (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), I also chose the quilt to challenge my initial notion that choosing a career was akin to the start of a journey. While other researchers and theorists enriched the area of career development and professional identity by introducing notions such as 'landscape' (Bruner 1990; Connelly and Clandinin 2000), the patchwork quilt challenged me to consider the gendered experience of choosing social work as a career and the to recognise that a 'professional landscape' is itself a socially constructed artefact.

Metaphors have been used in career counselling since the early 1900s, particularly as an intervention strategy to help illuminate a career's various facets and encourage the 'reframing of career experience' (Carson 2003). When reviewing the literature, Inkson (2004) identified nine key metaphors associated with career choice. These were: career as an inheritance; as a crafted construction; a seasonal cycle; finding the perfect fit through matching; a journey that follows a path over time; a social and political project that entails networking in both social and economic systems; finding the right role on an organisational stage; as an economic tool to create wealth; and as a storied past that links to our present and hoped for future. The 'career as craft' metaphor emphasises the role of the individual in creating their own career, encapsulating both functional and creative aspirations (Inkson 2004:101).

Bateson (1989) employed the metaphor of a quilt to illustrate a 'model of improvisation' used by women in their career building process. She notes that although western society upholds a linear ideal about professional success, this rarely applies to women. She describes how women often pursue a career in discontinuous circumstances – mainly due to reproductive demands. While Bateson acknowledges that her sample is not statistically representative, she states that it is important to recognise that most people nowadays, not just women, do lead lives that are makeshift and rely on improvisation. Therefore, rather than be lured into researching the separate and disassembled pieces that emerge from each aspect of life, Bateson advocates researchers look at lives

as a whole in order to capture the unifying patterns that emerge so as not to lose the 'loving labour used to compose the patchwork quilt'.

Therefore, for me the metaphor of the quilt as a heuristic device supported the focus of this study – as a qualitative research approach (Denzin and Lincoln 2000), a research experience (Bateson 1989) and as a construction of career (Inkson 2004). It acknowledges the relevance of previous research identifying traits (for example, helping others), but provides a more holistic picture that includes the important processes involved in linking these to create a professional identity (Clandinin and Connelly 1996; Mishler 1999). Not only does the quilt capture the 'textuality' of choosing social work as a career in today's work environment (Torsney and Elsley 1994; McMahon and Tatham, 2000), but it reflects the notion that social work is a gendered profession that, like quilts, attends to private and public questions and carries a cultural identity that has been stitched together from pieces of cultural and professional material to reveal a patterned article based on a social justice template (Bateson 1989; Torsney and Elsley 1994; Camilleri 1999).

Negotiating ethical considerations and entrance into the field

The formal execution of this project began in 2000 when I enrolled in the Masters course at Central Queensland University. By then, however, I had been a social worker for 17 years and a university facilitator for one and so in many ways this project began 'in the living' (Connelly and Clandinin 2004) many years before it was conceived as a project. Having been through the process of choosing social work as a career myself and being a key player (learning

facilitator) in the university program the participants would be recruited from, I was not only aware of the context (place, formal and informal degree expectations) in which the participants would find themselves during the course, but I was also immersed in the culture and nuances of the profession of which the participants/students wished to be a part. Despite the fact that I began to formally journal these lived experiences in a more prescribed way when I started the project, I have found that the line between the living and the telling of my research and my own career choice experiences have, and will no doubt continue to blur both now and into the future.

In hindsight, this research project has had three distinct phases. Each phase has been supervised by different research advisors and has been punctuated by various life events. In summary, the first stage could be described as an immersion experience that had few theoretical boundaries, but provided a rich array of field texts. The second period involved reflection on the collected field texts (while still creating new ones through journaling) and further understanding of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the project. This phase concluded with a redefining of the parameters around the collection of field texts. This process included reducing the participant number from 20 down to two and a refining of the theoretical approach as it applied to career choice. The final stage of the project involved the further collection of field texts and the co-construction of the research texts to be included in this document. As each phase was characterised by different ethical considerations that are integral to the research process, I will begin the description of the doing

by introducing both the administrative and intellectual processes associated with ethical matters in each phase of the project.

The immersion phase

Although I was familiar with narrative as a therapeutic approach and the purpose I had in mind at the start of the project, I wasn't fully cognisant of what narrative as a research method entailed. However, much like the experiential approach employed by the social work program, narrative research is said to be best learnt 'via experience and supervision' (Lieblich et al. 1998:11). Therefore, on the advice of my first research advisor, a social worker but not a narrative inquirer, I applied for ethical clearance to interview a sizeable cohort of students (20-30 students). Permission was given by the University on the 22 June 2000 for a period of 18 months to recruit participants and to interview them using an unstructured and open-questioned interview arrangement.

Having given consideration to my role as lecturer/learning facilitator in the programme, protocols were established to assure participants that there would be no academic implications or personal ramifications for choosing to participate or withdraw from the study (for example, I was not responsible for marking any of the participant's assignments). Invitations to join the research process were sent out by email by the school secretary at the start of the calendar year, prior to students attending residential in 2000. The email outlined the purpose and procedures associated with the project and invited those interested in participating to reply by email to the School secretary who then passed their information on to me. The students were informed that the

research process involved a single interview to be conducted during the residential period, either during lunchtime or after the day's activities. They were again assured that, if they chose, they could withdraw at any stage of the research process without penalty and that I would provide a transcript of the interview, on which they were welcome to provide feedback.

Twenty students, in all, agreed to participate in the research project: six in their first year of study (all women); four in their second (two men and two women); six participants in their third year (all women), and four participants who were completing their fourth year (all women). All initial interviews were completed in the first half of 2000. The tape-recorded interviews either took place in the main lecture theatre used by the students during the residential or in a smaller tutorial room, also used for residential activities, on the Rockhampton campus.

Relying on my previous experience as a counsellor and in keeping with a narrative approach, I chose to use an unstructured and open-ended interview format. Once the Consent Form was completed and the purpose of the inquiry explained, I began each interview with an explanation that rather than use a set battery of questions I was inviting them, as the participant, to tell me a 'story' about why they chose to do social work. I also informed them that while I was likely to ask questions along the way to clarify aspects of their story, by in large they were free to set the agenda and control the direction of the interview. I informed the participants that the expected time for the interview would be approximately an hour. While this was generally the case, some interviews went longer and others were shorter and two were interrupted.

Even though the formal boundaries of the research project were negotiated prior to each interview, by virtue of our respective roles in the training process I was aware of possible power imbalances that existed between the participants and I. Being concerned how this may impact on the participants and the stories that would be told, I was assured that asking participants about their career choice was a socially accepted practice in Western countries (Linde 1993) and that doing so had professional benefits (White 1997). Moreover, on reflection, I realised that the power imbalance itself could serve to accentuate the social purposes of career stories. That is, rather than hinder the process, it actually emphasised the need to negotiate group membership highlighting the social positioning aspect that I was particularly interested in exploring (Linde 1993; Riessman 2001). My concerns were further allayed when the participants themselves commented on the benefits they had gained from participating in the experience.

The reflective phase

Due to personal illness, I took 12 months leave of absence from the research project, extending from late 2001 until 2002. During that time, staffing issues emerged within the university leaving doubt as to who would be able to supervise my Masters' candidature. While certainty around this issue was not resolved until the third phase of the project, I had interim advisors who provided challenges and guidance. During this time I also considered upgrading the project from a Masters degree to a PhD candidature. While I made several attempts to make the move, the difficulties associated with being enrolled in a

small regional university where expertise in methodological approaches is limited and friendships and professional relationships overlap, the transfer of candidature proved difficult. The attempt, however, did provide an opportunity for me to review similar implications for those choosing to pursue their social work training in a regional institution. The crossover of personal and professional spheres can give rise to many overt and subtle ethical implications, which can't always be accounted for at the beginning of a period of study. In a journal entry I made while attending a Narrative Matters conference a year after my own study/career choice experience, I wrote:

There's a large part of me that is still reluctant to visit my experience last year. It seems to me that there are many, many layers that are just too complicated to dig through. I do know that I have felt very confused and powerless through the whole process. My attempt to create a sense of control has been my decision to not look at the situation and just to concentrate on the work. I think if I let myself look at it too closely, there are many relationships I would need to re-examine and I don't think I can afford that (23/5/04).

I had little research contact with the participants during the reflection stage. However, I spent time transcribing the tapes myself and returned them to the participants in 2003. Due to outside noise and the volume level of the participant's voices, not all the tapes were clear enough to transcribe, nevertheless, those that were, I sent written copies of our conversation with an accompanying letter outlining my initial reactions to the content that emerged from the interviews (see Appendix B(1), B(2) and B(3)). To those whose interviews were inaudible (two tapes), I also sent a letter explaining the situation and a copy of my reactions. I invited each of the participants to respond if they wished. Towards the end of this stage of the research process, I was much relieved to secure the research advice of a newly appointed Associate

Professor in Social Work at Central Queensland University, Jane Maidment, and to engage the supervisory skills of Professor Michael Connelly, co-author of the narrative inquiry approach I was pursuing.

The integration phase

Engaging the expertise of two new research advisors gave me the opportunity to review the research process in a formal way. As the number of 'field texts' collected during narrative inquiries is generally large, experienced researchers using this approach recommend that studies be limited to a smaller number of participants (Lieblich et al. 1998; Connelly 2002 -2004). Having realised that the number of participants in the project needed to be reduced and arrangements made for further contact with those willing to continue in order to complete the project, I set about obtaining further ethical clearance in early 2004 to re-engage with and re-interview a smaller cohort of students. Ethics clearance was given for a further period from March until December 2004.

The participants for the second half of the study were purposely selected from the group who had already provided feedback on their transcripts. The two chosen were still involved in the training process rather than in the workforce, therefore re-contacting them was made easier. Moreover, their involvement meant that I could maintain the original aim of the project – exploring students' experience of career choice. As before, the School secretary sent an email inviting Geraldine and John's continued participation; they both agreed claiming it helped them to keep learning about themselves. Both John and Geraldine were mature aged students, studying in external mode and lived in the

southeast corner of Queensland. While both had families and worked in the welfare/health sector in 'helping' roles, one was completing the degree part time and the other in fulltime mode.

Due to the remaining time frame of the project and the participants' relative inaccessibility (eight hours drive away), the participants and I agreed to continue our discussions about their experience of choosing social work by telephone and email. This was not without some challenges, but did reflect the distant nature of the course. The telephone conversations (1 x one hour session each) were recorded and transcribed, and copies sent to Geraldine and John within two months of the interview. The format of the interviews remained open-ended, but they focused on the content from our previous interviews and my re-storied texts of their experiences – particularly exploring the gendered nature of the career choice stories told (an emerging theme in the progress of the research project).

Ethical considerations for the reader

While I have only alluded to it above, the relational nature of narrative inquiry compels researchers to go beyond the institutional guidelines for ethical clearance (Connelly and Clandinin 2004). While it is important to consider the relationships between the researcher and participants, the imagined relationships between the finished research text and readers also need to be considered. The nature of research and its representation often precludes negotiation between the researcher, participants and future readers. This can leave participants in a vulnerable position exposing them to 'unfair judgments'

being cast on participants' lives. To avoid this, throughout the research process, the participants were invited to negotiate the representation of their experiences in the research texts to ensure there was a resonance with their own understandings of the events. This included a review of the chapters presenting my experience of their stories.

Collecting field texts as material

Narrative inquiry as a methodological approach requires more than the collection of interview transcripts as 'field texts' for the analysis and the retelling of experience. In capturing the three-dimensional nature of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend that the researcher include other 'field texts' such as written descriptions of the physical environment, the researcher's thoughts, documents, life experiences, and photographs throughout the research process. For the purposes of this inquiry, I collected a number of 'field texts' about the experience of choosing social work as a career, these included: transcribed texts from the original participants (used as general information and the formulation of general impressions); transcribed texts from the two principle participants, John and Geraldine (five hours of taped conversation); journal notes (particularly from January 2003 until December 2004), describing my own thoughts and impressions of the research experience, descriptions of the environment and notes from conferences and workshops attended; emails with the participants and colleagues in the social work, education and research fields; a letter written to my father during my final year of training as a social worker, and; autobiographical notes based on my own experience as a social worker, learning facilitator and researcher.

Appreciating the texture and nuances present in the field texts

As I describe the process of my engagement with the collected field texts, I am once again reminded of the notion of the *bricoleur*. Just as issues to do with the selection of and the ethical protection of the participants fell into different stages, the process of analysis and rewriting of the field texts did much the same. Each encounter with the participants' told and lived stories provided new opportunities to deepen my understanding of their analysis of choosing social work as a career. As alluded to in Chapter 2, these encounters were often accompanied by further forays into the literature, triggering other journal reflections and annotated bibliographic material. These in turn became field texts to be considered in the subsequent rewriting of the material. Therefore, the analysis process was much more of an organic process than a precise linear procedure.

Although I describe the steps I took, successive experiences provided information that led to the removal of certain bits of material and the use of others. I made decisions that become somewhat hidden when the process is recorded in a research text. While it would be nice to say that there were technical reasons for particular changes, this was not always so and reflects more of a 'knowing' on the part of the participants and/or an aesthetic preference on mine. For ease of description then, I return to each of the phases of the research process referred to previously and outline the processes of analysis I engaged at each stage in more detail.

The immersion phase

Although much of the formal analysis (for instance, sorting the content and addressing form issues (Lieblich et al. 1998)) didn't occur until the integration stage, my natural inclination to mull over information while listening to people's stories contributed to my understanding of the process. Albeit I was conscious of not engaging at a therapeutic level with the participants, the interviewing process for gathering qualitative data is much the same as it is to gather information for assessment purposes in social work (Scourfield 2001). Hence, on the completion of several of the interviews, I found myself commenting to my research supervisor that much of the content in the interviews revealed more about how the participants saw themselves than identifying particular traits that were necessary for entrance into the profession. In fact, it was this observation that led me to find and read texts by authors such as Clandinin and Connelly (1999), McAdams (1993) and Mishler (1999). I found I wanted and needed to know more about the links between narrative and professional identities.

The reflective phase

During the initial stages of the reflective phase, I spent time transcribing the interviews conducted with the 20 original participants. Although the transcribing process itself and the initial reading of the transcripts provided global information about the structure and organisation of the experience of choosing social work, I also chose to use a template to compare the material in the transcripts with aspects of the theory I had gathered during the initial stages of my reading. This was made up of a checklist (see Appendix C) highlighting some of the points noted by Gergen (1999b), Linde (1993) and Riessman

(2001) as well as some of the aspects of the theoretical lenses I included as part of my professional practice framework (feminism, critical theory and systems theory).

At this stage I noted that the stories told could be described as 'progressive', that is, the endpoint revealed an improvement in the teller's life circumstances (Gergen 1999b). Not only that, there seemed to be many more endpoints in the women's stories when compared to those of the men (Gilligan 1982). While all the participants tended to position themselves as being 'different' to the average person in some way (Riessman 2001), the women framed their aspirations of being helpful in terms of being personally involved with clients whereas the men talked about changing systems (Gilligan 1982). I also noted that the participants seemed to pick a number of different stories from different times in their lives which they then linked together to create a causal explanation for their choice in career (Linde 1993). These stories were organised around a theme rather than following an historical progression, giving credence to the focus on traits in much of the career choice literature.

Although the overall message that I gleaned from my initial reading of the transcripts could be expressed as 'It's who I am and besides I need a job', the experience itself appeared to involve a process of piecing together traits into a number of stories that made up a whole – once again, much like the making of a patchwork quilt. I decided to share this preliminary observation with the participants to gauge their reaction. While those participants who responded thought the metaphor resonated well, my then supervisors had reservations.

Rather than abandon the metaphor, I wondered about the significance of the difference in reactions and found myself doing more research around the effects of metaphors on people's conceptions of reality (for example, Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Gergen 1999a). I also read more in the career guidance literature and noted the shifting trend towards more protean notions of career choice and planning to better reflect the current employment market (Hall 1996; McMahon and Tatham 2000). It was also during this stage that I came across Bateson's work (1989) exploring the development of women's careers.

The integration phase

By the time I reached this stage of the research process, I had accumulated considerable knowledge about the phenomenon of career choice and the narrative inquiry process. I had also refined my theoretical template and was ready to explore John and Geraldine's initial transcripts in more depth. As has already been evident, there is no smooth transition from field text to research text in narrative inquiry due to the 'revisiting' nature of the process itself. However, as a practical approach to the task, at this point I chose to adopt Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002:339-342) tabled interpretation of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry space to guide the reading of the field texts (transcripts, information from the web about the areas they lived in, emails and my own journal notes). Ollerenshaw and Creswell suggest reading and making meaning of the field texts by looking for and listing the following components:

- Interaction: scrutinising the text looking for personal experiences and interactions with other people, for instance, along a personal to social continuum, that includes the identification of intentions, purposes and points of view on the topic of the story.
- Continuity or temporality: collecting data in the text identifying past events, present experiences and actions that will occur in the future that impact on the narrated experience.
- Situation or place: identifying specific sequential circumstances of the teller of the story and/or the actual physical places related to the narrative (Ollerenshaw and Creswell 2002).

In order to capture the social positioning that occurred in the participants' narratives about the experience of career choice, I added an extra column for the analysis process. Riessman (2001) states social positioning is ascertained by examining the text in light of information gained or known about the local, cultural and historical contexts the story is being performed in. Therefore, my impressions and results of my research about the participants' hometowns were collected and recorded in a separate column of the table. This fourth dimension helped identify the ways that the overall narrative supported and/or undermined the community's and/or the social work professional story.

While using the above table helped me better understand the interaction between the different dimensions, it also enabled me to compare elements of the participants' stories that revealed other nuances about conditions impacting on the choice of social work as a career that I had not previously seen (see

Appendix D). On the advice of Professor Connelly (May 2004), I also linked theoretical concepts with the content of the field texts by making notes in the margins of the transcripts. This additional procedure not only provided a different view of the content, it also deepened my understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of narrative and career choice and further highlighted the participant's social positioning, particularly in relation to the theoretical assumptions informing the social work profession.

Piecing the material together

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) facilitates reflexivity in a number of ways. It advocates a reflexive approach during the gathering and analysis of the field texts and then during the co-construction of the new narrative. This requires the researcher to be aware of their own story and to continually position themselves in relation to the inquiry and process of meaning making. Also implicit to the approach is the idea that the new narrative will invite the reader to enter a reflexive space to construct his or her own story. As previously mentioned, one of the criteria defining the success/validity of a narrative inquiry text is whether it resonates with the reader (Phillion 2003). Whereas dissertations using a narrative inquiry approach tend to veer away from a reductionist style of writing that allocates particular tasks to separate chapters, given my experience with the cultural imperatives governing research at Central Queensland University, I have chosen to err on the side of writing a more traditional research text. However, as is evident so far, I have tended to incorporate elements of analysis throughout the document in order to convey the organic process associated with the research approach.

Like the previous processes described, the rewriting of the field texts followed a similar journey over several phases. The initial feedback stories I returned to John and Geraldine contained pieced together stories around specific themes. While imposing some chronological order to convey the elements of causality and coherence evident in their narratives, I included detail about where the story was told to provide contextual material about the training process the participants were engaged in and to suggest possible impacts on the story told. I also captured the overall feeling of the stories John and Geraldine tell by including many of their words and some phraseology in the rewritten texts allowing their voices to dominate at different times by presenting their rewritten narratives in large blocks of text.

Even though the initial stories were intended to present the understanding of Geraldine and John's experiences of choosing social work, in the process of 're-storying' their anecdotes, I emphasise the social positioning that occurs between them and their characters far more than they do themselves. When giving feedback about the stories, both Geraldine and John refer to insights gained from the explicit highlighting of their relationships with significant others and express delight with the presentation of the information:

That story is so cool, it made me think about the different things that have influenced me in my life and now I have finally attached it to something, thank you. Here are my contributions from where I feel I am today. (John, May 2004)

I love the disjointedness of how you wrote my story as it matches my personality and thoughts and enriches your patchwork quilt. (Geraldine, April 2004)

The second group of re-storied texts were intended to provide an analysis of social positioning inherent in the participants' choice of social work and to reveal any links to their imagined role within the profession. I chose to use a letter format primarily based on the discussions I had with John and Geraldine around the emergent themes and stories identified in the first stories – these appear as the fourth and fifth chapter in this text. However, I also included other field texts (mentioned above), to augment the imagined discussions I have with the participants in order to convey the relationship between social and individual expectations in relation to career choice. In particular, the re-storied letters aim to illustrate the underlying theoretical assumptions identified by the other researchers in relation to career choice and narrated professional identities.

Before moving into the next chapter, it is necessary that I introduce John as my other co-participant. Following is the final story that describes the first residential experience in which both participants take part. As in the previous stories, this one is set in the main lecture theatre. It continues a discussion/forum that I as learning facilitator have introduced, and continue to chair, around the notion that people construct a professional identity. I have asked the students to describe why they chose to join the social work profession. Geraldine has just completed her story and the session is drawing to a close. For reasons of his own, John chooses not to contribute. However, he finds that the other students' accounts have triggered many of his own memories and he has, in fact, participated in an internal dialogue that reveals much about his choice of career.

Story 3: John's reflections during the 'Quilting Professional Identities' session

John listened for a while, but as he was wont to do, he found his mind wandering off on a tangent relating his story to what was happening for him in the welfare sector at the moment. After all, the bottom line for enrolling in this course was to be enable him to go beyond the 'ceiling' he felt he had reached in his present job. Being a 40-year-old male in youth work didn't quite sit right. Besides, he now felt he was at the stage where he wanted to become a 'professional male social worker' with something to offer that went beyond what he had been able to do so far. He wanted to be involved in making policy and being influential in bringing about a system that was more responsive to men's needs – in much the same way the women's health movement had achieved services for women. Still, that was where he was at now and the question seemed to demand a more in-depth analysis of why he was in this room.

In the introduction to the session, the learning facilitator (he liked the sense of equality that came with that term) had stated that there had been a very strong vocational dimension associated with the profession when it first began. While John could relate to that, he was far more interested in the gender aspect that was also mentioned. After all, he felt that his had been an incredible journey out of the traditional white male work culture into a more humanitarian one. When he looked back, John recalled how he had deliberately made choices to be more involved in the human service area. It had fitted his philosophy on life and offered him 'a place' in

the community that he felt was worthwhile and needed. John was conscious though, that it also set him apart from his family – both his family of origin and the extended one he was a part of now by virtue of his wife.

John grew up and still lived in what had been a traditional mining town in southeast Queensland, more than 10 hours drive (745kms) south west of Rockhampton. His parents 'did fine' in terms of raising him and his older brother. His father, set in his ways and cranky, worked hard and was very much a part of the local community. His mother, whom he had dearly loved and admired until her recent death, was also a working class woman. John sighed and thought, 'now she was someone that social workers could learn something from'. She didn't have any formal qualifications. In fact, she worked as a housekeeper in a nursing home, but she was known for her humanity and for standing up for the underdog. John was sure that was where he had found his strength and commitment. Still, she had had trouble talking about some things – particularly about her and his father's divorce when he was 18. That was a rough time.

John mused over how different he and his brother were. When they had dirt bikes as kids, Matthew's was always registered and clean, his was unregistered and the loudest. Even now, Matthew was likely to have next year's holidays planned while he was unlikely to even know what day it was. Still, Matthew was a good brother and supportive. He had stood by John even if he hadn't fully understood why the rift between John and his

father had eventuated. Mind you, John wasn't entirely sure why that had happened either, but he suspected it had something to do with his 'alternate' philosophy on life. John guessed that he had probably pushed the 'non-traditional job' thing a bit far, but this was extremely important to him, it was his real passion. Even last week while sitting at the table with his wife's family, he had found himself challenging his father-in-law's 'you just have to get on with it' viewpoint when discussing a family issue. John felt it was his destiny to follow this humanist path and felt it was something that was quite engrained in his personality.

John recognised he had deliberately made the effort to move out of what he described as the 'white, Anglo, Celtic, 'get a haircut', 'get a job', 'pull your socks up' culture'. He thought of the mentors he had had over the years and the opportunities that had exposed him to different lifestyles and ways of being in the world. Being discharged from the army had been just the beginning. John recalled the family reaction when he had decided to take on the apprenticeship to become a chef. His father had asked him, in a nice way, whether he was going to join 'those cultural poofers' and his mother had conspired with his aunts to come up with a plan to keep him safe from the homosexuals. John had brushed up against homosexuals while in the job, but there were other things that had challenged his perceptions on life much more. He recalled the anxiety he had felt on his first shift working at an a la carte restaurant where cooking steaks to order was the norm rather than serving them as they came. John also recalled the depression he had experienced during what he had come to call his

'40 nights in the desert', when working in Gympie north of Brisbane. That was the loneliest time of his life.

Marrying Anne had pushed him into opening another door. While moving away from many of the 'cultural norms' associated with being a male, John had always been cognisant of the need to think through his responsibilities as a partner. In his view, the time commitments associated with being a chef rarely encouraged a successful marriage, so John decided to look for a day job. He was pleased when he secured a position with a youth detention centre as a cook. At that time, 1987, there were some very innovative models of how to work with young offenders in place in the juvenile justice sector. His position was not a straightforward cook's role and had involved training young detainees towards completing an apprenticeship. This had meant he had had to attend staff training on instructional methods. John recalled being jolted out of his acceptance of traditional approaches to learning. This, and being seen as an equal player with other professionals such as social workers in 'reforming' young people's behaviour, had greatly impacted on his whole approach to young people and in his work today. The other thing he had discovered while there was his great love of art.

The art teachers at the detention centre were just fantastic. He had been fortunate enough to be involved with the programs that were available for the young people. While he had always loved to draw as a kid, it was during these courses that he had discovered his great love of colour and

of art. Thinking about it now, John could see how this was all tied up with his personality and general attitude to his work. Anne had always seen and described him as 'arty-farty'. Even this week during the residential, he had found himself preoccupied with how he could complete a creative piece of work for his first assignment instead of paying attention to the learning facilitator's complete presentation of course requirements. Nevertheless, his art had stood him in good stead in his jobs since the detention centre and would probably do so in the future. In his current job as a youth worker in the Health Department, he used art as a means to build rapport with young people, research their views on what they wanted to see in their community and as a strategy to educate them. John found himself drifting off reliving the play he, his colleagues and a group of young people had put on for sexual health week. That had involved a lot of creative energy, which not only was a great success with the young people, but had also gained him recognition with the departmental heads.

The choice to do social work was a complex one. Obviously all these skills were too good to let go of and were useful in preparing one for a job in social work, but this whole issue of social work being a gendered profession continued to echo in John's mind. He thought about how this question impacted on him as a person. It was interesting that he had chosen a wife who also found herself confronted with issues pertaining to gender in her work. Anne had chosen to be an officer in the fire brigade, 'a girl playing in a big boy's sandpit'. John admired the way that she handled the challenges she faced each day at work and wondered about the role

modelling that she and he provided for their three children. Mind you, in many ways they still played out traditional roles in the home. Anne certainly organised the home front with things like getting breakfast ready etc., and he remained fairly aloof from the family-nurturing role.

John recalled with mirth an experience he and Anne had encountered in the supermarket that epitomised the issues they both faced in their respective jobs. They had gone there straight from work so Anne was still in uniform with all her pips shining forth from her shoulders. A tall, blonde woman, about his age, had kept following them, looking at Anne. Eventually she approached Anne and said, 'What do you do, I've got to ask, what do you do?' Anne replied that she was the district support officer for the fire brigade. The woman didn't know what that was so Anne explained what the position entailed. There was great excitement when the woman revealed that she was a female drag racer. This had given them both the opportunity to sit and compare notes about what it was like and how they coped. That had been great fun and highlighted the personal issues confronted when choosing non-traditional work roles.

John had recently faced his own nemesis during a joint supervision session with a male colleague. Jeffrey was a male social worker with a much softer nature than he himself had and this had caused conflict between them. During this supervision session, which was with a senior female worker, John had declared that he didn't see himself as a stereotypical 'soft powder puff' male worker and that he was in fact a

strong male with a stereotypical male past that involved playing football and having a tattoo. He wanted to be a worker that could hang on to that image and bring with him other skills that would offer men different opportunities. He wanted to model being a strong male that was willing to explore his feminine side, but remain true to who he was.

So, while becoming a social worker seemed to be the next step in the journey for him in terms of his professional opportunities, John did experience a little ambivalence about what was expected of him as a social worker. Calling this session 'Quilting Professional Identities' certainly highlighted this dilemma for him. He often wondered where he fitted into his family and in many ways this feeling was being mirrored back to him during this session. He had a passion for bringing a more humanist approach to male affairs and social work certainly offered him a way to do that, but finding a place for himself in this profession may be more of a challenge than he had thought. Never mind, there were things he wanted to learn and he certainly didn't see the degree as a ticket but more as a tool. Maybe this was his way of distancing himself from the label of social worker yet integrating valuable strategies for his future professional use? This session certainly had challenged his thinking. Although he hadn't said anything out loud, he recognised that this had been an opportunity to practice holding back to let other people have a say rather than putting forward his views – another learning goal he had set himself to achieve in the year ahead.

Chapter 4:

Geraldine's Experience of Choosing Social Work as a Gendered Profession

In Chapter 3, prior to the story describing John's reflections on his career choice experiences, I note that the analysis of Geraldine, John and my 'stories of lived experience' is provided in a letter format in future chapters. This chapter includes the first of three letters – a letter written to John. The letter delves further into Geraldine's experience of choosing social work. It is composed of stories, conversation fragments and field notes describing Geraldine and my shared meanings of her experience of choosing social work as her preferred career. Chapter 5 contains an analysis of John's experiences in a second letter, this time written to Geraldine. The last of the three letters appears in Chapter 7. Although I mainly use this final letter to reflect on my research experience and how it has contributed to my identity as a researcher, as is typical of a narrative inquiry, rather than restrict the analysis to one section in the thesis, I also include pieces of reflection that pertain to the overall analysis of the experience of choosing social work as a preferred career (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

The letters themselves are re-storied texts based on the different interactions I have had with John and Geraldine (for instance, in person, by telephone and email) and includes reference to other field texts (for example, journal reflections, professional literature, emails and conversations with colleagues). However I must warn you as reader, that the letters themselves appear

somewhat formal and are not altogether in keeping with a letter that I would ordinarily write to a friend or a colleague. I have chosen to include headings and on occasions I launch into what can be described as 'academic speak'. My intention in doing this is to remind you of my role as learning facilitator as well as researcher, and to illustrate the professional-personal tensions that covertly, if not overtly, exist in the field and literature.

As stated above, this chapter is presented in the form of a letter to John. Drawing on Geraldine's story in Chapter 2, I expand on identified themes such as her capacity for caring and the importance of having a mentor. For Geraldine, the notions of relationship and caring are defining characteristics that suggest social work is indeed a career that would provide her with the recognition and respect that she is seeking. This chapter 'thickens' Geraldine's own identity story (White 1997), shedding light on her experience of choosing social work as a gendered profession. While the evolving 'stories of lived experience' that were co-constructed by Geraldine and myself in the writing of this chapter began around themes I identified in her initial story, the significance of Geraldine's experience of gender in relation to her choice of profession was sparked by the discussions I had with John. Theoretical links that contribute to the meaning making process that Geraldine and I engage in are also interspersed throughout the text.

The Personal Narratives Group (1989) defend their interest in women's personal stories by claiming that 'the dynamics of gender emerge more clearly' in women's narrative accounts than in those of men, however this wasn't

immediately obvious in my reading of Geraldine's story of career choice. Nevertheless, adopting the premise that much can be understood by what is not said as by what is said, there were many occupational assumptions made by Geraldine and myself that may not have emerged without John's account. Building on the Personal Narratives Group's (1989) assertion that life stories shed light on many aspects of gender relations, this chapter/letter reveals more about Geraldine's construction of a gendered self-identity; the relationship between her and societal expectations in the creation of gendered norms around career choice, and; the dynamics of power relationships between men and women within the social work profession.

Dear John,

The career choice story you told me after the forum at your first residential has raised some interesting points of discussion for Geraldine and I – particularly in relation to the gendered nature of the profession. While the issue of gender featured strongly in your career choice story, it was clear that neither Geraldine nor I had considered it as a shaping feature in ours. It was only after I reflected on the session some weeks later that I remembered that Geraldine had mentioned very few men in her own account. Apart from musing on her ex-husband's uncharacteristic support while attending the residential school, her narrative about choosing social work was filled with characters who were women. Since then, however, the topic of gender has become a crucial 'piece' in our discussions via email and by telephone. This is not to say that we didn't expand on other points of influence, but gender did begin to stand out as a significant variable in Geraldine's choice of profession – especially in relation to

her positioning within the dominant cultural stories that determine the professional roles that men and women can play in the welfare sector (Camilleri 1996b; Christie 2002; Riessman 2002; Scourfield 2002).

Here are a couple of segments of the letter I sent to Geraldine after the forum inviting further discussions on the matter. I have included them to provide some background for you to the remainder of this letter.

I have been thinking about some of the issues you raised during the open forum the other day and thought I would write to you to clarify a few things. First however, I want to say thank you for participating in the session the way that you did. I was very interested in the way you demonstrated your growth as a person over the years. Although yours was a 'typical presentation' of those who explain their interest in pursuing a particular profession, for example, you made sure that there was a link between past, present and future events (Linde 1993), I was fascinated that you didn't really mention any men in your narrative of career choice.

As you know, I am very interested in how would be social workers put together 'stories of lived experience' to explain their move into the welfare sector and how they position themselves in relation to their main characters. It wasn't until John told his story that I realised that you hadn't included any significant men in your story and that I hadn't invited you to do so. Even though I declared at the start of the residential forum that I was aware that social work is considered a 'gendered profession', I didn't think to explore how this notion related to your experiences of choosing social work.

Of course I had, and still do, have thoughts/theories about what are the predominant events and stories that draw people to social work. These aren't particularly original as there have been many authors who have written on these same areas over the years. One of my thoughts is that many are drawn to social work to help others after they have overcome some of their own difficulties in life and want to share this process with other people. Others are motivated to change the world because they have felt misunderstood and are on a quest to create a society that is more akin to their own value system.

Mind you, I don't see either of these as your primary motive. Rather, you appear to have moved into the profession as a natural progression from nursing to motherhood to social work – all which are fundamentally caring professions assumed by women. It seems

strange then that I didn't ask you any more about this in the session and can only assume that until considering John's response, I too have never been challenged to consider a gendered perspective in relation to my own career choice.

I am aware that you have a clear sense of difference from your family of origin. You mentioned that while your family tended to view people who had personal problems as having created them themselves and therefore needing to resolve them themselves, you thought differently. This sense of difference appears to be a common theme in many people's career choice stories. Social workers and students I have talked to over the years express a similar sense of difference. As an example, here is a comment Kathryn made in her learning journal after the 'Quilting professional identities' session (she gave me permission to share it with you):

I came to social work because I was the odd one out in the family, the one with the strange ideas, who questioned rather than conformed. I'm still in that position in the family. Or maybe it is because I see people as intricate, that their individual experiences may make it difficult for them to make the so called right decisions and yet sometimes by not making those right decisions they dig their holes deeper. (Kathryn 2004)

I find that I too can relate to this statement. It's not that I wasn't loved or accepted in my family of origin, but I felt that I had different values and aspirations to them – including a strong desire to explore and resolve feelings. This was something that my family seemed to regard as unnecessary or a private affair. I found their attitude annoying, disrespectful and superficial and set about righting this situation.

Even though I have highlighted the similarities of the themes you used in your story of career choice to those used by others Geraldine, I don't want to dismiss how your 'stories of lived experience' are still unique to you. (Although it does highlight that there are particular dominant professional stories that we perceive we need to take account of as we construct our own stories, particularly if they are to be used to facilitate our entrance into a particular social group (Linde 1993).) Just to summarise these events then, I saw your defining 'stories to live by' centring around: your family experience, described as typically traditional and illustrative of your tendency to bring home strays; your school experience where you were continuously being compared to a bright, older sister; the transforming experience you had through the mentoring you received from the principal during your extensive involvement at the local primary school your children attended; your participation in the career guidance work shop at Centrelink and its confirmation of your career choice; resolving a family 'drama' when your mother was unable to deal with the repercussions associated with the kidnapping

of your grandmother by your aunt, and; finally your experience at the nursing home that had a 'bad reputation' and your role in changing the dominant practices.

Reflecting on my role in the career choice experience

Needless to say, John, while I was writing this letter to Geraldine highlighting the issues about gender, I grew a little concerned about my role in this process of exploring stories of career choice with you both – especially as you are both students enrolled in the program of which I am a part. As a learning facilitator employed in the program, it could be argued that I have had considerable influence in relation to the stories that you and Geraldine tell. Linde (1993) states that while being asked about our choice of occupation is a culturally accepted way to elicit life stories, they are also used to 'negotiate group membership and to demonstrate that we are in fact worthy members of those groups, understanding and properly following their moral standards (Linde 1993:3)'. As a consequence, I have wondered, John, whether you and Geraldine have felt the need to 'get the story right' and how my raising of the issue of gender actually impacted on Geraldine – especially as she hadn't mentioned it in our initial discussions. On the other hand, this power differential between us need not be a hindrance, but rather an opportunity to expose and accentuate the process of negotiating group membership, highlighting both your positioning in what you perceive to be the dominant cultural/professional stories (Miehls and Moffatt 2000b; Riessman 2002).

Nevertheless, I am aware of the possibility of my influence in the process of identity formation. After all, Mishler (1999) argues that professional identities are

formed as a relational process rather than a personal project and that they take into account cultural mores in relation to a particular listener. Savin-Baden (1998) points out that students in higher education are in the process of identity formation, albeit a professional one, and while I may relish my part in this as a learning facilitator, in my role as researcher I struggle with the outcomes of our discussions. I understand that this is one of the apparent tussles when doing narrative research (Arvay 1998). However, I am consoled by Riessman's (2001) view that people's stories don't reveal an essential self, but rather expose seeds of social analysis that can, when interpreted, expanded on and analysed, be understood in the way that they support and/or undermine larger systems of domination. Once again, the situation may intensify and highlight the social positioning that is revealed in your stories that may not have arisen if I had been a peer.

When I expressed my concerns to Geraldine about my dual roles as facilitator and researcher, she agreed that time and place did have an effect on her stories, but chose not to comment on our relationship directly. She said:

When we had our discussion three years ago I had recently overcome a number of personal challenges but if I told it today it would be a much more positive story as I am feeling much more confident and self aware than I did in my first year. (Geraldine 2004a)

I have come to realise that this narrative process has been a useful one for you too, John. You and Geraldine have both shared with me the benefits of the process, describing experiences typical of those participating in a 'remembering practice' (White 1997). White claims that by reclaiming and privileging the significant historical and local associations in therapist's lives, we

provide opportunities for including other links and facilitate occasions for therapists to experience themselves as 'knowledgeable and skilled in their work (White 1997:23)'. Geraldine said:

When I first read the story I felt really honoured that you had put me on paper. It was very good for me to read it all. I felt some kind of distance from it and a kind of release from the things that bothered me in the past...The story has made me think of the person I am now from all of these experiences and I am happy about how my past has made my life rich. (Geraldine 2004a)

However, I digress, and although the research experience itself is worthy of investigation I explore it elsewhere and now wish to return to aspects of my social position – my gendered and professional role as a woman and social work researcher. In a journal entry I made in April 2004, I reflected on my own position in analysing and rewriting your narratives and remark how much easier I found it to analyse your transcript than I had Geraldine's and wondered whether this had something to do with my being a woman.

The words in Creswell's (1998b) book came flooding back about the challenges of being an 'insider' of the community being studied. It was so much easier to analyse John's story. After all, he was a 'he' and Geraldine a 'she'. I wonder whether this confirms the view that social work is a gendered profession. Being a woman myself blinds me to some of the nuances that I am sure are evident. (Mensinga 2004)

Van Heugten (2004) identifies a parallel experience in her research and concludes that collusion and unexplored areas in research can occur when the investigator's 'organising principles' include dominant discourses that replicate those of the respondents, professions or impacting institutions (van Heugten 2004:209). Adapting the psychotherapeutic process of detecting countertransference, van Heugten recommends that the researcher 'de-centre'

themselves using methods such as subversive reading and diligent self-examination to move beyond possible impasses allowing valuable information to surface.

Christie comments that men's 'presence in social work, precisely because of the gender contradictions it raises, offers an important site of reflexivity for both women and men social workers (Christie 2001:34)'. It is of little surprise, John, that your narrative not only raised issues for Geraldine to consider, but provided me with the opportunity to examine the dominant discourses that are part of the 'organising principles' I depend on when I read and retell both your's and Geraldine's narratives of choosing social work as a career. While I have explored some of these in the introductory chapter in relation to my interest in this project, I have found that the process of 'co-construction' we have been engaged in has been invaluable in terms of challenging my own gendered subjectivity.

Juxtaposing the role of men in social work with the position of women in engineering as a means of 'decentring' my research position, I found Walker's (2001) article on exploring the formation of gendered identities in engineering particularly useful. Walker claims that the accounts of female students in the university setting reveal that 'gendered power relations are obscured in a gender neutral discourse of the 'ability to do the job' (Walker 2001:76)'. Moreover, the presence of 'clever', 'strong' women in engineering programmes do not change the traditional constructions of gender relations, but rather serve to 'cement' them. While women were not seen to be different to the men in the

course, neither were they considered the same. Rather, female engineering students were viewed as different to other women and afforded the 'accrual of personal power' associated with men in the wider community. I found myself wondering if and how the social work profession perpetuated traditional gendered discourses and what part I played in this as a learning facilitator.

Awareness of a gendered identity

So, John, your story played a major part in raising my awareness of a gendered identity in social work. By way of re-engaging with Geraldine about the gendered aspects of the profession, I chose to share with her how I had become aware of and had become fascinated by students' seemingly different 'treatment' of the male learning facilitators as compared to the female facilitators in the program. I shared how the feedback forms filled out at the end of each day at each residential typically singled out the personalities of the men (for example, 'Max is such a wonderful presenter') while focusing on the content of what is presented by the women (for example, 'The information on community work was useful'). I wondered if she had any ideas on this. I had noted in my journal (24/4/2004) prior to talking to her, that maybe this was in some way related to the profession being a gendered one and just as engineering students may focus on a female lecturer in a different manner, social workers may do the same with men. After all, men in social work are not met with the same obstacles that women are in occupations typically held by men, rather they are often encouraged to participate to legitimise the profession (McPhail 2004).

Geraldine had chuckled at my observation and seemed to think that I had accurately interpreted the situation. She predicted that if the learning facilitators asked the students to claim their own comments in the feedback forms, the evidence to support my 'hunch' would be there. Geraldine claimed solace in the fact that other students seemed to think the same way that she did (even if it was subconsciously), and went on to tell the story about her reaction to one of the male lecturers.

There was a lecturer, Phillip, he was so good. But the first time I sat and listened to him, it's so hard to describe, it was kind of like entertainment value because he was male. By the third time, I could really listen to him seriously. It was nothing to do with his gayness as I am quite comfortable with gay men. We have a few at work, and I get on with them quite well... actually I'm probably more comfortable with them because they're friendlier somehow, they don't seem to have their hidden agenda. (Geraldine 2004b)

Although the differential treatment of academic staff by social work students has not been explored in any depth, researchers have noted that gender discrepancies do exist in relation to salaries, number of positions available to women academics, publication production, sexual harassment of students and the inclusion of gendered perspectives in curriculum development (McPhail 2004).

Have you noticed, John, how social workers are rarely challenged to reflect on how they acquire their individual or worker identity (Moffatt and Miehl 1999)? There is an assumption that the social worker embodies the 'normal person', often leading the worker to construe their reality as 'the only conceivable reality'. Moffatt and Miehl welcome the challenge that postmodernism brings to social work's claim of neutrality and the non-judgemental observer and invite students

and academics to reposition themselves to challenge the 'static, neutral and essentialised' representation of the social work identity. As part of this process, they claim that the individual is 'more able to know their identity when compelled to explain the position of oneself to another' (Moffatt and Miehl 1999:74).

Triggering my own reflections on positioning the social worker as neutral in gendered terms, I dug up a book by Mercer (1997) that I had recently read. In her reflections on traversing the spaces of student and lecturer in higher education, Mercer comments that a popular image perpetuated in feminist pedagogy is that of

... the bourgeois all-sacrificing, all-nurturing, well-resourced power – sharing 'good' mother. This mother has no desires of her own, no needs, no problems, no will of her own except to nourish and empower all her students/children whom she loves equally and without reservation. (Mercer 1997:42)

On rereading this passage I wondered whether the students' feedback forms had exposed a tacit support for a dominant cultural discourse that states that successful female facilitators/lecturers do not require personal feedback. Interestingly enough, while social work training addresses anti-oppressive practice and raises issues concerning the different forms of inequalities (Cree 2001), I can only recall one occasion that we as learning facilitators chose to challenge the students on their feedback – and then it was done in the spirit of fun.

After numerous comments made by the other female facilitators and myself, one of the male staff took it upon himself during one of the regular 'feedback on

the feedback' sessions in the Harvard theatre, to inform the students that the women facilitators felt overlooked. After some jovial discussion around the topic, not much else was said. However, for the remainder of that particular residential school, the women did receive many more comments. As an addendum to this anecdote, when one of the women recently returned to address students in the role of a regional manager of a large welfare agency instead of in her role as learning facilitator, it was interesting to me that her name was actually mentioned in the feedback forms with no prompting from staff this time. So, John, once again, the juxtaposing of your and Geraldine's account of career choice has raised some vexed questions for me about the covert ways the profession/academia continues to support traditional discourses of gender power relations. Nevertheless, returning to my interest in the impact of gender on career choice 'stories of lived experience' to do with social work, I asked Geraldine if she had noticed that she hadn't included men in her account.

No men in Geraldine's story!

Despite the fact researchers maintain that people typically exclude experiences in their stories that 'undermine the current identities they wish to claim (Riessman 1993:64)', Geraldine thought it strange that she had failed to mention any males in her original story. Nevertheless, she conceded that this had indeed been the case. On reflection, she claimed to never having any significant male influences in her life. Geraldine takes up the story:

The place I grew up in, and still live today, is predominantly working class. Although there are now new developments along the canal area that are being settled by the upper and middle classes, when I was growing up the town was a place to retire to or a place where

people lived in subsidised housing in 'Housing Commission Suburbs'. There were few community services then and if you needed any major medical treatment you had to travel two hours to the nearest training hospital. Of course there were aged care homes, but very few other places that provided employment for young people, particularly girls, when they left school.

My family was a traditional working class one where Dad saw himself as the breadwinner and master of the house and Mum was there for the kids. I now see Dad as a product of his time, but I never really knew him. He died when he was 55 and I was 21. I don't feel I really knew him well enough to say he had any influence on my life, but then again he may have in ways I am not aware of. When I was a child he worked on Saturdays and for long hours during the week. He would sleep in on the weekends and then spend time working on his car or mowing the grass – like Dads used to do! He had difficulty showing love, but we knew he loved us because we would overhear him bragging about his kids whenever we spied on him while he worked on his car with his mates.

My brother was a 'little accident', born five years after I was. My sister and I thought of him as the spoilt brat because he received a lot more material things than we did. Looking back on it now, I think that my parents had more money at that stage of our lives, but back then we saw it differently. He and I used to fight a lot, but as we have grown older, we are quite friendly and have grown much closer since my divorce. He lives only ten minutes away from me, whereas my sister lives two days drive away.

I gave up on my husband fairly early in our 20-year marriage. I stopped trying to involve him in family life. When I was married to him, I felt like a stagnant, unwanted, little creature and decided to throw myself into looking after the kids and earning money in ways that still allowed me to be at home when the children returned from school. I was telling my friends in the four-wheel drive club (4WD) the other day that if my husband had loved and respected me more, I would gladly have stayed at home and continued to play the role of the traditional wife. I never felt respected by him, so once I realised that the children were not going to be around for too much longer, I decided to make more of a life for myself. While it has probably been my own views about marriage that have held me back over the years, I have done more in the five years since I have been divorced than while I was married to him.

The other significant male in my life has been my son. I kicked him out of home soon after I started uni. I'm very proud of doing that now, but at the time it broke my heart. He was 19 and unemployed. He would be at home all day and would make no effort to find a job because the 'dole' was enough money for him to live on. I told him if that was how he planned to live then he would need to do more

around the house and be a part of the family. He didn't do any of this, so I told him either he changed or I would kick him out. He didn't believe me at the time. I struggled within myself, but I had some good support from a friend who told me I couldn't keep making false threats. So I did throw him out. It was very hard as I had all these notions about what a good mother entailed; but I was also determined to make a future for myself. After I threw him out he went to live with his father (which I found disappointing), but he found a job and started looking after himself physically. I am so proud of him now... that's that tough love thing isn't it?

The only men in my life now are those I interact with at the car rallies, at work and the men at residential schools – even my mechanic is a woman! I have been a member of the 4WD club for two and a half years now and absolutely love it. A couple of friends and I joined after going camping together with our kids for many years. It was and still is a place where women have to prove themselves to get clear of the 'silly woman' label. I think I am clear of that now, especially after this last weekend when I actually won a whole section and came eighth overall – that was real girl power. It did take a long time though. It's not that I am tomboyish and need to prove myself, but the men in the club do tend to treat you like you have just come from Mars. I don't know how they think we got on without them. Mind you, there are some nice men among them who treat their wives well and encourage them to participate in the rallies. I haven't seen this before and didn't think relationships could be like that. I did receive some flack from the other women in the group though this last time. I stuck up for a couple that were playing out traditional roles, you know, where he was waited on hand and foot by his wife. I could see that he really loved her though and that is what matters to me. I would be quite happy to do that if I was loved.

I work with men at the nursing home, but I don't get on with them for some reason. I think they lack too much to be good carers and I get angry with them. As I said before, I am much more comfortable with gay men. I find them friendlier and they don't have that hidden agenda. The men I have met at the residential schools are really special. I find I can sit down and talk to them without that hidden agenda – they're open, honest and considerate of feelings. I think of social workers as either women or feminist men. I do see my attitude to men as a problem though and will need to work on that. If I don't, I believe it will interfere with my work in the future. It's funny; I don't think I would have seen this before.

During our discussions Geraldine conceded that it had only been in the last five years that she had begun to trust men. Although there is research to suggest that in 'our sexist society, females will display a greater interest in female-

dominated occupations' (Johnson 1998), Geraldine didn't see this as contributing to her decision to pursue social work. She suggested that because she couldn't remember ever having any of her personal questions or problems answered by a male, she found herself automatically thinking 'female' when the phrase 'social worker' was mentioned. Nevertheless, she saw her revealed position in relation to men as a possible barrier in her future work as a social worker. She likened her attitude to a wall that needed to be knocked down and drew parallels between this wall and the one she had already identified as having towards religion. Geraldine reminded me that she hadn't been conscious of this until I had asked why she hadn't mentioned men in her story and saw that she 'pushed all male involvement away as much as she could'. She vowed to examine this in greater depth.

It intrigued me that Geraldine had chosen to be reflexive around this issue when questioned by me rather than accept it as her position. I wondered if reflexivity was a practice she was inclined to engage in naturally or whether it demonstrated her training and personal development in the course so far (Belenky et al. 1997; Taylor and White 2000). Josselson and Lieblich (1995) say that when we take narrative as a research method seriously and adopt an empathic stance, we have the opportunity to trace 'the growth of whole people' and that this is revealed when the participant enters a dialogic space with themselves. Mind you, I remain aware that the story told is within the context of an aspiring member talking to a gatekeeper of the profession where the practice of reflexivity is considered a valued attribute.

I chose not to question Geraldine about the origins of her reflexivity, but to leave it as a question to be pondered. While meaning making comes through social discourse and 'is generated by the linkages the participant makes between aspects of her or his life as lived and by the explicit linkages the researcher makes between this understanding and interpretation (Josselson and Lieblich 1995:32)', I felt caught between two culturally dominant discourses. There is the one that positions the researcher as outlined above and another exposed by Miehls and Moffatt, which positions the social worker in this way:

Traditional social work functions such as acceptance, non-judgemental attitudes and empathy (Biestek, 1957; Woods and Hollis, 1990) have been utilised to encourage practitioners to manage their feelings related to difference. We argue, however, that the social work identity is enriched when social workers allow themselves to be in a state of disassembly in the presence of the other (Bakhtin, 1993). (Miehls and Moffatt 2000a:337)

In returning to examine Geraldine's stories of the role of men in her life however, I encourage you, John, to make the linkages and interpretations considering the effects of the dominant discourses and how they influence you.

For me, I am reminded that 'plots are not innocent', and that they carry agendas 'that shape what gets excluded and included, as fact and fiction merge (Riessman 1993:65)'. Therefore, it is important to note that men do not play 'heroic' roles in Geraldine's stories from the past. Geraldine's stories seem to be dismissive of men's traits/contributions and exhibit anger at their ineptness. While she tries to explain this away in the case of her father and brother by noting social constraints, Geraldine's experience of men's lack of recognition of her talents and goodwill relegate them to playing either minor or 'anti-heroic'

roles in her stories – especially those that involve plots around caring or developing meaningful relationships. While her stories situated in the present include men, Geraldine chooses to introduce ‘masculinities’ (for instance, gay men, feminist men and those that love their wives) that are outside her experience of the norm – these new characters appear to have the capacity to listen and to respect women as competent and of value.

As previously noted, Geraldine flags an interest to further recast men in her future “stories of lived experience”. While it is unclear whether this is a result of reflexive insight (Taylor and White 2000) or because she wishes to develop non-judgemental and/or empathic characteristics typical of ‘good’ practice (Miehls and Moffatt 2000b), Geraldine’s stories, as they develop over time, already reflect a recasting of sorts. This recasting of roles has come about not so much from active reflection, but from Geraldine’s deliberate attempt to find the love and respect she feels she deserves. Geraldine’s stories of her experiences of men in the past focus on character traits required for roles predetermined by society. However, as she chooses to move out of her ‘predestined’ role, she discovers men, like yourself, that have moved out of character too. The process of redefining roles offers Geraldine an opportunity to reconsider her ‘rules’ for casting characters while not deliberately undermining the traditional ‘gender’ plot in the story she grew up with. This process however, is not carried through into her stories about the role of women in Geraldine’s life. They start out to be heroines in her career stories and remain so, offering support and providing role models epitomising the skills Geraldine believes are needed for effective practice.

Learning caring skills from the women in Geraldine's story

I put to Geraldine that the need for respect, empathy and the creation of relationship appeared to be large motivators for her. She agreed and thought that these were a large part of social work. However, she also acknowledged the importance of guidance. When reflecting on her early life and the role her mother had played in it, Geraldine said that although her mother had been a good friend to her and had supported her enormously, she believed that she had let her make too many decisions on her own. Geraldine would have liked more guidance so that she could have made, what she called, more informed decisions. Although I didn't ask her, I wondered if that was why she had sought confirmation for her career choice through the Centrelink system prior to applying to university and had appreciated the input from the principal at the school.

John, I found it interesting that Geraldine, three years after our first conversation, was now saying that she knew social work 'fitted her'. I was reminded of the story Geraldine had first told me about how she had intervened to help her mother deal with problems surrounding the power of attorney in relation to her grandmother to illustrate her innate familiarity with what it took to be a social worker. This story had clearly showed much knowledge about what she perceived her role would be in the future, but while she had used the story to justify her position then, it was only now that she seemed to trust the validity of her 'story of lived experience' (Connelly and Clandinin 1999). Dewey states that knowledge is 'always a matter of the use that is made of experienced

natural events, a use in which given things are treated as indications of what will be experienced under different conditions' (Dewey [1917] 1980:33-34). It seemed clear that Geraldine's knowledge was in fact a result of 'natural events' and I invited her to tell me more about where she had learnt these caring skills and from whom.

Continuing to portray the family she grew up in as traditional and working class, Geraldine, like you John, reinforced the importance of gender in determining what a person could or could not do as a career. In general, women were expected to stay at home and look after children and men were the breadwinners. A job for a girl leaving school, was a means to 'fill in time' until she was married and had children. I made mention of the fact that Geraldine's older sister had been encouraged to go on to join the police force and that this seemed to be at odds with what was traditionally expected. Geraldine reminded me that her sister was regarded as bright and was not considered maternal (as a child, her sister hadn't liked playing with dolls while she had) and since women were only expected to remain at home if they had children, her sister had been encouraged to pursue her education and a career.

Geraldine recalled always wanting to be a 'stay at home mother' as her preferred career. I mentioned that McAdams had described our identity as a life story (or personal myth) that we begin to create in late adolescence to 'provide his or her life with unity or purpose ... in order to articulate a meaningful niche in the psychosocial world' (McAdams 1993:5) and that being a mother and/or carer seemed to be an integral part of her identity. She agreed that while she

had learnt a lot from being a mother and a carer herself, her family of origin had played a large part in that process. She recalled the strong message from her mother that had cast her in the role of a good carer – the one that had evolved from what was seen to be her inclination to ‘bring home strays’.

I learnt a lot about being a mother from my own mother and one of her sisters. My mother had two sisters, one who was very maternal and the other who brought shame on the family by not being a good mother. I admired my aunt who loved children and made mothering a lifestyle, but the one who was not so good did things that women back then were not expected to do. She had three children to three different fathers, worked all the time and put the kids in care and boarding schools – it was just shameful. There were social workers involved, but my family regarded them as sticking their nose into business that they shouldn't. My family's attitude was that my aunt had made her own bed so she should lie in it. My values are very different to theirs.

I really admired my other aunt who raised six children of her own and then was very active in raising her grandchildren. She stayed at home full time and was very devoted. My mother was too, but she started to work on a part time basis towards the end of my schooling and wasn't always at home when I got home from school. I missed her terribly and didn't want to do that to my children. I ensured that I was able to find ways to support the family financially that allowed me to be at home when the children came home. Initially I earned money by sewing. I loved sewing at school so this was an easy thing for me to do. Of course, when I started work at the school, I was able to be home when the children came home.

I was also very aware of the lack of family discussion time in my own family so ensured that I had that time with my own children. It was so important for me to have all the children sit down and discuss things. I had given up on my husband by then, so it was just the children and I who would sit down for family meetings. They used to love to come to Mum's meetings. We'd have something special on the table and we'd all sit around and talk. You had to have input, you couldn't just sit there and be a listener. Even if it was only something about hating your teacher at school, you had to have something valuable to say so that the others would listen – the rules included no interrupting while others were speaking. Of course, it didn't last when they became teenagers, but I used to love doing that.

Yes, my aunt was very devoted, and while I really wanted to be like her, I learnt a lot about the empty nest syndrome from her too. When her own children left home, mind you there was probably something

else wrong with her before, she went into a type of shock and had seizures. The doctor said that the empty nest syndrome could bring these on, but I found it very upsetting, as she was my favourite auntie. She recovered when the grandchildren came along, but as they grew up she returned to that funny state. It was then that she turned to religion and became very fanatical. I decided then that I was never going to let that happen to me. While I was very attached to my children, I decided I wanted to have a life after children and went about finding something I could build a life around.

John, in her book exploring women's psychological experience and moral development, Gilligan (1982) asserts that women's descriptions of adulthood are different to the social reality described by men. Women, she claims, place greater emphasis on relationships of care than on individual achievement as a benchmark for assessing maturity. Moreover, because their 'sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care', traversing life stages comes to involve 'changes in the understanding and activities of care' rather than on the achievement of particular life tasks (Gilligan 1982:170-171). So it should have been of little surprise to me that Geraldine chose to defer to the women in her life when it came to reflecting on who taught her how to be a successful carer in the world. In Geraldine's narrative she clearly aligns herself to those women who model the appropriate use of these skills, contrasting them with those who don't. She also tells a story that demonstrates her integration of these skills into her own life approach and flags how she intends to successfully traverse the next life stage when her children no longer rely on her and 'the activities of care through which she judges her worth (Gilligan 1982:171)' are no longer there.

I did discuss with Geraldine the notion put forward by Chambers (1986) that social workers played the role of a public housekeeper in society and that her experiences and subsequent career choice story seemed to cast her in that

role. Geraldine said that she could see that her choice of career may be a continuation of her traditional role as carer as determined by her upbringing, but felt that the term 'civic housekeeper' was outdated. John, despite the fact that Geraldine believed that the professionalising of social work might have occurred because women were no longer at home to offer informal support in the community, she also felt that social workers had something more to offer and that the profession had evolved in recognition of this. Geraldine admitted that the theories informing professional practice she had learnt since being at university (the ones that she had initially dismissed as being a waste of time), were useful tools to be used in the future. Geraldine said that, in her view, this was the benefit of training.

In my forays into the literature regarding this topic, John, I came across a recent article by McPhail (2004). In her article McPhail refers to research that examines the often-linked 'nurturing' faculties of women to the 'nurturing' functions of social work. She asserts that in the early years of the profession the caring qualities of women were seen to be ideal for the profession, but in later years writers such as Meyer (1982) believed this view failed to account for other aspects of the profession such as 'analytical thinking, clinical perceptiveness, the rigor of research, professional autonomy, and administration (Meyer (1982) quoted in McPhail 2004)'. Once again, John, I found myself wondering about my part in positioning women in the profession, especially as McPhail goes on to say that the way the history of the profession is often taught by the academy (focusing on 'heroines' such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond) tends to reinforce the notion that social work is a female – dominated profession.

Nevertheless, having listened to both of your accounts describing the experience of choosing social work, I have come to appreciate the importance of women as principle and influential characters in your narratives and find myself becoming resolute to value the place of the heroine. Not only are the women in your stories significant as people, but their way of relating and caring for others has been emphasised as worthy of admiration as well – exemplifying essential skills and knowledges for the social work role. Yet, as a profession these nurturing attributes are assigned technical status and are there to be refined and/or learnt along with other more ‘scientific and theoretical knowledge’. This is no doubt associated with the need to legitimise the profession. Payne, the author of your second year text, in an earlier book of his (Payne 1996) states that as a society we come to identify particular knowledge and skills as being distinguishing features of a profession often as a way of asserting power over a particular social territory.

Still, returning to Geraldine’s narrative, John, I found it interesting that when I pointed out to Geraldine that her story about family meetings was a lovely illustration of her engaging in group work prior to her coming to university, she commented that she hadn’t made that connection before and that it seemed a long time ago now. In fact, Geraldine had paused and then went on to say:

I have noticed that I have a really strong empathy for others. I am not sure if that is connected to my life experiences. Mind you, because I’ve had back and neck troubles and know that the pain can be excruciating if you’re forced to sit up too quickly, I know to be careful when sitting someone else up. I also seem to pick up on things more than others because I relate things to how I would feel. For instance, at work the other day I was grabbed by the hair and slapped across

the face very hard by a person with dementia. Rather than be bothered by it, I was able to understand that the person was upset about things that had been happening to them and that they weren't blaming me but just expressing themselves. I know that I am able to understand that better than others and I think that goes back to the days that I brought home strays. I feel for people.

By connecting what I defined as a natural ability to a named professional skill, Geraldine had found other areas that could expose a similar propensity. While in our initial contact Geraldine had been keen to point out her natural ability to facilitate her entrance into the professional group, now she also chose to critically reflect on the link and examine it for its professional currency.

Dewey ([1940] 1988:111) in writing about Abraham Lincoln said 'the career which is his unique individuality is the series of interactions in which he was created to be what he was by the ways in which he responded to the occasions with which he was presented.' In saying this, Dewey highlights that identity is shaped 'in the *how* of interaction and in the meaning that we give to the interaction (Martinez Aleman 2002:119)'. In their longitudinal study of the development of professional expertise of human service workers, Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) establish that beginning students' substantive knowledge base is typically drawn from their personal circumstances including work history, family and socio-cultural background. As the professional matures, they develop a greater reliance on formal theory before using an amalgam of knowledge drawn from their personal background, contextual and theoretical knowledge. Geraldine, in the 'how' of our interactions, reveals that her training is indeed contributing to the reshaping of her professional identity.

While both your and Geraldine's accounts come to mirror Fook and her colleagues' (2000) findings in your appreciation of formal training, I have continued to find the way that you both position and reposition yourselves in relation to the major characters in your narratives thought-provoking. John, like Geraldine, you credit your mother with modelling caring and empathy; in fact you state that aspiring social workers could learn a lot from watching your mother in action at the nursing home she worked in. Moreover, you state that your major attraction to social work was to learn and apply feminist approaches in an effort to enrich men's experience in the world. Geraldine similarly positioned women as mentors and role models in her 'stories of lived experience' when considering her attraction to social work, but rather than seeking to refine her approaches to caring, she appears to want to validate her abilities and to find respect. To do that though, she undergoes a process where she repositions the heroines in her stories to make room for theoretical concepts.

While I may see this development as heartening in my role as learning facilitator, as a researcher I wonder why this should be. I am reminded of Mercer's observations of women's experience in higher education:

And so the women come seeking and maybe, just occasionally, find some affirmation in the realisation that their already acquired knowledge is just as important as the knowledge purveyed here. But still the books about mothering, maternal thinking ... and a zillion other aspects of being a woman are only in specialist, advanced, ghettoised, feminist courses. (Mercer 1997:35)

I am also mindful of Fook's (2002) comment that professional training is a masculinising process and wonder how this fits with the perception that social

work is a gendered profession and, more importantly, why our society has chosen to professionalise caring. I don't have any conclusive thoughts on this at this point in time, but I do acknowledge the complexities and multitude of layers that appear to exist at any one time in trying to understand the experience of choosing social work as a profession.

In Conclusion: Turning To Jane Addams

John, as I near the end of this letter, I want to revisit McPhail's (2004) assertion that the academy has tended to mythologise women such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond in their historical accounts of the social work profession. Conle states that 'when a story is encountered experientially, one reacts to it through 'resonance' ... that is to say, with a narrative of one's own (Conle 2000:53).' When I first read McPhail's article I found myself feeling guilty and thinking that I, as a learning facilitator, needed to reconsider my understanding of the origins of the profession and how to tell bygone stories in the future. However, on revisiting the recorded history of Australian social work, I am aware of the tendency to dismiss the role of Australian women in the establishment of the profession (McMahon, 2003). Moreover, having co-constructed the stories in this letter to portray the significant characters who influenced Geraldine in her choice of career, I find myself wanting to tell a professional narrative where women are indeed the significant characters who are there to inspire me and other would be social workers.

Like any other narrative identity, the provisional character of the social work profession portrayed at any given time is itself constructed as a result of the

relationship between the narrator and the plot (Ricoeur 1991b). While it may have suited McPhail's (2004) plot/purposes to portray a narrative identity that didn't include 'women as heroines', in my narrative, their inclusion would acknowledge the part women have played in Geraldine's stories of attraction to social work. After all Jane Addams, one of social work's formidable heroines, herself focused on the relational in her work.

For Addams, the intimate connection of the individual to the many knew no limits. She was the apostle of a healing domesticity in which the strong maternal image sustains and enables instead of smothering or constraining. She was a student of history and was therefore aware of the creative possibilities different epochs had afforded for enlarged female identities and communities. This all cuts much deeper than our dry notion of a role model. Addams sought to develop new ways of being that underwrote forms of autonomy within relationships, not in opposition to them. (Elshtain 2002:174)

However, I am also reminded that the focus of this project is an inquiry into the phenomenon of choosing social work as a career and while it is clearly linked to the types and forms of stories that you, Geraldine and I tell, the experience itself is open ended and the meaning changes as time progresses (Conle 2000). 'The narrative insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow (Connelly and Clandinin 1990:9)'. While the focus on relationships was one of your original attractions to social work, John, having been immersed in the professional training process for the last few years, I am wondering where you position yourself now? Does gender still feature in your career choice story or do other plots emerge as having more relevance to your professional identity at this time? Who or what currently take on the roles of significant others in your story of career choice today? For me, this letter has shed some light on the way Geraldine and I make meaning of the many interactions between gender roles

and professional identity in both the personal and social contexts we make our career choices in, however I look forward to your thoughts to further our understanding.

Yours sincerely,

Jo

Research process

P.S. I have had another thought on my position as researcher. Here is an excerpt of a reply email my sister sent to me when I shared with her my experience of a paper I had attended at a Narrative Matters 2004 conference in Canada this year. Wrapped in it are the notions of care, respect and listening and I am reminded how much the role of narrative researcher echoes my perception of the role of social worker and of the importance of listening, really listening.

From:ChristinePayard
Sent:Sunday,23May2004,9:37PM
To:JoannaMensinga
Subject: catch up.

Thanks for the accounts of the conference. Sounds fascinating.

The thought that strikes me the most about what you wrote about narrative was in relation to Nancy's paper and the importance of being able to communicate the stories and share the experiences of cancer sufferers. In our situation with Dan, he can't communicate that well -- he's gone down hill again in the last week despite an increase in the dexamethasone. His speech today and mobility today is better than it has been, but Anyway, my point is that at times the only way we can communicate effectively is by guessing and him saying yes or no. His accounts of his experience are therefore extremely

dependent on my experiences as the listener -- if I have no notion of his experience (which I am coming to know more and more that I don't) then our communication and sharing is limited.

In this situation I am also Dan's advocate with the medical fraternity. They are treating him based on my perceptions of his daily life. Yes, those may be the most accurate they have in providing a more well rounded picture, but I'm not sure that I know what his experiences are in order to portray them accurately. This concerns me when his medical treatment depends on my reading of his non-verbal experience. Whilst I trust my calls and feel I am doing the best that I can, the burden of accurate interpretation is huge.

Conversely, I'm the conduit of information from the Dr. back to Dan. There is considerable power and responsibility in that ... and I don't remember applying for that job! Again, it doesn't mean I can't and won't and wouldn't ever do it again -- I would. But, it is an awesome role to assume and in telling narratives we assume a similar role of sorts (on a much less life dependent way mind you), but the responsibility is still large (Payard 2004).

Chapter 5:

John's Experience of Choosing Social Work as a Gendered Profession

Like the Chapter 4, this chapter provides a continuing exploration of the participants' experiences contributing to their choice of social work as their preferred career. The material is again presented in the form of a letter, but this time the letter is addressed to Geraldine. While I mainly focus on reconstructed blocks of John's story, I also include conversation fragments and field notes pertaining to Geraldine's and my gendered experience of choosing social work. Through this process of reflection, I delve into how John and Geraldine position themselves in their 'stories of lived experience' and emerging 'stories to live by'. I also continue to include my own personal reflections from my perspective as both a learning facilitator and as a researcher and consider the interaction between personal agency and social structure in all our 'stories of lived experience'.

In the previous chapter, I ask John a number of questions regarding the impact of time and the training process on his story of career choice and how he now positions himself in his own career choice stories. In reality the letter was not sent to John, so some of the questions remain as rhetorical devices that flag possible directions this research inquiry could have taken and as questions to be pondered by you as the reader. In returning to John's story in my letter to Geraldine, I have chosen to continue to use gender to mediate the meaning

making process that he and I use to 'thicken' his narrative of career choice and to explore his evolving 'stories to live by' (White 1997). Sections of John's story that I specifically address include his apparent change in attitude towards facilitating structural change in the wider community. While his initial attraction to social work was to facilitate a greater appreciation of different masculinities and to reposition the role of caring and relationship in the community, now that John is nearing the end of his training this no longer appears to be a high priority.

I explain to Geraldine that John attributes his change in attitude to his own 'maturing' as a professional and his appreciation of the postmodernist approach he has been exposed to at the University. Ife (1997) suggests that while postmodernism has contributed to the professional discourse by legitimising different and diverse knowledges, it has eroded social work's mandate for a fairer and more just world. Christie (2002) argues that the dominating professional discourses in welfare only offer essentialised ways of being for men thereby perpetuating the expression of hegemonic stories of masculinity. While either of these explanations goes some way towards explaining John's move away from his original position, this chapter opens up the meaning making processes John engages in to make sense of this development from his own perspective.

Dear Geraldine,

I want to thank you for continuing to be involved in helping me explore the experience of choosing social work as a career. I feel like I have gained a much

greater understanding of what the experience has meant for both you and John. In the way both you and John have described it, the experience of choosing a career involves creating a 'space' to review your constructed ideas about life in general and your perception of social positioning in the community. Your stories are not just about describing future hopes or recounting identifiable traits that make you suitable for the job, they also expose 'entrenched meanings' that have emerged from your understanding of your own lived experiences within a particular cultural context. Certainly, our conversations have helped me better understand why Connelly and Clandinin (1999) describe the shaping of a professional identity as creating 'stories to live by'. I can now see how these 'stories to live by' are the link we make between our storied identities, perceived knowledges and the contexts in which we find ourselves.

I love how our stories have thickened over time with the integration of each 'new' bit of information that we have offered each other and as the context of the telling has changed. I can see how this process has prompted us all to explore and reveal other meanings in our thickening stories about the career choice process (White 1997), and in turn has provided us the opportunity to reshape our 'stories to live by'. For example, in the letter I wrote to John, I chose to focus on the gendered discourse that you and I explored as a result of his and my original discussions around gender. I also did more reading in the area and discovered a range of literature that looked at the interaction between women and men in social work (Crawford and Leitmann 1996; Cree 1996; for example, Christie 2001; McPhail, 2004); in other professions (for example, Walker 2001) as well as from a number of different perspectives (for example,

Hearn 1987; Josselson 1987; Seigfried 1996). Therefore, when I started writing my letter to John, I found that the readings themselves became an integral part of my written story that explored the personal and social agendas evident in both your and my 'stories of lived experience' and the academic discourses addressing the phenomenon of career choice.

Geraldine, even though you and I have examined the influence of the gender discourse at some length in our previous conversations and letters, in this letter I want to share with you what I have learnt about the experience of choosing social work from John's 'stories of lived experience'. If you remember back to the first residential forum, John chose not to tell the class his story so as to give others the opportunity to tell of their experience of choosing social work. While his story sparked our discussions around gender, I didn't actually share with you what I had learnt from his 'stories of lived experience', so I hope this letter will fill in that gap.

Having only the two of you as co-participants in this research project, one male and one female, has enhanced the risk of our discussions being reduced to a debate based on binary essentialisms (Gremillion 2004). However, as this letter reveals, I have found that our discussions have exposed the existence of a number of different 'masculinities' and 'femininities' and highlight that gender itself is a changing category depending on context and the themes and agendas we as tellers of stories are wanting to crusade. For instance, I have found it interesting how in our 'stories of lived experience' and evolving 'stories to live by', we continue to include community and professional agendas that largely

essentialise gender in relation to career choice (Gerson 2004). In exploring John's experience then, I am interested in noting what trends you identify and what purpose you see they serve in stories of career choice.

Women as characters in John's 'stories of lived experience'

Geraldine, do you realise that it is now four years since we had that first forum based around the theme of 'Quilting Professional Stories'. Doesn't time fly? The last time we spoke, you made the comment following our discussion about men and their role in your past 'stories of lived experience', that although your future stories were likely to contain different characters you would continue to use the same events to describe your experience of career choice. You also said that because you had become so much more confident as a person, **how** you would tell the stories would be different. I believe the same could be said of John as he reflects on his 'stories of lived experience'. However, I am also aware that there is an apparent change in the way he proposes to position himself as a male in his 'stories to live by' than he did when we first talked.

As background, the reading I have done of late suggests that men in social work courses tend to maintain, or revert to, a hegemonic stance in relation to women because of the dominant professional discourses they have been exposed to in their education (Cree 2001; Christie 2002). Although John explains this in different terms, for example, acquiring a postmodern perspective on gender, my reading has challenged me to consider possible pressures related to gendered expectations that may have been exerted on us all during the course of our professional training that encourages us to maintain a

hegemonic/neutral stance (Miehls and Moffatt 2000a). Mind you, I don't think these pressures are only evident in our training. Although the process of professional training is mooted as an opportunity to change or challenge personal views and behaviour, I am not sure that professional or community discourses facilitate this change when it comes to gendered positioning in the community.

Returning to the time when we had the 'Quilting a Professional Story' forum, John told me anecdotes steeped in personal struggle. Many of these stories centred on making sense of how he saw himself as a white Anglo Saxon male in relation to a community discourse that restricted the job opportunities available to men and women. Geraldine, John's 'stories of lived experience' gave me the impression that to be born a male in a working class family in an industrial city in South East Queensland was a great source of consternation for him and for other men. While John talked about being at peace with the male that he had become, he also felt displaced – particularly in the extended family in which he grew up. I remember a particularly poignant moment when John paused to reflect while telling that part of his story. When he resumed, he made the comment that he really wondered where he fitted in.

As in your 'stories of lived experience', Geraldine, John talked about developing skills and a liking for helping people. He told me how social work hadn't been his intended career choice, in fact he described completing his degree in terms of acquiring an additional tool. However, John had been resolute when describing how he had opted out of male gendered careers, such as the army,

mining and other heavy industry jobs that males in his family (both past and present) had chosen, in order to forge a path out of a 'dominant, white, male culture'. At the same time, John also emphasised that he was not one of those 'powder puff men' and that he saw himself as a strong male with a stereotypical male past. Once again I was touched when he showed sadness and confusion as he tentatively made the link between his estrangement from his father and his philosophy about life and choice of career. Geraldine, when I compare your's and John's story, I notice how John seemed to need to risk separation from his family and community in order to pursue his career of preference whereas your choice of the same profession encouraged, if not expected, you to continue to care for others. Mind you, there may have been a risk of separation if you had chosen to pursue this career path straight from school or at an earlier stage in your marriage.

I did find it interesting that both you and John, as aspiring social workers, portrayed your mothers as 'heroines' in your initial 'stories of lived experience' describing your career choice. However, while you noted the practical, everyday caring skills you learnt from your mother Geraldine, John emphasised his mother's philosophy and her willingness to 'stand up for the underdog'. John also chose to feature his mother and aunts as moral protectors in his 'stories of lived experience', particularly when he described the process he engaged in when choosing to become a cook. However, unlike you, John claims that his mother wasn't particularly good at talking about things that really mattered to him, such as the separation of his parents. Looking at your descriptions today, I find myself drawing parallels between your stories and Gilligan's (1982) work on

moral development. If you remember, she talks about women being 'defined' by an ethic of care and men focusing on a justice creed. To me, your descriptions of your mothers' influence seem to mirror this developmental process.

The other 'heroine' that featured strongly in John's 'stories of lived experience' was his wife. One of the stories John told that I particularly enjoyed, was about him and his wife being chased around the aisles by a woman when they were out shopping at the supermarket one afternoon. It turned out that the woman, who was a drag racer, wanted to know more about why John's wife was wearing a fire chief's uniform. In telling this story, John seemed to not only be celebrating Anne's achievements and highlighting an ensuing camaraderie between the two women, he was also juxtapositioning what he saw as the opportunities that women had forged for themselves with what he believed was available to him as a male in his social situation. Many men who are attracted to social work relate similar experiences of feeling unrecognised and discriminated against and see social work as a means of righting what they believe to be an injustice in the world (Cree 1996).

Choosing to become a social worker has enabled John to position himself outside the predominant cultural discourses surrounding career choice in his community, something that both he and his wife have opted to do in the public domain. However John's stories also reveal that he and Anne both adhere to traditional roles/expectations within the bounds of their created family, their private sphere. Despite John querying what kind of role modelling he and Anne provide for their children by continuing to have her as the main organiser and

nurturer on the home front, they choose not to change this private arrangement. I found this interesting at the time and am again reminded as I write this letter, of commentaries that discuss the private versus the public sphere when comparing the role of women and men in social work (McMaster 2001; McPhail 2004) and wonder about the origins and role of related discourses in the profession.

While many of John's 'stories of lived experience' were linked to his endeavours to move outside the male paradigm, on many occasions John also makes mention of a strong artistic streak. John chose to identify and use his love of painting both as a metaphor and transformative experience when describing his ability to connect with young people in his work at the time and when recounting his growing confidence in becoming the male he perceived himself to be. I remember how John's face would light up and become very animated when he talked about his encounters with art and its role in his personal and professional life. Of course, there have been many social workers who have described social work as an art rather than a science (for instance, Imre 1982; Goldstein 1999; Gray 2002) and who see the skills needed to execute a piece of artwork similar to those needed to engage with others in social work practice (Gray and Aga Askeland 2002). However, while the use of art is also a well-used approach in youth and community engagement processes (Lane 1999), much like the work John was describing at the time, he also linked the joy of exploring colour with his pleasure in discovering variations in human personalities and ways of being.

Negotiating the male career discourse

Geraldine, for both you and John the influential stories about your experience of career choice are set within particular family and community contexts. You both describe how these social contexts predisposed you to the development of specific skills and contributed to the formation of values you believe vital to your role as social workers. You both equate 'caring' with women and while you interpret what this means in different ways, you both identify it as a necessary part of professional practice. You also both cite examples of 'fraught' encounters with male attitudes as contributing to your sense of justice and need for personal and social change. Geraldine just as I asked you more about your understanding of males in your life in subsequent discussions, John and I also continued explorations into his meanings and implications of his positioning in relation to men in his stories, John takes up the story:

I grew up in a smallish community made up of a lot of large, working class families. Mining was an important industry and finding a job that involved heavy machinery was seen to be the significant benchmark for assessing young men's success. My extended family often referred to this benchmark while we were growing up. As there were a couple of male cousins and I of a similar age, we were frequently compared with each other and positioned against this benchmark to determine how we were progressing. It was as if we were constantly being bestowed a particular 'cultural place' in the community – the expectations were huge!

One particular cousin and I were frequently compared. Luke fitted in with the cultural expectations and didn't question or challenge them in any way. I tended to drift in and out of the heavy industry area so didn't put much credence on things like whether I was able to pass the necessary railway exams or not. In fact, I did fail the railway exam and while I was able to make sense of it by dismissing the value of the job rather than my personal worth, the information about my failure was passed around to the different aunts and uncles and I was 'banished to the woods'. Luke, however, was well regarded and was able to make good use of this within the family circle. Remember the speech at my wedding where he commented on my inability to find a steady job? That had a huge impact on me.

As I told you in our initial conversation, my leaving the army and deciding to take up a chef's apprenticeship caused great consternation in my family. My father was very concerned about this move and my mother and aunts had several conversations conspiring to keep me safe from any impending homosexual advances. While this amused me in many ways, in retrospect I can see that the dominant cultural norm, while offering some form of stability and belonging for men, actually became a type of prison that prevented many like me from moving outside it. I actually find it very hard to describe and explain, but feel quite strongly that these cultural expectations have stunted men's emotional growth and have caused a lot of anguish in terms of allowing them to reach their full potential.

I have thought about this, particularly in relation to my Dad. When we first talked, I commented on how he and I became estranged towards the end of his life. You asked me if that was because I refused to fit in with the male culture he so strongly believed in. Although it could have been a factor, in many ways he himself had moved outside the dominant culture by then and had explored other ways of being for himself. When you retire, the same rules don't apply any more and you can be more yourself. While I think he would have dearly loved to bring me 'back into the fold', I believe he saw this more as a problem that had to be solved so that he didn't feel vulnerable or uncomfortable. I am sure that having a son outside the norm had huge implications on whether he was accepted in his social group or not. Mind you, by the 1990s, that sense of male solidarity that existed in the bigger factories and workplaces had been eroded and didn't hold quite the same power in providing and defining men's worth, but he had retired by then.

I have wondered what it would be like if I had been raised in a different community and whether I could have been more myself and reached my potential. If I had grown up in a counter culture like the one in Nimbin², I almost certainly would have seen the world differently, but then I think I would have been on the margins there too. You see I consider myself to be more as a 'middle of the road' kind of person. For instance, even though I would like to resist a materialistic kind of lifestyle, I actually find myself immersed in it. The kids bring money-orientated values home from school and it is very hard to resist. Having said that, if I was from a different community I think I would have seen things another way and would have been less inhibited. However, I am sure there would have been another benchmark to measure myself against.

² Nimbin is a town in New South Wales, Australia, that is 'famous' for its counter culture lifestyle. While it is quite likely that there are patriarchal elements in its social structure, general mythology depicts Nimbin as being free of traditional expectations and more egalitarian in gender relations and employment opportunities.

Getting back to gender though and how it has affected my career choice, four years ago when I started the degree I was very aware of how few men were in social work. I thought that maybe as men we needed an 80s style campaign to bring about structural change where men would be allowed to value caring and relationship, much like the campaigns women had engaged in to bring about structural change for themselves. Now, though, I don't think this style of change is needed. I have come to regard gender as another feature on the human landscape and believe that if we explore it for its richness and beauty and learn to respect it, it doesn't become a divisive thing. For instance, now that I have started riding dirt bikes again with the guys I used to ride with 20 years ago, I can see that there is much more acceptance of difference than there was. They still make fun of me and make comments about how I need counselling because of the way I ride my bike, but now I laugh.

As I have matured professionally, the gender issues have dissolved. I am now part of a group of male practitioners that meet regularly and as such, gender doesn't seem to hold any value. It's not that it isn't acknowledged, but rather its viewed as a kind of force that you need to be aware of. A force to be worked with rather than eliminated and/or fought with. Social work has provided me with a way of viewing gender scientifically, for instance, I look at how the latest theoretical viewpoints position it, like postmodernism, and find that liberating and really exciting! Some of the guys I ride with are still stuck in that heavy industry area. They are now seniors among their peers and although they have achieved status, to remain there they resist change and isolate themselves from other ways of being.

Geraldine, even though the events and significant others in John's 'stories of lived experience' are much the same as when we first talked, I think the way he positions himself in them now is different. When I mentioned this to John in a later conversation I had with him, he put this change down to a maturing process that came about through the contact he had with other male social workers in the field and his exposure to theories such as postmodernism. Seemingly these experiences gave him more confidence to be himself with other men in the larger community in which he lives. Although John doesn't directly refer to the men in his family, he describes his interaction with the men from his school days in a much more relaxed manner and no longer seems to

need to justify his sense of difference. It appears that having found a niche for himself, John is not as passionate about having to change existing social arrangements. These men, in return, seem to make room for him as he is.

Mind you, John also suggests that his new found acceptance is partly due to recent changes in the social order existing in his community. He mentions that the hegemonic discourse associated with heavy industry has less of a hold over men in his community now days due to a greater emphasis being placed on service industries. Due to social work's very nature then, I can understand why John feels he is better accepted. Nevertheless, I think this does raise some interesting parallels with your 'stories of lived experience' Geraldine. Geraldine you indicate that if you had found the job you are in now back when you applied to go to university, you wouldn't have submitted an application. From where I sit today, it appears that in both your original 'stories of lived experience' you were searching for respect and acceptance for who you were from within your particular social contexts. Having found that acceptance today, neither of you wish to change society as a whole. I wonder if this change in attitude confirms Howe's assertion (cited in Cree 2001:151) that social workers are 'fixers' rather than the 'revolutionaries' they profess to be.

For John then, it seems that by joining a group of like-minded men who hold similar values to his own and are intent on connecting with each other to enhance their professional practice has been an important catalyst in his change of attitude. Mind you, I found it hard not to draw parallels between the group his father belonged to and the one in which John is now involved. I

wonder if John's positioning in life is any different to his father's and whether he just needed to find another stage on which he could play out his life story. From my perspective, it seems that the group John's father belonged to also had a strong commitment to relationship and helping each other. What John seemed to have difficulty with was a seemingly unjust benchmark that didn't permit him to position himself favourably, if at all. The new benchmark available to him by joining this group seems to include choice and the recognition of difference, but I have found myself wondering how it would have been if John had joined the profession in another time. Equally puzzling, is how things may have turned out if John hadn't found a group of likeminded men to relate to or, as has been pointed out to me, John's school friends had to find a place on this particular stage.

Nevertheless, John did make mention that there are other cultures that would allow him and others like him to express themselves differently. The counter cultures John identifies, such as the one that exists in Nimbin, certainly would allow him to be freer. But then he goes on to identify himself as a 'middle of the road' type of guy and claims that he wouldn't fit in with that culture either. I found it interesting to note that at this point of our conversation, John turns to more dominant discourses such as 'materialism' as a way of illustrating that he in fact can be seduced by other discourses. While this story diminishes John's projected sense of difference, I wondered if John had allowed himself to be 'seduced by materialism' because embedded within it is a notion of choice as being a measure of success. John also noted that other ethnic cultures might also have offered him different benchmarks, but that the racial divide prevented

this from happening. Once again while John highlights a dislike for adhering to dominant discourses that don't allow for difference and choice, the need to succeed or be accepted also impacts on his decisions.

Geraldine, I wonder if like me, you detected John's relief when he discovered that one of the theories sanctioned in your social work training was postmodernism. To me, John believes that by sanctioning the existence and equal relevance of different viewpoints, postmodernism allows him to incorporate 'diversity' into his professional framework in a way that doesn't necessitate structural change in the wider community. I assume that by focusing on postmodernism with its inherent acceptance of difference and alternate realities, John has found a way to come to terms with the hegemonic staging of men evident in his own community. However, this perspective also allows him to disassociate himself from one of the dominant discourses in the social work profession – structural change (Ife 1997; Christie 2002).

Pease (1999) claims that 'a recognition of differences between men is central for understanding men's lives and for reconstructing men's subjectivities and practices'. Like John, Pease recognises the transforming possibilities of postmodernism, but he links postmodernism with feminist theory as a deliberate strategy to challenge male subjectivities and gender domination. While I have contested John's membership of the men's group as a way of avoiding social change and reproducing his father's group, I have observed John playing out alternate ways of being 'male' that challenge accepted roles of the 'white male authority figure'. For example, John's choice to deliberately remain silent in

learning forums at university so that the women will put forward their ideas first has been one way John has tried to change social mores.

The importance of group membership

Geraldine, one of the prevailing themes in both your and John's 'stories of lived experience' that I haven't explored in any great depth so far has been your attitudes to group membership. As we have been concentrating on John's position in this letter, it has been easy to typecast the view that all women seek relationships and want to be part of a group, but this hasn't been typical in your case Geraldine has it? While you certainly focus on relationships with women, you were quite open about not wanting to be a part of a group because of the feelings of constraint and obligation that come with membership. You stated that you preferred to be on the outside even if it meant that 'outcasts' tend to latch on to you. Whereas John actively sought to find a group to which he could belong. Interestingly his preferences also go against the expected norms of autonomy associated with men and connection for women (Gilligan 1982). Nonetheless, in our recent discussions both of you and John talked about a developing degree of comfort in positioning yourselves differently in groups.

Geraldine, you noted that as you have become more self aware you have felt more at ease in being part of a group and have observed that as a result you are being accepted for who you perceive yourself to be. This has also been true for John. As he has become more comfortable with whom he is, John too has found himself being better received by others in his community. While there has been a lot of research into the importance of belonging to groups that may add

other information to our discussion (Payne 1997:64-66), for me your comments are more significant in demonstrating the interaction between the personal and social dimensions of our evolving career choice stories. Linde (1993) states that our narratives offer a site for reflexivity where the narrator can 'observe, reflect, and correct the self that is being created'. In the time between the tellings of your stories regarding group membership, you have been actively involved with group work in the social work course and have come to understand the importance placed on groups as a part of the educational discourse at Central Queensland University. While time has given you both the opportunity to experience groups in a learning context it has also provided you a chance to review your career choice stories and to create a self befitting the profession as portrayed by the university.

Of course, the process of altering self-narratives following reflection is not new to practice in the social work profession. While primarily based in feminist ideology, social work has used consciousness-raising as a strategy for altering personal as well as challenging community discourses for many years (Pease and Fook 1999; Milner 2001; Dominelli 2002). Consciousness raising employs reflection on the self within the context of existing personal and social arrangements to facilitate a deeper understanding of influence and power relationships when facilitating change. Applied as critical reflexivity in the academic and professional domains (for example, Taylor and White 2000; Fook 2002), this process invokes the practice of observing, reflecting and adjusting professional approaches to better respond to identified needs. Therefore, in many ways, its not surprising that your and John's recent 'stories of lived

experience's include references of becoming comfortable in groups. These references not only highlight the perceived 'gatekeeper's', my, agendas (The Personal Narratives Group 1989), but you also demonstrate your ability to perceive and negotiate narratives that facilitate your entrance into the career of your choice (Linde 1993).

However, returning to a more focused exploration of both your 'stories of lived experience' concerning the implications of being a member of a group raises further questions for me about your, and other social workers, desire to join social work as a professional group. I wonder how your evolving 'stories to live by' will effect your participation in the profession – especially the professional association (AASW). I recall occasions when I have attended conferences and meetings hosted by the AASW and have experienced many of the feelings that you have identified with group membership, Geraldine. Discussions with colleagues reveal that I am not alone in this, so it maybe just as well that the promise of active involvement in the AASW is not a requirement to practice as a social worker. Nevertheless, once again I find myself thinking about gendered notions of behaviour. In the latest professional newsletter where names of those who are no longer eligible to be members due to breaches of ethical standards are listed, of the ten mentioned, all were men (AASW, 2004:9).

Returning to the care theme

What stands out most for me in both your and John's 'stories of lived experience' and 'stories to live by', Geraldine, is how you have highlighted caring as the deciding theme for choosing social work as your preferred career.

Both you and John make use of the care theme as a device to legitimise your entrance into the social work profession. While you have depicted caring in different ways (Geraldine, you associate it with relationship while John links it to social justice), you also perceive it to be gender related. Linde (1993) states that our life stories are projects that are created 'in intercourse with other members of that culture', so it seems reasonable to assume that by choosing to use caring as a linguistic device, the community and social work itself must see it as a highly desirable feature of the professional culture. Geraldine, while I can hear you sighing and saying 'Well yes!' it seems to me that it is this link that inadvertently aligns social work with women's work – the very thing that is contentious within the profession.

As I have mentioned previously in our various conversations, the social work profession has often aligned itself with the scientific paradigm to legitimise its existence. I recently came across a lovely article in which Weick (2000) explores the links between women, the language of caring and social work itself. She equates the process of social work's alignment with the scientific paradigm to a similar practice where women deny their first language of care choosing to defer to a language that privileges 'logic, rationality and rules' in order to have their voices heard. Rather than deny the social caretaking role, Weick advocates that social work, like women, should assert its 'first voice' and claim its expertise in the caring arena. Instead of privileging 'the more distant voice of scientific and social scientific disciplines' (Weick 2000:398), she believes social work needs to value its tested practice knowledge base around

the process of caring/helping to differentiate it from other professions in the welfare sector.

When I first read this article, I found myself chuckling. I clearly remember the time that John challenged me in a learning forum when I made the statement that it was important for you all in your future roles as social workers to have a grasp of theory to justify your actions in the community. John said that in his experience, work colleagues from other disciplines actually valued social work's allegiance to the client over theory and that a reliance on theory was 'selling out the profession'. I have since wondered about my positioning in regards to the use of theory in my role as learning facilitator and have to admit that I am not totally comfortable in relying on my 'first voice' as Weick (2000) or John would have me do. While I concede that part of this is related to my perceived gendered status, I am also very cognisant of how the legal discourse has infiltrated the welfare sector and that 'evidenced-based practice' has become a dominant conversation within the profession. Still, I am also aware that theory itself is a story based on someone's lived experience which, having resonated with the experience of others, is conferred a collective status of a professional 'story to live by'.

In saying this, I want to revisit the notion put forward by authors such as Linde (1993) and Riessman (2001). Linde and Riessman say that our narrated stories do not reveal an essential truth about our selves, but rather offer an opportunity to convey a coherent life story that takes into account dominant discourses in a particular time and place. Cree (1996) claims that men are aware that there are

advantages for them when they enter the social work profession. Moreover, men feel 'freer' and know that they are more likely 'to be noticed and praised for attitudes and behaviour routinely expected of women (Cree 1996:80)'. While I am not sure if these notions provide material for an adequate explanation of why John feels comfortable with not relying on theory and I don't, I do believe that becoming a male social worker affords John the opportunity to take his position. After all, men are traditionally perceived to be the academic storytellers, are they not?

In another reading I came across, Eckert (1990) asserts that there are gender differences in male and female interaction styles and in the ensuing discourses that arise from them. She claims that these differences evolved out of the traditional economic roles each gender played in days gone past – men in the public market place and women in the private domestic domain. Although these roles have blurred with women's entrance into the employment market, Eckert asserts that the norms of interaction haven't. Women's power and social influence in the public domain continues to depend on the 'indirect use of a man's power, or through the development of personal influence' (Eckert 1990).

Eckert doesn't explore whether men's worth in the private domain is assessed on their ability to make connections and maintain order and control as women are, but from John's and your accounts, and my own experience, I suggest that they are. Within the inner sanctum of the social work profession, where much of the caring work is relegated to the private sphere, it seems that women are prepared to maintain their dominance. However, in the public sphere, male

social workers continue to receive recognition by virtue of the dominant social discourse, while women tend to either coopt men's support or secure status by exploiting and displaying relevant connections with men and/or theory. Geraldine, I wonder if this has made some sense of your feeling that men 'have to convince you that they are something'?

Having once again reverted to using theory myself to justify my observations, I want to return to Gilligan's (1982) assertions about the ethic of care and justice being aligned with particular genders. While these points of view seem to converge as men and women reach maturity, the experience of joining social work appears to refocus attention on the process of moral development. Geraldine, as I have already noted, on initial contact with both you and John you each had clear notions about the moral position you would take in relation to your social work practice and that this was predictable along essentialist gender lines (for example, Geraldine, you didn't think men would make good carers and John sought status for caring). However, as Gilligan (1982) would predict, as time has gone by your evolving 'stories of lived experience' and 'stories to live by' call into question the assumptions that differentiate between gendered notions of caring.

Seigfried states:

Much of the controversy over a 'woman's morality' arises because of a misplaced faith in the possibility and desirability of an objective, neutral description of the world. (Seigfried 1996:208)

Having noted that various philosophers and thinkers have disproved 'this assumption of a neutral description', Seigfried encourages us to move away from binary comparisons and to pay more attention to the contexts in which an emphasis on care or an abstract principle have been fostered or discouraged. Therefore, on reflection, I have wondered if this difference in your stories reflects your own maturing process in the profession where these points of view converge once again (Gilligan 1982) or an adherence to the masculinising effect of the academic discourse (Fook, 2002). Mind you, it could also be said that the reflexive process we have been engaged in throughout our discussions has allowed the inclusion of many versions of masculinities and femininities which have challenged your gendered assumptions of the profession (Taylor and White 2000). Still, irrespective of my intellectual machinations around this issue, it is clear that in your 'stories of lived experience' related to your career choice, gender has been construed as a significant factor in choosing social work as your chosen careers. I contend that much of this is related to the profession's perceived uniqueness as a value driven profession (Ife 2001).

The future

Geraldine, before finishing this letter, I thought it would be useful to quickly review the stories both you and John told about the future you envisage for yourselves as social workers. In doing so however, I want to remind you that these future based anecdotes, while part of establishing a coherence and causality in your stories of career choice, they are not essential truths that need to be acted on (Linde 1993; Mishler 1999; Riessman 2001). In both your stories then, you continue to expand on the themes around which you have built your

past and present stories – for example, wanting to help and being able to express your caring skills. In particular, you both hold on to the conviction that you want and need to be respected for who you are. This process requires developing autonomy and an intellectual voice for you, Geraldine, but for John, he intends to draw strength from a group of like-minded men and utilise the support that this offers.

I have found it interesting that the main theme that you both flagged in your initial stories about what you hoped to achieve once you become social workers continue to be the ones you build on today. However, while you both hold on to the belief that you want and need to be respected, there are differences in what you want to achieve. Geraldine, you intend to move out of your community while John continues to look forward to initiating some macro change while remaining in his. You also see the completion of your degree as a foundation to build a future on, where economic choices and the possibility of recognition are rewards in themselves. Whereas, having found a niche for himself, John has gained a measure of confidence and recognition that he hopes to put to good use by playing an active role in his community.

While the themes of relationship and courage continue to play in my consciousness, I wonder how both of your 'stories of lived experience' compare to previous studies that have focused on career choice in the social work profession. I won't engage in this comparison in any depth now, preferring to leave this to a later date. However, your career choice anecdotes continue to clarify for me that traits only provide some of the material from which we choose

and shape evidence to construct our 'stories to live by'. There is in fact, a lot more to telling why we have chosen a particular occupation to participate in. Not only do the stories we create include carefully selected and cut pieces of material, they also reveal how and why they are chosen, cut and joined together. Much of this is influenced by personal and social mores associated with a particular context in which the story is told, yet these mores themselves also reflect preconceived ideologies about gender, culture, the chosen profession and how a story itself should be told.

To wrap up then, in this letter I have illustrated that there exists a plethora of interactions between the personal and social structures evident in our lives. I hope that having participated in this research, both you and John are more aware of how professional stories are created and are now better placed to identify and piece together 'stories to live by' in your professional forays into the future. I am aware that you have some years to go until you complete your degree, Geraldine, and it will be interesting to see what your professional quilt will look like then. In my last conversation with John, he talked about adjusting to normal life again once he had finished his studies. He mused about how his youngest son will have to adjust to having a dad who doesn't study – as that's all he has known. I too wonder about this adjustment and whether having a dad who studied will have an intergenerational effect on John's son's choice of career. Still, that's the subject of another inquiry.

Geraldine, once you have read my constructed representation of your career choice stories, please let me know what you think and whether I need to change anything to better portray your position.

Bye for now,

Jo

Chapter 6:

Exploring Gender As An 'Obstacle' In Career Choice Stories

Throughout this research text I have discussed how narrative research approaches focus on the meaning-making processes that individuals and social groups engage in to better understand their experiences in and of the world (The Personal Narratives Group 1989; Connelly and Clandinin 1999; Riessman 2001; Daiute and Lightfoot 2004). I have also highlighted that people's oral life stories are recognised as important 'venues' for individuals to locate their sense of self and negotiate group membership (Linde 1993). Therefore, it is of little surprise that Geraldine and John's evolving 'stories of lived and told experience' reveal an inherent reflexivity that not only facilitates a growing understanding of themselves as people, but also demands they reflect on who they are as emerging social work practitioners. More than that, their stories draw attention to how this process extends beyond their knowledge of social work's professional agendas to include an understanding of the profession's social positioning in the wider community. Of particular interest to me, however, has been how John and Geraldine's stories have exposed individual and cultural assumptions that support women's entrance into the social work field while at the same time challenging men's participation.

In this chapter then, I summarise the links Geraldine, John and I make between the lived and told stories they disclose about their gendered experiences and the lived and told stories they tell about choosing social work as their preferred

career. In particular, I highlight the agendas that emerge from the community contexts, family environments, education and work situations in which Geraldine and John have and continue to participate. Within the context of this research inquiry, these identified agendas expose the competitive and politicised nature of the 'professional positioning' process that exists in the western, industrialised world. Recognising that dominant groups 'generalise their experiences and values and dignify them as neutral, objective, and universal (Seigfried 1996:207)', I purposely portray gender as a central variable in the career choice/building process. In doing so, I challenge society's devaluing of the notion of care, claiming that it strips social work of its professional agenda and positioning influence.

Also in this chapter, I weave in and specifically refocus on the research exploring career choice identified earlier in Chapter 2 of this thesis. I consider how John, Geraldine and my experience in this research inquiry compares and dovetails with the findings that others have made regarding career choice and gendered decisions. While acknowledging similarities and differences that exist between our research experiences, particularly relative to those studies based on Pearsons' approach, I point out contributions each has made in 'thickening' my and the participants' understanding and appreciation of what draws people to social work. In the final part of the chapter, I briefly touch on the role narrative as a research approach has had in contributing to this understanding of career choice. I assert that the quilt metaphor best describes the gendered experience John, Geraldine and my stories of lived and told experience reveal about choosing social work as our preferred career. This sets the scene for Chapter 7,

where I provide more detail about the advantages and challenges I have faced as an emerging researcher in using narrative as a methodology for this project.

Gender as a significant 'obstacle' in the career choice narrative

In telling their stories, Geraldine and John draw on themes already identified by other researchers to explain why they chose social work as a career. For instance, they claim that they want to help others (Hanson and McCullagh 1995), to advocate on behalf of those marginalised by society (Weick 2000) and are attracted to the profession's value base (Ife 1997). However, unlike others, Geraldine and John don't reveal any particularly traumatic events in their childhood stories (Coombes and Anderson 2000), although they do explain how they dealt with events of hardship and/or injustice to clarify their entrance into the profession (Cree 2003). In fact, their stories of experience highlight how they defended their choice of career in relation to dominant community and professional discourses (Pearson 1973). By exposing an inherent understanding that caring is a trait that is both associated with women and generally not afforded any economic value in society (Christie 2002; McPhail 2004), John and Geraldine's narratives also uncover strategies they use to negotiate the many gendered expectations that impact on their decision to pursue social work.

It is important to note that in their lived and told stories of experience, John and Geraldine prove themselves to be accomplished storytellers. They both generate a sense of coherence and cohesiveness necessary for their stories to be believed (Linde 1993) and narrate a 'selfhood' that is acceptable to

themselves and deemed suitable for the profession (Bruner 2002). By way of example, Geraldine and John identify and describe how they deal with instances of injustice that set them apart from their own communities, families, education and work institutions to reach their own career goals while giving them simultaneous entrance into the social work profession. Moreover, in adhering to culturally understood norms of what makes a 'good story' (Bruner 2002:72), Geraldine and John ensure that they not only tell of the 'story-relevant past' while introducing us to significant characters, but they also portray these characters as necessary allies or fiends in the playing out of the career choice plot – particularly when confronting identified obstacle(s) that thwart the storyteller from reaching their preferred goal.

Following then, are short 'stories' that summarise the meanings I have made of the experiences Geraldine and John reveal as pivotal in their 'self-narratives' – the ones that in effect, give them entrance into the social work profession. In the process of telling these 'stories', I present the gendered agendas Geraldine and John expose as the common 'obstacle' found in each of the social settings in which they place themselves. I also draw attention to the characters they choose as players and note how Geraldine and John position themselves in relation to them when faced with the gendered agendas they encounter. As such, I provide a rich description, rather than make reductionist claims, of the conditions that contribute to the formation of gendered expectations and of their impact on those choosing social work as a preferred career (Seigfried 1996).

Encountering gendered career discourses in the community

Women in our society are both expected to be and perceived as being more nurturant than men and less assertive. (Seigfried 1996:212)

Geraldine, John and I, now in our 40s, grew up in regional communities in Queensland during the 1960s and 1970s. Geraldine was based in a coastal community that, while largely middle class today, was then a poor area that supported traditional working class values. The predominant career discourse at that time encouraged women to stay at home to look after children and not to further their education. Geraldine recalls being praised for her caring abilities as a child and states that because of the shortage of money in her family and her 'obvious' lack of academic prowess, she was encouraged to get a job as soon as she could to support herself until she got married.

Initially Geraldine was willing to participate in the dominant career discourse that relegated her to the home front. She did so because she was led to believe that there was merit in being a good carer and mother, and that she would be respected for fulfilling this role. However, Geraldine's 'stories of lived experience' reveal that although her mother encouraged her in her role as carer, she felt let down by the men in her life, and society as a whole, when the respect she was promised was not forthcoming. So while Geraldine is now in a position to pursue a specific career goal to gain the respect she craves, she also makes it clear that if she had felt valued in her previous roles, she would not have pursued social work as her preferred career.

John grew up in a working class community in a regional city in southeast Queensland. Mining was the city's defining industry, in which both his immediate and extended family actively participated. John's 'stories of lived experience' about that era communicate that white, Anglo-Saxon, working class values informed the dominant career discourse in the community in which he resided. While John's 'stories of lived experience' also reveal that increased social positioning came from supporting others less fortunate than oneself outside of work hours, when it came to paid work, men in the district were expected to adhere to the community norm of finding employment in the heavy industry sector.

John reveals that for him the expectations associated with the dominant career discourse were oppressive. Unlike Geraldine, John resists the accepted paradigm and seeks career satisfaction outside the customary norm. Like Geraldine, John struggles with the fact that caring is not valued in the dominant career discourse and draws our attention to how society in general marginalises men who choose to participate in a career that champions caring skills. However, while John goes to some length to describe his journey out of the dominant discourse, he also describes his delight and success as he traverses the welfare terrain – particularly when he finds a group of like-minded men in the community who can't readily be described as 'non-masculine'.

It is interesting to note that neither John nor Geraldine offer any insight from their perspective into the restrictions imposed on 'the other' gender by the dominant career discourse. Rather, when considering 'the other' gender they

elaborate on ways the dominant discourse supports 'the other' in their career choice in ways they would have liked to have been affirmed in their own. This preoccupation with one's own experience mirrors Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) observation that when teachers are invited to tell about what they know, their narratives reveal a focus on issues to do with themselves (experience/identity) rather than on the telling of abstractions.

Negotiating gendered agendas in the family

Thus in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the dilemma itself is the same for both sexes, a conflict between integrity and care. But approached from different perspectives this dilemma generates the recognition of opposite truths, these different perspectives are reflected in two different moral ideologies, since separation is justified by an ethic of rights while attachment is supported by an ethic of care. (Gilligan 1982)

At some point John and Geraldine both recall a sense of difference from those in their own families. In particular they focus on the prevailing covert, if not overt, career discourse that is perceived to be both oppressive and failing to support gender diversity. Mainly linking this discourse to masculine ways of being, their stories in this setting centre on the traditional notion that women are carers and men demonstrate their caring by supporting their families economically. As such, Geraldine and John tell anecdotes about women as sources of inspiration and facilitators in relation to their caring aspirations, while men are described as either prejudiced against the notion of care or as being marginalised when claiming caring as a part of their way of being in the world.

John chooses his mother and wife as archetype carers to model strength and champion differences. Initially he introduces us to his mother, who demonstrates a strong social justice streak in her work at the nursing home, but who is also limited in her ability to discuss the emotional ramifications of his parent's divorce. John then introduces us to his wife who establishes her ability and capacity to 'play in a big boy's sandpit' and is encouraged in her pursuit of a 'masculine' profession. Both women seemingly epitomise and justify John's focus on pursuing 'justice' for his and other men's choice to go against the dominant career discourse in the hope of finding professional recognition. However, as I noted previously, while John draws our attention to these women's successes and the achievement of the women's movement in general, he doesn't offer examples of how community agendas negatively impact on women's career aspirations in his family.

Geraldine draws our attention to a range of women in her family from whom she has learnt about caring and who have facilitated her role as mother, nurse and now would be social worker. She introduces her mother as the one who nurtured her desire for relationship and who gave her valuable feedback about her capacity to care by emphasising her practice of always bringing home strays. However, Geraldine also draws attention to the women who didn't fit the mould – to her sister who chose to pursue a career because she wasn't maternal enough, to one of her aunts who didn't care well enough for her children and to the other aunt who cared too much. Geraldine's 'stories of lived experience' about women and their associated caring capacity not only provide

evidence for her own ability to nurture, but also demonstrate that not all women have the capacity to care well.

The men in both participants' families are described in patriarchal terms and are believed to be either unable to or diminish the importance of caring. While Geraldine notes that she knew her father was proud of her because of the stories she overheard him telling his mates, she recalls that she never went to him for advice. In fact, she recalls that if she did, he would tell her to go and see her mother. Her 'stories of lived experience' also reveal that neither her husband nor her sons were able to demonstrate caring or concern, backing up her argument that men 'just can't care'. Nevertheless, while there are now no particular close relationships with the men in her family to draw on, Geraldine's more recent 'stories of lived experience' include an incident where she observes a man in the four-wheel driving club she belongs to being very attentive to his wife. However, she moderates her 'story of lived experience' by also noting that other women described this same act as chauvinistic.

John also provides family examples where men are involved in supporting others less fortunate (for example, his family's past role supporting newcomers to the district), but prefers to draw attention to the racist and seemingly 'top down' notions of caring embedded in this practice. On another occasion John describes his brother trying to heal the rift between his father and himself, but again this act is tempered by placing his brother in the role of a diplomat rather than a carer. In fact, more often than not John tells of past and present experiences where the men in his family are unable to cope with the more

vulnerable aspects of caring. While it is easy to interpret John's stories as describing traits typical of men's way of being in the world, John appears to use these anecdotes to underline his appreciation of caring and his ability to perform this role in a non-oppressive way. Although it has been assumed that women have an innate capacity to deal with the emotional side of life and therefore make better carers, both John and Geraldine tell of experiences in their family settings that demonstrate otherwise.

Challenging the gender discourse informing education and work agendas

In the masculine myth, confirmation comes not at the beginning of education but at the end. 'Welcome to the community of scholars,' the president announces at the Harvard commencement. (That sure sounded weird to me,' said a woman graduate. He says 'Welcome.' Then he shows us the door.) (Belenky et al. 1997:193)

Both participants in their 'stories of lived experience' reveal the intersection between their career aspirations and the gendered expectations embedded in the dominant career discourses found in the education and employment sectors. Having already established their talents associated with caring within the family setting, John and Geraldine's lived and told stories also reveal how they navigate similar expectations to justify and prepare for a career that includes caring as a defining feature. While John's stories depict him as battling a public image problem, Geraldine highlights her efforts to establish her intellectual capacity. That is, John's lived and told stories defend his masculinity while travelling a middle path between macho and feminine discourses associated with particular careers, whereas Geraldine provides stories that

facilitate her courage/voice to assert her practical ability to care and her interest and aptitude to learn abstract notions to do with caring.

John doesn't provide any school based stories as part of his career choice narrative, but rather focuses on events associated with work and the learning experiences he encounters once leaving school. In fact, John's account of his journey out of the 'predominant Anglo-Saxon male career paradigm' describes social challenges and learning opportunities in different job settings that establish his preference for caring and his capacity to participate in a career 'outside the norm'. How John manages other people's opinions and actions associated with his decisions feature strongly. Of note is the attention with which he describes men employed in the 'feminine linked jobs' he finds himself in, and how he positions himself in relation to them. John contrasts obvious feminine qualities with his own maleness, endeavouring to normalise his choice of career on the basis of skills and ability rather than character traits. When it comes to positioning himself in the welfare sector, John tells stories that set him apart from the 'powder puff' type of male social worker that exist in the field and connect him with like-minded men who explore and reflect on their participation in the welfare profession.

John, on more than one occasion, becomes engrossed in stories about his love of art and his developing prowess in the medium. While John uses art as his entrance into the welfare sector (enabling him to work directly in youth sector), he also uses this skill to paint an identity that focuses on talents other than those associated with the feminine aspects of caring in the sector – at least until

he has attained his degree. However, John also seems to use these stories to illustrate the impact of the dominant career discourse which will allow him to be creative within the parameters of particular jobs (for example, cooking, juvenile justice and youth work), yet won't financially recompense him in a way that will enable him to support his family. Moreover, it gives him an opportunity to contrast his 'arty-fartiness' with the steady emotional capacity of his wife, again exposing possible covert agendas that ascribe specific gendered traits to particular jobs.

Geraldine chooses to feature her experiences in a local school, both as a child and as an adult, to illustrate her gendered encounters with the education system. While her education experience as a child failed to encourage any intellectual aspirations she may have had, being told she wasn't as bright as her older sister did allow her to follow her dream of becoming a mother. Geraldine's 'stories of lived experience' describing her return to the school in the role of an active parent, feature the school principal. The school principal plays the role of a significant mentor who, recognising Geraldine's commitment if not her ability, encourages Geraldine to pursue her own personal development and gives her the courage to pursue a career in social work. However, in an effort to successfully navigate her way through the dominant career discourse, Geraldine also seeks objective data (in addition to her ability to care), to justify her career inclinations. She does this by completing a vocational guidance test to determine her suitability for a welfare career and then explores the employability of various welfare professionals before reaching a final decision as to which career to pursue.

The issues of respect and adequate pay are raised in both John and Geraldine's work related 'stories of lived experiences', but with different emphases. In the stories Geraldine lives and tells, Geraldine notes how she is willing to make clothes as a way of generating an income for the family, but feels it doesn't bring her the respect she is seeking in her life. Having found respect while doing volunteer work at the school, Geraldine recognises that the work doesn't provide the income that she needs. Finally, although Geraldine finds the respect and income she wants on re-entering the workforce in the nursing home sector, the job requires heavy physical work – something that she doesn't believe she can maintain in later life.

John's lived and told stories reveal that finding a job that extends respect for non-productive skills, such as caring or creativity, also means foregoing social positioning that comes with productive occupations such as those found in heavy industry. It is easy to assume that since John's stories of moving out of the 'white, Anglo-Saxon, male' career market focus on how he deals with others' perceptions of his role rather than on the income he receives, he has been adequately rewarded for his work. However, John's stories do seem to 'quietly' position creative and caring jobs at the low end of the financial scale in the employment hierarchy.

While I find myself wondering why John doesn't overtly focus on income in his lived and told stories of experience, John's reasons remain speculative as I didn't explore this aspect with him in any of our subsequent discussions.

Raising the question as to why I didn't pursue this question is interesting in itself. However, there is sufficient evidence in both John and Geraldine's stories to suggest that there is a disparity in agendas associated with the financial rewarding of men and women as they participate in economically productive versus non-productive occupations. Given the relationship between these agendas and the social positioning that occurs in relation to the occupational hierarchy, I turn to consider the assumptions and expectations directly related to the profession that also emerge in Geraldine and John's 'stories of lived experience' and 'stories to live by'.

Accounting for the gendered career discourse in the profession

The gendered nature of practice appears to be the central aspect of social work practice yet the texts that exist in the world of libraries tend to 'see through' this and not treat it as a key to understanding the nature of social work practice. (Camilleri 1996a:115)

The dominant career discourse in western society appears to value and therefore financially reward independence and individuality. Yet, more often than not, an individual's professional positioning is established by virtue of group membership first (Linde 1993) and then by displaying exceptional talent within that particular field. Researchers have also noted that occupational groups that require active, intellectual and economically productive traits (often associated with men's approach to the world), tend to be better positioned than those that demand more passive, emotional and caring traits (said to be typical of women) (Hugman 1991). Therefore, despite the fact that social workers as a group have managed to acquire status as a profession and women have successfully challenged the notion that they are not able to participate in

intellectual and productive activities, it is of little surprise that the participants' 'stories of lived experience' continue to reflect how emotional and caring activities remain undervalued.

By choosing to include women as influential characters and the importance of caring and accepting diversity, both Geraldine and John's narratives expose implicit understandings about the social work discourse and demonstrate embedded tensions associated with gender within the profession. To briefly recap, the profession's history and development has been associated with women and an ethic of care (Scourfield 2002; Martin 2003; McMahon 2003). As such, in finding its place within the dominant career discourse, social work as a profession has had an ongoing history of confronting gendered notions to legitimise its standing and existence in the industrialised sector. While this has included placing social work training within the university setting and efforts made to 'speak, publish and contribute' by learning the dominant voice (Weick 2000; Moffatt 2001; Fook 2002), it has also meant the subversion of the 'feminine link' and supporting male privilege to increase the professions' social standing (Martin 2003). While this overt behaviour was challenged in the 1970s, there have always and continue to be debates about the role of science versus art and the privileging of evidenced-based practice over relationship. These debates, I believe, are linked to the many gendered agendas that are largely upheld and sustained by the dominant discourse in order to adversely position social work within the professional pecking order.

All the same, many are drawn to social work's ranks as an opportunity to offer and adopt a caring stance/dimension in a world driven by economic success (Cree 2003). Geraldine and John describe similar aspirations in their stories. Geraldine describes how her ability to care allows her to appreciate and withstand particular behaviours (for example, an elderly woman slapping her face), in the aged care facility in which she works. John reminds me that other professions admire social workers because they advocate on behalf of their clients first, rather than look to ways to justify their actions for legal protection. Nevertheless, they both also seek to assure me, a gatekeeper in the profession, that they find theories useful and that they are developing expertise in applying them to effect change.

While the 'stories to live by' that Geraldine and John tell provide evidence of their growing links between knowledge, identity and context typical of the traditional professional discourse, for example, social justice, empowerment, caring and equal opportunities, I find it interesting that neither mention the impact of managerialism and economic rationalism. As noted in Chapter 2, research in the United Kingdom suggests that managerialism and economic rationalism have begun to have an adverse effect on attracting new recruits and maintaining members in the social work profession (Harlow 2004b). The push to incorporate evidence-based practice approaches coupled with the drive to establish professional competencies when spending public monies in the welfare sector has been blamed for a further devaluing of caring work. Therefore, it seems that as more career opportunities that do not assume an

ability to care arise for women, both men and women are looking elsewhere to gain financial recognition and to find job satisfaction (Harlow 2004b).

In retrospect, I have always found it perplexing that there had not been any collective action by social workers to counter managerialism/economic rationalism to champion the professional value base of the profession in the public domain. It has been intimated that social workers are not able to organise themselves to raise a collective consciousness because of the diversity that exists among them (Treanton 1972). It could also be said that in setting out to legitimise its identity as a profession, the social work profession has inadvertently committed itself to accepting the sources of structural domination existing in the wider community for the purposes of social positioning (Castells 1997; Riessman 2001). Nonetheless, Ife (1997) asserts that while there has been an erosion of social work's positioning in the employment sector in Australia, the humanist vision of the profession is what will ensure the profession's continuing existence. If John and Geraldine's accounts are anything to go by, this indeed may be the case. It is clear that in both of their lived and told stories describing their career choice experiences, Geraldine and John fervently support the humanist perspective.

Returning to explore gender in pre-existing research stories

Reaching the end of this research project, I revisit the findings of previous career choice studies – particularly those using Pearson's sentence completion method (Pearson 1973; Holmes and Maizels 1978; Uttley 1981; O'Connor et al 1984; Solas 1994; Christie and Kruk 1998). Having been initially drawn to these

studies because of their shift away from psychodynamic explanations typical of other studies in the area, I am now struck by my own recognition that none of the studies appeared to attend to the effect of gender in any depth. Identifying that only one out of the nine researchers using Pearson's approach was a woman, I wonder how much a gendered view impacted on their research. On closer examination, I discovered that while mention had been made of the impact of age in some of the studies, others had deliberately ruled out gender as an insignificant variable. While this surprised me, it also gave me an opportunity to speculate on the notion that adopting a narrative approach to better understand research texts and reveal more about their authors is as necessary as understanding social workers in relation to their actions/experiences. As Riessman clearly states: 'The construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it (1993:26)'.

Nevertheless, taking the opportunity to revisit these studies gave me the opportunity to make some historical meaning for myself of the links made by the researchers between social environment factors, predominant community values and the motivations of those choosing social work as their preferred career. For example, Pearson's (1973) original research paper reflects a *general dissatisfaction with mainstream ideals*, an attitude that could be said to be typical of the 1970s. The studies carried out by Holmes and Maizels (1978) and O'Connor and his colleagues (1984) highlight aspiring social workers' interests as identifying *benefits that would accrue to them personally*, mirroring the more self-centred values prevalent in the 1980s. Finally, the emerging influence of neoliberalism seems to be reflected in both Solas's (1994) study

that identifies a *bureaucratic influence* on those who participated in his project, and Christie and Kruk's (1998) research that draws attention to student's pragmatic concerns about their *suitability and the economic ramifications* of choosing social work as a career. I found myself wondering if my research reflected the growing academic concern with *oppressive discourses* associated with economic rationalism and increased managerialism, or whether this was a reflection of my own personal interest.

Re-reading Pearson's (1973) original article proved particularly significant for me. When I had first read his article, I remember feeling excited that many of his observations about the effects of media imagery on the profession and the impact of being situated in a predominantly managerialist environment appeared to be as applicable now as they had been when he first presented his research. While I believe some of my reaction at the time reflected my own feelings of disillusion, I also remember being drawn to Pearson's passionate and largely narrative style. His writing and analysis was much more inspiring in its overtones than the other research that I had come across (Journal entry 2000). I am again reminded of women's ways of being and my predilection for relationship and stories. While gossip is largely diminished in the social work professional discourse, like Milner (2001) many characteristics of gossip, as described by Spacks, resonate with my interest in narrative approaches to practice:

[Gossip] embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life, and a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides a language for an alternative culture. Gossip's way of telling can project a different understanding of reality from that of society at

*large...gossip epitomises a way of knowing as well as telling.
(Spacks in Milner 2001:167)*

When re-reading Pearson's article, I also found it interesting to note that much of the language he used in defining social work's agenda bore the hallmarks of what Gilligan (1982:164) defines as men's way of caring, for instance, there was much more emphasis on an ethic of rights than there is on an ethic of care. Although researchers using a gendered lens to examine aspiring social workers' motivation are less cautious about identifying and challenging the link between patriarchal expectations and career outcomes in social work today (Cree 1996; Christie 2002; Lewis 2004), there continues to be a silence around challenging epistemological preferences embedded in the dominant career discourses prevalent in the larger professional and community sectors. That is, few arguments are heard that support the financial rewarding of care in terms of relationship outcomes than the economic/productive results sought by funding bodies.

Weick (2000), when likening social work's commitment to 'social care taking' to the first voice of women, holds hope that when members of the profession begin to use a voice that reflects practice rather than the second voice of the academy, we will hear more about the rich experiences and practice wisdom that practitioners have acquired rather than the theoretical abstractions that allow us to be 'judged by the standards of the sciences' or economic experts. Reflecting on my experience of using narrative as a research approach has given me hope that this can be achieved. For me, not only has narrative inquiry allowed me to explore and start exercising my own first voice, it has provided a

richer description of the career choice process that moves away from theoretical generalisations.

The process of quilting a professional story

In chapter 3 I introduced the quilt as a device to describe both my understanding of the research process and to move me away from the perception that choosing a career was necessarily akin to the start of a journey. Despite the fact that narrative is itself offered as a metaphor for understanding how people make meaning of their experiences, including their career choice (Cochran 1997; Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Inkson 2004), I explained how adopting the quilt metaphor enhanced my understanding of the phenomenon of choosing social work as a career. Although the 'career as story' metaphor encapsulates the understanding that our accounts are: largely incomplete, change according to particular audiences, are invested with meaning and enable us to see new patterns as we engage in 'retrospective sense making' (Inkson 2004:106), the making of a quilt emphasises the self-creation aspect of careers, for instance, 'the unity of self and work, learning through work, and integration of the process and product of work in the life-space of the individual (Inkson 2004:101)'. For me, the characteristics last mentioned are particularly applicable to the social work career and are often mentioned together in the one text (for example, O'Connor et al. 2003).

The quilt, for me, brings together these two career metaphors to illustrate the narrative processes people engage with when constructing and establishing a professional story/identity suitable for social work (Connelly and Clandinin 1999;

Mishler 1999). Of course, in itself the quilt as metaphor has been used extensively to represent women's textuality as well as of their political and aesthetic positioning in the community (Torsney and Elsley 1994). To my mind, the quilt also integrates Addams and Dewey's view that experience is pedagogical. Addams and Dewey strongly advocated that professional and academic practice be predicated on 'retaining and utilising past experiences' as well as applying and combining 'intellectual insight' with 'moral perception' (Seigfried 1996:200). These notions are captured in the narrative and craft career metaphors represented in the quilt. Moreover, it seems to me that as academics placed in the position of 'teacher'/guide, we are party to a process that facilitates the quilting of other people's professional stories. As such, we would do well to understand narrative process and explore and build on students' 'stories of lived experience' if we want to have an influence in the quilting of their professional 'stories to live by'.

For the participants and I, we discovered that telling a career choice story related to social work involved a process of selecting, cutting and joining pieces of material that contained story threads about social justice, caring and being able to negotiate gendered agendas to reach our preferred goal. While the cutting and piecing together process was somewhat intuitive, this research text also demonstrates that the story/quilt itself was unpicked and new pieces of material added or removed as our skills and awareness of professional and community expectations increased. Even though our personal values, perspectives and lived experiences influenced how we joined the material in our career story/quilt to negotiate our group membership, an awareness of the

dominant discourses in the community and the profession was particularly important for us to position ourselves in a place of influence both personally and professionally.

The quilt metaphor also contributed to my understanding in another way. On the 26 September 2004, I wrote in my journal how it was very easy to revert to an essentialised view of the world when gender is used as a lens to view the experience of career choice. However, on returning to Geraldine and John's descriptions of how gender infiltrated their career choice decisions, I was reminded of the change in focus away from binary descriptors to producing rich accounts of conditions that contributed to a myriad of masculine and feminine characteristics associated with different careers. Rather than seeing gender in black and white terms, the quilt supported the notion that an array of coloured material can be used to symbolise the variety of gendered agendas/patterns that are created and emerge from the many intersecting relationships between individual, social and professional expectations associated with career choice (The Personal Narratives Group 1989).

The quilt also drew my attention to how the creation and perpetuation of gendered norms/templates linked with particular professions can restrict, if not determine, how and which colours individuals use when quilting their professional stories. In fact, within the context of this research inquiry, it is clear that gendered agendas have been perpetuated to support and mediate the competitive and politicised nature of the 'professional positioning' process that exists in the western, industrialised world. Again drawing on Seigfried's

(1996:207) notion that dominant groups 'generalise their experiences and values and dignify them as neutral, objective, and universal', identifying gender as a central variable or template in the career positioning process has clearly exposed masculine nuances that strip social work of its positioning influence. The told and lived stories that Geraldine and John have shared reveal that linking social work with feminine attributes has meant that they have had to negotiate and accommodate personal, family and community views that may not have arisen if variables other than gender had influenced career positioning.

Chapter 7:

Reflecting On My Experience Of Narrative Inquiry As A Method To Explore Career Choice

Narrative inquiry has the compelling, sometimes confounding, quality of merging overall experiences with specific research experience, realms of experience often separated in inquiry. (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:115)

In the first chapter I described how my initial interest in the research topic developed out of a desire to understand my own experience of feeling undervalued as a social worker in the field. I also noted how my curiosity in knowing more about why people would choose social work as a career increased once I became a learning facilitator in the training program at Central Queensland University – especially because of the emphasis placed on experiential learning. As you recall, while I found a considerable amount of research identifying causal relationships explaining students' motivation to join the profession, there seemed to be little describing the experience or the meaning-making processes that students themselves engaged in to make sense of their career choice experiences. The purpose of this research project then was to explore the lived and told experiences of two students who were enrolled in the social work degree at Central Queensland University describing why they chose social work as their preferred career.

In the previous three chapters, I presented Geraldine, John and then my story of our experiences associated with this narrative inquiry into choosing social

work as our preferred career. In this chapter, I briefly revisit our stories and the other material presented in this written text to highlight how using a research approach that combined Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry method (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) with Riessman's notion of social positioning (Riessman 2001) has enhanced my understanding of the career choice experience. However, the greater part of this chapter is intended as a reflection of my experience with narrative as a methodological approach and how I have come to story myself as a researcher in the process.

While Geraldine, John and my accounts in the previous chapters revealed many traits and impacting issues already identified in other research, it is clear the meanings we attach to particular events and people in our experiences are as significant to our choice of career as identifying essential character traits. Rather than confirming that career choice is a cognitive act which is linear in its unfolding, the processes described in this inquiry revealed it to be a much more complex undertaking. In particular, when exploring John and Geraldine's stories of lived and told experiences it was clear that they took account of gendered expectations emanating from individual/familial, community and professional sectors when constructing a career choice story to demonstrate/legitimise their entrance into the social work profession.

I also demonstrated that although the value base and historical origins of the social work profession have privileged the ethic of care (McMahon, 2003), it is important to understand that caring is defined and experienced differently by the sexes (Gilligan 1982) and in the wider community. Despite the fact that scholars

and practitioners alike have noted that the perceived link between caring and women has and continues to negatively impact on the profession's standing in the community (Weick 2000; Martin 2003; LeCroy and Stinson, 2004), Geraldine and John persist in describing experiences that identify the importance of caring as a hallmark of the profession. It seems because of the importance John and Geraldine place on caring and its perceived connection with women that negotiating the various gendered expectations becomes the significant plot in their stories. As such, gender became the template for our co-constructed texts describing the experience of choosing social work as our preferred careers.

However, while this inquiry highlights that gendered notions of caring have played an important intermediary factor in our experiences of choosing social work, I am aware that Geraldine, John and I are all mature aged and have lived out a large part of our lives in rural Queensland towns. Recent research exploring gendered experiences in engineering (Walker 2001) has noted that younger women don't experience the same gendered assumptions that their older counterparts have been subjected to. Although the majority of students attracted to the Central Queensland University course tend to be mature aged, our experience may not be typical or necessarily applicable across other social work courses. Nevertheless, gender issues remain a focus of discussion in the profession (Camilleri 1996a; Lewis 2004), including being identified as a precursor contributing to women leaving social work to pursue more economically lucrative professions (Harlow 2004a).

In a traditional thesis limitations of the research project are identified in a single chapter, whereas in a narrative inquiry questions are raised throughout the text. In this final chapter then, while turning to explore my experience of participating in this narrative inquiry as a researcher, I also continue to raise questions about narrative as a research method. Narrative approaches to research expose the meaning-making processes that both individuals and social groups engage in to construct identities and legitimise their social positioning in the community. Therefore, there are many parts of this research text that reveal some of how I have come to construct my identity as a researcher and negotiate my position both within the academic community at Central Queensland University and within the growing narrative inquiry research community. My sister, Christine, played a very significant role in this development.

Like my experience in other areas of the project, my relationship with Christine contributed to the adoption of the quilt as a heuristic device as it epitomised the friendship that evolves in many quilting groups and has provided inspiration, when needed, to complete the project. Therefore, I conclude this research text with a letter to Christine describing what I have learnt about the research approach as well as the importance of understanding gendered notions of caring in relation to choosing social work as a career. In particular, I note that narrative inquiry offers researchers in social work the opportunity to learn more about marginalised groups as well as offers educators and employers more information that will assist in assessing/recruiting, training and supporting practitioners in meaningful ways.

Dear Chris,

Yay! I think I am nearly finished, I didn't believe the day would ever come! Still, here I am reflecting on the lessons I have learnt and what things I would like to say to you about my experience. I know this is an important part of the research process, but I feel as if I am over the whole experience and would love to see the back of it. Not that I haven't enjoyed collaborating with the students and meeting the people that I have during the process, but of late, it has become a bit of a millstone. Combining study and work has been a challenge. Still, I am not here to whinge, as I know you still have to complete your doctorate and I don't want to deter you from that.

I have to say that I have learnt a lot about how others see their experience of choosing social work as a career. I am becoming more convinced that taking on a career in social work is quite a political act, not so much in the self serving sense that I often associate with politics, although that may be so, but more because it involves negotiating a lot of different agendas. Mind you, I don't think this is typical to social work alone. My experience of negotiating the different agendas associated with completing this degree makes me wonder if what I may actually be capturing in this inquiry is the negotiating experience required of any aspiring professional seeking entrance into a career of their choice (Linde 1993).

On occasions I have questioned whether I have been as savvy as John and Geraldine in dealing with the cultural imperatives associated with pursuing a higher degree. Having made a pragmatic decision to pursue postgraduate study

to maintain my position at the University, I didn't spend much time in assessing possible options that I could follow. I can't help but wonder if my experience mirrors that of those students who also make equally pragmatic decisions to 'get a ticket' to practice rather than assess the learning approaches they may encounter at different educational institutions. But, if you didn't know this was important, why would you look? After all, it seems to me that as part of the whole social positioning process in the career market we are led to believe that certain professions have a role and culture that may not actually exist. Being part of the university has certainly demystified the academic profession for me and I am sure that entering a training course to become a social worker does much the same for many students.

While learning more about the experience of choosing social work has been terrific, I have enjoyed learning about the narrative inquiry approach more. I can say in retrospect that I was somewhat naive about what would be involved by engaging in such an approach, but as usual I tend to jump in and deal with the consequences as I go. I guess that's why I am such a staunch advocate of experiential learning. Thank goodness Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative inquiry is best learnt from experience. However, I know that I didn't come across their work until well after I had started the degree and that up until that point I had relied on Riessman's (1993) book. While that was useful and her work was also influential in the approach I ended up taking, Clandinin and Connelly's work resonated because of their interest in experience and process. Do you remember us finding that article by Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) and how I was particularly drawn to the three-dimensional process described

while you, at that stage, preferred the problem-solving approach. Haven't we come a long way since then?

It was a real struggle to move away from that linear, technique type approach and feel comfortable with the more protean attitude required of narrative inquirers. While for me it felt comfortable in its application because of my counselling background, the challenges came when I had to explain what I was trying to do to other researchers. At that point it hit me that being able to use the language of the dominant discourse was really important. While the research process itself was not linear, the process of explaining how the project would unfold was. Of course, as you know, my naturally resistant temperament didn't help this process (again) and I ended up in a few battles. Then again, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to approach Michael (Connelly) to look at my work if I hadn't had those battles and I probably wouldn't have learnt as much as I have. Besides, as my friend Judy once said to me, 'everyone has their postgraduate story' and didn't Bruner (2002) say that obstacles are necessary for a story to be a good one?

So, what have I learnt about narrative inquiry in relation to understanding students' experience of choosing social work as a career? My first comment leads on from what I have already been saying, that is, while the approach is growing in popularity and is becoming more accepted in the research sector, narrative inquiry is still on the edge. As I know from my experience in social work, it is easy to be marginalised if you don't know the dominant discourse and play it right. This is where I have also learnt the value of support groups. I

remember writing in my journal when I attended the Narrative Matters conference in Canada that I felt like I had come home.

Saturday, 22/5/04

Well, I knew this conference was going to be profound, but boy, I do feel like I have come home. This fits the session I have just been to where they used the metaphor of the house for the self – wow! It was amazing to be in the room and to witness the profound effect these research stories had on the audience. I can't help but contrast these 'storytelling' sessions with what was presented by a social worker in the session yesterday. (Not her fault, but our training). The richness of the data and the 'experience' captured was quite profound – it was much more compelling than the dry old facts presented yesterday. It strikes me how we as social workers have learnt to use narrative as a boring old text available for court etc. The medicalising/legalising requirement loses the personal experience. It fails to capture the whole person in their environment, it's as if feelings and experience don't matter. I struggle with that!

Still, I think what I have learnt the most is how the method has helped me explore the experience of career choice. Since beginning this project, a lot more research has come available that reinforces much of what I was able to find out from Geraldine and John's experiences. Even though I have often thought 'there's no point completing this project as everyone else has said what I have found', I have realised that this approach has actually provided the holistic information I was personally looking for. Even though other researchers have said a lot of what I have learnt, the information came from a number of sources rather than the one. On reflection, I can say that narrative inquiry gave it to me all in one. Nevertheless, this experience also alerted me to another aspect of the research culture that I hadn't understood. Jane (Maidment 2004) pointed out to me that it was good others were beginning to say what I was as I could then quote them to verify my position. I must say I get very confused about all this. There's a big part of me that wonders what the point is of reinventing the wheel

the whole time, but then I am reminded that I learn best from experience so reinventing the wheel can be considered essential as a learning tool. And, while part of the research process is to build and support the development of different knowledges, it is also about negotiating entrance into the research community.

But I guess it's the resonance that I have with narrative inquiry as a method that has become the greatest draw card for me. It links with my belief that social work is much more of an art than a science, but here I fall into the trap of thinking in binaries again. As I said before, one of the benefits that came from my battles over pursuing a narrative approach was the opportunity to meet other researchers. One of the social work researchers I had contact with was Mel Gray. Mel is an academic at Newcastle University, who like us, grew up in Africa. She is also involved with a problem based or experiential learning approach to social work training and has done a lot of work in exploring social work as art. In a piece of her writing she gave me to read, she says:

... the art of social work embraces values and philosophical explanations, as well scientific ones; uses rules, techniques, principles, and established knowledge as well as intuition, practice wisdom, creativity, and non-linguistic forms of expression to connect with and help clients, and ultimately to improve the human condition. (Gray 2003)

So moving away from the binary, I can see how narrative inquiry dovetails with this definition. While it seems a bit nebulous as an approach, it actually captures and involves many aspects of what Mel talks about.

Still, the processes involved are much more laborious than other approaches, but like anything, because it captured my imagination, it didn't seem so. I guess

that's where the art bit fits in – the aesthetic experience makes up for the process. But the time it takes does throw up some limitations. While the information I gathered from the two participants is comprehensive and provides a lot of the material to be considered, there are other variables that may impact on career choice, such as age and cultural differences that I didn't pursue. One of the reasons that gender emerged as the dominant piece in our template was because the study included a participant of each sex, thereby intensifying the gender variable. I wonder what the focus of the study would have been if I had chosen two women of different ages, two men, or a participant from western origins and one from the east, instead. Mel (Gray 2003) said that in her PhD thesis she argued that 'our values influence the type of social worker we become'. Given Gilligan's (1982) work on the gender differences in moral development, I feel that my inquiry has highlighted that gender is an important factor to consider when exploring the motivation of those entering the sector.

I made the comment before that I thought I might have captured the experience of those negotiating their way into the course rather than the career choice experience itself. While this may be the case, I have wondered whether there are any other ways to explore career choice as a phenomenon. Narrative inquiry requires an immersion of sorts over a considerable period of time and once someone has identified their interest in social work, they are already open to the influences that may impact on the career decision. Still, there have been many other studies that have examined unconscious motivation as well as conscious decision-making (for example, Hanson and McCullagh, Rowe 1983; Rompf and Royse 1994; 1995; Parker and Merrylees 2002). Besides, although I

may have started out wanting to understand an underlying reason for choosing to join social work, now I am much more interested in the narrative processes aspiring social workers engage in to negotiate their entrance into the field. In fact, I now think that this is more important and helpful as it reveals much more subjective information about how the person perceives and conducts themselves in relation to others – be it individuals, groups, organisations or in relation to communities.

As you are very aware, one of the challenges for me throughout this research process has been learning to trust my own voice. I remember one of the feedback emails I received from Michael (Connelly 2002 -2004) saying that it appeared as if I had used other people to help me think. This struck a chord, because, while in some ways I had, my experience of this was the other way round; that is, I had deliberately sought out references to justify my point of view. In retrospect, Chapter 2 of this thesis never did come together as I would have liked. While this too illustrates a struggle to find my own voice, it also demonstrates my effort to write to satisfy both the traditional and narrative tradition associated with writing a thesis. Finding Gilligan's (1982) book and then Belenky and her colleagues' (1997) work really helped me understand more about myself and women's ways of knowing. Of course, this then also helped me understand a bit more about the social positioning in the academy and the social work profession. As women we don't get praised much for taking a stance do we?

However, I know that the whole notion of a gendered way of being has been a struggle for you too, especially with the recent need to look after Dan. We have had many long conversations about dominant community and family discourses that dictate how you should behave as a wife, mother and now carer. The job of carer has been very hard and I know there have been times when you have reached the end of your tether. I guess like Geraldine says, it is a particularly hard job when there seems to be little recognition the wider community. I was reminded of the quote I read the other day that revisits the caretaking role of social work:

Recognising the capacity for toughness and tenderness, for clear reason and fluid intuition, for radical hope and dry-eyed reality brings us back to caretaking, But rather than discounting its demands and possibilities, the lesson of our first voice (women's focus on relationship) tells us to pay attention to every dimension it encompasses. Social work is social caretaking. It concerns itself with the everyday tribulations of human life met with consciousness and intent The key to unlocking the power of this knowledge is to lay claim directly and unselfconsciously to its centrality in social work. (Weick 2000:401)

Still, this is hard to do when there are strong agendas in the community that diminish caring and the caretaker role. Jane (Maidment) recently directed me to an Australian edited book that explores women and violence (Thorpe and Irwin 1996). One of the concepts raised in the book is that of 'structural violence'. For the authors, structural violence is not only about obvious social arrangements that encumber women, but 'is also about a process that is exploitative – a way that one group can be disadvantaged and another advantaged by 'the system' (Thorpe and Irwin 1996:10)'. Weeks, a contributor to the same book, claims that organisations in particular are 'powerful arenas for the gendering processes which recreate and perpetuate gender power (Weeks 1996:69)'. I can see how

these same processes when applied in the professional sector, relegates caring invisible. Caring is considered a 'natural ability' of women, thereby concealing qualities required and leaving it as an unrecognised activity (Weeks 1996:79).

I can see now how gender and my social work identity have played a part in my choice of narrative inquiry and in tainting my perceptions of the research endeavour. When I started this project, I was pretty adamant that I was not interested in the social positioning that I perceived to be attached to the role of researcher. I remember thinking it was elitist and believed that research didn't really have anything to do with supporting people or bringing about change – it was somewhat removed from the 'real' world. I suspect my thoughts mirror many other practitioners in the field. I think that's why I initially chose to take a narrative approach, I believed that it gave people a voice and offered me a chance to say something too. But this can be pretty scary and finding the right language is not easy either. I had an email from Geraldine today who said that after reading John's story she realised that she wasn't interested in trying to find a voice that suited men anymore, but rather she wanted to find a space for her own. I wonder how that will impact on her practice and positioning in the future?

Thinking about Geraldine's comment and how I have changed over the years (for instance, no longer feeling that I have to fit cultural norms to be accepted (*see Chapter 1*)), has reminded me of a recent incident that I wanted to share with you. I think it illustrates the difficulties and resistances we all face as we challenge and go against agendas, especially gendered ones, in our families and the wider community. On Aunt Mary's recent trip from Canada to visit

Graham and I, we were once again confronted with the need to explain our household and work roles. As you know, Graham and I have reversed our gendered roles in recent years. Although we both found initially that it was quite hard to adjust to Graham looking after the house and having the meal on the table when I got home from work in the evening, we have become accustomed to the change. In fact, we now openly and deliberately 'play around' with the gendered expectations that have arisen since the change.

As you can imagine, Aunt Mary found our situation quite challenging and would often make comments to us both about Graham's domesticity and the good job he did. While Graham does do a good job, she didn't comment on my going to work in the same way. In the end, when Aunt Mary made her comments about Graham, we pointed out to her that it would be unlikely for her to make the same remarks if it had been me at home doing the same tasks. While she agreed with us, it was difficult for her to adjust. I am reminded of the observation made by Cree (1996), that men are often noticed and praised for doing tasks regularly done by women and contrast that with how women were met with resistance when they first entered what was socially constructed as the male work domain.

While I haven't heard from John for a while, I imagine that he is enjoying a new found freedom that comes with completing his degree. The last time I talked to him, he mentioned that his youngest son had found it strange having him around to spend time with instead of rushing away to do some study. Balancing work and leisure seems to becoming more of a challenge, but maybe it only

looks that way because of where I sit at the moment. I am certainly aware of how much I have been immersed in a world of text during the last few years. I suspect that the world of practice may have moved on. Like John, I am sure I will need to renegotiate a new social position when I return. Maybe you and I will have a chance to see each other more and talk about different things? I can hear you laugh as I have just realised that this too is a world of text and recognise another facet of my affinity with narrative as a research method.

Well, Chris, I know there are many other things that I could reflect on regarding my affinity with narrative as a research approach and as a phenomenon and what I have learnt about gender, career choice and social work as a profession. But at some point, like this letter, the story must come to an end. I am sure as soon as I fold it, seal the envelope and post this letter other thoughts will come to mind, but that will always be the case. Clandinin and Connelly (2000:166) state that 'the research text, like life, is a continual unfolding in which the narrative insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow'. As such, my inquiry into why Geraldine, John and I chose social work as our preferred career is unlikely to end with this text. How this will evolve for us I cannot say. However I am sure that there will be many other opportunities for us to attend to our professional quilt/story.

On that note I will end. Say hello to Dan and the kids for me.

Jo

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Appendix A – Describing the terms used to structure this inquiry

Although I draw on other approaches to narrative research applicable to the exploration of career choice stories, this project relies heavily on Clandinin and Connelly's work spanning the last twenty years. In the years that these authors have been investigating teachers' knowledge, they have coined metaphoric terms to describe the experiences their participants' encounter. Despite the fact that these have emerged from the education sector, many of the terms they have used can be translated into the welfare field providing a language that experientially describes the processes aspiring social workers engage in to legitimise their entrance into the profession. Following are terms that will be used in this research text. They are not offered as definitions, but rather to provide parameters of how they are used in relation to the experiences described in this text.

Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) – The professional body that oversees social work practice in Australia. Although not a registered body, employers generally expect practitioners to be eligible to join the Association before they will employ them. AASW is responsible for the accreditation of training courses throughout Australia and endorses overseas trained professionals.

Community Focused Learning (CFL) – The experiential learning approach developed at Central Queensland University to support the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for membership of the AASW. Embedded in Problem Based Learning, CFL facilitates learning in three arenas: (a) content knowledge for the completion of case studies and projects; (b) knowledge of group dynamics in formal learning teams, and; (c) reflexive analysis of values and dissonance (de Warren and Mensinga, 2004:61)

Course – The name used to describe a unit of study that makes up a degree program at Central Queensland University, commonly called a ‘subject’.

Field texts – Term used in narrative inquiry to describe the types and forms of data used to compile a research text. Clandinin and Connelly describe these as created artefacts that represent aspects of field experience of both participants and researchers (2000:92). They can include participant stories, journal notes, letters, conversations, research interviews, documents, life experiences and autobiographical writing. It is important to note that field texts themselves are filled with interpretative inferences.

Learning facilitator – Person employed by Central Queensland University, conventionally known as lecturer, to facilitate learning in the Bachelor of Social Work degree program.

Narrative – Although ‘... a narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically

connected (Czarniawska 2004:17)', it is used in this text in a broader sense, as a metaphor that can describe 'a life course, a developmental theory, a reference to a totalising cultural force, and/or the method for interpreting oral or written narrative discourse (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004:x)'. It is when the word narrative is linked to others that it assumes a particular meaning.

Narrative method – Is an interpretive research method that is more specifically defined by a researcher's discipline and orientation. Riessman (1993) introduced this approach to social work. She says narrative analysis involves the interpretation of the 'informant's story', analysing 'how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity (Riessman 1993:2)' In education, the narrative work of Clandinin and Connelly's work is referred to extensively. These authors give significance to experience by entering a three dimensional space that includes: interaction, continuity and situation (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

Narrative inquiry – My interest for this inquiry includes exploring experience for its educational value in relation to social work training. While narrative methods have been used to study experience (Riessman 1993), I use the term narrative inquiry specifically to describe Clandinin and Connelly's narrative approach to researching it as a phenomenon. Building on Dewey's notion of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000:20) claim that 'narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience' that involves entering a three dimensional inquiry space with participants to explore and describe lived and told experiences over time, possibly in different places and usually using a number of different social

settings. The inquiry itself is a collaboration between the researcher and the participants in ‘the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives’.

Narrative space/three-dimensional space – A metaphorical term developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to describe their interpretation of Dewey’s theory of experience. The term describes a space of inquiry that accounts for temporality/continuity (*past, present, future*) along one dimension, the personal and social (*interaction*) along another and place (*situation*) along the third.

Problem Based Learning (PBL) – A teaching and learning approach developed by McMaster University to educate medical staff. It is based on Dewey’s idea of learning from experience. Several models of PBL exist, but most aim to give ‘learners the actual, ill-structured, open-ended and messy problems, or simulations of the problems they will encounter in their careers (Barrows 1999)’.

Program – A generic term describing the academic requirements that students need to complete in order to receive a degree in social work.

Social work program – Four-year degree program provided by universities and accredited by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW). Individuals must complete the requirements of the degree program, including courses in psychology, sociology and law as well as key social work courses, to be eligible

to join the AASW before they can practice as a social worker in the Australian community.

Social work student – Person enrolled in an accredited social work degree program at a recognised education institution.

'Stories to live by' – A term developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1999:4) to understand teacher's narrative professional identity. This term describes the link made by participants' in their stories between knowledge, context and identity when describing their personal practical knowledge.

'Stories of lived experience' – A term used to describe the stories participants tell about their lived experience.

Appendix B(1) – Letter to Respondents

Dear

After 2 years I have finally managed to complete the transcripts that I recorded for my research as to why you wanted to do social work. I bet you can't even remember participating ☺. However, I have now had the time to get this transcript typed and am sending it back to you. I hope you will enjoy reading it and reviewing what you said all those months ago – particularly noting the brilliant 'story telling' ability you have!

I haven't done any deep thinking about what was said by everyone, but what did emerge was the similarity in the way people told me about their decision. Since doing the interviews I have had the opportunity to do some research into 'life stories' and narrative research in general. It is clear that there seems to be an established pattern that we adhere to in telling our stories about the important decisions in our lives – you tended to follow that. Typically for a story to be considered 'true' and believable, it needs to have some congruity over time and some causal elements. There are other aspects too that I am happy to share with you if you are interested.

The thing that did emerge from all of the interviews though was that it appeared that the stories reflected how people saw their choice in terms of their identity rather than just a set of reasons. Moreover, the choice seemed to be a part of 'constructing' an identity rather than finding and following a career path. I have come to see the process like the construction of a 'quilt' where each of us decides to work on or tell a story about different parts of ourselves (including our career) in different ways depending on who we are talking to and what life circumstances are paramount at the time.

As a result, I have decided that I will be writing up my findings as if I am making a quilt. The front of the quilt will be made up of 'blocks' that you and I will construct using your transcript and the feedback you give me as I start piecing the information together. The other parts of the quilt will be made up of my own story and the theory around the area. (I think the quilt metaphor also reflects the social work profession as quilts have been used as projects of social action and is traditionally a gendered craft that attracts more women than men to its ranks.)

I would be grateful if you could read the transcript and add or change anything. I would also be very interested in any other comments, thoughts, feelings you have about what you have said or any thoughts you have had since the interview – especially since it has been such a long time since the recording was done. I will understand if you no longer wish to be involved. Therefore if I don't hear from you I will assume you are happy with the transcript and don't wish to have any further involvement. However if you are interested in continuing to be involved, please return the transcript with your comments. I will keep in touch with you and let you know how I see the 'constructing' process evolving.

Thank you for your patience with this.

Kind regards,

Jo Mensinga

Appendix B(2) – Letter to respondents

Dear

After 2 years I have finally managed to complete the transcripts that I recorded for my research as to why you wanted to do social work. I bet you can't even remember participating ☺. However, I have now had the time to get this transcript typed and am sending it back to you. I hope you will enjoy reading it and reviewing what you said all those months ago – particularly noting the brilliant 'story telling' ability you have!

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Thank you for your patience with this.

Kind regards,

Jo Mensinga

Appendix B(3) – Letter to respondents

Dear

After 2 years I have finally managed to complete the transcripts that I recorded for my research as to why you wanted to do social work. I bet you can't even remember participating ☺. However, I have now had the time to get the transcripts typed and sent out. Unfortunately some of the tapes were not very clear and much of the detail lost. I was unable to gather much from the tape we did – we both spoke really quietly!

I haven't done any deep thinking about what was said by everyone, but what did emerge was the similarity in the way people told me about their decision. Since doing the interviews I have had the opportunity to do some research into 'life stories' and narrative research in general. It is clear that there seems to be an established pattern that we adhere to in telling our stories about the important decisions in our lives. Typically for a story to be considered 'true' and believable, it needs to have some congruity over time and some causal elements. There are other aspects too that I am happy to share with you if you are interested.

The thing that did emerge from all of the interviews though was that it appeared that the stories reflected how people saw their choice in terms of their identity rather than just a set of reasons. Moreover, the choice seemed to be a part of 'constructing' an identity rather than finding and following a career path. I have come to see the process like the construction of a 'quilt' where each of us decides to work on or tell a story about different parts of ourselves (including our career) in different ways depending on who we are talking to and what life circumstances are paramount at the time.

As a result, I have decided that I will be writing up my findings as if I am making a quilt. The front of the quilt will be made up of 'blocks' that the respondents and I will construct using their transcripts. The other parts of the quilt will be made up of my own story and the theory around the area. (I think the quilt metaphor also reflects the social work profession as quilts have been used as projects of social action and is traditionally a gendered craft that attracts more women than men to its ranks.)

Even though you don't have a transcript to review, I would be grateful for any other comments, thoughts, feelings you have about what you said or any thoughts you have had since the interview – especially since it has been such a long time since the recording was done. I will understand if you no longer wish to be involved. Therefore if I don't hear from you I will assume you don't wish to have any further involvement. However if you are interested in continuing to be involved, please forward your comments. I will in turn, keep in touch with you and let you know how I see the 'constructing' process evolving.

Thank you for your patience with this.

Kind regards,

Jo Mensinga

Appendix C – Checklist of theories for analysis of stories

Theories for the analysis of narratives:

Gergen:

- Story must include:
 - Valued endpoint... ..goal emerged in value
... ..value influenced by culture
 - Events relate to the endpoint... ..make it credible, obtainable, significant or clearer
 - Ordering of events... ..determined by culturally determined conventions, usually linear and temporal
 - Stability of identity... ..all characters must have continuous and coherent identity across time
 - Causal linkages... ..offered explanations close from previous events
 - Signals for beginning and end of story offered (Gergen 1999a:2)

1. Stable narrative – same
2. Progressive narrative – improve
3. Regressive narrative – deteriorate (Gergen 1999a)

Riessman:

- Story told to highlight identity pertinent to listener and situation, need to focus on how teller performs social identity during their narrative
 - Context (local, cultural, historical)
 - Teller's interpretation of how larger social structures have influenced understanding of social positioning
 - Attention to how narrative is told (Riessmann 2001)

Linde:

- When did professional story begin?
- Labov's analysis:
 - Abstract... ..summarises the narrative
...evaluation of narrative to come
...offers how reader needs to interpret it
and respond to it
 - Orientation clauses...Maybe at the beginning or interspersed, establish:
 - ...characters
 - ...time
 - ...place
 - ...circumstances of the narrative
 - Narrative clauses...form skeleton of narrative. Simple past tenses clauses, order established by order of events
 - Coda...usually after last narrative clause given. Maybe spoken or implied
 - Evaluative sections...extremely important socially!

- ...means the narrator conveys the point of the story
- ...conveys how the listener is to understand the meaning of the narrative sequence of events
- ...establishes what kind of response the narrator wants
- Coherence principles (important parts of the process of constructing the life story): (1) Causality and (2) Coherence
- Causality...
 - ...character as adequate
 - ...richness of account
 - ...inadequate causality can be as a result of an accident or are discontinuous (take up strategies to explain it: apparent break, temporary discontinuity, discontinuity as sequence, self distancing, discontinuity as meta-continuity, without account)
- Coherence systems (belief system or cultural)...provides people with the vocabulary for creating a self eg Psychological theories, archetypes, common sense
- Common sense defined as '... an issue of morality as an issue of universal factuality.' (Linde 1993:195)

Feminism:

- Women have more endpoints in narrative and extra information (Gergen)
- Women highlight grass roots caring role – preference for bonding, caring, nurturing and forming interpersonal communities (Gilligan 1982)
- Men highlight policy role – preference for autonomy, generality, impartiality and abstract (Gilligan 1982)
- Assess predilections for knowledge

Critical Theory:

- Awareness of power structure within the narrative re my position in relation to their's (based on: (Fook 2002))
 - Effect of power relations in student's meaning making process
 - Use of value or ideological basis in meaning making
 - Use of language
 - Social positioning involves provision of views accepted by the dominant community
 - Narrative favours alternate meaning making processes

Reflexivity:

- Based on (Taylor and White 2000) and (Fook 2002)
- Influence of my story on the process of interpretation and data collection
- Influence of my meaning making process on interpretation eg participant's response to my analysis
- How will the data affect the reader
- Influence of:
 - The School's style of teaching
 - Type of course
 - Professional discourse

- What year the participant is in
- Geographical region
- Age
- Sex

White's (1988) adaptation of Bruner (in(Sax 2003):

- landscape of action questions encourage people to situate influential events within the
 - past,
 - present and
 - future.
- Landscape of consciousness questions inquire into the meaning of developments that occur in actions' which can include
 - perceptions,
 - thoughts,
 - beliefs,
 - speculations,
 - realisations, and
 - conclusions

Appendix D – Example of table used to analyse social positioning

Social positioning			
Story type (for example dominant cultural one)	Position of narrator to audience (and vice versa)	How positions characters in relation to one another and to themselves	How positions themselves to make identity claims
<p>➤ <u>Professional Inside</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intuitive - Need for education - Interested in life long learning - Sees marginalised - Demonstrated skills of advocacy - Able to work outside peer pressure - Drawn to helping the down trodden - Need to have facts to back up decisions, not just emotion - Is able to look at self - Doesn't like stereotypes - Likes to be with people, but not belong - Attracted to social justice - Want to be able to describe 	<p><u>Me</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - * Unsure of self... - * Constantly checking the process - * Defers to my expertise - * Surprised to discover I am not the expert - * 'Offers' for me to take it up again - * Finishes on more equal power balance - - Other students - * Appearance of being on the outside of the group is own choice not as a result of not being accepted by them - * Knows this sets her apart and open to be 	<p><u>Institutions and elderly clients</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Clients need someone to advocate on their behalf * Elderly are supportive and proud of their children (mellowed with age) <p><u>Schools, staff and volunteers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Supportive management can offer opportunities for those who volunteer... don't just need financial rewards * Staff development courses can be of benefit and character building <p><u>Centrelink and public</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Has bad reputation with 	<p>Always drawn to the down trodden and fighting to help them overcome it</p> <p>Family script can be overcome</p> <p>Own script of low intelligence and low self esteem came from interactions with sister</p> <p>Being an outsider is her own choice... likes to mingle with people but not belong</p> <p>Exposure and success in educational courses has been beneficial and character building</p> <p>Had to find a new job, but wants to be</p>

<p>situations from a professional standpoint not just use lay terms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Willing to take a risk to overcome change - Has experienced oppression - Willing to move beyond own personal myths - Use of a mentor is useful - Is a strong woman <p>Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decision to do social work not a passion - Clients are helpless <p>➤ <u>Feminine</u></p> <p>Inside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wanted to be a wife and mother - Didn't work when had children - Did volunteer work - Don't see herself as intelligent - Values support of other women - Intuitive - Doing a 	<p>being joined by the 'outsiders', but is happy to support them if doesn't really jeopardise her standing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - - Authority figures - * Don't bother them unless you know what you want - * Are busy people - * Are usually supportive - 	<p>people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Can be helpful and refer you to appropriate resources * Is worth checking out the advice to match what the client wants eg recommendation to do TAFE course 	<p>recognised as someone</p> <p>Likes being valued</p> <p>Sticking to different values to those of her family has paid off ... no longer needs to please sister, mother now accepts her as she is, been accepted into uni</p> <p>School experience facilitated her belief in herself</p> <p>Able to form own conclusions</p> <p>Intelligence is important</p> <p>Still coming to terms with recognition of own intelligence and academic capacity</p> <p>Experience is important as a source of knowledge</p> <p>Women are able to support themselves financially</p>
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<p>'women's' job</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive - Willing to talk about emotional issues and express them <p>Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to support self financially - Taken on feminist ideas - Happy to go to uni - Is a strong woman <p>➤ <u>Town/cultural</u></p> <p>Inside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patriarchal - Likes being part of the community <p>Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Going to university - Likes diversity <p>➤ <u>Family</u></p> <p>Inside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Followed in family tradition re work and looking after family - Involved in family <p>Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divorced - Need for education - Interested in life long 			
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<p>learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sees marginalised - Brings strays home - Willing to go to uni - Has different values <p>➤ <u>Education</u></p> <p>Inside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See lecturers as expert - Wanting to learn and be self directed - Need to be intelligent to attend - Willing to fulfil administrative requirements - Believes it is beneficial and character forming <p>Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values her own experience - Hasn't a family history of attending uni <p>➤ <u>Aged care sector</u></p> <p>Inside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - *Supportive of aged care system - *Recognises it - is a larger system than the nursing home itself 			
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<p>Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- -Not prepared- to accept abuses- Sees the role of a social worker- Will go outside work/ peer pressure to assure social justice			
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