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**The declared political identity of social workers in  
a neoliberal era**

**Hefin Gwilym**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of DSW**

**March 2016**

**Keele University**

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## SUBMISSION OF THESIS FOR A RESEARCH DEGREE

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the impact of neoliberalism on the political identity of social workers. It discusses social work as an inherently political activity that has been under attack since the advent and domination of neoliberalism since the early 1980s. It explores social work's roots in social reform and social justice and how today social work has become a depoliticised and technocratic activity. The thesis explores these phenomena through an empirical study of fourteen social workers who have a declared and enacted political identity, such as parliamentarians. It takes a biographical inquiry approach to examining their identity from early development of social reformist and social justice perspectives to facing the dilemma of neoliberalism in social work. It also deploys a constructivist grounded theory analytical process to analyse the biographical interviews and construct a substantive theory. What emerges is a study of social workers managing their social work identity in the face of changes within the social work profession and sustaining a stable social reformist political identity throughout their life course to date. It also demonstrates how strongly attached the participants are to their social work identity during their political careers. The thesis has importance for the social work profession not least because this cohort can advocate on behalf of the profession in powerful places.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis examines the formation of the declared and enacted political identity of a group of social workers across their lifetime to date and contextualises their political identity within the events of their own lives and the historical and theoretical developments of the social work profession with a primary focus on the UK. Declared and enacted political identity in this thesis is defined in terms of participants' known political belief system as well as political activism in the form of membership of a political party, trades union activity and involvement in interest groups. Declared entails that participants have made their policies and principles clearly known to the public. They have enacted on their convictions by putting their political beliefs into practice, such as through being involved in campaigns and standing for political office.

It is argued in this thesis that the process of political identity formation is a life-long process encompassing early influences of family and environment and critical events. I was particularly interested at the early stage of this research project to see how the declared political identity of social workers reflected the social reformist values of the social work profession and how their declared political identity related to neoliberalism in social work from the 1980s to the present. Thus of particular interest in this thesis is the development of neoliberal policies in Western countries and the effects these changes have had on social work, such as the introduction of business principles (Lymbery 1998, Garrett 2009, and Carey and Foster 2013). Neoliberalism is defined as a 'thought collective' incorporating welfare retrenchment and a commitment to the supremacy of the market in the social field (Mirowski 2014:43). It is widely regarded as having its source in the 1980s and has remained a dominant political and economic force ever since - successfully traversing changes of government, such as the election of a Labour Government in the UK (1997-2010), and emerging strongly from the financial crisis that started in 2008 (Mirowski 2014).

The participant sample chosen for this study are qualified social workers who are no longer in social work practice but work as either a political representative or activist, such as in one of the UK parliaments and assemblies, as well as local authorities. Although no longer practising as social workers some of the participants are involved in voluntary work and community projects. The sample was chosen because of an initial interest in exploring why social workers were leaving the profession and why in particular social workers with a declared political identity were leaving to pursue their political interests elsewhere. I was interested in this particular sample of social workers since they had spent a significant time working as social workers during the era of neoliberalism and wondered whether the changes that neoliberalism had brought about in social work was related to their decision.

I was also interested in exploring how the participants had managed to maintain and develop their political identity as practitioners in the face of neoliberal changes in social work. I was particularly interested in how they had been influenced by neoliberalism and how they had responded. I was further interested in what was happening to politics in social work and where it was headed in the face of neoliberalism and many practitioners leaving the profession. Many commentators (Rogowski 2010 and Garrette 2013) agree that neoliberalism has had a major effect on social work not only in the introduction of business principles for welfare practice but also in diluting the nature of social work as a form of political practice. An example of social work as a form of political practice is its longstanding mandate of social justice and human rights (Wronka 2008).

The initial interest in why social workers were leaving the profession and in many instances entering into full-time politics led to an initial literature review on political identity. It was soon very obvious that although the concept of political identity had been extensively explored in the literature, the political identity of social workers had been given scant attention and was under theorised. While there is extensive literature on social work and politics both from a historical and theoretical perspective, there is very little on understanding how the declared political identity of social workers was constructed. This was a serious omission since to understand the actions and motivations of social

workers leaving the profession it was necessary to examine the social workers themselves and the context in which they practised. Becoming aware of the omissions in the literature enhanced the desire to address the gaps by looking in depth at the biographies of social workers and their declared political identity grounded in their life story to date and then to examine how their political identity reacted with the changes in social work in neoliberal times from the 1980s onwards.

## **1.2 The place of self in the topic and research project**

With hindsight, I believe that politics has always played an important and formative part in my life. Some of my earliest memories are of political arguments in my paternal grandparents' home, a small farm in north Wales. My father was a printer by trade and a working class Tory who supported the Conservative Party, traditionally the party of privilege (Rose 2001). The 1960s and 1970s in Wales, similar to other places, was a period of political and social radicalism. There were local campaigns about the status of the Welsh language and the effects of Anglicization on predominantly Welsh speaking areas of Wales (Morgan 1982). From the present day vantage point, I can now see that I am a product of these times since the tempestuous political climate of the time affected my family and thus me. My father's politics had awoken an interest in me and the juxtaposition of our political views that would evolve would create a life-long tension between us. Once awoken, my political perspective was left of centre and I became interested in current affairs and open to the influence of significant people in my life, such as my English teacher who had been a lifelong socialist and pacifist. Discontent with the historian's view of determinism and inevitability, I abandoned my earlier plan to study History at university and applied to study Politics instead.

The years studying Politics at Swansea University in the early 1980s deepened my understanding of Politics through the examination of the work of eminent political philosophers, such as Rousseau, who had famously said 'Man was born free and he is everywhere in chains' (Rousseau 1968:49), and Tom Paine who campaigned for human rights a long time before it was fashionable to do so and influenced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (Paine 1999). The thinker who had the profoundest

influence on me at university was Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist. In his famous book 'Mutual Aid', Kropotkin argued from a Darwinian perspective that 'sociability' rather than natural selection was the most important factor in evolution (Kropotkin 2006). To some extent the concept of sociability is reflected in the modern idea of social capital (Putnam 2000).

During the 1980s I became involved in the anti-apartheid movement and organised local pickets of supermarkets that sold South African produce. I also sent letters to a local authority that was investing heavily in South African companies as part of its pension fund; ironically it was the main social work employer in the area. I can see a clear link between the development of an interest in politics during my formative years and the values of social work, in particular the view that social work is a human rights and social justice profession (Wronka 2008). However, my route into social work was not direct and involved a detour into work as a research assistant before starting work as a locum support worker with people with learning disabilities. Even at this time I had no plans to enter social work but the desire to become more involved in helping clients led me to apply for a social work course.

After qualifying I worked as a social worker in mental health for five years before becoming a full time social work academic initially in further education and then in higher education. During these years I experienced at first hand the changes that had occurred in social work following the introduction of neoliberalism in the UK. These included the introduction of business principles into social work, the regulation of social work and the increased bureaucracy in the social work role. These were of particular interest to me since in my own life I had traversed the changes from a Social Democratic and more equal society in the 1960s and 1970s to the election of the neoliberal governments from 1979 onwards. I sensed that social work was less a political activity than it had been in the 1960s and 1970s and although I did not have a full understanding at this stage I was sufficiently aware of a change to feel concerned - after all one of the reasons I had been attracted to social work in the first place was the belief that social work was a natural place for someone as myself with left-wing and social reformist views. I was concerned enough to want to find out more about the effects of neoliberalism on social

workers. I soon realised that many social workers had become disillusioned about the changes in the profession as a result of neoliberalism. In my case I have managed a sense of disillusionment with the direction of social work in recent times by developing new interests which are compatible with my political outlook, particularly international links with Social Democratic countries and colleagues.

My current interest in international social work has led to the development of an MA course at Bangor University in International Social Work. In this role I have developed social work Erasmus links with universities in Europe, such as the Social Democratic countries of Finland and Denmark, reflecting my own political positioning. Visiting Denmark numerous times as a social work lecturer has intensified my interest in their Social Democratic society and during the initial stages of the research I was inspired by these visits to question the neoliberal changes back home and their effects on social work. Another close Erasmus partnership with a university in the city of Nuremberg, Germany, also inspired my interest in the potential of social work as a transformative political activity through an emphasis on human rights. Nowadays, Nuremberg is known as the City of Human Rights, a situation far removed from its infamous past as the spiritual home of Nazism and the setting for their rallies. These lifetime experiences reflect my own political identity development as well as my enduring social work identity as an academic.

### **1.3 Aims and focus of the research**

I have always been interested in this cohort of social workers who have become politicians and wanted to know what had been the influences on their lives and what accounted for them becoming social workers and politicians. I wanted to know if their experiences had been similar to mine and how politics and social work had become an important part of their life as it had become in mine. I wanted to know whether social work had attracted them because of its social reformist tradition and how they reacted to the advent and subsequent dominance of neoliberalism in the profession.

### **1.4 Conceptual framework**



The conceptual framework for this research is informed by a social constructionist perspective which identifies the creation of knowledge as a representation of reality rather than viewing knowledge as a body of truth to be discovered (Berger and Luckmann 1966). In this respect the conceptual framework develops a qualitative approach to knowledge and research which posits that knowledge is co-constructed with participants and is grounded in the lived experiences of participants and may change with new perceptions and understandings. The participants' political identity will have already been formed along the lifespan and declared and enacted in the public realm. The degree to which the participants and interviewer will co-construct knowledge is through a reflection on the participants' political identity formation over time from the vantage point of the present. The social constructionist perspective is closely allied to the symbolic interactionist perspective which also views knowledge as a social construction (Denzin 2001 and Charmaz 2006 and 2014). Within this conceptual framework the methodologies of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry sit comfortably and easily together since both methodologies have close affinities to symbolic interactionism and social constructivism (Roberts 2002 and Charmaz 2006 and 2014). The conceptual framework as described here has been an important influence on the way the research has been conducted, for example informing the sampling process and the conduct of interviews.

### **1.5 Methodology**

During the course of the modular part of the DSW I developed a deep interest in the use of both constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry. I believe that this interest was due to two factors. Firstly, both grounded theory and biographical methods share an affinity with social work practice, such as in the political links between the symbolic interactionists in the Chicago School of Sociology and the founder of the Settlement Movement and the social work profession in the US, Jane Addams. Secondly, grounded theory emerged in the 1960s at a time when biographical inquiry was revitalised in the democratic turn in methodology, particularly pertaining to qualitative methodology. The 1960s also advanced values that are important to social work, such as social justice and equality.

These radical and innovative perspectives appealed to me and I recognised the synergies between them and identified strongly with them. In the initial stages of planning the empirical research I was very keen to use both methodologies in examining the declared political identity of social workers.

Central to my thinking at this initial stage was the belief that the construction of the declared and enacted political identity of social workers is best understood through a biographical examination of their lived lives since political identity formation is a lifelong process. I reasoned that the nurturing years, the career in social work and subsequent political career might all be a significant part of political identity formation, adding in various degrees to their political perspective and commitments. I conjectured that a life course perspective rooted in personal biography would provide a fuller picture of how participants' political identities might relate to the pre-neoliberal era and the neoliberal era in social work. In other words, which era did they most strongly identify with and why? I also reasoned that a constructivist grounded theory approach would get at the deeper meanings of political identity since it seeks to allow such meanings to emerge from data. This also appealed to me at this early stage since I wanted to listen to the genuine voices of social workers and was at pains to find a methodology that would not impose my interpretations on data. I believe that this is again explained by my identification with the democratic turn in social sciences in the 1960s.

## **1.6 Contribution to knowledge**

Very little has been published about the biographies of social workers and even less about social workers who have a declared and enacted political identity. There is scarcely any other study specifically looking at the way neoliberalism has interacted with the political identity of social workers. Thus this research thesis will add to this field of knowledge which has been characterised by a lack of qualitative research knowledge about social workers' political biographies. It will provide an analysis of the social anatomy of the social workers who declare their political identity. Moreover, it raises interesting questions about the place and role of the social workers who have a political identity within the social work profession today. Allied to this, it contributes to the debate about what the future of

social work should look like post the Munro Report (2011). The Munro Report sought to restore professional autonomy and reduce the effects of bureaucracy in social work. The thesis considers whether social workers who have a declared political identity have maintained a strong social work identity throughout their political careers or not, and whether they can be of greater use to the social work profession as allies in powerful places. Thus the research is of interest to, and contributes new knowledge to the fields of social work political biography, social work politics and policy, and professional identities.

### **1.7 Ethical concerns**

While this research presented no apparent danger of physical harm to participants, the area of life story telling can potentially raise sensitive areas from the past which might be very private and closely guarded. This was kept in mind at all stages in the study including during the biographical interviews and in the use of quotations in the findings chapters. Ethical approval was sought and received from the Keele University Ethical Review Panel in March 2013 (Appendix One).

### **1.8 Structure of the thesis**

This introductory chapter gives a general overview of the thesis and explains my initial interest in the declared and enacted political identity of social workers in a neoliberal era. It shows how my initial interest is closely linked to my own life experiences and career as a social worker and social work academic.

Chapter two explores the political roots of social work in social reform and the effects of neoliberalism on the profession from predominantly an UK perspective but with a limited focus on other European countries, the US, and other countries. It argues that social work has historically been an inherently political activity with an emphasis on social reform and transformation. But with the advent of neoliberalism and business principles in welfare practice the political nature of social work has been undermined. Exploring the political roots and the effects of neoliberalism on social work is a

prerequisite to understanding the people who occupied that landscape, namely the participants in this research project. It helps to explain why they would have been attracted into social work as a social reformist profession in the first place and the frustrations that emerged with the dominant influence of neoliberal policies in welfare and social work.

Chapter three reviews the literature on the concept of political identity and political identity in the social work profession. It argues that understanding the nature of political identity will assist in understanding the declared political identity formation of the participants and how their identity has responded to the significant challenges posed by the neoliberal changes in social work. The chapter discusses some of the main characteristics of political identity, such as stable and evolving political identities. The objective of the chapter is to understand the nature of political identity and how it is formed.

Chapter four on methodology and methods is in two parts. Part One explains the methodology used in this research and Part Two discusses the methods deployed. The chapter justifies the use of a constructivist grounded theory and a biographical inquiry in examining the declared political identity of the participants (Roberts 2002 and Charmaz 2006 and 2014). Biographical inquiry is used because it captures the life-long nature of declared political identity formation. It would identify any changes in participant's political identity as a result of external changes, such as the impact of neoliberal policies on social work. Constructivist grounded theory provides a systematic approach particularly in the analysis of biographical interviews. It has its roots in the democratic turn in social sciences in the 1960s and has a longstanding relationship with social work and social care research. Its emphasis on allowing theory to emerge from data is particularly suited to biographical research and research on identity since the concepts of biography and identity are grounded in and emerge from life experiences. This is a particularly pertinent contrast to neoliberalism in social work which has to a large extent become a hegemonic imposition on social workers.

Chapter five is the first of the findings chapters and focuses on the construction of participants' political identity during the nurturing and early years. It illustrates the main themes of political identity construction that emerged for this life stage from the biographical interviews.

Chapter six is the second findings chapter and it focuses on the process of political identity construction during participants' social work careers. It explores the themes that emerged from the biographical interviews particularly participants' passion for social work and later a growing sense of disillusionment.

Chapter seven is the third findings chapter and it focuses on participants' political careers. It explores the themes that emerged from the biographical interviews, such as their continued strong identity with social work and their interest in campaigning on social work and social work related issues.

Chapter eight focuses on discussing the findings in the previous three chapters. It explains how the research questions have been answered by showing that the declared political identity formation for the participants is a life-long process and how the neoliberal landscape of social work has had a bearing on their social work and political trajectory. It is argued in this chapter that both social work and political identity have coexisted right up to the present for the participants with their social work identity being their strongest or master identity. It is further argued that the participants are an important and under used resource for the social work profession with their access to and influence in high places, not least in resisting any further advances of neoliberalism in social work. The chapter explains that the end result of the research project has been the construction of the new substantive constructivist grounded theory of the social worker politician. This theory has emerged from data as a result of empirical research and is an original contribution to the literature on social work and political social work.

Finally, chapter nine summarises the main areas of the research and offers conclusions as well as recognising limitations and areas for future research.

## **Chapter Two: Social Work's Political Roots and the Neoliberal Ascendancy**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The central purpose of this chapter is to account for the political roots of social work in social reform and to delineate the emergence of neoliberalism in social work which it is argued has been a vehicle to depoliticise social work by making it a neutral and technocratic activity (Carey 2007 and Harlow et al 2013). Furthermore, it is argued that social work has attracted people into the profession because of its human rights and social justice perspectives (LeCroy 2002, Cree 2003 and Humphrey 2011). Since the emergence of neoliberalism in social work a dilemma was created for practitioners as they began to see social work moving away from its social justice perspective which challenged their own position within the profession. It is argued that to understand why this dilemma was created it is necessary to examine the historical development of the social work profession which encompasses social work as both an inherently political activity and as a depoliticised profession. The dilemma of social work as a political activity being under attack by depoliticising forces is experienced by practitioners as a question of whether they should stay within and maybe fight within the profession or leave the profession altogether.

The first section will establish the inherently political nature of social work. The second section will seek to draw out from history some clear examples of the centrality of politics within social work in years gone by which has inspired generations of radical and politically minded practitioners to enter the profession. The following section will argue that neoliberalism has achieved a hegemonic position in social work and in the welfare state more generally. The chapter will conclude with a section on examples drawn from far and wide within the field of social work practice to exemplify some modern day illustrations of social work practice engaging with politics and thus illustrate how practitioners are dealing with the dilemma that they are facing regarding the political nature of social work in a neoliberal age. Overall, the chapter seeks to establish and explain what is meant by the often recurring phrase in social work literature that social work is ‘...inevitably political...’(Chu et al 2009:292);

fundamentally concerned with the principles of human rights and social justice; and that the inherent political nature of social work has been under attack in recent times with serious implications for social workers who have to grapple with the changes as well as their sense of despair and disillusionment.

## **2.2. The political nature of social work**

Social work has been defined as a 'practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people' (IFSW 2014). Central to the nature of social work over many years has been its political mandate of achieving social justice and a fairer society; indeed, social work is so closely aligned to political agendas and action that it has been described as 'a totally political activity' (Lees 1972:96). Sunker (2005:1) makes a similar point in regarding politics as 'inherent of social work' and thus something that cannot be detached from the social work profession. Chu et al (2009:293) agree that social work is an 'unambiguously political practice' and further, for social workers, not only is the personal political, but also the 'professional is political'. What they mean by this is that social work as a profession has a political purpose in creating a more equal society and a society where people are protected from the harshness of unrestrained economic forces. Butler and Drakeford (2001) argue this point by emphasising social work's role to challenge the status quo and the forces that maintain the power and privileged positions of those who have power and means. They view the social work profession as an 'essentially equality-driven enterprise' and as an heir to a 'radical, emancipator and transformative ideal...' and as such is an activity that is 'antagonistic to the status quo' (Butler and Drakeford 2001:16). Furthermore, Daniel and Wheeler (1989:18) believe that social workers' unique position of knowing at first hand their clients' experiences obliges them to make 'meaningful contact with the political process'. In this regard social workers are at the cutting edge and on the front line of social justice issues and are ideally positioned to witness the consequences of injustice and disadvantage. Thus social work as an inherently political instrument has the potential to transform society.

Responding to social injustice is, according to Powell (2001:2) a 'political task of social work' and is a form of a 'politics of conscience' with the moral imperative of concern for the poor and oppressed. The political context of the poor and oppressed creates the environment where social workers are 'political actors', particularly social workers who directly engage in seeking to redress social injustice and influence public policy (Marston and Macdonald 2012:2) - a view shared by Jordan (2012:630) who agrees that social work has always been 'strongly influenced' by political ideology and its practice shaped by public policy. The concern that social work has with economic and social change and the effects these changes have on the poorer members of society commits the social work profession to being 'intrinsically' concerned with social and economic change and thus 'inherently a political activity' (Gregory and Holloway 2005:44). Despite the definition of social work as an inherently political enterprise, in recent years there has been a focus on the depoliticization and de-skilling of social work, leading some critics to notice a process of 'proletarianization' of social workers and the creation of a 'neutral technicism' within the profession (Carey 2007:110 and Harlow et al 2013:538).

### **2.3 From a 'Golden Age' to neoliberalism?**

This section will delineate the historical development of social work from its earliest days to the present by highlighting the early roots of social work in political activism and social reform. It is argued that this is important for an understanding of why social workers have been attracted into the profession and why they have viewed it as a profession that sees transforming society as a central goal. Even in recent times the view of the social work profession as a political activity has attracted aspiring social workers despite all the changes that have militated against it since the 1980s with the introduction of neoliberalism into social work (LeCroy 2002, Cree 2003, Furness 2007, Stevens et al 2010 and Humphrey 2011). According to Stevens et al (2010) the desire to tackle injustice and inequalities in society was mentioned by as many as 70% of students in their research as a motivation for choosing social work as a career. However, despite students' intentions in entering the social work profession, it is argued in this thesis that the forces of neoliberalism that have achieved ascendancy



and a hegemonic position in social work, supported by all governments since the 1980s, continue to dominate today with important implications for the social work profession, such as the morale of social workers themselves (Carey 2014).

The early roots of modern social work in Nineteenth Century social reform had an unmistakable political context. In Britain the Charity Organisation Society was managed by middle class women, such as Octavia Hill who became social activists on behalf of the oppressed and supported reforms to alleviate the distress of the dispossessed. In the Victorian era women had virtually no social and property rights, were widely regarded as insignificant in their own right and viewed as an extension of their husbands who were regarded as the sole provider for the family. Women were able to advance their rights in this intolerable situation by engaging in charity work outside the home, which was deemed an acceptable role for women to play in a highly patriarchal society. This shift in focus to outside the home and household management tasks was in itself a political move by Nineteenth Century women who wanted to make positive use of their intelligence and skills. Even though the women who participated in charity work and founded the Charity Organisation Society were invariably conservative in political outlook, the involvement of women in such activity as friendly visiting was a gradual but discernible step along the long and difficult road of female emancipation. It was also the root of what later became known as social work casework since the friendly visitors kept notes for the very first time about the families they visited. The Charity Organisation Society sought social reform rather than significant social change let alone social revolution (Hearn 1982). Nonetheless, it was important to social work not just as a root but as an example of political activism.

A more radical political initiative and another significant root of the social work profession was the Settlement Movement in both Britain and the United States. The Settlement Movement was politically radical since it had an understanding of the social and structural causes of poverty and distress and sought to address them through working in and with communities to address individual, family and social problems (Hugman 2009). The development of the Settlement Movement represented a

significant change in responding to massive socio-economic upheavals of the Nineteenth Century. This was the era of industrialisation, urbanisation and the division of labour and capital. It was in many ways the birth of modern society and modern politics with the growth of the modern central state (Greenleaf 1983). The Charity Organisation Society viewed social problems as broadly the responsibility of the individual, and the Settlement Movement viewed them as socially determined (Hugman 2009).

The next great landmark in the development of social work was the establishment of the Welfare State. This can rightly be viewed as the era of 'institutionalised social work' (Statham 1978: ix) and as the era of the 'nationalisation' of social work (Powell 2001:2). Moreover, one of the most important steps in the development and arguably in the professionalization of social work was the Seebohm Report (1968) and its implementation, particularly the setting up of large social work departments within local authorities. Most social workers in the UK are employed by the state and fulfil roles as set out and regulated by the state (Garrett 2010). The era of nationalised social work represented by a collectivist state approach to the social work profession practised at a local level within local authorities is viewed by many as something of a golden age in social work practice. It is often referred to as the 'high tide of social work' since it came at the 'tail-end' of the 1960s Social Democratic commitment to tackling social problems through expertise located in the state and promoting citizenship through social solidarity (Harris 1999:920). According to Hearn (1982:22) the new social work departments were also 'spawning ground' for radical social work by enabling easier communication between social workers in large departmental offices and the reality of strong trades unions resistant to bureaucratic and managerial restrictions.

So far this discussion has looked at the roots of social work in the era that preceded the full impact of the mixed-economy of welfare and the influence of neoliberalism and its close ally New Managerialism over social work practice (Harlow 2003). Although neoliberalism emerged as a dominant political and economic force in the 1980s, it had its roots in the economic crisis of the 1930s as a means to restore

Capitalism and profits. It's best understood as a 'thought collective' rather than as a single ideology since it has many variants and trajectories, such as Thatcherism and New Labour in the UK and Reaganomics in the USA (Mirowski 2014: 43, Davies 2014 and Springer 2014). Commentators (Steger and Roy 2010) view neoliberalism as intertwining manifestations of ideology, mode of governance and policy packages. Examples of ideology include a commitment to the supremacy of the market in all areas including welfare; examples of governance include a strong state to implement neoliberal policies including new managerialist practices such as auditing; and examples of neoliberal policy include welfare retrenchment, for example through the reduction of social services and the replacement of welfare programmes by welfare to work. These policies are implemented by a system of private sector management practices with a focus on rationing and risk assessment in children and families' social work services (Rogowski 2010). Neoliberals share a distrust of the welfare state since in their view it threatens their cherished goal of freedom as argued by one of their greatest proponents, Friedrich von Hayek in his book 'The Road to Serfdom' (1944). Paradoxically, they believe in a strong state to promote economic freedoms and markets and to eliminate or reduce countervailing forces, such as trades unions (Dean 2014). They believe in competition and the supremacy of the market place as the best guarantors of freedom and efficient services, including public services. The neoliberal influence has been global, albeit unevenly across different locales with different effects, for example in Germany the process is similar to the UK except that it started somewhat later on in 1990 as a response to the economic upheaval presented by reunification. Nonetheless the process of extending the market into social work has proceeded in Germany along similar lines to the UK (Kramer 1998 and Erath et al 2000). Furthermore, it is widely believed that neoliberalism has emerged unscathed from the financial crisis that began in 2007 thus indicating that its global influence on social work and welfare more generally is set to continue (Mirowski 2014 and Davies 2014).

According to many commentators (Lymbery 1998, Carey 2008 and Rogowski 2010) the critical step in the emergence of neoliberalism in social work in the UK occurred in the 1980s with the mixed economy of welfare which heralded the advent of privatisation, reduced public expenditure on welfare,

reassertion of the responsibility of the individual and the family, increasing the role of volunteers, management consultants, competitive tendering, and auditing. Two important landmarks in the development of a market led welfare service were the Financial Management Initiative of 1982 (HMSO 1982), where caring was no longer seen as a 'labour of love' but rather as a 'commodity' (Dominelli and Hoogvelt 1996:50); and compulsory competitive tendering and the Next Steps Initiative in 1988 (HMSO 1988b), which promoted contract governance and made possible the purchaser-provider split in social care. The drive to reconfigure social work was further significantly advanced with the Griffiths Report (HMSO 1988a), which advocated business methods for social work to increase the productivity of the profession. The Griffiths Report was realised with a push towards community care and the privatisation of some parts of social provision, made possible by the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 (Lymbery 1998). Reflecting on these changes at the end of the 1980s, and in particular the introduction of competitive tendering, Daniel and Wheeler (1989) comment that such developments were introduced and pushed through by politicians in the face of strong professional opposition and scepticism.

## **2.4 The critique of neoliberalism in social work**

It may be argued that the neoliberal changes in social work form part of a wider attack on the working class and their institutions since the 1980s (Jones 2012 and Mirowski 2014). The significance of the period since the 1980s is recognised as a catalyst for the deprofessionalization and the depoliticisation of the social work profession (Butler and Pugh 2004 and Harlow et al 2013). According to McDonald (2006), this process mirrored wider depoliticisation in society as the welfare state gave way to the workfare state and government gave way to the concept of governance. Of particular importance in the advance of neoliberalism in social work was the introduction of Care Management from the 1990s onwards. This was a radical development that led to sweeping changes in the practice of social work with an intensification of bureaucracy, rationing, managerialism and the 'deskilling' of social workers (Carey 2007:99). These processes have continued and accelerated in recent years, including during the

periods of both Labour and Conservative/Liberal Democrat administrations. According to Chu et al (2009:288) the combined effects of these changes has resulted in the 'repression' of social work's 'critical and political nature', and the 'withering away' of its 'political bases'. It is argued the current social work approaches lack the authenticity of true social work practice and risk 'trivializing, or even ignoring, the moral and political nature of practice' (Chu et al 2009:295). This perspective on the neoliberal changes in social work is shared by other social work academics. Butler and Drakeford (2001:7) believe that social work has 'lost its way' by unwittingly but not unwillingly partnering with 'political and ideological processes that have robbed social work of its essential radicalism and transformatory potential'. They believe social work has been too compliant to government agendas and has not developed a strong enough identity. Even under the New Labour Governments, 1997-2010, there was a significant shift towards social authoritarianism and moral and political conservatism, such as in the areas of crime and disorder and mental health policy (Butler and Drakeford 2001). The New Labour Governments continued the commitment to marketization and managerialism with no enthusiasm for rolling back some of the neoliberal reforms of the Conservative Governments, 1979-97, such as trades union reforms and the use of the private and voluntary sector in the provision of public services (Harlow et al 2013). Furthermore, according to Jordan (2012) initiatives from the Coalition Government, 2010-2015, continued the process of shifting responsibility away from the state to the voluntary sector and in so doing disguise cuts to social services. In this respect, the neoliberal project did not end with the financial crash of 2007 but has in fact been 'emboldened' by it (Garrett 2013: 53 and Mirowski 2014).

The wider causes of neoliberal changes in social work are closely allied to political ideology and in particular to the crisis in Social Democracy in the 1970s, and the advent of neoliberal economics as a means of addressing problems within the economy, as well as addressing social problems (Giddens 1998). These developments had a profound effect on social work and led some commentators to regard the influence of neoliberalism as an example of 'hegemony' at work in the social work profession (Carey and Foster 2013:249). The effect of these developments is to view social work as a

business whereby the principles of the private sector have colonized the public sector (Harris 2003), and the processes of marketization and managerialization are promoted as routes towards freedom, choice and empowerment (Harris 1999).

The neoliberal efficiency measures in social work are supported and driven by managers who have significant influence and control over the way professional workers organise and deliver their services (Rogowski 2010). The introduction of new managerial techniques was aided by the perception that social work in the 1970s was poorly organised and that social workers had too wide a discretion and professional autonomy. One of the most dramatic effects of the business culture within social work has been increased flexibility, in particular the emergence of private social work agencies and the large number of agency workers practising within statutory social work departments (Carey 2011). For example, Carey (2007) refers to 2% of all social workers within social services departments in England and Wales in 2003 being agency staff generating large profits for the private agencies. One effect of these changes has been the reskilling of social workers in areas where they might not have initially desired to gain skills, such as in business skills and in the areas of contracting, costing and information technology. Moreover, Carey (2007:104) points out how many social workers viewed 'upskilling' in some areas, such as the use of information technology, as leading to deskilling in the long term, since the new skills involved engaging with mundane tasks. In this respect social workers felt that they were not engaged in 'real' social work and were experiencing overwork, stress, and a sense of detachment where the emphasis was on procedure and less time with clients and carers. Furthermore, Carey (2007) argues the emphasis on crisis work and intense paperwork tasks brought about by managerialism left many social workers feeling disillusioned and perplexed within social services departments that they viewed as under-resourced and with rigid eligibility criteria for services that were often not made available. According to Aronson and Smith (2011:434) the effect of new 'managerialist ideology' in the public sector has been to require workers to conform to 'increasingly narrow conceptualisations of service and of self'. Moreover, Garrett (2009) argues that children services have been modernised in the neoliberal mould with emphasis on targets and quantifiable data. He believes that high profile

cases where vulnerable children were failed by the system illustrate the effects of neoliberalism in social work, such as the Baby P case where social workers were spending more time working on their computers and not enough time doing direct work with families. At the time of writing the case of Rochdale children services is in the news and no doubt in due course it will emerge that the working practices in the authority was a factor in the failures that have emerged.

According to many commentators (Garrett 2009 and Rogowski 2010) social work in the modern era has become alienated from its traditional practises and ideals and has been required to reorient itself from its roots in social justice towards a technocratic practice which is controlled by managers and external regulators. Social justice as a means of achieving a fairer society with greater equality in outcomes, and encouraging the participation of all in society, including the most disadvantaged, has been 'pushed into the background' (O'Brien 2011:176) by a narrow definition of professionalism and by the impact of new managerialism. This has meant that the wider social, economic, cultural and ideological domains have been either 'ignored' or given just 'scant and passing consideration' (Tsui and Cheung 2004 and O'Brien 2011:176). Thus the link between social work and social justice is now 'tenuous' and 'under considerable strain' (O'Brien 2011:176). This is despite national and international social work codes of ethics, such as that of the International Federation of Social Work, making clear reference to social workers' responsibility towards social justice (IFSW 2009 and 2014).

It is sometimes argued by commentators such as Dominelli and Hoogvelt (1996) that these developments have been aided by the process of globalization, by which is meant the international liberalisation of markets and the inevitable effect this has on welfare states. In this sense it has been argued that welfare states are converging as a result of globalisation (Achterberg and Yerkes 2009). The consequence of increased marketization and privatisation in social work provision has been the loss of a public service ethic, a reduction in the power and influence of professionals with regard to welfare policy and provision, the deprofessionalization of professional skills and the bureaucratization of service user involvement as social work has been increasingly integrated into the market economy

(Harlow et al 2013). With a new emphasis on competences and less on professional autonomy, complex tasks have been broken down into manageable components which can be done by workers holding lower level qualifications and are thus cheaper to hire. The new emphasis on auditing and evidence-based practice has helped to create an environment where politics is taken out of policy and a neutral technicism is elevated (Harlow et al 2013). Moreover, certain forms of service outcome-based audits, rather than client outcome-based audits, have been inimical to social work and have restricted professional discretion (Munro 2004). The neutralisation of the idea of social workers as 'political actors' in areas where social work has been traditionally concerned with social justice and influencing public policy, has resulted in social workers becoming demoralised (Marston and McDonald 2012). The idea of political action has been replaced by micro practice, hyper-professionalism and anti-intellectualism manifested by practitioners functioning as administrators rather than as advocates and public intellectuals (Karger and Hernandez 2004). A consequence of these changes during the modern era of social work has been a high turn-over of social work staff as social workers seek employment elsewhere as freelance consultants, as qualified staff within the independent sector or in completely new fields (Dominelli and Hoogvelt 1996 and Harlow 2004).

## **2.5 Social work's response to the neoliberal dilemma**

The advance of neoliberalism has had a considerable impact on the social work profession and on social workers themselves. It raises the question as to how should social work as a profession with its traditional social reformist mandate respond to the dilemma posed by neoliberalism. The starting point is the recognition that these changes may not necessarily be irreversible, at least to some degree. Responding might be easier if perceived hegemonic truths can be made to appear neither inevitable nor natural and other alternatives are possible (Marston and McDonald 2012). Harlow et al (2013) detect that the current time may be a turning point for neoliberalism and for managerialism in social work, especially since management is essentially a human process and not even the outcomes of neoliberalism can be fully predicted. Any change of direction in the current time may represent both



an ideological turn in the organisation of social work, partly as a result of resistance by social workers over the years, as well as an accommodation of at least some of the developments that have occurred since the late 1980s (Harlow et al 2013). For example, the protected status of the 'social work' title and the degree level qualification for social work entry may be viewed as positive developments. There is evidence of change within social work with the establishment of the Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task Force 2009) and the publication of the Munro Report (2011) which sought to restore professional autonomy and reduce bureaucratic mechanisms of accounting. The Munro Report in particular challenges the managerial developments that have eroded areas of professionalism within social work. However, it seems that the recommendations in the Munro Report are not being fully implemented and that demands of paperwork might be getting even worse (Cooper 2013). Even the concept of the 'Big Society' is to some degree a reaction to the culture of regulation and the technocratic milieu that accelerated under New Labour. On one level it seeks to redress the balance by restoring to professionals the ability to exercise judgement and recognises the interdependence of society, unlike the old Conservative Party doctrine of individualism. However, the 'Big Society' has been heavily critiqued not least because of its lack of organisational support and lack of adequate resources. It may also disguise real cuts to social services budgets and the increased transfer of responsibilities to the voluntary sector (Jordan 2012).

Another important point is that the processes of neoliberalism and new managerialism may not have rooted themselves in social work to the degree that some commentators have argued. According to research amongst social workers carried out by O'Brien (2011:177 and 185) the 'reports of the death of social justice in social work are premature'. His findings reveal that social justice is 'alive and well' in the work of practitioners he interviewed, although within a more restricted definition rather than in a broader social justice focus with an agenda for wider social change. In practice this means advocating on behalf of individual clients and promoting their rights on a micro level and sometimes within teams and social services departments to achieve socially just outcomes. In this regard, social justice within social work practice takes a 'individualized' and 'personalized' form since the aim is restricted to

achieving social justice for particular individuals and families. Only some of the social workers interviewed by O'Brien (2011) were engaged on the mezzo level of influencing and challenging their organisation's policies, such as perceived unjust criteria and service decisions. An even smaller group had taken action on the macro level for example by writing to government ministers and lobbying governments about the level of social security benefits. However, this doesn't address the fact that this form of macro level engagement remains firmly within the sphere of the private citizen since social workers are only listened to in the same way as any other citizen regardless of their claim to special expertise and knowledge (Hugman 2009). One of the reasons why social work has not developed a stronger voice on the macro level is that the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has not operated as a mass-membership movement effectively campaigning on wider societal issues, thus influencing the destiny of the profession (Marston and McDonald 2012). Such a mass-membership movement could utilize the knowledge from social workers engaged in social justice battles at a micro level into a campaign for social and economic change at the macro level. The realisation that today social justice exists within social work practice only in a narrow sense may be surprising considering the development of the anti-oppressive movement in social work in the 1980s and 90s in response to what were perceived as social ills and inequalities. However, the anti-oppressive movement in social work may not have been as radical as first thought. According to Mclaughlin (2005:284) the development of anti-oppressive practice was a response to the political defeat of Social Democracy and a means of minimising rather than changing the power differences in society. The achievements of the anti-oppressive movement have now been institutionalised and the state has been able to reposition itself by accommodating much of the anti-oppressive rhetoric, especially in the policing of the use of oppressive language. In order to achieve social justice social work needs to be more than a profession that raises awareness about discriminatory language since this seems to be detached from clients' daily priorities and the need for material measures to tackle inequality (Mclaughlin 2005 and 2008).

It appears that addressing the dilemma of neoliberalism in social work will need to enhance the sense of professionalism, particularly the autonomy that social workers need to feel as agents of change. This would involve a higher degree of freedom to analyse clients' problems, deliberate on the best method of working in any particular case and organise their time in such a way as to be able to meet the requirements of effective practice. This might involve a shift in attitude back to seeing social work more as an art than a science with recognition that a mechanistic view of human behaviour is not enough and that understanding peoples' predicament also involves empathy, experience and intuition (Jordan 2012). One hindrance to this might be the fact that autonomous critical reflective practitioners are harder to control than less skilled practitioners (Dominelli and Hoogvelt 1996). Recognising that politics is an intrinsic part of social work, it follows that social work needs to enable practitioners to be heard, particularly since national politics has a direct impact on the profession as a whole (Shamai and Boeham 2001). To this extent, according to Marston and McDonald (2012:2) there may be a need to 're-imagine' the political dimensions of social work practice by revitalising the local dimension as a focus of political activism by thinking critically and acting politically. This could include genuine partnerships with service user movements which are grounded in citizenship rather than consumerism. Furthermore, they (Marston and McDonald 2012:3) criticise 'grand thinking' on social work qualifying programmes that give students a distorted view of the possibilities for successful action on a societal level. They encourage other pathways to emerge for reconceptualising social workers as policy actors based on an understanding of global governance, transnational actors, covert resistance within social work practice, engagement in social research and crucially, small-scale activities.

Another dimension for future political engagement is for social workers to become more engaged in action research, comparative policy research and community development approaches which challenge taken for granted policy assumptions. For example, social work has a role in social advocacy to uphold humanistic values and to act as social critic to protect marginal groups (Chu et al 2009).

According to Jones and Truell (2012) social work should make a stronger contribution to policy development and setting a world social agenda, especially by engaging with global and regional political institutions. Ferguson et al (2002) and Ferguson (2008) believe that social work needs to return to its modern day radical roots in social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, for example by working with anti-globalisation and anti-Capitalist organisations. The anti-Capitalist view is shared by Gray and Webb (2013:6) who argue for a new social work left combining social movements and critical social work practice that is 'antagonistic' towards neoliberalism and 'parliamentary capitalism'. Ayers and Saad-Filho (2015) take the anti-Capitalism argument further by positing that neoliberalism has a restricted view of democracy which promotes the interests of capital. They believe that the expansion of democracy through a radical process of democratization in the economic and social fields, as well as the traditional political sphere, is the best vehicle for ending neoliberalism.

## **2.6 Examples of contemporary international social work political engagement**

Although it is generally assumed that social workers should be neutral towards the political opinions of clients and avoid sharing their own political opinions with them, there are some international contexts in which the political decisions and policies of a country are the source of clients' problems. For example, Shamai and Boehm (2001) writing about the Israeli context describe how a couple received support because of relationship difficulties. At the start of one session the social worker happened to ask the couple about their reaction to the latest terrorist attack that had occurred on that particular day. It was at this stage that one of the partners revealed that he feared continuing to live in the Samaria area because of security fears since the government had sanctioned the building of new settlements in the area despite Palestinian opposition. However, it transpired that the other partner was very keen to continue living in the area. In this instance the root cause of the couple's stress was linked with a particular government policy and action within the wider political context of Israel. Moreover, Grodofsky and Yudelevich (2012), describe their work as social work academic and community worker in inter-communal organising, to bring both Israelis and Palestinians together to

form a peace vigil against an Israeli military incursion into Gaza and the firing of rockets into Israeli towns and villages. In situations of political conflict, it may be essential for social workers to intervene to help communities to rethink about the relationships with the 'other' and their own political identities (Grodofsky and Yudelevich 2012:1071). In these situations, the desirability and feasibility of separating the professional, the personal and the political in the lives of social workers is questioned (Ramon et al 2006). In Nazi Germany, for example, most German social workers followed the official line rather than their professional values, with the result that many clients lost their lives.

In some conflict situations there might be very real tensions between social work colleagues, such as when Israeli Arab social workers felt rejected by their Jewish colleagues after a terrorist attack. In these situations, it might be necessary to work with the political issues to enhance relationships between colleagues and contribute to conflict resolution in conflict zones (Ramon et al 2006). The social work skills of advocacy, mediating and negotiating can be particularly usefully deployed in situations of conflict, such as in the Palestinian context (Gordon 2009). However, it should not be assumed that all social workers adopt a political role in the Israeli/Palestinian scenario. Indeed, many are reluctant to become involved in issues that are seen as political (Duffy 2012).

Most of the world's poorest people live on the African continent and the majority of social work clients in Africa are affected by structural problems such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, civil wars, ill-health and homelessness. Mmatli (2008) argues that the necessary social work response in Africa must include political activism as a strategy. Since the root causes of many of the problems are structural and political, the solution also needs to be political so 'African social workers need to become overtly active in the political processes and debates in their respective countries' (Mmatli 2008:297). However, even Mmatli recognises that this might be hard to achieve in African countries where civil rights are restricted, such as in Zimbabwe. Likewise, it would be difficult to realize political activism in other countries where professional freedoms are restricted and where social workers are expected to follow the government or party line, such as is the case in China (Leung et al 2012 and Xu

2012). The exception to this is Hong Kong where social workers have been elected as politicians to the urban and regional councils to effect social change (Chiu and Wong 1998).

Other important dimensions of social work practice within a political context are the areas of language and culturally sensitive social work practice and practising social work as a feminist practitioner. According to Harrison (2009:1083) an 'apolitical view' of communication is taken within social work and disinterestedness in language politics within the European perspective. The probable exception to this is Wales where Welsh language sensitive practice is seen as essential criteria for social work practice in areas where the majority of the people are Welsh speaking. In some social work settings, the communicative environment has a political dimension since the use of one language, for example English in Australia, is supported as a measure of assimilation; and linguistic diversity may be viewed as a threat to the national identity. In such settings English has a privileged position which reflects a covert language hierarchy within social work. This can be reflected in power relations between social workers and clients where monolingualism is seen as a sign of dominance (Harrison 2009). In this scenario social workers may have a responsibility to engage in language politics and advocate for language and culturally sensitive social work practice, as they have done in Wales (Davies 2011). Feminism is defined as a movement to improve the political, social and economic status of women and came to the fore in what is known as second wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s (Valentich 2011). In recent times there is evidence for believing that managerialism within social work has restricted the ability of social workers to act as feminist social workers (White 2006). To act as feminist social workers there is a need for professional freedom to be proactive towards clients and social policy.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the political roots of social work in social reform and the emergence and subsequent dominance of neoliberalism and new managerialism in the profession. It has argued that social workers have been historically attracted into the profession because of its transformational nature. The purported golden age of social work was supposedly at the end of the 1960s with the

creation of large social services departments at the local level with responsibility for organising and providing services. However, as a result of the changes that have come about since the introduction of neoliberalism into social work since the 1980s social workers have faced a dilemma, have become increasingly disillusioned and many have left the profession for other careers. Moreover, it has delineated the social work profession's responses to this dilemma, including the latest moves to restore an enhanced sense of professional autonomy into the profession. Within this context the chapter has demonstrated the particularly strong relationship social work has with politics, such as its longstanding status of antagonism to the status quo. The chapter concludes with examples of how politics enters the day to day work of social workers on a global level.

Having established that social work has its roots in social reform and has experienced enormous changes since the advent and hegemony of neoliberalism the focus in the next chapter is on the potential impact of these changes on social workers themselves. This will be done by defining the concept of political identity as political allegiance and activism, and then more specifically establishing what is already known about the political identity of social workers. It is argued that an understanding of the concept of political identity formation and maintenance is a necessary step to understand the impact of neoliberalism on social workers who have a declared political identity.

## **Chapter Three: Literature Review - Political Identity and the Political Identity of Social Workers**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this literature review is to explore what is meant by the concept of political identity in this research and to discuss what is already known from previous research about the declared and enacted political identity of social workers, the latter primarily by an examination of social worker biographies. It will critically examine the biographical literature that provides the most comprehensive knowledge to date regarding the declared political identity of social workers. It will also seek to identify the gaps in knowledge that need to be addressed in this thesis and other future research. These gaps include a dearth of biographical research and published articles on the declared political identity of social workers and the effects neoliberalism has had on this particular group.

The previous chapter discussed social work as a political activity since its early roots in social reform and examined how it has come under attack in recent times as a result of the advent and subsequent dominance of neoliberalism. The concept of political identity and how it responds to the neoliberal changes in the social work profession has been a central part of this thesis since the initial stages when I was curious about the developments that I had witnessed in social work as a practitioner, namely the increasing importance of business and managerial imperatives such as competitive tendering and auditing. Furthermore, I was inquisitive about how social workers managed the dilemma of their social reformist and transformative values within the neoliberal landscape in social work. In approaching the literature review I was curious to see what light the current literature on political identity might cast on the process of political identity formation and how it responds to external changes. I wanted to learn about its potential source and progression and to see what might be learnt about the process of political identity formation amongst social workers.



This literature review followed a mixed narrative and systematic approach which allowed a degree of flexibility best suited to an authentic constructivist grounded theorist approach with a strong inductivist component. The review employed a systematic approach in that it identified major publishers of academic journals, such as Oxford, Sage and Cambridge journals and conducted a systematic search using their search engines by entering specific key words. The key words were 'political identity', later refined to 'identity' and 'political'; and 'political identity and social work' and 'political identity in social work'. A similar search was conducted using Google Scholar. The stocks of two university libraries were searched as well as the stocks of leading publishers such as Sage UK. Articles were accessed if any of these key words appeared in the title or within the body of the texts. The articles were then sorted on the basis of most relevance. Most articles were qualitative rather than quantitative in terms of the methods deployed within them. The review was predominantly narrative in nature since this allowed for more freedom in drawing together a range of conceptual and theoretical ideas (Kiteley and Stogdon 2014). Each article was chosen on the basis of what it might reveal about the formation of political identity over the life course, such as early family influences or life experiences.

### **3.2 Defining the concept of political identity**

The focus of this section and the next two sections of the literature review is on what is meant by the concept of political identity in this thesis. It is argued in this section that central to the definition of political identity throughout this thesis is both an ideological commitment and a political activism on the part of actors. These are the twin components of the meaning of political identity in this thesis. This definition takes account of current and historical discourses within the scope of political theory and sociology. The broad range of sources will help to inform the design of this thesis' empirical study by relating the findings of the literature review on the nature and formation of political identity to the formation of the declared political identity of social workers in the current research, particularly in light of social work's social reformist and transformational values and the advent and dominance of neoliberalism in the profession. The next two sections discuss the literature that defines political

identity as both ideological commitment and activism. It will draw firstly on political literature and then sociological literature.

### **3.3 Political literature on defining political identity**

The following discussion is based on a definition of political identity as both ideological commitment and political activism. It draws out a range of varied perspectives on this definition which will be informative in devising the research questions for the empirical study with social workers who have a declared political identity. In his classic but rather opaque book on political identity, Mackenzie (1978:119) offers a definition of political identity as to 'identify with' someone or something, such as identification with an ideology and political activism. From a temporal perspective he identifies a proliferation in the use of the concept of political identity in semi-popular discourse from 1971 onwards. According to Theodoridis (2013:545) political identity simply put is about associating 'the self with a group or category...The strength of that association is the intensity of identification'. The definition of political identity is added to by Cerutti (2003:27 and 28) who sees political identity as 'the set of social and political values and principles that we recognize as ours, or in the sharing of which we feel like "us", like a political group or entity'. On the wider European scale political identity results from the 'mental elaboration of political and social experience' over forty years of EU membership (Cerutti 2003:28). Moreover, Huddy (2001) in his article on political identity was particularly struck by the considerable stability of diverse political identities amongst citizens of the United States. He identifies a number of mainstream American political identities, namely conservative, environmentalist, liberal, pacifist, radical and socialist. Furthermore, Balcells (2012) writing about Spain takes a broader perspective and defines political identity in terms of two blocs, namely left and right. In the aftermath of the Spanish civil war she identifies four effects on political identity resulting from her research participants' experience of victimisation, namely acceptance, rejection, apathy and no effect. On the other hand, Weltman (2004) sees the traditional blocs of left and right as breaking down in response to the end of the Cold War when political affiliations were polarised. In the new era Weltman identifies an anti-political political identity where politicians desire to be seen not as very

political but more as idiosyncratic and independent. Klar (2013) agrees that independence is a meaningful political identity. Political identity may also be relational by spatial geographies of connection through networks and place-based political activity (Featherstone 2008). The processes of forming political identities are constructed within the confines of political structures and represent relations of power (Ryan et al 1992).

People have numerous identities but when collective identity becomes politically relevant people take political action on behalf of the collective (Klandermans 2014). The 1960s witnessed the development of what became known as identity politics which can be defined as the rise of self-interest groups and social movements, including groups that had been marginalised and ignored by civil society, such as women, gay people and ethnic minorities (Tebble 2006). There is a clear and important difference between the concepts of political identity and identity politics and this distinction is important in this thesis. While the concept of identity politics is well defined in the political literature, political identity is a broader concept that may include certain aspects of identity politics, such as identification with a social movement or a self-interest group. In its usage in this thesis the term political means being a part of the sometimes troubled public interface between individuals, groups and the state. This can involve conventional political behaviour such as political party membership, protest, activism and dissent. Activism has long been viewed as a legitimate means of expressing dissent including civil disobedience within a democratic society. Alinski (1989) describes how popular protest often deploying the tactic of community fun activities for families, can mobilise communities against oppression, such as against racism during the Civil Rights campaigns in the US in the 1960s.

Political identity at an operational level has been conceptualised in many different forms. Mouffe (1992) conceptualises it in terms of what she calls new radical democratic citizenship that transcends the old liberal and conservative republicanism of the United States. The new conception of citizenship is constructed on identification with the principles of modern pluralist democracy, namely asserting liberty and equality for all. Opp (2012) writes about how collective identity affects protest behaviour.

Pozo (2011) operationalizes the concept of political identity by a historical-sociological assessment of 'the people' as a political identity and its role in class accommodation and as a means of bourgeois hegemony. Friedman (2010) conceptualises political identity in terms of both national identity that has a deeply felt internal identification with the nation, and the more legalistic citizenship status that infers a set of rights and obligations attained through community membership. Friedman also contributes an alternative definition of political identity that encompasses the concept of transnationalism with membership in multiple national communities. The definition of the concept of political identity as constituted by both cultural identity, namely a felt experience of belonging to a community, and civic identity which relates to the person's identification with a political system that determines their rights and responsibilities is shared by Bruter (2009). Writing in the context of post colonialism, Mamdani (2001) offers another dimension to the concept of political identity that postulates that the creation of new nations following the end of colonialism generates new distinct political identities. Likewise, Hohne (2006) describes the process of new political identities forming as a result of post colonialism and civil wars in Somalia in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **3.4 Sociological literature on defining political identity**

Identity according to Parekh (2009) is what distinguishes individuals from other people, such as different political allegiances. Identity has two closely related dimensions; personal development over time and a social dimension of how people 'situate and orient themselves in the world' (Parekh 2009:276). Furthermore, according to Klar (2013) political identity has its origins in underlying psychological processes and personality traits and life experiences. Partisanship may be an inherited trait drawing on culture and tradition. Identity between the self and a particular category can vary in strength and change over time as the individual develops along the life course. It may be marked by relative stability or fluidity over time. Many commentators view political identity as forming a part of the wider social identity theory since political identities tend to be more collective in nature. For example, identification with a political party may be conceptualised as a social identity (Theodoridis

2013). Social identity theory locates the origins of identity in motivational and cognitive factors, such as psychological motivation to endorse or disavow group membership (Huddy 2001). The person with a political identity has become involved in the political process through personal development and social interaction sometimes over many years. The personal and the social are important, in so far as they relate to the person's political identity. According to Tajfel (1974:69) identity is 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership'.

In her classic 1991 text, Molly Andrews describes in detail how fifteen life-long socialists experienced 'political awakening' and life-long 'political commitment' (Andrews 1991:73 and 42). In analysing her participants' narrative accounts, Andrews (1991:113 and 117) identifies three crucial factors in the 'radicalization' and 'politicization' of her participants. She describes how political consciousness is developed and constructed, consistently grounding her theorizing in the detail of the lived experiences of her participants. She identifies three common influences in her fifteen participants, namely identifiable individuals; intellectual stimulants, such as books; and the role of highly visible organisations, such as the National Unemployed Workers' Union.

According to Hite (1996) the construction of political identity is grounded in psychosocial processes, a deliberative conflictive process that individuals go through to define their ideology and political roles. A constructed political identity is characterised by a 'dynamic interplay between the psychological make-up of individuals, their embeddedness in particular political and social structures and institutions, and the major political experiences of their lives, which together influence their political ideologies and roles' (Hite 1996:300). Her research with politicians in Chile where participants were asked to recount their life histories presents a three dimensional model of individual political identity which she uses to examine how leaders justified their contributions to society and political programmes. She identifies cognitive frameworks as the central dimension of political identity which she defines as participants' fundamental approaches to politics 'rooted in the values they assign to

ideas, political organisation and their relationship to fellow political leaders and activists' (Hite 1996:299). She recognises in her participants that beneath the surface level political trajectories there are divergent class and cultural contexts, life experiences and senses of self and the relation of self to others. Her research identifies four ideal-types of political identity within the cognitive framework, namely political party loyalists, personal loyalists, political thinkers and political entrepreneurs. According to Hite political identity is an important explanatory framework for political thinking and action particularly at times of political crisis and flux. It can help to understand the broader question about identity formation and transformation in a historic and political context. The other important frameworks for understanding the construction of political identity are the concepts of embeddedness, for example within a political party, family, class or generation; and life experiences, which are both positive and negative. Although these components are analytically distinct they are also intertwined and bound to one another.

The wide range of insights into the nature and formation of political identity from the political and sociological literature discussed in this section – which include the importance of biographical inquiry across the life course to capture the political identity formation process - will help to inform the research questions for the empirical study where social work participants will be reflecting on their own declared political identity formation. The next section will explore what is already known about the political identity formation of social workers within the genre of social work biographies.

### **3.5 What is already known about the political identity of social workers?**

In her article on the socialization of social workers, Miller (2010:929) characterises the process of socialization as 'phase-based' and not necessarily linear. She identifies a pre-socialization phase and the importance of early formative experiences in personal development and forming a worldview. This indicates how useful a biographical inquiry can be in drawing out participants' early formative experiences and their impact on participants' political identity. Valutis et al (2012) believe that identity formation is a central factor in the socialization of social workers. Drawing from the traditional

psychological idea of identity they posit that identity formation occurs in crisis stages which eventually result in identity achievement, such as in the choice of career. According to their research, identity achievement correlates with age. Their article provides an interesting framework for exploring identity formation across the life course to date, including the declared political identity of social workers.

There is a dearth of research on social work biographies and particularly biographies of social workers who have a declared political identity. What is already known about the biographies of social workers is extensive enough to give clear indications about the reasons why people enter the social work profession, and limited enough to strongly justify further research in this area. For example, there is a predominance of social reformist motives in the account of social workers entering the profession but a gap in gauging the effects of neoliberal changes in social work on social workers after entry into the profession. Working with the literature is both fascinating and frustrating because it provides interesting insights but mostly superficial accounts of social workers' motives and reasons for their career choice and career progression. Another handicap is the obvious problem that while the literature is theoretically informative, such as in formulating some typologies, it is also restricted in terms of the small number of published studies and accounts available. In the biographical literature of social workers one often comes across an account of early life social disadvantages which is clearly an important area for the construction of a political identity. However, the accounts lack full exploration of the link between these experiences and entry into social work and later career trajectories (Merton 2003). In one particular instance it was many years later that the subject took up a career in social work. Such accounts tend to be brief life histories within a volume containing other life histories but without a deeper level of qualitative inquiry.

There are three significant contemporary published volumes on social workers' biography (LeCroy 2002, Cree 2003 and Humphrey 2011). These volumes are intended to be introductory reading for prospective social work students and those at the start of their programme of studies. They cast very little light on political identity in the context of social workers' career trajectories and the hegemony

of neoliberalism in social work. The nature of the volumes is initiatory, seeking to give the reader an understanding of what social work is - and within this context the volumes seek to address, in varying degree of detail, the significance of background and biography on career choice. All the volumes assume that this is important but none are able to provide a satisfying account about the nature of its importance. The very fact of being introductory texts means that none of the volumes analyse and explain the meaning and construction of social work biographies and their significance along the life course. Indeed, they avoid an examination of biography within a profession dominated by the influence of neoliberalism.

Humphrey (2011:24), under the heading 'Biographical Routes into Social Work', offers a basic typology of three general categories. These are: the service user route, the personal carer route and the citizen route. Of particular interest to this thesis is the citizen route. According to Humphrey (2011:28), the students' whose trajectory is along the citizen route '...bear witness to poverty and prejudice...so their narratives revolve around the structural and cultural conditions which underpin human suffering...' The transition from this into a social work career is dealt with only briefly. However, it is clear that the attraction of social work lies in its social reformist perspective. Referring to one subject, Humphrey (2011:28) says: 'He had escaped these problems himself and wanted to devote his life to eradicating them'. She later continues in this vein saying that their greatest asset to social work is their awareness of economic, cultural and political contexts of human suffering and commitment to the ethos of empowerment and to challenging existing power elites. This approach is of course fine as far as it goes since it acknowledges a very important area in the construction of political identity as outlined earlier in this chapter, namely early life experiences. However, such generalised statements owe more to the idealisation of the social work profession and social workers rather than to robust inquiry.

Cree (2003:1) in her volume is concerned with the 'driving forces' that brought the subjects of her book into social work. She is less concerned with a life course biographical approach in seeking to understand the social workers' political identity. She does well to acknowledge that the typological



categorisation of social workers owes as much to assumptions and stereotyping than anything else, at least in the public mind. She recognises that social work in the public mind is a 'detested' profession, made up of 'sandal-wearing wet liberals' and 'politically correct zealots' (Cree 2003:2). According to Cree (2003:3), social work is about the interaction between social workers and service users and '...it is this which brings people into social work in the first place, and it is this which sustains social workers through their working lives'. Whether this is what brings people into social work in the first place and sustains them in their career is contested and it is interesting that Cree offers no evidence for such a statement.

Cree's volume is a compilation of social workers' accounts of their own biography. It does cast some light on political identity through a focus on the type of early life experiences that are known to influence its development. She starts with a summary of her own life history acknowledging that part of her social work identity has been about '...trying to resolve central contradictions in my own background and upbringing' (Cree 2003:5). These include early family Christian influences and the family's suspicion of the social work profession. Yet in such a brief summary it is not surprising that there is not a fully satisfyingly account and explanation of how social work fits within Cree's biography. As is the case with so much of the literature on social work biography, we have here a less than full account and thus yet another reason for further and rigorous qualitative research in this area. Interestingly in the same volume, Chima (2003:12) describes the racism that she experienced as an adolescent and recalls later being dared by friends to go and do something about discrimination or 'shut up'. The implication here is that social work may not have been a long-term planned career choice but a more practical response. This might be rather simplistic since the response to enter the social work profession is certain to have had a multiplicity of determining factors ranging across many social and personal domains. Howell (2003) also describes the racism that she experienced and while she concludes that a career in social work seemed the obvious choice, her trajectory into social work was long and involved a period of working as a hairdresser. Holman (2003) refers to his spiritual framework

and life-long interest in the meaning of life and death but interestingly discloses that he is not sure whether these experiences shaped his career motivations. He simply states that he became a child care officer in a local authority's children department. What is of interest is that trajectories of this kind are not planned routes into social work but owe more to chance than design. Such chance occurrences are contextualised within the individual's life experiences, values and ideology, but this is not fully explored in the volume.

The third volume (LeCroy 2002) is more convincing because of the research method used, namely biographical interviewing. This method is known to be extensive and allows for life experiences to be explored at depth. Interviews were conducted in the US and transcriptions were then edited and produced in the volume as life histories. However, the volume is criticised for falling into the temptation of sentimentally idealising social work and social workers. The research framework makes reference to social workers embarking 'on a calling' (LeCroy 2002:1). It glorifies and maybe patronises social workers who have found and are following '...a meaningful and authentic life' (LeCroy 2002:1). What is an authentic life and how are they to know whether they are living it or not? Although like Cree's (2003) volume, the life histories from social workers in this book are short, there are some fine examples that illustrate some interesting dimensions about their biographies and political identity. Instances of these include Anita Royal's account of being a child of the 1960s and the influence of the anti-war demonstrations and the Civil Rights Movement. Another is Josefina Ahumada's narrative about developing a social conscience while growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 60s. In both instances the trajectory into social work involved a detour, in Royal's case into Law School and in Ahumada's case into a religious community. Detours are not a surprise in real life amongst rounded people who navigate through their various life choices. A serious shortcoming of this text is that it doesn't delve into data rigorously. The narratives are short summaries that raise more questions than answers for those interested in the biographies of social workers who have a declared political identity.

Crawford (2012) makes some salient epistemological points in her article about social work students' experience of diversity in the classroom. Her article focuses on the experience of a young African-American male social worker's account of becoming a social worker. Crawford argues that identity is a living experience that is not constructed around fixed and universal categories, such as gender, race and class. In her view identity incorporates '...the multiple constructed and shifting qualities of modern subjectivity...the complexity of identity formation and its variability over time' (Crawford 2012:37). She uses the concept of 'intersectionality' to understand the social worker's trajectory and current experiences. Intersectionality acknowledges the complex intersection between gender, race, class and other constructs in the lives of social workers. Such intersections are best illustrated within biographies which are in themselves also socially constructed. Crawford contrasts what she views as the individualism of Anglo-American social discourse with autobiographical accounts which she views as '...never about autonomous individuals but are a way of picturing social constructs through single lives'. Crawford's interpretive approach is convincing and is aligned to an understanding of the intersection between political identity and social work.

Swartz et al (2011) make a valuable contribution to the literature on the biographies of social workers with a declared political identity. Writing about their research in the context of South Africa as a post-conflict society they identify reluctance amongst health and social services students to talk about the past. In their view, in societies where life goes on in a 'business as usual' manner, such as in the UK, the political aspects of social services work are obscured and 'politicised biographies' of academics and social service workers are 'erased' (Swartz et al 2011:490). Whether it is because the past is too painful to recount as is the case in countries such as South Africa, or whether it is the case that political biographies are ignored and erased in neoliberal countries such as the UK, it is undeniably the case that there is a dearth of published research on the biographies of social workers generally, and those with a declared political identity in particular. Reissman and Quinney's (2005) authoritative review of narrative in social work confirms this point by uncovering few studies, in contrast to narrative research

in education, nursing and other professions. Autobiographical accounts tend to appear in highly specialized journals with few accounts in mainstream academic journals. Mensinga (2009:203) was also disappointed by the paucity of published research in the area of biography in social work. She believes that this has left a gap in capturing 'the meaning making processes individuals engage in to make sense of their career choices within their personal and social contexts'.

The social work biographies discussed have many limitations not least because they do not engage in a life course examination of the development of social workers' political identity and how their political identity responds to the neoliberal turn in the social work profession. The gaps identified will help form the research questions for the empirical research in seeking to understand the declared political identity formation of social workers and how it responds in the face of neoliberal dominance.

### **3.6 Eminent political lives in social work**

According to Marston and McDonald (2012), all professions need inspiring historical figures and narratives that help to define the profession's identity. Among social work's famous alumni are Clement Attlee, Britain's first post-war Prime Minister and leader of the great reforming Labour Government, 1945-51. After graduating from Oxford he moved to work as a social worker in the East End of London (Thomas-Symonds 2012). Later he became a social work lecturer at the London School of Economics. Barak Obama is another politician who prior to entering politics worked as a community organiser in Chicago where he developed his political ideas and organising skills (Obama 2007).

Social work is fortunate as a profession to have two outstanding autobiographical works by two founding members of the profession, who combined working as a social worker amongst the most disadvantaged members of society, with campaigning effectively as social reformers to overcome the major structural barriers that stood in the way of improving the living conditions of the poor. Jane Addams (1860-1935), pioneer of social work in the US and the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, founded the Settlement Movement in Chicago with the establishment of Hull-House, a

residential centre for the neediest in one of the most deprived areas of the city. In her autobiography, 'Twenty Years at Hull-House' (Addams 1960), she recounts how as a middle-class child she first encountered squalor and poverty and how it left a lasting impression on her and determined the course of her life. Even as a child she was preoccupied with 'the old question eternally suggested by the inequalities of the human lot' (Addams 1960:27). Later in her life she relates how she became involved in the politics of Chicago from her base in Hull-House, often working with activists from Chicago University who were later credited as the founders of symbolic interactionism. She began a systematic investigation into the rubbish collection system in the city since there was a possible connection between poor rubbish collection and the high death rate in some wards. Eventually the city authorities responded with more inspectors and the task of keeping the streets cleaner was achieved with the removal of dead animals from the streets. This is a clear illustration of social work political action to achieve social reform although the response from some in authority was not always positive with Addams at one time being called 'un-American' (Addams 1960:xv). Addams' life as recounted in her autobiography was characterised by an awakened political consciousness from early on that guided her career and social work activity throughout her life. Her political identity was one of identification with the poor and the ideological and policy perspectives that would improve their condition in life. Her political identity that incorporated political activism was intertwined with her pioneering social work career in ways that are almost unthinkable in Western societies today, where social work is a legally defined practice and is dominated by the hegemonic power of neoliberalism. Nonetheless Addams remains an inspiring figure in the way that she was prepared to take on the vested interests of her day.

Alice Solomon (1872-1948) was born in Berlin and from her earliest days had felt a 'vocation' and a 'calling' to help people and to do something about 'the troubles of the world' (Solomon 2004:12 and 20). In her inspiring autobiography 'Character is Destiny', Solomon describes how she was involved in petitioning parliament to improve the condition of the poor as well as starting a Consumer's League to improve the working conditions of factory and shop workers. She was motivated by a sense of rebellion

against injustice and unequal opportunities, especially with regard to social welfare and women's rights. She faced considerable resistance from large businesses who felt threatened by her campaigning for social rights and from a largely patriarchal society where there were 'fathers of the city' but no 'mothers' (Solomon 2004:38). Facing enormous problems of inequality, poverty and the lack of rights, Solomon (2004:68) viewed all the challenges through the prism of politics. Even during the era of the Nazi terror from the mid-1930s onwards, Solomon remained committed to her ideals and resisted the darker forces that were engulfing her country, turning the clock back on social reforms that had been gained over fifty years, such as the eight hour day. She criticised former women associates and colleagues who had been influenced by Nazi doctrine on the family that would confine women to the home. In the 1930s she helped colleagues from Germany and Austria escape abroad from the violent Nazi regime (Wieler 1988). Just before the Nazis came to power the School of Social Work that Alice Solomon had set up - the first such School in Europe - had been named the 'Alice Solomon School of Social Work'. The School was renamed quickly under the Nazis and Solomon was given an ultimatum to leave Germany at three weeks' notice because she was classified as Jewish as well as a progressive woman with an internationalist perspective. Alice Solomon's life is of interest not least because of her commitment to social reform and her enormous bravery in resisting the reactionary forces of the Nazi regime of terror. Her political identity remained stable at this time despite numerous colleagues in the social work profession taking a different course, especially the very many social workers who joined the Nazi party. This is one of the worst examples from history of how political identity, which is in other times stable, is particularly under threat at times of crisis in total war and civil war scenarios.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Despite the major changes that have taken place in the social work profession, especially the dominance of neoliberalism since the 1980s, it remains the case that there is very little published biographical research on the political identity of social workers. The literature that does exist tends to be rather superficial and does not explore in-depth the construction of political identity amongst social

workers, thus failing to identify potential developments in political identity that may have occurred as a result of social work becoming less of a social reformist activity in the face of neoliberalism. This is surprising since, as has been argued, social workers have been attracted into the profession because of its transformative nature and yet social workers have had to contend with the dilemma caused by the dominance of neoliberalism and new managerialism within the profession, leading to many social workers leaving the profession.

Conducting this literature review has further heightened my curiosity about the declared political identity of social workers. There is an increased interest in discovering more about their lives, and the relationship between their life experiences, their declared political identity and social work. The question remains as how best to investigate the declared political identity of social workers in the light of what has been argued in this chapter, namely that political identity is best understood as formed by the influence of values, ideology, culture, social background, nurturing and critical events in the whole life course. Furthermore, it raises the question of how best to examine the effects of neoliberalism on social work and on the declared political identity of social workers. The next chapter will argue the case for a methodological approach to these questions that examines the areas under investigation at a new, deeper and wider level of inquiry.

## **Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will argue for a methodological approach that will answer the main focus of this thesis and the gaps in knowledge that have already been identified in the literature review. It has already been argued in this thesis that social work has its roots in social reform and social transformation and that many social workers have been attracted into the profession for that reason (Stevens et al 2010). It has also been argued that social work experienced major changes from the 1980s onwards with the advent and subsequent dominance of neoliberalism. This has had a profound effect on the social work profession leading to the charge that the profession has been depoliticised and alienated from its traditional role of achieving social justice and social transformation. Furthermore, this has led to many practitioners leaving the profession for careers elsewhere as evidenced in chapter two. However, gaps remain in the biographical literature about the impact of neoliberal changes on social workers who have a declared political identity. The literature is primarily concerned with routes into social work which are invariably aligned to social justice and reform. There is no examination of their political identity once in the profession and thus an opportunity has been missed to capture the effects of neoliberalism on this group of social workers. There has been no investigation into why many social workers' who have a declared political identity chose to enter into a new phase of political activism outside the social work profession. Moreover, it is argued that to answer these questions appropriately, it is important to take a life course perspective since this would make it possible to identify the roots of political identity formation and its course in social work and political careers.

The chapter is presented in two parts. Part one consists primarily of an examination of the research methodologies of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry. Part two examines the research methods including the operationalising of the biographical interviewing and the constructivist grounded theory process of analysis.



## **4.2 Part One: Methodology**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

The research methodology deployed in this thesis is an innovative combination of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry regarding the biographies of social workers who have a declared political identity. While this approach may not be unique it is innovative within this specific area of study, since it has not been used before to examine the political biographies of social workers. This first part will focus on the research design and conceptual framework for the thesis, including the construction of research questions. It will examine the methodological approaches of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry and explain why a qualitative approach is best suited for an examination of the declared political identity of social workers.

### **4.2.2 Research questions**

The research question or questions are the 'foundation stone for the whole research project' (Kelly 2012:99). Designing research questions can be viewed as a craft since they need to be relevant and achievable. In the past grounded theorists have been resistant to research questions because of the inductive and open ended nature of their research. Today more grounded theorists are using research questions to focus their research and gain credibility with funding authorities. Research questions are themselves viewed as social constructions within the research framework of social constructivism. In framing the research questions I have been influenced by my position as an academic in the fields of social work and social sciences, particularly in relation to the neoliberal changes in social work and my curiosity about how these changes have affected social workers who have a declared political identity. The research questions are of relevance to social work since they seek to understand the nature of political identity within the professional identities of social workers, particularly the effects of neoliberalism on social workers who have developed into new roles and careers as political activists and parliamentary and local government representatives. In the early stages of forming research

questions I used an exercise described by Kelly (2012) where the title of the project is written in the middle of a blank sheet of paper. Then research questions are generated and refined based on experience from the pilot study, areas of particular personal and professional interest and findings of the literature review. The literature search as ‘conversation amongst scholars’ has been an ongoing process in this doctoral research project and an integral part of the research design (Ravitch and Riggan 2012:22). The emerging research questions are listed below and reflect an interest in exploring further the origins of participants’ declared political identity; their earliest identification with social reformist values; their response to the dominance of neoliberalism in social work; how they view their political identity after leaving social work; and to what extent are participants still connected today with social work as a social reformist and transformational activity :

1. How did social workers’ political identity emerge and evolve from life experiences?
2. How do social workers talk about the link between their career and political identity?
3. Did social work practice enable the development of social workers’ political identity?
4. How can the intersection of social workers’ life experiences, social work career and political identity be theorised?

Research design is defined as the best structure for answering the question ‘what evidence is needed’? Its function is to ‘ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible’ (de Vaus 2001:9). The research design provides an integrated conceptual framework for the whole research project. A clear and coherent research design is important to avoid confusion and drift in the areas of research questions, research focus and methods. Conceptualising the framework helps to shape and direct the research project. According to Ravitch and Riggan (2012:6) the conceptual framework ‘is a way of linking all of the elements of the research process: research disposition, interest, and positionality; literature; and theory and methods’. It is the researcher’s map of the field being studied as well as a guide and organising tool. Research disposition and interests include epistemological assumptions and the researcher’s social location. This is a

reflexive component since it requires some consideration on 'who you are' in the research process (Ravitch and Riggan 2012:10). In this thesis it is important that the research design is able to capture the development of political identity throughout the life course since political identity formation is a lifelong process and thus one should avoid privileging one part of the life course above another (Parekh 2009 and Crawford 2012). A life course perspective will establish the strength of participants' convictions from early days and how they potentially clash with neoliberal changes in social work.

#### **4.2.3 Theoretical sensitivity**

Theoretical sensitivity is defined as 'the researcher's sensitivity to concepts, meanings, and relationships within the data, and it comes largely from professional and personal experience' (Seale 2012:368). It allows the researcher the opportunity to use professional and personal experiences to see the research data in new ways and exploit the data's potential to produce new theories. It is about 'being able to see beneath the obvious to discover the new' (Strauss and Corbin 1998:46). It helps to counter potential researcher bias by the use of analytical procedures, such as coding. According to Hall and Callery (2001:263) theoretical sensitivity 'refers to the researcher's manipulation of the data to yield explanations that best reflect the reality that is being apprehended'. The concept of theoretical sensitivity includes awareness of already existing theories and knowledge, and the reality that social science investigation is theory laden (Hall and Callery 2001). In grounded theory existing theories can be useful in building categories during the coding process (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The 'trick' in grounded theory is to combine the concept of emergence, that is, what one is discovering in the field, with what the researcher takes as theoretically possible from their previous learning and accumulated body of social science knowledge (Hall and Callery 2001:198). Theoretical sensitivity in the process of generating concepts from data is acquired by the researcher 'pondering and rethinking anew' (Charmaz 2006:135). It entails both analytical temperament and analytical competence (Holton 2007). Temperament is about analytical distance from data and competence is about the ability to conceptualize from data. Sensitivity is also important in guarding against forcing preconceived

concepts out of data. The main obstacle to theoretical sensitivity is when the researcher becomes doctrinaire or locked into a pet theory. In this research project theoretical sensitivity is about being sensitive to new knowledge discovered from biographical interviews particularly relating to the formation of political identity across the life course. It is also about being aware of what is already known about the roots of social work in social reform and social workers' allegiance to this perspective, and the potential dilemma the dominance of neoliberalism has caused for practitioners.

#### **4.2.4 Reflexivity and positioning**

Allied to theoretical sensitivity is reflexivity in research which is about locating the self in the research process, including the researcher's interests and biography (Charmaz 2008). It is a way of 'thinking about...the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways difficult to become conscious of' (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000:245). Fortunately, reflection is familiar ground for social work practitioners who engage in critical and reflective social work practice (Brown and Rutter 2008). It becomes an asset in research since it can enhance the validity of grounded theories through addressing the influence of the researcher-participant interaction on the research process. It also addresses relationality between the researcher and participant in terms of power and trust (Hall and Callery 2001). An area to address is that in grounded theory the researcher has occupied the position of expert, especially because of the analytical process. This requires sensitivity and transparency in the research process, such as in the case of this research project where all participants were provided with full information about the research purpose and procedures in advance. My own biography of developing a Social Democratic identity and becoming a qualified social worker and later on a social work academic was shared with the participants. Furthermore, my own biography enabled me to identify with my research area and the participants.

#### **4.2.5 The epistemological background to the research**

This section argues that a qualitative approach is best suited to answering the research questions and that further it is the approach that I as the researcher feel most aligned to. The section begins with an account of how the qualitative paradigm emerged in social sciences research. Bouma and Ling (2004:3) ask the question: 'How do we know what we know? The research of social life is a contested area where social scientists have argued over many years about the nature of knowledge and knowing. This debate has revolved around the areas of quality and status of knowledge and which approach has most theoretical justification; which approach is more superior and which approach is more inferior. It has also revolved around the question of whether these approaches or paradigms are mutually exclusive or can they be combined in empirical research, such as a mixed-methods approach. The German sociologist Wilhem Dilthey in 1883 had argued that there were two fundamentally different types of science, namely *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft*. The former is associated with the natural sciences and is concerned with abstract explanations and the latter is concerned with an empathetic understanding of people's lived experiences in historical settings. The concept of *Verstehen*, meaning empathetic understanding of the participant's inner world and the meaning of the participant's actions from his or her point of view, was further developed by Weber (Domecka et al 2012).

Today, the social sciences are multiparadigm since no one paradigm is predominant. The first dominant group in this historical and theoretical perspective of the social sciences is positivist social science which is broadly the same approach to inquiry as that used in the natural sciences (Neuman 2010). Positivism had emerged from the Nineteenth Century with the rise of Chemistry, Physics and Biology which have been perceived as the '...crowning achievements of Western civilization...' where 'truth' transcends opinion and bias (Denzin and Lincoln 2013:4). Crucially the main outlook of the positivists is that reality is real and exists 'out there' to be discovered (Neuman 2010:72). Allied to this is the view that phenomena can be understood in terms of cause and effect and that general laws can be written to describe these processes. The highest level of positivist inquiry is probably the randomized controlled clinical trials for new forms of medication.

Qualitative research is paradigmatically different to positivist research. The focus is on how people make sense of their settings and experiences through examining concepts such as identities. It is a hybrid of perspectives that embraces Denzin and Lincoln's (2013:6) definition of '... a situated activity that locates the observer in the world'. This is qualitatively different to the positivist emphasis on the objectivity and disinterestedness of the observer. Qualitative researchers assert that claiming such a position is an erroneous understanding of the world and lacks research reflexivity and transparency. Qualitative research experiences the lived lives of participants and interprets the world through representation and makes sense of phenomena in terms of the meaning people ascribe to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). According to Neuman (2010:77) social reality is constructed by '... people interacting with others in ongoing processes of communication and negotiation'. The methods used in qualitative research, such as biographical interviewing describe routines, problems and meaning making in people's lives. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) use the image of the qualitative researcher as bricoleur making a quilt or a film maker assembling images into montages.

Until the radical turn in the 1960s, Sociology was dominated by 'all-inclusive grand theories' and logico-deductive theories (Glaser and Strauss 1967:33). However, the 1960s was a period of reappraisal and renewal in sociological methodology (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). There were calls for the direct study of the empirical world through gaining first-hand knowledge of it. Critics such as C. Wright Mills had called for a movement beyond examining simple analysis of variables as was the case in deductive inquiry. Other critics valued more intuitive and empathetic ways of knowing and believed not everything could be represented numerically. Researchers such as Goffman were clear examples of how individual researchers acting as embedded observers in the research setting could produce convincing analysis. In 1962 Thomas Kuhn published his ground-breaking book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 1962). In it Kuhn argued that scientific knowledge was a kind of closed shop of acknowledged achievements and limited open door for innovation. Kuhn named this phenomenon a paradigm. He believed that science was a '... a collective activity centred on traditions, authorities, institutions, networks and community solidarity at least as much as on some unquenchable

thirst for truth and knowledge' (Bryant and Charmaz 2007:42). In 1966 Berger and Luckmann (1966:15) had contributed to a paradigmatic shift in the direction of qualitative research with the publication of their classic text *The Social Construction of Reality* which posited that: '...the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality'. These developments were the forerunners and the intellectual context for the emergence of grounded theory in the late 1960s.

The study of identity including the declared political identity of social workers is suited to a qualitative approach since it is concerned with an understanding of the lived lives of participants and the meanings they ascribe to phenomena. It accesses the inner world of participants and values their own point of view by being empathetic to their lived experiences and how these are represented by the participants. Furthermore, the methodological approaches adopted for this research project namely constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry are informed by the wider perspective of social constructivism. The next two sections will explain more about constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry as methodologies deployed in this thesis.

#### **4.2.6 Constructivist Grounded Theory**

This section explores grounded theory in more detail as a methodology to examine the declared political identity of social workers. Grounded theory is informed by the anti-positivist epistemological perspective and ways of knowing discussed in the previous section. As Corbin and Strauss (2008:1) have accurately said: 'Every methodology rests on the nature of knowledge and of knowing, and so does ours'. Since the late 1980s grounded theory has become the most widely used methodological approach in qualitative social sciences (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). In this research project I am committed to using a full and authentic constructivist grounded theory approach not just in the analysis process but fully intrinsic within the research design and process. Grounded theory originated from the works of both Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s and early 1970s (Glaser and Strauss 1965, 1967, 1968 and 1971). Glaser and Strauss came together at the University of California during the intellectually fertile years of the 1960s and early 1970s. The publication of *The Discovery of*

*Grounded Theory* in 1967 has been called 'revolutionary' and a watershed moment in the history of qualitative research (Walker and Myrick 2006:547). In it Glaser and Strauss boldly proclaimed (1967:2): 'The basic theme in our book is the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research'.

Grounded theory is an inductive approach that draws out 'theory from data' (Glaser and Strauss 1967:1). An inductivist approach entails extrapolating patterns from data to form conceptual categories (Charmaz 2006 and 2014). This means that grounded theories are discovered through the process of acquiring and analysing data and then confirming it through gathering further data until a point of theoretical saturation is attained. The process of gathering further data is called the constant comparison method where data is scrutinised for theoretical patterns and categories (Covan 2007). In grounded theory data can include interview transcripts, observations and secondary sources (Strauss and Corbin 1998 and Carey 2009). Consistent with an inductivist approach in grounded theory, data is allowed to generate theory rather than starting with a predetermined hypothesis to be tested (Humphries 2008). This is accomplished through conceptualising about the data using the grounded theory coding analytical process and interpretation. Glaser and Strauss articulated the discovery of two types of theories, namely substantive and formal theories. Substantive theory is located within an empirical research project and is regarded as a middle-range theory. While formal theory is a higher level theory that is discovered from a range of substantive theories. In practice, while there is an extensive body of substantive theories in being there are relatively few formal theories (Glaser 2007). In this research project the aim is to arrive at a new substantive constructivist grounded theory.

Chief amongst the formative influences on Glaser and Strauss was the influence of symbolic interactionism, the idea of the social construction of knowledge, society and reality, which was an innovation of the Chicago School of Sociology (Charmaz 2006 and 2014). Reality is socially constructed through participants being actively engaged in creating their own meaning through language, communication and negotiating everyday life (Payne and Payne 2004). Data itself is a social



construction and the construction of knowledge is a collaborative exercise (Hall and Callery 2001; and Darlington and Scott 2002). In this respect the self of the researcher is not a 'passive medium' and claims to complete objectivity are 'impossible' (Strauss and Corbin 1998:43 and Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000:14). In this research project the researcher and participants will engage in a co-construction process by reflecting on the development of the participants' declared political identity from the vantage point of the present.

Grounded theory is more concerned with exploring meaning in rich data and dense transcripts than discovering so-called objective truths out there in the world to be discovered (Mensinga 2009). The importance of reflexivity in research whereby the researcher is aware of their own part in the social construction of generated theory has been emphasised in current day grounded theory approaches (Charmaz 2008). Allied to the idea of symbolic interactionism, is the philosophical stance of pragmatism. This is about the practical rather than abstract value of research, in particular what practical utility a theory has in real life and how well does it work (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000 and Denscombe 2007). The other major influence on grounded theory, particularly its systematic approach to data analysis and coding, was the experience of Glaser in the quantitative research environment of Columbia University.

This research project is informed by certain grounded theory 'canons' or principles that need to be followed (Glaser and Strauss 1967:5). These principles came into existence as a response to criticism from quantitative researchers about the reliability and validity of qualitative methods and the desire of Glaser and Strauss to set out a clear scientific procedural basis for qualitative research. These canons include the emergence of theory from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967); purposeful and theoretical sampling (Corbin and Strauss 1990); constant comparison (Covan 2007); copious memo writing (Lampert 2007); ongoing analysis (Corbin and Strauss 1990); coding (Charmaz 2006 and 2014); and theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). These canons are explored further when applied to the research project in part two of this chapter.

Grounded theory has evolved since the early days into a hybrid, nuanced and even contested approach to research (Walker and Myrick 2006 and Bryant and Charmaz 2007). The nuanced nature of the evolution of grounded theory evokes Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' to denote concepts that are related but not clearly defined as exactly the same although there may be some unifying features (Wittgenstein 2009:67). These unifying features include coding, constant comparison, theoretical sampling, copious memo writing, data, conceptualising categories and theorising (Walker and Myrick 2006). However, there is no basis for a '...sustained and seamless understanding...' of grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz 2007:10). In general terms there are at least three broad categories of grounded theory in existence, namely the Glaserian School of Grounded Theory (orthodox), the Strauss and Corbin School (evolved), and the Constructivist School (Punch 2009). This nuanced and contested nature of grounded theory is no better exemplified than in the area of coding. For example, coding is constructed differently by grounded theorists. Glaser's coding method can be described as orthodox or traditional grounded theory, consistent with the coding method outlined with Strauss in the 1967 classic text. Conversely Strauss, in association with Juliet Corbin, evolved the grounded theory coding method to a degree that was not acceptable to Glaser. Methods of coding in grounded theory have evolved even further in recent times with the constructivist grounded theory contribution of Charmaz (2006 and 2014). Charmaz's constructivist coding system is the one adopted for this research project since as a researcher I view knowledge as a social construction and a representation of reality as understood within a wider socio-economic and historical context. A serious source of tension within grounded theory has been the extent to which the approach is both inductive and abductive and how it has become more abductive over the years. Abduction means examining data and considering all possible explanations for the data and then forming hypothesis to be confirmed or disconfirmed in the light of the most plausible interpretation of the observed data (Charmaz 2006 and 2014). In this sense, grounded theory is an inductive methodology with an important deductive component (Payne and Payne 2004). The degree to which

abstraction was possible became a contentious issue between Glaser and Strauss and was a significant factor in the schism that emerged between them at the start of the 1990s (Reichertz 2007).

An important reason why grounded theory is particularly suited for this research project is its rigorous analysis process that allows the participants' voices to be heard as findings emerge from data. Its careful process of analysis is best suited for a research project where the voices of participants need to be carefully examined and their meanings drawn out thoroughly. Another reason for using grounded theory is that both social work and grounded theory have roots in symbolic interactionism of the Chicago School of Sociology and share similar assumptions. Jane Addams, as discussed earlier in the literature review, was the founder of social work in the United States and a pioneer of the Settlement Movement in that country, who founded Hull House in Chicago at the same time as the University of Chicago was established. The founders of symbolic interactionism, George Mead and John Dewey were based in Chicago University and campaigned with Addams on radical causes such as women suffrage and labour conditions. Addams researched the neighbourhoods surrounding Hull House and influenced what later became known as urban ethnography. According to Oktay (2012) both Dewey and Mead volunteered in the Hull House kitchen and helped with planning social action in the community as well as research. Thus symbolic interactionism developed from social action, research and theory development during the radical era in Chicago in the 1890s. Since grounded theory derives theories from real world settings it has the potential to construct theories to guide social work practice.

Another reason why grounded theory lends itself well to this research project on the biographies of social workers who have a declared political identity is because it has a long affinity with health and social care research, with an impressive track record supported by '...highly developed methodological guidelines' (Oliver 2012:373). Both Glaser and Strauss had personal experience of family bereavement and as a result conducted their initial research in hospitals with terminally ill patients from which grounded theory emerged. They explain the emergence of the theory of 'social loss' in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss 1967:23-24). As a methodological approach it has sustained

the interest of researchers working in the health and care fields over the years. For example, Strauss' close associate, Juliet Corbin, was a nurse by profession and many other nurses were inspired to pursue qualitative research through grounded theory (Charmaz 2006 and 2014). The methodology is also very suited for small scale research by individuals working within temporal and financial constraints. The methodology is particularly suited for social workers since prominence is given to reflexivity and empathy, both familiar social work territories. It also lends itself well because grounded theorists stress the importance of developing theories based on empirical research, including the fundamental role of fieldwork (Denscombe 2007).

Although grounded theory offers a scientific and rigorous methodology, the approach has been interrogated from numerous perspectives. The limitations of grounded theory need to be recognised, such as in the area of generalizability where concepts and theories derived from data may be contested by academics who might view substantive grounded theories as not generalizable to the whole population. The grounded theory response to this criticism is that the rigorous methods used are not intended to produce results that can be generalised to whole populations but rather are representative in theoretical terms. Other areas of criticism include the role of the literature review; complexity of the coding process; neglect of the wider socio-economic context; disadvantages of an 'open mind' approach; issues of power within the researcher participant relationship; challenged justification of small samples; the risk of reinventing the wheel; and criticism with regards to self-reflexivity in theoretical sensitivity. Grounded theorists defend their positions by acknowledging that these criticisms may have been true in the past but do not need to be so in the future (Charmaz 2008).

#### **4.2.7 Biographical Inquiry**

Biographical inquiry is defined as resting on 'the collection, analysis, and performance of stories, accounts, and narratives that speak to turning-point moments in people's lives' (Denzin 2001:59). It views individuals as having agency and are actively involved in the making of society and not merely made by it (Roberts 2002).

Biography has emerged as a form of life writing which gives a voice to people not heard in traditional writing, such as feminists and minority perspectives of the 'disenfranchised, the powerless, or those with alternative visions' (Smith 1998, in Lincoln and Denzin 1998). Squire et al (2008) views biographies as a means of traversing social change, particularly amongst underrepresented communities and communities that form elements of resistance to power, such as working class communities. The negation of ordinary voices has been echoed in the research process where ordinary biographical narratives were ignored as unscientific (Smith 1998). The change of direction in the social sciences in the 1960s led to a more favourable climate for qualitative methodologies, such as biographical inquiry in social research; and new voices to be heard, such as those of gender, class, ethnicity and the professions (Rustin 2000 and Chamberlayne et al 2000). According to Shacklock and Thorp (2005) people live out their lives in ways that can be understood and communicated narratively. Roberts (2002) locates a biographical turn in social sciences research linked to a heightened interest in cultural studies and sociology. This is mirrored in other fields, such as nursing where the rise in the use of biographical methods has been associated with a stronger voice for the patient and as a means to humanize medicine and redress power relations between professionals and recipients of care (Rickard 2004). Today biographies have grown in popularity and number; they have an almost ubiquitous presence in modern culture as illustrated by the number and range of biographies in any bookshop (Bathmaker 2010). The development of postmodernism which has undermined grand narratives and dominant ideologies has also advanced the study of individual lives within social and cultural contexts (Chang 2008). This is partly reflected in an 'intense sense of personal identity and selfhood' and the 'subjective in postmodernity' (Rickard 2004:166). The effect has been that biographical research is viewed as a valid means of understanding major social change through interpreting the lives of individuals within families, groups and institutions. The biographical inquiry in this research study shares many of the roots explored earlier in grounded theory, namely a social constructionist perspective and the roots of both methodologies in symbolic interactionism and the democratic turn in social sciences in the 1960s.

Biography also draws together personal accounts and historical and social contexts, reflecting C. Wright Mill's notion of 'personal troubles' and 'public issues' (Wright Mills 1955:248); and Denzin's concept of the 'universal singulars', universalizing in their singular moments features of the historical moment (Denzin 2001:59). As Schutze (2007b:2) says: 'There is a very close relationship between the unfolding of individual and collective identities; their "histories" and identity work are very much linked to each other'. In this research project there's an opportunity to relate the individual experiences of social workers who have a declared political identity with changes in the social work profession as a result of neoliberalism becoming a dominant political and economic force in western society. From the social constructionist perspective biographical narratives are co-constructed in the sense that meaning, intention and interpretation are situated in history, culture, politics and social positioning and viewed from the vantage point of the present. In this regard, in biographical research meaning is continuously negotiated:

'People answer the questions which they think we are asking them, and we respond to the answers with which we think they have provided us' (Squire et al 2008:14).

Our interpretation of data changes as we view and review it over time, thus our interpretations are provisional. As we evolve we view experiences differently and consequently our interpretations of data are always connected to the 'vantage point' of our world view and our different layers of understanding (Andrews 2008:86). To this extent research is both historically and socially positioned. Andrews, for example, recounts how history intervened into her study of East German identity when communism unexpectedly collapsed while the project was ongoing (Andrews 2008).

Of particular methodological interest in preparing this research project have been the works of Miller (1981), who recognises the value of biographical work with clients as a means of enhancing self-awareness; Crawford (2012) who recognises identity as a social construction within the context of racism and black consciousness; Oakley (2010) who also sees biography as a social construction and an imaginative act of linking biography, history and social structures; and Watson (2009) who makes

the very important point that biography ought to be concerned with the whole person rather than privileging one dimension such as the professional lived life of the person, hence a strong argument for a life course perspective. Other works have looked at the formation of identity throughout the life course, such as in relation to nationalism, migration, and repressive regimes (Roberts 2002). Biography helps to construct identities rather than living out a predetermined life path (Bathmaker 2010). In this sense participants in biographical research have the opportunity to negotiate their identities and to make sense of their lives as active agents.

Within this thesis the strategy of combining constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry has been deployed because of their close epistemological association and as the best fit to examine not only the development of political identity across the life course but also the effects on participants of neoliberal changes in social work. This fits into a social constructionist perspective which as the researcher I identify with as the best approach to understanding the nature of knowledge. Both constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry share similar suppositions, including being regarded as inductive in nature and seeking to avoid too many preconceived ideas about the research at the outset. They proceed along the lines of investigation based on concepts and knowledge generated during the course of the research project. Moreover, they are concerned with the lived experiences of the participant and their involvement with their social worlds over the trajectory of the life course. Thus both methodologies are particularly compatible in research which looks at life trajectories and life choices within a social setting.

In this thesis the main source of data is the life histories, derived through biographical interviews, of social workers who have a declared political identity. The data in the form of interview transcripts are analysed using Charmaz (2006 and 2014) constructivist grounded theory analytical process of coding. The constructivist grounded theory system of analysis is consistent with biographical interviewing since ‘... doing biography is an active constructionist activity...’ (Lincoln and Denzin 1998:218). Combining both methodologies results in data that is sensitive to the participants’ lived world as well

as the influence of the wider societal context. It provides a systematic and theoretically integrated strategy for thorough and rigorous analysis. Amongst the advantages of this combined methodological approach is the synergy between the two approaches and the rigorous scientific structure of constructivist grounded theory analysis; and amongst the disadvantages is no statistical representation (Mrozowicki 2009).

#### **4.2.8 Ethics**

Research ethics is of the highest importance not least in biographical inquiry which involves participants sharing information about themselves. Before starting on the doctoral research project I applied for and received ethical approval to proceed from Keele University Ethical Review Panel in March 2013 (Appendix One). Research ethics have gained in importance in recent times and researchers are required to conduct their research at all times consistent with sound ethical principles in research (Oakley 2010). Ethics form an important part in the process of building trust between the researcher and participants. This is essential in research, particularly where interviews are involved, to ensure rapport at a relational level (Darlington and Scott 2002). Another important ethical principle in research is the researcher's openness about his or her own epistemological positioning and values. Humphries (2008:30) believes that neutrality in research is a 'pretence' and that all research is influenced by the researcher's values and that the remedy is to make these explicit, which I have tried to do throughout this thesis. The first point of contact with participants was made through email correspondence containing information about the purpose and process of the research and an invitation to participants to be involved. The information consisted of details about what would be expected of them, including the nature of the biographical interview and how long it would take. The participants were also sent a copy of the topic guide so that they could have an idea of the areas that would be covered in the interview. The participants were reassured about confidentiality and anonymity as well as informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without having to give a reason. Biographical interviews can draw out confidential data which participants might



disclose in a free flowing and off the cuff interview, thus sensitivity in respecting participants' data is paramount in biographical interviews. Likewise, participants' voluntary consent and self-determination are of prime importance in ethical research (Shamoo and Khin-Maung-Gyi 2002). The participants were given a consent form regarding taking part in the study and for the use of quotations. They were also given the name and contact address of my lead supervisor as well as a contact address for Keele's Research and Governance Officer should the participants have had any concerns or complaints.

Of particular importance to social work research is the Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research which entrusts a responsibility on social work researchers to be '...congruent with the aims and values of social work practice' (Butler 2002:245). Ethical practice has of course been a long-standing and essential part of the social work profession (Clark 2000 and Banks 2004). Of critical importance in this respect is that social work practice should be informed by a social justice perspective. Although grounded theorists in the past have been criticised for ignoring the wider socio-economic perspective in favour of narrower in-depth investigations, present day grounded theorists (this researcher included), do recognise the importance of social positioning and social background.

#### **4.2.9 Conclusion**

This first part of the chapter has explored the epistemological background of the research project and argued that the methodologies of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry are best deployed in the current research to examine the declared political identity of social workers. The next part will examine the method deployed in this research as well as the operationalising of that method.

### **4.3 Part Two: Methods**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction**

This methods section will examine the operationalisation of the method of biographical interviewing, which is the main source of data collection in this research project, and will justify the use of constructivist grounded theory analysis of the interviews, in preference to more traditional forms of analysis of biography and as a particular innovative feature of this research project. The method deployed gathered data on the formation of participants' declared political identity throughout their life course to date. By covering the early years of participants' lives it was possible to explore the source and strength of their early political identity formation and social reformist attitudes. It was then possible to examine the effects of neoliberal changes in social work on their political identity. Furthermore, the method deployed enabled an exploration of the participants' current political identity and their current day relationship with the social work profession. Moreover, this methods section will look in detail at the other components of the research design, such as the acquired method of sampling, memo writing and coding.

#### **4.3.2 Biographical interviewing**

Biographical interviewing involves extracting extended and broad accounts of life histories from the lived experiences of participants during the course of one or more interviews (Reissman and Quinney 2005). The focus on life histories is useful and highly pertinent to the current study since key events in forming identities tend to be life-long processes (Winnicott 1985). The purpose of biographical interviews is to encourage participants to talk at length about their lives (Seale 2012). These lengthy interviews which ranged in this project between one-and-a-half to three hours, are seen as a constructive and creative encounter between the interviewer and participant with the participant being encouraged to talk in detail about a theme within the context of their whole life experience. These encounters have been called 'conversations with a purpose' because they seek to elicit the participant's account in as natural or 'off-the-cuff' way as possible (Riemann 2005:87). Biographical interviews are concerned with generating data 'from below', meaning that data is derived from the lived experiences of participants and grounded in the reality of their everyday life (Riemann 2010:91).

The focus on data 'from below' is one reason why biographical interviews have particular synergy with grounded theory. Consistent with the theoretical position of social constructionism biographical data is open to subjective interpretation where different meanings might be given to the same stories by different readers (Wengraf 2001 and Mensinga 2009). Concepts and theories emerge inductively from the data and represent one of many possible explanations rather than absolute certainty. Another aspect of the social constructionist nature of biographical interviews is the consideration that biographies are being continuously reconstructed in the light of new experiences and changed life perspectives.

Biographical interviewing like grounded theory is a contested and nuanced field of research (Squire et al 2008). Two distinct approaches to biographical interviewing are represented in the works of Tom Wengraf (2001) and the German sociologist Fritz Schutze (2007a and b). Wengraf favours a semi-structured interviewing style for biographical interviewing thus allowing for more focus and relevance during the course of the interview. While Schutz in contrast favours an open-ended approach allowing the interview to proceed virtually uninterrupted following a generative first question or initial sharing of the interviewer's own biography. The interview proceeds until a point of 'narrative coda' has been reached where the participant feels content that they have had the space to 'unwind the story of their life' (Schutze 2007a:7 and Domecka et al 2012:22). This stage is then followed by questions to clarify the meaning of unclear areas and aspects of the biography and then more challenging questions to understand the 'why' aspects of the life story. For this research project I chose to use a topic guide (Appendix Two) during the interviews but also allowed participants to speak freely and at length with as few interruptions as possible. Thus the participants were able to convey the stories of their lives until a point of coda had been reached but through the use of a topic guide the focus and relevance of the interview was sustained. With some participants some helpful intervention was required during the course of the interview and with others the interview ran its course with fewer interruptions. Consistent with the grounded theory concept of constant comparison the topic guide was adapted in

the light of interview analysis and recognition of the need to focus-in more closely on some areas in subsequent interviews.

Biographical interviewing has synergies with social work practice since social workers are dealing with service users' biographies on a day to day basis (Kyllonen 2004). As a mental health social worker I would invariably take long life histories from service users at the start of interventions. Social workers also deploy interview skills when carrying out assessments, including the skills of empathy, exploration, listening, open-ended questioning, and purposeful intuition (Rogers 1967 and Egan 1994). Good interviewing is hard to do well and poor quality interviews are unlikely to produce information at a deep level. Conversely, good quality interviews can produce rich data, new insights and new interpretations even within familiar research territory. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:15) regard the research interview as a 'craft' that, if practised well becomes an 'art'. There are no hard and fast rules for interviewing, rather it's a process that relies heavily on the skill of the interviewer, in particular the ability to form on the spot judgements during the interview. Amongst the rules of thumb for good interviewing are thorough preparation and avoidance of academic language. The better the preparation the higher the quality of the knowledge produced during the interview interaction (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). In depth research interviewing also shares in common with social work the notion that people are experts in their lived experiences and are thus best placed to account for a particular experience or phenomenon (Darlington and Scott 2002). The biographical interviews in this project were conducted in either the participant's own home or in a suitable office environment. It was important to conduct the interviews at a place where the participants felt comfortable because of the sensitive nature of the information shared (Schutze 2007a).

Fourteen biographical interviews were conducted, two of which were pilot studies. The pilot studies have been included in the thesis because of the evolving nature of the inductive constructivist grounded theory approach and thus each interview has informed the focus of inquiry in the next interview, consistent with the concept of theoretical sampling and constant comparison. The pilot

involved two biographical interviews which were analysed using the constructivist grounded theory coding process. They were carried out in Germany and the UK in early 2012. There were two main results emerging from the pilot studies. Firstly, an initial realisation of how important the early years are regarding political identity formation. This ignited my curiosity as to whether this would be similar for a wider group of participants. Secondly, the pilot interviews had started with a generative question to prompt the participants to begin relaying their biography. It became apparent that using a generative question did not allow participants to settle down to the interview and it did not ease them into their biography. Having learnt from the experience of the pilot interviews all the subsequent interviews began with a generative statement whereby I gave a brief resume of my own biography thus allowing the participants to settle before embarking on the telling of their own biography. I conveyed my biography in a concise manner but avoided using jargon lest it would distract participants from giving a straightforward account of their lives. For example, I did not use the term 'political identity' during the brief biography. Using a biographical resume worked well by being a warmer approach and was preferable to a generative question in enabling participants to not only ease themselves into the interview but also open up in a spontaneous way about their own lives. The post pilot interviews were conducted during the summer and autumn of 2013 in various parts of the UK.

Once each interview was completed, an initial analysis was undertaken with a detailed and time-consuming full analysis happening later on after more interviews. The reason for this was that during the summer and autumn months interviews followed quite quickly after each other. It was surprising how many of the people invited to participate responded positively even from parts of the country and constituencies that had no link with me as the researcher. All participants were genuinely interested in the field of study and were more than open about their life histories and social work and political career trajectories. One early concern was whether the politicians, being public figures and used to being interviewed, would have 'prepared' answers since they may have given their biographies numerous times before. It would have been a problem had the politicians not engaged in the

interviews in a spontaneous and free flowing manner. This fear proved to be groundless since all the politicians talked openly and at great length.

During the biographical interview I drew upon interviewing skills, particularly those associated with the Rogerian perspective (Wilkins 2003), especially listening skills. Rogerian skills are particularly useful during the crucial early stages of an interview to establish trust and to allow the participant to relax. After the interview coda had been achieved I sought clarity through further directed questions and then sought to clarify the 'why' aspects within the life history through the use of more challenging questions, challenging being another recognised skill deployed in social work (Egan 1994). The biographical interviews were audio recorded, with the permission of the participants, and then fully transcribed. The first rule of transcribing is to make sure that the audio recorder is working. Thus for this project I learnt the importance of proficiency with new recording technologies and the need to reduce the risks of human error. In any research project transcribing is a step along the interpretative and analytical path. The transcript is a translation from an oral form of speech to a written form with the risk that a lot of meaning is lost or misrepresented in translation. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:178) view the transcript as an 'impoverished, decontextualised renderings of live interview conversations'. This highlights the importance of writing detailed fieldnotes after each interview to capture the impressions and non-verbal messages conveyed during the interviews. The initial impressions were recorded as soon as possible after the interview and more reflective thoughts were recorded within days of the interviews. For most of the interviews I used the help of a known and experienced transcriber who had been recommended to me within my academic institution. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) in most interview studies the transcribing is carried out by an experienced transcriber. The exception might be where the focus of study is on detailed linguistic or conversational analysis. Using an experienced transcriber freed-up time for interview preparation and analysis.

Researchers, particularly those new to the field, ponder the question of how many biographical interviews should I conduct? The best answer to this question is that it 'depends' (Charmaz 2012:21

and Flick 2012:27). Charmaz (2012) believes that a number of complex considerations come into play when deciding how many interviews to conduct. These are consistent with the emergent process of discovering about and interpreting participants' views about their experiences. The issue is also related to such questions as 'what do you need to know? And for what purpose is the research being conducted? Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:113) also address this issue by saying it 'depends' on the purpose of the study. Their general impression is that often too many participants are interviewed thus not allowing for enough time to prepare well beforehand and to perform detailed analysis after the interviews. Preparedness is particularly important since the quality of the interview has a huge bearing on the quality of the subsequent analysis. In this project I interviewed until I reached a state where further interviewing would be unlikely to produce any new knowledge or perspectives but would most likely verify already existing understandings.

#### **4.3.3 Sampling**

Sampling in this research project proceeded along theoretical lines (Alston and Bowles 2003) by identifying participants who would help to answer the research questions on the biographies of social workers who have a declared political identity. The identified sample helped to explore why some social workers develop into the public sphere of political action, for example as an elected politician or activist. It also helped to elucidate why this cohort may have been attracted into social work in the first place because of its social reformist values and why they might have been frustrated with social work in the neoliberal era and felt they needed to enter the sphere of political action. The criteria for participating in the research project were that participants had to be qualified social workers with a recognised qualification such as the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, the Diploma in Social Work or a social work degree and had worked as social workers either within the statutory or non-statutory sector. In fact, at one point in their careers all participants had worked within the statutory sector. The participants were no longer practising social workers but were politically active, such as within a political party, trades union or a political group or organisation.

The theoretical foundations of sampling in grounded theory is defined in terms of 'concepts, their properties, dimensions and variations' rather than samples which are representative of society as a whole (Corbin and Strauss 1990:8). Purposeful sampling is an important canon of grounded theory where the sample is determined by emerging concepts from previous interviews. Another dimension of sampling proceeding on theoretical grounds is convenience sampling where the researcher follows up leads on potential participants who may be available and accessible - this is regularly used within grounded theory research including this one (Morse 2007). Sampling continues until a point of theoretical saturation is reached where it would serve no useful purpose to carry out further interviews since no new perspectives are likely to emerge. Grounded theory also permits the use of a 'snowball' method where researchers invite associates and professional colleagues to join the study (Alston and Bowles 2003 and Schutze 2007a:3). Some participants were already familiar to me as social work academics and politicians and I contacted them first. Invariably they would suggest other people who were known to them and who also met the criteria for participation. Altogether nineteen participants were invited to take part in the research. Of these five declined the invitation for a variety of reasons. These reasons included not wanting to disclose personal information; being out of the country; too busy because of caring responsibilities; not able to devote the time necessary for a biographical interview; and my position of not living in their constituency. Of those who took part most were UK citizens except for one who was German. Two had an ethnic minority identity; eight were women and six were men. The gender balance of participants does not represent the dominance of social work by women. But it is a higher representation of women than there is at the UK Parliament and it is broadly in line with the devolved parliaments. The age of participants varied from mid-thirties to late-sixties. Since many had already had a long social work career before entering full-time politics it was natural that most participants would be older. The participants who were members of a political party were drawn from left leaning parties, namely the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru and one from the Socialist Workers Party. Despite efforts to find a participant from the Conservative Party through contacting Conservative Central Office and emailing one parliamentarian who seemed to meet the criteria, the



search proved fruitless. This very much reflects the class nature of the main UK political parties with very few potential participants within a party that has a high number of lawyers and business people. According to Criddle (2010) 40% of Conservative MPs elected in 2010 were from banking or business backgrounds.

#### **4.3.4 Participants**

The following is a brief factual description of the fourteen participants. They are presented in the order in which they were interviewed. All participants have been given a pseudonym:

**Erik** was born in Germany and is a social work academic and an active anti-nazi campaigner. He has practised as a social worker in the fields of older people and mental health. He is in his mid-50s.

**David** has been a social work academic and is currently a member of one of the devolved parliaments in the UK. As a social worker he practised in the fields of youth justice and children and families. He is in his late 50s.

**Gareth** has been a social worker in mental health and children and family services and is a member of one of the UK's parliaments. He is in his late 50s.

**Liz** has been a social worker in children and family services and is a councillor in one of the UK's city authorities. She is in her early 60s.

**Carl** has been a social worker in children and families' services and community work and was until 2010 a member of one of the UK's parliaments. Since leaving parliament he has been a strategic leader in a social work organisation. He is in his late 50s.

**Camila** has worked as a social worker in children and families' services and youth offending and is a full-time councillor in one of the UK's city authorities. She has a mixed ethnic identity. She is in her early 30s.

**Hugh** is an academic and has practised in social work as a welfare officer, youth worker and community worker. He is a councillor in one of the UK's city authorities. He is in his mid-50s.

**Huan** practised as a social worker in children and families' services and is a full-time councillor in one of the UK's city authorities. She has a mixed ethnic identity. She is in her mid-30s.

**Gillian** has been a social worker in children and families' services and community work. She has been a member of one of the UK's parliaments. She is in her late 60s.

**Stephen** has been a social worker in children and families' services and community work and is a member of one of the UK's parliaments. He is in his late 60s.

**Laura** has been a social worker in children and families' services, older people services, and community work. She is an academic and activist. She is in her early 50s.

**Karen** has been a social worker in mental health and community care and is an academic and activist. She is in her early 50s.

**Jan** has been a social worker in children and families' services and people with disabilities and is a member of one of the UK's parliaments. She is in her late 60s.

**Ann** has been a social worker in youth justice and is a member of one of the UK's parliaments. She's in her early 40s.

#### **4.3.5 Coding and analysis**

Coding is the 'fundamental' system of analysis in grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 1990:12). It encompasses many of the great canons of grounded theory methodology, including constant comparison, theoretical sampling, conceptualisation and the generation of substantive theory. Coding, according to Charmaz (2008:217) provides the 'analytical scaffolding on which to build' and drives the next stage of the research including subsequent interviewing. However, there are many variants of coding within grounded theory as a result of the evolving and contested nature of the methodology.

Glaser is seen as a traditional or orthodox grounded theorist in that he stayed closely to the principles set out in the classic 1967 text he co-authored with Strauss. He uses two types of coding, namely substantive and theoretical coding (Walker and Myrick 2006). Substantive coding is about identifying categories within the data and then identifying themes that emerge from the categories. Theoretical coding draws together the concepts that form the theoretical framework for the overall grounded theory (Holton 2007). Grounded theorists who adopt Glaser's coding system often do so because it is they claim 'altogether simpler to follow' (Urquhart 2013:107). Conversely, Strauss in association with his research collaborator Juliet Corbin, developed a different system of coding, namely open, axial and selective (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Open coding is where data is instilled into categories and subcategories. Consistent with grounded theory's inductivist nature, further fieldwork may be required at this stage to resolve ambiguities in the data. Axial coding is the stage where the fractured data is reconstructed by making analytical connections between categories and their sub-categories. This stage involves identifying causes, actions and strategies used to respond to phenomena (Blaikie 2000). The final stage of selection coding is where core categories are identified as examples of patterns that have emerged in the earlier stages (David and Sutton 2011).

Charmaz (2006 and 2014) added to the variation of coding methods with her constructivist grounded theory coding system, the coding process chosen for this research (Appendix Three). The constructivist process in this research has a two-step first stage coding analysis process, namely line-by-line coding and incident coding. The purpose of coding for Charmaz is to form descriptive categories for chunks of knowledge and to start conceptualising abductively about what the data may be saying. The second stage of coding for Charmaz is known as focussed coding where the first stage analysis is condensed to broader concepts thus aiding the process of theory emerging from data. The third stage is theoretical coding which assists theorising about the data. The theoretical codes are more general than focussed codes and help to 'tell an analytic story that has coherence' by identifying thematic links between focussed codes (Charmaz 2006:63). Within this approach it is more accurate to describe theories as being constructed rather than discovered (Flick 2009). It provides a rigorous and systematic

approach to data analysis, an area that has traditionally been viewed as a weakness of qualitative researchers who have tended to identify themes without demonstrable scientific analytical tools and methods. The negative side of the constructivist grounded theory coding process in this research was the amount of time it consumed and the patience required. However, these were rewarded through gaining confidence in a rigorous analytical process and fascination on seeing theoretical categories emerge from data.

Each interview transcript was subjected to both line-by-line coding and incident-to-incident coding. The line-by-line coding meant a deeper understanding of the interview since it necessitated very close attention to detail within the interview which helped to make sure that nothing important was overlooked in the participants' stories. Each page of the transcript was filled with codes written by the side of lines where there was a point of significance that needed to be drawn out as of analytical value. The codes were as brief as possible usually between two or three words. Some of the line-by-line codes were in vivo codes. In vivo codes are codes which use words or phrases used by participants in the interview and are widely utilised at this first stage coding analysis process (Bozeley 2013). Likewise, a similar initial process was carried out on the transcript but this time highlighting important incidents in the biography of participants. Again, like the line-by-line codes, the incident codes had analytical value and drew out something significant about the events in participants' lives as they related to political identity and social work and political career trajectories (Appendix Four).

After all the interviews had been subjected to line-by-line and incident-to-incident coding, a further coding process was undertaken, namely focussed coding. The focussed codes are built from the line-by-line and incident coding and take the analytical process one step further (Appendix Five). They conceptualise about large sections of the interview thus honing hundreds of line-by-line and incident-to-incident codes into a conceptual code that interprets the interview but keeps grounded in the data. The focussed codes derive from multiple interviews and thus build on patterns and recurring themes in the interview transcripts. In constructing focussed codes the transcripts were re-read numerous

times over a period of months. During this stage the field notes were particularly useful since they informed the process of conceptualising about data with their records of interview impressions and 'at the time' reactions to the interviews. Following focussed coding conceptual categories were identified and utilised as subheading themes in the three findings chapters (Appendix Six).

The next coding stage was theoretical coding. Theoretical codes are a group of codes developed from the focussed codes. They capture some of the main overarching themes that have emerged from focussed codes and each theoretical code contributes to a unified interpretation and understanding of the data being analysed. The theoretical codes point towards the final stage in the construction of the substantive constructivist grounded theory.

#### **4.3.6 Memoing**

Closely allied to coding within grounded theory methodology is the process of writing copious memos or field notes. Charmaz (2006:72) defines memos as 'informal analytical notes' that form a 'pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing draft of papers'. They are a bridge between data and emerging categories and concepts, the 'methodological link, the distillation process, through which the researcher transforms data into theory' (Lampert 2007:245). In this respect memoing is a creative and imaginative process where the researcher is engaged in the initial process of conceptualising about the data and starts to explicate and abstract the eventual theory. Throughout this research project I have written copious memos following biographical interviews with participants and presentations on the research to various groups and conferences. I have used the memos to capture impressions immediately after interviews by noting key comments and indications of any areas that might need revisiting during subsequent interviews with new participants. The way memos have been used in this research project is consistent with the important grounded theory principle that analysis begins 'as soon as the first bit of data is collected' (Corbin and Strauss 1990:6).

To give a flavour of these memos and their usefulness, I refer here to two examples which have been chosen because they identify areas that would be confirmed later on as of significance. For example, the very first participant, Erik, sparked the idea of how important early family nurturing would be as a theme, in this case the influence of his family in both 'positive' and 'negative' terms, was captured in this field note entry immediately following the interview:

'A significant emerging theme might be the direct influence of family members, especially in Erik's case. His father was a social democrat, trade unionist and these values seem to have been positive influences on Erik's part...Another theme is resistance, namely the reaction to negative inheritance, in this case...the effects of the Nazi socialisation on his father and how these influenced Erik's upbringing'.

Later on after interviewing participant eight, Huan, my field notes identified another dimension in the experiences of participants which would be explored further in the coding stage. In Huan's case my reflection was on how she was becoming frustrated with social work and saw more opportunities for bringing about social changes by being in full-time politics. For example, I wrote:

'She identifies that you can do so much in social work but can do more in local politics. There is a continuum between social work practice and becoming a social work politician'.

#### **4.3.7 Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter has explored the epistemological roots of anti-positivist research and located the research project as well as the researcher's self within that tradition, with particular reference to the social constructionist perspective. It has argued for the methodologies of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry for the research and the use of biographical interviews as the most appropriate method to capture the formation of declared political identity and to examine how political identity has been affected by changes in social work such as the advent and subsequent dominance of neoliberalism in the profession. Furthermore, biographical inquiry establishes the connections between early life experiences, the effects of neoliberalism and participants' political

identity since leaving social work. Biographical inquiry and constructivist grounded theory are closely aligned and both allow the voices of participants to be heard. Constructivist grounded theory analysis enables the participants' voices to be heard through giving careful attention to the transcript and facilitating theoretical concepts to emerge from the data. Moreover, this chapter has examined other important areas namely the research questions, sampling, theoretical sensitivity, reflexivity, coding and analysis, memoing, and ethics. The following three chapters present the findings from the field work with participants. The findings come as a result of using the combined methodology of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry as set out in this chapter.

## Chapter Five: Findings, Nurturing and Early Experiences

### 5.1 Introduction

The construction of political identity for the participants for this research study did not happen in a vacuum, but can rather be traced back to early childhood family nurturing and early life experiences. It is argued that their political identity is a product of their own position in time and place and is grounded in their own lived life experiences. For the participants, political identity formation was not an abstract concept but rather was linked to their real life experiences as was demonstrated in the interviews.

This chapter will identify the various themes in the nurturing and early life experiences of the participants and illustrate these themes using their own words from the biographical interviews. The themes are within two broad categories, namely the influence of family, such as whereby a political identity is nurtured within a family and maintained by participants for the full life course to date; and the influence of certain events which may be of a personal or external nature, which had a significant impact on the participants in the early years and helped to shape their political identity. Prior to conducting the interviews I had speculated on the significance of the nurturing experience in constructing political identity. Post interviews it became clear that the importance of the nurturing experience has been at the higher end of my expectations. Indeed, the nurturing experience has emerged as a rich area for investigating the source of political identity.

The chapter title reflects the constructivist grounded theory overarching theoretical code **early foundations** which has emerged from the data, namely from the biographical interviews themselves (See previous chapter). The focussed codes referred to in this chapter have been constructed directly from the constructivist grounded theory analysis process. The focussed codes are the third stage of the analysis process following on from line-by-line and incident-to-incident coding. The focussed codes will be presented in this and the other two findings chapters in bold print. In this chapter the



participants are discussed thematically rather than sequentially. The subheadings are key themes identified following the coding process and used to facilitate the presentation of the findings.

Since all the participants live unique lives the nurturing and early experiences do not occur in the same way and to the same degree for each participant. Each process is grounded in the unique life experiences and familial relationships that the participants find themselves in. These factors are associated with other factors such as spatial and temporal positioning, for example generational cohorts, socio economic status and the significance of a particular era in time. While the experiences of each of my participants are unique to their lives they share in common the importance of nurturing and early life experiences as sources of their life long political identities.

The realisation of the importance of the familial nurturing relationships and early life experiences started to emerge during the two pilot interviews that I conducted prior to embarking on the full research project. Consistent with the grounded theory perspective of constant comparison and theoretical sampling this became a justification to explore the nature and significance of nurturing and early life experiences in subsequent interviews. I was interested to investigate further the significance and the quality of the influence of nurturing and early life experiences. At this early stage I had speculated that the formation of political identity amongst my participants might have started later on in life or indeed after they had embarked on a social work career.

## **5.2 Conflicts and resistances**

The place of familial nurturing and early life experiences in the forming of participants' political identity had emerged in the first interview. The area of conflict and resistance is exemplified in the interview which was conducted with a political activist and social work academic who lives in Germany whom I initially met while on an Erasmus teaching mobility exchange in social work. In this interview the sources of political identity in early life are demonstrated in relation to the social and historical positioning of Erik growing up in West Germany during the post war years. He was born in the late

1950s, an era defined by post war reconstruction and a coming to terms with the disastrous era of the Nazi terror. The first significant incident was an awareness of his own father's political identity and the complex paradox entailed within this. Like so many ordinary people living in the first part of the Twentieth Century in Germany Erik's father had been socialised by the National Socialists. Thus he had been an admirer of Hitler and had assimilated the repugnant dogma of the Nazis into his own beliefs and value systems. However, a great paradox emerged since his father, after Erik was born, voted for the German Social Democratic Party and would even proudly wear a red tie on election day to demonstrate his left of centre allegiance. In my analysis of the interview I wrote the focussed code **ideological paradox** as a concept to describe Erik's experience of his father's political stance. The paradox was ongoing since although his father was a Social Democrat he continued to have the 'finger prints' of National Socialism. Erik put this point well when he says:

*...both was important for me - on the one hand the Social Democratic position and on the other hand there were the finger prints, the finger prints of National Socialism always considerable in also in my youth time.*

The second significant incident relates to the precise way in which his father's socialisation to National Socialism had a direct and dramatic effect on Erik's personal life. This occurred when his father would not allow him to continue his friendship with his best friend when he was about ten years old because his best friend had a physical disability. Erik conveys this account with eloquence and emotion:

*...my father didn't allow me to have a relationship to my closest friend when I was ten or eleven or something like that because he was physically handicapped. He was my closest friend and he said to me "I don't want you to play with him football or so" and asked him why? And he said because he is handicapped and Hitler would send him into the gas (ah?) um. He didn't like handicapped people because of his socialisation during the Nazi time and my first resistance I ever organised was the resistance against my father and against this, this rule that I must not have a contacts with the boy because he was handicapped and had an accident when he was*

*three or four years old. I loved him very much, [Name]. [Name] ...15 years later [Name] made a suicide.*

This was a critical incident in his life and may help to explain why he has been a long-standing campaigner against present day neo-nazis. He helps to lead community groups that openly oppose neo-nazis. During the interview Erik reflects for the first time on the degree to which his life has been characterised by active resistance to arbitrary authority and reactionary ideology, and the concept of **resistance** became another of my focussed codes in the analysis of this interview. His many acts of resistance recounted in the interview included organising against bullying employers and as a student a successful campaign against a professor who had Nazi sympathies, removing him from office. The other focussed codes derived from interview data in the analysis process and relating to Erik's early childhood experiences included, **torment**, relating to how he was often bullied at school by students who used Nazis rituals to humiliate and torture those they despised, such as being forced to move stones from one part of the school yard to another and then forced to move them back to exactly the same spot. And **power and privilege** reflecting his position as a child growing up in a working class and financially deprived household. The reality of power and privilege was drawn sharply into focus for him when at a meeting at his school to consider his future plans which his father also attended, Erik heard a teacher say to his father that university was not an option because of his class background. Erik recounted this experience during the interview in the following way:

*...my teacher said to my father and I heard this... your son is very good in school but don't give him the gymnasium (university), this is nothing for you, nothing for you, he mean nothing for your family because the gymnasium they were the sons and daughters but especially the sons of professionals not the working class.*

Thus the paradoxical experience of seeing his father voting for the Social Democratic left at the same time as seeing the lasting influences of the Nazi era on his father were a strong early influence on the political identity forming process for Erik as he negotiated these different forces in the reality of his

life. Likewise, the experience of power and privilege, and the continued traces of Nazism within the post war German society that he belonged to, were factors that impinged into his life and influenced the formation of his lifelong political identity. With regard to Erik I started on the process of conceptualising political identity as being linked to the processes of familial nurturing and early life experiences.

In contrast the sources of Carl's political identity were constructed by the influences he experienced growing up in a mining and fishing area in the North East of England which was in many ways an idyllic childhood. He became a Labour MP and then later on returned back to social work in strategic and campaigning roles. Among the influences on his development in the early years was the political music of Bob Dylan and the awareness of student protests in 1968 which led to Carl organising his first political campaign at the age of ten in his junior school yard. The protest was ostensibly about school dinners, but as he recounts it was more about being rebellious at school, a possible reaction to the strict moral code of his grandmother. **Rebellious child** was one of the focus codes used when analysing the interview data:

*I mean I loathed school dinners anyway, even if they had been absolutely wonderful, I would have loathed them anyway. But, led by a lad in the year above us called [Name], I was his side-kick and we organised a demo in the school yard 'Demand our money back' for the school dinners. And that was the first of it really and I think I became a, sort of, rebel through school, after really enjoying junior school in this little village.*

Later on he stood as a candidate for the School Boys Alliance in a school election at the time of the 1970 General Election. However, his early attempt at a political career 'crashed' when he alienated the girls by saying his party was 'just lads', an important lesson for his subsequent political career. Recalling his school days Carl recognises the rebellious side that he developed during this time and how it has prepared him for a political career:

*I think I enjoyed rebellion, I think that is what I learned from marching up and down the school yard at the age of 10. I always enjoyed a good argument or a good debate and always I think being able to hold my own in a discussion. And I was really quite a shy person as well. And I think... Always been quite a shy person but actually feel... I suspect my grandmother is at the heart of this, that it is no good, you can't be shy, you have got to stand up for yourself and you know, if I see something that I don't like then I always speak out about...*

### **5.3 Political upheaval of the times**

Five participants conveyed the importance of world events on their political identity development, such as the events of the 1960s in the case of David and Gareth. David was the second participant for the pilot study and is a highly respected social work academic and an elected representative within one of the devolved legislative bodies of the United Kingdom. His background differs significantly from my first participant since he was brought up in rural Wales at roughly the same time as my first participant. Would his nurturing experience and early life experience inform his political identity development? This was the questions triggered in my mind following the first interview. The nature of the significance of nurturing and early life experiences is qualitatively different for David. The main focus for him was the influence of activities in school, his academic interest and an acute awareness of the events and upheaval that were going on in Wales and beyond during the 1960s.

The wider international dimension of political upheaval was followed closely by David, in particularly some of the high profile events in US politics. These events made an impression on the young school boy who was already starting to engage with current affairs, particularly as a result of the influence of his socialist head teacher who would go through the news stories in the Daily Mirror in the school's morning assembly. The school had an ethos of following major news stories and my participant has a vivid memory of the children being brought into the assembly to listen to Ian Smith declaring UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence) in Rhodesia in 1965:

*...I went to a primary school where the head teacher I think looking back seems to me now a very straight forward [town] Socialist... not that I would have known in that way then but we started the day in junior school with everybody in the school hall with him going through the Daily Mirror, that's how assembly started so you would sort of made aware really of what the big events that were going on in the world were. I remember very vividly the whole school being brought into the assembly hall to listen to Ian Smith declaring UDI... And of course they were you know very very vivid international events because that is the year of the assassination of Martin Luther King, riots in Los Angeles, the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the Chicago convention, you know the riots at the Democratic convention in Chicago, Mayor Daley, all of those, those were really really vivid things for me.*

David was also influenced by his awareness of the upheaval that was going on during the 1960s in Wales. This brought about the focused code **political upheaval**. This is exemplified by him describing how he remembers road signs being brought into the school yard as a part of the civil disobedience campaign in the 1960s in Wales for bilingual road signs. At the time the road signs in Wales were in English only and a campaign was formed to have the Welsh place name also included on the signs as recognition of the equal status of the Welsh language and the need to protect it as a minority language.

In the case of Gareth, who was the first person to be interviewed following the pilot study, and who is a representative in one of the UK's parliaments, what comes across strongly from his early life experiences is the influence of the historic context of the 1960s, as a backdrop to his upbringing. The 'events' as they were known were brought vividly into his consciousness as his brother spent time in radical Paris in 1968. The focussed codes that I used to analyse this section of the interview were **fearful times** and **satire culture** conveying the fact that the 1960s was both an exciting time and a time of great concern for him. He vividly recalls how the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 had made a fearful impression on him. He has since campaigned against the Iraq war and anti-war campaigning has been a theme of his political career:

*I remember being scared as a child thinking that we were going to be blown up...I remember this great fear of the bomb, and then when I was at school, I wasn't a member of CND, but I cut the CND symbol on my satchel (My translation from Welsh).*

The culture of the 1960s extended beyond the capital cities and into the towns and villages throughout the country even as far as the small town where Gareth lived on a council estate. He was affected by the sense of expectation in the 1960s that radical change was possible. In 1964 a Labour Government had been elected promising to bring about radical change both in technology and in social attitudes. It was a more optimistic time following the years of post war reconstruction which had also been a part of Gareth's background since his father had fought in the war and the family had been allocated a house on a post-war mixed council estate. There was a culture of satire exemplified by the television programme 'That Was the Week That Was' which he remembers watching. He remembers his older brother who had moved to London returning home with copies of the satirical magazine 'Private Eye' and family discussions. He also recalls being given a copy of a collection of Che Guevara's writings and reading all four hundred pages of them. Like David, being brought up in Wales, he was aware of the growth in protests for language rights which was a particularly Welsh expression of the radicalness of the times. Being brought up during the 1950s and 1960s demonstrates as well as any era the influence of the historical events of the time on the early construction of political identity for Gareth.

In contrast, many participants were influenced by the formative political events of the 1980s. This was the case for Ann who is an elected representative in one of the devolved parliaments of the UK. Formative memories for her were the miners' strike and the Greenham Common peace camp of the 1980s. The miners' strike was for many people about saving working-class communities and Ann was only too aware of the effects unemployment and fewer work opportunities were having on her peers. Her friends were on Manpower and YTS work schemes since there was a lack of permanent employment. It is not surprising that there was a reaction by her family against the ruling class of the time:

*Yeah, I remember Thatcher was a fairly large feature in our house and she was a proper hate figure, proper hate, you know. I remember my parents used to get upset when she was on the TV and saying things, shouting at the TV and things like that but not really knowing exactly what. That was probably when the miners' strike was going on really.*

#### **5.4 Family poverty**

Being a witness to the harsh experiences of his parents' lives was a key early influence on Stephen who comes from a very ordinary 'monochrome' working class setting in the Midlands. His father had served and been injured in the Second World War and worked in a tough environment in an iron foundry. One of his earliest recollections was of his mother washing his father's vest which was full of iron dust. His father died before he reached sixty years of age and his mother worked as a school cleaner. Stephen vividly remembers how the kitchen cupboard was bare by Thursday evening of every week. His father was a working class Tory and had an interest in current affairs and there were plenty of opportunities to discuss these with his son. This was usually after tea time when he had recovered from the day's work in the foundry which Stephen described as 'the jaws of hell':

*When my brother and I got to be teenagers we started getting after him about what have the Tories ever done for you. And so in the end I think he became a Labour voter. But the important thing was we had lots of discussions about current affairs and I, even at the age of 14, remembered thinking that my parents were classical salt of the earth, both of them had fought in the War, served in the War and my father was badly injured several times and ended up losing his lung and what have you, even so, he went to work back in an iron foundry.*

Significantly Stephen developed awareness into how poorly regarded by society his parents were, I have called this awareness by the focussed code **secondary insight** because it was Stephen who had an insight into the reality of how his parents were valued by society and not his parents themselves.



For instance, his father became seriously ill with a collapsed lung but there was no sick pay available to him:

*And they, you know, brought us up to be decent citizens, they were honest. And yet even as a 14 years old, you could see that in our society they were of absolutely no account. And I concluded that politics was a means by which you could change society, hopefully sometimes for the better. Based really on my perception of, you know where they were. They were very happy with their lot I have to say, I mean there was never any kind of feeling that they didn't feel as if they had been badly treated by society but that was my view of it really.*

The experiences of viewing the way that society had treated his parents were the source of his left wing political identity. He viewed the ruling class as fallible and getting on with looking after itself and had no regard for a whole class of people such as his parents. One poignant incident during his childhood demonstrated this perspective. His brother died at two years of age but when his father had asked a local clergyman to perform a baptism on the child before he died the request was rejected. Stephen's understanding of this was that his parents recognised the fallibility of the ruling elite but because they were locked into their position in society they were unable to do anything about it. To reflect this, the focussed code **fallible ruling class** was given to this segment of the interview.

Similarly, Ann was brought up in a traditional working-class and indeed post-industrial area with high levels of poverty. Her father was made redundant during the 1980s and experienced long-term unemployment. Her mother worked part-time and like most families in the area her family lacked financial resources. Her mother would worry about buying shoes for Ann and her sister. She recalls living for many years in a house with two separate carpets on either end of the room because there was not enough money to have one right the way through. Even so the people in her area lived proud lives despite the poverty. Most would be quiet about their situation and everyone was 'pretty much in the same boat' and faced considerable difficulties:

*I didn't realise until afterwards that I am pretty sure that my mother spent a lot of the time going without food you know in order for the rest of us to eat, and she always pretended she wasn't hungry but in retrospect, I think it was because there wasn't enough and she would say, oh I will have mine later when you have all gone out, and I don't think she did you know. So things like that. But like I say, at the time, when you are living in that experience you don't really feel it or realise that you are any different to anyone else you know.*

## **5.5 The smell of poverty**

While some of the participants had encountered poverty within their own families, others encountered poverty in the society in which they lived. The importance of places is brought out in the experience of Hugh who lived in different parts of the country as a child. He is a councillor in a large city and an academic. Although his parents were Welsh and had been brought up in Wales, he was brought up in various parts of England. His father moved because of his job and as a result Hugh encountered social and economic differences from area to area, and being particularly influenced by the poverty that he encountered as a child in Staffordshire:

*So I think we were brought up as kids with this sort of social awareness and I think if you do move around, I heard Faye Weldon talking about this but if you do move around you kind of become a sociologist and you become attuned... or an ethnographer perhaps, you become attuned to ah, you spot the differences. And also as a kid, you want to fit in so you think, you know, I am not going to press those buttons or whatever. So I think I took to the social sciences quite easily possibly as a kind of result of that upbringing. But absolutely, Staffordshire was definitely my first real encounter with what I would call poverty, yes.*

He vividly recalls the poverty that he encountered amongst the community in Staffordshire, a place where he felt happy as a child and made good friends with the children who were considerably less well off than his own family. The focussed code derived at through the analytical process of this part

of the data is **sociologist by mobility**. The perspective of **sociologist by mobility** was echoed by other participants who had moved to live in different parts of the country, such as Huan who had been internationally adopted and moved into a middle class community in northern England. Hugh's school experiences in Staffordshire were more positive than his experiences elsewhere since he enjoyed the social participation of school and having many friends in what he saw as a more democratic environment:

*But there was a huge contrast between Staffordshire and Wiltshire in terms of, I mean really my first experience of meeting people who were really poor was in Staffordshire and that was... I mean it had a smell to it, you know, there were a lot of families moved from the slum clearances in Birmingham at that time. We are talking about the sixties now. So I met poor people really for the first time... I had heard about poor people because my parents talked about this, my parents went through the thirties, my father fought in the Second World War so I knew about... I knew the narratives of, kind of, poverty and struggle because these were things that were talked about, the War was absolutely defining but so too was what was before the War and then what came afterwards.*

## **5.6 Family values**

Parental influence can subtly contribute to the source of a participant's early political identity construction. Liz stated during the interview that she could not think of any direct family influences on her own political identity but during the course of the interview she identified a number of important indirect influences. She has her roots in a large city in the North West of England and is a left-wing councillor in the city where she currently lives. The influences came especially from her mother whom had herself left school at 16 because of poverty. There was a theme in the family that education was good and people should not be disadvantaged because of their background. In those days, education was something that the parental generation had missed out on. Her parents managed to qualify as teachers later on in life after having done office work previously. Among my focussed codes after

analysing the interview was **value of education** reflecting something that was held deeply within the family. Liz's mother was most influential because of her progressive views, particularly on women's rights and anti-racism:

*My mother was also quite keen on women's rights, I suppose. I know when she went to college she was doing a bit of, kind of, unqualified teaching before that and then went to college and she didn't tell my Granddad because he wouldn't have approved of a woman, you know, going out to work and stuff like that... But yes, they were certainly very anti-racism and things like that. My mother, sort of, defended women's rights and things like that but didn't translate into any kind of socialist politics.*

Jan echoes the importance of parental nurturing in her biography when she refers to her mother as the 'formative' influence in her life. Her mother campaigned for the 'have-nots' and was an innovative teacher with children with disabilities:

*...we were in our family doing things and sticking up for people- that was quite important.*

In contrast, the significant moral influence within Carl's family was the authoritarian figure of his Grandmother who sought to mould her grandson and implant in him a sense of civic duty. She represented a strongly liberal Church of England wing within the family. Both his parents were teachers and his grandparents lived nearby thus allowing for access to Carl and the opportunity to influence. She used to do this to instil in her grandchild the perspective that he could achieve anything he set his mind to:

*And, you know, we used to go around, we went to Granny on Saturday and Grandma on Sunday and she used to pretty well try and indoctrinate us I think. But on the lines of, nothing is impossible, you can do anything, nothing is impossible; don't ever say anything is impossible. And I used to come away after those, sort of, sessions wondering, of course things are impossible – that's ridiculous. But it was a very strong, sort of, didactic approach that she took.*

*She had four grandchildren but we were the two most immediately accessible ones, so that was that.*

She was a notable person within the local community and he has a very vivid memory of her speaking publically which made a positive impression on him:

*...but I remember being very proud of her and she opened the local church bazaar or something and I was really proud of my Grandmother standing up there and making a speech, I must have been eight or nine or something, I thought oh that is really something good.*

Moreover, the construction of political identity for Karen had its source in her upbringing in a Christian household where her father was a Minister and an elected councillor. Her father served as an independent councillor for eighteen years first in England and then in Scotland. He felt that being involved in the council was part of his Christian duty. This sense of Christian duty and values was transferred onto Karen and informed the formation of her political identity:

*...but I think also I have always had this sense about... and it is from Christian, you know, that is where its roots are. It is about respecting people, trying to support the person whose voice is not being heard, who is being discriminated against. But that also fits in with where I sit politically now.*

Being brought up in a manse where her father was both an active Christian and local politician resulted in her being exposed to numerous formative experiences. The focussed code **communitarian nurturing** was arrived at when analysing this section of the interview. She recalls people calling at the house to discuss some of their pressing needs, such as a need for social housing when her father was the housing convenor for the local council. Her father would visit a nearby prison which housed very dangerous criminals and she recalls some of the prisoners' wives staying over at their house because they had travelled far to visit and had no accommodation. Her parents had also been pioneers of a Samaritan group locally. Early influences also included watching Question Time on television with her

father and agreeing on most things in the programme. She also recalls having discussions with her two sisters on how to respond to men of the road who came calling at the manse as they did at particular times of the year. Karen would respond by making them a sandwich while one of her sisters would tell them to go away and the other would give them something different to eat. She also recalls the darker side of living in a manse, namely the parish bereavements, troubled families and the church power games that involved characters within the congregation. Even though she did not start to theorise about politics and develop a mature political position until much later on in her life, the roots of her political identity, like all participants, had been set in her nurturing and early years.

### **5.7 Early political socialisation**

The experience of being brought up within a politically active household was quite extensive amongst the participants. For example, being in a politically active household introduced Camila to the world of politics early on in her life, captured in the focused code **activist nurturing**. Brought up in a working class family amongst her earliest memories are of her father, who was a committed trade unionist, regularly being on strike. In retrospect, she can recognise how great an influence her father was on her. Both had similar personalities and temperaments:

*And I think that as my dad got more political and more aware and interested then I probably did as well without even realising it.*

One of the ways in which her dad became more political was in developing a black workers' group within his trade union. As this happened he became more politically active and more aware of his identity and how he had been suppressing this in the past. This chimed with her experiences of racism at school where she was bullied. The school was all-white and in her early childhood Camila was brought up 'to be as white as possible'.

Being brought up in a different type of political household was the case with Gillian whose father was a councillor and subsequently elected as an MP in the mid-1960s. She is a veteran politician whose

career included ministerial experience at a high level. My focussed codes for this segment of the interview included **politically nurtured household** and **imbued social responsibility**. From early on Gillian was imbued with a sense of civic responsibility:

*I was brought up in a household that was both political but also massively interested in social policy and issues and my mum and dad were both school teachers. My father was on the local council and he brought us up that we had a responsibility to be involved in the public realm, we would call it these days, that we, you know, we just had a responsibility.*

The household was strongly Labour and Methodist. Her grandparents lived in the same house and she vividly recalls political discussions between her father and her grandfather and believes these to have been formative in her own development:

*My mum taught within [Town] but her parents lived with us; and that was always important. I always thought that was very important in terms of my development that, you know, my granddad would have lots of arguments with my dad about politics, they got on extremely well but he would have lots of debates.*

The arguments revolved around the decisions her father had to take as Chair of Education on the council regarding taking the town into the comprehensive system. She can also remember faith leaders who had a vested interest in the school system coming to the house to discuss the changes. She would also visit people with her father in his capacity as a representative. The family through the United Nations Association welcomed people to their home from all over the world and she has clear childhood memories of a visitor from Africa:

*And I remember in our street, people had never seen a black person before and a friend from two or three doors down wanted to come in and see the sheets after he had been in; and had any of them got coloured. I was mortified by this because I had been brought up where we had talked*

*about international affairs and all the rest of it but it was an important lesson for me too that many of my friends and our neighbours knew nothing about this.*

Gillian explains her feminist perspective was ignited when she had a meeting with her headmaster who insisted that she should become a teacher because it 'is the right thing for a woman to do' since she will get the school holidays to look after her children when they are off school. Later on in her political career she became a supporter of all-women shortlists for parliamentary seats and has mentored young women politicians:

*People always think it was just my mum and dad being school teachers that put me off being a school teacher, but actually I was so angry that the head should say that sort of thing about girls you know, this was just at the beginning of feminism and thinking about feminism. So I was determined that I wasn't going to be labelled in that way and that therefore I was going to do something else.*

The whole family would demonstrate together as part of the anti-apartheid movement in the town centre which 'horrified' her school teachers. Thus there were political threads going through her upbringing and socialisation into a political milieu, as well as exposure to arguments and personalities which as she says 'just affects you'.

In contrast, the construction of political identity through political nurturing and an awakening to political literature was the experience of Laura. Her nurturing within a Scottish middle class family with strong working class roots and traditions provided a creative ambiance and freedom for her to develop and discuss political perspectives. Hers was a socialist family and although her mother worked as a teacher the family was not well off financially since her mother had to bring her and her three siblings up alone and also cared for her grandfather who lived in the same household. Her mother remarried an Englishman who was a strong left leaning Scottish nationalist but was made redundant soon after the marriage and took on the role of primary carer within the family. One of the focussed codes used



in analysing the interview was **inherited political identity**, reflecting the depth of socialist conviction which had characterised the family for generations and to which she subscribed to:

*I come from a long line of socialist claiming left leaning people. My maternal grandfather was a card-carrying Communist, a lifelong member of the Communist Party, visited Russia in the thirties and forties and very, you know, convinced by Lenin and Stalin until he became less convinced as all the facts came out. But he didn't actually... he remained a member of the Scottish Communist Party all of his life. And from his influence, I suppose to my mother, and from my mother to me. My mother never joined the Communist Party but certainly was also of that, what would be I supposed deemed now as Far Left, in her leanings. But I suppose all around the house there were the books. My grandpa used to take me to the Marxist book shop in Glasgow in Clydeside when I was quite small. I remember sitting in the dark and the books all around me and you know, kind of, wondering what it was.*

Laura traces the source of her political identity to her early upbringing experiences and the influence of her family where political thinking and lively discussions were encouraged. Her early experiences were rich in family tales of activism, such as her mother's direct action in painting pillar boxes with 'Ban the Bomb' slogans during the anti-nuclear arms campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s. Amongst her earliest memories are the miner's strike of the 1970s when she recalls sitting at home in the dark and cooking on her grandfather's gas camping stove with candles lighting the house because of the power cuts. She recalls how her grandfather and mother would be very much aligned with the miners and with other working groups who went on strike during the industrial upheavals of the 1970s. She recalls having discussions about the concept of the 'family wage' at school and at home, with her mother arguing strongly against a family wage because of her feminist views. In the interview Laura reflects on how she reacted in a positive way to the political nurturing while others might have reacted more negatively:

*I suppose people would call it indoctrination almost, you know, because the left leaning sentiments in my family at the time were very powerful. And maybe some children could have actually come out very much the other way, as a reaction to it. But it just felt absolutely right...*

Among the other early influences on Laura were a number of cultural outlets, such as the book 'Black Like Me', which made a 'huge' impression with its account of a white man masquerading as a black man and going undercover in the Deep South in the 1960s (Howard 1962). The extent of racism in the Deep South was 'deeply affecting' and made Laura reflect on how 'very white' her own upbringing had been. Another influential book that she read when she was about fifteen was 'The Women's Room' which is a classic feminist novel about women coming of age and standing up to men and asserting their rights (French 1978). The experience of reading both texts was aligned to the process of political identity formation for her:

*...so there was that kind of awakening, I suppose, of recognition of racism and sexism, kind of almost at the same time, which was very powerful for me as a teenager.*

One formative incident during school days was a homophobic attack on one of Laura's friends who had been out as a gay person from the start of adolescence. On one occasion she remembers a cream cake being squeezed into his face by a girl and being called a derogatory name. Even the teachers thought the incident was funny but Laura was horrified:

*And it sounds like I was maybe an uptight, you look back and you think maybe I sound a bit pompous but I was always outraged by these things, you know, how could people not see that this was wrong. You know, and I suppose that has always stayed with me, you know, how can people not see the bedroom tax is wrong. And for me it is quite clear cut and it always has been, you know. I have a certainty that there are just some things that are right and some things that are wrong. And I always felt that way at school, you know.*

Laura's left wing political identity has remained constant throughout her life course and during the interview she recounted how it has always been from the beginning an important part of whom she is and what she does:

*...I just always knew I would be active, I would be political. I went on CND marches with my mum, I lay down in George Square, you know, I was fourteen and got dragged off. My mum was dragged off George Square very recently at an anti-bedroom tax meeting, at 76. It was just always there really.*

Locality and family has a significant impact on the early source of political identity formation. Jan was brought up in a very working class area where there had been a Labour voting tradition for many years. She has been a councillor and an elected representative in two of the UK's national and devolved parliaments. She belongs to the radical tradition of the area in which her family was located and views some of her early influences as 'inherited' from the political tradition of the area. Among the focussed codes arrived at after analysing the interview was **social justice nurturing** and **imbued social concern**. Her family had close involvement in helping the disadvantaged members of the community:

*Obviously, being born and brought up in [Area], most people are Labour so that is the general sort of tradition. So my family was Labour but not party political Labour in terms of campaigning or anything like that but my family has always been involved with fighting for the have-nots, shall we say. Which are obviously a link with social work and a link with Labour in terms of working for disadvantaged people.*

Her father had worked in an approved school for disadvantaged children until his premature death when Jan was seven years old. Her mother was also a teacher and taught children with learning disabilities. She describes her mother as a 'formative influence' on her development. She was 'pioneering' in her work with children with disabilities, being the first person to take the children out

of the hospital environment where they lived and into town on a bus once a week to the swimming pool:

*And I used to go as a child with her and doing that and that had a very strong influence on me really because you could see the way that they were, you know, treated at that time and, I mean, things have improved a lot but not as much as they should have probably now.*

Her mother pioneered a gypsy encampment and started an alternative school for gypsy and travelling children. She would take the children on trips to the seaside which Jan remembers as being a lot of fun as well as learning experiences. This was the root of her career long activism in support of gypsy children including chairing parliamentary groups on gypsies and travellers. Recalling these events my participant reflected on how they had 'defined how I look at society'.

## **5.8 Awareness of difference**

Political identity constructed in terms of defining one's whole life as a political act was the experience of Huan, who is a city councillor. It is interesting to note, as she identifies below, that she only became aware of this retrospectively:

*Yeah, I think I feel like I have lived a political life. But when you are living it you don't realise maybe. So, I was internationally adopted from [Country] by an English and Scottish family and I grew up in [Town] in [County]. I had a brother, so I was living in quite a predominately white, sort of, middle class town. And even though at the time, probably I wasn't so aware that it was. Because when you are in that kind of family, it is just normal isn't it?*

She was internationally adopted and lived in a white family which seemed normal to her at the time. The focussed codes derived at in examining her interview included **living political life** and **retrospective insight**. Her family were well off and she had some of the advantages of a middle class upbringing such as music lessons and encouragement to read and go on to university. However, during

her upbringing she experienced 'horrendous racism' and has 'strong memories' of racist events outside the family:

*But I think if you are an ethnic minority, growing up in the UK, you are more... well you are different and so your life is a bit more political, do you know what I mean? Because you encounter you know, forms of oppression, don't you sometimes, whether that be structural or just on an everyday... So yeah, I think that probably maybe on an unconscious level wanting to get into a forum to be able to say that or I can see it in other children that I work with, it is like an unsaid thing, an unsaid kind of connection that you can have with people. And I really think that I could help other people to rise...*

Huan's experience of difference was shared by Camila who was brought up by her family in a large city. At that time the convention for black families was to conform to the dominant white culture. She recounted in the interview how her father became more involved in black trade unionist groups and started resisting the one-way assimilation route that had hitherto been the norm.

### **5.9 Significant other**

One significant formative influence on Ann was her history teacher whom as she says 'sparked my interest in politics'. He challenged conventional thinking, particularly about the assumptions of Britishness and Britain's place in the world and challenged the children to think about these issues from a different perspective. The focused code used to summarise this section of the data was **challenging teacher**. In retrospect, Ann is able to evaluate the effects on her of the influence of her teacher and how important it was as a source of her political identity construction:

*And actually, having a British Nationalist sentiment challenged on a fairly consistent basis, I think, was very good for my political development, although at the time I wasn't aware that was happening at all of course. But it was that standard, this is the way things are you know, we fought the War and we are the good guys always aren't we approach to education, which*

I had always had up until then. He turned that around and really made you think about some of the things that you took as read and I would be forever grateful to him for that to be honest.

I think it was a really good educational experience. It was being taught to think, you know.

In the case of David, the significant other was a community councillor. Although his own family was not particularly politically active, a formative experience was the exposure to the life of a family of a school friend. The school friend's father was a local Labour councillor and this made a great impression on my participant as he recounted in the interview:

*A close friend of mine who lived nearby, his father was a Labour councillor and we'd spend time in each other's houses but when I went to his house I was always very struck by the sort of community role really which councillors played and how whenever you went there, there would be people knocking on the door and looking for help in various sorts of ways. That side of politics I remember being very struck by even when I was very young.*

The focus code I constructed in analysing this section of the data was **community politics** reflecting how this concept had been instrumental for David in constructing his own political identity by valuing the role of the representative and how they are able to help constituents with problems. For him the early conceptualisation of the role of a politician was as a helper who could work for improvement in people's lives.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the overarching theoretical theme of nurturing experiences of participants can be summarised. There are many formative and diverse influences during the early years and during childhood on the participants. For example, the influence of place and time, such as being brought up in an economically deprived area, and the effects of events, such as the enormous social and political upheavals of the 1960s; witnessing the poverty of parents and the indifference of the political establishment; the experience of discovering literature and the influence of teachers; experiencing

subtle and sometimes not so subtle parental and family influences; bequeathed political identity within families; the emergence of idealism and convictions; the working through paradoxes and dilemmas when faced with conflicting messages within families; and the experience of difference, such as being a member of a minority group. Some of the influences were explicit and others more subliminal. What comes across strongly is the importance of these early years in developing social reformist and social justice values. It is clear that the early years and the childhood years are an important time when considering the construction of political identity amongst this cohort of qualified social work participants.

## **Chapter Six: Findings, Social Work Career**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The focus of the previous chapter was the place of nurturing and early experiences on the process of political identity construction in the case of the fourteen participants who took part in this research project. Both the previous findings chapter and this chapter argue that the development of political identity is a lifelong process for the participants, a key argument in this thesis. This second findings chapter explores what has been discovered in the social work career trajectory from an analysis of the biographical interviews. There are two overarching theoretical codes derived from the constructivist grounded theory analysis process that are relevant to the content of this second findings chapter, namely **force for change** and **residualizing social work**. The way that participants viewed social work as a means of making a difference and as representing their own values is represented by the theoretical code **force for change**. However, in their social work careers participants became less positive about neoliberal approaches and new managerialism having an apparent significant impact, reflected in the theoretical code **residualizing social work**. All the subheadings in this chapter are key themes derived from analysing the data, namely the biographical interviews (See chapter four).

The discussion that follows explores the relationship between participants' political identity formation and their social work career trajectory. It will examine the participants' experience of social work, including the skills of social work that have helped them in their political careers and their reasons for leaving social work and adopting a career in politics. It will explore the relationship between their social work career and their political activism and how these are related to each other. It will also demonstrate the participants' sense of disillusionment with social work, particularly during the last few years, and how they felt the urge to work for their social reformist values and beliefs within a wider political context.

### **6.2 Serendipity and motivation**



Considering the strength of participants' social work identity, it is interesting to note that so many of the participants entered social work, at least on the surface level, almost by chance. For instance, it was an unplanned route into social work for Huan due to a chance encounter with her friend's sister who worked as a social work assistant. The focussed code derived from analysing this section of the data was **opportune links** to reflect how chance encounters and incidents can help to steer the life course and career choice:

*... I think it was from conversations with certain people like my friends, a really good friend, we got friendly at (Employer), her sister worked in (Town) as a social work assistant and I think it was, well there is job coming up and you know...And then I just started at (Town), you know, that was quite tough but I felt I was good at it and felt I could connect with the people and then I started the MA social work and it was like that really. It really wasn't like thought through or complex or...*

However, since Huan regarded herself as having lived a 'political life' by being an international adoptee, the significance of the chance encounter is contextualised within the confines of social work being aligned to her values and outlook on life. In the interview she described this time of her life when she became a social work assistant as 'a voyage of discovery'. Previously she had an administrative job within a private company which made ends meet for her and her young child. While on her social work course a whole new world opened up for her and she attended every lecture including lectures that were going on in the wider university, such as in the politics department. Despite her passion she only practised as a social worker for a brief period of time before becoming a full-time councillor.

David had also entered social work for pragmatic reasons. His original plan of studying abroad was scuppered by the oil crisis of the mid-1970s which hugely increased the financial costs of living and studying in the country which he had desired to visit. Social work was an obvious route considering his social value base but even so the role of serendipity had a part to play since the trigger for entry into the social work profession was a newspaper advert. He had not planned to enter social work and

indeed one wonders what might have happened had the advert been for teaching or another public sector post:

*... I hadn't thought of it beforehand or anything like that. I saw the advert, responded to it. Once you start doing that I think you do begin to plan because you think about where you are going to go ...But I had no long term plan to end up in social work.*

Liz echoes the importance of chance occurrences when she describes in the interview living in a student house where one of the other occupants was on the social work course. She had moved into the house on her own without knowing the other occupants. She had started on a teacher training course but dropped out of this later. It is interesting to note that talking with the student social worker was important in directing Liz into social work. A year later she started her social work course. The importance of this encounter was captured in the analysis process for this section of the interview with the focussed codes **chance happening** and **pivotal year** to reflect the significance of the year spent in the student house. Interestingly, she also remembers having had a chance encounter with a social worker while hitch-hiking years earlier.

However, despite the apparently important role of serendipity in directing many of the participants towards a social work career, such a move would not have been successful was it not for the motivation and a sense of passion that the participants had about making a difference to society through helping others. Numerous participants expressed that they viewed a social work career as a way of helping people and as a gradual move in the right direction regarding what they wanted to do with their lives. This desire to help was captured in the interview analysis process by the focussed code **joy of helping**, reflecting the sense of enthusiasm and motivation participants had towards their social work role. For example, Hugh's value base was consistent with a public service career having been brought up to take civic responsibilities seriously. Through a link with someone he knew he got a job with Barnardo's in a community development project. Many of the children had backgrounds in care or had come to the

attention of social services or had been at odds with the law. Already interested in politics he thought of social work as a role where he could make a small contribution to changing society:

*So whilst I was committed to you know, changing society, I thought in the meantime, here are young people and families who have got real needs and we can actually do something. In a kind of, muddled kind of way but we can actually make some small differences to people, you know, that can make a big difference. So that appealed to me, I like working with people as well, I am interested in people.*

Camila echoes the view of a social work career as a way of helping people, in her case children who had been disadvantaged by poverty and social exclusion. This is evidenced in the interview when she describes her motivation to help the children she encountered in her social work role:

*I could see a lot of poverty and I just really enjoyed trying to help people. It is kind of as simple as that but using the resources that I had available to myself in that my role just helped young people on the right path as much as possible really.*

### **6.3 Community engagement**

During the two pilot interviews an interesting perspective arose which would be explored further in subsequent interviews. Erik demonstrated a clear commitment for a type of social work practice that would incorporate his political values and beliefs. The focussed codes **social engagement** and **agent of change** resulted from analysing this segment of the interview. His first social work post was within community work which he regarded as a 'political field of social work', in particular since it involved organising people into associations:

*So we offered the possibility of the people to come together to found self-help groups and support groups and to found interest groups. The idea was, for me the concept was (to) realise more basical democracy and culture coming from the people, not top down culture but bottom up culture. It was a big movement of that time in the 80s in Germany and a lot of these*

*organisations were founded also here in [Town]. It was one of the centres of this social cultural social work. I don't know whether you heard about it? One message was culture coming from all and culture for all the people, just a basic democratic orientated idea of culture...everybody is an artist and this was also an idea open to make this experiences you can change things when you associate with people.*

Involvement in community work continued to be an important theme in subsequent interviews. Numerous participants found this area of work to be particularly compatible with their sense of social work as a form of collective action and social engagement. It was an area of practice that the participants could strongly identify with and enjoy, and it became a comfort zone for many of them. For example, Carl having got married and intending to start a family applied for and got a job as a community worker on a housing estate having previously done some youth work. In the interview he recalls how he and his wife were given a council house and told to get on with the job which involved working 60 or 70 hours a week in the community. While analysing the interview transcript this section was given the focussed code **community working**. He became a very successful community worker building up relationships with the local community and encouraging the young people to become involved in activities in what was viewed as a notorious estate. After a while in the community role he decided to apply for a social work course, partly because he needed to earn more money to support his family but also because he was becoming aware that the people he worked with had their lives enormously affected by social workers. He became an unqualified social worker before starting the course and immediately he was viewed differently by the same community:

*I applied for a job (unqualified social worker post) with a local social services, didn't get the first one but then after I had been for the interview, somebody rang me up and said that was really great, there is another interview coming up, I think you should come along to that one, sort of thing. So I went along to that and became a social worker. And instantly, as far as [Area] was concerned, became one of them. And I joined the other side really. I think this is... you know I*

*continued living in the council house, [Area] and had a considerable caseload of people who were my neighbours.*

Reflecting in the interview on the public perception of social work, Carl learnt later on when he was a local councillor that people 'hated, loathed and despised social workers', not so much for their work but 'because they had a nicer car and they came from miles away and they dotted into the estate and then they cleared off again'.

In contrast, community work for Gillian was an antidote to the 'sticky plaster' nature of casework. Entering social work had been the 'obvious' choice for her after returning from two years volunteering with VSO in Kenya. Obvious because she had always been interested 'in helping people change their lives' as her commitment to VSO had shown. She had been offered a place on a social work course at the end of her undergraduate studies and took up the place after returning from Kenya. Her first post was with children services and she soon started to see that the social work response was often 'too late' and 'trying to put very thin patches on what had gone wrong before'. This was despite working with directors and managers, in her then social services department, who were forward thinking and committed. This was reflected in the focussed codes **narrow social work** and **social work limitations**. The emergence of community work at the time was a breakthrough for Gillian since this offered her a way of doing social work that suited her:

*I remember working with adolescent girls and feeling that, you know, I wanted to work with them in a different way to what managing them as a social worker, as a case worker, you were able to. So I sort of... there were then opportunities coming up in my... what was actually my home town of [Town], down the road. And they were beginning to do community work, where they were basing workers to established projects in three of the most difficult areas of the town; it was then a town and subsequently became a city. So I got a job in the area of [Town] that my mother had grown up in, which was not far from where we had lived as a family, although by then, because my dad was the MP, he had moved back to his, our home area as the Member*

*of Parliament. So I moved back to [Town] and got involved, setting up a community project and actually also setting up a youth work project - that took me a bit longer. And I did that out of the community work project.*

In the community work project Gillian was able to carry out work that was more interesting and in her view more useful, such as doing welfare rights and working in partnership with local people to set up a summer play scheme. Through community work she was able to carry out her interest in early intervention and in enabling the community to take collective action. She had always been interested in the wider perspective and in helping people to empower themselves and was 'interested' in a positive way 'in the person as a political tool' to achieve progress. The fact that community work in social work has diminished in recent years will certainly have an impact on the attraction of social work today for people like my participants who have a calling to a wider dimension of social work involving mobilising communities to empower themselves.

#### **6.4 Encountering poverty**

Witnessing poverty for the first time as a social worker intensified the political identity of participants who experienced it. The experience had a significant impact on participants, most of whom had been brought up in far more comfortable circumstances. While working as an early career social worker within a children and families setting Gareth encountered enormous social problems including poverty. In the interview he recalls meeting families who lived in a deprived area whose main problem was poverty, reflected in the focussed code **encountering poverty** given for this particular section of the interview:

*...very soon after starting working there, I could see that one of the main problems people had was poverty, they were just so poor. They didn't have much of anything and they were living in poor housing, and their health wasn't very good, and a lot of them were unemployed, even at a time when work was available in other places. After all, I had had a post without trying, fallen*

*into a professional post, paying a lot better than what they were getting, and as I was saying they had nothing. I remember we had a store of old second hand furniture in the office cellar; it was furniture people had given us. I thought it was unjust, something repugnant to say the truth, that people were given second hand furniture, after all why shouldn't they have new ones? Why shouldn't the DSS give them money to buy them? That's how I saw the world (My translation from Welsh).*

Gareth's experience of poverty as a social worker influenced the trajectory of his career. As a result, he developed a keen interest in welfare benefit entitlements and worked hard to support his clients make applications for benefits which they were entitled to but lacked the skills to apply successfully. He became involved in organisations outside social work which were campaigning against poverty, such as the Child Poverty Action Group which highlighted the plight of poor children. Moreover, he also subscribed to the radical left wing newspaper run by social workers called 'Case Com'. 'Case Com' took a class struggle perspective viewing the family as an instrument of oppression and social work, at best, maintaining oppression by helping people come to terms with their circumstances. He recalls in the interview being the only social worker in his authority who distributed radical magazines to co-workers. It is interesting to note how this sense of reaching out beyond the social work role was to become even more important later on when participants built a political career.

Likewise, encountering poverty had a huge impact on Laura. She had found a route into social work through studying Sociology at university after transferring from a modern languages degree. Reading Sociology opened the door for her to enter into a social work career and it has informed her teaching since as a social work academic. After university she saw by chance an advert for a post as an information officer for Gingerbread, the single parents' organisation, and applied since she had done a similar role as information officer for the students' union. She worked for Gingerbread for two years in essentially a campaigning role to raise awareness about lone parent issues and rights. Having discovered her liking of working with lone parents she started working in a community care scheme

for older people visiting lonely and isolated people. In this experience she encountered even greater poverty on a scale that she had never imagined seeing and that had a huge impact on her. The focussed code **others going without** was deployed as a result of analysing this section of the interview.

## 6.5 Critical incidents of injustice

During the course of participants' social work careers there are critical incidents which strengthens their sense of political identity and increases their activism for a cause. This was the case with Camila who recounted during the course of the interview experiences of apparent injustices which had a profound effect on her. The focussed code **injustice awakening** was arrived at after analysing this section of the interview, reflecting the impact these critical incidents had on her. She had worked as a volunteer befriender with children services and had been an appropriate adult in police stations with the youth offending service prior to doing her social work course, thus she had extensive experience of visiting police stations. As a social work student she was allocated the case of a Vietnamese boy whom had been found working in a cannabis factory. She was informed by the social work team that the usual practice in such a case was to write a pre-sentence report and then the boy would be sentenced. However, she was shocked by this since she was certain that the boy had been working against his will and that he was a victim of trafficking rather than a criminal, and she determined to fight for him to be released:

*Right well, you know, I got really angry, really upset, well why would you do that? Well we don't know anything about him. So I Googled and I looked and I said well this child has clearly been trafficked, he has been brought from the other side of the World to this country, to work. He doesn't know by who, he doesn't know why, he has got no contact with his family, he is in criminal activity. He had been found with £400,000 worth of cannabis. So I looked up the [Organisation] policy on safeguarding children who could have been trafficked and there is a clear child protection procedure. And getting that in place and getting the agencies into that first strategy meeting was unbelievable, nobody wanted to know.*



Eventually the boy was released on a non-custodial sentence to the disbelief of the senior social worker who had expected the boy to be sentenced, apparently the usual course of action in such cases. The other formative encounter with apparent injustice for Camila was regarding the treatment of another vulnerable child. When she was on placement with an organisation supporting asylum seeking children she came across a boy from Afghanistan whom she visited in a police station after he had been detained by the police. An experience she clearly found shocking and brought her into conflict with the authorities:

*And that night I remember going down to [Name of police station] and going into the cell, I had been into a cell millions of times with kids but... I feel quite emotional talking about it now... he was in a padded suit and he was kept in there and they wouldn't let him out.*

Becoming more politically active as a result of what she had experienced Camila became involved in a massive campaign to release the child which included the End Child Detention Group and an eminent archbishop. As a result of the campaign the child was released. The effect of these two experiences which had made her 'physically ill' was to spur her on to fight against injustice and to take a more active role in politics. She had resigned from the Labour Party in protest at the way asylum children were treated, a resignation which she conceded was a 'pointless protest', because as an isolated act by one individual it had no effect. Having learnt from the experience and having become more politically skilled she later re-joined the Labour Party and became more involved in local branch meetings and campaigned in elections, getting 'properly active' which soon resulted in her being selected to fight a council seat.

For Ann the critical event of injustice awakening was the impact of unemployment on her working class community as a result of the closure of traditional industries in the 1980s. Reflecting in the interview on that era of change she recalls how her community was affected:

*But then it was more the after affects really, there were high levels of unemployment, having friends who were the same age as me, coming up to school at 16 or a few years older than me*

*coming out of school and them being out of work and having to go on a YTS because there was nothing else and people then getting into trouble and that sort of thing.*

## **6.6 Doing social work and politics**

As already seen in the previous section many participants have been able to combine social work and political activism. Being politically active had been the experience of Liz before she entered a social work course in the mid-1970s. She became active within the anti-apartheid movement and women's groups, both areas of increasing interest in the late 1970s. Whilst on the social work course she joined the Labour Party which seemed at that time to be a broad enough church to accommodate many diverse left-wing perspectives. Interestingly, numerous participants have commented that not all social work courses of this era were radical since some courses were quite conservative and thus they didn't feel fully at home there. It has always been Liz's firm belief that social work on its own is not enough to change society. The focussed code **integrating politics and social work** was constructed from this segment of the interview:

*... my politics was very left wing and I knew when I started my social work course I think a lot of the social workers on the course thought I was a bit odd because I used to stand on the streets and pass out newspapers and that and actually go on demonstrations and I would have these arguments with them because they thought that you could change society through social work and I would say well, you know, it is a good thing to be in and you can do a certain amount for individuals and that but you can't change society through social work. So we used to have a lot of these discussions in seminars and that, they would think that just being a social worker was enough, you didn't need to actually go out and do politics or go on demonstrations or stand on the street doing this... I think they thought I was a bit odd ...*

During the course of her social work career Liz combined social work with political activism, she became involved in numerous political campaigns, and was particularly active in the Campaign for

Nuclear Disarmament. Interestingly, she reflects how from her experience politics has always been ahead of social work in accommodating social and cultural change, reflected in the focussed code **social work catches up**. For instance, in recent times, working as a practice teacher she found that social work was catching up with her own left-wing political thinking, particularly with the introduction and emphasis on anti-oppressive practice:

*... I mean it is like a breath of fresh air to go back and see that and to be doing that sort of work with students which then fits in with your politics, you know, I quite sort of enjoyed that really. So that was, yes, I mean I think that was almost like social work, I mean I have thought this before that social work tends to sort of catch up with the kind of left wing political thinking in a way in that, yeah, I mean I think that is true; I mean, it used to frustrate me when I was in social work years ago there would be... you could see there was quite a lot of racism really, it might not have been overt racism but failure to understand the needs of different communities.*

In contrast, in the case of Stephen, social work was a means of making a living to support his role as a councillor. He had become a warden of a probation hostel and was supported by his employer to pursue a CQSW course. There followed a series of social work posts before he became elected as a full-time councillor. As a full-time councillor he also managed to work as a social worker to make ends meet, reflected in the focussed code **maintenance social work**:

*During that period I worked as a councillor for 8 years, although during that 8 years, I mean I considered myself to be full time, I was always a full time councillor, I ended up being deputy leader of the council here. But periodically I would have to go and earn some money, so I did short term contracts as a social worker or a community worker or whatever, but essentially I considered myself to be a councillor. And I have always been on the Left, I consider myself to be a socialist, I want to see a different kind of society.*

After the eight years as a councillor and before being elected to parliament he returned to social work and community work rather battle weary having been a successful councillor. Thus my participant was able to combine a councillor role with the occasional sojourn into social work and community work.

Gareth combined social work with the politics of language sensitive practice. His identification with the movement to promote the Welsh language in Wales had its roots in his upbringing in a predominantly Welsh speaking area of Wales in the 1950s and 1960s when awareness about language rights was growing in Wales and reflected the international radical awakening of the times. He was a pioneer in establishing a social work bilingual group in the county where he worked. In the interview he recalls meeting in pubs to 'plot' how to move the council forward on the issue of language rights within the local social services. Today, both main languages in Wales have equal status and social workers in the most Welsh speaking parts of Wales are required to be able to speak Welsh with Welsh speaking clients. Reflecting the way he combined social work and politics the focussed code **interdependence of social work and politics** was used when analysing the interview.

Another example of combining social work with political interest occurred through a role in the miners' strike of the 1980s. For most of his social work career Hugh worked in youth justice and became a manager with the probation service. During the miners' strike he was a legal observer on the picket lines. He recalled during the interview seeking to challenge a police inspector who was verbally intimidating the miners. He identified himself with the welfare campaigning side of social work and would feel frustrated by the limitations of casework, contrasting two seemingly opposing traditions of social work:

*I felt okay lobbying... because I knew councillors and MPs and then later Assembly Members, I felt okay about lobbying these people from that kind of perspective. But I think that you know I did, I was sometimes frustrated with some if you like, social workers on the other side, I am not saying that... there is nothing wrong with case work you know, I have done it myself but the wider social and political context has to be tackled as well. And I did sometimes get*

*frustrated with colleagues who were very much on that other or belonged to that other tradition sometimes and those who would psychologise you know, people's problems really.*

## **6.7 Social work skills for politics**

Some participants were politically active whilst practising as social workers but this was invariably in their own time and reflected in the focussed code **after hours socialism**. They recounted in the interviews how useful social work skills, such as empathy and meeting deadlines were in the political realm. Participants found ways of managing both a social work career and their interest in politics. For example, Hugh held social work as a means of putting his Social Democratic values into practice at a micro level, while being politically active during the evenings and weekends at the macro level of addressing structural socio-economic problems:

*But social work it seemed to me was a way of trying to, kind of, make a difference to people, to help them negotiate their way, to get them their entitlements and so forth, to make a difference. But at the same time there was the kind of, after hours, socialism of you know, being involved with the trade union, being involved with the Labour Party or campaigns and so forth.*

Carl worked as an unqualified social worker for a while as well as 'doing politics' in his 'spare time'. He had joined the Labour Party whilst working as a community worker on the estate, going against a long time loathing of the Labour party as a vehicle to change the world:

*And it just came as a revelation to me really that some of the people I was in contact with working in that community as Labour councillors were really doing a fantastic job, you know, I mean they weren't great orators or anything but they were just doggedly working away for people, day after day.*

In getting elected as a councillor in the late 1980s Carl used many of the skills he had learnt as a community worker, particularly the skills of working with people. This is reflected in the focussed code

**social work and politics link** which captures the similarities between the skills needed to be a successful social worker and a successful political representative. In the years previous to his election he combined social work with political activity in the community. He was engaging with people to take up issues and organise local campaigns and worked hard to bring non-traditional voters out from the council estates to vote:

*And in '87 I first got elected to the city council, in a ward where they had never ever had a Labour councillor before, because of that work we had done and because we brought out people from that estate to vote for the first time in their lives; and I thought that was one of the most incredible experiences. There were people in their forties and fifties who didn't know how to vote and had had to be told... had to have it explained to them to vote. You know, it was no good me, particularly being a middle class social worker just going in there, but we managed to build a, sort of, cadre of local volunteers off the estate, who basically went around.*

One of his achievements as a councillor was to get the first scheme of road humps in the country introduced onto the estate after a campaign involving young mothers from the estate. While working as a social worker and being an elected councillor his political work was characterised by achievements that were consistent with social work values of helping less fortunate people to have their voices heard and their interests represented. For example, as deputy leader of the city council he was able to help improve the life of looked after children by having the council provide four houses a year for children leaving care. With colleagues he set up a twice yearly conference for young people in care. In those days the director of social services would personally attend a weekend conference to meet the young people and to hear about their issues and concerns. Likewise, in those days it was quite easy as a councillor to take time off for council meetings in a sympathetic employing authority. The way social work and politics were brought together in his life was reflected in the focussed code **politics and social work interdependence**.

## **6.8 Diminishing social work**

From the second pilot study interview onwards a common theme of disillusionment with social work emerged which was later also expressed by subsequent participants. At some point in their social work career participants would become aware of the limitations of social work. For example, in the case of David the nature of this awareness was about seeing the need for collective rather than individual action and the most effective way of doing this. Once in the profession the limitations of casework soon became apparent for him as well as the importance of organising on a collective basis. The focussed code of **collective action** was used for this segment of the interview. The realisation of the extent of the need for collective action led David to become a councillor and begin his political career:

*... once I was practicing social work then the political dimension of social work became more clearly apparent to me. And that was because social work practice was then, as it is more so now, dominated by individual interventions on behalf of particular people and families. But I became much more aware of the way in which if you wanted to make improvements, then to do it person by person there were community dimensions to it and there were ways in which whole systems needed to be changed and improved so that they could be made better for people in those places.*

Moreover, for Laura the process of disillusionment set in when she noticed a radical change in the way that social work was being organised and managed. She built a social work career around children and families and child protection. In the interview there is a striking contrast between her experience of working as a social worker in London which she enjoyed and working as a social worker in her old town later on when social work as a profession seemed to have changed dramatically in a period of about five years, reflected in the focussed code **depleted social work**. London had given her the experience of learning about cross-cultural communities and although working with difficult social problems, the experience actually enhanced her belief in humanity and she did not become cynical. She could see that the problems were caused by class disadvantage and poverty and were not the individual's fault. She was based right in the middle of the community in London in a massive 1960s housing estate. In

the interview she recalls how clients would stop her in the street and she would feel a part of the community where she worked:

*People would actually say you had better pop up and see [Name] because she is really struggling with it and people... so that was a lovely experience I think and proof for me that community social work, you put social workers in communities rather than call centres, it is proper social work.*

Her social work career reinforced her politics and her belief that there were some things that were unjust. In London she felt that she had actually been of help to families. However, on return to her old town, social work had changed and had become alienated from the people it existed to help:

*After five years in London we came back to [City] and I found a much more depleted social work, a much more reactive social work, social work still based in neighbourhood offices but with barriers. Whereas I had just worked in an open office where clients could come in and shout me and I could go out and there was a coffee machine I could sit down and have a coffee with them. When I came up to work in [Area] there was locked doors and screens so people had to come and press a buzzer to get in. I didn't know what was going on because when I had trained in [City] we didn't have that, five years before. So something had happened and it had become a much more them and us. And much more reactive, and much more about taking children away and much less about supporting families.*

Soon afterwards she left social work practice with children and families for a period with the probation service but found that to have experienced similar changes: 'all the what works stuff was beginning to kick in and the cognitive behavioural programmes which I just had no time for you know'. She then returned to residential social work with children where she became a practice teacher and was gradually drawn into social work academia.



Other participants also regretted what they perceived to be the demise of social work within an accessible community setting. For example, Karen recalls how good it was to have a social work office on the estate and how she was able to work collaboratively on the wider social causes of people's problems:

*I landed up in a job on a council estate that had, you know, the social work office, and it was generic social work in those days. The social work office was beside the chippy, beside the newsagents, beside the supermarket, beside housing. And everywhere we were surrounded by our service users and families. And obviously I became aware of things in a much more 'in your face' way, so like there was... you know, one of the families that I visited had sewerage flowing under the floor boards because the sewers were broken in that street. So clearly I started getting involved more in terms of advocacy but also because housing was so close by and about raising that as an awareness, but not just doing it for one family thinking this isn't an estate problem and the housing officer down there was very much into that as well.*

Moreover, Huan viewed social work as becoming a less humane profession. She experienced a process of soul searching and some disillusionment. In analysing this segment the focussed code **machine social work** was used. She had used the term 'machine' herself to describe aspects of social work practice:

*I never forget this, a social worker – this woman was absolutely on her arse from want of a better word, and I was shadowing this more experienced social worker and the person was just about to have her children taken off her because of drugs and alcohol and domestic violence. And I never forget, she was telling her off for these, for orange juice or something being spilt on the kitchen tops, you know, like just completely missing the point and just not understanding why these women were out of control when their children were about to be taken off them. You know, I mean I would never criticise child protection social workers because it is a horrendous job and I understand why they need to be so tough like that but I felt like sometimes*

*it was missing the point. Because these women have come from horrendous backgrounds and then it is like a cycle then isn't it?*

Varying degrees of disillusionment within social work were an important factor for participants to move into a full time politics role. For example, in the interview Ann reflects on how she was attracted by social work but later started to feel frustrated about some of its limitations:

*I think there is something about the awareness of young people being just written off and a real sense of injustice from my part against that and really wanting to not let that happen and try to put a stop to it in some way. I couldn't really think of another profession where I could feel that I was making some sort of impact on that. As it turned out, in practice, over time, I got quite disillusioned with that and thinking that I wasn't making any difference, and then that is another driver then for getting more involved on the political side, because you do realise that you are very constrained working with people as individuals, but there is a societal thing up here that needs changing before you can really impact on people down here. So that is the way that the two things are entwined really.*

The specific issues that frustrated her were neoliberal policies to shift youth justice away from welfare towards punitive and correctional action, such as the idea of contacting welfare benefit offices when clients did not turn up for their appointment so that their benefits could be stopped. She viewed this as a 'step too far' and was 'outraged'. She left probation and became a part time social work academic and worked part time in Women's Aid for a year before becoming a full-time elected representative in one of the UK's parliaments.

Similarly, Liz was relieved to eventually retire from social work to concentrate full-time on her role as a councillor. This is because of the changes she found in social work in recent years which she asserts have made the profession less egalitarian and more hierarchical. Moreover, there has been an increase in bureaucracy and financial constraints. She found that the result was more time consuming work

without more people and time to do it. It became harder to take time off work for council meetings and thus with increased pressures the idea of early retirement became more attractive. She felt the demands of social work had become too great to combine with the councillor role; a loss she feels to councils since practising social workers would not be able to take on the councillor role. She also detected a bullying atmosphere, emerging within social work, particularly in the way the profession was managed. The focussed code **bullying culture** was arrived at from this part of the interview:

*Well I only came across it, I would say, just in the last couple of years I was in work and it was one of the motivations for me to actually retire. But I know of other people who have come across it and I think I was quite sheltered really most of the time I was in social work, I mean, I never... only in the last couple of years did I start to feel that there was anybody kind of looking over my shoulder and sort of was going to kind of, you know, pick on people and this kind of thing. Or have unrealistic demands on you. Or one of the worst, not understand the work you were doing, because that is quite common if you are in a specialist area like children and disabilities, you know, you get a manager comes in who doesn't understand the work as well.*

Some participants talked about how they became increasingly aware of the lack of interest in politics amongst their social work colleagues. This was Camila's experience of social work in children's services where she found that people were generally 'not very political', reflected in the focussed code **depoliticized social work**. She also found frustrations within social work before she resigned her post to concentrate full-time on her role as a newly elected councillor. The frustrations emerged at a time when financial constraints increased as a result of the economic crisis and austerity measures following the credit crunch. Managers would require children placed in expensive placements to be moved. She felt this left her and other social workers complicit in care plans that were based purely on finance and not on need. The turnover of staff was high and new inexperienced managers were appointed. New types of managers were 'processed driven' with long supervision meetings meticulously examining the database and questioning professional decisions. The managers were also 'twitchy' about her taking time off for

council work and while she felt she could have been an asset for social services as a councillor, she experienced an oppressive culture of 'keeping everyone down' as much as possible. She had hoped to carry on working as a part-time social worker after being elected but she faced intransigence from her employer about agreeing a reduced case load and working hours.

The experience of moving on from social work practice into full time politics can be a journey over years for a number of reasons. In the case of Jan, it was a sense of wanting a change after spending many years working as a social worker. In the past she had worked as a hospital social worker where the experience was very positive as she was based in a pioneering establishment which was non-hierarchical with the various disciplines working as a team of equals and with patient care as central. Later she worked as a children and families' social worker and combined this role with being an elected councillor. Faced with having a reduced political profile within statutory social work because of the negative views of local authorities regarding their employees being politically active, she joined Barnardo's as a senior manager where there were no constraints about a prominent public political profile. Eventually she decided to dedicate her energies to full time politics:

*Well I ended up thinking that politics, I would achieve more but I had spent quite a few years in social work by then and I do think doing a lot of front line stuff does, I wouldn't say burns you out, but I wanted a change in any case, I wanted a change, you know, and politics was there for me to go to and use all the information I had and all the experience I had got. I could use it in politics. So, that all fitted in.*

In contrast, Carl returned to social work after deciding to stand down as an MP in 2005. He returned to a number of high profile social work roles which entailed considerable degree of campaigning and working with the Government on social work and wider social issues. In some of these roles he felt more empowered than as a backbench MP since the line of communication from Government would reach people in these roles before the backbench MP. However, his current view of the state of the social work profession should cause alarm for those concerned about its future. Expressing scepticism

about the ability of social services to manage social work services he supports attempts to take children services out of the hands of local authorities and put them more firmly in the hands of service users themselves:

*It seems so difficult to sustain really good practice and as I said, I am very, very sceptical about... you know, I have seen the local authorities and the large charities as well, working out how they can carry out things to a minimum, carry out the bare statutory duties, rather than the spirit of pieces of legislation.*

Reflecting on the way Wales and Scotland are able to carry out social work differently to England he is committed to campaigning for greater powers for the regions of England, including elected assemblies with more devolved powers over social services.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

In conclusion, participants entered social work with enthusiasm as a means of putting their social reformist values into practice. Community work and community empowerment had considerable attractions for them; as did a campaigning form of social work. Other important areas of influence on their political identity were, encountering poverty and critical incidents; participants were often able to integrate social work and politics; however, all participants expressed a sense of frustration and disillusionment with the limitations of social work, particularly in the light of neoliberal policies, financial constraints and new management styles. Participants moved from social work in to a political career for a number of reasons, including a changed management culture in social work and the awareness of the limited role of case work and the need to expand into a more collectivist role through their political careers.

## Chapter Seven: Findings, Political Career

### 7.1 Introduction

In the two previous chapters the focus has been on the nurturing and early life experiences and the social work careers of participants. This third findings chapter will examine participants' experiences in politics after leaving social work practice. It will explore their political career trajectories, in particular how they continued to take a keen interest in social work and social care issues. It will also explore how they maintained and valued a strong social work identity as a politician. The chapter will also examine how their career as a social worker was particularly advantageous in the political world, not least in applying social work skills to constituency casework.

There are two theoretical codes constructed from the constructivist grounded theory analysis process which are relevant for the findings presented in this chapter (See chapter four). These are **extending social work** and **vocational politician**. **Extending social work** conveys how the participants have demonstrated a continuum of strong social work identity into their political careers. They continue to have a strong interest in social work and social work related issues in their political roles and are aligned to social work values and the transformative goals of social work to create a more just society. **Vocational politician** conveys that the vocational or professional identity of the participants is as much 'social worker' as it is 'politician', since a strong social work identity has been maintained by the participants. All the subheadings in this chapter are key themes derived from analysing the biographical interviews. The participants have a lasting social work identity and are engaged in campaigns on social work and social work related issues.

### 7.2 Transferrable social work skills

All the participants expressed a view on the extent to which the skills and knowledge they acquired in social work have been invaluable and advantageous in their work as a politician. These skills include the skills of empathetic listening and understanding how inequalities affect communities. During the

analysis of the interviews the focussed code **social work skills for constituency** was constructed to represent the importance that participants gave to the skills and knowledge they acquired in their social work career and how they helped them in their work as a politician. This theme came to the fore early on during the second pilot interview. David is a politician with a keen interest in health and social services. From the moment he was first elected a councillor he found his social work skills to be vital in carrying out the elected role:

*Yea, I really enjoyed being a councillor; I was straight away at ease I think with the sort of pastoral side of it. A lot of being a councillor is dealing with individual cases, individual issues and you know I was already by then very used to sitting in people's front rooms and talking to them about the things that were worrying them so in one sense the set of experiences you have as a social worker are very transferrable to that side of what a councillor does... So that's not a political thing particularly but you know just those basic ways that you learn in social work of trying to make sure people know you are listening carefully to them, taking them seriously, responding directly to them as people and so on.*

A keen interest in social issues also characterised Gillian's political career. She rose to ministerial ranks with responsibility for some of the most vulnerable people in society. She found her social work skills to be an important asset in her role as parliamentarian, particularly regarding keeping appropriate boundaries in her casework:

*It certainly meant that I knew how to deal with cases. That and the community work did because the community work, as I say, I had to become an expert in welfare rights and that was very useful... But it also helped to make sure I knew not to become the caseworker, you know, that you did know how to do casework but you know you couldn't be the... you know, and it also meant I was able to work with my staff around what was the appropriate relationship for them with people. You know, so having had all of that, good intensive training*

*early on, on the nature of professional relationships and how you handle those and all the rest of it was very important.*

Social work skills were also useful in her role as a party manager within parliament and in her role as a minister. In that role she would visit rough sleepers at night and having been a social worker she found her understanding of people with complex needs to be of critical importance. Emerging from this section of the interview was the focussed code **social work skills advantage**. The ministries in which she served were areas of interest consistent with her social work career and values, demonstrating a continued strong social work identity long after leaving social work practice. Since retiring as an elected representative she has held a number of important roles on the boards of charities and third sector organisations working in areas such as homelessness and people with addictions.

Participants talked positively about their social work career having benefitted their political role. For example, Ann talked about social work skills as providing the 'tools' for doing constituency casework. Of particular benefit has been the skill of working with constituents who are experiencing emotional problems by the deployment of social work communication skills. The focussed codes **social work instincts aid** and **social work job feel** were created when analysing this section of the interview. Many of the constituency work resembles social work since most of the constituents who come to constituency surgeries are in need and vulnerable. The following excerpt also encapsulates how many of the participants felt about being able to do more as a politician than as a social worker:

*I find that in terms of interacting with people, especially in terms of dealing with people who are angry or emotional in any way, you know those skills kick in and also around things like, people needing to take responsibility for their actions and things like that as well. I still feel those instincts, those reactions coming in, you know... So most people that come into the politicians' offices are very needy, vulnerable people who we were dealing with in social work. So sometimes in some ways, my job still feels like a social worker, you know. But I have got a*



*few more levers I can pull as well I suppose. I just don't have to keep saying the computer says no, which is a bit what it feels like being a social worker sometimes.*

Hugh also acknowledged the value of social work meeting skills and vividly recounted in the interview how he was able to use his skills whilst working for the Council of Europe on youth policy:

*I was in a meeting in Moscow with people in the Government there - Putin's people, and this key kind of Council of European person, they couldn't stay any longer and they said do you mind just chairing the meeting. I thought... because I was just there as a researcher and just to feel.... the evidence shows this about youth policy or whatever, do you mind just chairing the meeting. But then after about five minutes of being quite panicked you know... I thought actually this is just like maybe having a family mediation or something like that, and that is what it was. And they were all extremely happy with what I did and I got an email saying I heard you did really really well.*

### **7.3 Ambivalence and engagement**

Many of the participants expressed some ambivalence about belonging to their political party. Hugh was not the only participant to disagree with the Labour Party leadership about the Iraq war. Although a member of the Labour Party, his political identity could not be confined simply to his party, particularly the Blair wing of the party. This was conveyed in the analysis by the focussed code **political ambivalence**. He was more comfortable with the Welsh Labour brand rather than the New Labour brand but had believed that Labour had to change to become electable in the 1990s. Indeed, he had respect for other parties' aspirations, such as for more devolution and self-government in the UK. In this sense belonging to a political party entailed quite a lot of compromise and flexibility rather than an overly ideological stance, familiar territory for social worker practitioners.

The transition into politics has not been smooth for some participants who expressed their feelings about adjusting to the political world and full time work as a politician. Huan describes the 'rough and tumble'

of politics and reflects on it being 'tougher than I am'. Of particular difficulty has been implementing 'crazy ideology' of government austerity cuts which she views as 'inhumane' resulting in more complex constituency casework. One of the areas in which she contributed to these issues was through working in partnership with other social workers who are members of the council scrutiny committee for children and families to influence as best they can the fairer implementation of the austerity cuts. She felt a strong sense of belonging to this group as well as a strong connection to other key political figures in the party outside the council. This was reflected in the analysis of the interview by the focussed codes **influence of elders** and **political habitus joy**. The social work councillors on the scrutiny committee were able to create a conciliatory and respectful atmosphere in working with the council officers, similar to collaborative working in a social work team.

#### **7.4 Transformative politics**

Jan joined the Labour Party at nineteen and has found it to be a rewarding experience not just because of its transformative political philosophy but also because of the huge range of influential people she has come across in the party. She regards herself as a socialist and a keen supporter of the devolution project in the UK. Her most recent political campaign has been regarding reasonable chastisement and the need to suppress all forms of violence in disciplining children. In the interview she recalled meeting a group of established Labour politicians with whom she became friends and had influential conversations. In analysing this segment of the interview the focussed code **joyful activism** was generated. She values being a 'part of something' that works for change and has not become cynical about politics but on the contrary she believes that so much can be achieved through politics. She remembers one policy that had a great effect on her personally and which taught her about the transformational **power of politics**, a concept that became a focussed code for this segment of the interview:

*But one of the things that made me feel very strongly that I could see the power of politics was that they used to have, a widows' earnings rule I think it was, and this meant that if you earned*

*money, it was taken off your widow's pension and the Labour Government, when it came in, changed that. And this had an immediate effect on my family because my mother had a widow's pension but it was being cut whenever she got a job and that was changed and you could see the power of politics, you know, the power of what can be achieved and I think that influenced me very strongly.*

Ann's political identity was formed through a 'gut instinct' response to the issues that she came across. It was only later that she theorised about her responses and was able to put a political label to them. For example, she would hear the views of the Greenham Common women in the 1980s and feel that what they were saying made sense. She became a republican early on since she did not see the point of having a monarchy. She views herself as both a socialist and a feminist and joined Plaid Cymru (the Party of Wales) because of her awareness of the Welsh national question and started questioning British nationalism. The bringing together of different political strands almost simultaneously at a formative time in her adolescence and early adulthood was given the focussed code **knitting political strands**. Interestingly, her entry into a political career and progression within her party is viewed by her as 'accidental' having been 'in the right place at the right time'. She became a party spokesperson on social security reflecting her expertise in social work. She has campaigned on a number of social work related issues such as on the social security changes brought about by the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Government's (2010-15) neoliberal welfare reforms, and on anti-racism.

Campaigning on social issues and finding her own 'left leaning social work voice' was Laura's experience. She had no time for the formalities of political parties. She once flirted with Militant but was disgusted by the sexist attitudes she witnessed in the movement. Over the years she has campaigned on single issues, such as anti-apartheid, and has worked through the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) and unions to present an alternative voice and to influence official bodies. Her political identity is strongly aligned to her strong belief in humanity and community action, exemplified by her work in setting up community groups and in disability rights action. The focussed codes derived

from the interview included **humanistic convictions** and **single issues activism**. In some ways she believes being a political activist can sometimes bring her closer to social work than through social work practice itself:

*I actually think there are times when we are connecting more with what social work is about than they are by simply just telling people that they can't provide them with a service, you know.*

For Karen in particular her political identity did not develop strongly until later on in her life. Whilst growing up she did not take a keen interest in politics and describes herself at that time as 'soft Labour'. However, there was a significant change in her political identity in the last ten years as she made links with academic colleagues and focussed on political literature. Having done a master's in applied social research when she studied Sociology and read on Marxism and feminism especially, she started thinking more structurally about politics. At the academic institution where she works she is actively involved in union business and has been involved in strike action. She is also a member of SWAN and has been active in the Anti-bedroom Tax Federation. Her journey has led her to recently join the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), a radical development from her earlier identity with the Labour Party.

Numerous participants were conscientiously involved in their council's scrutiny role where they were able to scrutinise the working of the council's executive or cabinet and challenge policy and make recommendations in areas of social policy where they had acquired expertise as social workers, such as in provision for children with special needs. Camila was elected chair of the children and families' scrutiny committee which meets monthly. One of the hardest things she has had to face on the council was the decision to 'top slice' budgets, including the children services' budget for financial reasons. In the interview she reflects on how she had, as any good social worker would, challenged the leader of the council about the negative effects of the cuts on children and how she had to face the dilemma of the budget vote with constituents demonstrating against the cuts outside the council building. As a

qualified social worker and councillor she was in a position where 'knowledge is power' but found that the council responded negatively to her rebellion:

*... the budget process here was, for me, very very stressful, we were just literally given a load of cuts and when I asked questions, well what is the impact of removing this funding, oh well I don't know, oh well how can that be good enough... I have got the emails... it is in the emails that I sent to the leader outlining my concerns that were never responded to. Sleepless nights, thinking am I going to vote for the budget, am I not? If I don't vote for the budget I haven't got a job and if I haven't got a job then I haven't got any money, you know. And then turning up at the budget meeting and my dad was outside on the microphone challenging gutless backbenchers to vote against the budget, knowing full well what it would be like and we didn't speak for weeks after that.*

As a councillor Camila has campaigned against the bedroom tax and attended many anti-cuts rallies and brought motions before the council. She has been an effective chair of the scrutiny committee by using it as a political vehicle to help the vulnerable present their case to the council. She has completed a number of task and finish group inquiries for the scrutiny committee relating to her interest in young people and social work. The inquiries looked into and made recommendations to the local authority in the area of the transition of young people out of care and into society. She was also involved in a task and finish groups into education attainment and poverty, and into child health and disability. She was able to use her social work expertise on these task groups to influence the future direction of her authority's policies regarding young people. The scrutiny committee was also the first in the country to hold listening days for looked after children. After analysing this section of the interview the focussed code **professional as councillor** was constructed, reflecting her professional social work identity in her political role. But one of the lessons for Camila has been about realising where power really lies in the council and how important it is to occupy offices where most power resides, if she is going to achieve the utmost for vulnerable children and their families. This mirrored similar dilemmas experienced by participants when they were in

social work practice, namely that in their current roles there are limitations on how much they can achieve for vulnerable people, reflected in the focussed code **quest for power**:

*I have campaigned on the bedroom tax and I have brought a motion to council and spoken at rallies and whatever but if I was the cabinet member I could organise a conference like that [referring to a conference organised externally on the council tax], do you know what I mean? So it is like you are nearly there but you are not quite there to be able to have the influence that you want to have. It is like from social work to councillor, from councillor to cabinet members, to Leader.*

### **7.5 Sophisticated parliamentary social worker**

Stephen was a successful councillor chairing both the social services and housing committees. As a self-confessed 'political anorak' he is a sophisticated politician who knows how to organise and win local election campaigns. He has been a Labour Party member since he was nineteen but was ambivalent about many of the things that happened during the Blair years. He resented candidates being foisted on the constituency since they were not able to inspire the local party to campaign, thus losing a potentially winnable seat. Since joining the Labour Party he has undertaken all the roles in the party at local and regional level. However, he is not a career politician as exemplified by his decision to join the Campaign Group of Labour MPs. When elected to parliament he made a conscious decision to concentrate on working in the constituency rather than in London. In the interview he reflects that had he been elected when he was younger he might have taken a different decision regarding his parliamentary career. His commitment to the constituency and the service he and his staff provide mirrors a hard working social work team:

*There is more than a full time job here, coping with meeting the requirements of 120,000 people, 80,000 adults who... I mean I see a 1000 a year at surgeries. I have got six staff and throughout most of these 16 years, casework crowded out much of anything else we might*

*have wanted to do. We get involved in local campaigns as well but because my view is you can't do two full time jobs and you shouldn't try to do, so you have to make a choice, my choice was made before I went which was I was going to favour the job here. All my staff are based here, I haven't got any staff in London and I live here. We only close here three days a year, other than weekends, but we are on call at the weekends and so I think we provide a much better than average service here. I think that is reflected in the electoral support we get although all the advice when I got there from people I respect like [Name] who said look don't be doing all of this nonsense, you are not a social worker and it is not your job and anyway they won't vote for you.*

In parliament Stephen has campaigned on a number of social work and welfare related issues, such as issues relating to asbestos, and drugs and alcohol. In analysing this segment of the interview the focused code **parliamentary social work** was created to reflect the depth of his interest in social work. He participates in the parliamentary all-party social work group as well as groups relating to alcohol and drug issues. The all-party social work group has held an inquiry in association with BASW into the present state of social work (BASW 2013). He views the profession to be in a current state of 'crisis' as a result of the cuts in funding to local authorities.

Carl has worked pragmatically within a political party to promote social and economic issues, exemplified by his view that 'dripping water wears away the stone'. He has been the deputy leader of a council and chair of the economics committee. He fostered a community politics approach taking up issues and campaigning on behalf of constituents. He entered parliament later on in his political career and immediately when elected campaigned on social issues. He formed an all-party group on children in care and brought children into parliament so that their voices could be heard. For a time he was the parliamentary children's champion and introduced a Private Member's Bill to establish a Children's Commissioner for England.

Promoting social issues was also Gareth's experience within his political party. He became spokesperson on health and social policy and took a keen interest in welfare benefits and policies. He was also enthusiastic about doing community politics and working with people in a more cooperative way. The focussed codes **participatory politics** was generated from this segment of the interview. In parliament he campaigned on welfare changes, particularly opposing the reforms to disability benefits, such as to the Disability Living Allowance.

## **7.6 Always a social worker**

All the participants continued to regard themselves as social workers and continued to maintain a strong social work identity in their political careers. They combined a strong social worker identity with political identity, in some instances many years after leaving the social work profession. They continued to take a very active interest in social work and in some cases retained strong links with the profession, such as being contacted by trusted practitioners in the field who would brief them on social work issues. All the participants were actively involved in campaigning on social work areas and social welfare issues more generally. In truth, they worked as politicians who had a strong and lasting vocational calling to social work. For example, Carl acknowledges in the interview the two principal identities that he possesses in his career, namely political identity and social work identity:

*So I think I will always be a social worker, and I think I will always be a politician and I think that I will always try and combine the two.*

Hugh describes his master identity as that of being a social worker, even though he was working as an academic in another but related field and a full time councillor. His identity as a social worker is long lasting, long after becoming an academic and councillor:

*So I kind of miss social work in a way but it is just the way that it has happened... I feel myself still to be a social worker, as an academic I still think of myself as a social worker.*



Jan makes an interesting point in the interview about politicians' previous careers influencing the type of politician they become, whether their previous careers were as lawyers, bankers or social workers.

The focussed code **fundamentally social worker** reflected this part of the interview following analysis:

*Somebody was saying to me the other day that ultimately we meet a lot of politicians and they always go back to what their jobs were, you know, that influences, that is the fundamental thing about you as a politician is really what your job was beforehand and that is why sometimes people criticise people who have always been in politics, you know, the people who are career politicians because they haven't had that... bring that experience from before and I think I am fundamentally always a social worker.*

The participants remain very much interested in social work matters, in terms of the social work role as well as the issues that social workers meet in their day to day work. In this sense they are an important but underused supportive resource for the social work profession since they are positioned in arguably powerful places in society.

## **7.7 Experience of women participants**

This section is particularly concerned with two life events which had a significant impact on my female participants' political identity formation and maintenance, namely marriage and having children. The focussed codes used to describe these sections of the interviews included **emancipation**, **female political identity formation** and **motherhood impact**. It was particularly striking that so many of the women talked about the role of their gender in their political activity while none of the male participants found a need to talk about their gender in the context of their political activity or indeed in any other context.

In the case of Liz having a baby brought about a change in her working life since she left her job as a social worker to bring up her child. In those days you had to work for two years to qualify for maternity pay and part time jobs were not available in the same way as they are today. Thus after marrying soon

after starting her job as a social worker and having a child less than two years from the day she started her job, she felt she had to leave her post. However, doing so opened the door for more political activity since she joined the historical ten-day march to Greenham Common which set up the Greenham Common Peace Camp in 1981. This was a protest against basing U.S. cruise missiles in the UK. The march was overwhelmingly made up of women and the camp exclusively so. Liz marched to Greenham with her one-year-old baby son and stayed at the camp for a while.

Earlier at university during the 1970s and a year before she did her social work course, Liz had an experience of political awakening as a result of living in a student house with fourteen other women. She recalls sitting up late at night talking about issues and mixing with people of differing leftist ideologies. Critically she met a number of political people who either lived in the house or were among the large group of people who visited the house. The first area of influence on her was what she calls 'the women's question'. She attended a number of women's conferences and identified herself both as a supporter of women's rights and a socialist and believed the liberation of women could only be achieved with the latter.

In the case of most of the female participants the experience of marrying and having children had a slowing down effect on the intensity of political identity and political involvement. But this was not necessarily a negative experience since, as in the case of Camila, they re-engaged in politics after their children had grown-up and devoted a lot of their energies on children issues. She had her first child soon after leaving university and went on to do her social work qualification when her two children were quite young. Her own mum had stayed at home with her children and looked after the house while her father had worked and was an active trade unionist. She reflected on this during the interview saying that while her father did his thing her mother 'was staying the same'. Nonetheless, after having children her political activism within her political party was much less. Likewise, for Laura having a family lessened her political activism for a while:

*There was always of course, when I went off to University, in the eighties, there was the next miners strikes in the early eighties which I was very active in through the student union. I was involved in picketing and raising money and ended up having hospital treatment, having been mowed down by a police horse in a demonstration in [Town]. So I suppose I have always been on the streets really, certainly not quite so much since I got married and had my child but you know, my politics were out there and they were, not for me party politics because apart from a brief fling with Militant I have never been a member of a political party.*

The experience of being drawn away from political activity after marrying and giving birth to her son was also Karen's experience. Her situation was complicated by the sudden break up of her marriage very soon after her son was born. She had given up her social work job to stay at home with her son. Three months after the birth her husband left and Karen was desperate to find a part-time job to make ends meet. Other than her part-time job in academia and being at home to look after her child, there was no time for anything else, so her political activism diminished. It is only after her son became older that she felt able to re-engage with political activism:

*Now, I have been looking to join a party for the last three years, a political party. But in Scotland I haven't found a political party that I actually can ethically and politically agree with and I kept holding off to see what Scottish Labour would do. But Scottish Labour are just getting worse and worse and I have thought okay, there is a year and a bit to go for independence and I want to do something. So I have just joined, I haven't started doing anything active within it but hopefully you can see how I am actually becoming more political now. And the reason why I have held off doing a number of these things is because, as a single parent, my priority was my son, you know. And my priority was keeping a house, getting money, but also building up a really nice network of friends, you know.*

According to Camila the perception of women politicians is often different in society to the perception of male politicians. Moreover, this can make the role of politician for women so much greater a

challenge as she tries to be taken as equal in a society that has assumptions about women politicians. In the interview Camila evaluates how being a woman politician is unfairly viewed as different to being a male politician:

*'It is interesting because I did an interview for a student journalist about women in politics and I don't think that my husband was very happy with it but what I was saying was that being a woman is like as if politics and my job is a bit of a hobby and I should be grateful that I have got it. Whereas, my husband is hard working, always out there working. So am I, but I am not necessarily in a 9 till 5 job, but I work full time and in the evenings and on the weekends. But how it is viewed is interesting'.*

Jan was spurred on by an awareness of the need for more women to be representatives in the political process and their reluctance to stand:

*And then the selections came up for elections for 92 and I never even thought of trying for Westminster but I also have campaigned a bit on women's issues and I just thought, oh well, who is going to do it if I am not going to do it.. you know, how can I expect women to, you know, if I am not going to do it when I am a councillor already and could try.*

Having tried for a Westminster seat once and having the full support of her husband who is also a successful politician, she decided to try again. In the following excerpt from the interview she expresses some of the stresses related to campaigning for parliament, in particular, the demands of competing interests that women face more than men. In her case she was forced to give up her day time job:

*'So I tried for [constituency name] and I got it and so I fought the 92 election and we slashed the majority there, so it was quite small. So I got a taste for it then and so I thought I could try again at the next election. And during 92 and 97 I was chosen as the candidate very early to fight it again as I say, I had the children and I had the council work and I was the candidate and*

*I couldn't do the three, so I then took unpaid leave from Barnardo's to concentrate on being the candidate and the council work, and I won in 1997, very easily.*

Participants' view of the life of their mothers can exhibit a sense of loss, a feeling that despite their talents and abilities their mother's generation was wasted. At the same time their own life reflects the complexity of wrestling with the demands of home and a working life, as illustrated by this excerpt from the interview with Huan:

*I think the most profound political things for me, in terms of when I look back are the things like the way women, working class women... the thing that motivates me in politics is the gender issues and the diversity of the gender issues, you know. I think I have seen my mum's generation as, you know, wasted really, wasted. But at the same time I have benefitted undoubtedly that I had a mum that was at home. And you know, that wasn't repeated with my children do you know what I mean, because I always had to work. So I think we need to create some kind of new, more mature way of looking at women's place in society because it is extreme misogynist, oh like, get them in the home and then... but at the same time the extreme feminists like, oh we should be working.*

The place of women in society is a fundamental part of Huan's political identity right from the time when she had a baby at eighteen years old, which was for her a life changing event. She thinks back to this time with some sense of regret that she did not have a break to be a mum and bring up her child. However, she felt pressurised by her middle class adoptive family to go on at that time to university. The goal was to keep on going, get an education and then a good job despite her feelings:

*But I mean I look back, you know, when I had [Name], first of all and it was really, not chaotic, but it was really like work and child, you know what I mean, there was very little room for anything else, a partner or anything, it was... I felt that there was pressure, to get... it was like you are the man, you are the dad and the mum if you know what I mean.*

The experience of being a single mum was often one of just surviving with little time for anything else other than the necessity to get a job to make ends meet. Significantly, it was after her daughter had become older and had her own friends that Huan had time to become a political activist. Crucially she went on her own to a Labour Party talk on Africa and there met some key women who drew her into the party. Moreover, she had to deal with society's prejudices against single mothers, such as having one's morality questioned because of the stereotype of the single mother on benefits. The effects of living in a male dominated society has led her to question whether she is cut out for politics despite being an excellent councillor who uses her life and social work experiences in her role, such as by focussing on children and young people issues:

*That is why I am not so good at this formal, well I am still learning about the formal way in which politics works but I don't know whether I am naturally cut out for it, if you know what I mean, because its largely run by people who haven't necessarily had... well they have had political lives but different lives I would think, do you know what I mean, it is quite a male dominated environment.*

## **7.8 Conclusion**

In conclusion, participants found social work skills invaluable for their political role, especially for constituency casework and keeping professional boundaries. They demonstrated flexibility and pragmatism as well as conviction in political roles, although there was also a sense of ambivalence about their political party identity. Their campaigning on social issues such as against budget cuts demonstrated a determination to protect essential services for vulnerable people. Within their authorities they have tried to resist the austerity measures, particularly the unfair practice of top-slicing. It is clear that as politicians the participants continue to resist neoliberal policies within their elected authority and in society more generally. As evidenced by the interviews participants have made a significant contribution to social legislation and policy initiatives, such as in the area of children and young people. Significantly they have sustained a strong social work identity well into their political

career. Theorising about these findings it is clear that social work occupies a space beyond professional practice. Social work and political identities coexist strongly in a continuum amongst social workers who have a declared and enacted political identity.

The next chapter will discuss the significance and implications of the findings from this chapter and the previous two findings chapters. It will theorise about the findings and examine their contribution to the literature on social work biographies and political social work. It will also discuss the key findings in relation to the arguments presented in this thesis that social work has its roots in social reform and social workers have been attracted into the profession for this reason but have been disillusioned as a result of the advent and subsequent dominance of neoliberalism in the social work profession.

## **Chapter Eight: Discussion - The Social Worker Politician**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to theorise about and discuss the ideas presented in this thesis – how they have been developed and their significance for social work as a social reformist activity with a traditional mandate for social justice and social change. It will examine the significance of neoliberalism in this research, particularly how the effects of neoliberalism has been illustrated in the lives of participants especially in the development of their declared political identity and in their career trajectories. The chapter will discuss the theories of political identity formation outlined in chapter three in relation to the findings of the empirical research with participants. It will explain how the findings confirm and add to the literature on political identity formation. It will also argue that this research thesis adds to our understanding of political identity formation amongst social workers, an area that has been under investigated. Furthermore, the chapter will discuss the contribution this research thesis has made to the literature on political social work with the creation of the new substantive theory of the social worker politician. It will show how the social worker politician is constructed from life experiences such as the influence of the early years. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the methodology deployed and by revisiting the research questions.

### **8.2 The significance of neoliberalism in this thesis**

It has been argued in this thesis that social work has gone through a transformative period especially since the early 1980s with the advent and subsequent dominance of neoliberalism. This has had a significant impact on social work and social workers. For example, many social workers have felt demoralised (Marston and Macdonald 2012) and have left the profession for other careers (Dominelli and Hoogvelt 1996 and Harlow 2004). They have been demoralised as a result of working practices which have been adopted from business, such as privatisation (Lymbery 1998 and Carey 2008) and



target driven practice (Garrett 2009). The result has been the deskilling and depoliticization of social work (Butler and Pugh 2004, Harlow et al 2003 and Harris 2003). Government policy and legislation since the 1980s has promoted the dominance of neoliberalism in social work. This process was introduced by the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and continued under the New Labour Governments, 1997-2010, and then by the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, 2010-15. Thus the neoliberal process of depoliticizing social work has been pursued by governments of all political persuasions with only differences in emphasis (Rogowski 2010). It is argued that this process can be contextualised in the broader assault on working class institutions from the early 1980s onwards, such as the attack on the power of trades unions through trades union reforms. The institutions of the working class, which were once feared by governments, particularly since they had been responsible for the downfall of the Heath Government in 1974 and contributed to the downfall of the Callaghan Government in 1979, became the target of government attack (Mirowski 2014 and Jones 2012).

The irony of the neoliberal assault on the political base of social work is that historically social work has had an inherently political role in fighting for social justice and a fairer society (Lees 1972, Hearn 1982, Powell 2001, Butler and Drakeford 2001, Sunker 2005, Gregory and Holloway 2005 and Jordan 2012). Since the days of the Settlement Movement it has championed a more equal and fairer society (Hugman 2009). Social work has always been defined as a transformational activity that is driven by the ideal of equality (Butler and Drakeford 2001). However, this understanding of social work as a political activity has been undermined and the political base has been withering away (Chu 2009). It can be further argued that social work is now alienated from its political roots in social reform and from its political mandate of social justice (Garrett 2009, Rogowski 2010 and O'Brien 2011).

The major perspective of social work as a social reformist and social justice activity which has been under attack in neoliberal times is depicted in the lives of the participants for this research project. Their early commitment to social reformist values and the dilemma posed by the hegemony of

neoliberalism in social work are evidenced in the biographical interviews. The interviews also illustrate how strongly attached the participants are to social reformist values which many had acquired from their earliest years. All testified to the depleted nature of social work particularly referring to management approaches and the financial constraints on services, with particular emphasis on the austerity measures. These were a significant factor in their decision to move out of social work practice and develop their political careers. However, the participants remained committed to social work and to social work's mandate of social justice and fought for these goals as politicians. They regard themselves as a resource that the social work profession could make more use of particularly in advancing the social reformist mandate of social work and in resisting the effects of austerity on the profession and its clients. The next three sections will discuss the roots of participants' social reformist identity and how participants encountered the challenges of the neoliberal dilemma in social work. This will be done by examining their early years, their social work careers and their political careers.

### **8.3 Early experiences**

The nurturing and early years' experiences of the participants are extremely important for their political identity formation. Their social reformist values had their roots in early life experiences such as the political, social and economic upheavals of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. This finding confirms Hite's assertion that political identity is influenced by living through major political experiences (Hite 1996), and Klar's assertion that political identity is closely linked to life experiences (Klar 2013). Furthermore, the importance of the early years confirms Parekh's (2009) argument that political identity formation is about a process of personal development over time. Thus the roots of political identity formation for the participants were firmly grounded in the realities of early life experiences.

One significant finding from the early years about the strength of political identity was that participants from families with a tradition of political activism had a stronger political identity than those from families without a political tradition. In these instances, politically engaged families seemed to nurture political awareness in their children leading to political activism later on. Many of the

participants were encouraged by their parents, especially by their mothers, to aim high and believe in themselves to achieve ambitious goals in life. Their parents inspired and drove them on while imbuing them with progressive values. The positive influence and support of parents cannot be underestimated as an important root in the development of participants' political identity.

Other factors that influenced the early development of their social reformist values included progressive family values such as of esteeming education as a means of enablement and escaping the traps of poverty and disadvantage. The concept of embeddedness within a family's values as mentioned by Hite (1996) was true for many of the participants since they were conversant with their families' progressive values from an early age. Moreover, Cerutti's (2003) theory that political identity is associated with culture and tradition is exemplified in the lives of the participants, such as in their close affinity to their area and its history and way of life.

The experience of discrimination was present in the development of political identity in participants who encountered incidents of racism and sexism while growing up within their communities. This is no surprise since the literature has ample examples of this phenomenon (LeCroy 2002, Cree 2003 and Humphrey 2011). Participants had the ability and courage to turn these experiences into something positive and channel their energies into affirmative political action such as by working for people who are disadvantaged in their communities.

The significant other was also an important influence on developing an early social reformist perspective, both within and outside the family. This confirms Hite's theory that political identity construction is about assigning value to others who might be in positions of leadership, such as teachers and councillors (Hite 1996). The significant other (along with books and highly visible organisations) was also identified as an important factor in Andrew's study of fifteen life-long socialists (Andrews 1991). The current research confirms the importance of the significant other in the construction of the political identity of social workers.

The experience of poverty in early life was a determining influence on the political identity formation for many of the participants. Participants witnessed at an early age the effects of post-industrialisation on their communities and the near Dickensian experiences of parents at the hands of economic forces and the economic powers that be. In these instances, the experience of poverty awakened a strong sense of injustice and a burning ambition to create a better society. In this regard the participants' experiences reflect what Pozo (2011) describes as political identity forming as a result of being aware of bourgeois hegemony and social injustice at the hands of ruling classes.

Some of the participants identified literature as a formative influence on the development of their political identity in the early years and in adolescence. Research in other fields has shown the importance of identifying with literature in the biographies of political activists (Andrews 1991). Radical literature has always influenced the beliefs and behaviours of diverse peoples and this research has shown that it has influenced the formation of political identity amongst social workers.

Another root of political identity formation amongst the participants is the experience of conflict and resistance to reactionary ideology and arbitrary authority. Conflict illustrates that political identity development can be challenging and at times painful, such as conflict regarding political beliefs with parents. This finding confirms Hite's (1996) theory that the formation of political identity can be a psychologically conflictual process; and Balcells' (2012) understanding that political identity formation can involve both acceptance and rejection of ideologies. Thus the importance of the early years in forming political identity and how participants became aligned to social reformist values which would be important later on in attracting them into a social work career since social work had a long established reputation as a social transformative and social justice profession is clearly evidenced from the biographical interviews.

#### **8.4 Social work career**

The process of political identity formation continued to evolve along the participants' life course and included critical phases, such as entry into and progression within the social work profession. Initially participants were enthusiastic and passionate about social work as a career that could bring about change in the lives of people in receipt of social work services. They identified with social work as a social reformist and social justice profession (Hugman 2009). Their entry into the profession reflects Humphrey's (2011) general typology of the citizen route into social work since participants were aware of structural issues such as poverty and prejudice and wanted to change society. Her other routes into social work, namely the service user route and the carer route were not relevant in the lives of the participants in this research project.

The effect entry into the social work profession had on the participants was to quicken their political identity through their motivation and passion for social work as a way of achieving social change. Participants encountered serious levels of poverty in their roles which was significant for their professional and political development. Most participants expressed a sense of passion regarding social reform and felt they were engaged in a project to improve peoples' lives. The interviews with participants capture the sense of excitement that early career social workers feel about social work's social reformist mission.

Participants had a strong affinity with community engagement including community work to bring about real social change. This seems to have been a natural fit for them in that it allowed for a degree of creativity and flexibility, but most importantly many viewed this form of social work as a type of political engagement. It reflects Klandermans' (2014) definition of political identity as taking action on behalf of a collective. Taking action on behalf of a collective enabled the participants to engage in partnership working with community cohorts to transform their communities, such as tenants on social housing estates campaigning to improve the safety of their local area. Participants viewed community work as an antidote to case work which they found very restricting, and a real opportunity to address the wider socio-economic problems that blighted their clients. Perturbingly, today

community work at least within statutory social work is virtually non-existent in the UK. It is not difficult to see why community work should have been a casualty of neoliberalism in social work since it was a vehicle for working class groups to organise against state institutions (Owen 2012 and Mirowski 2014). Later, participants experienced disillusionment as a result of the neoliberal changes in social work, particularly changes in management systems and the financial pressures social workers have had to bear as a result of the Great Recession and financial austerity that started in 2007. All the participants commented about facing the neoliberal dilemma in social work and how this was a reason for leaving the profession. Many were concerned about the changed management style which they felt had become more intimidating with its emphasis on targets and procedures. This is consistent with Carey (2007) and Smith's (2011) view that social workers had less time with clients and experienced more stress. Participants were particularly concerned about the effects of the austerity measures on social work and social work clients. In effect they felt social work had become a lesser activity in terms of its political mandate of social justice which had been an inherent part of social work (Hugman 2009) and which had attracted them into the profession.

One of the ways participants responded to the dilemma that neoliberalism presented to them in social work was to intensify their political activities outside work, for example in campaigns against government austerity cuts. They also campaigned against what was perceived as a harsh criminal justice regime reflecting neoliberal's strong identification with the penal system (Mirowski 2014). Similar encounters with the effects of unemployment on working class communities, following the demise of traditional industries in a post-industrial society, led to a deeper involvement with politics. This dimension is similar to Miller's (2010) account of socialisation as phase-based with critical incidents heightening the process of identification over time. It also reflects Valutis' (2012) theory of political identity formation through crisis stages, such as encountering injustice and challenging authority.

Participants combined political activism with their social work careers, believing that social work on its own can never be enough. Examples of this involved challenging the policies of their own employing authorities. However, such campaigns were targeted at the authorities and not endorsed by them, thus such campaigns are best viewed as risky subversive activities. Most participants' political activism was outside the work setting, thus recognising the limitations of professional boundaries.

The participants became social work skilled politicians by adapting their social work skills to a political role, such as elected councillor. Remarkable similarities between the social work role and the role of an elected representative emerged in the research. Both require good people skills, particularly empathy, when meeting the general public either in their own homes, the social work office or in the constituency surgery. All the participants testified to how social work skills enhanced their role as an elected representative. The social work skills acquired from practice were an important component in enabling the participants to carry out their constituency case work more effectively and later on in taking on a full-time political role. Social work skills such as working in partnership are an important characteristic in the identity of the participants, as all participants developed a way of working collaboratively with constituents and linking into community campaigns.

There were three instrumental and linked factors in participants' decision to leave social work practice and extend their social work identity beyond the confines of the agency, to wider political action and representation. These three factors were the effects of neoliberalism on social work; the restrictions of social work, particularly the dominance of casework; and in some instance a natural desire for a change because of long social work careers. However, all participants remained committed to social work - campaigning on social work and social welfare issues in their locality, constituencies and in their various parliaments and councils.

## **8.5 Political career**

During this final phase, participants become very skilled and sophisticated political actors within the context of their political roles. Their activism can be categorised as campaigning for social reform and against neoliberal policies and the effects of austerity. Indeed, the participants extended the social work role into their political careers. They chose to do this rather than create a new non-social work interest for themselves, such as in foreign affairs. The participants' vocational commitment is both to social work as well as to their political careers. They continue to engage and identify strongly with social issues and some volunteer with charity organisations and community groups. The vocational dimension of their identity was and still is as much social work as it is politics. Moreover, within their political careers participants have become very widely respected both amongst their political colleagues and amongst outside observers. Such political capital could be further used to advocate and campaign on behalf of the social work profession and those who are its clients.

All participants are resolutely committed to transformative politics and a changed society - in line with social work ideals of social justice and social reform. This fits in with Friedman's concept of the transformational in defining political identity (Friedman 2010) since all participants had a vision of a fairer and more equal society. However, they felt that they could best oppose neoliberal policies in politics rather than social work since they would have more power and leverage to make a difference on the structural socio-economic level through policy development, legislation and campaigning. Participants enthusiastically campaigned against the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition Government's (2010-15) neoliberal policies of welfare reform and austerity measures such as the bedroom tax. In this regard the participants' political identity has been stable throughout their life course to date since they have shown a life-long commitment to the politics of change. Moreover, the research findings are consistent with Huddy's (2001) theory of political identity stability since participants have demonstrated life-long devotion to social reform. This is in stark contrast to the fluidity of political identity in some scenarios, such as in post-soviet societies.



During the transition into their political careers, the benefit of social work skills continued even as they progressed up the political career ladder. Of particular value were listening skills when working with vulnerable constituents with complex needs. It is interesting how some participants regarded themselves as more of a social worker in their political role, and more in contact with ordinary people, than what was possible in social work practice which was dominated by eligibility criteria for scarce resources. Thus participants' strong social work identity endured well into their political careers and they were able to successfully combine multiple identities in their political roles.

Participants became skilful and successful politicians within their elected bodies, such as in the manner they were able to negotiate their way through formal procedures. Significantly, participants have also been prepared to go against the party line when led to do so by their conscience, such as in relation to the Iraq war which many opposed. The Iraq war was one issue where a number of Labour Party participants felt a sense of ambivalence about their political party. In this regard the participants most certainly do not easily fit into Hite's (1996) typological group of party loyalist in her defining of political identity. However, they do reflect Hite's (1996) view that political identity formation involves psychological processes of conflict and resolution. In contrast, some participants felt an emotional attachment to significant actors and groups within their political party, such as veteran and highly respected politicians. This is consistent with Theodoridis' (2013) view that political identity is collective in nature and Tajfel's (1974) view that political identity is about attaching emotional significance to a group.

## **8.6 Substantive theory of the Social Worker Politician**

The three findings chapters argued that the declared political identity of the participants is a lifelong process that has critical roots in the nurturing years and early experiences. This is reflected in the theoretical code **early foundations** (see chapter five), indicating the importance of the nurturing years until the end of adolescence in fostering social reformist and social justice values. The participants' early career enthusiasm and passion for social work is reflected in the theoretical code **force for change**

(see chapter six) showing the diverse ways the participants viewed a social work career as a means of making a difference in society. The sense that social work has been depleted in recent times is reflected in the theoretical code **residualizing social work** (see chapter six) which is about social work decreasing as an inherently political activity as a result of neoliberal changes in the profession. The process of extending the social worker identity into political careers is represented by the theoretical code **extending social work** (see chapter seven). Although the participants have left the profession they remain committed to social work and continue to identify strongly with it as reflected in the theoretical code **vocational politician** (see chapter seven).

The final constructivist grounded theory stage, namely the stage of constructing a substantive theory is built on the findings from participants' whole life course to date. The substantive theory of the social worker politician encapsulates the key findings of this research project. The theory is about a group of social workers who have extended their social work identity into politics as either a representative or activist. It explains how they have deep roots in social reformist and social justice values extending back to their early years. Furthermore, it explains how they entered social work because of these values and later became disillusioned because of the dominance of neoliberalism in social work. Moreover, it elucidates how today they are interested and engaged in social work and social work related issues in their various parliaments, councils and activism. Indeed, for the social worker politician their social work identity remains their master identity. It is argued that in relation to social work's future this group is a valuable potential resource for social work since they have political capital and are in a position to advocate and campaign on behalf of the social work profession. They have intimate knowledge of the social work profession and are able to act as consultants and policy advisers. Furthermore, they are in a position to work for the expansion of democratic control of political, economic and social institutions - viewed as an antidote to the advance of neoliberalism (Ayers and Saad-Filho 2015).

The substantive theory of the social worker politician contributes to the discussion regarding typologies within social work. A typology has been described as 'an organised system of types' such as the citizen route into social work (Collier et al 2012:217 and Weller et al 2013). This research confirms the citizen route (Humphrey 2011) into social work since the findings are consistent with Humphrey's findings, such as the experience of poverty in early life. However, Humphrey's citizen route typology has limitations in that it only covers the period into the social work profession. Previous published works on the biographies of social workers have tended to cover the period up to entry into the profession and the start of their career but nothing beyond this point. They have not examined the significance of the early years in depth and there is a virtual absence of chronicling the citizen route through social work and political career trajectories. The three published volumes (LeCroy 2002, Cree 2003 and Humphrey 2011) in this field although admirable are in many ways general introductions and thus limited.

This thesis extends the citizen route beyond a narrow focus on what drove participants into a social work career to include what motivated them in both their social work and political careers. It offers considerably more detail on the dimensions of the citizen route typology than does Humphrey in her account (Humphrey 2011). In this thesis the nurturing and early years have a number of important routes such as the experiences of political socialisation and poverty as outlined in chapter five. Moreover, this thesis extends the citizen route by examining how it is developed within social work careers including encountering injustices as well as initial career enthusiasm, but later facing a diminished social work profession reflecting career disillusionment as demonstrated in chapter six. In political careers the citizen route is developed through the politician who has a vocational calling to social work and campaigns on social issues as well as having a continued strong social work identity long after leaving social work practice as delineated in chapter seven. The complexity of the citizen route as illustrated in this thesis reflects Crawford's (2012: 37) concept of 'intersectionality' since political identity development for the participants has been over time and is a living experience which recognises complex intersections between key influences and constructs.

What is clear from this research is that the social worker politician is a long standing social reformist with a keen interest in changing society for the better. Furthermore, the dimensions of the citizen route consist of a multiplicity of influences and experiences on each individual across their life course as demonstrated in the three findings chapters.

The construction of the social worker politician makes a distinct contribution to the field of social work biographies and in particularly the field of social work political biographies. It does this through examining the roots of participants' declared political identity and the life-long influences to date on the participants' political identity. It contributes new perspectives on the political identity formation of social workers, such as the significance of families with a tradition of political activism in nurturing a stronger political identity in participants.

### **8.7 Evaluation of methodology and methods**

In chapter four, I presented the case for a combination of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry methodologies in this research project (Roberts 2002 and Charmaz 2006 and 2014), an approach that had not been previously used to examine the biographies of social workers who have a declared political identity. While the approach has limitations, such as in the generalizability of findings, there are considerable advantages to using both methodologies. As a researcher and social work academic I felt comfortable using both constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry. I made reference in chapter four to the strong affinity with social work and the use of social work skills. Both approaches have been influenced by the radical turn in the 1960s, towards more democratic and radical approaches in research. This is mirrored by a radical turn in politics in the 1960s and 1970s, of which I am a part as elaborated in chapter one. Thus the approaches of constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry fitted well with my own social, historic, intellectual and professional positioning.

My own sense of comfort and fit was of course, not the only advantage of deploying the methodologies. The use of biographical inquiry and the method of biographical interviewing were strongly justified by the rich data that was generated along the whole life course of the participants to date. It generated full and spontaneous responses in the interviews. Had this approach not been adopted then a lot of this data might not have been recorded, for example, any approach focussing on the here and now would not have been able to capture the extent of family influences and early life experiences through the nurturing to late adolescence phase and to gauge the course of participants' political identity to date. On reflection, I believe that biographical interviewing allowed the significance of neoliberalism in social work to emerge naturally from the participants' stories. This is arguably superior to a more direct approach of asking a targeted question about neoliberalism in social work for example in a structured interview or questionnaire, which might have resulted in contrived or superficial answers.

The constructivist grounded theory methodology and the methods of analysis deployed generated theoretical concepts and substantive theory which casts new insights into social work political biographies. The scientific and rigorous constructivist grounded theory analysis process of multi-layered coding produced the substantive theory of the social worker politician within a life course continuum and provided a social anatomy for the make-up of this particular group of social workers. The constructivist grounded theory analytical method with its carefully managed steps has produced reliable and robust findings which I argue will be useful for the future of social work as a social reformist activity.

## **8.8 Revisiting the research questions**

To facilitate the reading of this chapter the research questions are reproduced here:

- 1 How did social workers' political identity emerge and evolve from life experiences?
- 2 How do social workers talk about the link between their career and political identity?

3 Did social work practice enable the development of social workers' political identity?

4 How can the intersection of social workers' life experiences, social work career and political identity be theorised?

The research questions have been addressed in this chapter and chapters five to seven by demonstrating how political identity has emerged and evolved along participants' life course to date (research question one). The link between social work career trajectories is demonstrated by participants engaging in political activism while practising as social workers but later on becoming more disillusioned with social work and leaving the profession to work for social justice as political representatives or activists (research question two). In many ways participants' social work careers both enabled and frustrated political identity formation (research question three). For example, critical incidents of injustice witnessed while in social work practice were a catalyst to a deeper commitment but the hindrances of social work practice, particularly the ascendancy of neoliberalism were frustrating factors. The intersection between life experiences, social work career and political identity have been theorised through the substantive theory of the social work politician which has been discussed earlier in this chapter (research question four). Moreover, the chapter relates the findings to the argumentation developed in the second chapter on the political roots of social work and the ascendancy of neoliberalism, particularly the inherence of the political in social work and its diminution in recent times.

## **8.9 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has explained the significance of neoliberalism in this research thesis and the effects the neoliberal dilemma has had on participants, particularly how participants became disillusioned with the social work role and extended their social work identity into their political roles. It has discussed the lifelong development of participants' declared political identity, from the early years, through to social work and political careers to date and related these to what is already known in the literature on social work identity. Further, it has discussed the formation of a new substantive

theory of the social worker politician. The characteristics of the social worker politician have been defined and discussed. Both social work identity and political identity coexist within the social worker politician. It has been argued that the social work politician can make a valuable and enhanced contribution by representing the interests of the social work profession such as in defending the profession's traditional social reformist and social justice mandate and in campaigning against the effects of austerity on the social work profession and those who need its services. Finally, the chapter has positively evaluated the methodology used for this research project, namely constructivist grounded theory and biographical inquiry.

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

When I started this research project I wanted to examine areas that had been of interest and concern to me ever since I had practised as a mental health social worker and subsequently social work academic. I was interested in how social workers had been attracted into the social work profession because of their social reformist values and how they faced a dilemma within social work as a result of the hegemony of neoliberalism in the profession (Carey and Foster 2013). I was interested in exploring the source of their social reformist convictions and the way these reflected the values of the social work profession and how they responded to the dominance of neoliberalism in social work. Furthermore, I wanted to explore whether neoliberalism in social work had been a factor in causing a group of social workers with a declared political identity to leave the profession and concentrate on political activism, such as being a member of one of the UK's parliaments as well as local authorities. I was interested in exploring what future might social workers with a declared political identity have in a social work profession dominated by neoliberalism. Moreover, I was concerned with the future place of politics within the social work profession, particularly with regard to its political and social justice mandate. Of particular interest to me was whether social workers with a declared political identity had maintained their social work identity in their political careers and whether their value to the social work profession could be enhanced.

I have addressed these issues and provided evidence in chapters one to eight to demonstrate that these aims have been achieved and the research questions answered. I have demonstrated that the social workers who participated in this study have a life-long connection with social reformist and social justice values and that this attracted them into a social work career. They viewed social work as a social reformist activity and I have demonstrated in chapter two that the social work profession does indeed have deep roots in social reform and social transformation. However, the advent and dominance of neoliberalism in social work posed a dilemma for the participants. I have shown through



the use of biographical interviews how this dilemma was responded to by the participants. I have been able to firmly establish that neoliberalism in social work was a significant reason in contributing to a sense of disillusionment with social work which eventually led to participants leaving the social work profession. I have also demonstrated that participants remain committed to social reformist values after leaving social work and continue to regard social work as their master identity in their political roles. The constructivist grounded theory process of analysis has enabled me to construct an original substantive theory based on the findings discussed above, namely the social worker politician. This theory describes a person whose declared politician identity has been forged by a life time of experiences and who is strongly committed to social justice and to social work within the context of their elected authority and activism.

## **9.2 Social work at a crossroads**

The social work profession is at a financial, intellectual and political crossroads - a time for it to reassess its direction in view of high profile cases, the bureaucratic demands made on social workers (Munro 2011), and the effects of neoliberal austerity measures on social work and its clients. Maybe the social work profession will choose to reverse at least some of the processes of managerialism in the light of the Munro Report (2011). But social work should also reaffirm its tradition of community work and generic neighbourhood or patch-based teams – such important practice zones for the participants in this research. This could be done by giving these areas a higher profile on social work qualifying courses and in working in partnership with community and client groups. Neighbourhood based social work teams could help to ameliorate the sense of ‘barriers’ that have been created between social workers and clients despite the neoliberal rhetoric of consumerism. They could also address new social workers uncritically accepting neoliberal reforms in social work and perpetuating the neoliberal hegemony. Moreover, qualifying social work courses should reflect more on international social work, such as social work in African countries where political social work is very strong, for example in community development work.

Furthermore, social work will need to look again at how it can create a mass movement in a way that has so far eluded BASW (Marston 2012). Any such movement will need to reconnect with the profession's roots in social reform and social justice and resist the hegemony of neoliberalism. It has been argued that social work should campaign along-side current day social movements and reconnect with its roots in protest movements that occupied the political landscape in the 1960s (Ferguson 2008). While this is one way forward the limitations of current day social movements also need to be recognised, for example the Occupy Wall Street anti-Capitalist campaign may have raised the profile of its cause but it never managed to actually occupy Wall Street. It was halted a few blocks away from New York's financial centre.

Allied to these campaigns the social worker politician is a potential valuable resource for the social work profession as it addresses the challenges of neoliberalism and reaffirms social work as a social justice and human rights profession for the future. The social worker politician could have an enhanced role in advocating and campaigning for the social work profession perhaps as a special group within BASW or as a separate association of politicians and activists campaigning for the interests of social justice and reform in social work. Such an association could campaign for the extension of democracy into the social and economic fields as a means to counter the hegemony of neoliberalism. The association could be named the Clement Attlee Group of social worker politicians in honour of the former Labour Prime Minister and social worker. Although the current all-party parliamentary group of social workers is to be commended for its work, it has limitations since some of its members are drawn from the right of the political spectrum and this inevitably leads to compromise with neoliberal ideas and a weaker voice for social work. The Clement Attlee Group would reflect social worker politicians desire to be more involved in the future of social work as expressed in the interviews.

The need for social work to have strong advocates in powerful places is greater than ever to respond to the challenges faced by social work as a result of the neoliberal austerity measures introduced by the Conservative / Liberal Democrat Coalition in 2010 and continued after the surprise election of a

Conservative Government in 2015. The Government has not delayed in indicating that it will abolish the Human Rights Act 1998 and will continue the attack on trades unions with new legislation to curtail their power. In his autumn statement 2015 the Chancellor, George Osborne, announced severe financial cuts for local government. Inevitably this will have an effect on social work services. It continues the attack on the working class and their institutions, in the case of local government, an attack that started with the abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC) in 1986 after a bitter ideological battle with the Conservative Government of the day.

### **9.3 Limitations**

There are limitations in every thesis and mine is no different. Firstly, caution needs to be acknowledged before making any generalisations about the findings presented in the thesis. I interviewed fourteen participants for in-depth biographical accounts. While these interviews are robust in representing themes it cannot be claimed that they tell all possible accounts, thus the biographies are limited to these participants. Secondly, it also needs to be acknowledged that the participants may have exaggerated their altruistic motives for entering social work in the first place and may have wanted to give a positive impression about their career choice. Likewise, participants may have hidden ulterior motives for leaving social work and entering full-time politics, such as the desire for self-aggrandisement. I recognise that interviews are themselves social constructions and participants may have chosen to be silent about some areas of their biographies. Thirdly, I cannot escape from my own biography and political identity when conversing with participants and in the process of analysing and understanding the interviews. I have declared my own position as a Social Democrat and first-hand witness to some of the neoliberal changes in social work described in this thesis. My concerns about these changes are certain to have influenced my research since like all researchers I am susceptible to bias. However, I believe I have as far as possible compensated for this by allowing participants' voices to be heard in long interviews and through rigorously analysing the transcripts. Fourthly, I have deployed biographical interviewing and constructivist grounded theory analysis for this research.

While both methods have been suited to my own research philosophy, I acknowledge that there may be other ways of exploring the declared political identities of social workers. Furthermore, while I have analysed and interpreted the interviews, I acknowledge that there may be other possible interpretations and understandings of the same data.

#### **9.4 Recommendations for future research**

I am keen to conduct further research into the parliamentary work of social worker politicians. I would like to explore the contribution they have made to initiating, shaping and scrutinising legislation in the social field and to the development of social policy. I would like to explore how they can advance the interests of the social work profession in a neoliberal era, particularly through a more high profile campaigning role and using their political capital and access to policy makers to advocate on behalf of the social work profession and its social reformist values. Moreover, the demise of community work as well as the neoliberal and managerial changes in social work raise further research questions about the role of social workers with a political identity in the profession. How can their commitment to the social work profession be maintained in the long term when their comfort zones such as community work have been under attack?

#### **9.5 Afterthought**

During the 2015 General Election the opinion polls had indicated that Labour would be the largest party, opening the door for a progressive coalition of left of centre and anti-austerity parties. I have reflected on the result and what it means for me personally and professionally and how it might impact on social work. The effects of neoliberalism on social work has been a part of my life since I qualified as a social worker and particularly so during the last five years as a professional doctorate student researching its effects on social work. Like all Social Democrats I am disappointed at a result which strengthens neoliberalism and opens another chapter of austerity measures including severe welfare

spending cuts. The hegemony of neoliberalism in social work is set to continue at least for the time being.

However, I am not overwhelmed by feelings of pessimism about the future of social work. There is room for optimism that the social reformist and social transformative values of social work will continue to prevail as they have always done. I think that the elections to the devolved parliaments of the UK in 2016 will be of particular interest and may highlight more collectivist approaches to social work. Likewise, it will be interesting to observe whether Social Democratic parties in other parts of the world will become beacons of light in their own general elections. There is great interest in the emergence of anti-austerity parties in Europe since the 2008 credit-crunch crisis, such as Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the SNP in Scotland – giving new hope for democracy and popular movements of young and previously disenfranchised people. The overwhelming election victory of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, a member of the all-party parliamentary social work group, was unexpected and represents an upsurge of anti-austerity feeling in the UK.

It is an interesting paradox that despite the challenges facing social work the social work identity remains strong and resilient as demonstrated in the biographical interviews. Notwithstanding the debates and controversies, such as the tension between casework and transformative social work, and the effects of neoliberal reforms and austerity measures, all the participants demonstrated an enduring core social work identity that has remained resolute from their days in social work practice to date. The social work identity is strong and endures in the social worker politician – a group that has potentially a lot to offer the future of social work.

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## Appendix One

18th March 2013

Hefin Gwilym  
9 Alotan Crescent  
Penrhosgarnedd  
Bangor  
Gwynedd  
LL57 2NG

Dear Mr Gwilym,

**Re: 'An examination of the biographies of social workers who have a political identity'**

Thank you for submitting your revised project for review.

I am pleased to inform you that your project has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel.

**Please note:**

For future reference please submit 'clean' copies not ones with track changes.

Recommendations

- The panel recommends that a statement about the 'debrief' be added.
- The panel recommends that the topic guide be sent with the invitation letter.

The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document(s)	Version Number	Date
Summary Proposal	HG01	07-Mar-13
Letter of Invitation(s)	HG02	07-Mar-13
Consent Form(s)	HG03	07-Mar-13
Consent Form(s) for use of quotes	HG03	07-Mar-13
Interview Topic Guide(s)	HG04	07-Mar-13

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application (January 2014), you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via Elizabeth Cameron

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to Elizabeth Cameron. This form is available through the following link, <http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/>

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Elizabeth Cameron in writing to [uso.erps@uso.keele.ac.uk](mailto:uso.erps@uso.keele.ac.uk)

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Cameron  
ERP1 Administrator

**Dr Jackie Waterfield**  
**Chair – Ethical Review Panel**  
CC Supervisor – Dr Damian Breen

## **Appendix Two**

### **Interview Topic Guide**

Since I would like the interview to be as free flowing as possible and want to allow the participant the freedom to relay their biographies, I will be using an interview topic guide. However, the interview starts with a general question which is asked of all the participants:

**Question:** I am interested in the biographical stories of social workers. Please give your own story in your own way.

#### **Topic Guide:**

Influence of parents

Critical events

Personal experience

Consciousness awakening

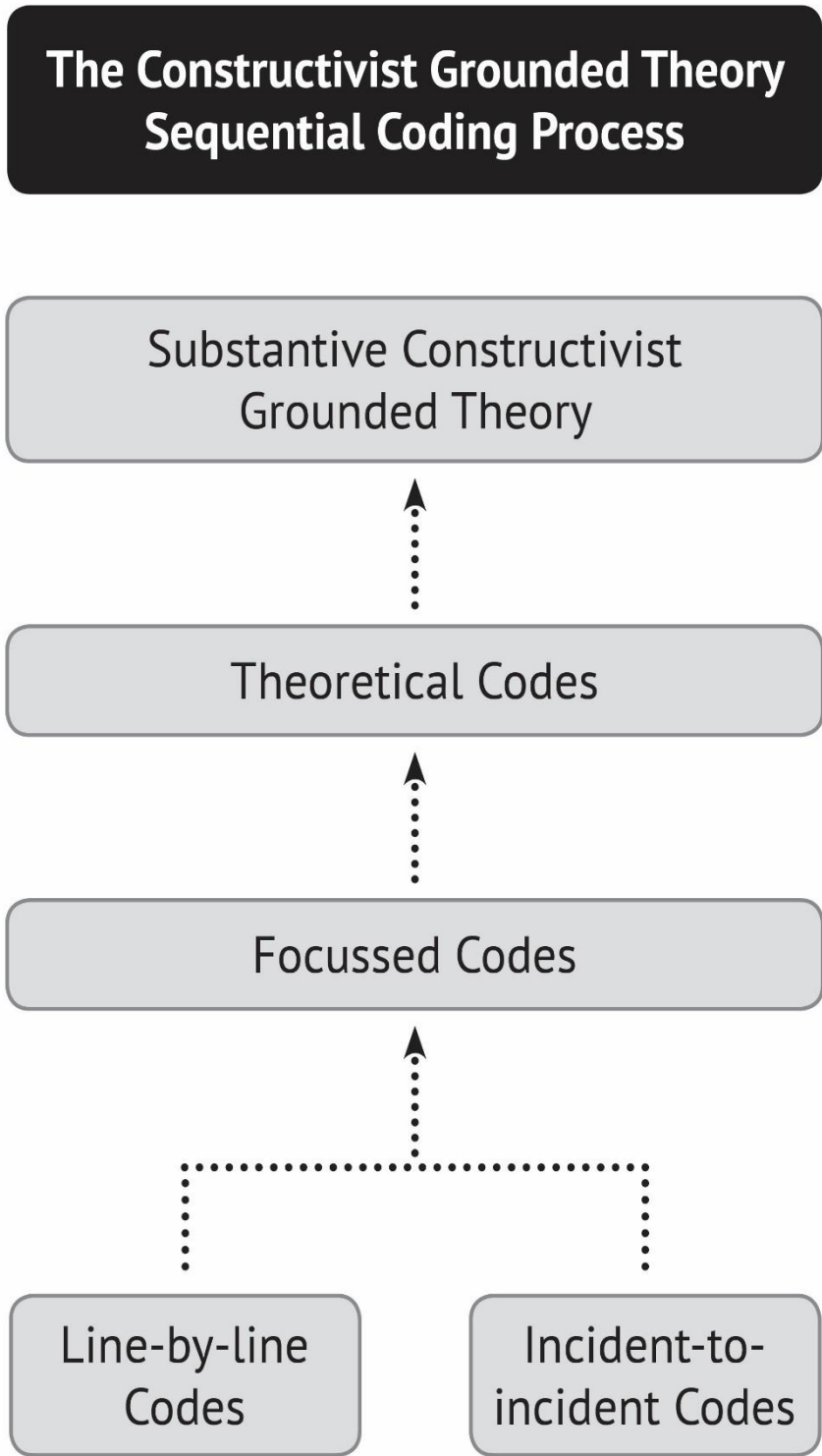
Time and place

Socio-economic factors

Influential others

Career path

HG04Feb2013



## Appendix Four

### Incident-to-incident coding

Excerpt from the interview with Stephen. The incident-to-incident codes for this segment of the interview are highlighted in bold type. They demonstrate how he became aware of the unfairness of social disadvantage and class differences while growing up in a working class environment. Identifying features have been redacted.

*I was the first person in my family to get to go to grammar school, it was a 400 year old establishment, we had a minor member of the Royal Family there for speech day when I was there and I think they hadn't a clue what you did with working class kids (**Contemplating meaning of grammar school**). And my parents had no idea what you did to line your child up and support them through it, they just didn't know really. Both my parents left school at fourteen and as such I remember on the first day that I went to school for the September term, the school of course sent you a long list of all the equipment you needed and all the clothing you had and I was sent with it all, all the sports equipment the lot because how did you know what you were going to need and of course, you couldn't ring up and ask because you wouldn't know how to do it, wouldn't know how to speak to them (**Reflecting on class disadvantage**).*

*So by the time I had been there a year and we had the end of year exams and you know, I had concluded that this was not a kind of environment which I felt anything other than alien really, good training for getting elected to Parliament really. And so I just couldn't be bothered to go and the same thing happened to my brother, he was two years younger than me, the same thing happened to him (**Feeling culturally alienated**).*

*So no, there were no teachers. I had teachers at my junior schools but I had a year off school when I at junior school, I was asthmatic as a kid I mean I now realise that living in a family where everybody smoked forty and fifty cigarettes a day is not terribly good for a wheezy kid. But that was not quite understood in those days was it. And so I had a year when I essential didn't go to school because I was so ill and I was then in a B stream and I got promoted as it were to an A stream (**Considering background challenges**).*

*I had an horrendous teacher there called [REDACTED], I remember her well, but then there was a teacher, [REDACTED], I remember who was very helpful and very good with my parents because he kind of made them feel that they could come into school and it wasn't such an alien place that they could come and talk to a teacher (**Contemplating educational barriers**).*

*When I was kid and the GP came, my father as I say was ill for ten months, he was in hospital and we were dressed in our Sunday best when the GP came, I have got photographs to prove it. This was the kind of class distinction was profound but it was kind of unmediated, it was kind of unrealised I think really. But as soon as you get a bit of perspective on it you just see it really **(Insight into class)**. And yet my father's experience of the ruling class, he was a sergeant through the War and when he did talk about the War, he was at Monte-Casino and he was the sergeant to an officer from the [REDACTED] family, [REDACTED] family, and he said I knew he would get killed, there was nothing you could do to stop him, he was such an idiot. He got killed **(Learning about ruling class folly)**.*

*So his experience often of the ruling elite, the local clergyman, who when my brother died at aged two weeks old wouldn't come and baptise him before he died. So their experience of the ruling elite was that they were you know, fallible and you know **(Aware of fallibility of elites)**, the Emperor has got no clothes but none the less you kind of locked into this, this is our position **(Experiencing how people become resigned)**. They wouldn't articulate it as that but that is what it amounted to.*

## **Appendix Five**

### **Focussed codes (Some codes have been redacted to protect participant confidentiality and personal information)**

#### **Erik**

Conflict

Resistance

Exclusion

Social reconstruction (the new Germany)

New order

Torment

Social engagement

Agent of change

Loss

Power and privilege

Felt injustice

Ideological paradox

#### **David**

Political upheaval

Community politics

Political action

Collective action

Academic interest

#### **Gareth**

Influential others

Fearful times

Fun of the left

Discovering language oppression

Interdependence of s.w. and politics

Satire culture

Participatory politics

Wide activism

Sociability of activism

Discovering poverty

### **Liz**

Equality for women

Poverty (in family)

Value of education

Emancipation

Pivotal year

Influence of others

Exciting time

Social work catches up

Integrating politics and s.w.

Bullying culture of social work

Ideological commitment and insight

### **Carl**

Rebellious child

Influence of others

Family paradoxes

Influence of the times – 60s



Pragmatic approach  
Disillusionment (with social work)  
Politics and social work link  
Community working  
Team working

### **Camila**

Activist nurturing  
BME identity awareness  
Finding own voice  
Joy of helping  
Injustice awakening  
Politicians' network  
Depoliticized social work scenario  
Disappointing managerialism  
Professional as councillor  
The quest for power

### **Hugh**

Welsh identity formation  
Social Democratic countenance  
Two worlds – social work and politics  
Sociologist by mobility  
Fell into social work  
Social work as way of helping  
After hours socialism  
Political ambivalence

  
**Huan**

Living political life (int adoption, single mum, ethnic minority)

Identity struggle (ethnicity – isolation, no racial identity)

Confusing upbringing (no talk about appearance)

Family restraints ( / no political debates)

Education opportunity

Intellectual flourishing

Retrospective insight (family life, university entry and work, 'what seemed normal')

Perceived normal world

Underdog empathy

White middle class pressures

Culture friction

Motherhood impact (affecting political career; mother's generation wasted)

'Machine' social work (questionable social work practice)


Influence of 'elders'

Opportune links

Political habitus joy

Vocational politics

Authentic voice

'Now it is making sense'

Not belonging

Accountability of knowledge

Longer political time frame

Councillor strain

**Gillian**

Politically nurtured household (inherited politicism; grandparents; long family legacy)

Political 'threads'

Open family discussions

Wide ranging perspectives [REDACTED]

Capable disadvantaged children

Independence by resistance (not being a teacher; for comprehensives)

Activism (anti-apartheid/CND)

Narrow social work ('sticky plaster')

Imbued social responsibility (received responsibility)

Social work limitations/deficits

Advantage social work skills

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Feminist issues

Methodism influence (Christian upbringing)

Collective working (community work; welfare rights; early intervention)

Enabling people

Innovative academic

Person as political agency

What works agenda [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Charity work

**Stephen**

Dutifully unjust

Secondary insight

Churched socialist

Sophisticated politician

Moral working class

Proud in face of adversity

Monochrome working class

Lost education

Fallible rulers

Maintenance social work

Parliamentary social work

### **Laura**

Socialist nurturing

Literary awakening

Inherited political identity

Others going without

Gender difference

Happy childhood

Imbued activism

Living political views

W/class / m/class hybrid

Depleted social work

Community activism

Single issues activism

Influential models (step dad, mum)

Creative ambiance

Humanistic convictions

Social change agent social work

Area move effect

Social work practice confirmed politics

Teaching route out

Voluntary re-engagement

Radical social work voice

### **Karen**

Working class background

Communitarian nurturing

Independently political (dad)

Political ideology absence

Diversity introduced

Faced with poverty

Subversive manager

Political literature influence

Grew into ideology

Religious faith loss

Uprooting unhappy

Public and private face

Colleagues' influence

Practice preceding understanding

Hearing the unheard

Political activism

Social work restraints

Formative group

Formative 10yrs

Thinking structurally

**Jan**

Social justice nurturing

Pioneering mother

Socially empathetic parents

Imbued social concern

Children impact (own)

Discrimination experienced

Passionate campaigning

Homely Labour

Influential mother

Community people (parents)

Richness of involvement

████████████████████

Joyful activism

Power of politics

Team of equals (social workers)

Social work skills (for constituency)

Incompatible pursuits (statutory social work and politics)

Through the ranks

████████████████████

More through politics

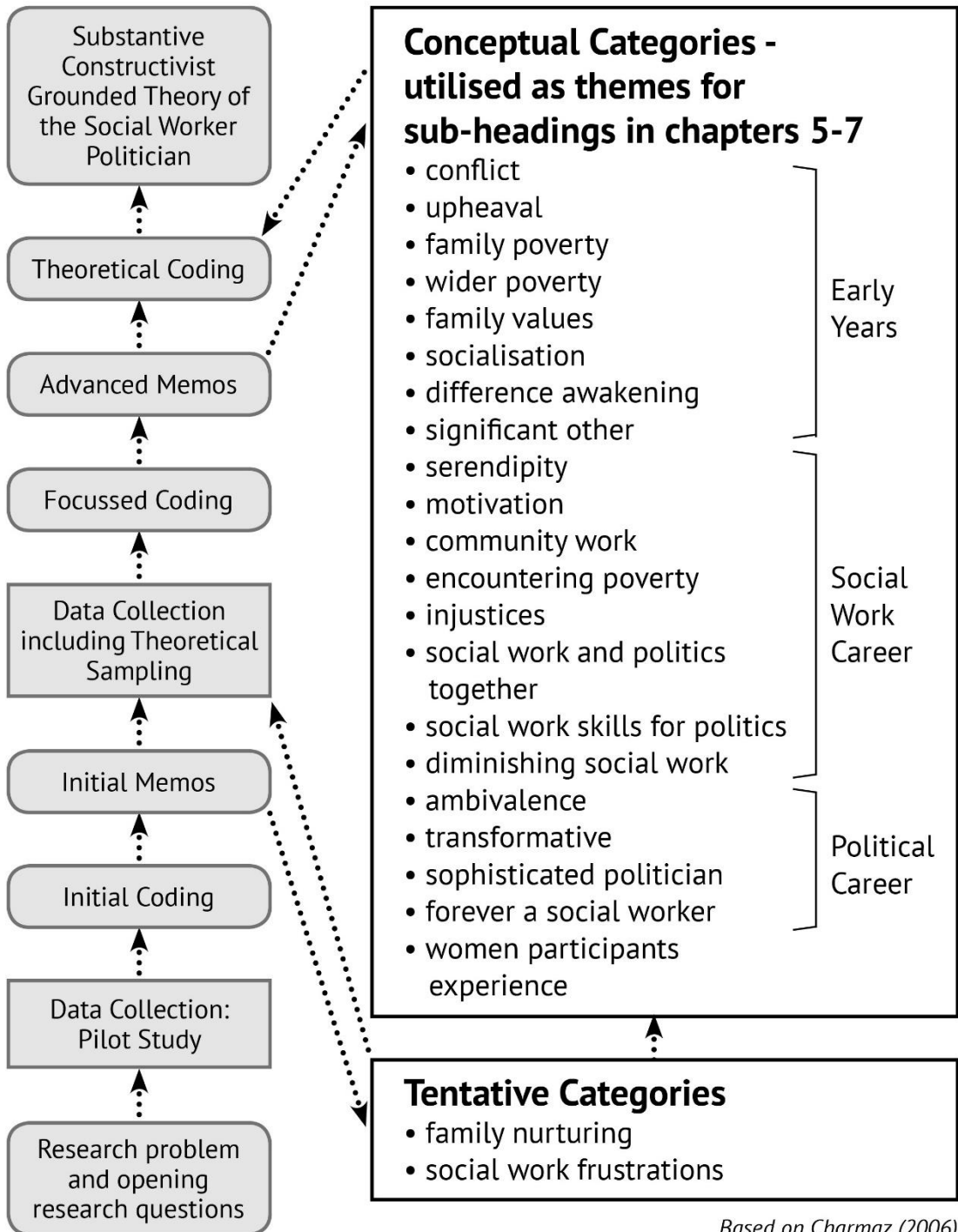
Fighting for have-nots

Fundamentally social worker

**Anne**

Time and events nurturing  
After strike effects (unemployment)  
Hostile government  
Social and national insight development  
Social disadvantage association (worked in factory)  
Working class political nurturing  
New life opening up (joy of awakening)  
Challenging teacher  
Rebellious schooling  
██████████  
Idealistic phase  
Gut-instinct politician  
Knitting political strands together  
████████████████████  
Accidental advance (no grand plan/design)  
Social work disillusionment  
Political driver (do more than social work)  
Social work instincts aid ██████████  
Social work job 'feel' ██████████  
Social work type portfolios  
Social issues campaigning

## Categories in the Constructivist Grounded Theory Analysis Process



*Based on Charmaz (2006)*