Exploring the identities and perspectives of social workers with environmental interests

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Abstract

This research contributes to the relatively small collection of primary research exploring environmental social work. The research is qualitative in design and is underpinned by critical theory. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 14 Welsh based, social work participants who all possessed a self-identified interest in environmental issues. The interviews elicited biographical narratives which were subject to thematic analysis. This gave insight into the development of such interests through childhood experiences, contact with nature and rural living. The underlying beliefs systems of participants were highlighted as political, spiritual and ecological awareness.

The participants offered accounts of how social work and the natural environment were connected for them. The rural social work field shaped perspectives which were holistic and anti-discriminatory, containing evidence of structural understandings. Practice involving nature as a tool for individual change, food based initiatives and green work based behaviours emerged. The participants' narratives are presented through a Bourdieusian lens. Barriers to integration were explored with notions of restrictiveness and disillusionment emerging from a neoliberal setting.

The participants contributed to the development of the action stage. The action stage first, investigated the inclusion of the natural environment in the social work curricula in 5 Welsh Universities. The survey revealed a focus on individualised approaches being given priority with limited attention given to the wider environment. Phase two, involved the delivery of lectures on the subject of green social work in two universities. A post lecture evaluation form highlighted an interest in the subject amongst students as well as a perception of it being both

relevant and of value to contemporary social work practice. Recommendations are made in relation to social work education, giving attention to food based initiatives and a reconsideration of community based social work with a focus on sustainability.

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Acknowledgements

My interest in critical approaches began many years ago at Middlesex University. I was influenced by several radical academics who offered me alternative ways in which to see the world. I later studied social work at Bangor University, where I met Professor Charlotte Williams who inspired me greatly. I met Charlotte again after she had moved to Keele University and she told me about the Professional Doctorate course and encouraged me to apply. Im extremely grateful to you for your encouragement and belief in me which started me on my doctoral journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Situating the researcher

This thesis is the product of many years of critical discussions which reflect both my personal and professional identity, particularly my interest in social justice. I have felt concern over the growing scientific evidence of climate change and the absence of meaningful societal change towards sustainability, coupled with an awareness that the social work profession has made little effort to challenge ecological injustice. My preferred methodological approach is qualitative as I feel this can encapsulate a politicised and value based stance. This thesis is written in the first person at times when my views are being reflected, which embodies the spirit of reflexivity (Gilgurn and Abrams 2002). To not reveal oneself within the research, which Haraway (1988) refers to as the 'God trick', is to take on an invisible, omniscient presence. Reflexivity or returning to the original source of interpretation and design allows for the avoidance of distortion (Humphries 2008). Denzin (1989) stresses that a qualitative approach must include the researcher moving outward from their own biographies. In recognition of research emerging from the researcher's standpoint, I will begin with a brief synopsis of my biography as an acknowledgement that my identity has influenced this doctorate research. It is important to declare my identity to give the reader an understanding of my cultural and historical positioning. Whilst there are many life events, structures and factors which create our identities, there are key characteristics which impact on our life chances.

I am a white professional female, who resides in rural North Wales and was raised in a Western society. I was born in the 1970's in Newcastle Upon Tyne and raised in an old Labour, patriarchal, working class household. The estate I grew up on held a notion of community which has now diminished, or perhaps my nostalgic viewpoint recalls the estate in this way. I have a long

background of working in the social care sector which began with volunteering as a young adult with a young people's charity. I have also had the privilege of engaging with higher education for several years, initially studying Criminology with Sociology at Middlesex University, where numerous radical thinkers worked at that time. My main interest was feminist criminology, with a specific interest in domestic abuse. I migrated to North Wales in 2004 to study social work. My main interest during my Masters course was feminism and anti-oppressive practice. I completed placements in Women's Aid as well as Youth Justice. After qualifying, I initially volunteered for a Non-Governmental Organisation in Palestine. I have spent over ten years practicing in North Wales in the statutory and charity sector in practice, management and consultancy in the areas of looked after children, leaving care and fostering. I am currently employed by NSPCC Cymru (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Wales) and manage a child sexual exploitation service.

Throughout my social work career, I have continued my interest in community development, critical theory (CT) and the impact of neoliberalism. I have always been mindful of the visibility of neoliberalism within my employment which ensures that control and surveillance are at the top of the agenda. Morley and Macfarlane (2011) have asserted that the threat of neo-liberalist discourses infiltrating the domains of social work is a threat to the very essence of social works value systems. This is an assertion with which I firmly agree, but feel uncertain about how to actively challenge this. Having an interest in environmental issues has been something which has progressed from a commitment to social justice and learning how climate change and environmental degradation is an issue which entwines economic, social and environmental issues together and impacts of the world's poorest people. This academic interest was initially triggered by learning about global feminist perspectives.

My interest in the environment is also reflected in my preference for rural living and feeling at peace in a natural setting. This preference contrasts my childhood and early adulthood which

was spent in cities, and was formed by living overseas for a 4 year period, in a variety of mainly rural places. Despite being a social worker with environmental interests, I only became aware of environmental social work literature during the first year of my professional doctorate course. I had been exploring some writing by Dominelli (2012) when I came across the term 'green social work'. This opened up a new area of learning for me which ultimately lead to the development of my study.

1.2 Welsh context

I have always practiced social work in a Welsh context. This has enabled me to develop a strong understanding of the importance of cultural and linguistic sensitivity. In addition to this, I have been employed by two United Kingdom (U.K.) national charities with English centric tendencies which frequently failed to recognise Welsh based cultural and linguistic needs. It could also be argued that so called U.K. research, often only considers English only data samples or analysis of policy and practice. It is therefore of great importance to me as a Welsh based social worker to undertake Welsh based research. This recognises the need for culturally specific responses to environmental challenges and community development.

While it has been acknowledged that Welsh society has undergone change, the notion of Welsh culture has proven to be robust (Baker and Brown 2008). Wales has a relatively small population of 3.1 million and holds some unique characteristics. For example, the Welsh language is of central importance to cultural identity. Social work students are required to demonstrate linguistic sensitivity in relation to the Welsh language in order to qualify and service users have a right to statutory service provision through the medium of Welsh. It is protected in law to ensure that it receives equal treatment to the English language (see The Welsh Language Act 1993, Government of Wales Act 1998, and Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011). Welsh is an

official language of public bodies, with all forms of literature being produced in both in Welsh and English. In respect of age and health, Wales has been identified as having a larger ageing population, with 18% of all residents being over the age of 65 years (ONS 2011). Population density varies considerably across Wales with population density (in persons per square kilometre) estimated at 2565.5 in Cardiff compared with 25.5 in Powys (statsWales 2016). These demographics highlight the importance of welfare provision which needs to cover both sparse and densely populated areas in a bilingual country. In respect of child poverty almost one child in three lives in poverty in Wales. This is a higher proportion than in any other nation in the UK and equates to over 200,000 children (Chamberlain and Mullineux 2012).

Denzin (2002) strongly asserts that social justice must include a relentless commitment to cultural diversity. Within this context, it is recognised that the country of Wales has a cultural and historical heritage which differs from other countries in the U.K. It is important for social workers to stress the interdependencies between all life forms but work to engage people at a local level (Dominelli 2012). It is for this reason that this research is to be Welsh specific, with a transnational appeal.

1.3 Climate change and its connection to social work

This research has emerged from the indisputable evidence of climate change and concern about future possible crises relating to resource shortage, including food and water. A recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2013) asserts that global warming is unequivocal and unprecedented. This includes temperature increase of the atmosphere and the oceans, diminished snow and ice levels, and rising sea levels. Scientists have evidenced the warming of the Earth's surface over the last 30 years. This warming has led to a decrease in ice mass in the Polar Regions and a worldwide advancement of glacial melt. This in turn has

impacted on sea levels, with scientists evidencing an increase in sea level rise since the mid-19th century, unprecedented in the last 2 millennia (IPCC 2013). Sea level rise is of urgent concern to low level areas such as Bangladesh and small Island states. It is important to recognise that such areas produce a significantly lower carbon footprint than Western countries yet they will suffer the consequences in more profound ways. An increase in levels of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide in the atmosphere has been reported and is currently at the highest levels for 800,000 years. The increase in carbon dioxide, primarily from fossil fuel emissions, has increased by 40% since the industrial era began. Carbon dioxide is absorbed into the Earth's Oceans, having deleterious efforts through acidification (IPCC 2013).

The report states that the dominant cause of observed warming since the 1950's is extremely likely to be human influenced (IPCC 2013). Both industry and capitalism have led to development on a large scale which is unsustainable as a result of the Earths finite resources. Despite clear scientific evidence and widespread concern about the effects of climate change there has been significant resistance to the acknowledgement of environmental harm being caused and as Dominelli (2012) clearly warns us:

"There are many vested interests involved in maintaining the world order as it is."

(Dominelli 2012 p196)

It is therefore critical that alternative paradigms are promoted to resist such a world order and to find much needed solutions. Social works insight into community development approaches, organising and activism could prove useful in this struggle if these skills were fully realised and embraced on a global scale.

The effects of environmental degradation and resource depletion on marginalised people globally highlight the importance of social work research in this area. This depletion benefits a privileged few whilst jeopardising the survival of everyone (Besthorn 2012). It is vital that social

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work recognises the valuable skills it can bring in contributing to the arena of environmentalism. The challenges which are facing the planet cannot be addressed solely by the scientific community and require a wide range of groups. It is the recognition of the adverse effects of climate change on the most disadvantaged communities and social work's aim of promoting social justice, which places the profession in a position whereby it can no longer regard the environmental crisis as a marginalised interest. Social workers are uniquely placed to take action and challenge unsustainable practices and as such, for social work to remain relevant, it must ensure that environmental issues become an integral part of practice (Dominelli 2012).

1.4 Contribution to knowledge

There has been an increased engagement in ecological justice as the social work profession begins to understand how social justice and climate change are inextricably connected. Several publications and special edition journals have highlighted the vast potential for social work engagement with the natural environment such as Australian Social Work (2013), Social Work Education (2015), Gray et al (2013) and Dominelli (2012) and whilst the theoretical approaches of commentators may vary:

> *"environmental issues are increasingly acknowledged as a concern for the social work*
>
> *profession."*

(Molyneux 2010 p61)

In recent years, the calls for an increase in theoretical specificity (Kemp 2011) and practice frameworks (Molyneux 2010) for environmental social work have begun to be heard, with research and practice examples emerging to support this vision.

This research aims to develop knowledge about social workers who hold an interest in the environment and environmental issues in Wales. By way of in-depth semi structured interviews, the social workers narratives were elicited in relation to the natural environment. The research explored how social worker's connect the environment and social work, if at all and how integration into practice may have occurred. These interviews were analysed through thematic analysis which offered insight into the level of practice engagement in Wales as well as the perceived barriers.

The research is methodologically underpinned by CT, which carries with it a component of action research which should progress the aims, integral to CT, of social justice being incorporated throughout the process. This occurred through engaging with social workers who were interested in environmental issues and providing the opportunity to consider the environment and social work as well as action planning to increase awareness and consider barriers and opportunities for environmental social work to occur. Based on input from social work participants, the action component comprised a preliminary survey to Welsh Universities running social work degrees and subsequent lectures on the topic of green social work to students in two Welsh Universities. Therefore, this research has an intended outcome of an increase in awareness of environmental social work within Wales. Awareness raising is a key strategy which has strongly featured in other critical traditions such as feminist approaches to addressing domestic abuse. The findings are discussed through the lens of Bourdieu's (1984) theorising of the agent, habitus and field and incorporates a critique of neoliberalism within social work which supports an understanding of existing barriers to structural change.

1.5 Thesis outline

- The Introduction chapter situates both the researcher and the cultural context of the research.

- The literature review is divided into considerations of theoretical development, primary research and practice. These three chapters follow the chronological development of environmental social work which began with debates around systems theory and eco-critical approaches, followed by some experimenting with primary research as well as practice based considerations. This chapter concludes by presenting the research aims and questions for this thesis.

- The methodology chapter follows which addresses the paradigmatic scope of this research which draws from CT and the work of Bourdieu (1984). The methodological basis for the action stage of the research is presented as well as a discussion on reflection and reflexivity.

- The methods chapter provides the reader with an in-depth description of the participants and the recruitment process. The data collection process and approach to analysis are discussed in detail as well as ethical considerations underpinning the research.

- Chapters seven to eleven present the research findings: Chapter seven explores the identities of social work participants with environmental interests. The formation of habitus is considered through childhood and family influences, contact with nature and rurality. This chapter includes three selected case studies which demonstrate the impact of modes of production on participant's experience of nature.

- In Chapter eight there is then an exploration of the belief systems which has driven the participants to accumulate environmental capital. These belief systems comprise spiritual beliefs, political beliefs and ecological awareness.

- The focus of the research findings shifts in Chapter nine to the field of rural social work which identifies a number of perspectives: holistic approaches, anti-oppressive practice and structural social work.

- This is followed by chapter ten which explores the following practices: nature as a tool for change, green work based behaviours and initiatives involving food.

- In chapter 11 the participant's perspectives on barriers to integrating the environment into practice is presented. Participant's views on social work, particularly statutory social work and the restrictive nature of that system are discussed. This chapter captures the disillusionment felt by the participants, which emerged during the interviews. Another prevalent theme was the feeling of insecurity about being interviewed on this topic. Many participants felt they lacked the credentials to discuss the environment and social work and despite having a strong interest in both subjects, few had previously considered a connection between them both.

- The action stage is presented in chapter 12. This chapter presents the responses from the participants when asked how the environmental social work could be more visible. This led to the development of the action stage. This involves a survey targeting social work courses and an awareness raising action with social work students.

- The findings chapter culminates in chapter 13, the discussion chapter. This chapter reflects on the findings through a Bourdieusian lens exploring the habitus, field and symbolic violence experienced by participants within a neoliberal setting. The discussion chapter then moves on to discuss social work resistance in the era of the Anthropocene.

- The thesis ends with a concluding chapter which offers some final reflections and recommendations.

Foreword

Social work's emerging curiosity and interest in the wider environmental debate is on the increase and the inclusion of the physical environment on to the social work agenda is gaining ground (Gray et al 2013: Molyneux 2010). Social work by its very definition is intrinsically linked to human rights and social justice: therefore it is essential that issues relating to ecological justice are given full consideration given the global situation relating to the climate, resources and marginalised populations (Dominelli 2014). As a consequence of these global contexts, there is a widening call within the international social work arena for the profession to incorporate such issues into practice, policy, values, education and research (Hoff and McNutt 1994: McKinnon 2008: Zaph 2009).

The data bases which were used in the search for relevant literature were Ebsco, ProQuest and the Web of Science. A range of search terms were included and included: 'environmental social work', 'green social work', 'sustainability and social work' and 'ecological social work'. Certain social work journals were identified as being a platform for such discussions including: International Social Work, British Journal of Social Work, Social Work Education, Critical Social Work, Critical and Radical Social Work and Australian Social Work. In addition to journal searches, I became aware of academics that held a particular interest in the subject.

This literature review will explore a variety of theoretical perspectives which have been utilised in the social work and the environment discourse. This includes the theoretical frameworks of the person in environment / systems theory, eco-spiritual perspectives and the eco-critical approach. There are diverse perspectives and terms used to discuss this subject which can present a challenge as at times these are used interchangeably. These theoretical convergences

and definitional differences will be given attention. Secondly, the review explores research which has been undertaken in this field. Also included is the emergence of several case studies, models for practice and educational initiatives which have provided potential directions for environmental social work, whilst reducing the praxis of theory and practice. The review continues with an assessment of the current state of literature in this area and a consideration of research gaps. To conclude, the research aims and questions are presented.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Development

2.1 Introduction

Social work has been slow to address environmental issues (Gray et al 2006) being referred to as 'isolated' from key debates and environmental action (Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001). For the social work profession, much discussion on the 'environment' has only referred to the social environment (Närhi and Matties 2001), with the proximal, interpersonal environmental facets, such as family and school dominating. This is despite social work's historical understanding that people's physical environment significantly affects their life experience and matters relating to equity and justice (Kemp 2011). However, the inclusion of the natural environment was indeed a feature of early social workers and social reformers who supported the creation of a recognised profession today. Pioneers, such as Jane Addams and Octavia Hill understood the need to incorporate the wider physical environment into practice and therefore the:

> "*the roots of environmental thinking can be traced back to the very first days of social work*
>
> *itself.*"

(Närhi and Matties 2001 p19)

Addams' holistic practice helped to found the Settlement House movement and had an unrelenting focus on the urban environment, addressing concerns such as poverty reduction, housing conditions, pollution and sanitation (Närhi and Matties 2001). The movement also gathered research data to identify needs using this data to improve communities through political activism and organising. Such improvements included child labour laws, public health reforms and widows' pensions (Shaw 2011). The U.K. based example is that of Octavia Hill, a founder of social housing and the National Trust, a social reformer who did not separate the

natural environment from the social environment. Despite these promising beginnings, social work quickly moved away from any consideration of the natural environment for a significant period of time, while increasingly focusing on individualised approaches. It was the emergence of the environmental movement, and the increasing recognition of environmental degradation, primarily caused by human behaviour and activity, which has promoted a resurgence of interest the natural environment (Peeters 2012).

In the early stages of a growing environmental awareness, interest was limited to a small group of academics who repeatedly asserted the need for social work to engage in environmental issues (Berger and Kelly 1993: Besthorn 1997: Hoff and McNutt 1994). It was not until 1981 that social work academics Germain (1981) and Weick (1981) 'raised the alarm' in relation to a bio-physical absence in the social work agenda, and over the following two decades more academics with an awareness of a pending environmental crises joined the debate. The ground breaking publication edited by Hoff and McNutt (1994) entitled '*The global environmental crisis: Implications for social welfare and social work'* gave social work its first comprehensive text calling for the profession to fully recognise the connection between planetary and human well-being. Contributions made by Rogge (1994), Tester (1994) and Shubert (1994) offered persuasive arguments relating to social work's lack of foresight on environmental issues, recognising the breach in social work ethics and values involving the well-established aim of upholding social justice. These early pioneers sought to raise awareness of the impact of climate change, environmental degradation and the potential engagement of social work.

The need to raise awareness spanned decades and to an extent still continues. However, it became increasingly recognised that early publications did not offer any vision of what this form of social work intervention may look like in practice (Molyneux 2010: Kemp 2011). In addition, it was noted that there was reluctance from the profession to transform practice to include environmental justice (Coates et al 2006: Zapf, 2005a: Zapf, 2005b). In the context of a scientific

consensus on climate change and an increase in extreme weather events, the subject is finally starting to expand its remit.

2.2 Terminology

A clear feature which emerges from the literature is the variety of terms which have been attributed to the study of the environment and social work (Ramsay and Boddy 2017). These various terms consist of: ecological social work (McKinnon and Alston 2016), environmental social work (Gray et al 2013), green social work (Dominelli 2012) and eco-social work (Peeters 2012) or as some have said:

> "*Whatever you want to call what we call a new paradigmatic shift in our attitude to person-in-environment.*"

(Hessle 2014 p2)

These various terms appear to have occurred largely as a result of theoretical disparity informed by diverse cultural contexts. However, this has been somewhat unhelpful when trying to gain definitional clarity, with few writers defining their work and identifying with a specific theoretical perspective. Ramsey (2016) views the lack of definitional clarity as potentially impeding the progress of practice based initiatives. An exception to this is Dominelli (2012) who offers clear definitional clarity for her green social work practice model.

Dominelli (2012) has distanced her work from environmental social work, making a clear distinction between environmental and green social work which she views as being separated by green social works focus on socio-political analysis (Dewane 2013). The distinction between 'green' and 'environmental' is also supported by the work of Ife (2013) who makes a critical contribution to this debate in '*Community Development in an uncertain world*'. The publication

discusses differences in solutions posed between 'environmental' and 'green' perspectives, with environmental responses adopting a singular isolated approach, which seeks discrete solutions to specific problems, e.g. family planning programmes as a response to population increases, and a reduction of greenhouse gases to reduce global warming. Such solutions are sought within the existing industrialised neoliberal paradigm, often involving a technological focus (Ife 2013). Green responses differ in that they adopt a more radical approach as environmental degradation is deemed to be a mere symptom of an underlying paradigmatic problem, involving socio-economic and political structures which need changing. Underpinning this is a focus on sustainability (Ife 2013).

Despite the aforementioned challenge, recent publications which adopt the terms 'ecological social work' or 'environmental social work' do have a focus on structural factors and contain a transformative approach and they are increasingly used in publications. This increased focus on structural factors may be caused by an increase in theoretical convergence which will be given attention later in this chapter. It is also the case that terms are not always selected because of a theoretical stance. Within recent publications of social work and the natural environment, there appears to be no definitional or conceptual difference given to the terms 'ecological social work' and 'environmental social work'. Regardless of the variety of terms used, there is a collective concern about environmental crises and its impact on human welfare. This includes agreement that the natural environment should become a central focus of the profession (Boetto 2016).

The term which will be adopted throughout this thesis is that of environmental social work. Gray et al (2013) identify principles for the environmental social work agenda which include sustainable development, a shift from social justice to ecological justice, the critique of capitalism, spirituality and interdisciplinary research. It is felt that this term is inclusive of a variety of different theoretical perspectives and focuses. As evidenced in Ramsay and Boddy's

(2017) review the term 'environmental social work' has become the most commonly used term in publications on the environment and social work. It is felt that the term ecological social work has been widely used to refer to human and community systems based on general systems theory. It is hoped that by adopting the term environmental social work, the focus on the natural environment will be clear. It should be noted that in the early stages of this research the term green social work was adopted, this is notable in the documentation within the appendices. The term was changed during the data collection period to reflect the wide ranging interpretations of the subject.

2.3 Systems Theory

The most influential early theoretical contributions to the subject of environmental social work have stemmed from systems theory, with numerous attempts to develop the person-in-environment approach in social work to include the natural environment (Kemp et al, 1997: Gitterman and Germain, 2008: Kemp, 2010). The origins of systems theory emerged in the 1940's (Mary 2008). The introduction of systems theory within social work marks a clear emergence of an established ecological framework for the profession. It became influential in the 1970's through the work of writers such as Auerswald (1968) and is still widely utilised in education and practice. The works of Von Bertanffy (1968) and Bateson (1972) were developed to establish a systems theory specific to social work, primarily used to consider the dynamics between family members. There are two identified strands of the theory which came to dominate within the U.K. from Goldstein (1973) and Pincus and Minahan (1973). The later work of Siporin (1975) and Germain and Gitterman (1980) becoming more dominant within the United States.

Contemporary systems theory has two branches which are referred to as 'generalist' and 'ecological' with both branches utilising person-in-environment thinking and using the term 'ecology' as a metaphor. The generic use of systems theory, which has also been adopted in traditional sciences, connects societal systems with biological systems and stresses their interconnectedness. The theory allowed social work to move forward from viewing individuals, and their perceived problems, as isolated from there wider environments (Barber 1991 cited in Närhi 2004). Ecological systems theory separated from the generalist framework in the 1970's and attempted to reconcile and refocus on the social and natural connection (Mary 2008). Germain and Gitterman (1980) state that within the ecological model of systems theory, individuals and the physical environment hold an engagement of exchanges containing reciprocal shaping and influencing of one another over time.

Mary (2008) perceived the development of systems theory as a reactionary tactic against the domination of psychodynamic approaches which individualised the human problem. In addition, a growing understanding of global structural facets has allowed theorists to strongly argue that ecological forces have potentially more of an impact on a child than the parental relationship (Rick 1998). On this basis, Ungar (2002) refers to early person-in-environment models as implicitly 'naive' based on the narrow focus of family relationships. Yet despite numerous critics, there are those within social work who highlight the usefulness of a theoretical basis stemming from an expanded version of this approach, which incorporates the natural environment. For example, Lucas-Darby (2011) asserts that the professions person-in-environment focus, ensures a 'natural fit' with incorporating the natural environment into social work education. Despite arguments for its usefulness, systems theory, both generalist and ecological has had a series of criticisms launched against it. For example, both general and ecological systems theory have come under criticism for their drive for stability and therefore, resistance to change (Mary 2008). The main critique of these approaches comes from feminist, post-structural and critical theorists. Such theoretical perspectives strongly assert the need to

consider power within all relations. Efforts have occurred to rectify the highlighted flaws to the ecological systems theory model.

A revised version of Germain and Gitterman's (1996) life model attempted to address criticisms by incorporating the concepts of power and oppression as well technological pollution. However, explanations exploring the reasons for connections and why occurrences happen are absent (Ungar 2002) and therefore structural analyses remains limited. This can be seen in the children's and families assessment framework still widely used in the U.K. This is visually presented as a triangle representing developmental needs, parenting capacity and environmental factors. Whilst this is seen as a holistic approach to understanding a child's life, it does little to support a structural understanding. An analysis of the origins of social work and the environment by Närhi and Matties (2016) illustrates the significant of systems theory which has played a major role in the development the subject. However, it is noted that its importance in environmental social work has waned in recent years, giving way to the prominence of eco critical approaches.

2.4 Eco-spirituality

The eco-spiritual theoretical perspective within social work was developed during the 1980's and 1990's. The development of an eco-spiritual social work perspective has been based on the following assumptions:

Table 1 Eco-spiritual assumptions:

The Earth is sacred

Wholeness (unity consciousness)

Emergence

Interdependence

Diversity and inclusivity

Individual in community

Creativity

(Gray and Coates 2013)

The perspective encapsulates an eco-centric stance (Besthorn, 1997, 2013: Coates, 2003: Mary, 2008: Zapf, 2009) which has challenged anthropocentrism and is an unusual stance for a profession focused on humans. Those who belong to the deep ecology social work movement do not perceive a social justice framework to be sufficient for the challenges ahead. The focus on human wellbeing and impact is referred to as 'shallow justice' and is perceived to have had a debilitating effect on the professions progress when considering the environment (Besthorn 2012). For the eco-spiritual stance to be achieved, an ecological consciousness is needed which moves humans away from nature domination and cultivates an eco-centric perspective, influenced by the approaches of Gandhi and Spinoza, whose actions encompassed a universal interest, not a self-interest (Besthorn 2012). For Besthorn (2000):

"Spirituality is inherently ecological and ecology is inherently spiritual."

 (Besthorn 2000 p2)

In-depth insight into the eco spiritual perspective is offered by Coates (2003), who presents a broad range of eco-spiritual aspects to the reader, such as cosmology and concepts of wisdom in nature. A key tenant of Coates' (2003) argument on global consciousness states that, the process of increased awareness and personal change begins for humans, on an individual level, which includes the rejection of the existing paradigm. As the numbers of people with increased awareness grows, the process occurs at a more rapid pace, with the social work profession supporting such changes on a personal and community based level.

The impact of this perspective has largely been confined to the United States of America (USA), with the theoretical development being undertaken by a few key individuals. There is some evidence of its impact as the key principles of 'deep ecology' were identifiable in the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) in the USA in 2000, when they asserted social worker's responsibilities in protecting the environment and acknowledged that humans are a mere part of the Earths ecosystem and do not have superiority over other parts of the system (Besthorn 2012). In relation to theory compatibility, the eco spiritual perspective has aligned itself with an expanded version of systems theoretical thinking (Gray and Coates 2013). Like many critics of systems theory, the eco spiritual perspective is critical of the strong focus on social components of systems theory which has led to restricted vision of wider ecological concerns. For Coates (2003) by expanding systems theory an 'Earth consciousness' can be incorporated:

> "*Such an awareness will enable Social Work to play a significant role in helping humankind to develop a systems consciousness in which thinking and consciousness are closely linked to nature.*"

(Coates 2003 p81)

The theoretical basis expands to assume the interdependency of all life forms, which the eco spiritual theorists claim to be consistent with traditional indigenous knowledge production.

Principles of indigenous cultures resonate with the concepts of harmony and balance with spirituality integrated into the everyday physical discourse (Coates et al 2006). Coates et al (2006) state the space created in discussions of the environment and spirituality within social work has created an arena for the discourse of indigenous perspectives to be heard. Further claims of theoretical alignment come from Gray and Coates (2013) who discuss this perspectives compatibility with critical perspectives in respect of the analysis of power relations. Both seek to overcome hidden barriers to move towards a new paradigm: however they claim the eco spiritual perspective differs by focusing on developing cooperative strategies as opposed to a focus on conflict.

The perceived ability of the perspective to incorporate or co-exist alongside other perspectives (systems theory, CT and indigenous perspectives) is a potential strength. However, it needs to be acknowledged that the claim that an eco-spiritual perspective can incorporate indigenous perspectives is a large one which could be deemed professional imperialism. Furthermore, there are deep philosophical tensions existing within the primary tenants of the movement surrounding 'oneness' and the term 'environmental fascism'. Such terms have been applied to those who seek general environmental goals which occur at the expense of humanity, based on the lack of recognition that those who are most marginalised suffer exponentially from environmental degradation (Gray and Coates 2012). This debate may continue to provide resistance to the approaches growing visibility and popularity. However, the eco spiritual perspective has an apparent ability to adapt to criticism and evolve. The major need for an individual to increase their awareness (or globalise their consciousness), can be criticised as this places responsibility on individuals to change themselves whilst in their existing conditions. However, the recent contribution by Gray and Coates (2013) presents a new value system which combines a social, political and spiritual approach when considering the environment which includes social and environmental justice and thus moves away from individual responsibility to create change. This shift to a new paradigm, they state, does not occur individual by individual

as there is a need to engage with the social, political and economic systems to move towards a sustainably viable alternative (Gray and Coates 2013). It would seem likely that the subject of environmental social work will continue to consider spirituality, but a continuation of an individualised approach appears unlikely, as eco-spiritual contributors begin to include wider structural considerations in their publications.

2.5 Indigenous perspectives

In addition to more prevalent theoretical perspectives, the environmental social work literature has made some efforts to engage more peripheral perspectives, such as indigenous perspectives (Tedmanson 2014: Dominelli 2012). While there is clear scope for such perspectives to play a role in advancing social work's understanding and contribution in this area, there have been few attempts to directly include such perspectives. It has been argued that the dominance of Western perspectives in the development of social work knowledge has resulted in an accompanying reluctance to engage with and embrace the knowledge and skills of indigenous people. This has resulted in social work being more closely aligned with colonisation and professional imperialism (Coates et al 2006). The most striking example of this is Australia's 'stolen generation', where children were removed from Aboriginal families and communities with the aim of integrating them into white culture (Coates et al 2006). The recognition of indigenous perspectives concerning the environment is becoming increasingly visible globally, in both legislative change, and action against corporations. Examples of this include the Bolivian 'Law of Mother Nature', which acknowledges that the Earth itself has rights, including the right of protection (Vidal 2011) and the Dakota pipeline protest which has gained worldwide support, highlighting the police forces' role in attacking unarmed civilian protesters in an attempt to protect corporate interests (Wong 2016).

Nevertheless, some social work writers have considered indigenous perspectives for example, Coates et al, (2006) whose contribution suggests that the discourse relating to spirituality and environmental social work offers a space for indigenous perspectives, which could also create the space to re-think mainstream social work discourses. In addition, Weaver (2014) from the Lakota people in the USA, explains environmental justice from an indigenous perspective. Weaver (2014) argues the need to strengthen indigenous and non-indigenous partnerships which incorporates an acknowledgement of colonising societies' responsibilities for climate change and the disproportionate 'burden' this places on indigenous populations.

Dominelli (2012) makes frequent reference to indigenous populations and perspectives in '*Green social work*' and reminds readers that European models of practice have been unwillingly imposed on indigenous people, drawing attention to the indigenised social work, which has developed in the global south in opposition to these traditionally dominant perspectives. Indigenous perspectives are interwoven through Dominelli's (2012) text, illustrating examples from practice including: the use of the 'First Nations environmental assessment framework' and a case study on the 'Mapuche struggles for land rights in Chile' which also draws attention to the difficulties of indigenous people's perspectives being recognised by environmental activists. Ramsay and Boddy's (2017) review of environmental social work literature found that 41% had been influenced by indigenous perspectives. The importance of including indigenous perspectives is imperative: firstly because an indigenous worldview which is connected to spiritual consciousness, survival needs and a harmonious relationship with the planet, which lies in contradiction to capitalism values (Gray et al 2013). Secondly, because Indigenous populations are amongst the first to be impacted upon by climate change (Weaver 2014). Such a perspective therefore holds great insight for social work and the environment as well as wider environmental discourses (Dominelli 2012).

2.6 Eco-critical approach

The eco-critical approach seeks to combine social and ecological questions and seeks the inclusion of sustainable development within social work practice (Hoff and McNutt 1994, Opielka & Ostner 1987). The development of an eco-critical theoretical framework has emerged from the environmental movement and environmental sociology originating in the 1970's. Areas of sustainable development and environmental awareness are key to this approach. Närhi (2004) describes the eco-critical approach as the search for sustainable and ecologically viable models of social work and social policy. A characteristic of an eco-critical approach involves extensive critique of industrial modernity. The eco-critics attend to social action and change, urging social workers to politicise their practice at the micro, mezzo and macro level. Concepts of participation, empowerment and collaboration are of central importance. The eco-critical approach strongly asserts that social workers should embrace a political agenda which moves towards sustainable development (Närhi and Matthies 2001).

The eco-critical approach has as a result of influences from socio-cultural and political factors, separated into two distinct theoretical strands, one emerging from an Anglo-American lineage and the other a German lineage. The Eco-critical perspective became particularly well established in Germany, driven by the rise of the green movement. During the 1970's and 1980's German social work became more politicised in practice which involved social workers in political protests against nuclear energy to everyday realities such as cycling, organic food production and recycling (Närhi and Matthies 2001). Such eco-critical practices were underpinned by the principles of self-help, decentralisation, subjectivity and de-professionalisation (Närhi and Matthies 2001). The German strand of development transformed 'social questions' in policy and social work practice into an 'eco-social question'. The German school of thought is deemed more radical as it seeks solutions outside of institutional

boundaries. Whereas in the Anglo-American strand, the focus has remained on social welfare (Närhi and Matthies 2001).

The prevalence of an Eco-critical perspective from Anglo-American writers was much less common. Hoff and McNutt (1994) challenged assumptions that natural resources are there for humans to exploit and stressed the interdependence between nature and humanity. They highlight that contemporary social work discourse and social policy were developed during industrialisation which now needs to embrace matters of sustainability and localised communities. It has been argued that over the last decade, the eco-critical approach from Anglo-American writers has strengthened and expanded since the new millennium e.g. Ungar 2002: 2003: Coates 2003: Besthorn 2003 (Närhi and Matthies 2016).

From the 2010's onwards, eco-critical discussions have grown and transformed global debates. This has been supported by several international conferences and publications (Närhi and Matthies 2016). These discussions hold common features which challenge mainstream social work and call for a paradigm shift whilst critiquing current structures. Närhi and Matthies (2016) view these discussions as having a global perspective whilst creating models for local action focusing on community resilience. For example, Rambaree (2013) argues for a stronger focus on social justice within sustainable development and the need for social workers to analyse both social and cultural impacts. Rambaree (2013) offers insight into the significant factors of Mauritian eco-critical social work, which includes anti-oppressive practice, critical thinking and the advancement of social justice. It had previously been noted that the U.K. had not made any contribution to the Eco-critical approach (Närhi and Matthies 2001), however, this changed with the publication of Dominelli's *Green social work* in 2012.

2.7 Green social work

In recent years the drive to establish theoretical specificity has been progressed significantly by the work of Dominelli. Dominelli's (2012) publication *'Green Social Work: from environmental crises to environmental justice'* established a clearer conceptual framework to explore issues relating to social work and the environment with a strong practice model to work from, positioning her as a clear expert in the field (Dewane 2013). It could be argued that one of the most refreshing contributions which '*Green Social Work*' makes to the debate is the offering of concise definitional clarity on what this term actually means. Green social work has been defined as:

> *"a form of holistic professional social work practice that focuses on the: interdependencies amongst people, the social organisation of relationships between people and the flora and fauna in their physical habitats: and the interactions between socio-economic and physical environmental crises and interpersonal behaviours that undermine the well-being of human beings and planet earth."*

(Dominelli 2012 p25)

This is a transformative approach which challenges oppression and poverty with an aim to:

> *"work for the reform of the socio-political and economic forces that have a deleterious impact upon the quality of life of poor and marginalised populations, secure the policy changes and social transformations necessary for enhancing the well-being of people and the planet today and in the future and advance the duty to care for others and the right to be cared by others."*

(Dominelli 2012 p25)

Dominelli critiques industrialisation and urbanisation adopted in the West leading to intensified environmental pressures and takes a globalised perspective which includes a critique of neoliberalism, and poses societal and community based sustainable solutions. For example, addressing the impact of poverty is considered, and includes women's initiatives, credit unions and social enterprises such as self-employed women's association (SEWA) which engages in various activities to support income generation, promote energy saving initiatives such as supporting women's access to solar powered lanterns and energy efficient stoves (Dominelli 2012). Other environmental priorities include: industrial pollution, climate change, migration and resource scarcity and accompanying case studies offer examples of practice which illustrates the potential of social work to embrace roles in environmental efforts aimed at addressing these priorities.

Dominelli (2012) asserts that the green social work model transcends a systems based ecological social work which she is critical of, based on its lack of action and blindness towards structural power relations. Dominelli's (2012) work is also critical of the deep ecology movement due to its limited impact. In comparison, green social work focuses on responses to the environmental crisis which include the necessity of challenging and addressing poverty, structural inequalities, industrialisation processes, consumption patterns, global interdependencies and the use of limited natural resources (Dominelli 2012). Dewane (2013) argues that green social work holds more relevance for community based social workers which excludes those in direct practice with individuals, where the majority of social workers in the Global North are employed. This has major implications for those in countries which have lost their community based focus. However, the practice model for green social work clearly moves beyond more Western dominated practices of an individualised approach which creates barriers to structural change and challenges systematic oppression.

2.8 Theoretical convergence

Närhi and Matties (2016) update their 2001 chapter which traces the historical and conceptual development of ecological social work. Using content analysis and meta-analysis on existing literature they examine theory and evidence of the two conceptual strands of systems theory and the eco-critical approach which have coexisted since the 1970's as well as reflecting on more recent theoretical convergences (Närhi and Matties 2016). This convergence was noted to have appeared since the 1990's based on a maturing theoretical understanding that the incorporation of systems theory does not have to exclude the development of a sustainable society (Närhi and Matties 2001). For example, those whose work stems from the eco-critical approach have given consideration to the place of systems theory. Hoff and McNutt (1994) consider social sustainability and this is also considered in Närhi's (2004) field research. In addition, Peeters (2012) also combines systems theory with an eco-critical approach. Another example of a convergence of theoretical perspectives includes Mary (2008), whose publication considered societal and economic transformation towards a sustainable world, which also included chapters on new systems thinking and spirituality. It would appear from contemporary literature that the earlier deep ecology proponents, such as Besthorn (2000; 2012) and Coates (2003) have also embraced a more critical stance, learning from the criticisms heralded against deep ecology, and accepting the necessity of recognising the disproportionate effect of environmental degradation on marginalised and indigenous communities. Such writers have produced articles on subjects such as environmentally displaced persons (Besthorn and Meyers 2010), vertical farming and the global food crisis (Besthorn 2013) showing a stronger awareness of structural inequality.

It would appear that theoretical specificity has progressed significantly and the various perspectives are intentionally no longer viewed as mutually exclusive:

"By uniting the strengths of different perspectives it is possible to create new tools to understand the relationship between human (society) and living environment (nature)."

(Närhi 2004 cited in Närhi and Matties 2016 p9)

For Coates et al (2006) the model of a puzzle supports attempts to resolve tensions between social work and environmental discourses which emphasises the need for a persistent search to resolve theoretical tensions and find foundations which can incorporate the diverse nature of social work and differing worldviews. The puzzle model (Figure One) is described as a theoretical jigsaw whereby a framework can be created which can manage the dualism of localised, indigenous perspectives and wider structural considerations.

Figure One: Theoretical framework for the eco-spiritual perspective
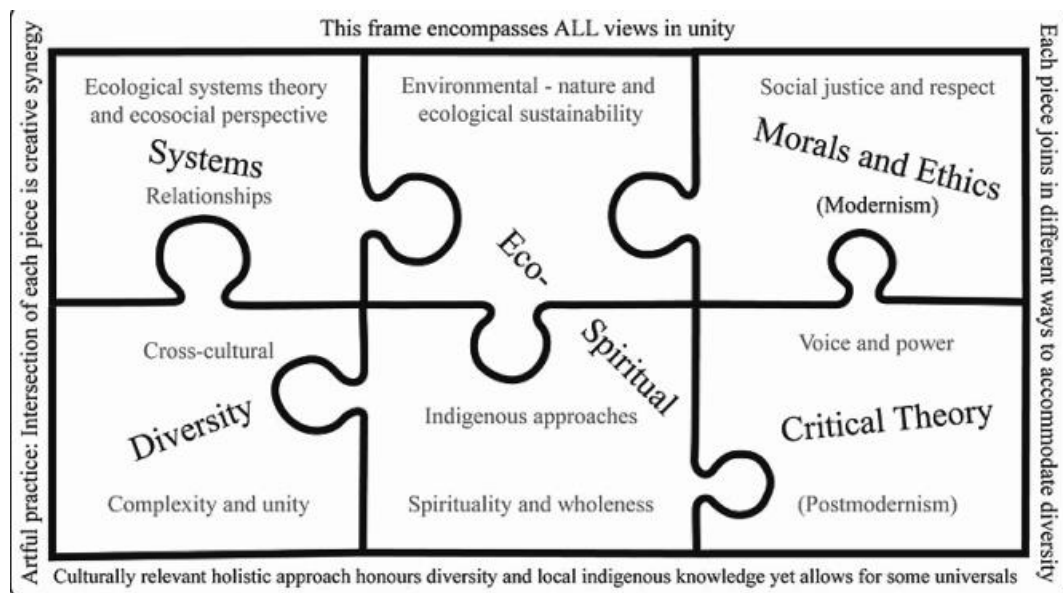
(Coates, Gray and Hetherington 2006)

While the model is not clear in explaining how tensions are to be resolved, it does offer an alternative to viewing theoretical variations as being in conflict with one another. It is also recognised that social workers do not rely on single theories in practice, drawing on a range of theories to achieve change. It is however clear that systems theory is reducing in popularity as a result of a more critical approach which highlights the inequalities and oppression relating to resource distribution and ecological injustices.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an overview of the various theoretical perspectives used in environmental social work thinking. The literature and historical analysis of the subject begins in the early days of the profession with social reformers such as Jane Addams and Octavia Hill, who recognised the importance of the physical environment and its impact on human welfare. Whilst this understanding was then lost, interest in the natural environment started to re-emerge due to the influence of the environmental movement and increased knowledge of climate change. This interest was slow to emerge and involved a small group of academics. The well-established systems theory proved a useful theoretical perspective for those wishing to argue for a stronger focus on the natural environment. Whilst this perspective was widely used, other perspectives, such as eco-spiritual and eco-critical perspectives also began to gain prominence.

In recent years there has been an increased visibility of eco-critical publications which give attention to sustainable solutions and social / ecological justice. Whilst systems theory can still feature, its importance appears to have diminished. This may be due to a maturing discourse which acknowledges the disproportionate effects of climate change on the world's poorest people. This ensures that critiques of existing economic, political and social structures occur and

environmental social work is political in nature. Given the extent of neoliberal critique in eco-critical approaches, it is noticeable that environmental social work has not yet considered the work of Bourdieu. Bourdieu's theories, which have previously been applied to environmental issues outside of social work (Haluza-DeLay 2008), have the ability to incorporate both the individual and the structures surrounding them. This could be useful for social works advancement of environmental considerations. Bourdieu's focus on neoliberal critique and interest in the social work profession (Garrett 2007b) illustrates the potential of his work to support eco-critical approaches in developing theoretically. In more recent years there have been calls for more attention to practice methods and primary research. Whilst the theoretical debates seemed to have occurred for decades the emergence of primary research is relatively new and will now be given consideration.

Chapter 3: The emergence of primary research

3.1 Introduction

The role of research is crucial in establishing a solid platform for investigating how social work develops environmentally orientated practice and to identify existing gaps. It has been argued that without research, environmental endeavours to establish a recognised, evidenced based subject will not be fulfilled and will not come to the attention of policy makers and mainstream social work (Molyneux 2010). While undertaking research has been slow to develop in this area, the research base of environmental social work is continuing to expand. This section will explore three pieces of research which have contributed to the existing evidence base. These have been chosen as they give attention to social workers environmental beliefs and practices within cultural contexts and exemplify research which focuses specifically on environmental social workers. These three pieces of research therefore hold similarities with the aims of this research.

3.2 Marlow and Van Rooyen (2001)

The pioneering work of Marlow and Van Rooyen (2001) heralded the emergence of primary research in environmental social work. This exploratory study involved a comparative questionnaire and set out to understand the extent to which social workers include environmental issues into practice. The study contained a brief literature review concerning theoretical frameworks but it does not explicitly align itself to any particular theory. It does however, engage in a theoretical debate by discussing the use of systems theory, offering a critique on social work's lack of recognition of the physical environment over social / cultural aspects.

The main aim of the research was to:

"take the first steps in the development of guidelines for environmentally related

interventions and in order to stimulate interest in green social work."

(Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001 p242)

The research was based within two countries and regions with completely separate cultural histories: KwaZulu Natal, South Africa and New Mexico, USA. The researcher's acknowledge this by referring to the divergent demographic contexts and the variations in social problems constructed by their political, social and economic positioning (Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001).

The results show that 92.8% of social work participants personally felt that environmental issues were important to them and 21.6% said that they held a membership with an environmental group. Participants were asked about the importance of environmental issues to the profession of social work. An overall percentage of 71.1% (KwaZulu Natal: 75%, New Mexico: 68.9%) were in agreement with the importance of environmental concerns to social work. 43.2% of participants felt that this was important to their practice and was shown to be statistically insignificant in response difference between countries (KwaZulu Natal: 50%, New Mexico: 37.7%). A more surprising finding was that a total of 45.9% participants indicated that they incorporated environmental issues into their social work practice (KwaZulu Natal: 38.5%, New Mexico: 49.2%) (Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001). This figure is of interest as it indicates the potential of an already well-established environmental theme within the practitioner's practice.

A follow up question asked how participants incorporated environmental issues into their practice. This response generated a total of 88 responses and seven themes emerged in relation to how this incorporation occurred.

Table 2: Ways in which environmental issues are incorporated into practice

Categories of incorporation	No. of respondents
Philosophical interpretations	11
Voluntarism	4
Political action	4
Therapeutic contact with nature	5
Cleaning up environment/recycling	11
Education for increased awareness of environmental issues	35
Not able to categorize	18
Total	88

(Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001)

In addition, the researchers explored obstacles to incorporating environmental issues into their practice with results showing a wide range of barriers being present as illustrated below.

Table 3: Obstacles in incorporating environmental issues into practice (%)

	Both regions	New Mexico	KwaZulu Natal	T-test (*p*)
Bureaucratic	71.1	21.3	15.4	.219
Workload too heavy	39.6	27.9	46.2	.020
Lack of education/ training in environmental issues	37.8	21.3	55.8	.000
Lack of time	36.0	31.1	46.2	.055
Lack of resources	31.5	23.0	50.0	.015
Lack of relevance to social work	25.2	24.6	26.9	.129
Lack of support among colleagues	17.1	21.3	7.7	.037
No supervision	4.5	4.9	1.9	.12

(Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001)

The identified barriers offer insight into reasons why environmental social work may struggle to flourish which therefore appears worthy of further consideration by future research.

Statistically significant differences were found in relation to workload, resources, education and time for the KwaZulu Natal social workers (Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001). The results showed the KwaZulu Natal participants' favoured community based responses over individual social work approaches. This was in contrast to participants from New Mexico, whose responses significantly favoured an individual approach to practice. The researchers produced recommendations which included the development of interventions, partnerships with public health, theories for practice and environmental education for social workers. The researchers call for a more in-depth exploration in the area of interventions, including different varieties and an evaluation of their effectiveness (Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001). They also state that research needs to occur which clarifies the extent to which environmental issues are taught in social work programmes and precisely what this comprises of (Marlow and Van Rooyen 2001).

3.3 Närhi (2004)

Närhi (2004) explores how community based social workers from specific regions of Finland, construct eco-social social work. The study involved an action research project where the social workers' action and knowledge production was studied. This doctoral research spanned a 5 year period. Närhi's (2004) research utilised an eco-social theoretical framework which, she stated, had roots in both branches of systems theory and environmental sociology, stressing the politicised nature of the subject. The 'goals of change' were to increase the social work knowledge base of how the physical environment affects human welfare, and to create others ways of working. This relates to the production of eco-social and inclusive communities emerging from local policies (Närhi 2004). The social workers had contact with the researcher

in a variety of settings such as seminars, work offices and 'out in the field' (Närhi 2004). In addition, eight social workers were interviewed and participant observation was used. Monthly meetings were held with the social work participants to explore their knowledge based on human welfare and the physical environment. This involved 20 social workers over a 3 year period. Another source of data was collected by the participating social workers, which entailed the participating social workers interviewing 20 service users about matters relating to welfare and the physical environment.

The participating social workers viewed eco-social social work as community based and upholding the principles and ideologies of other types of community based social work. Therefore, the approach was deemed to be already established, it has merely transformed into its contemporary form, which gave consideration of pressing environmental matters. Environmental concerns, such as the increase in greenhouse gases, had yet to effect Finnish (or European) service users or social work practices. Therefore, the social workers emphasis lay in the social elements of sustainability as this was in line with local community issues e.g. youth unemployment (Närhi 2004).

Figure 2: How did the social workers construct eco-social social work?

Eco-socially sustainable and inclusive living environment (Aim)

2

4

Social work expertise in the late modern society

1

5

3

Structural and emancipatory social work (Action)

Practical knowledge (Knowledge)

Construction process of eco-social social work
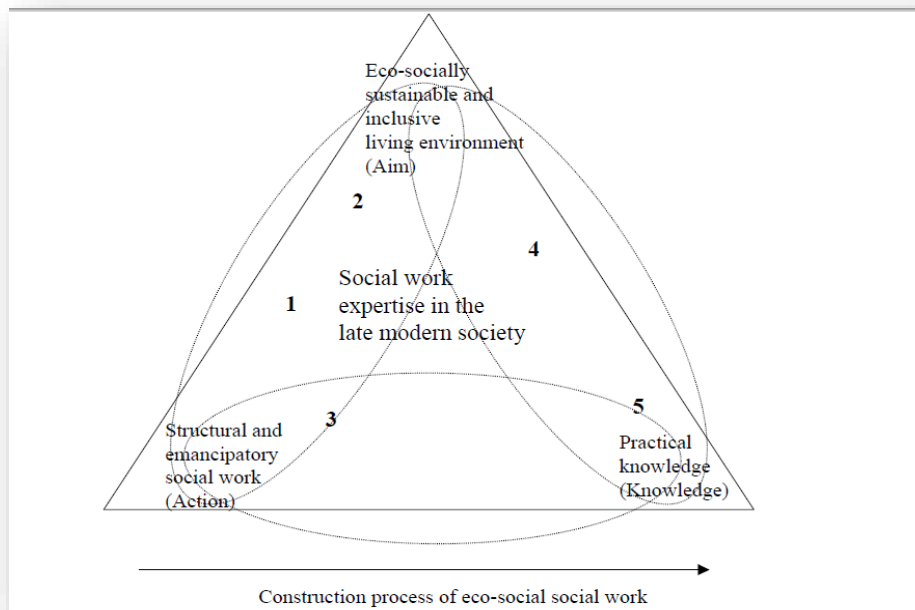
(Närhi 2004)

Närhi (2004) produced an innovative model (figure 2), which offered her interpretation of how eco-social work in her study was constructed. The necessary framework requires 'eco-social self-understanding and self-reflection' when considering social works relationship to sustainability. Närhi (2004) viewed the research as having demonstrated social work's potential for expertise in discussions on eco-social sustainability. The reasons given for this are that social work professionals hold a unique knowledge base which contains multiple 'ways of knowing' as well as a strong grounding in mediation and local community issues. Närhi (2004) concludes by calling for social workers to step forward and offer this knowledge diversity and community understanding as well as for practitioners to reflect upon their own professions actions in regards to eco-social sustainability.

3.4 Shaw (2011)

Shaw (2011) offers a quantitative, cross sectional survey exploring environmental social work. This USA based research involved selection from a random sample of National Association of Social Work (NASW) members to measure environmental attitudes and knowledge. Based on similarities between the aim of environmental justice and the profession's goals, Shaw (2011) hypothesised that social worker's environmental attitudes would be more in line with members of environmental justice organisations as opposed to the general population. The main tool used in the research was the New Ecological Paradigm scale (NEP). The original scale referred to as the 'New Environmental Paradigm' was devised by Dunlap and Van Liere (1978), published in the Journal of Environmental Education which:

"*has become the most widely used measure of environment concern in the world.*"

(Dunlap et al 2000 p3)

The development of more complicated measuring tools transpired throughout the 1980's, however, these have 'proven unwieldy' e.g. specific elements of environmental concern changed causing the measures to become outdated. The NEP scale was later revised and improved in 2000 to incorporate a wider range of ecological perspectives. The current NEP scale consists of fifteen questions where respondents indicate their level of agreement with each statement via a Likert scale. The NEP scale has become a widely recognised and accepted measuring tool (Dunlap et al 2000). It is widely accepted that a high NEP score will relate to pro environmental beliefs and attitudes across a variety of issues. NEP scale use within environmental organisations has evidenced a consistent relationship between high NEP scores and environmentalists compared to the general public (Dunlap et al 2000). It has proven to be a '*resilient analytical and conceptual instrument*' and has influenced many attempts to think about emerging social change in relation to the environment (Shanahan and Perstring 1999 p3).

Dunlap and Van Liere (2000) assert that the overall evidence suggests that the NEP possesses criterion validity.

Shaw (2011) targeted 1000 social workers from the California area which resulted in 373 usable survey responses, giving a response rate of 38.4 percent (Shaw 2011). Demographic categories of respondents were tabulated. Respondents were asked about their knowledge on NASW's statement relating to the natural environment, of which 68.36% of respondents stated that they were not aware of it and a further 10.99% did not believe such a statement existed. Further findings state that 67.56% of social workers said their social work education had not included matters of the natural environment. However, 90.08% of respondents believe that this issue should be included in social work education (Shaw 2011). The NEP scale results were compared with two previous studies, one on the general population and the other on environmental group members. The overall scores for social workers were 3.75 out of 5, with Shaw (2011) concluding that the results were similar to the study on the general population. Shaw (2011) suggested that despite the profession being well situated to consider the natural environment, the philosophical and theoretical foundations which underpin social work were not producing social workers who hold pro environmental attitudes. Shaw (2011) concluded that the lack of ecological considerations in social policy is unsustainable and dangerous for future well-being. Despite these findings, Shaw (2011) argues that social work has the potential to integrate environmental issues into practice and play a leading role in this area.

3.5 Conclusion

These three studies utilise a variety of methods and research designs. The inclusion of research in environmental social work provides a way forward for supporting the development of practice methods and interventions. Without such research this subject is unlikely to become

visible within mainstream social work discourses (Molyneux 2010). Whilst this subject is amenable to a variety of methods from either qualitative or quantitative approaches, there does appear to be a preference or presumed desirability for adopting an action research approach. Action research has been described as a:

"useful approach for studying something that does not yet exist but that is just emerging and is therefore an issue of development."

(Reason and Bradbury 2001 cited in Närhi, 2004 p23)

For Närhi (2004) the action research approach is not a robust research method, but a 'loose research strategy' and 'a special way of understanding the relationship between research and the research subjects.' In general the three main attributes of this approach are: to strive for change, the 'research subjects' must be actively involvement in the process and lastly, reflexivity from the researcher is required (Närhi 2004). Therefore, adopting this approach is likely to prove useful for further research endeavours and has already been used by Tedmanson (2014) who utilised Participants Action Research when working alongside indigenous communities to promote sustainable local provision through social enterprises.

Chapter 4: Practice Considerations

4.1 Introduction

A common theme occurring through much of the literature is the lack of practical application in environmental social work, which leaves social workers with little insight into what it looks like in practice. Commentators have noted that whilst social workers are asked to create a new vision, contributions to this subject are often 'abstract', 'devoid of detail' and 'detached from everyday interaction with service users' (Molyneux 2010). For example, such vagueness can be seen in the work of Coates (2000) who urges social workers to support people in recognising that all life is sacred and to develop supportive social structures which promote wellbeing. Molyneux (2010) concludes that such offerings present more like a prophecy than a practice method which can be used, causing readers to be motivated but unable to apply this directly into practice. Marlow and Rooyen (2001) called for an increased focus on practice responses as a result of their research (Marlow and Rooyen 2001) and this crucial aspect has more recently been given greater attention.

4.2 Case Studies

The enhanced focus on practice has led to an increase in practice based case studies which offer examples of environmental social work from around the world. Evans et al (2010) described a Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) commissioned research project which drew on case studies to highlight how adult social care in the U.K. can become more sustainable in its service provision. The paper outlined Swansea Council's co-production model which utilises time banking systems of skill exchange. The main drive of the initiative was to reduce carbon emissions and therefore reduce costs. Whilst this project affords a rare U.K. example of practice,

this example does not challenge the existing framework of welfare provision and reduced government funding for Local Authorities and is therefore not transformative. Gray et al's (2013) Environmental Social Work book is divided into three parts: theoretical, educational and practice. The practice section contains case studies covering the areas of community gardens and activism, working with drought affected families, challenging corporate ethics and an environmental project for young offenders. This publication supports the move towards a more practice orientated focus by writers and improves our understanding of what environmental social work practice might entail.

Lysack's (2015) Canadian based case study demonstrates that public policy is an area which environmental social work can engage with and influence. The case study offers an example of policy engagement in relation to coal in Alberta, Canada where political agreement to phase out the use of coal was achieved through the work of a network involving health professionals, NGO staff, and academics. The Chair of the network was a social work Professor. The group gathered evidence relating to the health and economic costs to the community and applied pressure to gain a political commitment for change. Whilst examples of practice still appear to be scant (Ramsay and Boddy 2017), and there is scope for a wider array of case studies, particularly from the U.K., it is clear that some recent efforts have been made.

4.3 Models for practice

The focus on practice has been supported by the development of models for practice. Boetto (2016) provided a practice model which is both holistic and practical. The transformative eco-social model has an ontological base or 'being' aspect at its centre. This represents the practitioner's individual worldview based on their attitudes and belief systems. The epistemological layer concerned with 'thinking' relates to the values, ethics and professional

knowledge base which inform practice. In the initial stages an understanding of the environmental crises is needed. This can be achieved through gaining knowledge and learning to critique neoliberal ideology. The outer layer of the model relates to the methodological or 'doing' aspect of eco-social work which involves frontline practice with individual and communities. This is acknowledged to be the least visible aspect in the current literature base (Boetto 2016).

Figure 3: Transformative eco-social model
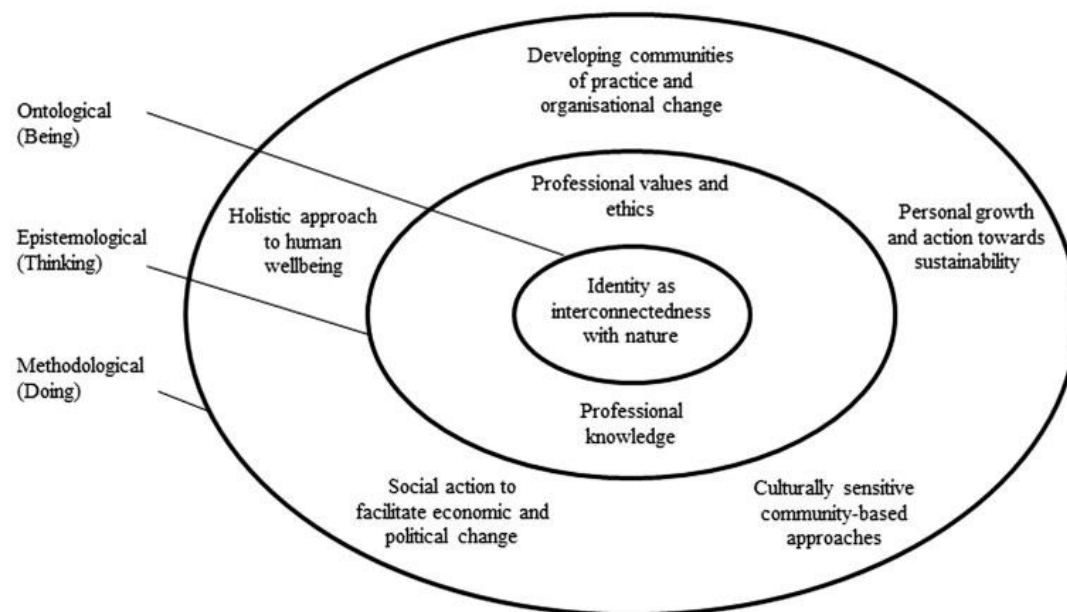
(Boetto 2016)

It is also claimed that this model addresses the paradox of social works modernist roots which hold an inherent contradiction with environmental social work. This occurs as a result of a philosophical base which includes sustainability, interconnectedness as well as indigenous and

global south perspectives (Boetto 2016). This article includes examples of eco-social practice to promote engaging and understanding at the level of practice which includes an emphasis on activism. It is important to note that the practice examples and practice models do not require social workers to alter their skill base, suggesting that many of the necessary skills are already practiced (Coates, 2003: McKinnon, 2001: Muldoon, 2006). Models of practice such as Boetto's (2016) would appear to be accessible to those practicing in both the Global North and Global South.

Ramsay and Boddy (2017) have contributed to the field by using a concept analysis framework to identify characteristics of environmental social work. This involved a systematic literature review with Table 4 containing a total of 117 articles. The article supports moving towards an 'operational definition' by identifying four common themes to improve clarity (Ramsay and Boddy 2017). The identified themes consist of: using social work skills creatively, openness in values and practice, transformation and interdisciplinary working. This approach moves away from theoretical disparities and focuses on commonalities within the subject. The table below identifies the prominence of each theme / sub theme in this analysis:

Table 4: Number of articles that state attributes

Themes	No. of articles	%
Creatively apply existing skills to environmental concepts	67	100
Openness to different values and ways of being or doing		
Shift practice, theory and values to incorporate the natural environment	67	99
Learn from spirituality and indigenous cultures	28	41
Incorporate the natural environment in social work education	17	25
Appreciate the instrumental and innate value of non-human life	22	32
Adopt a renewed change orientation		
Change society	60	88
Critique hegemony	58	85
Work across boundaries and in multiples spaces		
Work in multidisciplinary teams	58	85
Work with communities	45	66
Work with individuals	38	56

(Ramsay and Boddy 2017)

Ramsay and Boddy's (2017) analysis showed that within the last 15 years publications have tripled on two occasions which could be indicative of a professional shift. They perceive the various understandings and terms for environmental social work as a cause of confusion which could hinder the development of environmental interventions. This finding supports the need for early clarity of terminology used in this research. Whilst differences in terms used remains a feature, the impact of this on environmental social work's need to engage in practice, research and theory should be reduced by writers being explicit about terms and theoretical perspectives used.

4.4 Social Work Education

The need to integrate the environment into social work education was a common theme in the literature and whilst a lack of engagement from universities remains, efforts in recent years have increased. McKinnon (2008) has discussed the need for social works 'on-going relevance' by having a focus on social sustainability within the education curriculum of both pre and post qualification courses (McKinnon 2008). Such efforts are presented in Gray et al's (2013) publication which holds five chapters on education as well as the special edition on environmental education in the Journal of Social Work Education (2015). Writers agree that for a transformative change to occur in the profession a paradigm shift needs to occur within education as such a change would:

> "*provide a way forward for developing a different frame of reference for understanding Earth as a holistic entity and for taking action towards a more sustainable environment.*"

(Boetto 2016 p16)

Despite some encouraging steps forward, incorporating environmental social work into the social work curriculum is still in the early developmental stages. Research undertaken by Jones (2013) analysed course content from twenty seven social work courses in Australia, finding 'little evidence' of environmental content, with the exception of four universities. Similarly, Kemp (2011) refers to the marginalisation of environmental content in the social work curriculum in the USA, and asserts that where such content is present, it is due to specific faculty members interests. Dominelli (2011) urges social workers to master the scientific evidence behind climate change, making universities and interdisciplinary modules a prime location for such learning to occur. It has been suggested that social work students can be supported with environmental engagement by being offered opportunities in field education, a place-centric teaching focus and involvement with environmental organisations (Jones 2010), in addition, exploring one's own lifestyle can also be an important aspect of social work education (Coates 2003).

The area of education has also been focused on by researchers. An example of this is Lucas-Darby's (2011) study. This research centred on a community practice course with 'greening' as its theme, with students spending a semester undertaking a community based green project, and concluded by stressing the critical need to include such content. The inclusion of social work education in the literature highlights the impact it can have towards transformation in social work.

4.5 Collaboration

Environmental social work calls for a wide range of partnerships and a broad interdisciplinary knowledge base (Gray et al 2013). The facet of collaboration is a theme which appears to need greater attention, but it is nonetheless present in the literature (Besthorn, 2003: Coates, 2003: Muldoon, 2006). Environmental social work, by its very nature involves many disciplines and

communities from around the world as all species rely on the Earth's systems and resources for survival. Progression in this field will require unusual interdisciplinary partnerships, which Kemp (2011) refers to as 'strange bedfellows' and local community collaboration where daily life consists of environmental threats. On this matter Närhi (2004) states:

"*Environmental issues can be approached from the vantage-point of different disciplines.*"

(Närhi 2004 p12)

Other disciplines will need to be leaned upon by the profession of social work, such as the area of pedagogy, agriculture and science. Examples of this are Bower's (2001) eco-justice education and Brandt's (2004) 'critical pedagogy of place'. In addition, Taylor (2013) offers a unique practice example of collaboration when working within the area of marine science. A case example of collaboration can be seen in the Gilesgate energy initiative, U.K. This project aimed to developed renewable energy sources to create affordable energy and create employment opportunities to tackle fuel poverty. It involved a community social worker, local residents, interdisciplinary academics, private businesses, social workers, policy makers and housing providers. They held public meetings, exhibited renewable technologies, undertook energy audits in households and informed residents of available grants. This led to homes being adapted which lowered fuel costs. The long term aim of the project was to become energy self-sufficient. The community social worker supported the co-ordination of stakeholders, meetings and exhibitions and played a central role in the project (Dominelli 2012).

Kemp (2011) draws attention to the benefits of engaging with urban planning and geography. This includes the use of participatory approaches currently used in these areas. Such approaches bring together professionals, researchers and community stakeholders to undertake community based participatory research. Such approaches allow for collaborative action plans to achieve change and can be adopted into practice, policy and research (Kemp 2011). Efforts to make

environmental social work meaningful require a focus on practice theories, models and interventions accompanied by research and practice evidence. In addition to this, environmentally focused social work education needs to be increased (Kemp 2011). Such endeavours require interdisciplinary alliances with sustainability initiatives, academic programmes, and most of all local communities (Kemp 2011). For Gray et al (2013), all environmental work is 'inevitably disciplinary'.

4.6 Neoliberalism

A significant proportion of the literature included a critique of neoliberal ideology. While this corresponds with eco-critical approaches, such critique appears to exist across approaches, particularly in regard to recent publications. It is clear that this knowledge has been heavily incorporated into the environmental social work agenda as Ramsay and Boddy's (2017) review found that 85% of publications asserted that an understanding and ability to critique neoliberalism was necessary for social workers (Coates, 2005: Gray et al, 2013: Hawkins, 2010: Jones, 2010: Miller and Hayward, 2014: Peeters, 2012). This inclusion is not surprising given social works pre-existing engagement with neoliberal critique in respect of the world's population as well as the profession of social work (Wallace and Pease, 2011: Harlow et al, 2012: Ferguson and Lavalette, 2006: Dominelli, 2010).

Environmental social work requires an understanding of structural issues on both a local and global scale. Globalisation has begun to intensify its pace facilitated by technological advancements, the increasing presence of Multi-National Corporations (M.N.C.'s) and diminishing trade barriers (Ellwood 2001). This global growth is transforming capitalist relations and structures, spreading specific ideologies (particularly neo-liberalism) and commodities (Wilkin 1996 cited in George and Wilding 2002). It has been recognised that environmental

injustice stems from resource inequality and environmental degradation which occurs through

normal industrialisation processes:

> *"Unsustainable models of development, unequal power dynamics and unequal*
>
> *distribution of resources, central to the current global socio-economic system of neo-*
>
> *liberalism, exacerbate structural inequalities and affect most poor and low-income*
>
> *people."*

(Dominelli 2013 p431)

Ramsay and Boddy (2017) stress the pervasiveness of neoliberalism, whereby individuals can

internalise and act out neoliberal values without having an awareness of this. For example, it

has been argued that, social work practices which support people to participate in society – a

society which exploits nature and promotes competition and individualism, is aligning itself with

the neoliberal agenda (Coates 2003). It has also been raised that those who stand in opposition

to neoliberal practices may find themselves isolated and vulnerable if they are situated within

bureaucratic systems (Ramsay and Boddy 2017). This raises dilemmas for both environmental

theorising and practice in relation to ensuring that environmental social work stands firm in its

commitment to justice by challenging existing structures and not colluding with them. Having

an understanding of neoliberalism would appear necessary for a move towards transformation

which entails a rejection of consumerism and a move towards a sustainable society (Boetto

2016). This highlights the importance of involving neoliberal critique in the subsequent research.

4.7 Drawing the strands together

In its challenge of the mainstream social work paradigm, environmental social work holds

similarities with critical, feminist and radical perspectives of social work (Närhi and Matthies

2016). However, for Kemp (2011) environmental social work requires further attention to all

aspects: practice theory, models, interventions, research and practice evidence as well as an educational focus. Kemp's (2011) paper optimistically concludes that 'green shoots' are appearing within social work but warns of a need to strengthen the foundations both empirically and conceptually. This literature review has explored the advances made by social work in exploring how it can include the natural environment into its discourses. This review has demonstrated that efforts have been made within theory, research and practice as this subject area continues to gain increasing prominence and visibility. Environmental social work is an exciting area, which McKinnon (2008) views as having the potential to redefine current social work parameters.

Ultimately, social work's commitment to social justice and the enormity of this, is then accompanied by the asserted need for a value base which leads the profession into embracing and tackling the environmental threats which face the planet. Whilst this literature review is extensive, it must be highlighted that only English language publications were included which may have excluded other sources of knowledge. Similarly, only academic literature has been reviewed. It is acknowledged that such an approach stems from a positivist paradigm and has been excused of marginalising the voices of women, children and the natural world (Gray and Coates 2012).

The literature review revealed that a wide range of theoretical perspectives are used in environmental social work. It became apparent that systems theory has reduced in popularity, and the eco-critical approach has prevailed with its critique of industrial modernity and neoliberalism. The review has highlighted the benefits of adopting this theoretical perspective as it is grounded in ecological justice notions and reflects a politicised form of social work which seeks transformational change. Such a perspective is deemed compatible the anti-oppressive practices of social work. It is not felt that environmental social work can fulfil its aims of transformation without such a perspective. This research will therefore adopt an eco-critical

perspective. This will involve considerations of micro and macro systems, identifying and critiquing the impact of neoliberalism and the development of a methodological approach which seeks change.

It has been identified that Bourdieu is yet to be adopted in environmental social work considerations. Given that Bourdieu held an interest in social work, the environment and neoliberal critique; it is somewhat surprising that environmental social work is yet to incorporate his work. In the endeavour to produce original research, Bourdieu's work holds the potential to enhance the eco-critical perspective and contribute to the theoretical development of environmental social work. It is recognised that Bourdieu's theorising transcended binary divides between the individual and the state and was able to develop a social theory which gave consideration to micro and macro aspects. This is felt to be of great value for qualitative research which seeks to incorporate structural and ideological critique.

This review has identified the gaps in the literature, which has supported the development of suitable research questions for this thesis. Närhi and Matthies (2016) have recently identified gaps in knowledge on how alternative practice methods for Western social workers can be implemented which incorporate politicised action and change involving a re-engagement with local communities, as well as how the environment can be successfully incorporated into practice. This review has confirmed the importance of culturally specific research and practice development. It has illuminated the area of social work education as an area of research interest and potential reform. In relation to a methodological approach, the literature has shown that a variety of approaches are suitable, however, there appears to be a preference for action research with Molyneux (2010) recommending action research for future research endeavours.

In addition to this, the literature review has led to an interest in exploring the identities of environmental social workers. The extent of environmental knowledge held by social workers in different cultural settings remains unclear and while it has been stated that many social work

students 'care deeply' about the environment (Kemp 2011), others have found that social workers do not possess a higher level of environmental knowledge than the general population (Shaw 2011). In relation to the U.K., this review has highlighted that there are few voices advocating for a transformation which integrates the environment. This has ensured that this subject remains a marginalised one with an extremely limited array of research and practice examples available to social workers who hold environmental interests. This lack of engagement promotes a view that such interests should only surface in the personal lives of social workers, having no role in a professional sphere (McKinnon 2008). This generates an interest in exploring how social workers with environmental interests combine these interests and what emerges in practice.

It is clear that this area of exploration will pose complex issues for social workers as barriers to integration also appear present. There are three identified barriers for practitioners wishing to include an environmental awareness into practice as identified by McKinnon (2008). First, the subject is marginalised in social work literature and lacks perceived importance within managerialist employment structures. Second, although a professional interest has now been established, those in direct practice need guidance e.g. workshops / case studies, to support environmental incorporation into practice. And third, the university curriculum needs attention in relation to the connections between social and environmental justice and sustainability to promote the transition (McKinnon 2008). As a result of the recognised marginalisation of environmental social work, I have become interested in what barriers contemporary Welsh based social workers with environmental interests face and how they experience notions of power and empowerment. This is an important consideration if environmental social work is to increase in visibility. This literature review has facilitated the development of my research aims and questions which will now be presented.

4.8 Research aims and questions:

My research project contributes to the relatively small collection of primary research which addresses questions relating to environmental social work. This research is qualitative in design and aims to produce knowledge about social workers with environmental interests by eliciting their biographical narratives and perspectives on the subject. This area of research has derived from an understanding of the current available literature on the subject and the need for culturally specific responses.

The main research question for this study is: What identities and perspectives do social workers with environmental interests hold?

The following research questions have been generated to enable the main research question to be answered:

Q1) What are the biographical narratives of social workers with environment interests?

By eliciting the biographical narratives of the participants, a rich description is presented of the key components of their identities. This illustrates the socialisation processes involved in developing an environmental interest and the nuanced connections between the social work and environmental value base.

Q2) How do environmental social workers connect the environment and their profession?

This question seeks the perspectives of the participants in an effort to generate practice based theory considerations which can aid future developments in the area. The perspectives are constructed from a multitude of perspectives which incorporate micro, meso and macro understandings. This question also highlights the level of engagement and usefulness of academic theorising for social workers in practice.

Q3) Is environmental social work integrated into practice?

The exploration into social work and the environment was previously situated in critique and theorising. However, there have been calls to move to a more practice orientated stance to support practice based initiatives emerging. Whilst it is acknowledged that social work practice in Wales has not heavily engaged in such forms of social work, this question has been formulated so any examples of practice can be clearly illustrated.

Q4) How do these social workers experience notions of power and empowerment?

Contemporary critical social work places notions of power inequalities and empowerment as its cornerstone (Fook 2002). This question offers insight into the realities of contemporary social work practice in Wales and its effects on practitioners and service users. The question aims to capture the dilemmas inherent in the relationship between the social worker, service user and the state and identifies barriers to transforming practice.

This research therefore offers insight into what constitutes the significant features of an environmental social work identity. The outcome of the research supports the understanding of environmental social work in a Welsh context by identifying how it is constructed, what it looks like in practice and what might be preventing the establishment of a visible environmental social work movement.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the rationale for CT underpinned by a qualitative method. I argue for a humanised stance which can be achieved through a qualitative approach which addresses anti-oppressive considerations and is transparent in its political perspective. The chapter will then discuss the adoption of CT in framing the research. The richness of CT allowed me to situate the phenomenon under investigation within a political and historical context. Therefore, all research is deemed political and research which conceals its political stance through assertions of neutrality is open to criticism. Notwithstanding, it is acknowledged that the CT paradigm is not without its shortcomings which will also be explored.

The social theorist who has influenced this research and supports the analysis of this data is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical framework is discussed in this chapter after chapter two identified the potential of Bourdieu's work for environmental social work. Following on from these fundamental foundations, the following methodological considerations are addressed: the ideological and political motivation of this research, reflection and reflexivity and a social justice framework. To conclude the chapter, a discussion on the action stage offers the reader insight into this essential component of CT research. This characteristic of critical theorist methodology is of key importance to the research strategy. Figure Four represents the methodological framework underpinning my research and is used as a basis to structure this chapter.

Figure 4: Methodological Approach
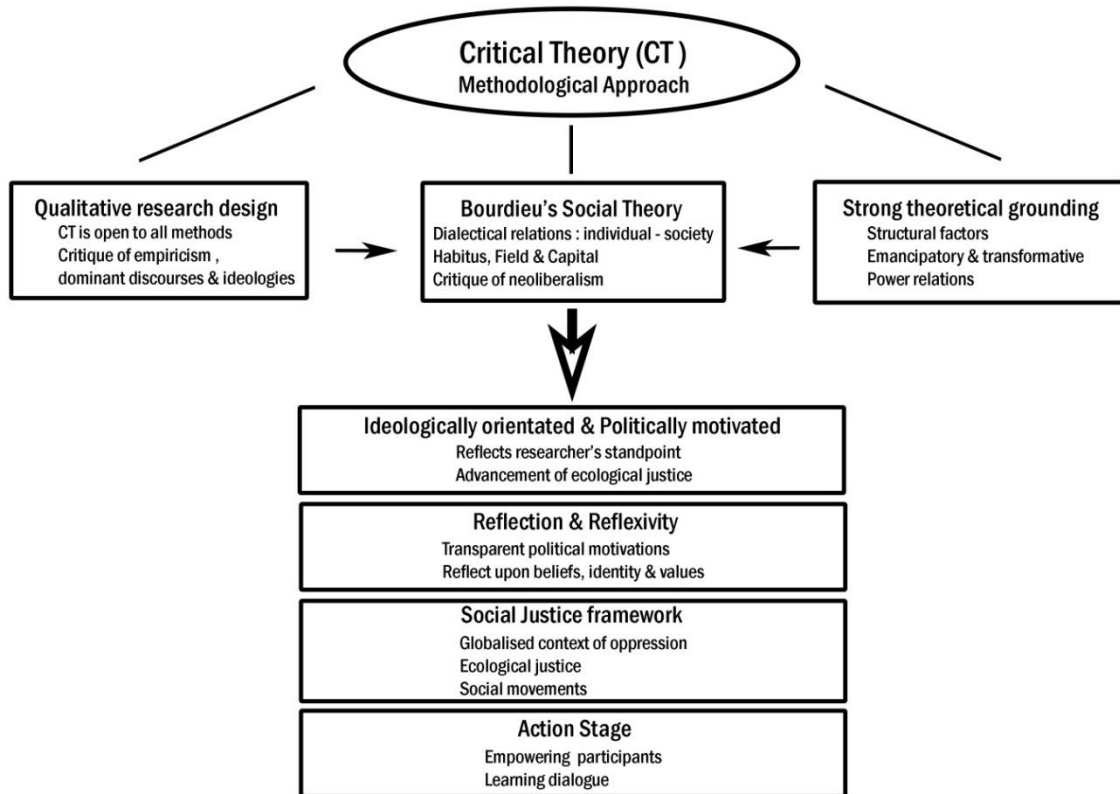
5.2 Critical Theory (CT)

The origins of this theoretical tradition were developed most notably by Horkeimer, Adorno, and Marcuse at the Frankfort Institute of Social Research during the 1920's (Morris 2006). CT is ideologically orientated and politicised (Morris 2006) offering a distinctive approach (Humphries 2008). From the outset the dominant societal factor to gain attention from the approach was that of class (Humphries 2008). However, its analytical reach later expanded. It now encompasses several traditions e.g. Feminist, Marxist and Queer Theory, which seek to address issues of power and empowerment with an emancipatory and transformative aim. Whilst CT can be seen as an outsider approach in research, practice and education, a return of interest in

CT has occurred (MacKinnon 2009). CT research is grounded in CT (Humphries 2008). Whilst the theory base is strong, there has been a distinct lack of associated methodologies to allow critical theorists an appropriate framework for research as often the focus is on critique (Morris 2006: Pease 2010: Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). As a CT researcher, no method was essentially excluded; however, there was an assertion that critical pluralism is needed as methodologies hold political and ideological contexts (Morris 2006). For Humphries (2008) the main premise of CT research relates to:

- The identification of the oppressive nature of societal structures, which are legitimised and upheld by a range of strategies. These should be explored and the exploitative features should be made transparent for critique and challenge.

- Attaching assumptions and commonly held belief systems to wider historical and political factors

- Investigating ways to overcome oppressive structures

- The CT researcher encapsulates a reflexive approach which engages with these structural considerations.

My research will offer an analysis of contemporary society which critiques the prevailing neoliberal ideology and will seek to explore ways to overcome barriers which ensure that transformative approaches to social work are marginalised. The critique will examine the profession of social work and consider how neoliberalism has impacted upon it. The critical tradition explores economic and political facets which impact on groups lived experience and structural forms of oppression (Pease 2010). The CT research approach takes an interest in domination and power relations (Humphries 2008), which is transferable to the natural environment and therefore notions of power and empowerment have been incorporated into the research questions. Critical research has disrupted the conventional view of scientific research by deeming mere objective observations as 'unsatisfactory' due to their failing in

locating the phenomenon under investigation within a political and historical context (Humphries 2008). Few social work writers promote a CT informed position in research compared to other disciplines (Pease 2010) and such research is rarely funded (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000).

An example of CT research is offered by Ferguson and Barclay (2002) whose research explored the mental health of asylum seekers. The research was critical as it identified the negative outcomes of legislation and includes the media and politicians in its analysis, equating this with promoting racism. However, CT research exceeds the realm of social science and has featured in other disciplines where a sociological consideration is of use. The approach's far reaching scope is demonstrated by Cecez-kecmanovic's (2001) work on Information Systems (IS). This explores the wider political and social structures relationship to IS. As with all CT researchers, the drive for change and improving lives is central:

> "*By demystifying technological imperatives and managerial rationalism justifying a particular information system design, the critical IS researcher helps both IS practitioners and users understand its social consequences, envisage desirable alternatives and take action.*"

(Cecez-kecmanovic 2001 p142)

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) discuss critical research as containing triple hermeneutics involving: participants perspectives held within their own cultural reality, the researcher's interpretation of this reality and the additional third component of critical examination of ideologies and power relations. Popkewitz (1990) identifies the following paradigm themes: research methods emerge from a context e.g. the researcher's stance, the specific time and place of the research, as methods are developed in a historical context and objective reality is formed by the subjective perspective. Therefore the same phenomenon can be seen in different

ways (Popkewitz 1990 cited in Morris 2006). The paradigm is referred to as dialectical, as subjective and objective realities both impact on each other. This entails a back and forth approach to the subject of investigation and the wider structures which it is contained within (Humphries 2008). In addition, an ever present feature is that of historical process considerations (Humphries 2008).

The CT research approach has not gone without criticism. Ironically, some of the perceived key strengths of the approach are the focus of such criticism. Agger (2006) notes the positivist criticism of CT in relation to a politicised perspective and a non-scientific approach. Whilst the political component is a valued ally of the social work researcher, based on the professions human rights and social justice commitments, the accusations of a non-scientific approach need to be carefully considered by ensuring a rigorous research strategy which holds up to scrutiny. Another frequent criticism of this approach is that the empirical description can be overshadowed by the theoretical framework it is held within as the data is not the main focus of attention (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). As a result of its provocative approach, CT research has associated risks of being discarded as a result of its controversial nature (Humphries 2008). There have been serious claims made that engagement in such an area has been detrimental for academic careers with promotion constraints and marginalisation occurring within academic institutions (MacKinnon 2009). Despite these criticisms, it is argued that CT has a central role to play in research, education and practice and without examining the wider structural factors a distortion of how to address people's needs occurs (Cox and Hardwick 2002). This research will consider the broader remit of structural factors and their relationship with the planet. This will uphold a strong commitment to illustrating the urgent need to consider the human condition from within its biophysical environment.

5.2.1 Qualitative Design

Qualitative inquiry is conducive to the endeavours of social work by way of offering rich descriptions of lived experiences, typologies and concepts which quantitative methods cannot offer (Gilgurn and Abrams 2002) prompting scholars to call for the 'democratisation and humanisation' of social work research (Truman et al 2000, Butler and Drakeford 2005). The social work value base and qualitative research are connected (Gilgurn and Abrams 2002), with the discipline of social work publishing numerous articles featuring qualitative research (Shek et al 2005). However, there has been extensive debate on existing discourses which assert the need for quantitative engagement in social work in order to be deemed a 'credible profession' which has been promoted by some of the profession's academics (Sowers and Dulmus 2009). Significant criticism has been directed towards quantitative research, including its epistemological and ontological foundations (Bryman 2008). CT as a paradigm has significant strengths in its ability to contextualise research, leading to a critique of empiricism (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000) and dominant discourses and ideologies. There have been strong calls for the international community of critical qualitative researchers to challenge attempts to control and regulate what is deemed to be 'good science', such as so called 'evidence based research' (Denzin 2005). Denzin (2005) views this enforcement as leading to a restriction of freedoms within inquiry resulting in a marginalisation of feminist, indigenous and queer perspectives.

Steinmetz (2005) has referred to an 'epistemological unconsciousness' which encompasses an innate preference for objectivity. Whist this discussion is not an attempt to relive the historically outdated qualitative versus qualitative debate (Staller 2012), it celebrates the richness of experiences captured by qualitative inquiry and the focus on anti-oppressive frameworks for research to occur within. However, it is recognised that an anti-oppressive framework is not guaranteed on the basis of qualitative preference. In contemporary research there is a much greater understanding that all inquiry, both qualitative and quantitative is political and moral

(Denzin 2005). This research does not perceive the qualitative research community to be a homogenous group and aligns itself with Denzin's (2002) call for new ways to deeply integrate critical qualitative inquiry into social work research. As Strier (2007) warns us:

> "*The quest to liberate social work research from oppression is based on the assumption that any intervention or research project, regardless of the benevolent and progressive nature of its goals and intentions, may replicate the structural conditions that generate oppression.*"

(Strier 2007 p859)

This qualitative methodology chapter will proceed to outline its critical tenets which offer a framework for exploring environmental concerns, a highly politicised human rights issue which is gaining attention within social work globally.

5.2.2 Habitus, field and capital

The critical theorist, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) will inform the theoretical approach used in my research. Bourdieu held a clear interest in the social work profession. It is surprising that social work has not reciprocated this interest given the potential of Bourdieu's social theory for social work (Emirbayer and Williams 2005). It is also the case that Bourdieu's work holds relevance in relation to the ecological crisis. Considering the ecological crisis through a Bourdieusian lens gives clarity to how environmental degradation continues despite clear (and largely undisputed) evidence of significant, wide scale harm to the planet and its inhabitants in the context of advanced capitalism based on an overall lack of environmental capital (Karol and Gale 2004). Bourdieu was a strong critic of neoliberalism (Garrett 2007b) who held intellectual insights into both social work and the environment. Therefore his social theory has been adopted and utilised to support the analysis of this research.

Bourdieu's social theory contains the key concepts of: habitus, field and capital which will be utilised to discuss the findings of this research. The habitus, which is fully discussed in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (2003), enshrines the dialectical relationship between the individual and society (or agency and socialisation), avoiding binary opposites such as subjectivism - objectivism and humanity - nature (Karol and Gale 2004) an approach which has dominated social theory. For Bourdieu, the habitus can be:

> *"Understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions".*

(Bourdieu 2003 p82)

The construction of the 'primary habitus' begins in childhood and occurs within the family unit with constructed 'dispositions' becoming second nature, acting as a:

> *"system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organising principles of action."*

(Bourdieu 1990 p13)

In addition to one's primary habitus, 'specific habitus' (see Bourdieu 2000) involving more specific socialisation processes, often occurs later in life (Emirbayer and Williams 2005), and can include, for example, the process of becoming a social worker. It is the habitus which allows agents to understand the 'rules of the game'. Therefore, the habitus, as a system of dispositions, informs us how to navigate daily life, affording a sense of what is acceptable, by way of orientating one's actions rather than determining them (Bourdieu, 1991). Dispositions held within the habitus are not essentially conscious but rather embodied at a deep level (Haluza-

DeLay 2008). The habitus is perceived as having a generative function whereby it reproduces the structures which shaped it (Bourdieu, 2003).

Individuals are not only situated in geographical spaces but also social spaces, which Bourdieu referred to as 'fields'. These social fields constitute a field of relations which contain unspoken rules and carry specific discourses. The field and the habitus are inextricably linked as neither can operate in isolation to determine action or create change (Garrett 2007b). Fields can be defined as:

> *"Relatively autonomous social microcosms, which function and are structured according to their own inner logic."*

(Emirbayer and Williams 2005 p690)

For Bourdieu, society is a construction of interconnected and multi layered "fields" which agents interact within (Haluza-DeLay 2008). Within any society, an array of independent fields are present, with varying degrees of scope and complexity ranging from the microcosm of the familial field to the macrocosm of the state field (Emirbayer and Williams 2005). In this context, the field of social work can be viewed as a meso level field which, like other fields aims to retain its own autonomy (Garrett 2007b). When considering the field, the notion of 'capital' is central to its very definition. Bourdieu explained that the field can be:

> *"seen as a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or 'capital'."*

(Bourdieu, 1991 p14)

The field and capital are interconnected as: "*a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field*," and capital "*constitutes the very structure of the field*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 p101). Bourdieu identified three main forms of 'capital': economic (which

relates to material assets), cultural capital 'scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles' (Wacquant 1998 p221), and social capital, which is the network of institutionalised relationships which affords recognition within the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In addition to these main forms of capital 'symbolic capital', which can be regarded as prestige, can be present in any of the aforementioned forms of capital. Subsequent writers, theorising with Bourdieu's framework have developed the idea of capital in different areas, such as education capital, environmental capital, emotional capital and imperial capital. It is within the field that agents compete for different forms of capital with the field representing a 'terrain of contestation' (Emirbayer and Williams 2005). The positions of agents within the field can be explored through the types and amount of capital they possess (Emirbayer and Williams 2005). The field can also be shaped by those who possess the relevant capital to do so, the:

> *"right to speak, legitimacy, is invested in those agents recognized by the field as powerful possessors of capital."*

 (Moi 1991 cited in Garrett 2007a p358)

Bourdieu's theory supports the analysis of this research and provides an understanding of how social workers with environmental interests operate within the social work field and what barriers they face.

5.2.3 Ideologically orientated and politically motivated

The impact on social research from a CT approach has been a politicised one (Humphries 2008). A CT researcher does not present as a political by-stander, as they are historically located within the research. Moreover, 'Critical scholars' will make clear their own values (Denzin 2002). While this methodology focuses on structural factors and historical constructions, it does not deny the necessity of offering direct support to individuals in need, or the importance of individual

biographies which have been sought from participants. Kam (2014) suggests both individualised and social interventions are necessary in social work, but that historical and contemporary trends have seen dominance towards an individualised focus. An approach which includes both of these considerations has been offered by Mullaly (1993) who outlined a transformative social work approach which is referred to as 'structural social work'. She argued that a structural approach does not ignore people's immediate needs, but rather twin tracking occurs between the immediate care of those who struggle to exist within patriarchal capitalism and a commitment to societal restructuring with socialist aims (Mullaly 1993).

The politicised nature of CT is deemed a strength: however it is essential that this must not lead to a distortion of facts (Humphries 2008). For Denzin (2002) all methodological constructions are a product of the researcher's standpoint. From a CT perspective, political neutrality cannot exist and whilst the importance of rigor is stressed by Fraser (1989), assertions of political neutrality are challenged (Fraser 1989 in Humphries 2008). CT research is ever present but could be viewed as being under threat by contemporary social work discourses. In relation to training, social work education has reduced its engagement with CT (Jones 1996: Webb 1996). This has implications for practitioners coming into practice with a focus only on 'what' and 'how' as opposed to 'why', with commentators referring to this as the de-politicisation of social work (Dominelli and Hoogvelt 1996), giving full attention to skills and competencies, devoid of critical analysis. For many social work students, education has become a means to qualify and enter practice, as opposed to an opportunity for exploration and critique of structures and systems (Cox and Hardwick 2002).

Based on the methodological framework, I perceive the existing dominant paradigm as embracing a conflictual stance between humanity and the rest of nature based on human dominance and a perceived separation (Feygina 2013). This is evident within neo-liberalism which coexists with authoritarianism. From a justice framework, authoritarianism is aligned with

beliefs of social and economic inequality as well as numerous 'ism's', which ultimately promote social injustice. When considering authoritarianism and the environment, prevailing beliefs of industrial growth and denial of environmental damage exist, which mask the need to consider sustainability (Feygina 2013). Wang (1999) argued that right wing authoritarianism placed both nature and women in subservient positions whilst supporting both a diminishing of women's rights and actions leading to environmental destruction. This offers further indication of social and environmental justice connections.

5.2.4 Reflection and Reflexivity

A characteristic of the critical theorist research methodology is that of reflection (Humphries 2008). Critical research demands high levels of reflection (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000), this will occur throughout the research project, promoted by the supervisory process. Unlike a positivist view of research, it is essential for the critical theorist to hold an ideological stance. Where knowledge production comes from and who benefits from it should always be explored (Cox and Hardwick 2010). As a researcher the political motivations and standpoints will be made transparent. This research is transparent about its ideological commitment to social / paradigm change and holds a clear view on the need for ecological justice as a basic human right stemming from structural change and the ending of the neoliberal ideology. Therefore the following assumptions in my capacity as a criticalist are held:

- Power relations are socially and historically constructed
- 'facts' are not held with a vacuum, they hold ideological commitments
- The centrality of language in forming subjectivity
- Forms of oppression are interconnected.

- Mainstream research practices frequently support the reproduction of oppressive facets

(Morris 2006)

Närhi (2004) stresses the politicised nature of the eco-critical perspective. Just as feminism identified alignment of the personal and the political, one can view environmental social work in a similar way as the Earth is home to all human beings, many of whom have their spiritual beliefs drawn from their relationship with the Earth. Therefore this research can be viewed as openly political, unlike the hidden neo-liberal agenda which attempts to present as neutral / non-political (Dominelli 2012). It is vital for the methodology of this research not reinforce wider societal discriminatory belief systems and ideologies. This will need to involve not only high levels of reflection but also reflexivity towards social welfare and one's own positioning within a western capitalist system. Reflexivity must also be part of the approach's methodological framework (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). It is acknowledged that considerations of anti-oppressive practice emerge from those already in powerful positions. It is therefore of importance for myself as a researcher to continually reflect upon my own location in terms of beliefs, identity and values. This awareness needs continuous attention and is integral to the research process (Rutman et al 2005).

The methodological approach ensured the need for experiential relevance which justified the use of specific criterion, as opposed to randomly selected participants. For Morris (2006), research which is critical needs to recruit those who are not merely 'disinterested observers' but those who can engage politically in the subject area and contribute to strategies for action:

> *"It is involvement, commitment and potential to affect empowerment that guides selection of participants in a CT study, not their identification number on a table of random numbers."*

(Morris 2006 p141)

Social work's social justice goals have attracted intellectual activists since the late 1800's (MacKinnon 2009). Wildman (2002) distinguishes between academics and academic activists stating that academics may begin and end their endeavours with reflection: however, action is incorporated into the academic activists work. This is a necessity for social change which requires research energy and resources to support alternative visions (Johnston and Goodman 2006). From a critical perspective, the existing oppressive social order can only be transformed through praxis, which is reflection and action (Freire 2006 in McKinnon 2009). As Freire states:

> "*It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organised struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action: nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis.*"

(Freire 2006 in MacKinnon 2009 p521)

McKinnon (2009) recognises the impact of pressures to pursue the individual goals of publication rather than engaging critical thinking and social justice promotion. The rise in global conservatism makes challenging injustices more risky in terms of reprisals for perceived activism (Abramovitz 1998: Jacobson 2001). For critical theorists, the goal of knowledge is liberation, not advancing personal credentials (Mckinnon2009): however, I acknowledge that undertaking this research is not an act of altruism. The undertaking of a research project which is free of organisational constraints (self-funded) provides a political outlet to express a form of social work which is not fully possible within a professional employment remit and is of great interest and perceived value. On a personal level the qualification obtained from producing this research will offer professional advantages in the future and will therefore hold individualistic benefits.

5.2.5 Social justice framework

The paradigm which the research design stems from contains a clear commitment to social justice. This research takes the stance that justice issues are central to the identity of social work and should therefore be given attention in social work research. In the first instance, it is important to justify this stance as the significance of social justice to the profession is a matter of opinion rather than a factual statement (Solas 2008). There are many reasons why social justice is of importance to social work. These reasons need to be given attention as this stance is by no means secure and can be subjected to erosion or expansion throughout time and place.

Since its inception social work has aligned itself with a social justice framework (Kam 2014). From its early origins social workers have undertook leadership roles in the area of human rights. A primary Western example of this being Jane Addams (1860-1935) of the USA who fought on issues of women's suffrage, housing and education and assisted in establishing some important national and international organisations. She was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1931. Other examples are Eglantyne Jebb (1876-1928) a U.K. social reformer who was instrumental in developing children's rights, writing the initial Declaration of the Rights of the Child and founding Save the Child charity and Ellen Khuzwayo, the first black South African to obtain a social work degree, becoming significant in the fight against apartheid. For Healy (2008) a natural linkage between social work and human rights exists.

On a contemporary, international platform, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) code of ethics, incorporates a social justice aim. This has also been adopted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). The code states:

> "*social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work.*"

(IASSW 2004 cited in Solas 2005 p816)

A strong commitment to macro considerations increases the scope to challenge the discriminatory contexts which marginalised groups are subject to. This involves asserting that social work has a wider responsibility which goes beyond considerations of the individual. Kam (2014) asks:

> "*if a practitioner is committed to individual treatment work but shows little concern about social issues, distances himself or herself from the socially disadvantaged groups, does not locate the client's problem in the social context, neglects the social construction of the client's problem, does not strive for social changes, and detaches his or her mission from social equality, should he or she then still be considered a social worker*?"

(Kam 2014 p736)

Research by Rosen and Livine (1992) found that 70% of 176 social worker's preferred an individualised focus as opposed to interpersonal and ecological considerations. Other research suggests social workers who do show a commitment to incorporating a social justice approach into practice do so at a micro level with their allocated cases and not at a macro level (O Brien 2010 cited in Kam 2014). Such a focus is the result of the organisational structures which surround social work in the U.K. and elsewhere. As Kam (2014) states:

> "*Social work students nowadays are drawn into the SW profession not by their passion for social justice - but by their aspiration to become competent and professional therapists.*"

(Kam 2014 p730)

The politicised nature of this research is transparent and a clear research aim relating to a desire to increase the visibility of environmental social work in practice, research and education is present. Whilst the subject of social justice in social work has been widely discussed, it has been

recognised that the development of the profession has not coincided with an increased commitment to social justice goals (Kam 2014). This commitment needs constant evaluation as social workers find themselves positioned within organisational contexts which continually lead to challenges of one's value base. For example, within Local Authority case work, individuals in significant need are supported in ways which are dictated by contemporary 'evidence based' interventions which do not address wider structural factors.

Whilst Healy and Meagher (2004) are critical of the strive for professionalisation they warn that the de-professionalisation of social work is also a neoliberal endeavour causing further marginalisation which gives rise to the positive proposal of a new professionalism and political union. Olson (2007) has claimed that the pursuit of the professionalisation project has been prioritised over the social justice project, despite claims of social work's commitments to justice issues. It has been argued that the reduction of resources has led to an increased focus on resource allocation by the social work profession (Kam 2014): with those accessing services having become a product of neo-liberalism and consumer capitalism (Denzin 2002). Kam (2014) claims that social workers can actually 'control, restrain and reduce' service user's demands for equality in respect of their resource gatekeeping function. Despite concerns about the erosion of this fundamental concept within social work, many commentators strongly assert its essential role in the profession with Finn and Jacobson (2003) actually proposing that social work's name should be changed to 'social justice work'. The goal of social justice is central to critical social work (MacKinnon 2009) and therefore social justice is integral to this research design and is indeed integral to the profession of social work. As Humphries states:

> "*A critical research methodology asserts that questions about justice, freedom and equality should be explicitly addressed as part and parcel of its approach.*"

(Humphries 2008 p107)

Furthermore, it is recognised that for a large portion of humanity, social justice is a matter of life and death, not an abstract concept (Solas 2008).

My research views ecological justice as a component of social justice. I acknowledged that this is an anthropocentric approach and I have chosen not to pursue an eco-centric perspective as social work is a human centred activity. This research does not deny the view point that planetary rights exist (see Peru's mother earth law) nor does it assert that humans are superior to other life forms. The view of human dominance has prevailed since antiquity, with the emergence of philosophical thinkers such as Plato, which led to notions of human superiority being formed with animals being deemed inferior. Such a doctrine is also evident in Christianity and later became part of modern discourse, with technological advances and industrialisation widening the perceived gap (Feygina 2013).

Feygina (2013) illustrates the interconnectedness of ecological and social injustice stressing that they both emerge from and are upheld by socio-economic processes and hierarchal power structures which uphold the dominant paradigm. For Feygina (2013), right wing authoritarianism e.g. political conservatism and the promotion of the free market, upholds the existing paradigm and attempts to prevent strides towards equality and redistribution. This not only exacerbates injustices to humans but also contains considerable disregard for the environment. Thus Feygina (2013) asserts that the ideological roots of social injustice and anti-environmental sentiment, exist within the same paradigm. This understanding has importance in considerations of how to effect change (Feygina 2013). CT researchers highlight a number of structural factors such as gender and class which impact on human experience, but they also engage with issues of consumerism and environmentally harmful practices (Denzin 2002). Feygina (2013) suggests that given the connection between social and environmental (in)justice, enlarging the theoretical landscape of justice is of great value and concludes by suggesting that

without the amalgamation of social and environmental justice considerations, sustainability may be beyond reach.

The drive for social justice is strongly identifiable with social movements, which have offered an alternative to so called legitimate political parties. Thompson (2002) asserts that Anti Discriminatory Practice partly developed from social movements. This has taken the form of challenging dominant individualised approaches to practice, such as psychodynamic interventions. Whilst there is no direct relationship between social movements and social work (Thompson 2002), the social movement influence allowed for a reconsideration of sociological factors affecting service users enabling the integration of social justice concepts (Thompson 2002). This originated with an analysis of class, progressing gender and race then moving on to disability and sexuality.

For Hambermas, social movements align themselves with the strive for equality, self-realisation, participation and human rights which Thompson equates with what he refers to as 'emancipatory' social work (Thompson 2002). Whilst acknowledging the historic context of social works involvement in social movements, Ferguson (2008) identifies radical social work as a product of great social movements, referring to the 1970's era of civil rights, women's rights and anti-war protest. The impact of new social movements throughout the decades of the 1980's and 1990's, such as the disability movement which saw the introduction of social models of disability integration into social work practice have also impacted, although to a lesser extent, on radical social work (Ferguson 2008). Furthermore, the 'user participation movement' has challenged the form of professionalism which assumes elitism and promotes power imbalances between the user and social worker (Thompson 2002).

CT research is aligned with social movements, as Humphries (2008) states:

"A critical social theory frames its research program and its conceptual framework with

an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it

has a partisan, though not uncritical identification. The questions it asks and the

models it designs are informed by that identification and interest."

(Humphries 2008 p104)

Thompson identifies the social movements he deems most relevant to social workers, which

does not include the green movement. However, this research envisages a clear link between

social work, environmental justice and the green movement. Social work has commonalities

with social movements in the shared belief that collective action can create change (Thompson

2002): however the reach and potential for change through conscious raising by social justice

organisations must be recognised by social workers (Van Wormer 2004). Social movements have

impacted on social work's inclusion of social justice aims and critical forms of social work

(Thompson 2002) this offers great potential to environmental social workers around the world

in terms of future capacity building.

5.2.6 Action stage

My research aligns itself with Morley and Dunston's (2013) call for the social work community:

practitioner, educators, students to 'resist participation' within the neoliberal agenda. For

research to be anti-oppressive the core agenda must be for social change and to go beyond

formal research endeavours which end with publication (Strier 2007). Ultimately, there is a

belief in humanity which emanates from the CT paradigm in that there is a strong belief that

humans can create change once awareness of oppression has occurred (Humphries 2008). In

relation to research findings and dissemination, it is important that this transcends beyond

academia (Gilgurn and Abrams 2002). The essential premise of the action planning stage is to

empower participants by asking their views on how to increase the visibility of environmental social work in Wales. It involves a learning conversation, were the researcher and participants are both teachers and learners (Morris 2006) and by transforming the power imbalances between the researcher and the participant an emancipatory approach emerges (Strier 2007).

Proposed actions will be developed in partnership with participants, an identified necessity of CT research (Morris 2005). The action planning stage will allow for the development of an 'action' to be taken forward as a secondary stage in the research design. For MacKinnon (2009) action is equally as necessary as theory, for example, the actions developed in Christopulos' (1995) CT research involved gaining agreement for eating disorder groups to be held on campus, programme development and organisation, resulting in an increased awareness of the issue for students and staff.

Potts and Brown (2005) propose that anti-oppressive research involves social justice in process and outcome, therefore the action planning stage, and subsequent follow through of an 'action' is a critical stage of the research project. However, for environmental social work to thrive it must be open to trans-disciplinary involvement, a component of the eco critical theoretical approach. Environmental social work will need to engage collaboratively with disciplines which the profession does not normally engage with whom Kemp (2011) refers to as '*strange bedfellows*' (Kemp 2011 p1206). The field of natural sciences has also begun to consider its relationship with social science when considering environmental issues such as conservation with an increasing awareness of the need to collaborate. Within the field of conversation, Campbell (2005) stresses the need for increased interdisciplinary approaches as being critical for conversation success.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the methodological framework which will guide the CT research on the environment and social work and efforts to increase the visibility of environmental social work within Wales. At this early stage of environmental social work's development social work interventions, educational content and research are all in need of further attention and development. The social justice framework ensures that environmental justice will be given primary attention. The work of Bourdieu provides opportunities to consider both the individual (or agent) and the wider structures which surround and influence them, giving importance to both. This will be crucial in ensuring that, as a researcher, I am able to give attention to the individual lived experiences of the participants as well as considering the context of their practice and wider environmental issues.

Chapter 6 Methods

6.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the steps undertaken to systematically address the research questions outlined in section 4.8. The methods used to both elicit and to analyse the data will be considered. Firstly, the criteria for participation will be clearly outlined: including the justification for a Welsh based study. The recruitment process is then explained in detail and the sources of recruitment have been tabulated for ease of reading. The participants are briefly introduced by way of a demographic table and the ethical considerations which guided the research are also addressed in this chapter. This is followed by a section on the data analysis method of thematic analysis. Finally, the methods utilised for the action stage are also presented here, although the action stage was developed at a later stage in the research. In line with the methodological approach the action stage was developed from the semi structured interviews with participants.

6.2 The Participants

To participate in the research, potential participant's needed to meet the following inclusion criteria:

1) they were qualified social worker's:

2) they had an expressed interest in the environment or environmental issues and

3) they were practicing in Wales, U.K.

I elected to use purposive sampling as participants were included for their 'experiential relevance' and potential to support theory and practice evolution in line with the research aims (Rudestam and Newton 2014). Additional information on what 'an interest in the environment or environmental issues' may consist of was intentionally not expanded on to enable prospective participants to interpret their suitability for the project from their own standpoint. For example, participants may or may not consider themselves 'environmental social workers'. Furthermore, it was important not impose any pre-existing notions that I may hold on the subject which could have influenced the recruitment process.

Each participant needed to practice in Wales. This occurred in recognition of the need for culturally specific understandings of this form of social work. The notion of 'global as local' is central to this research, therefore, practice (and research), should be identified as culturally specific. The criterion for participation was reviewed in light of one participant who lived in England but practiced in Wales. This participant was Welsh and spoke Welsh as her first language and, on balance, I felt that the important aspect to uphold was the location of practice.

A sample size of 15 was initially sought based on practical considerations relating to managing the fieldwork across a geographically disparate area as a single, unfunded researcher. Moreover, I hoped to achieve saturation which is recognised as a key determinant of sample size, occurring when repetition becomes evident in data and therefore no new significant themes will emerge (Josselson and Lieblich 2003). However Josselson and Lieblich (2003) also recognize that each participant brings their own unique contribution to the research. From this perspective, saturation in its true sense could never fully occur. They also suggest that it is the researcher who actually becomes saturated. Qualitative sample sizes will vary according to the method deployed, usually ranging from 5-30 participants. For Josselson and Lieblich (2003), an adequate amount of data needs to be collected to ensure transcripts can be analysed in depth. It is frequently the case that fewer participants will be required when transcripts are lengthy

and detailed (Josselson and Lieblich 2003). For this research, a total of 15 prospects participants agreed to participate. However, one participant later withdrew their expression of interest.

6.3 Ethical considerations

This research was approved by Keele University's Ethics Committee (see appendix one). Ethical practices in research were given consideration throughout the process from the early research design stages, throughout the data collection period and the writing up stage. All the documentation intended for participants / employers of participants and the research design has been scrutinised by this committee. Additional influences on ethical considerations came from the Code of Ethics for Social Work and Social Care Research (JUCSWEC 2008) for example: attention was given to Point 10 of the Code of Ethics which states:

> *"The social work and social care researcher will at all times respect the individual participant's absolute right to decline to participate in or to withdraw from the research programme, especially when the researcher, is by any means, in a position of authority over the participant."*

(JUCSWEC 2008)

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Two copies of the consent form were signed, one copy was kept by the participants and one copy was retained by me. There were two components to the consent form. First, participants gave consent to their participation which covered aspects such as audio recording (see appendix six) and secondly consent was acquired for the use of quotes (see appendix seven). In order to gain informed consent, the prospective participant must receive enough relevant information for an autonomous decision to be made (Farrimond 2013). Therefore, the information sheet (see appendix five) for participants clearly stated the research aims, what being a participant entailed as well as

covering key aspects, such as, how the information will be used and who will have access to it. Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants to ensure privacy and confidentiality of data as it is important to allow participants to express their views without being identified (Farrimond 2013). All personal data on participants has been kept confidential. During the course of the research, one participant withdrew their consent to use quotes from their interview. This request was upheld.

Due to the research following a progression whereby the participants supported the development of an action plan, leading to subsequent action, a certain degree of uncertainty existed as to what the action stage would entail. The research strategy was explained in the initial proposal to the ethics committee. Once the later stages of the research were fully developed, I sought further approval from the committee. This research has received no grants from any funding agencies.

6.4 Recruitment

The participants were accessed through advertising and contacting social care and environmental organisations throughout Wales (see appendix two). A letter of invitation was sent (see appendix four) as well as an 'information sheet for employers of participants' (see appendix three) with each initial e mail. Consent for employees to participate was assumed as being given if the agency / organisation agreed to forward the call for participants to staff. Each Local Authority Head of Service, for both adults and children's services, was approached to gain consent to advertise the research to all social work staff. The response from this initial contact was largely positive but variable. Some Head of Services did not respond and it is unknown if the research was advertised within those departments. Many responded and gave contact details of a manager to liaise with. One Head of Service was particularly helpful and advertised

the research on the Authority's intranet (this Authority produced the largest amount of participants). Some individual managers were aware of specific social workers who they felt matched the criteria well and they were directly contacted with details of the research.

As well as contacting Local Authorities, there were two regional forums relating to children's residential care and independent reviewing officers which I engaged with as part of my employment, which were approached. This increased awareness of the research and yielded several participants. The call for participants was also sent out on an e mail list to members of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering Cymru (BAAF Cymru). After contacting known individuals employed in the environmental / conservation sector in Wales, relevant organisations were identified and contacted. Again the response was variable but yielded more enthusiasm in relation to the subject of research than the social care sector. Several organisations agreed to send the call for participants out on their member's e mailing list. Despite a positive response from the environmental organisations, no participants were recruited via this route.

Table 5: Sources of recruitment to the study

	N=14
Self-referral through L.A. advertising	7
Referral through regional social work forums	2
Self-referral through regional social work forums	3
Referral through snowballing	1

Personal contacts	1
Referral through Environmental organisations	0

Agencies / organisations were sent information to share with their social work staff including the 'call for participants' document (see appendix two). This contained basic information about myself, the research and the criteria for participation. A detailed information sheet (see appendix five) and consent forms were also sent to prospective participants.

It was made clear that if they agreed to participate, I would travel to their area and conduct the interview in an agreed location at a time which was suitable for them. The length of the interview, estimated at 1-2 hours in length was also made explicit as well as key areas which would be discussed during interview. Prospective participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and transcribed with a copy of the transcription being sent to them to check for accuracy and giving them the opportunity to add or remove information if necessary. In respect of anonymity, it was made clear that participants name and location would not be disclosed at any stage of the research with pseudonyms being adopted. They were made aware that the research findings would be presented at social work conferences and via publication in academic journals. In terms of withdrawing from the research, participants were able to withdraw their consent at any time without giving a reason. The information sheet explained that any data the participants provided would not be used in future research projects without their written consent. Information on safeguarding concerns, research funding and whom to contact if any concerns arose, was also included. All of the collected data was stored securely on a password-protected computer and will be retained for a further 3 months after the research is concluded and the thesis is finalised.

The recruitment process led to a steady flow of prospective participants agreeing to be interviewed. One prospective participate requested a telephone conversation to discuss the environmental interest criteria before feeling confident about agreeing to participate. Interviews were undertaken across Wales over a period of 5 months. Participants were able to choose the venue for the interview and, in each case, I travelled to the participant's place of work. Considerations of lone working practices occurred. Private rooms were made available to ensure privacy and to avoid interruptions. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 – 60 minutes.

Participant profiles can be found in appendix ten of this thesis. Table two briefly presents basic information about participants:

Table 6: Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Area of practice	Place of birth	Location in Wales	Personal environmental interests	Professional environmental interests
Joseph	Children's services	Zimbabwe	Urban	Food growing Community activities	Previous refugee camp employment Global / structural perspectives
Karolina	Children's residential	East Germany	Rural	Gardening / food growing Hill walking Outdoor swimming, pescetarianism	Outdoor education Using nature to support behavioural change
Margaret	Children's services	Wales	Urban	Environmental / animal rights activist Hill walking / Bird watching Veganism	Promoting green work spaces Families accessing nature
Gabrielle	Children's services	England	Rural	Nature walks Ethical consumption	Families accessing nature Structural perspectives
Terry	Children's residential	England	Rural	Sustainability Food growing Community action to protect nature	Using nature to support behavioural change

Name	Service	Country	Setting	Interests	Focus
Ravinder	Adult services	Trinidad	Rural	Spiritual beliefs Using nature for meditation Vegetarianism	Promoting green work spaces Families accessing nature
Carol	Adult services	England	Urban	Hill walking Geocaching	Recycling Referring others to community services
Seren	Adult services	Wales	Urban	Sustainability Hill walking Food growing Vegetarianism	Families accessing nature Food and consumption support Community perspectives
Simon	Children's services	England	Rural	Outdoor pursuits Sustainability Food growing	Using nature to support behavioural change
Sue	Children's services	Wales	Rural	Spiritual beliefs Vegetarianism	Families accessing nature
Joan	Children's services	Wales	Rural	Hill walking Academic interests	Families accessing nature Food and consumption support Structural perspectives
Einir	Adult services	Wales	Rural	Spiritual beliefs Kayaking Vegetarianism	Families accessing nature Using nature to support behavioural change
Erina	Children's charity sector	England	Rural	Sustainability Hill walking Vegetarianism	Delivers Support programmes using nature
Sally	Adult services	Wales	Rural	Sustainability Spending time in nature	Food and consumption support Community perspectives

6.5 Fieldwork

Semi structured interviews were selected as a method to elicit the experiences and perspectives of participant's. This interview style, involves pre-determined questions, but allowed me to seek clarification and ask additional questions spontaneously, based on the emerging content of the interview. The open nature of this method has been described as promoting depth and vitality which can assist in the emergence of new ideas (Dearnley 2005). It was my role as an interviewer to facilitate as oppose to direct the interview (Ross and Green 2011). Despite being an early career researcher, as a qualified social worker I have gained extensive experience of interviewing throughout my professional career and therefore felt confident in my ability to interview participants. The semi structured interviews offered participants the space to elaborate on what they found particularly relevant from their lived experience (Gill and Liamputtong 2011). The order of an interview may vary accordingly and additional unplanned questions can be asked based on the unpredictable interview content (Robson 2011). Therefore, the semi structured interview offers a flexible approach which was deemed suitable for this exploratory topic. The lack of standardisation can invoke criticism in relation to reliability and bias. However, this can be minimised with interviewer skill resulting in rich and 'highly illuminating' material (Robson 2011).

Participants were prepared for the interview by considering the 'interview guide' which was sent to them in advance of the interview. This served to direct the flow of the interview as it provided a checklist of topics to be considered (David and Sutton 2004). In addition, an interview guide provides a sense of order and promotes similarity across the data set. One pilot interview occurred which provided the opportunity to trial the interview guide to ensure it was fit for purpose. The interview guide (see appendix nine) contained the following information:

- Tell me about your life / story in relation to the natural environment.

- Tell me how / if the environment and social work are connected for you and in more general terms.

- Tell me about your organisational context.

- Have you ever integrated the environment into practice?

- What barriers do you face? (Comment on power relations / notions of empowerment).

During the interview, I incorporated supplementary prompts and probes in an attempt to elicit further information. For example, on several occasions I asked if participants could offer examples to illuminate their perspectives further. Ensuring that a full record of the interview was taken is essential (Robson 2011) and was achieved by using, with participant consent, a digital voice recorder. It should be noted that several participants appeared somewhat uncomfortable that the interview was being recorded. However, it is not known if this impacted upon the content of the interview.

6.6 Data analysis

I used thematic analysis to undertake analysis of interview narratives. Thematic analysis is a frequently utilised method in qualitative research, (Roulston 2001) used to identify, analyse and report themes which 'emerge' from data, providing interpretations of the accessed experiences given by the participants. It is a flexible method, which brings with it a theoretical freedom which other methods do not possess (Braun and Clarke 2006). This flexible methodological stance is particularly suitable for exploring new domains of research as it has a focus on: in-depth descriptions, understanding how meaning is created from experience and the active role of the researcher (Flesaker and Larsen 2012). Whilst frequently associated with a realist research paradigm, it can be used across epistemological approaches. The flexibility of this method does

not undermine its theoretical and methodological 'soundness' (Braun and Clarke 2006). Therefore, this method is appropriate in not only the analysis of biographical narratives but in contributing to a critical theorist research methodology.

Thematic analysis can be either deductive or inductive in its approach to data. Researchers, such as Boyatzis (1998) have framed thematic analysis as a methodological tool as opposed to a method, whilst others have denied thematic analysis its own separate identity by perceiving thematic coding to be a process contained within major forms of analysis e.g. grounded theory. However, this research is aligned with the work of Braun and Clarke (2006) in that thematic analysis is deemed a method of data analysis in its own right. I used a 6 stage thematic analysis which is discussed below. 'Experiences accessed' from the interviews were subject to the 6 stage thematic analysis guide developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The stages of thematic analysis are presented below and will be sequentially discussed. The stages of thematic analysis do not adhere to strict guidelines but phases which can be applied flexibly to suit the research design (Braun and Clarke 2006). While I did not follow each stage in a strict linear form, I have presented in this way below for clarity in Table 7, and I discuss each stage below.

Table 7: The stages of thematic analysis

1	•Stage 1 Familiarising yourself with the data •Transcribing, reading / re-reading, noting ideas
2	•Stage 2 Generating initial codes •Coding interesting features systematically, collating data for codes
3	•Stage 3 Searching for themes •Gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4	•Stage 4 Reviewing themes •Checking themes against codes / entire data set. Generating a thematic map of analysis
5	•Stage 5 defining and naming themes •On-going analysis to refine specifics of themes. Overall story the analysis tells, clear definitions / names for themes
6	•Stage 6 writing up •Final analysis, selecting vivid & compelling extracts, analysis refers to research questions & literature, writing up findings.

Stage one: My familiarity with the interview narratives started during the interview stage. However, the scale of organising the interviews across Wales was time consuming and impacted on my ability to reflect systematically on the early hunches I was aware of as I undertook the interviews. As the interviews were digitally recorded, I was able to listen to the interview content several times throughout the analysis period. I arranged for each audio recording to be fully transcribed. While it is acknowledged that many writers advise the researcher to transcribe the audio recorded interviews themselves to increase familiarity at an early stage (Riessan 1993), the transcribing was not undertaken by me as a result of time constraints. The transcriptions were verbatim accounts, which included participant's pauses and coughs.

All of the transcripts were then checked against the audio recordings by me for accuracy. This significantly increased my familiarity with the interview content and provided me with an opportunity to begin considering the narratives in their entirety. This was identified as a time consuming but essential task as it provides the bedrock for subsequent analysis. I offered transcripts to participants to view, amend and comment on in relation to their accuracy and as an important means of ensuring their authenticity. One participant made changes and then returned the transcription. I further immersed myself in the data through repeated reading of the transcripts. This was an active process as a search for patterns was occurring at this time.

Stage two: Coding involves the identification of a feature within the data. Boyatzis (1998) refers to codes as the basic segments of data which are identified as meaningful. This stage marks the beginnings of actual data organisation. The codes were smaller than the overarching themes which were developed after coding had occurred. Coding occurred across the entire data set with equal attention being given to each interview and segments of interviews. At this stage, there was no pre-existing notion of what may be identified as a code. The data analysis was supported by the use of QSRNVivo 10 software. NVivo is not a method of analysis as it can support a wide range of methodological approaches (Bazeley and Jackson 2013). The software is a useful tool for managing large amounts of data (Zapata-Sepúlveda et al 2012) and by using NVivo, I was able to consider content from its original source then move to consider related content across the data set with ease (Bernauer et al 2013).

Stage three: After coding had occurred, codes were grouped together under relevant themes. A theme is a representation of a pattern within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). At this stage several codes were coded on more than one occasion and no codes were discarded, although some did not fit within the developed themes.

Figure 5: Image of coding in NVivo

Name	Sources	References
Nodes		
Q1 Themes in SW's Narratives	0	0
Rural location	9	20
rural community living	7	9
city living	7	9
community group	1	1
community work	2	3
economic migrant	1	3
hydro project	1	1
small holding	1	2
Welsh culture	2	2
Welsh language	1	2
Childhood	12	18
Family Background	7	9
Family Values	4	6
birth children	7	8
food	5	8
environmentalism and perception of others	1	6
compassion for animals	1	2
Diet	6	8
drought and flooding	1	1
growing food	6	12
fuel	1	2
soil erosion	1	1

It is misrepresentative to claim that the data simply 'emerges' or 'reveals' the themes and gives voice to participants as the researcher selects, edits and interprets the narratives which are then presented. Therefore, such an approach fails to recognise the role of the researcher (Braun and Clarke 2006). The use of *a priori* concepts was not present during the coding and the early development of themes. There was no attempt to fit the themes into a pre-determined framework and early thematic development stemmed directly from participant's accounts and was therefore data driven. However, I acknowledge that I did not begin the analysis tabula rasa due to the undertaking of the literature review. In any event, engagement with the literature afforded greater sensitivity to data collection (Braun and Clarke 2006). Traditionally 'data' will be derived from an inductive or deductive approach. However, by adopting an inclusive framework both approaches are of use and are not mutually exclusive, but can be viewed as a continuum (Fook 2002). For example, procedural stages for data analysis and theory

construction (Huberman and Miles 1994), conclude with comparisons between emergent theories and pre-existing ideas, as a result of this it is recognised that theories do not emerge in a vacuum but stem from existing discourses (Fook 2002). The early themes produced were descriptive in essence, with the subsequent analysis becoming more interpretive.

Stage four: A descriptive analysis of the data led to the development of a thematic map which is presented in the discussion chapter. This approach ensured that as a researcher, I remained close to the data, considering the data set in its entirety. However, when reviewing these themes the relationship between them remained unclear and a further analysis was deemed necessary. The data analysis then shifted to a deductive approach which was more interpretive in nature. This afforded a more conceptual in-depth analysis of the data through utilising Bourdieu's social theory.

Stage five: A more conceptualised thematic map was developed from the secondary analysis showing the overall conceptualisation and the relationship between them. The thematic map was continually reconsidered and reviewed throughout the write up of the findings chapter as the analysis of data continued during this stage. Whilst themes can be identified by prevalence, it is the relevance to the research questions and methodological approach which guided the thematic development. Therefore prevalence did not necessarily imply that the theme was crucial. As a researcher, I used my judgement whilst developing the thematic map as the focus was on the theme encapsulating something important relating to the area of investigation (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Stage six: The analytic themes were progressively developed into meta themes. An iterative approach was continually deployed throughout the research with data collection and analysis occurring simultaneously. A periodic return to the transcripts, literature and an ongoing search for new peer reviewed papers occurred. This supports the avoidance of reaching simplistic or premature conclusions (Probst 2012). The themes derived from the data are presented in the

subsequent findings chapter and are summarised in Figure six. Through the themes, the story

of the data is told in relation to the research questions. Extracts from the data have been used

to illustrate the themes and their importance which has been integrated into the analysis. Due

to the iterative nature of the analysis the writing of the findings chapter and discussion were

also part of the analytic process. The analysis was frequently edited and altered as the data

analysis continued through to completion of the final thesis document.

Findings Chapter's

Foreword

The findings chapters provide a detailed exploration of the findings derived from this qualitative research project. The final themes have been presented below and the subsequent chapters will follow this diagram. The findings have been separated into six distinct, yet interrelated sections followed by a discussion chapter. This section begins with an exploration of the components which comprise the primary habitus of the participants, entitled: '*The formation of habitus'*. This chapter includes a consideration of structural factors through the development of case studies. This is followed by an analysis of the accumulation of environmental capital and the components which comprise the foundations of this form of capital in the chapter entitled '*The accumulation of environmental capital'*. Chapter nine and ten examine how the participant's environmental interests and social work co-exist through perspectives and what emerged in practice in the rural social work field. A critical part of the research explored the barriers faced by the participants in integrating the environment into practice and this comprises the fifth chapter. This section has wide reaching ramifications as it exemplifies the challenges faced by the profession within a neoliberal, managerialist framework. The action stage chapter describes the planning stage which involved asking participants how to increase the visibility of environmental social work and increase integration of the environment into practice. This led to the development of an action stage which engaged with social work education through undertaking green social work lectures. Both staff and students engaged in the data collection which is presented in the action stage section of this chapter. This section culminates with the discussion section which utilises the work of Bourdieu to explore the symbolic violence experienced by the profession and the impact on members of society.

Figure 6: Final themes post analysis
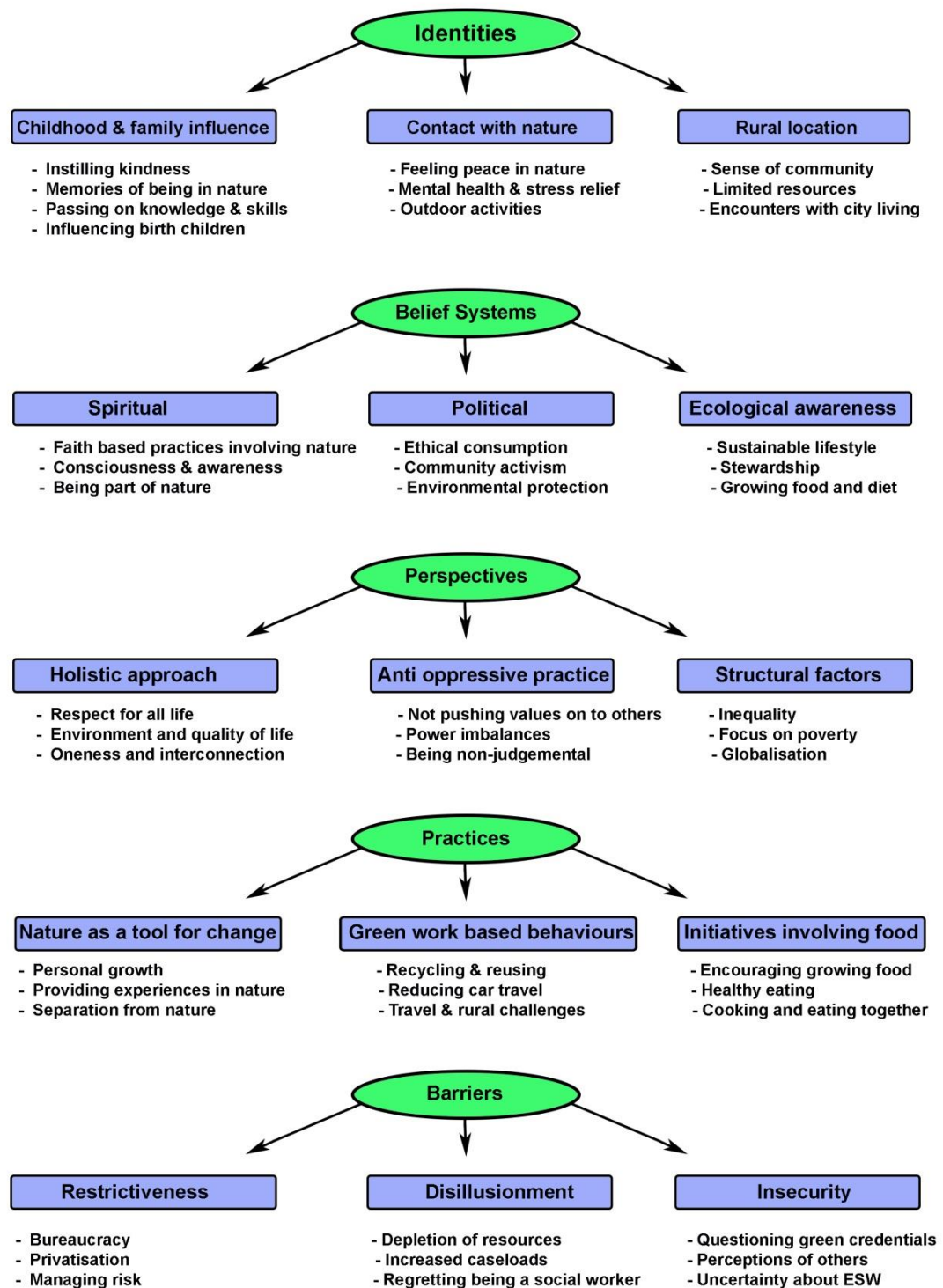
Chapter Seven The formation of Habitus

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the identities of participants with an interest in the environment or environmental issues in Wales. Their direct personal experience included: childhood and family influence, contact with nature, and experiences of rural living which participants identified as defining influences in the development of their belief systems. Participant narratives captured both micro and macro systems with the participants' relationships with the environment being shaped by the wider societal structure of their setting. While I did not initially expect the degree of diversity in participant cultural backgrounds, I subsequently decided to capture this by way of illustrative case studies which highlight how the participant's relationship with the environment has been constructed within macro socio-economic structures.

7.2 Childhood and Family influence

The influence of family in supporting the development of environmental interests was a clear theme in participant narratives. During interview, participants were encouraged to reflect back as far as they liked when considering their life story in terms of the natural environment. This led many participants to begin their narrative at childhood. Eleven participants spent their childhood living in a rural setting. Family values and childhood experiences had instilled a deep respect for the environment and exposure to nature. Participants offered numerous reflections of childhood outdoor adventures, emphasising the freedom which accompanied these experiences. Such activities involved cycling, walking, camping and food growing.

Simon attended a summer camp with his parents for the six-week summer break. He reflected on this time with great fondness and noted that a few days prior to the research interview he had smelt freshly cut grass which evoked strong memories of those childhood summer camps. For Sue, much of her childhood reflections were of horse riding across the moors. Whilst Seren referred to her childhood as *'idyllic'*, likening it to an Enid Blyton scene. She described walking and cycling in nature with her four sisters as a *'fairy tale'*. Similarly, Carol talked about walking in nature as a child and being 'mesmerised'. A common reflection from participants involved being influenced by parents and family. The participant's early experiences appeared fundamental in the development of their belief system and worldview. Margaret discussed her family instilling kindness towards animals and nature in her when she was a child:

> *"My mother would always say "What do you think they would feel?" as all the neighbours' kids were pouring I don't know, boiling water on ants' nest, I think. So I was doing that and then it was my mother going "Oh, I think that's a bit sad for ants. What if they're mothers?" You sort of think, 'Oh God'. So, and they were not vegetarians or anything but it was always the being nice to animals and I suppose, you know, you take that further as you grow up really. The first few times I was arrested my mum went (intake of breath) "Are you sure you should be doing this?" and it was "Well you told me". " (Margaret)*

Gabrielle discussed her family's political orientation and socio economic background. She felt that her value base evolved from her parents and family. Their socialist politics and low income status instilled a sense of respect for using resources. She said that her interest in the environment was not as a result of an epiphany but evolved over time. Joan highlighted her mother as being a key influence in promoting an alternative world view and ecological awareness.

As well as influencing the participant's value base, their family also helped them acquire knowledge and skills. Joan discussed how she and her siblings were encouraged to access and learn about nature by her parents. Both of her parents had a keen interest in geography and geology. Terry's father was instrumental in instilling an interest in the environment. His father passed on knowledge about plants and food growing to him throughout his childhood. He explained that he has passed this knowledge on to his own children. Sustainable lifestyle skills were also passed down to Seren from her family, by way of growing food and minimising consumerism. This was a necessity due to economic hardship. Seren had adopted this lifestyle again as an adult. Three participants described losing their interest in the environment during adolescence, with it later re-emerging.

Only two of the participants mentioned not being influenced by their family in respect of the natural environment. Einir referred to her interest in the environment as 'self-generated' stating that her family were not *'conscious in that sense'*. Whilst Erina spoke about her parent's divorce and how her mother would not go camping or spend time away in a caravan, which her other friends often did. Erina reflected that perhaps this was the reason for her deep love of both activities, having spent time living in a caravan whilst renovating her cottage.

The participants were not directly asked about influencing their own birth children however, this was raised by seven of the participants. Such influences resulted in ecologically aware behaviours relating to consumption, having an academic focus on climate change, mindfulness about litter and recycling, a love of nature and accessing nature. Overall, the participant's perception of how they had influenced their birth children was overwhelmingly positive. Only Simon spoke of his frustration with his teenage children:

> *"they are an absolute bloody nightmare in terms of the environment and their thoughts. I try the same old thing when I'm saying erm can you turn the switches off or put that in there. I always have to say 'that is for my grandchildren', it's you know...*

they don't give a shit about it and I think they are being reeled in slowly, I have some

good moments when I can see I have had an impact on them….. but erm but no they

are just living their lives in the here and now which is great - but I do see that world

they are inheriting you know is….. these are finite things that weve got and we do have

to work with what we have got." (Simon)

Despite Simon's frustration his comments also acknowledge some positive intergenerational transmission. Seren spoke about taking her son on environmental demonstrations as a child and the positive impact this had on him:

"It's made him more aware of life and the meaning of life really so that's good that we

promoted and instilled morals in him". (Seren)

The participants felt that this influence had affected who their children had become as adults, in respect of their values and lifestyle choices.

7.3 Contact with nature

Another theme which underpinned the participant's value base was their personal experiences of contact with nature. This contact had brought them numerous benefits and their reflections on its impact included feeling at peace in nature and accessing nature to manage stress. Participants' past and current levels of contact with nature was high and included, walking in the forests, on beaches, cycling and wild camping. For some participants, contact with nature was experienced as very calming, while others did more adventurous outdoor activities. Carol had spent time undertaking expedition work for the Duke of Edinburgh scheme as a qualified expedition leader and had been a Girl Guide leader for many years. She also spent time in nature geocaching. Karolina had held previous roles as a walking guide and a coast guard. As well as

having a hands on role she worked as a counsellor for team members and offered crisis support for survivors. This role also gave Karolina the opportunity to spend time out at sea:

> *"So from the area where I'm from, I think the sea.. it's 8 hours away to the north, so just being able to be outside being in the water [after moving to Ireland].... go swimming every day, feel the water....sea, it's so nice."* (Karolina)

She spoke about spending time in nature and about how much fun this was compared to staying indoors as "*it's very good to stimulate your whole senses*".

The participants spoke about spending time out in nature as peaceful, giving them time to reflect. Margaret spoke of feeling most at peace when out walking up a mountain or in woodland. Einir described relaxing in a kayak with the stillness of the water around her and the feelings this evoked within her. When asked how being in nature made her feel? Sue replied *"at home I suppose".* Simon explained that being in nature afforded him perspective. He continued by stating that when he is emotionally struggling with something he will walk and find that he is feeling different at the end. Whilst the issue he has contemplated may not have been resolved, walking in nature allows him the space to consider matters. He also discussed the space he has when he was outdoors doing dry stone walling and how he used this time to undertake reflection on social work practice. He acknowledged that working outdoors was good for his mental health. Simon worked part time as a social worker, stating that he could not engage in practice on a full time basis due to the work pressures. He talked about how his Local Authority was attempting to set up 'reflection groups', but stated that he creates this space by his own means.

In respect of emotional benefits, Joan went hill walking with her family on a regular basis and she discussed how this helped relieve stress. Whilst Margaret found that nature afforded her a

quiet space for stress reduction. When asked what feelings emerged when accessing nature, Seren stated:

> *"I think it erm alleviates stress..... It makes you appreciate the environment more.... it makes you look at things more, not just be blinkered, 'I've got to get this latest thing I've got to go shopping': shopping to me is a nightmare now. It just gives me more stress...."* (Seren)

> *"....and it does actually calm you and makes you think differently really, you know, it opens your eyes doesn't it? To what's out there and some people don't realise where we live and how beautiful it is."* (Seren)

Carol felt that accessing nature offered her 'head space'. She enjoyed walking with a local Ramblers group. She discussed how at times her *"head is full of stuff, particularly from work"*. She continued by talking about having previous mental health issues and how such activities were part of a strategy for managing such difficulties.

7.4 Rural location

The geographical location of the participants was overwhelmingly rural. Twelve participants were living in a rural area, one lived in a city and one lived in a large coastal town. As a result of this, rural living and rural community life were present in the narratives of the participants. The experiences of rural life in Wales were largely positive, particularly in relation to accessing nature and having a sense of community. Whilst there was acknowledgement amongst participants that resources may be limited, the benefits of a rural lifestyle outweighed the constraints or for some a rural lifestyle provided everything which was needed. This is reflected in Erina's comment when she discussed her local area:

"I think we're really lucky around here, you know. It is on our door step [nature] and we can sort of access, the streams and rivers, and mountains and sea side you know, we've got everything here." (Erina)

Whilst this quote may reinforce the 'rural idyll' which dominates the literature on rurality (Somerville et al 2015), participants drew attention to the lack of services and opportunities with one participant speaking about the area being 'closed' and another of making the most of what's around you. Sally's previous experience of rural living was more challenging. She referred to herself as an 'economic migrant' resulting from a lack of employment opportunities in North Wales. She relocated to England and continued to live there and work in Wales. She felt that the area still lacks infrastructure and investment and her narrative held a sense of frustration at her situation:

"I was forced to go into London to work when I was there I was Welsh speaking, when I was there then I had to totally lose that, become English speaking. I thought that was quite traumatic really at the time to be honest and quite... went to the city to work, so it was quite a different environment altogether." (Sally)

Sally was the only first language Welsh speaker in the sample. Her comment highlighted the extent of her loss from needing to relocate.

The participants spoke about periods of time spent in the city. Seren's family briefly moved to the city during her childhood, returning to the countryside as her mother missed rural living. Several other participants spent periods of time studying or working in cities. Despite a clear preference for rural living, some participants recognised some benefits to city living. Simon was asked how he found his 'brief spell' in the city:

"It's handy....there is no doubt about that.....the book shops are much nearer erm but its concrete..... and I think I might be right in saying I once read that man is the only

animal that actually constructs these concrete edifices in which to live.....all other

creatures have a more harmonious mode of formulating their domicile.... and that was

it.....concrete really...." (Simon)

The perceived access to opportunity the city held was also reflected in Margaret's narrative when she discussed a transition from a rural area to a city:

"South Wales Valleys are quite sort of closed, I suppose, and I wanted to sort of go off

and change the world. So I moved to Cardiff, not far but I went to Cardiff." (Margaret)

While many participants saw benefits in city living, there was a distinct culture and lifestyle preference for rural living. Many participants spoke about a strong sense of community within their environment. Such comments were overwhelmingly positive in respect of a community spirit being present in rural areas. However, despite the evident preference for rural living amongst participants, notions of countryside living was not romanticised. Some participants also spoke of the erosion of community caused by structural changes. Karolina's narrative included childhood reflections of rural life. In East Germany at this time there was a strong collective spirit which was affected by structural changes. Previously, the community had focused on food growing and trading. After the economic system transitioned, people began working outside their homes. The loss of community was also present in a Welsh context. Margaret resided in an ex mining village in Wales. She spoke about the growth of poverty which came with the loss of industry which had impacted on the community spirit:

"that village has changed since… the pit closed, you know, sort of, really poor and run

down, and that sense of community that was always there and was always political,

very, you know, is just… gone really. It's just no longer there…." (Margaret)

Irrespective of such changes, the majority of participants spoke positively about rural community living, both in the past and present. A sense of sharing time and resources was

present. Whilst growing up in a Welsh rural village, Seren discussed how inclusive her community was regardless of the experiences of poverty. She referred to childhood outings involving the whole community hiring a coach together. During her interview, Sally made reference to the closed community of North Wales and how everyone helped each other out. Whilst Erina considered her location remote, she felt her rural community was active and supportive:

> *"… and we really have good neighbours and there's always something going on in the village hall erm…a market, local market once a month and things like that, so lots going on". (Erina)*

Similarly, Joseph discussed how people in his community shared resources and stressed that during difficult times you couldn't leave your neighbour without water if you had water in your well. A sense of togetherness, especially when times were difficult, was evidently important to the participants.

7.5 Macro level influences

The following section describes the childhood experiences of three participants in relation to growing food. Each elicited experience is shaped by the wider socio-political and bio-physical sphere of the participant. Each participant's environment strongly differs in terms of cultural, historical and political factors which influence and shape the mode of production which governs where the participants were situated. The three narratives were selected based on the rich diversity of macro systems they reflect. They refer to growing food in Eastern Germany during communist party rule, a large U.K. city during the post war era, and rural Zimbabwe during colonial occupation. The exploration of these three narratives offers the opportunity to highlight the ideological impact on people's relationship with the environment.

Communist rule, East Germany

Karolina was raised in a rural village in East Germany at the time of Communist rule and the separation of East and West Germany. This separation involved an ideological separation and a physical separation in the form of a heavily patrolled border. The division of Germany following the Second World War embodied the bitter ideological rivalry of the cold war (Hogwood 2000). For Karolina and the other community members, life during this period was characterised by growing food. Each family had an allocated plot to grow vegetables and keep animals. Additional land could also be hired in the area surrounding the village. Growing food was a significant part of Karolina's upbringing, which all village members were involved in. This appeared to have other functions separate from sustaining life as this created a space for community members to interact and celebrate together, solidifying community cohesion:

> *"I know it was work and it was good to have your own food, but on the other hand it was for them a nice place for relaxation you know at the weekend if you had done your work in the evening then you would have a barbeque maybe with your other neighbours, or family parties so it was work but it was also fun, you know, afterwards."*

In relation to the production and consumption of food, basic foods were available. During her childhood the food consumed was locally produced with the exception of trade from other communist nations, bringing in food grown in hotter climates. Any surplus food grown by the community could be sold to a local shop:

> *"So if there were bananas available in the local shops everybody would know suddenly and everyone was running down to the shop and there was a big queue and they probably only had about 20 bananas for the whole village and so obviously if you were lucky and we got one obviously the child got it then because the parents or my grandparents said they don't want to take it away from me, and it's bad you know if you have to consider say in West Germany*

they have everything... erm also I'd never seen a pineapple I think, I'd never seen a kiwi, you know

them exotic fruits, same with oranges, the ones we got was from Cuba and they were always green

and very dry inside... so they were always the worst ones you could get probably..."

Karolina described the community as simultaneously poor and wealthy. The community member's monetary wealth was described as low, but rich in food and community support. This included systems of trade and exchange of materials to build. She was 10 years old when the partition wall dividing Germany came down and she recalled the loss of employment for community members and changes to her education. Educational changes included a reduction from 6 to 5 days and language class changing from Russian to English. The transition to a market based economy impacted upon the immediate community for Karolina who stated:

"... about the community spirit, I think it got lost..... because people obviously were too busy

[earning money]."

The reunification of Germany in 1990 was perceived as a victory for capitalism and an extensive paradigm transfer began in the East. Unification resulted in a rapid socio economic change (Dalton and Weldon 2010). Hogwood (2000) describes this transfer as a 'sudden and traumatic disjuncture', claiming that the population continue to struggle with this transition as a result of the abrupt end to what constituted the political community (Hogwood 2000 p47). The process of reunification was both a policy and economic challenge however cultural challenges also existed (Dalton and Weldon 2010).

Colonial rule, Zimbabwe:

Joseph's childhood was spent in a rural village in colonial Rhodesia, which gained political independence in 1980 becoming Zimbabwe. Joseph's narrative is dominated by the interconnection between the people and the land in a more visible way than the other participants. He was born into a peasant farming family. The family unit grew maize for consumption with a small proportion of the produce being sold. Earning a living at this time was difficult with no opportunities for employment existing in the rural areas. His parents attempted to generate additional income by planting fruit trees such as mangos, guavas, peaches, oranges and lemons. Joseph reflected that as a result of colonial rule, the indigenous populations were moved on to more barren land allowing the white farmers the high quality fertile land. Each family was allocated land to grow food. During his childhood he reflected that it was difficult to be both sustainable and to survive tilling the land with ox driven ploughs. Growing food produce at this time was largely an organic endeavour of small scale agriculture with people relying on cow dung to support soil quality. Joseph observed that cow dung in his village was of great value to people:

> *"It's very important, if you see somebody picking your cow dung, it was going to be a real argument. Sometimes…. the thought of this idea, I always laugh at it, sometimes... one guy in the village used to tie a plastic bag at the back of the cow, it drops in the bag [laughs] and he can use it in his garden to grow vegetables, can use it on his land… and at night, put the cattle in their pens…all the cows go there in their pens and all the cow dung goes in there and you could just go there and collect it, but then during the day they were just roaming around the village to find something to eat, which was again very, very difficult. We'd created this problem of soil erosion and there isn't enough grass now for our animals. Now you would find*

animals roaming around everywhere eating trees, leaves and all that, that's when

someone said that I had to keep my cow dung, the ox, the cow....the droppings."

His father was chosen as the kraal head of the village by the white administration. Above the rank of kraal head was the chief. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's increased pressure, including international sanctions, to decolonise led to the Smith regime expanding the numbers of chiefs and kraal heads in an attempt to diffuse nationalist support (Worby 2001). The local people gave a proportion of their produce to the chief who retained this for distribution during periods of hunger, in exchange for labour. These were known as 'food for work' programmes involving projects such as the construction of wells and footbridges to prevent drowning. Joseph's childhood reflections contained accounts of flooding, droughts, soil erosion and hunger. He reflected on the natural environment of his homeland from a recent visit, noting that there were visible signs of damage from soil erosion and people were struggling to grow food as a result of this. He spoke about his observations of crop yield being much smaller:

"So that was my relationship with the environment and I see it now as a way of....

during those times, it was very difficult. I see it now..... a way of making the

environment sustainable, to try and keep it feeding the people".

Post War Birmingham, Britain

Terry's narrative was situated within an urban environment in the U.K. His childhood was spent in Birmingham, one of the largest U.K. cities during the 1950's. His father had a strong ecological interest and childhood recollections involved time spent at the family's allotment and day trips foraging for edible foods:

> *"we used to have to take all the tools in a wheelbarrow [laughs] - half an hour's walk*
>
> *through the streets to...to where the allotments were"*

The family's two allotment plots generated enough food to provide for the family for the entire year at a time when food rationing was still in existence. Terry recalled the various storage systems involving bottling and salting food in pots in an era before refrigerators were widespread in the U.K.:

> *"He also used to take us on family journeys on the bus on weekends, usually about*
>
> *collecting something and we would go out with baskets and bags and collect*
>
> *elderberries or something and bring it back in the evening and do something with it*
>
> *and we would go out on the bus… he'd planned a route.....we'd go out on a bus, he'd*
>
> *have a route of walking across fields or whatever to another bus route and we would*
>
> *come back a different way but he [father] had a lot of sort of.... what seem to me a*
>
> *lot of knowledge when I was a kid… He knew the names of flowers and trees and he*
>
> *knew things, he knew things like wood sorrel and and….. erm the properties of plants*
>
> *and, and the uses of things and trees and stuff like that and which made the whole*
>
> *thing a nice sort of adventure stroke information stroke erm production… like*
>
> *collecting stuff to take back and make jam or whatever he was doing and.... so I*
>
> *remember those journeys with huge fondness and the allotment the same."*

Terry recollected that upon reaching adolescence he temporarily lost interest in growing food and spending time in nature with his family. However, his upbringing instilled an interest in the natural environment which returned during his thirties. At this time he relocated from the city, established an allotment and re-engaged with nature. This interest continued throughout his life leading to his

active involvement in community organising to protect a local green space and the incorporation of environmental social work into his residential children's home.

The post war era heralded a significant period of change in U.K. food production, particularly in the name of efficiency. This led to a displacement of local farming knowledge and practices with the use of pesticides increasing dramatically during the so called 'chemical revolution' (Ward 1994). Morgan and Murdoch (2000) highlight that during this period, knowledge of farming practices came to be owned by large corporations and the modern consumer society emerged (Shaw et al 2004).

The three case studies presented above illustrate not only the importance of food in the participant's narratives, but also the influence of the ideological and structural factors on their lived experiences.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided insight into the participants narratives, presented through the themes of childhood and family influence, contact with nature, and experiences of rural living. These direct personal experiences were pivotal in the participants developing an interest in the environment and environmental issues. During the analysis of the narratives, it became apparent that there were diverse life experiences within the research sample, shaped by different ideological and structural factors. This was illuminated through three case studies describing the participant's relationship with food growing and the societal system which they were situated within. The next chapter will continue to focus on the participants identities, but will give attention to their belief system.

Chapter Eight:

The Accumulation of Environmental Capital

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the belief systems which informed the partipants relationship with the environment which drove the accumulation of environmental capital. These are divided into spiritual, political and ecological awareness. These beliefs systems were related to and underpinned by the direct personal experiences of each participant.

8.2 Spiritual belief systems

Spiritual beliefs were not a strong feature across the sample: however it was an overwhelmingly strong feature in three of the participants' narratives which, informed their relationship with nature, as well as influencing their practice. Spiritual beliefs were discussed by other participants briefly. The three participants who discussed this aspect aligned themselves with specific groups / faiths. Ravinder belonged to the Braham Kumaris World Spiritual University, Einir was a practicing Buddhist and Sue was a practicing Druid. Their involvement with these faith groups dominated their narratives.

The Braham Kumaris are a registered charity, teaching Raja Yoga meditation for no profit. Ravinder teaches this meditation on a weekly basis in her local community. The group also engages in peace walks around the world. Ravinder explained the group's practice in the following way:

> *"So really using everything we have as individuals in a worthwhile way, our time, our*
>
> *breath our thoughts our wealth and bodies, using everything in a worthwhile way. So*

that as you can see, will obviously extend into the wider world and the relationships we

have, and erm you know everything, everything we use really to do our daily routine."

(Ravinder)

Einir's value base relating to the natural environment consisted of an interweaving between personal appreciation of nature and Buddhist and Taoist belief systems. She explained how she recently spent time with Zen Monks in West Wales. She felt that they have developed a different quality of consciousness which is interwoven with all life and the Cosmos. She reflected that they hold a deep appreciation of life because of this. Sue spent time exploring her spiritual beliefs before aligning herself with Druidry, joining the group a few years ago. She spoke about the prioritisation of caring for her large family during her 20's at the cost of her spiritual development. After meeting her husband and holding a hand fasting ceremony, they have both explored Druidry in a more committed way. Sue believed that contact with nature is 'vital' for her spiritual life. She described feeling connected to seasonal changes and talked about her recent attendance at a ceremony for Lughnasadho, connected with the harvest period.

The aforementioned spiritual beliefs had led the participants to have a deep connection with the natural environment. Ravinder discussed her group's involvement with the natural environment, which included representation within the United Nations on climate change issues. The group has a retreat centre based in Oxfordshire set in 150 acres of natural surroundings. This natural environment supports contemplation and personal growth. The group holds meditations outside in nature. The focus of this practice is watching one's thoughts. This encourages an awareness of the moment and promotes transformation within oneself. When speaking about the retreat centre Ravinder states:

"it's all about people enjoying nature, because it's absolutely stunning where the

retreat centre is… but also helping to understand you know the deeper things of life like

vegetarian cooking, you know, like being aware of how we treat animals, erm… how

we treat ourselves, the kind of thoughts we have, which is….. which is the biggest thing

we do really, watching our own thoughts. Because our own thoughts can be so

destructive and you know the kind of thoughts we have are based on what we've been

conditioned to think. You know, I can't do that because… well I don't think I could. You

know, where's that, where is that coming from? When I know my source of power

when I know who I am on the inside, then I'm able to change." (Ravinder)

Ravinder associated the development of her environmental interests with her spiritual practice. She discussed how prior to this, she would engage in 'normal' environmental activities such as recycling. Her meditation practice has generated an increased awareness for her. She discussed how the Brahma Kumaris promote using the Earth's resources ethically through raising people's awareness.

Einir believed that a deep impact on people's consciousness is needed to effect environmental change. She spoke about how the West has become a consumerist society, reflecting that humans have forgotten that they are animals and part of the eco system as a whole. She felt that humans are overly influenced by others factors, such as the media and employment. The busyness of people's lives leaves them little time to reflect more deeply. She continued by discussing the inter relatedness of all existence and how Buddhism encourages followers to move away from perceptions of duality. When asked about how her spiritual beliefs inform her relationship with the environment, Sue discussed how all aspects of her life are now related to nature:

"It is how we fit and work, with nature. It's how we operate, we are nature, we are a

part of it. And then I suppose the more you learn, I suppose you realise from your little

micro spec don't you, to the planets, that it's all interconnected and flows and nothing

is separate and apart." (Sue)

She continued by stating:

"Every system operates within itself and impacts on each other." (Sue)

The participants whose spiritual belief systems defined their interest in the environment were heavily influenced by the concepts of oneness with nature and interconnection. Nature was a feature of their spiritual practices, including celebrating seasonal changes and meditation in nature.

8.3 Political belief systems

Several participants held a politically informed value base in relation to the environment. This led to a strong understanding of the economic system and how marginalised people experience exclusion in a consumer based society. Several participants held activist standpoints, engaging in direct action and collective community action to achieve change. Whilst engagement in activism was present in some participant's narratives, this was more evident when discussing past experiences. However, notions of an activist and politically orientated stance did pervade and inform participant's belief systems.

Margaret's narrative contained high levels of activism and her views on the environment, were predominantly informed by politics. This activism initially concerned animal welfare issues, which then expanded to include environmental issues. After picking up a leaflet by Animal Aid, she became actively involved with the animal rights movement. She discussed the first demonstration she ever attended at Porton Down. At this demonstration she observed a division between the protesters. There were people chanting and holding banners and then there were people consciously being disruptive by climbing over fences. At this moment she felt a desire to join the more challenging group. Margaret became an active hunt saboteur from the 1980's onwards. She stopped this involvement around 5 years ago. Her engagement gradually

reduced from running the group to occasional attendance. Margaret explained that she did not feel physically fit enough to continue with this activity. She continued by saying that as she has grown older she feels she can't keep up with such activities and now prefers to spend her time going bird watching and hill walking.

Margaret also had a high level of involvement in environmental protection. She described her engagement in an illegal green camp set up to protect woodland, which contained a dormouse colony from development. The police would enter the camp and move protesters on. She explained that this action was not successful in achieving its goal. She is currently active in G8 demonstrations and will join actions when she has time. During interview, Margaret spoke about her plans to attend an upcoming North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) conference as a demonstrator.

Terry talked about his engagement to save land on a disused quarry from development. He would regularly access the quarry, taking his children there when they were young to ramble and picnic. When the owners put the land up for sale, a community movement emerged to protect the land which Terry became heavily involved in. When local famers began buying up pieces of this land for agricultural purposes**,** Terry and his wife made an application for the land to become an open space under the Open Spaces Act 1906. This deterred buyers, but led to a conflict with local farmers with both sides attempting to prove and disprove the community usage of the space. He explained:

> *"so it did actually cause some friction within the village which still is there now ...we've*
>
> *had that for ten years - it was ten years ago this year which we succeeded in purchasing*
>
> *and there are one or two people who really wanted to buy big chunks of it and didn't*
>
> *succeed who are still anti what we do, they interfere with things, they protest about us*
>
> *going there, they harass one or two elderly people in the village who gave us lots of*

information about its use…. and it's still there… it's horrible… it's horrible really."

(Terry)

The group, containing around 12 community members, applied to an underused compensation fund relating to quarries with the intention of using the land as a community nature reserve. They received over £150,000 and purchased the quarry. Terry reflected that the land has significance to the local community. Some elderly residents could recall the land prior to it being quarried and the land was regularly accessed by families for walking and enjoying nature. The community group has been active for a ten year period and continues to regularly meet. They continue to successfully raise funds and have recently reinstated a pond and secured money for fencing. Terry makes charcoal to sell with wood from the land to raise additional funds. The group also holds working parties to manage the scrub. Terry discussed his concerns about the group diminishing in size, stating that at the age of 67 years old, he is the youngest trustee. The group has attempted to increase interest by holding events such as pond dipping, bird watching days and nature walks. Despite the community usage of the area, the group has not grown in size. Terry stated that this may be because the membership payments are now electronic and the group no longer engages face to face with local residents.

Seren discussed protesting in relation to environmental issues and warfare. She would attend demonstrations with her husband and young son during her twenties in London stating that at this time she became very politicised. She recalled talking with Tony Benn and listening to him give public speeches in Trafalgar Square. Sally appeared unsure about the role of political activity in relation to the environment. Initially she discussed the need for the professional middle class voice to be strengthened as opposed to *"when we used to have banners and fight the fight…..I'm old enough to remember that!"* She then considered this and reflected that perhaps more protesting was needed, something for people to fight for and to have a voice.

Several participants spoke about their politicised relationship with the economy in terms of consumerism. Their lifestyle adaptations stem from a wish to move away from engaging in a highly consumerist society. Whilst this was driven by the participant's political understanding, for several it also emerged as a result of their economic situation. This appeared to enhance their political drive for sustainability. The participants held strong beliefs in regard to engaging in consumer activity, and felt that this should be limited as a result of global inequality and resource inequity. It was evident that exposure to poverty either in childhood or in their current context served as a strong driver for a more sustainable lifestyle and supported their political stance of sharing resources.

Various considerations on consumption were offered without prompting. Margaret spoke about being thoughtful about what she purchases. This included buying products which are in season and have not been transported by aeroplane. Gabrielle discussed her endeavour to not adhere to a consumerist society which promotes the regular purchasing of new products. She would rather purchase second hand furniture and buy clothes from charity shops. She seeks out products which are fair trade and considers the ethics of a company before purchasing from them. She also will consider ethics in relation to banking. When discussing the consumerist nature of the West, Einir felt that deep seated power issues of domination and acquisition were present. In this context, nature is something to be dominated and controlled. Ravinder was also mindful about purchasing. However, this was in relation to animal welfare as opposed to wider political issues.

The participants who spent their childhood outside of the U.K. had a very different experience of consumerism. For Joseph life revolved around subsistence living with survival resting on the environment for food and water. As a result of living within a communist state, Karolina was not exposed to consumerism and material choice. The available product range was sparse due to economic sanctions. When asked if her community was experiencing poverty or thriving in

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this context, she feels both were being experienced as wages were low but the exchange of resources and skills were highly developed, leading to a good quality of life. She talked about how her parents saved for 16 years to buy her first car. No second hand cars were available in East Germany as people did not upgrade, keeping their vehicles until they were no longer fixable. From Gabrielle's political perspective, the affluence and waste of resources in the West was 'obscene' given the extent of poverty in other parts of the world. She expressed her views about the sharing of resources with others by way of global solidarity:

> *"…..I can't understand why people are against immigration, you know, because it is for me, we have one world, this is one world and what we should be doing is raising the standards of everybody in the world, so everybody has a good way to live."*
> *(Gabrielle)*

In relation to poverty, participants spoke of experiencing this in childhood and some spoke about currently experiencing financial difficulties. When discussing her experiences of poverty in childhood, Seren reflected that as others in her community were experiencing the same, she did not experience exclusion. This 'grounding' has led Seren not to heavily engage in consumerism in her later life. She discussed how she did engage more in consumerism from late adolescence onwards as a result of peer pressure. At this time she no longer wanted to wear home-made clothes or take a packed lunch out with her. However, now she is older, she feels she is less materialistic. This change was triggered by Seren's financial situation. At this time there was a realisation that she could use the skills she learnt during childhood to transform her lifestyle. She spoke about her sustainable lifestyle and how she gets more enjoyment and pride from living in this way:

> *"…..so we learned to survive on the little we have got. Even though I'm on a good wage erm there are things that, you know, you actually erm you sometimes live above your means don't you? And I think I need to get back to, you know, not living above my*

means really and enjoying it as well I don't need all the latest gadgets.... I don't need

this.... I don't need that, you know, and using less fuel as well, you know, I don't have

the gas on as much.... you just get used to it don't you? Turning it on, but no no. So I

think I'm learning again to get back to.... to nature and erm… basics really and I think

you discover yourself as well, you're not hidden by all material things." (Seren)

Similarly, Simon spoke about living in relative poverty. He explained that he is currently planning for his retirement and is focusing on his finances. He explained that his family have been reducing spending for some time due to the need to increase savings. For the participants a move to a more sustainable lifestyle was supported not only by their political perspectives, but by the economic benefits this brings as well as a sense of fulfilment.

8.4 Ecological Awareness

The participant's belief system concerning ecological awareness led to efforts to live a more sustainable lifestyle. This involved growing food, planting trees, collecting wood as a source of energy and keeping chickens. In addition to this several participants utilised alternative technologies such as solar and wind energy sources. For some participants this was a major part of their lives with enormous amounts of time and energy being put into sustainable living. A strive towards reusing, recycling and reducing was evident. Recycling was discussed by the majority of participants. They recognised that this activity was now normalised, although several reflected on times when such practices were perceived as unusual and were more difficult to engage in. Notions of stewardship were also present in discussions on ecological awareness as several participants raised concerns on what future generations will have to face and the need to respect what is being handed down to their children or grandchildren.

A major discussion point on this subject related to food, particularly growing food and diet. This research has identified household food growing and dietary considerations as a characteristic of social workers with an interest in the natural environment and environmental issues in Wales. Some examples of practice relating to food also emerged which are discussed in chapter ten. The phenomenon of food growing was an important aspect of the participant's identities relating to ecological awareness. This was an activity which they were undertaking in the present but reflections on childhood food growing were also incorporated. The extent of their growing varied from very small scale efforts to larger engagement. One participant had lived in a community which embraced self-sufficiency with a shared collective ideology. Food was organically grown with surplus being purchased by the wider community. However, for the majority of participants their endeavours of food growing were at a household level as opposed to a community level, consuming the food within the family unit:

"We currently thinking about, just discussing with my partner about buying a field just to extend what we do in terms of... you know, growing veg and stuff like that." (Simon)

Whilst economic considerations were present within the data, it did not appear to be an overriding reason to grow food with the feeling of enjoyment being given more attention. During Seren's interview she discussed a return to food growing, an activity which was prevalent in her childhood, due to her current economic situation. However, she then stressed the enjoyment that this has brought to her family unit and how it has altered her relationship with food and consumerism. Joseph's childhood narrative was dominated by food growing. Whilst his childhood accounts highlight the necessity of food growing for subsistence, his current engagement is predominantly motivated by enjoyment. During interview he spoke about the migration to the city after independence was gained in Zimbabwe, illustrating food growing as part of a community's identity, but also, as a necessity to survive:

"…after independence you could see that people still wanted their culture, their way of living in the rural areas to follow them in the urban areas, you go to work Monday to Friday, you would get paid at the end of the month, but still people wanted to till the land, they would go out, wherever they would see an open space… they plant their crops… tomatoes, maize, cabbages….. you name it, potatoes. I know here sometimes they call them here the green areas, you know? Where you're not supposed to build anything, that's for the government, but people then in those days were saying we are independent, we don't have people telling us what to do. What do you want us to do? We are starving… we need money... we need food." (Joseph)

Such a statement reinforces the lived reality of those in poverty and the awareness that food is a fundamental facet in community's quality of life. When Joseph left Zimbabwe to live in Wales he realised that he really enjoyed growing food and now has an allotment.

Diet is a powerful aspect of identity (Beverland 2014) and was also a discussion point raised by participants when considering ecological awareness without being prompted. In relation to dietary choices, four of the participants identified themselves as being vegetarian: two were pescetarian, whilst one was vegan. Out of the remaining 7 participants, 6 did not discuss meat consumption and 1 participant (Joan) spoke of locally sourced meat where animal welfare is ensured. Vegetarianism is estimated to represent 2% of the U.K. population's dietary habits with less than 1% of people eating a vegan diet (National Diet and Nutrition Survey Statistics 2014), given these national figures the participants represented a higher proportion of those who avoid meat consumption and this was therefore deemed a significant theme relating to their identity. Whilst animal welfare concerns were present in some of the participant's narratives, health reasons were not a motivating factor of any participant, but awareness of the health benefits was acknowledged. Of the seven participants who spoke about meat avoidance, all were female, the three male participants' in the sample did not mention meat consumption.

There was awareness from participants that at times they engaged in behaviours and activities which were contradictory to their belief systems. This is evident in Erina's narrative when she highlighted the *"hypocrisy"* of striving for an ecological lifestyle whilst driving a vehicle. Similarly, Sally discussed her previous interest in racing motor bikes, acknowledging the divergence of this activity with her overarching belief system. During interview, Sally expressed strong feelings against the development of inland wind farms in Wales. She felt they look *"monstrous"* and describes them as *"obnoxious".* She felt that communities who may not have the power to speak out about their impact have been intentionally targeted as sites for the turbines. She also felt that they damage the scenery of an area and cause noise pollution, deterring people from moving there, ultimately affecting economic growth. Simon commented that he rarely flies but has done this twice during the year and will soon go overseas again. When discussing lapses in environmental behaviour he states:

> *"…I'm a bit kind of random really, you know, I'll erm, I'll be... I'll be doing that [using solar power] at the same time as having left the fridge door open for 20 minutes or so [laughs]." (Simon)*

Whilst Margaret is mindful of consumerism and her political stance, she discussed how she is not always successful in this:

> *"I'm not perfect, so you know, I had some potatoes the other day, they were from Israel which I would not normally do so I felt bad about that but I, you know, I try to be conscious about what I buy and what I eat…" (Margaret)*

The participants were able to critique their own consumption and recognised that their behaviours and beliefs systems weren't always congruent. Nethertheless their political belief systems led to efforts towards sustainability and considerations of consumption.

8.5 Connections and contradictions

The belief systems held by participants were not mutually exclusive as some overlap with political, spiritual and ecological awareness occurred. There were also occasions when participants acknowledged that they did not behave in a manner which reflected their beliefs. Participants who engaged with spiritual discourses did engage with practices which had wider political and social justice components such as Ravinder's participation in peace walks with the Brahma Kumaris. Some of the participants who held predominantly political beliefs on the environment did indicate that some elements of spirituality were involved but to a much lesser extent. The identities of the participants were formed in a variety of experiential ways and led to the construction of belief systems which informed their relationship with the environment. Whilst the participants have been divided into the 3 separate belief systems, it is recognised that these are very interconnected and individuals rarely possess one sole driving factor, with mixed motives often being present.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the belief systems which were elicited from the biographical narratives offered. The themes of spiritual, political and ecological awareness were developed from the interviews. Three of the participants were heavily influenced by spiritual belief systems which underpinned their relationship with nature. It has been noted that participant's belief systems were not exclusively held within one theme as connections and contradictions were evident. These belief systems and experiences were also instrumental in the participant's decision to enter the social work profession and their current social work practice, including perceptions of how the environment and social work were related. The following chapter will

present findings on the perspectives offered on how the environment and social work are connected.

Chapter Nine

Perspectives from the rural social work field

9.1 Introduction: The rural social work field

The participant's perspectives offered on the connection between the environment and social work was formed within a rural social work field. This rural context underpinned their views on the subject and informed discussion. Such practice was distinct from social work occurring in more populated environments. Furthermore, it was evident from the narratives that participants saw their physical environment as both a solution and a barrier to achieving change. The rural context which the majority of participants practiced in influenced many aspects of practice. Numerous discussions occurred relating to the geographical area in terms of isolated communities, difficulties in accessing centralised services and travelling across unpopulated areas to reach service users. Whilst many participants spoke of the difficulties of practicing across large sparsely populated areas in terms of having contact with service users, others spoke of the benefits, including the relationship between their agency and service users in their community. Despite such recognised advantages of the field of rural practice, disadvantages were also identified which directly related to the physical environment. Participants spoke of the concentrated areas where services were located. This had resulted in vast areas with few services available, causing further isolation for vulnerable people, which had impacted on the cultural heritage of the indigenous population:

> *"I do think it's the infra structure and I do think it's the NHS you know people don't*
>
> *need me to do it most of them know how to do it themselves they just don't have the*
>
> *finances or the ability to do it and that's sad and I think that's what it was like before*
>
> *it wasn't that people didn't want it... they wanted to keep their communities they want*

to keep that culture that heritage they had the language, everything… all they need is

a bit of support, they want to work they want… most of them do want to work. I'm still

finding that they want to eat well they want to educate their children well, you know,

they have closed the village shops. They have closed the village schools, they have all

moved….. everything, everywhere…. you are losing that culture" (Sally)

It is this rural field, where the participants practice occurred and the physical and cultural space which shaped their perspectives and practices. Numerous perspectives were offered which have been analysed and presented thematically below. Participants provided examples of practice which incorporated the environment, despite barriers which prevented alternatives to contemporary social work practice emerging. Whilst participants' perspectives were contained within identified theoretical approaches they were not mutually exclusive, with some overlap occurring. Whilst there was agreement about social work and the natural environment being connected, participants addressed this question in differing ways. These perspectives have been developed into the themes of; a holistic approach, anti-oppressive practice and structural factors.

9.2 A Holistic approach to Social Work

Several participants spoke about the need for a holistic approach to social work when considering this question. This emerged as part of the social work value base with concepts such as integration, and living a peaceful, respectful existence being incorporated. This approach was used in relation to practice as well as all other aspects of the participant's life. The importance of the natural environment in participant's lives gave them great insight into wider environmental factors and how these impact on a person's well-being. The natural environment was viewed as the fundamental basis for all aspects impacting on an individual or community's

quality of life. Participants expressed a view that social work as a holistic approach explores all aspects of people's lives and that people's environment was the starting point for such considerations:

> *"I think one of the most important things that starts [you] off in your life is where you are living and your ability to access anything from that….. Really I think your environment is phenomenally important to how you feel". (Sally)*

Notions of respect for life ran through the participants' accounts. They frequently connected a respect for individual service users and the respect they have for the environment and other life forms. This emerged as an overarching view that all life forms were of value and importance. Margaret discussed the strong association with her wish to support those who are vulnerable and living and working together with others in harmony. In relation to becoming a social worker, Margaret stated:

> *"I came into it because I see my value is to try to be… you know, live a peaceful existence, where you cause as least harm as possible erm… and you know, you support people who need supporting really." (Margaret)*

She continued by discussing the notion of having 'one planet' and the need to live with respect for all of life, people, animals and plants therefore incorporating the entire eco system into her perspective.

There was a strong sense that participants did not see a separation in their social work value base and their wider value base outside of practice. This ensured congruence between participants professional and personal value base, which included a strong desire to support others. For the participants with spiritually orientated belief systems, the connection between the environment and social work was strongly related to their spiritual practices and perspectives. Ravinder discussed her focus on consciousness from practicing Raja yoga. This

focus pervaded all aspects of her life and was a part of her identity. This included her social work practice. She explained that her spiritual practice was not just a meditation, but a study. She felt that this study increased compassion and respect for others. Ravinder discussed the feeling of increased detachment from the persons pain she is working with which she felt improved her quality of interaction, and ability to support someone in crisis.

As notions of interconnectedness had pervaded some participants' belief systems, the same notion was applied to social work perspectives. Einir reflected that her belief in the *'interrelatedness of all existence'* and effort to move away from a duality concept must also inform her social work practice. She spoke about how remaining conscious and mindful at all times, in a stressful social work context, was challenging. She discussed how the fast pace environment can make her lose sight of this at times. Einir also alluded to the genuine relationship she has with service users and the real connection she has felt which went beyond the service user – social worker duality. She discussed her recent contact with a service user who was about to pass away and recognised that despite the need for professional detachment there was a human connection with one person facing a momentous stage in the life course. For Einir, this recognition promoted compassion and she commented that the skill of being a social worker is about blending professional detachment and humanity. The recognition that human beings are part of nature was present in Sue's narrative. Her focus on the interconnectedness of all life led her to seeing that everything operates within a system, impacting on other systems. From this understanding she questioned how the environment and social work could not be connected, as having an understanding of this concept ensures that all aspects of one's life is intertwined, including the personal and the professional.

This holistic perspective led the participants to practice in a way which moved beyond immediate interpersonal relationships, to include wider environmental factors, including the natural environment. In relation to implementing this perspective into practice, Sue spoke about

reviewing children's care plans and the need to consider the wider environment for children. This included family time, social activities and access to nature. She reflected on the importance of these aspects in reviewing plans which emerged from a consultation project with young people. She felt that sometimes adults focus on what they view as important from their own perspective. She spoke of the importance of a child's wider environment, particularly looked after children, who have been relocated and the need to avoid isolation through accessing opportunities in the community. She also spoke about the need for careful matching of foster carers to children, so children are afforded opportunities to access nature. However, she acknowledged the challenges of placement shortages which can impact on this.

Ravinder spoke about ensuring that adult care plans include access to nature by using escorts when necessary to promote service user wellbeing. She offered an example of a service user who had severe breathing difficulties. It was his wish to travel to the sea. Ravinder proceeded to ensure he accessed direct payments to have a break at the seaside after gaining support from her manager. She spoke about how grateful the family were, but that she was just doing her job. When asked what this meant to the service user and his family, Ravinder stated:

> *"A whole lot….. A whole lot. Erm, he died a couple of months later, but they always said… I mean they sent me a huge basket of flowers and stuff because that week meant so much to him. It meant a lot to him, he just wanted to be by the sea". (Ravinder)*

She explained that the barriers to achieving this were policy and procedure orientated, so Ravinder needed to strongly advocate on his behalf and develop an additional care package around the trip. She described this as a fulfilling piece of work. These holistic approaches to social work show a wide vision of support which considers multiple aspects of a service user's life.

9.3 Anti-oppressive practice: Pushing values on to others

A theme which emerged from the narratives was the notion that participants did not want to push their value base on to others. This emerged as a form of anti-oppressive practice whereby participants saw challenges to environmental engagement with service users based on power imbalances between them, and the acute level of need those they worked with, were experiencing. The drive to be non-judgemental in practice, was underpinned by understandings of power and empowerment, with empowering approaches being consciously utilised.

Margaret's empowering approach was evident when she spoke of how proud she felt about the philosophy which has become embedded in the contact assessment centre she developed. The centre focuses on an empowering approach when undertaking parenting assessments, providing a stronger emphasis on supporting parents to improve the quality of contact instead of, *"just looking to see what they do wrong"*. As a result of such power imbalances participants were mindful not to replicate this in their practice wherever possible. Einir reflected that despite the profession's understanding of such forms of oppression, the hierarchical system which social workers practiced in, still exerted power over others and reflected wider structural power imbalances in society.

Simon talked about power imbalances between social workers and service users commenting that *"you could do that whatever you like really"* when engaging with families. He acknowledged that people were so vulnerable that they did not hold social workers to account or have expectations of receiving a high quality service. Within this discussion he also spoke about the realities of removing children from birth parents only to provide them with inadequate substitute care. He felt that austerity had impacted on the threshold for receiving services which impacted on service provision for such families. When Simon began working for the adoption team he noticed a distinct difference in how social workers were held to account by prospective adopters explaining that they were a, *"more questioning client group".* Simon's political view of

social work led him to interpret the statutory welfare system as another form of social control leading to significant power imbalances in practice, which he referred to as, *"doing to the done to".* As a social worker in the adoption team, he identified times when he had failed to challenge adoptive parents on their parenting techniques, which he felt would not have been the case when working with birth parents. Such a reflection has challenged Simon significantly and encouraged him to continue to train and develop his skills as well as giving him a deeper understanding of structural oppression. An adopted strategy for Simon was to allow himself periods of reflection to consider commonalities between services users and himself. As a result of this he frequently used the word "us" during contact with service users. At times this led to adopters assuming that he was also an adoptive parent, however, Simon utilised this term as a form of solidarity and recognition that everyone, including social workers' experience difficulties across the life course and can also be vulnerable and need support at times.

There was a strong drive from participants to engage with service users in a non-judgemental way. This led to the acceptance of lifestyles choices which others made, regardless of how the participants felt about those choices in both their professional and personal spheres. Whilst some participants questioned the behaviours of others, they consciously tried not to judge or let this interfere in the social work relationship. While tensions were sometimes evident, efforts to remain focused on the social work task, and adopting an empowering approach prevailed. Gabrielle spoke about the difficulties of connecting social work and environmental issues as the service user, with their own worldview and value base, need to be given respect. She also commented on the need to work in a detached way, and felt that one's own value base should not be pushed upon either service users, or others outside of work, such as friends. Whilst she felt she may quietly question an individual's lifestyle choice, particularly relating to consumerism she stated:

> *"you just have to sort of learn that people's lives are their lives and it's not up to me to interfere with that." (Gabrielle)*

Whilst Erina appeared to have lower levels of acceptance towards different lifestyle choices to herself, she felt it was important to recognise that others had different values and this was not a matter for her to comment on within practice. She explained that at times she needed to reign in her views on the environmental behaviours of others whilst at work. However, regardless of her feelings, when engaging with both service users and colleagues she felt:

> *"As a social worker there's nothing that I can impose on them." (Erina)*

During interview, Einir pointed to a quote from Socrates she had on her office wall which said '*the unexamined life is not worth living*'. She discussed the fast pace of people's lives and how people rush through their daily tasks at home, and in work, with little contemplation, simply reacting to immediate stimuli. She reflected that she does not judge people for this but she asks what quality of consciousness is involved in this lifestyle and pattern.

When ethical dilemmas involving different values arose in practice for participants they remained focused on the social work task. Margaret discussed an assessment she undertook where the father of the family engaged in poaching. He had informed Margaret of this and she had explained to him that she was on the *"other spectrum"* to him, with him responding by saying that they would meet *"out in the field one day".* She discussed how, whilst she disagreed with his actions, she understood his relationship with the countryside and commented, that if she was outside and saw poaching, she would make efforts to stop them, but within her practice, she would not hold this against people. She continued by stating that if someone she is working with engaged in activities she was opposed to, such as hunting, whilst she would not agree with their actions, she understood that this did not necessarily impact on their parenting capacity.

For Einir, there was an awareness of the agency she holds in her position and how this needs to be managed with care and awareness. She explained that whilst she felt the environment 'should' be preserved, telling people you 'should' behave in this way, was a different matter as it involved power imbalances. From her knowledge of Taoism and Buddhism, she reflected that change should not be forceful, but gentle, "*like water eroding rock overtime*". She felt that as a social worker there was no right to impose change on another. For Ravinder, her meditation practice engaged all aspects of her life. She raised detachment as an attribute and stated:

> "*So if somebody eats meat… or is a butcher, whatever they are… it's not that I'm going to be judgemental. It's your path, that's what you choose to do in life." (Ravinder)*

Ravinder discussed how she would support people in using resources in a better way only when she was certain the person would not be upset by this.

Whilst participant's made conscious efforts to uphold anti-oppressive practice and not push their values on to others, there were occasions, when tensions between the participant's ethics and service user's behaviour, impacted upon practice. Margaret recalled a time when undertaking an assessment with a family. The father of the household baited badgers and Margaret recognised him from a local hunt group. After discussions with her manager Margaret felt able to assess the family without prejudice, although it was also made clear to her that there was no one else available to undertake the assessment, and she had to do this. Margaret stated that she worked positively with the family and was not critical of the parent taking their children out hunting, reflecting that ultimately he was a 'good' parent:

> "*But there was the one time, and it was doing an evening visit... and he's oh you don't need me here do you Margaret? And I saw all his friends outside and I know he had his gun with him and his terriers and his lurchers as well. And erm… he was obviously going*

out and I said I actually do want you to stay. So I was like, I was quite sort of thinking,

oh that is bad, but erm… I did it anyway." (Margaret)

At times Margaret's belief system was clearly not compatible with practices occurring in the workplace. Her refusal to engage with activities or practices she found unethical was not always understood by colleagues. For example, she was unwilling to accompany children to McDonalds and did not agree with other staff doing so. Margaret explained that she lives her life by vegan and green principles but stated that, *"I don't push it down people's throats at all".* She spoke about how she had been criticised by colleagues for not taking children to a local community farm on the grounds of cruelty to animals, and another time, when she refused funding for a group of young carers to visit a local zoo. Margaret discussed how friendly the team were and how they *"tolerate"* her approach to practice, and the changes she implemented in the workplace, although tensions did emerge.

Participant's identified that engagement in ecological issues would not be a priority for service users and services should ultimately target need. They highlighted that service users may be unwilling or unable to engage in environmental issues, due to being in crisis and experiencing various forms of marginalisation. There was awareness that environmental behaviours may be more evident amongst the middle classes, to the exclusion of others. This class consciousness exacerbated the wish for participant's to not push their values on to others. Several participants commented on how poverty leaves people unable to engage in environmental issues. Seren identified poverty as a barrier to a more environmentally aware society as people experiencing poverty aren't able to look wider than their immediate environment and current hardships. She felt that austerity was a challenge to achieving change for the planet. Gabrielle reflected that at times she could not achieve everything she would like to, in terms of ethical and ecological behaviours. She gave an example of her daughter and explained that as she was experiencing

financial difficulty, and needed to prioritise costs over a company's ethics. In respect of this, Gabrielle stated:

> *"you can't always do everything you would like to do can you? You have to just do what*
>
> *you can really." (Gabrielle)*

As a result of the high threshold for intervention from statutory services, the service users which participants came into contact with were unable to engage in environmental issues due to the severity of the crisis they were experiencing. For Joan, questioning consumption patterns was a way she felt she could contribute to an environmental social work agenda. She felt that this related to her own household and that engagement with friends and colleagues was also possible. However, she also felt that due to the constraints of her statutory role she could make more of an impact outside of her job as the families she engaged with, had *"bigger problems to think about".* In terms of willingness to engage, Erina explained that it will be those who have an existing interest in the environment who would engage, leaving the harder to reach groups isolated. When speaking about the SMILES programme (Simplifying Mental Illness plus Life Enhancement Skills), Erina discussed how *"up for things"* the children were but felt that if she had been working with adults this may not have been the case. She discussed how children seem to have a stronger connection to the environment, as people 'move away' from this as they grow older. She stated that if people did not want to engage in such an activity, as a social worker she would not wish to impose something which she has an interest in on to them.

During interview there was a moment when Margaret stopped talking and paused to make sense of her thoughts. She was reflecting on how she would not challenge or hold someone's actions relating to the environment and animals welfare against them:

> *"Really it's strange because if they were… racist, I probably would because I think that…*
>
> *yeah, I don't understand that actually". (Margaret)*

Such ethical dilemmas may impact on how incorporating the environment into practice progresses, given the perceived separation between social and environmental issues in the West. To challenge individual service users on their environmental behaviours was clearly unacceptable to the participants who framed such practice as being outside an anti-oppressive framework.

9.4 Structural social work approaches

Structural social work perspectives were offered when considering the connection between the environment and social work. These perspectives placed people within a macro framework and included discussions on structural inequality on a global scale. Participants demonstrated a strong understanding of the connection between people and place with perspectives on community development emerging. For Joseph, a person cannot be removed from their environment, referring to it as, *"your home where you actually fit"*: he warned that this focus in social work practice should not be lost as both the person and the environment go together.

Several participants spoke about service user experiences of poverty and the impact this had on them. They spoke about the extent of poverty that exists, both within their communities, and globally. Seren reflected on the life of those marginalised in her community where she practices and how their environment affects their mental health. The area she practiced in was once a thriving seaside resort, now economically deprived with few employment opportunities. Gabrielle referred to the current system as in need of a radical overhaul. She explained that most service users she works with are accessing benefits and in poverty and discusses her idea on paying people to parent and giving them the choice to work and access a nursery or to stay at home. She viewed the current benefits system which entails people having to attend the job centre at regular intervals and "*go through the moves*", despite the lack of employment

opportunities in their area, as putting more strain on families and increasing intra familial tensions. She stressed that the current system had lost sight of people. Joseph reflected that on a global scale it is those who are most disadvantaged and suffering that are not listened to as, *"the voice of the poor people is not heard".* In relation to development, Joseph demonstrated a strong understanding of how this effects the most vulnerable.

During interview, Joseph pointed to the direction of traffic noise and explained that the motorway was close by to this side of the city. He talked about how it is the people living in this area who are affected by air and noise pollution. When asked if this was a poorer community, he stated:

> *"Yes, it's a poorer community, they all breathe it..... not an executive director of a big company."(Joseph)*

He went on to say that those with power only focus on the profits the infrastructure brings, disregarding communities' health costs. Joseph also discussed Local Authority plans to build a new motorway in the city. He explained how this motorway will not be close to affluent areas in the city, but that it will run through a deprived neighbour associated with a variety of social problems, such as, poverty, the use of illegal substances and violence. He reflected how this situation resembled Zimbabwe during the colonial period. At this time the Black community would walk to work facing the sun and the White communities would drive from the other side of the city with the sun behind them. Such city planning was intentional with planning also considering the direction of the wind and the industrial pollution affecting Black residential areas.

Community integration was discussed in relation to service delivery. Seren referred to the need to involve people in their own community. She felt service users should be worked with in depth rather than just 'rushed through' the service as learning new skills and knowledge takes time.

She also felt that many people were not aware of what was happening in their own community and that this lack of engagement created isolation. Community engagement can generate motivation and independence in a person which supports their recovery. When asked what she thought was causing this isolation, Seren said that a person's mental health and an individualised approach to life, whereby people focus on their own immediate needs, are key factors. Seren felt that community engagement enhanced a person's mental wellbeing. The travelling community was identified as a point for consideration in respect of how a lack of basic services for mobile families, such as toilets and running water, created community tensions and was the root cause of social problems.

When discussing globalisation and inequalities between and within countries, Joan reflected how her environmental degree has supported her understanding of this. Her course has also afforded her the opportunity to learn about the scientific evidence on climate change. She acknowledged the connection between this knowledge and social work practice and stated:

> *"Your social work kind of… values are very much against you know the dominant values of globalisation." (Joan)*

She felt that the critique of globalisation reflects her world view and whilst wide scale changes are needed, she finds the scale of the difficulties overwhelming. Joseph also discussed social work in relation to globalisation. He reflected on a social work placement he undertook in a refugee camp in Zimbabwe. His role included assessing new arrivals and showing them how to work with the natural surroundings to avoid degradation. This role also involved repatriation and family tracing. He talked about the current conflict involving the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and related this to social work. He spoke about forced human movement and how this predominantly affects women and children. Joseph stressed that once a conflict ends, those who have been displaced normally wish to return to their homes or, *"to their roots",* and social work support is needed to achieve this. Such a role needs an understanding of the environment

as without basic services in place, disease and starvation may occur. Joseph felt that in the U.K., social workers feel that environmental issues are separate from their practice. However, he thought that practitioners who are able to think critically would make the connection. Joseph's life experiences, social work education and early practice, have allowed him to gain a strong understanding of wider environmental issues. His understanding of why social work and the environment are connected, appeared more sophisticated than other participants, as he explained his thoughts on the matter with precision and depth, in an effortless way. As a result of his insight, he held strong views on the need for U.K. social workers to understand community development.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has captured the perspectives offered by participants through the themes of; a holistic approach, anti-oppressive practice and structural factors. The context of these perspectives occurred within a rural location, shaped by cultural and physical space. These perspectives highlight the wide remit of considerations to support people and the need to work in partnership with families. The inclusion of structural factors indicates a need for such considerations when thinking about the environment and social work. This following chapter will now explore the practices which emerged from the interviews.

Chapter Ten

Practices from the rural social work field

10.1 Introduction

The participants reflections on how social work and the environment were connected, led to the emergence of practice examples and efforts. These examples were situated within a rural location. Many of the participants had been able to make connections between social work and the environment through experiences in youth justice and residential settings, whilst others considered issues of sustainability within the work setting. In addition to food, practice examples of food were present, which included an example of an adapted programme for children. Therefore this chapter has been presented through the following themes: nature as a tool for change, green work based behaviours and initiatives involving food.

10.2 Nature as a tool for change

The inclusion of the natural environment as a tool for change in social work practice across Wales is sparse and confined to small scale, short term projects, and residential settings for young people. It would appear from the sample that social work engagement with the natural environment in the youth justice service, was popular historically, with several participants practicing in this setting previously. Across the sample, the frequent use of nature as a tool was a considerable feature of participant's who were employed in a residential setting. Other participants showed a strong understanding of the importance of service users accessing the natural environment and advocated accordingly for appropriate services when necessary. The use of nature as tool was prevalent in participant's accounts of practice with numerous contexts

and aims being cited. These approaches were centred around achieving change on an individual or familial level. There was a view that such approaches could also raise awareness of ecological issues and had the potential to increase people's interest in protecting the environment, although this was never a strong objective of the intervention.

Previous practice relating to youth offenders and community reparation involving the environment was evident within the sample. For the participants, this practice had occurred sometime ago, much earlier in their social care careers. Participants who had gained past experience working with young offenders in an outdoor setting spoke of several aims they were attempting to achieve with interventions spanning across several levels of development: personal, inter personal and the wider environment. It was also recognised that community reparation had diminished but should be brought back to support community development and integration. Terry began his professional career as a probation officer. He reflected that at the start of his career in social work there was a significant overlap with probation work. He worked in 'alternative to custody' schemes, engaging in community projects involving the environment. He described the area he worked in as an isolated ex mining community in England. This was regarded as a deprived area with a lack of employment opportunities and social problems:

> *"I would go on a Sunday with half of dozen people on community service and we would*
>
> *do some scrub clearance somewhere, or whatever.... pathway maintenance, those sort*
>
> *of projects mmm... which most, not all, most of the people that were on community*
>
> *service programmes enjoyed, really enjoyed it erm, for some of them a lifeline and they*
>
> *became volunteers for their local groups and stuff, You know?" (Terry)*

Numerous benefits and opportunities for growth were cited by participants who felt that using nature as a tool was effective as a vehicle for change and personal growth. Whilst there was some recognition about the criticism of such approaches in relation to a lack of change in the individual's local environment after the intervention is over and they return, participants felt

that they had observed real change during such interventions and supported this approach. The perceived benefits of using nature as a tool included: promoting a feeling of achievement, experiencing a non-criminal environment, learning new coping strategies, developing social skills, facing new challenges and experiences, positive memories, appreciating a simpler lifestyle and learning practical skills.

Such interventions involved the young people building friendships and supporting each other, which is something which appeared to remain after the intervention was over. Einir reflected on an incident at work which, she explained, has always stayed in her memory:

> *"we were in the office on one occasion and a group of these kids came to the office in a little huddle and had one particular boy with them now, he was kind of a big guy of the gang so to speak and they had been around to see him and he was about to flip and probably would do some further offending and then back into an institution so they had all got in touch with each other and rallied round and persuaded him to come and see us at the office rather than do something stupid". (Einir)*

Other participants also discussed the longer term effects of such interventions. For Karolina, such interventions provided memories which remained long after, and could be utilised by young people when they were facing challenges later in life, thus increasing resilience. She recalled a time during a hill walk when a storm came unexpectedly. Despite the difficulties this brought the group, it also created a memorable experience for children who were not frequently out in nature and were not normally permitted to get dirty. She reflected on how much she enjoyed the opportunity to support a young person through a new experience such as camping. Similarly, Margaret discussed such experiences as being memorable for service users:

> *"Every time I've done things like that with families, it's just been, a huge sort of… awakening for them really. It's what memories are made of, isn't it." (Margaret)*

Terry talked about what he sees the young people gaining from the natural environment while living in a residential setting. He discussed the benefits of young people learning practical skills and how their self-esteem can be improved by making something e.g. woodcraft. He talked about the importance of the young people having positive feelings about themselves and their environment, which he hoped would reduce engagement in harmful behaviours. Theoretical considerations were evident in his discussion relating to resilience and attachment and he talked of 'taking advantage' of psychological approaches to support his work and to encourage play and learning with nature at every opportunity. Some participants discussed the matter of accountability and risk when engaging in nature based interventions. One participant reflected on how poor historic health and safety practices within this area had been, stating that such interventions had occurred in a different era.

The lack of access to nature experienced by service users, particularly children, was discussed by participants. The benefits of being outdoors offered exposure to an alternative environment which strengthened the opportunity to achieve change. Several participants worked with service users from deprived urban areas thus affording them their first experience of a rural setting. Participants working directly with children and young people felt that there was less physical activity from the current generation than previous generations and fewer skills being passed down to them. Terry mentioned feelings of 'sadness' when considering the effects of consumerism on young people. He felt young people only considered acquiring things through purchasing, rather than making something or growing it, skills which they have not been taught. He clearly enjoyed using his knowledge of sustainability when engaging with young people. There was a view from participants that people and nature had become more separated, and the benefits of accessing nature were not being fully realised, particularly as a result of consumerism and technology use. The separation that has occurred between humans and the rest of nature was highlighted by Karolina. She discussed a conversation between a staff member and child at the centre she had worked at which had farm animals on site, including a

cow. The conversation referred to the German brand of chocolate from 'Kraft' whose products contained an image of a purple cow on the packaging:

> *"One of the instructors said to one boy.... he must have been around 8 or 10, "do you know what animal this is?" He said "I don't know" we were all like [shocked expression] we said "You don't know what it is?" and he said "No" and we said "it's a cow" and he said "no, that's not true... the cow is purple". (Karolina)*

The main source of motivation to engage with nature as a tool for change was based on the belief in the benefits this offered service users. This belief frequently stemmed from the identified benefits this had for participants' own lives, although other motivating factors were present. Only one participant spoke of being inspired by another person. Terry talked about an early mentor, who became a considerable influence on his practice, later becoming a chief probation officer. He described his mentors, *"extreme faith in the goodness of people"* who believed that imprisonment could exacerbate social problems. His mentor believed that engaging people in beneficial and creative initiatives, which also benefitted the community could promote change in people.

When asked how social work and the natural environment were connected, Karolina commented that nature and social work, *'go hand in hand together'*. She reflected that was based on her personal love of the outdoors, her belief that people need to spend time away from television and the internet, and the social work education she received in Germany, which commonly uses nature as a tool for personal growth and relationship building. Karolina's four year social work course involved two placements, including a 12 month final placement. Both placements heavily engaged with the natural environment and as a result of this, Karolina appeared to have gained a more thorough understanding of using nature as a tool for change. Her placements afforded her the opportunity to combine her interest in social care and outdoor activities. Karolina's first placement was at a camp for children accessed via parents during

school holidays or through schools for away days. The centre included hostels where the children slept, with staff being responsible for their welfare at all times. The centre accepted children from all backgrounds but parents incurred a cost. It was situated in a forest and the staff team included social workers, childcare assistants, blacksmiths and agricultural staff. Activities included baking, gardening and night walks with the children allocated responsibility for the maintenance of the onsite farm, with a focus on promoting trust, resilience and confidence building.

Other participants spoke of supporting families to access nature in a less structured way. This included talking to families about spending time together in local green spaces for walking and picnicking and allowing children the space to explore. Spaces which could be accessed without the use of transport and were therefore free, were particularly encouraged. Joan discussed the lack of available resources for practitioners, and for families, but acknowledged that the environment was a resource in itself. As someone who reviewed care plans for children, she reflected on the difficulties of parents and families having supervised contact with children in a restrictive, small room. She encouraged contact to occur outside when possible, so the physical environment could improve the quality of contact, and occur in a less stressful environment.

Projects involving groups undertaking community projects such, as river cleaning and treasure hunts for groups of adopters and adopted children, were also discussed. Practitioners showed an awareness of community projects which they referred service users to which involved the natural environment. One participant spoke about a pioneering local initiative based in North Wales known as the 'land adventure playground' which has been built in a deprived area by a local resident and parent. The area is staffed by play workers at all times and is supported by Welsh government funding. It contains 'loose parts' or junk, including ladders, tyres, fishing nets, ropes, and den building materials. Children are permitted to build and light fires and adult free play is promoted. Carol spoke of local community services relating to recovery such as the

'walking for life scheme' which supported recovery relating to physical and mental health. She discussed a variety of community projects service users could access such as agricultural projects on community farms for those with learning disabilities, and employment training schemes teaching horticultural skills, environmental management, landscape gardening, animal husbandry and farm management.

10.3 Green work based behaviours

The participants were very conscious of the need to reduce reliance on car travel to help protect the environment and had made numerous efforts within the workplace to achieve change in this area. However, there was widespread agreement that practicing in a rural context made such an endeavour fraught with difficulty. Participant's efforts in this area included walking or travelling on public transport to home visits, cycling to work and car sharing. These efforts appeared extremely difficult to maintain on a regular basis, involving major time consuming efforts and challenges from management. The physical environment created difficulties in accessing service users in their homes and participants spoke of needing to travel for 2-3 hours to undertake one home visit with additional difficulties occurring when weather conditions were poor. Participants were accepting that this was an aspect of rural practice which was extremely difficult to achieve change in, taking a practical approach involving driving when necessary.

Margaret had made efforts to undertake her role using public transport. She discussed the difficulties this entailed spending a lot of time travelling in between visits. She explained that her manager did not support this endeavour. Whilst Gabrielle discussed how the public transport in her area is inadequate but when she previously practiced in a large city, she would walk to home visits. Joan raised the matter of confidentiality whilst engaging in paperwork on public transport and how this acts as a further deterrent. Some participants spoke about cycling

as a method of transport. Simon had purchased a bike as part of the 'bike to work' scheme and described how nice it was to cycle alongside the canal from home to work. Other participant's talked about how they were unable to benefit from the scheme due to the vast areas they covered and the need to respond to crises in a timely manner. Joan described how her team will attempt to allocate cases close to their offices which are situated separately across the large rural county, however in practice, this was difficult as service users moved area and continuity of worker is important in social work.

Some participants spoke about initiatives their Local Authority had implemented to reduce travel. This involved a car hire scheme for long distance journeys and video conferencing programmes available on social workers' lap tops. One Local Authority had also introduced a payment scheme whereby passenger's car sharing also received a small mileage reimbursement to encourage car sharing wherever possible. Participants highlighted that the key driver of the Local Authority initiatives was cost reduction, rather than environmental considerations:

> *"you're not getting 20 people travelling to one place anymore, cos you won't get the travel money for it. So you're actually erm.. car sharing and using a more economic vehicle. So that's the impact on the day to day basis so... Yeah, and I think that's, again it is helping the environment. This is more about... what's happened in the world though isn't it. It's more about the fact that everybody's poor that they're now driving slower or car sharing cos they can't afford to go anywhere. I don't think it's…. I'm not convinced it's anybody's change of heart, or seeing the impact of their driving on society." (Sue).*

The effects of austerity were evident when discussing transportation. The majority of participants had experienced the removal of the 'essential car user allowance' which supported staff needing to use their own personal vehicle for work. This allowance went towards the maintenance and upkeep of vehicles. The removal of the essential car user allowance in many

parts of Wales has financially affected social workers who need to use their vehicle to cover vast rural counties. When discussing the removal of the essential car user allowance, Sally felt that despite the cut backs, the expectation that staff will use their cars at work remained. Sally purchased an efficient newer vehicle: she explained that this was purchased on the basis that the car user allowance would support its maintenance and up keep, and that she would not do this again in the future.

Other work based environmental behaviours were discussed relating to recycling and reusing resources, reducing printing and efforts in energy efficiency. Several participants were based in old buildings which made energy efficiency more difficult. The engagement in recycling at work was high and involved encouraging colleagues to recycle. Participants had observed improvements in this area by their employers but felt that more could be done. Sally stated that she was *'devastated'* by the extent of waste occurring in the work place, Sue talked about retrieving milk cartons from the bin to place in the recycling and similarly, Gabrielle discussed the waste of paper in practice giving an example of child protection conferences where her report is printed out for up to 15 attendees then immediately shredded afterwards. In Joan's place of work food composting provisions are in place, but successful implementation varies, depending on the manager of the specific building. Ravinder described frequently being the last to leave her building and how she went around turning off monitors and turning off lights to save energy. Margaret discussed the changes she made when she became the manager of the assessment centre she worked at. She explained that she removed the plastic cups from around the water container, ceased purchasing yellow sticker notes, paper towels and note books and directed staff to use scrap paper. She has now reduced her hours to part time and has ceased undertaking any form of management responsibility, since this time she had witnessed some of the changes she made cease:

"I did hear the other day when someone said "Oh, can I have… I know we don't normally have… erm notepads, but can I have some for some work I'm doing?" And [the administrator] went "Oh we order them now. Yeah we don't have to listen to…" and I said "Oh, you're not supposed to do that." And she said "Yeah, don't listen to Margaret, she's not the Manager anymore…." (Margaret)

Whilst the participants were mindful of environmental issues in the work place, the narratives captured the difficulties of such endeavours. When participants did implement change, they were often left unsupported.

10.4 Initiatives involving food

The prevalence of food in the participant's narratives included examples of practice. Several of the participants offered examples of food integration with one participant providing a concrete example of a structured programme. The examples offered by the participants stemmed from their awareness of the importance of food in the lives of service users, but distinctly individualised approaches were used, lacking a structural critique. In the first instance, Joan discussed the notion of utilising surrounding spaces without families incurring costs. This involved encouragement to engage in nature walks, blackberry picking and making pies from edible berries. She also discussed the use of smaller accessible green spaces such as gardens. When Joan was in frontline practice she would encourage families she worked with to garden with their children, even in window boxes, growing herbs for cooking, or planting onions and lettuce. She implied that such direct work with families was easier whilst being on her placement as a social work student. Joan had considered engaging families in allotment growing, but this idea was not pursued. Joan also implied that such endeavours whilst she was frontline practice may have stemmed from her inexperience and naivety at the time. Gabrielle also mentioned

early social work experiences in the mental health team with 'Exercise on prescription' which involved garden maintenance and growing organic vegetables. In addition, Sally spoke about her interest in food which emerged in her practice. This entailed supporting people to grow food at home and informing people about schemes to access allotment spaces. One participant raised the issue of food ethics in practice by discussing her known dislike for the frequent visits to McDonalds which occurred at the family centre she works for.

Seren was asked if she witnessed malnutrition as a social worker as she shared experiences of working with those in poverty, she confirmed that this was definitely the case. She discussed undertaking assessments on food nutrition and being surprised by service users' diet as many were not aware of how to cook healthy low cost meals. Seren questioned where this knowledge had gone and acknowledged the assumptions she can make in practice. She discussed different upbringings and how many people have actually never acquired such skills. Having a focus on food had increased for Seren as a result of economic challenges. She supported families to buy fresh produce from local markets to cook healthy food. Some service users were referred to occupational health to explore food in more depth. Such practice also involved carers who according to Seren, may only prepare ready meals for quickness:

> *"Yeah, I've had some quite successful stories erm of clients actually learning how to cook or relearning it really, you know, and them quite enjoying it really... yeah bringing that joy back that they lost you know accidentally so that's quite important and they've saved a lot of money as well as enjoyed it. They've got the family involved as well with cooking: it's quite old fashioned isn't it? But I think some of them do enjoy that, learning that skill." (Seren)*

Seren viewed the preparation and consumption of food as a means of developing relationships through spending time together and acknowledged the economic advantages of home cooked meals. Sally talked about the pressure the local food bank is under due to the high demand and

how her team had discussed how they could work together with the food bank service to improve the quality of food distributed, for example, asking local fresh vegetable suppliers to give contributions. Sally explained that the food banks were over ran and struggling to fulfil their basic role. Sally continued by discussing healthy eating in the context of poverty. The adult's team she worked within engaged with service users around healthy eating. Support workers from the team would attend local markets with service users: however, Sally acknowledged that the availability of money is a factor which impacted on this. She discussed the expense of purchasing healthy food recalling a case whereby processed food was needed to gain enough calories due to poverty:

> *"they said this mother had to feed this teenage boy chips and white bread because it was the only way she could give him enough calories on the amount of money because if she had tried to feed him fruit and veg she would not have been able to because the money would not have stretched and he would have actually been mal-nourished on fruit and veg because she would not have been able to buy enough of it to give him enough, so she had got to give him a lot of rubbish just to get the calories up .... which is… is sad isn't really?" (Sally)*

Erina offered an example of a programme which integrated food, known as SMILES which is currently being delivered by the NSPCC across the U.K. The programme engages with children aged between 8-14 years in families where parents are experiencing mental health difficulties. The programme consists of eight group sessions which aim to increase the child's resilience through an increased understanding of mental health and the development of coping strategies, including how to keep themselves safe and how to access help if necessary. Throughout this period the parent will also receive six individual support sessions to increase their understanding of how their child experiences living with a parent experiencing mental health difficulties. These sessions explore parental strengths and ways to improve how they, and the wider family,

support the child. Towards the end of the programme, a safety plan will be developed with the family, to promote the child's safety during future episodes of parental mental ill health. The additional associated benefits of the programme are an improved parent – child relationship and increased self-esteem. This is a preventative programme which recognises mental health difficulties as a contributor to childhood abuse. Erina was an experienced social worker with an interest in the natural environment. During a recent SMILES programme delivery she adapted the course to include the natural environment. This occurred as a result of her environmental interest and the background of the two social work students she worked alongside involving forest school education. This adaptation was also sought as a result of the additional learning needs of the particular group and the perceived difficulties of working within a confined indoor environment:

> *"The room we were going to do it in was quite small and I thought these children are going to explode and we found the room quite hot and it didn't have any...it didn't have a window.... a really difficult room to do it in. So that was partly it, but really we thought how could we be creative for these children you know, and both my colleagues used to work in a forest school and we were trying to adapt you know, each session to have outside time so we did." (Erina)*

The adapted course was held within a school setting which also provided the use of a poly tunnel. Food growing was focused on and caring for plants. The group also created a garden pond. The children responded extremely well to this new experience. Erina reflected that the children shared this new knowledge with their parents who had no acquired knowledge of growing food. As the level of energy within the group was particularly high, accessing nature and undertaking physical activities worked extremely well. Erina spoke about the restrictions in practice relating to commissioned pieces of work and this programme being the first

programme she was given permission to adapt as well as the potential barriers of finding an appropriate outdoor space.

10.5 Conclusion

The themes of nature as a tool for change, green work based behaviours and initiatives involving food, showed that the participants developed ways of incorporating the environment into practice. However, these efforts were challenging and were based on their individual motivation and environmental knowledge. Those who worked in a residential setting found this easier to achieve than those in statutory case work roles. Whilst this chapter has shown examples of practice, these examples focused on an individual level with no focus on community or societal change.

Barriers to integrating the environment into practice

11.1 Introduction

The data analysis revealed a number of barriers which participant's experienced in integrating the environment into practice. These barriers were identified by participants during interview and significantly impacted upon practice. Three distinct themes emerged: restrictiveness, disillusionment and insecurity. This chapter discusses each of these themes, exploring how employment within a bureaucratic statutory system involving austerity and privatisation severely restricted the participant's ability to integrate the environment into practice. The feeling of disillusionment was particularly strong for some participants who questioned their future involvement in the profession and expressed some regret over their career choice. The final theme is that of insecurity. There was a distinct lack of awareness of literature and theory relating to the environment and social work. While participants may have held knowledge about sustainability and climate change they had not considered why this may be relevant to social work as they frequently viewed this as a personal rather than a professional interest. This led to high levels of insecurity for participants during interview.

11.2 Restrictiveness

The majority of participants expressed criticism of the changes they had witnessed in practice and felt that social work had become too focused and rigid in its approach to supporting people. This dominated participant's experience of practice within a context of austerity. The "straight jacket" of Local Authority practice dictated and shaped participants' experiences providing

barriers to transforming practice to include the environment. Discussions about changes to service delivery not only focused on the depletion of services, but also included concerns about the privatisation of services and how this had impacted on the social work profession. Concerns reflected national debates and enquiries outside of participant's immediate Local Authority involving children's homes and prison services. For example, Gabrielle thought that the Local Authority needed to remain accountable with services remaining state led. She was concerned that when services became private businesses the goal became profit. She felt that profit needed to be controlled and directed back into services rather than going to companies.

The privatisation of support services restricted and shaped contact with service users with social workers adopting the role of commissioners of services who managed and reviewed care plans. Participant's felt that this system reduced creativity and the utilisation of skills. Simon, an adoption social worker, discussed his idea to take a group of young people from the '16 plus team' out to do some dry stone walling with him. He reflected that often such ideas do not come to fruition because of the procedures that need to be followed for such activities to occur. He continued by discussing how social care providers, who employ unqualified low paid staff are overused. Whilst he understood the reasons for the Local Authority's 'preferred providers list' to commission services, he expressed concern that larger organisations would primarily focus on profit. He provided another example of him spending time kicking a rugby ball around with a service user whilst they spent time talking. Simon had a contact that was a local rugby player, and reflected that it would be of great benefit for the young person to connect with the rugby player in his own community. However, he felt that the rigid commissioning process would prevent such an intervention. He also discussed his upcoming 60th birthday and how he planned to undertake a sponsored canoe trip and how he would have liked service users to become part of that:

"but there is that whole thing about whether I am representing myself or whether I am

representing [the Local Authority] and then all of the…. you know once… if I was doing

it as a social worker or from the adoption team all of the strait jackets that would kind

of come around me then, in terms of what I could or couldn't do." (Simon)

Experiences of the impact of restrictiveness were evident in Simon's narratives. He explained that once you adopt a certain role in social work you put, "*a uniform*" on, both physically and mentally, which prevents you from having other identities and can also prevent someone thinking *"outside the box".* The commissioning out of services and a reduction in preventative services had left social workers dealing primarily with situations of high risk and crisis. As a result of the acute needs of a family experiencing crises and the level of accountability placed on social workers, the nature of their intervention was governed by processes and procedures, which dictated their role. This led to competing priorities as participants were unable to give attention to transforming practice. For example, Carol reflected that the statutory mental health role she is employed in can squeeze out any potential creativity as it involves engaging with people experiencing severe crisis who may be in need of an urgent assessment and hospital treatment. This acute need understandably overrode any other social work focus for participants.

Bureaucratic restrictiveness was present in participant's narratives affecting participants in numerous ways. One participant was left unable to practice for a considerable amount of time. Karolina spoke of bureaucratic difficulties with registering as a social worker with the Care Council for Wales, the professional regulatory body for social workers. She explained that she did not have any U.K. contacts to endorse her paperwork, therefore registration was delayed leaving her unable to apply for social work positions. Eventually she was registered and after several attempts she secured a social work position in a residential setting. Some participants felt a strong sense of frustration with bureaucratic procedures. Einir spoke about how she had

entered social work due to the supportive nature of the work, but stated that her biggest challenge was bureaucracy which, she stated tested every spiritual value she had.

The restrictive nature of contemporary statutory practice appeared to have a significant impact on how participants perceived changes to their role and deterred some participant's from future engagement in practice. During interview, Terry reflected that he would not return to a statutory working environment in social work or the probation service because of how "*manualised*" it had become. His comments referred to the standardised approach to providing services with service users needing to fit into the service rather than directing provision based on need. He spoke about an I.T. trained workforce which he felt out of touch with, but mainly focused on changes which had occurred due to economic cutbacks. He recognised that during austerity core services were protected at the cost of other services resulting in limitations to trying new initiatives as the emphasis was on achieving central government imposed targets. The restrictions of contemporary practice were not an environment which Terry was willing to practice in:

> *"I couldn't survive in that, I'm too much of my own man, I couldn't do that mmm I wouldn't ..... I couldn't survive as a social worker in a modern environment." (Terry)*

Terry recognised that voluntary organisations now engaged in more direct work with service users and that social workers were hugely restricted in practice by the systems which surrounded them.

For the participants who gave more attention to individualised approaches utilising the environment, barriers to integrating the environment into practice were restricted by notions of accountability and managing risk. Engaging with the environment ensured numerous health and safety restrictions which acted as a deterrent for participants and organisations. This was in stark contrast to historical practices discussed by Simon who reflected on risk in his early

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career in youth justice. He explained how too few staff were qualified as outdoor instructors and while practice was more spontaneous, some of the practices he witnessed made him "shudder" now. Terry discussed restrictiveness based on fear in relation to the service users he worked with as they had been assessed as having sexually harmful behaviours. For some time he had wished for there to be more community integration with service users in using the woodland setting where the centre was based. He explained that obstacles would emerge from both the unit and community members in relation to risks the children may pose to others. He also discussed the restrictions he has faced in supporting young males in the residential unit to learn skills through using tools. He explained that he had employed a green wood worker who taught the young people to safely use tools such as sharp axes which many may consider dangerous. During interview, Terry laughed and explained that chainsaw qualifications were on his, *"secret list"*. But, he needed to plan this proposal and present it at the right time.

11.3 Disillusionment

"In retrospect I wish I'd been a countryside ranger" (Margaret)

The depletion of resources in the participants' work environment was a frequently cited barrier to transforming practice. This depletion was raised in respect of financial constraints occurring in an era of austerity. The consequence of this service depletion resulted in an increase in caseloads and a reduction in time that social workers were able to spend with service users. The conceptual theme of disillusionment emerged from the participants' narratives whilst speaking about economic pressure and managerialist approaches which had become increasingly visible throughout their social work careers. Margaret spoke about diminishing preventative services and how the contact centre she works at needed to ensure its survival by being deemed economically viable. This was achieved by focusing on supporting parents in developing their

parenting skills through direct work and undertaking specialist parenting assessments to be used in court. Whilst there was some resistance from the court based social workers, Margaret was clear that more robust interventions around contact provided families with the opportunity to achieve and demonstrate change or provided social workers with clear evidence for care proceedings. She reflected that social workers were now case managers, who developed and reviewed care plans, while others provide services. She felt that as she was employed within a 'service provided' unit, there was more scope for direct work. While she was mindful of avoiding drift within care planning, she reflected that parents, who were experiencing significant difficulties, were expected to make changes within a short space of time:

> *"You have to sort of have a clear indication of whether they are going to be able to maintain change and… erm… but I think you can only get that if you work intensively with a family, not if you see them once a week. You need to sort of walk in their shoes really and see what makes them tick and whether their motivation to change is… you know, credible, you know, whether they can maintain it. It has become more… has to be cost effective. Social work has to be cost effective. Erm… the resources aren't there to support, it is about assess, plan and review and that's not why I became a social worker and I'm finding it, harder to do that." (Margaret)*

Margaret's statement reflects the effects of a reduced budget across the social care sector and the loss of preventative services.

Ravinder talked about global resource shortages which social workers are experiencing in practice, and ways in which this impacts on service users. She gave an example of supporting people living with dementia and how the ideal would be to ensure people remained at home in their own environment, but this was not possible to achieve across the population with current resource deficits. The drive for efficiency and cost effectiveness ensured that participants felt that any cost implications would be a barrier to change. For example, cost implications were an

"*obvious*" barrier to change for Sue. She explained that whilst there has been an increase in contact with the corporate parenting board, and the chief executive who would like to modernise services, any 'project work' was difficult to develop, as it was not viewed as a political priority. Gabrielle reflected that even when useful policies were implemented, such as the car sharing scheme, the drive was only to reduce costs.

The ramifications of austerity had led to changes within Local Authorities which increased feelings of work place uncertainty which exacerbated disillusionment. Gabrielle talked about her Local Authority's plan to implement agile working, something which several Welsh Local Authorities have already made the transition to. She explained that her team were against this development as they did not feel that an increase in isolation and less peer support were beneficial in anyway. She spoke about the potential impact of not having feedback and to be left constantly doubting one's actions. Gabrielle viewed this change as coming from central government in an effort to reduce costs. She explained that over the last ten years she cannot recall a time when the annual budget has increased:

> *"I don't know how it's expected that Local Authorities can provide services at a higher*
>
> *cost, to more people on less money year upon year upon year." (Gabrielle)*

Similarly, Seren discussed uncertainty with her service stating that the health and social care partnership she worked within had come to an end and she was unsure if their statutory service would be withdrawn and moved to a single location covering a vast area.

As a result of the economic pressures within the statutory sector the participants spoke about the high caseloads which they were experiencing and how this impacted on the effectiveness of their role. Time constraints featured as a barrier for many participants both inside and outside of their employment. For example, Gabrielle stated that time was a barrier to her engaging more with environmental groups. However, time, or a lack of time was most commonly discussed as

a barrier within employment. Seren discussed the pressures of the workplace reducing time spent with service users. For Seren, capacity was the biggest challenge she faced due to her high caseload. She felt that an increase in people needing statutory support, stemming from economic difficulties, had resulted in higher caseloads, which made it difficult to spend quality time with service users undertaking direct work. She discussed the time and energy which a social worker needs to do anything above and beyond their already high caseload. On a personal level, she felt willing to put additional time into her practice, but acknowledged that other colleagues she worked with were more protective of their time. She stated that she did not want to lose her social work skills, explaining that when she qualified she undertook what was expected of her, but as time passed she felt that she was losing her skill base:

> *"So I really need to keep what I trained to do and my personal thoughts as well, you know..... and my human side as well." (Seren)*

Her statement emphasised the potential to lose not only her skill base, but also her sense of self due to her working environment. The occurrence of stress within work was raised as she felt that in the context of increased pressure on services, undertaking additional tasks outside of the expected job requirements would likely lead to burn out. Seren reflected on the need to maintain a "*balance*" and look after yourself while in practice.

Some participant's appeared resigned to the situation of high caseloads. Sue felt that staff seemed to have double the caseload which they should have, and that she has always known this to be an *issue, "even when times were good",* referring to a pre austerity period. There was an element of defeatism in her narrative, as she felt that this aspect of social work would never change and implied that individual social workers need to develop their own strategies to manage this. While some Local Authorities appeared less resistant to change, implications of cost and time needed a strong business case to be put forward. Some participants felt that an aim of their intervention was to prevent further reliance on statutory services. Whilst such

discussions were focused primarily on community integration and recovery, the term, *"move people out",* was used by one participant to describe the ending of services which may have also been indicative of time and resource constraints.

Several participants expressed concern about changes they had witnessed, and the negative effects this had on them as practitioners, with a couple of participants stating that work place pressures had led to a decision to only work part time:

> *Even in this job, you know, I think I'm lucky to hold this position and its part time as well, which is great. But it does become soul destroying and I've done it for so long now and I think if I could find another job, I think I would sort of take a pay cut and take it because it has changed so much."* (Margaret)

Margaret's disillusionment with social work was clear and her child care career did not appear to have been a conscious career choice but rather a practical one based on employment opportunities:

> *"I've always worked in Child and Family. Didn't really mean to… but I was so naïve when I qualified and I had very little social work experience and so the only job I could get was in Child and Family because they were always desperate for social workers."* (Margaret)

She explained that so much had changed within social work, and that the social work values which she aligned herself with, no longer seemed to reflect the profession. On reflection, Margaret wished that she had not entered the profession instead preferring to have become a countryside ranger. She talked about her friend who was employed as a countryside ranger and how he spent his day's pond dipping with groups of children and clearing woodland and how she would enjoy such a role. The theme of disillusionment was strong across the sample,

containing an overwhelming feeling of responsibility for service user's welfare in a period of depleting services. This feeling was captured by Ravinder who stated:

"I mean there are cases on my case load at the moment where I feel that I am the one holding… that person's… care in my hands." (Ravinder)

Such a statement epitomises the feeling of isolation and individual responsibility afforded to social workers in contemporary practice, leaving participants feeling disillusioned and ineffective in practice.

Whilst the barriers to transforming practice were significant, there were attempts to challenge the system and glimpses of hope were present. Such challenges frequently involved individual strategies as opposed to collective efforts. Whilst contemporary practice appeared to challenge practitioners in a variety of ways, they recognised that contemporary statutory practice and the profession of social work were not mutually exclusive. For example, Carol described contemporary statutory social work practice as rigid, but highlighted that social work practice in itself was not necessarily rigid, but that it had the potential to change lives and involved enormous creativity. Participants were not of the view that transformative change was imminent, however, the potential for change did exist.

For Einir, any barrier to change was attitudinal. She reflected that such an assertion may be perceived as simplistic, but felt that a person's attitude stems from their consciousness which can create either an opportunity or barrier to change. She explained that any existing system had emerged from someone creating it, and before any system can change, the attitude behind the system needed to change. Individual strategies to change may have been adopted by participants in the absence of an organisational drive for change. Seren noted that there was a lack of incentive from within her work place to be ecologically aware or green as she felt she was only encouraged to meet the requirements of her job role. She spoke about a general lack

of attention given to ecological awareness in the work place and a lack of efficiency in energy usage. She reflected on the irony of working for and on National Health Service (NHS) premises which affords no incentive to be healthy. Some participant's spoke of the benefits of slow change as opposed to no change at all, with discussions on collective action remaining largely absent. Ultimately, there was a lack of attention given to collectivisation with individual approaches and challenges to change being presented. Furthermore, there appeared to be no belief that transformative, structural change, could occur.

11.4 Insecurity

Whilst all of the participants had an interest in the environment or environmental issues, none of the participants identified themselves as an environmental social worker. In addition, many participants doubted or dismissed their environmental engagement, questioning their green credentials during interview, with a sense of unworthiness relating to their participation in the research. For example, in despite of Joan's academic knowledge on climate change and sustainable lifestyle she stated:

> *"So as a family we're quite… erm involved in… I wouldn't say actively involved in the environment but we are, we do enjoy the environment I guess really". (Joan)*

Similarly, at the beginning of her interview, Carol stated that there was *"not a lot to say"* about her life story in relation to the natural environment. She explained that she was a keen walker and enjoyed going camping, but that there was no other commitment beyond that:

> *"We weren't Woodcraft Folk or anything. We were Guides." (Carol)*

Despite Terry's commitment to sustainability and his active involvement in protecting green space he stated that:

"I'm by no means a sort of campaigner or eco-warrior in any sense". (Terry)

Such comments illustrate the level of insecurity experienced by participants and uncertainty over their green credentials, and to some extent, insecurity around the appropriateness of their participation in the research. There was also uncertainty about how environmental social work would be perceived by others. Societal perceptions and stereotypes of both social workers and environmentalists, replicated in television and elsewhere, were evident in participant's discussions. Some participants were concerned about how such forms of social work would be perceived based on the stereotypes which have been attributed to both the social work profession and environmentalists. Joan discusses her initial thoughts after hearing the term green social work for the first time:

"when you watch EastEnders and you watched it 10 years ago, the image of the social worker was sandals, ponytail you know and I think erm, and I guess really they were influenced I suppose by the social work values of you know erm, that kind of feed into green social work I think, and then of course with different legislation, social work being much more focussed on, child protection and things… The image of the social worker, that as you see has come from now somebody who's more in a suit who's you know… and I think really it kind of erm... I suppose some of the battle that you'll get is people individually will have their ideas about wanting to do the right things for the environment and I guess what you won't want is to kind of have people erm… or have… a public view that social work is going back to, or not going back to, but having something that I guess people were ridiculing erm…. 10-20 years ago in terms of namby pamby or something, you know that kind of thing. (Joan)

This quote highlights the potential impact of perceptions of environmental social work and how this could discourage others from engaging and progressing the movement further in an era of 'professionalisation'. Such perceptions were evident in other participant's discussions leading

to participants being treated differently due to their lifestyle choices both within work and outside of work. For example, while activities such as recycling are now common place, Margaret felt that in the past she was perceived to be,: *"just a sort of mad person that took things a little bit too far",* and Sue commented about how her children call her a hippy because of her lifestyle and belief system, telling her to be quiet about her, *"hippy stuff"*. In particular, Margaret who had a vegan diet spoke about perceptions of her lifestyle choices in the workplace at length. She had been a vegan since 1982 and informed me that she did not compromise on her diet. Margaret was amused by her reflections on colleague's reactions to her diet. She explains that in general they responded very well, and had on occasion, bought food products for her in the knowledge that they were vegan products which she could eat. She also felt that it has helped her colleagues gain knowledge on veganism. However, the overall lack of understanding about vegan diets was expressed in her interview when she discussed a new employer joining the team who was also vegan:

> *"And we've got another vegan here now as well. And it was really funny cos she came and joined the team… and… just a few little things… I'd, you know, noticed her eating and having black coffee and I thought ooh I bet she's a vegan so, I did ask and she oh er er she… I think she said oh I'm a vegan eventually… and I said oh really what do you eat? And I just saw her face drop and I thought (laugh) that's what I must look like a when people ask (laughs).   So erm, yeah… what do you eat?... (more laughter)*

> *Interviewer: Is it a common question?*

> *"In fact one of the… sort of young workers in family support assistant said, 'do you mind me asking what you eat?' And I said 'yeah Kate I do, just look it up on the internet, I can't be bothered any more'… (laughs)". (Margaret)*

Margaret's diet was guided by strict adherence to vegan principles which was motivated strongly by animal welfare concerns. She continued by discussing service users whom were also aware of her diet and described the children's understanding of her choices. However, the consequences of Margaret's activism became apparent during interview. As a result of her activism, she has been arrested a number of times. She was asked if this has ever impacted on her professionally which she felt it frequently had in relation to Disclosure and Baring Service (DBS) checks. Margaret spoke of the need to declare her offences and explain them to her employer. She explained how she felt that environmentalism is more accepted than animal rights activism and discussed a time when she was arrested for breaking into a breeding station. She stated that she has not been arrested in recent years. This assisted her in dealing with DBS disclosures: however, she also discussed being concerned about an upcoming protest at a NATO summit she intended to go to and the worry about future arrests. Discussions on perceptions appeared to impact on some participants both personally and professionally, leading to a level of concern about how environmental social work would be received by the mainstream profession. For Margaret, the consequences of challenging authority had more of an impact which raises further questions about how activism could have detrimental consequences for social workers perceived suitability to practice, and potential conflicts between environmental and regulatory aims.

Whilst the participants were able to vocalise how they felt the environment and social work were connected and offered practice examples, there remained a high level of insecurity about what environmental social work actually entailed. Insecurity was present in both theoretical and practice considerations as participants had never had such a question posed to them before. Furthermore, there was a lack of engagement with academic literature on the subject. Some participants talked about perusing the internet prior to interview, however few of the participants felt confident about engaging in discussion about environmental social work. As a result of this, many participants found it difficult to provide examples of how they had

integrated the environment into practice. Despite offering some interesting examples of incorporating the environment into practice and being able to theorise about how the environment and social work were connected for her, Ravinder expressed high levels of insecurity about the subject. She initially stated that she was not able to say much about the subject and couldn't see how her work and the environment were connected:

> *"But for me, and this is why I'm not sure how green social work is going to be, you know, married into social work practice as we see it today. Because to me it's all about the relationship… between myself and the person I'm working with." (Ravinder)*

The prevalence of micro social work practice with individuals and families led even those with a strong understanding of macro structures to struggle with envisaging environmental social work practice. Despite Margaret's high level of commitment to the environmental movement, she had never considered how this could merge with social work in anyway explaining:

> *"I know very little about Green Social Work but I would consider myself to be an environmentalist". (Margaret)*

She also commented that she had asked colleagues about their view on the matter, but no one was able to understand the connection. The level of uncertainty present led to some amusing perceptions of what environmental social work entailed. When asked about integrating the environment into practice, Einir could not envisage what this may look like, asking what I had in mind. She laughed and stated that when reading the interview guide she thought about dragging branches into a service user's house. When Gabrielle was asked about examples of practice integrating the environment, she stated:

> *"mmm.....I probably have. But whether I can think of any mmm.....I'm trying to think and I'm aware of the tape going on and the long pauses in it..... I can't think of anything particular at the moment." (Gabrielle)*

Joan discussed how it was her social work value base which enabled her to connect the environment with her profession. After discussing incorporating nature in her work with families she displayed uncertainty by stating,: *"... I don't know if that's really what you were looking for though in terms of that." (Joan)*

Similarly, Carol explained that she had never considered the link between the environment and social work before and could not see how they were connected in her daily practice:

> *"I must admit, when I looked at your interview guide I had no connection or mind between the two. I can see that there's a... a link that I'd have assumed around erm, sort of social justice and around responsibility and collective responsibility and there's personal responsibility, but I hadn't really thought how the two would be intertwined. In fact, I read the erm... the details of the project twice over to check that I've got it right." (Carol)*

At the end of her interview, after sharing ideas for the action plan relating to a website, Joan was apologetic about her contribution and several times during interview. Erina sought reassurance about the content of her discussion, asking if this was what I was looking for from her on a few occasions and stating that she felt she was being 'vague' in her responses. At the end of her interview, she was asked if there was anything else she would like to add, she laughed and stated:

> *"I don't feel that I've really given you anything."*

Further insecurity was apparent from Seren who spoke about needing to carefully consider how the environment and social work were connected prior to interview. During the interview she expressed concern that she had not answered the question sufficiently. After the interviews had occurred, further contact with participants was necessary. During this contact further insecurities and a lack of worthiness were evident from some participant's. Carol expressed

disappointment about her contribution to the research project and Einir felt so disappointed when reading back her transcript, she considered withdrawing from the research entirely.

Despite the levels of insecurity and uncertainty about what environmental social work was, and what it looked like in practice, participant's displayed a commitment to continued learning throughout the life course. This commitment led participants to be open to learning more about the research subject and to show an interest in reading the research once published. Simon expressed that it was important to be open to new approaches and not get, *"set in your ways"*, and to challenge oneself in life and in practice. He displayed openness to learning new approaches by saying:

> *"I am an older social worker but I am determined not to be an old fart who just moans, celebrates the good old days and.. and doesn't knows about what is going on currently I think that is rubbish. I think it is a very corrosive erm… way to be so you know I am always…. I always think it is important to shake it up erm and to not be complacent."*
> *(Simon)*

For Simon, taking a questioning approach to practice, was important. He felt that at times, his perspective left him feeling isolated in the workplace, leaving him at odds with other people as they weren't afforded an opportunity to consider different approaches to practice. He was also keen at the end of the interview to learn more about why I had chosen this area of research. An appreciation of the research being undertaken was evident. For example, Margaret expressed an interest in reading this research once published and hoped that the research would have a positive impact on social work, whilst other participants asked for online links to relevant academic papers. Regardless of her uncertainty about the connection, Ravinder was extremely positive about the subject being given some attention as she felt that awareness of environmental issues needed to be raised in all sectors. The uncertainty which featured in the research emerged on several levels relating to green credentials and an ability to envisage what

environmental social work may look like. Despite this, the participants offered their perspectives

not only on how social work and the environment were connected and what emerged in practice

but they also offered their considerations on how the subject could become more visible and

established within Wales.

11.5 Conclusion

The barriers which participants raised during interview were presented through the themes of

restrictiveness, disillusionment and insecurity. These barriers had a significant impact upon the

participant's ability to transform practice. Bureaucracy and depleting resources effected how

the participants felt about their involvement in social work practice. Some of participants

expressed regret about being a social worker. The feeling of insecurity was present in respect of

understanding environmental social work and being able to contribute to the research. These

themes will be returned to in the discussion chapter as they strongly relate to the neoliberal

impact on social work.

Chapter 12 Action Stage

12.1 Action stage planning: solutions from participants

A key feature of the methodological approach of the research was to embed an action component into the research design. The action stage was directly derived from gaining the participant's views on how to move forward in making environmental social work more visible within social work. This was a crucial part of the research process, undertaken after the interviews had been completed. It is noted that this question was challenging for participants and not everyone was able to offer ideas. The participant's suggestions on how to increase visibility can be summarised as follows:

Table 8: Participant's suggestions

	N=9
Online engagement	2
Influencing policy	2
Schemes to reduce travel within work	2
Incorporating the environment into social work education	3

The action stage was not intended to address all aspects of the participant's ideas as this was not practicably possible from a unfunded researcher. While it is acknowledged that more environmentally friendly travel and policy involvement are important, it was not within the scope of this research to progress these issues. Therefore, the decision about which idea to move forward with was based on time and cost implications as well as potential impact.

Online engagement involved the use of social media and the promotion of U.K. based issues relating to the environment. It was also suggested that resources for activities involving the environment could be shared on this platform. As a result of these discussions a Facebook page was developed. This page has attracted social workers worldwide and has been used to promote key environmental issues and social work academic efforts concerning the environment. This has included advertising publications about the environment and social work, IFSW resources for the environment, disaster response training for social workers as well as post relating to sustainability efforts across the world. The page has also prompted discussions about the definitions and requests for relevant publications from social work students. At the time of writing there were 163 members engaging in the 'green social work', See appendix 17. To access the page go to:

https://www.facebook.com/GreenSocialWork/

Several participants spoke about incorporating the environment into social work education and post qualifying training. Joseph felt that social workers in the U.K. were unable to integrate the environment into practice because of a lack of training relating wider environmental approaches. He commented that if practitioners had such an understanding they would be able to make environmental links and effectively challenge corporate and government plans which impact on communities. He stated that this type of insight is not present in the U.K., with social workers unable to understand the connection:

"for some reason we tend to forget that we are here to fight social injustice...... we are here to help the disadvantage people....we are here to help vulnerable children and adults, members of the communities, those who cannot stand up on their own, so that their voices can be heard, yeah? Then the question is, are we part of this system?" (Joseph)

Joseph's questioning of social work led him on to reflect that social work may well be inflicting social injustices on to people rather than challenging such injustices. He is clear in his view that as a profession, social work is not engaging with environmental issues because of its narrow practice focus in areas such as child protection. While he acknowledged that such areas were essential, for Joseph, such a narrow focus only scratched the surface of social problems, never reaching the root cause, while a wider focus involving meso and macro considerations would afford a deeper understanding of how to challenge the social injustices communities face. When asked about barriers to integrating the environment into practice, Joseph focused on political barriers and challenges which would come from corporations. Joseph discussed the focus on profit which corporations have as opposed to environmental health. A solution to this matter for Joseph was the widespread integration of community development into social work education and practice:

"So you will have those people who would be a barrier if you try to [incorporate community development]..... because when you train with social workers and you incorporate this you are going to be agents of change, you are going to be groups of people who are going to lobby for certain things, they will say no....because of awareness, don't agree to this road coming through here, because of ecology, water and everything is going to be damaged and there's no compensation. People are going to be breathing dirty air." (Joseph)

As a social worker in the U.K., he has observed a lack of understanding about the connections between people and the physical environment which was prominent in social work education and practice in Zimbabwe. He felt that universities needed to recognise that there was a gap in education. When asked if he believed social work was a social justice profession, he replied:

> *"No and yes, because those who created it want to maintain the status quo and the training is tailored to achieve that goal." (Joseph)*

For Joseph, social work education was the starting point for environmental social work, and without this, the detachment from the wider environment would remain. He discussed his supervision of university students in the U.K. and how they were not aware of wider environmental issues. Other participants also spoke about incorporating the environment into social work education. For Simon, social workers need space to envisage their role and to separate it from statutory forms of practice. In addition, Sue highlighted the need for university involvement and discussed how, as a practice teacher, she could support efforts to incorporate the environment into student placements with university support. Seren also gave attention to education in the form of post qualifying training.

The participant's contributions were considered and it was decided that engagement with university social work departments was a feasible option for a single self-funded researcher. The action component sought to raise awareness of green social work across social work departments in Wales and involved two stages. As discussed in the methods chapter, a survey was sent to the six universities across Wales who deliver social work programmes. The universities were also offered a lecture on green social work with students being asked to complete a post lecture evaluation form (Appendix number 15). I choose to focus on green social work as opposed to environmental social work due to a number of factors. While the lecture touched upon other theoretical approaches, such as therapeutic approaches with nature, there was not the scope to give equal attention to all aspects of environmental social work. Due to

the transformative nature of green social work, with its focus on ecological justice, this was deemed to be the most appropriate lecture topic. The level of expertise I had in this specific area was an additional factor as well as the vast area which environmental social work covers. The findings the survey and the post lecture evaluation form will now be presented.

12.2 Action stage methods

The action stage of the research was developed from discussions with the participants during interview. Participants were given the opportunity to share their ideas about how to increase the visibility of environmental social work in Wales. After considering the participant's ideas, I decided to engage with universities delivering social work education in Wales. While the other ideas for action were of great merit, time and funding considerations were important as well as what could reasonably be achieved by a single researcher. The purpose of the selected action was: a) to consider if (and to what extent) green / environmental social work was currently being taught in Wales and b) to invite social work students to a lecture on the subject to raise their awareness.

A basic survey instrument was designed which was sent to the head of social work departments. Whilst it is acknowledged that a survey often involves a large sample size with a small amount of data being collected from the population, the phrase 'survey' is used in a variety of ways (Kelley et al 2003). Surveys offer a snapshot of a specific time and place. In this case the sample size was governed by the purpose of the survey and size of the population in question involving purposive sampling. In addition to this survey, a post lecture evaluation form was designed to gather the views of students who attended the lecture. Both forms were clear in their design and avoided questions containing more than one element. The action stage required further ethical approval from Keele's ethics committee which was sought and ethical approval was

gained. The lecture content was developed with oversight from a scientist in the field of ecology / conservation to ensure an accurate explanation of acute environmental issues was presented. The link to the scientist had already been created prior to the research beginning. Numerous scientists have called for the need for inter disciplinary working to meet the challenges of environmental management (Morse 2007: Drew and Henne 2006: Brosius 2006).

12.3 Action stage findings

There were six universities who delivered social work programmes in Wales of which five responded to the survey. This gave insight into the extent to which green social work was taught in Wales. The universities offered the social work programme through a Masters or Bachelor of Arts / Science programme. One institution offered both programmes. The five responding institutions had approximately 476 students undertaking social work training at the time of the survey being completed. Social work departments were asked if any of the following subjects were included in the curriculum:

- Green social work / environmental social work theory

- The natural environment

- Community development

- Sustainability (Environmental, economic and / or social)

- Ecological Justice

- Any other related topics

Survey responses showed that the these subjects were not explicitly taught as part of the curriculum with the exception of community development. Three of the institutions included this subject in their curriculum to some extent, with one institution stating that they were about to begin teaching this subject. One institution taught the subject across their core modules in

the form of stand-alone lectures delivered by a guest speaker. These lectures included: definitions of community and community development: principles and values of community development and approaches to community development in an international context. Another institution offered students the opportunity to learn about community development approaches, specifically, in relation to service user and carer involvement. This module was delivered by a service user group, 'Outside In'. This institution felt that while the other subjects listed above were not explicit lectures, such subjects were discussed in class and there were further opportunities to explore these subjects through a variety of assignment choices. For example, the third year book review included Dominelli's ground breaking text 'Green social work' as an option for the assignment. They were also keen to highlight that teaching contained a distinct social justice focus stemming from international social work perspectives. This was being taught due to the increasing devolution of Wales from England. The institution recognised the theoretical overlaps of such approaches with green social work. One of the institutions who did not include any of the above subjects into their curriculum commented that completing the survey had prompted them to consider how social work education should include the wider environment.

The survey also asked if there was any consideration for future inclusion of the above subjects with the matter of course priorities being cited. One institution commented that due to their lack of knowledge on green social work, they were unaware of the potential of the subject but felt that the these areas would become more prominent with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 affecting the curriculum, as it has a strong focus on 'sustainability'. It should be noted however, that notions of 'sustainability' in the new Act appear to relate more to the avoidance of duplication in services and the continuation of services on a reduced budget. Another institution stated that their curriculum was undergoing a review due to internal and external factors, and would be considering such subjects with a range of other subjects for curriculum inclusion, based on what was deemed a priority. The issue of these subjects not being

deemed a priority was not being driven by the individual institutions as this response made clear:

> *"The curriculum is currently very full due to professional body requirements to cover a wide range of topics mainly centred on individual casework and assessment and working with families. It is challenging to locate space for the above topics, although they remain highly relevant." (Social work lecturer)*

Further responses highlighted that restrictions on direct contact time had led to an increased number of non-module based learning opportunities which could include ecological and social justice teachings. From the survey responses it was clear that community development was the only subject to be given attention and that in most cases, this did not have a significant role in the curriculum with Institutions appearing to lack confidence in their ability to teach such subjects. Pressures on the curriculum were evident and a prevailing government led agenda appeared to be in existence restricting institutions from including meso and macro subject content. In regard to the offer of a lecture on green social work, three institutions initially accepted this offer. One of these institutions ceased contact after their initial agreement: therefore two lectures were delivered with feedback being elicited from attending students.

Lectures in green social work were delivered to 32 students across two universities in North and South Wales. The lecture was delivered to 14 second year BA students in the North and 18 first year Master students in the South. Feedback forms were optional and completed by all who attended. One feedback form was removed as the consent boxes were left blank. The results showed the extent of prior knowledge of green social work amongst students was low. The post lecture evaluations showed that prior to the lecture, 5 students were aware of green social work and 27 were not aware. All the students who had prior knowledge were from the same institution. Whilst they were studying at a lower academic level, they had been engaged in the programme for a longer period of time. The relevance of the natural environment for social

work had been previously considered and utilised by a total of 14 students. Such considerations mainly referred to utilising nature for therapeutic purposes, an approach which was not given attention in the lecture. Some insight into community action was evident with one student engaging in a local anti-fracking campaign. A total of 17 students stated that they had never considered the connection before.

A large majority of students (23) felt that green social work should be incorporated into the curriculum. They felt that this would raise awareness of the subject and enable future practice. However, those who did not feel this should happen were concerned about the already compact programme. The extent to which they felt it should be incorporated into the curriculum varied. The majority of students felt that a one off lecture to raise awareness was most appropriate. Only one student felt that it should be delivered as a module. The lecture which gave insight into green social work had prompted the majority of students to want to learn more about the subject. There were however, concerns expressed about how green social work could be applied in practice within Wales. The post lecture evaluation forms showed that the students had enjoyed learning about green social work and were appreciative of the opportunity to learn about the subject.

13.1 Introduction

This discussion draws on Bourdieu's formula of: [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984). The formula offers a way to connect the biographical narratives with the perspectives and practices of the participants within the field of rural social work, giving both value and not viewing the agent and society as dialectical. The formula also supports the enquiry into barriers faced by participants and illuminates the challenging context of practice, allowing for a critique of contemporary practice. Bourdieu's conceptual framework supports the articulation of these research findings which have been presented in the model below:

Figure 7: Model of research findings
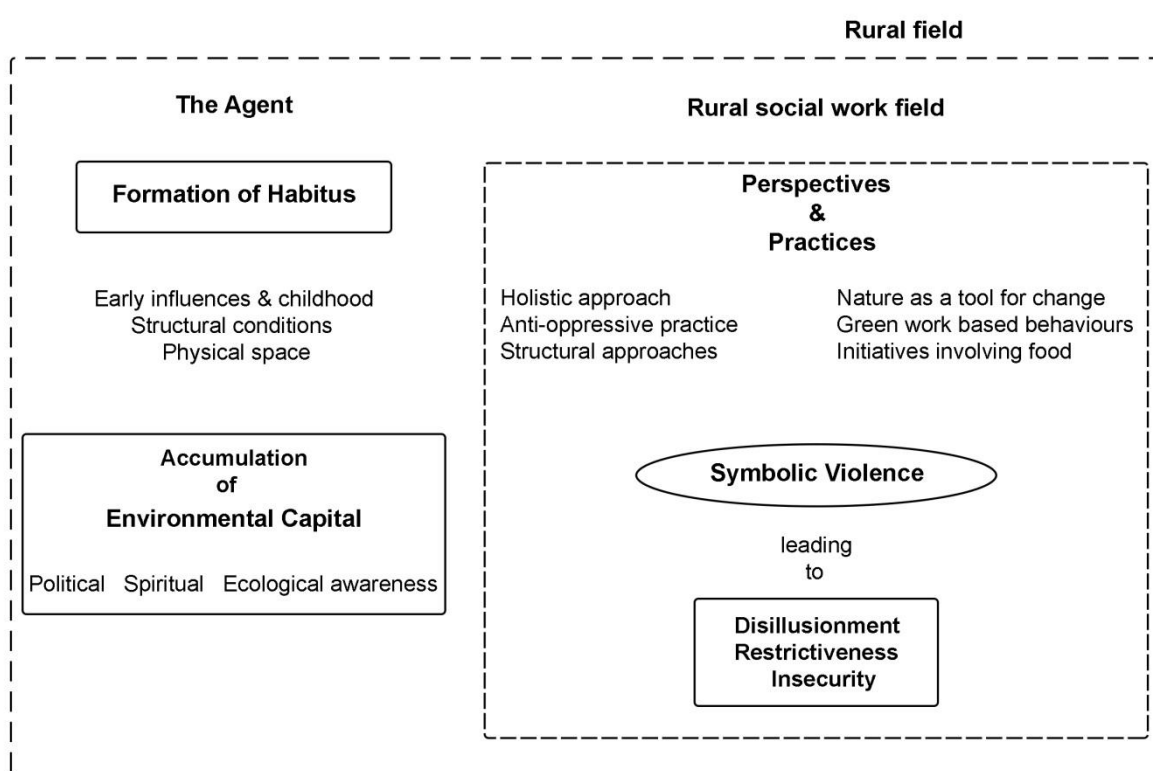
13.2 Reflections on social worker's identities'

The participant's environmental interests began to develop during childhood, becoming incorporated into their primary habitus and remaining significant to them throughout their life course to date. It is widely accepted that parents are the primary agents of socialisation in youth (Gronhoj and Thogersen 2009), with studies showing that parents can play a significant role in the acquisition of environmental attitudes (Ewert and Place 2005). The role of parents in supporting the acquisition of environmental capital was significant and facilitated a high level of exposure to nature which further facilitated their interest. Low environmental commitment to the environment during adolescence has been previously identified as a phenomenon and subject to research. This is an occurrence which is often explained through presenting 'life stage barriers' associated with this stage of development (Gronhoj and Thogersen 2009) and was present for several participants, whose environmental interests were revived after this period. While it is clear that no single determining factor influences environmental interest, direct childhood experiences in nature are associated with a predisposition to care about the environment later in life (Ewert and Place 2005).

The high levels of contact with nature, both as children and as adults, arose from the participant's location within a rural area. However, it is recognised that rurality is more than a geographical location as it contains cultural and linguistic identities (Somerville et al 2015), constituting a field. A preference for rural living strongly featured in the identity of participants. Despite structural disadvantages, such spaces provided a sense of community, culture and access to nature (Milbourne and Kitchen 2014).

The transcending of the dialectic nature of the individual and society is a major asset of Bourdieu's original social theory (1984). While participants offered their individual biographical narratives, these narratives were also reflections of the macro level structures which surrounded them. These were highlighted in three case studies which focused on food during

childhood (see p66-69). Narratives on food reflected deeply entrenched wider value systems influencing both attitudes and behaviours: however, they also reflected the structural food systems which people exist within (Wynne-Jones et al 2015). While technical enquiries into food productivity are being focused on by agriculture, the social dimensions relating to consumption and production patterns are often forgotten (Wynne-Jones et al 2015). The exploration of these three narratives offered the opportunity to highlight the ideological impact on experiences of food production and consumption from three distinct areas. Food is held within specific historical, political and cultural contexts. Macro level formations shape all aspects of production and consumption affecting the individual, family dynamics and community activities and cohesion. All three cases highlighted the direct connection that people have with the land and occurred prior to the domination of corporations within a capitalist political economy. At this current juncture, our food system which is now globalised, faces threats from climate change, biodiversity loss, freshwater depletion and energy resource scarcity (Sage 2013), which are major challenges in the context of a growing population.

The types of capital identified based on Bourdieu's social theory (1984) have been expanded to include environmental capital which when acquired, leads to a 'habitus of sustainability', or an 'ecological habitus'. Karol and Gale (2004) argue that this form of capital encompasses economic, cultural and social forms of capital and is therefore, a 'hybrid' form of capital (Karol and Gale 2004). Environmental capital is possessed by those who have attained knowledge on the environment. It consists of an understanding about the inter dependencies of all life forms and the impact of human activity on the planet. The connection between social, cultural, economic and political arenas and knowledge of how the environment is effected by these, also constitutes environmental capital (Karol and Gale 2004). Environmental capital can be acquired through relevant education and employment as well as ownership of sustainable products, such as solar panels and is therefore effected by the extent of economic capital one has (Karol and Gale 2004). Byrne (2000) contends that certain skills are needed in the acquisition of

environmental capital. Knowledge on its own is insufficient to create change as action is also needed. Action skills, such as communication skills, deep thinking skills and collaborative working skills are identified (Byrne 2000). Those in possession of large amounts of environmental capital have an awareness of environmental harm caused by consumerism and are likely to view 'wealth' and 'success' in a different way to others e.g. successfully living in a sustainable way. For the participants, environmental capital was much more visible within their personal lives as oppose to their professional lives. Numerous sustainable lifestyles choices and activities were being adopted, particularly relating to growing food and dietary choices.

In the U.K., small scale food growing occurs within household gardens, allotments and community gardens. There has been little research into the phenomenon of food growing in the Global North (Church et al 2015) and in particular, available literature on informal household growing remains sparse (Kortright 2011). However, it has been suggested that food growing in the U.K. is significantly increasing (Horticultural Trade Association 2010). There are many diverse settings for people in the U.K. to grow with 87% of households having a garden space (Davies et al 2009). Barthel et al (2010) estimated that are three million allotments across Europe and waiting lists for allotment spaces are high, with demand continuing to rise (Metcalf et al 2012). Despite the distinct lack of research, the benefits of community food growing are becoming widely acknowledged (Metcalf et al 2012) and it has been asserted that community health and wellbeing is fundamentally shaped by food security which local food growing can contribute to (Kortright 2011). For Kortright (2011) food growing enables people to consider the source of their food and the meaning it holds as well as having the potential to contribute to food security in a number of ways: increased sustainability, nutrition and wellbeing. Growing food at home provides the potential to change our relationship with food. A central motivation of growing food for Kortright's (2011) participants was environmental ethics which included locally sourced food and organic practices which ensured high quality nutritional value. Growing

food brought an awareness of seasonal products and an understanding of the effects of pesticides. White (2002) explains:

> *''As our society becomes technologically more sophisticated it also becomes biologically more ignorant. We no longer know what we eat or drink, or where our wastes are taken.''*

(White 2002, p. xi)

The subject of food growing therefore has the potential to greatly contribute to environmental social work. The interaction with the earth which growing food brings can effect change in peoples overall approach to food (Kortright 2011). Worldwide complex networks of energy intensive food distribution by corporations are firmly established with food travelling many miles prior to being bought in large supermarkets (Kortright 2011). Food systems which are based on regional needs are required and a community based ethic of care to challenge the neo-liberal regime of isolating the individual (Blay-Palmer et al 2016). Similarly, the choice of participant's diet constructed their identities and communicated meaning. This was a way of expressing values and beliefs or a way to express what they were against (Cronin et al 2014). Ultimately, people's relationship with nature and how this impacts on their values, attitudes and behaviours has been deemed an area of investigation which despite its individualised focus, could hold insight into achieving environmental objectives (Restall and Conrad 2015). However, how the habitus interacts with the field and more specifically how an ecological habitus interacts with the rural social work field leads to a deeper understanding on what actually occurs in practice.

13.3 The ecological habitus within the field of social work

Participants had diverse ways of explaining how the environment and social work were connected for them. It was apparent that both the perspectives and practices they engaged with covered a wide range of theoretical approaches. Many of the participants had developed knowledge and skills from historic practices involving probation and youth justice which were widely practised in the U.K. during the 1980's (Dominelli 2012). Such initiatives significantly decreased after numerous media attacks presented as an indulgent waste of tax payers money which rewarded criminal behaviour. Media attention included the scandal of so called 'Safari boy' who engaged in an 88-day intervention in Africa at the cost of £7,000 only to reoffend shortly after his return. The media 'hysteria' which ensued focused on the failure of costly interventions gave no attention to the states failure to improve the deprived communities where the young people returned to afterwards (Dominelli 2012). Such interventions are now rarely found in the U.K., but examples of contemporary practice can be found elsewhere such as Norton et al's (2013) case study featuring a USA environmentally based programme for offenders, which works with nature to support people's social reintegration and ecological restoration. For the participants, such interventions had given insight into how nature could be utilised as a tool to promote change and to build resilience.

Adopting a therapeutic approach to enhance wellbeing through nature is increasingly popular in adult services with some emerging interest from children's services. The research evidence of such initiatives has continued to accumulate in recent years (Bird 2007) and such messages have been relayed to practitioners (Gordon 2014). In addition, research techniques have improved with advancements in neuroimaging. For example, Aspinall et al (2013) study uses the method of mobile electroencephalography (EEG) to record a group of walkers as they explore 3 types of urban places: a green space, a shopping area and a commercial district. The results show participants experienced lower frustration and a higher meditative state whilst accessing

the green space (Aspinall et al 2013). These results support theories relating to the benefits of contact with nature. Prior to the development of such techniques, Kaplan's 'Attention Restoration Theory' asserted that exposure to nature improves concentration and reduces mental fatigue (Gordon 2014) and 'Connectedness To Nature' theory hypothesises that an individual's relationship with nature affects both their mental and physical health (Restall and Conrad 2015). Whilst therapeutic approaches work with the individual, it has been suggested that such contact with nature not only has an acute effect emotionally, but may also lead to an increased interest in protecting it (Restall and Conrad 2015). The participants were very aware of such benefits and many were actively engaging with the environment to support their own wellbeing as well as a space to reflect and recover from the demands of their social work employment.

Food formed a strong association with the natural environment with participants speaking about food whilst reflecting upon childhood memories, food in relation to service users and practice, growing food and their own personal diets. Anthropologists recognise food as a 'powerful semiotic device' as it pervades daily life and holds meaning in terms of dominant norms and resistance (Appadurai 1981: Bourdieu 1984: Fox 2003). It pervades all aspects of a community's mode of production, defining relationships to each other and to the state. While Kortright (2011) acknowledges the separation which has occurred between humans and food, there is an assertion that what we eat and where our food comes from are rooted in the structure of human life. Food is not merely consumed to support life, humans are able to express culture (and sub culture) through it (Fonseca 2008), this central aspect of life is therefore critical to any transformative paradigm.

The 5th annual report from the IPCC (2013) allows the consideration of scientific consensus relating to climate change and documents how climate change is affecting food security. There is a well-established assertion that the corporate food sector destabilises food security and

concentrates the accumulation of wealth. The food systems themselves are impacted on by climate change, extensive amounts of waste and free trade policies (Lappe et al. 2013: Clapp 2014). Given the level of interest expressed by participants, food could become a central aspect of environmental social work and there are numerous ways which food could feature within social work practice, policy and research. Vermeulen (2014) stresses that as the impact of climate change becomes more visible more wide scale 'systemic and transformative' approaches may be needed. Social work can therefore support the development of a socially just food system by speaking out about the identified barriers which prevent this such as price instability, disease, shortages and land grabbing (Blay-Palmer et al 2016).

Despite theoretical differences between individual and structural perspectives, participants gave attention to both approaches and did not see these as competing or conflicting. However, when considering how their interests emerged in practice, it was clear that only remedial approaches were adopted. Similar findings emerged in Weiss-Gal's (2008) research which considered how social workers applied a person in environment perspective. The study revealed discrepancies between professional ideologies and practice as a wider environmental perspective was strongly evident theoretically, although it was scarcely applied in practice. Crawford et al's (2015) study similarly highlights the difficulties students and supervisors had when attempting to meet the newly implemented learning goal of sustainability into social work placements in Australia. Many students held a limited view of the subject and in practice got 'stuck' on recycling, even when in theory they understood that the area had a much wider remit. Understanding how to apply their knowledge in practice was problematic and success appeared to be shaped by the organisation they were situated in, with those based within a community development setting finding connections between theory and practice much easier than those within a hospital or child protection setting (Crawford et al 2015). The results from both studies strongly support Molyneux's (2010) finding that environmental social work is more theoretical than grounded in practice. Despite a wide ranging recruitment process for this study, none of

the participants were from an environment or community based organisation. The majority of participants were employed in the statutory sector, adopting remedial practice methods.

Since its inception, social work has utilised a variety of methods to practice such as casework, group work and community work which are associated with different aims, reflecting a variety of conceptions from individual treatment to social reform. However, the major form of social work practice across the globe today featuring heavily in industrialised countries, consists of a remedial approach involving direct work with individuals and their families (Midgely 2001). The dominance of remedial approaches has led to accusations that social work has turned away from its commitments towards challenging oppression and being in solidarity with those who are poor (Midgely 2001). The ability to practice environmental social work or sustainability within social work is shaped not just by the individual but also by the field. This highlights the need for community development roles for social workers – a field which is more conducive to social justice principles and societal transformation.

Enquiries into perspectives held by participants revealed a wealth of insight into the value base held by social workers with environmental interests, with a respect for all life and its interconnectedness. However, there was a distinct lack of engagement with the social work literature which has focused on the natural environment. This division highlights not only a divide in the praxis of theory and practice (or academic and practitioner), but also potential difficulties in moving the environmental agenda forward within social work in Wales. It was apparent that whilst the participants held extensive environmental knowledge, terms such as green or environmental social work were unfamiliar to them. Additionally, the barriers which they encountered within the public sector were significant and were rooted in fundamental tensions between social work values and a managerialist welfare state enduring austerity.

13.4 Symbolic Violence, social work and neoliberalism

The participant's cited numerous barriers when practicing social work as a result of neoliberal constraints and the managerialist structure which surrounded them. Despite numerous grievances relating to contemporary social work practice, the majority had sustained careers in a statutory setting which had affected their overall vision of social work, largely as a result of bureaucratic and economic factors which engulfed daily practice. Whilst participants were able to critique services and systems as well as understand imbalances of power, they remained exposed to forms of symbolic violence which pervades social work's professional identity. The concept of symbolic violence, which has similarities to Marx's false consciousness, involves an internalisation of dominant discourses (Smith 2007). For Bourdieu, symbolic violence becomes constituted within the habitus and does not need to occur in an openly coercive way as dominant discourses imposed on the populace are experienced as legitimate (Jenkins, 2002 cited in Cushion and Jones 2006). Symbolic violence is therefore:

"*violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*"

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 167)

Within this context power relations are not challenged, they are legitimised as the dominant discourse enforces the 'correct way' at the cost of other (invisible or discredited) options (Schubert, 2002). Such power is maintained through deliberate practices and ordering of habitus, field and capital within this context the imbalance of power is perceived as 'natural' (Ojha et al 2009). People therefore, not only endure, but accept oppression – a concept which is referred to by Bourdieu as the 'paradox of doxa' (Smith 2007). Neoliberalism is both globally and cognitively pervasive, being described as a 'mental colonisation' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2000 cited in Smith 2007). It has been argued that neoliberalism constitutes a generalised form

of symbolic violence (Smith 2007) which heavily impacts upon social workers, service users and the natural environment.

Whilst neoliberalism can be seen as a form of political economy, it is mainly referred to as a discourse or an ideology (Harlow et al 2013). The neoliberal policies of Thatcher continued after the Conservative defeat in 1997, and under Blair's Labour government with a sustained approach towards 'marketisation and managerialism' (Harlow et al 2013). The introduction and advancement of managerialism under neoliberal reforms have revolutionised public services (Clarke, 2004) which has led to heavy criticism from social work academics (Baines, 2006: Ferguson et al 2005: Mendes, 2009). Neoliberalism has infiltrated the welfare state through both supply, through managerialist approaches such as privatisation of services and demand, through the marketization of services focusing on consumerism and individualism (Harris 2003). The wide scale restructuring of public services which has occurred across the U.K. has occurred based on market principles to enhance efficiency and competition. Such changes are not neutral but advance the neoliberal agenda and de-politicise the public sphere (Aronson and Smith 2010). This contemporary style, brought over from the private sector, is referred to here as managerialism, for White (1999) managerialism comprises of 3 key elements which are the localisation of operations whilst maintaining nationalised control, developing strategies for monitoring and surveillance (e.g. audits and Q.A.) and implementing managed competition. This organisational style provokes constant change caused by the latest 'management fix' leading to an environment which perpetuates uncertainty and inevitably lowers morale (White 1999 cited in Powell 2001).

Managerialism has infiltrated services with business practices which focus on profit and market forces which were previously not present (Dominelli 2010). Research which has explored the impact of neoliberalism on social work illustrates a devaluation of skills and knowledge, changes to the relationship with service users and refers to the difficulties in challenging such changes

(Wallace and Pease 2013). For example, Jones (2005) identifies concern about funding, restructuring and restrictions placed on social work vision and Singh and Cowden (2009) highlighted that the despair felt by social workers in relation to capacity and managerialism had resulted in alienation and demoralisation as well as anger. Similarly, it has been argued that this managerial or technicist role has reduced social worker autonomy and created widespread dissatisfaction amongst the profession (Harlow et al 2013). It is the feelings of powerlessness, experienced by social workers and service users, which gives relevance to Marx's theory of alienation for those seeking to theorise at a structural level (Ferguson and Lavalette 2004). Whilst Bourdieu's conceptual framework is not Marxist in essence, Bourdieu, like some social work academics, utilised his work to understand the exploitative nature of capitalism (Garrett 2007a). Based on the findings from this research, Marx's theory of alienation is of relevance and offers a way to explain the feelings of disillusionment and restrictiveness which result from practice under neoliberalism. Alienation occurs within the labour market, ensuring that those within its structures do not have control over their labour power which becomes the subject of commodification. This comprises the worker having no control over production or process. It is the human engagement in production as a means in itself, rather than out of necessity, which separates humans from other species. However, labour also separates us from each other due to the competitive and class producing nature of capitalism (Ferguson and Lavalette 2004). Therefore, the theory of alienation:

> "*analyses the human anguish, isolation, violence and competition that is generated by the society we live in—it locates the individual within the totality of the dominant social relations within society.*"

(Ferguson and Lavalette 2004 p309)

It has been argued that the growth in managerialism, which has increased control and regulation for social worker's, has led to an increase in dissatisfaction within the workplace. (Jones 2001

cited in Ferguson and Lavalette 2004). This has included an overwhelmingly strong emphasis on budget management and frequent structural re-organisation which ultimately reduces time spent with service users (Ferguson and Lavalette 2004).

Neoliberal policies have promoted the privatisation of public services and introduced a competitive social care market whereby Local Authorities tender to outsource services (Harlow et al 2013). Difficulties relating to staff retention have created a vacuum for the private sector to expand. Employment agencies have recruited social workers whose labour is then sold to Local Authorities at higher rates of pay on long term, temporary contracts (Harlow et al 2013). The sector for independent fostering services continues to expand. Directors from children's services have recently urged the government to tackle Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) encouraging foster carers to move from the public to the private sector with so called 'golden handshakes' of up to £3,000 after the Local Authorities have spent resources in recruiting, assessing and training foster carers. The same foster carers are then sourced through the IFA to care for children at a higher cost to the Local Authority (McNicoll 2016). Further risks are evident as there is considerable concern about the threat of privatisation of child protection services in England. The relationship between the social worker and service user has altered by commodifying all aspects of practice and repositioning the service user as a 'customer' of services (Ferguson and Lavalette 2006). The level of contact and quality of relationship has been affected with contemporary social workers assessing need then co-ordinating services by providers, with little direct work occurring (Harlow et al 2013).

As Dominelli explains:

"*Turning goods and people into commodities lies at the heart of neo-liberal globalization.*"

(Dominelli 2010 p604)

It is not just the relationship between social worker and service user which has been affected by the neoliberal agenda, as social workers relationship with their service has altered as a result of changes to their working environments under the auspices of austerity. Many areas of the U.K. (including Wales) have seen a move towards agile working, large open plan working environments and more remote working (Jeyasingham 2016). Social works embrace of 'agile' working has not led to a reduction in complex procedures or an increased role in decision making, such as resource allocation, it has merely compromised the space in which social workers are based - transformed by so called 'hot desking' which has effected the proximity of colleagues and supervisors (Jeyasingham 2016). It has removed what was previously seen as a space for reflection, support and practice discussions (Jeyasingham 2016). Furthermore, it has been stated that agility has emerged from the ideology of neoliberalism (Gillies 2011). Despite these changes, there is a distinct lack of literature which has critically explored the impact of agile working (Jeyasingham 2016). Most online forums discussing the issue indicate a lack of satisfaction with the approach resulting in increased isolation. Jeyasingham (2016) explores the practices and experiences of this working method on social work practice compared with a non-agile working team, through an ethnographic study. The non-agile space was shown to be more than a space for debate and reflection, one which contained the potential for both secluded and open spaces for social workers. There was a feeling of autonomy in practice but also a continual opportunity to observe others practice. They were able to share practice knowledge and their actions could be affirmed by colleagues. The research questions if the work space in large open plan offices, which include non-social care staff, inhibits staffs use of space and removes a shared understanding of urgency (Jeyasingham 2016). Gillies' (2011) reminds us that the '*neoliberal self is individual, not social*' and movements towards agile working are economically motivated (Gillies 2011 p217). Agility is therefore a consequence of austerity and equates more with survival during a recession as opposed to service improvements (Gillies 2011).

While neoliberal austerity continues to reduce services, despite a clear financial ability of the government to bail out banks and ensure bankers receive their large bonuses (Dominelli 2010), the culture of blame perpetuated against individual social workers and the social work profession by the media continues. It produces a negative public image of the profession (Forde and lynch 2014), particularly in relation to high profile cases which capture the public's attention, for example the death of Peter Connolly (Parton, 2011). The culture of blame also extends to central government who focus on social work failings without acknowledging or understanding the wider complexities, evident in 2015 when the Prime Minister announced plans to extend the criminal offence of wilful neglect to children's social workers. In response to this, community care magazine wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister in which it stated:

> *"Although recent serious case reviews have sadly highlighted some deeply concerning social work failings around the country, such failings rarely, if ever, occur because practitioners were wilfully neglecting the needs of the vulnerable. They occur because of scant local authority resources, burnt out staff, unmanageable, out of control caseloads, unprecedented demand for services, insufficient staff training and so forth."*

(Community Care 2015)

Bourdieu's conceptual framework offers a way of explaining why people may continue to endure oppression (Garrett 2007a) which can be used to explain the current situation of social workers and wider U.K. society. It could explain the political context of the U.K. with austerity being viewed as a political choice with other options possible, yet, the conservative party, with a manifesto of pro austerity policies easily won the 2015 general election. The increased support and popularity of far right wing political organisations across Europe reflects the despair felt by many in regard to government's inability to improve people's standard of living. Such despair and disillusionment can be seen in the U.K.'s recent referendum results and the racist / anti-immigration rhetoric which accompanied the leave campaign arguments. The U.K. referendum

reflects a growing worldview that people feel they no longer have control over their own lives, unable to influence government policies or corporations. In this vain the leave campaigns dogma consisted of slogans like '*we want our country back'* and '*take back control'*. The disillusionment of workers has been discussed by Bourdieu (2001) who stated:

> *"Once an object of pride, rooted in traditions and sustained by a whole technical and political heritage, manual workers as a group – if indeed it still exists as such – are thrown into demoralization, devaluation and political disillusionment, which is expressed in the crisis of activism or, worse, in a desperate rallying to the themes of quasi-fascist extremism."*

(Bourdieu, 2001 p100)

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) who campaigned to remain in the EU have stressed that in the wake of the Leave campaigns success, it is vital for social workers to support community cohesion in what has been a bitterly divisive campaign (BASW 2016).

The dissatisfaction experienced within the profession, highlighted by research and online forums and surveys, has resulted in difficulties in staff retention and a perceived inability to uphold the values of social work. It has been argued that the root cause of such a demoralised workforce lies within the neoliberal paradigm shift which has taken place in the U.K. to a greater extent than elsewhere (Ferguson and Lavalette 2006). For Bourdieu (1998) neoliberalism heralds the dominance of individualism at the cost of collectivism. As Ferguson and Lavalette (2004) explain:

> *"The consequence is that social workers find they have less freedom and control over their contact and work with clients: they are subject to speed-up, bureaucratic control and regulation: their work activities increasingly confront them and their clients as a set of 'alien' practices (and one consequence of this is that violence against social*

workers is increasing): and all this limits the scope for social workers to stand shoulder

to shoulder with their clients in the face of their oppression—the system increasingly

places barriers between the social worker and the client."

(Ferguson and Lavalette 2004 p304)

Despite these barriers and wide spread disillusionment it remains critical for social work to live up to its definition of engaging with people and structures to promote liberation and uphold social justice. Without such a focus, environmental social work is likely to remain a marginalised and theoretical endeavour. Environmental social work is transformative in nature, with sustainability as its driving force. This requires a shift away from a hyper capitalism mode of production which perceives natural resources and people as commodities and potential profit. It is therefore of great importance to give attention to resistance and action.

13.5 Social work resistance in the era of the Anthropocene

There has been much debate on Bourdieu's (1990) belief in people's ability to resist and overcome oppression by creating change. For Bourdieu, the ability of the oppressed to become conscious and resist their oppressors was overstated by Marx, believing that oppression was deeply ingrained in the consciousness (Garrett 2007a). It has been highlighted that Bourdieu gave more attention to the rigidness of habitus rather than its dynamism (Garrett 2007a). Yet despite criticisms of 'pessimistic determinism' (Leitch 2003) and the lack of attention given to the human potential for liberation (Schinkel 2003), it was clear that Bourdieu did believe in the possibility of change through the alteration of the habitus. This change could then influence and change the field. In response to his critics, Bourdieu felt that such criticisms did not recognise the strength exerted by the 'field' and the structural constraints it imposes on agents (Bourdieu 1990). However, the Habitus is not easily open to change as it has a tendency to dismiss new

information which challenges previously accumulated information (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), it is enduring, but not a permanently fixed state. (Bourdieu 2002):

> *"Habitus, as the product of social conditionings, and thus of a history … is endlessly transformed."*

(Bourdieu, 1990 p116)

The opportunity to change can emerge from several occurrences. Fowler (2001) asserts that resistance to habitus can be achieved through reflection as the habitus can be:

> *"controlled through awakening of consciousness and socio-analysis"*

(Bourdieu, 1990 p116)

Bourdieu's theory (1984) has been used to explain the lack of change in sustainable practices, despite wide scale efforts. For Haluza-DeLay (2008) the 'fields' of ecologically unaware society and an 'ecologically orientated' habitus are simply not compatible. However, change is able to emerge from new information and new circumstances (Karol and Hale 2004) and the habitus and field are particularly susceptible to change during times of crisis. Similarly, Friedmann (2002) also identified factors which can induce change, such as social mobility, social movements or societal disorder (Friedmann 2002 cited in Garret 2007a). The challenging of oppression is a key social work task which needs ongoing attention. It is therefore critical to discuss the areas which hold the opportunities for change for the social work profession and society and that in resistance lies the possibility of:

> *"developing a new, more robust paradigm for a critical social work practice."*

(Ferguson and Lavalette 2006 p312)

Social work has a long history of engaging with oppression and inequality, yet despite this, the remedial practice method has spread across the globe with many developing nation adopting

this method and educating social workers from Western only texts. This style of education has not prepared social workers for their local practice context involving wide scale poverty and deprivation (Midgely 2001) and appears inappropriate for many environments and points in history. It has been argued that the remedial approach, widespread across the U.K., has deflected attention away from tackling social inequalities (Midgely 2001). Regardless of remedial dominance, social work has engaged in activism since its inception with examples ranging from the USA rank and file movement during the 1930's to local activism and community work in the U.K. during the 1970's. Activist social work in Latin America also has a visible history, inspired by the work of Freire (Midgely 2001). Whilst an engagement with activist based social work has occurred, activism has never been a priority and is even deemed an inappropriate activity by some (Midgely 2001). It is therefore still necessary to highlight the benefits which this practice method can offer, in light of the concerning criticism of neoliberalism and the pending ecological crisis.

It has been argued that social workers are no longer able to perceive social work as occurring outside of neoliberalism, unable to critically reflect on the managerialism which dictates practice as a result of neoliberal infiltration at both a conscious and unconscious level (Carey 2008). However, this assertion is challengeable as social work resistance in the U.K., though not widespread is visible. For example, resistance was evident in 2009 when BASW organised the rally 'Taking Back our Profession'. Resistance can also be found in the form of the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) – a radical campaigning organisation based in the U.K. SWAN attends rallies and demonstrations showing social workers visible challenge to government policies such as austerity. They also hold uplifting (and radical) conferences each year. Recent developments have also emerged as a result of the refugee crisis. Social Work First, has recruited social work and social work student volunteers who work in Calais on a weekly basis. Although they note gaining trust has been challenging due to the mistrust felt towards the profession they continue to work towards a social work model fit for this area of intervention. Pal U.K. Social Work

Network is another initiative which is in opposition with conventional practice. The group promotes solidarity between U.K. and Palestinian social workers and social justice, holding annual joint conferences. Such resistance offers the potential for professional change:

> "*Social Work is fighting back. With SWAN, BASW, social workers without borders and social work first we can reclaim social work from the shackles of the state and have pride in our profession.*"

(SWAN 2016 p1)

White (2009) has argued that resistance to neoliberalism can occur from within existing power structures. But challenging practice can be 'risky' and strong trade union organisation is required (Ferguson and Lavalette 2004). If social work is to remain committed to its definitional aims of social justice, it must not only engage in political critique but there is also a strong need to consider an alternative vision of social work. Therefore attention will be given to the areas of education transformation, with a focus on community development and engagement with social movements.

13.6 Education

Higher Education has a key role to play in the realisation of sustainable communities (AASHE 2010). Bourdieu's theory (1984) shows how education can influence habitus (Karol and Gale 2004), making social work education a key area for potential transformation in supporting the accumulation of environmental capital (Karol and Gale 2004) and promoting social justice principles. Social works preparation for responding to an ecological crisis is imperative (Melekis and Woodhouse 2015) and if social work is to truly respond to human need this subject area can no longer remain marginalised or non-existent in social work education, research, placements and practice. Integrating the environment into social work education was not

evident across Wales and globally the inclusion of the environment into social work programmes has been 'peripheral' and 'piecemeal' (Melekis and Woodhouse 2015). However, some innovative departments in Australia, North America and Europe have developed modules and interdisciplinary courses which are pioneering future developments in this area (Drolet et al 2015). Such examples offer insight into how Universities can further support such endeavours by developing a cultural commitment to sustainability, developing curriculum and guidance for staff and students and creating interdisciplinary departments (Melekis and Woodhouse 2015).

As university courses relating to the environment have been criticised for the distinct lack of attention given to social and cultural matters, reinforcing notions of humanity and nature as separate (Karol and Gale 2004), creating a space for joint learning may benefit everyone. However, it is recognised that transformational education also has its challenges as U.K. Universities have also succumbed to neoliberal transformation (Radice 2013). Whilst social work education could support a green agenda for the profession, implementing such a curriculum will hold many challenges. For example, in England the government has financially backed a fast track scheme for social workers in child protection. This scheme is for academic achievers who have obtained at least a 2:1 undergraduate degree. They embark on a 5 week intensive course then go into a statutory placement for a year, continuing to study, before qualifying in year 1. In 2 year they undertake a Master's thesis. There have been concerns over elitism and creating a 2 tier system as well as concerns over removing training from universities. Students are paid over this 2 year period. This initiative views traditional training as inadequate and responsible for social work failings, ignoring the resource shortages and pressures of practice (Unsafe Spaces 2012).

Whilst it is clear from the findings that remedial practice methods can incorporate the environment, the benefits of integrating the environment into social work practice which is situated within community development would have more transformative outcomes. Social

worker's based in practice and education repeatedly assert the relevance of community work approaches within practice (Barron and Taylor, 2010: Healy, 2012) and whilst such practice methods aren't widespread in the West, research by Forde and Lynch (2014) found that social work contributions to communities often goes hidden and unacknowledged. As Dominelli states:

> "*The complexities arising from the financial and environmental crises require practitioners to look for new paradigms for practice, and give greater priority to social and community development within an ecological framework that cares for the environment as well as the people living within it.*"

(Dominelli 2010 p603)

For Ife (1998) community based practice engages in bottom up processes, not found within managerialism. This discourse has a social justice focus working alongside marginalised groups seeking community and societal level changes, informed by critical perspectives. The possibility for the environment to be incorporated into social work education in Wales would be best achieved within a community development context with strong interdisciplinary links. Such training would offer social workers skills which are relevant in a fragmented U.K. society.

13.7 Conclusion

Whilst CT can offer a highly articulate analysis of current neoliberal practices and institutions, there can be challenges in identifying what the transformation or new paradigm being sought may consist of. This is a criticism which is also frequently directed towards the environmental movement. Lane (1997) argued that for community work to maintain its politicised nature, environmental work needed to be prioritised and there are many initiatives from the green movement which may hold insight for social work. Such insights include the growing number of

Pay as you feel Café's which solely uses discarded food from supermarkets. Such endeavours offer a way to transition towards sustainability by combating poverty and the extensive food waste in a hyper consumerist society. Similarly, the emergence of 'Transition towns' offer a strong example of a grassroots, community led response to neoliberal practices. Transition towns, sometimes referred to more generally as 'the transition movement', have become one of the most influential movements across the global north (Sage 2014). The projects adopted within the movement consider sustainable and localised responses to key challenges within the areas of transportation, food, energy and housing to build resilience against climate change, economic deprivation and finite resources. Food is a central component to the transition movement in terms of growing and localisation of supply. Some academics have looked to Cuba for examples of empowering practice within an anti-capitalist context (Backwith and Mantle 2009), as Cuba has a strong grasp of sustainable development, triggered by rapid resource depletion (from the fall of the USSR and years of sanctions), Cuba may hold valuable insight for environmental social workers.

There appears to be no one route to social change. In adopting a Bourdieusian approach, it is acknowledged that habitus is difficult to transform. However, engagement with social movements can produce alternative visions and can support and maintain change (Haluza-DeLay 2008). Despite the disillusionment and challenges facing social workers in Wales, there is great scope to promote the integration of the environment into education and community based practice. The cost of failure is high and could render the profession irrelevant in the face of ecological crisis, community divisions and ongoing austerity. Therefore there has never been a better time to challenge and promote change.

Chapter 14 Conclusion

14.1 Overview

This research set out to explore the identities and perspectives of social workers with environmental interests. A call for participants was advertised across the social care and environmental sector in Wales: however only social workers from the Local Authority responded and were subsequently recruited. I travelled throughout Wales to undertake semi structured interviews with 14 participants. The interviews elicited the biographical narratives of participants and provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the formation of environmental interests in social workers in Wales as well as how they perceived the connection between the two. The interviews were analysed through the use of thematic analysis which was guided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis illustrated how their ecological habitus had been formed and what perspectives and practices had emerged. An action stage was also incorporated into the research design in keeping with the CT methodology which aimed to raise awareness of the subject amongst universities and social work students. As this thesis now draws to an end after a 6 year period, it is important to reflect upon what emerged from the research, what was learnt and what future steps could be possible. I will now return to each research question and reflect on how it was addressed and what findings emerged.

14.2 Biographical narratives and beliefs

The first research question asked '*What are the biographical narratives of social workers with environment interests?*' This question was addressed by asking participants to describe their life story through the natural environment. Almost everyone began with their childhood and described being influenced by family members. Despite a decline in this interest during

adolescence, environmental interests were revived in adulthood and had remained significant throughout their life course. Childhood memories included walking and camping trips which instilled an appreciation of rural settings. This research question was answered by considering both the individual agent and the field in which they are situated. It supported previous studies outside of social work which show the importance of childhood socialisation and how human experiences are shaped by the wider environment. This showed that environmental interests in social workers emerge in similar ways to the non-social worker population. Whilst the environmental interests of social workers have been explored by Marlow and Van Rooyen (2001) and Shaw (2011), both studies adopted quantitative methods. By addressing this question through semi structured interviews, I was able to elicit a richer, more nuanced understanding.

Through the use of Bourdieu's social theory, I was able to transcend the individualised nature of the biographical narratives and engage with structural influences. The combination of the rich descriptions offered, and the unusually high level of diversity, allowed me to consider how macro systems affected participants narratives. This led to the development of three case studies illustrating differing modes of production featuring post war Britain, colonial Zimbabwe and Eastern Germany during the communist period. The case studies allowed me to illustrate how structural systems shape relationships, including people's relationship with the natural environment. The narratives also offered insight into the belief systems which supported the accumulation of environmental capital. Whilst the belief systems were not mutually exclusive they were divided into categories of spiritual, political and ecological awareness which showed how the participants understood their relationship to nature and what drove their continued interest.

14.3 Connecting social work and the environment

The research then asked: *how do environmental social workers connect the environment and their profession*? The semi structured interviews offered the participants flexibility in how they responded by allowing them space to explore this idea. The responses offered a range of perspectives which were divided into: a holistic approach, anti-discriminatory practice and structural approaches. A holistic approach involved a respect for all life, which was particularly pertinent for those holding spiritual belief systems. Participants felt that an understanding of how the natural environment impacted on people's quality of life was vital, as within practice, they were supporting people through profound life events.

Throughout the interviews, there were numerous comments raised about not wanting to push ones value base on to others. Such feelings emerged in recognition of the power imbalance between participants and service users and the wish to practice in an empowering way. There was a willingness to accept others, even if their behaviours and attitudes were contrasting. Participants recognised that notions of class were often aligned with Western environmentalism and that those in crisis, were often not able to focus outside their immediate environment. Participant's perspectives incorporated understandings of structural inequality often grounded in globalisation and poverty. Participants were knowledgeable about how the poorest communities were marginalised and impacted on most by environmental degradation. The importance of community development and the need to think critically about structural factors emerged from participants. The exploration of the perspectives held by social workers with environmental interests is an original research idea. It holds some overlap with Närhi's (2004) study, which explored social workers action and knowledge production. However, Närhi's (2004) study focused on construction of knowledge rather than already held perspectives and focused on a small area in Finland.

Notions of practice were placed within a rural social work setting, distinct from urban practice. This setting was perceived as both a solution and a barrier to achieving change. It was clear that while the culturally specific nature of environmental social work has been previously recognised, the difference between the rural and urban settings needs full attention when developing practice interventions. Practices which involved using nature as a tool for change reoccurred across the interviews. Participants were very aware of the therapeutic benefits of nature for both service users and themselves. Several participants had been involved with youth justice activities such as community reparation and outdoor education to increase young people's confidence and skills. Participants expressed concern about the lack of opportunity for children to access nature and the effects of consumerism on their lifestyle.

When reflecting on environmental efforts in the work place participants spoke about the extent of travel necessary when undertaking social work in rural areas. Despite this difficulty, many of them had attempted to make changes through car sharing or in one case attempting to undertake home visits by public transport. The cycle to work scheme had been accessed by some participants, although most were unable to travel by bike across the vast geographical areas they covered. Many participants talked about recycling and composting although the success of such endeavours seemed to be dependent upon individual manager's attitudes. In addition, participants offered several examples of food based initiatives from micro approaches to group work structured programmes. Growing food was seen as way of reducing costs and eating healthily. Food was also recognised as a way to promote family cohesion and relationship building. The exploration of practices demonstrated that there was a lack of engagement and an overemphasis on remedial practice methods which was not an unexpected finding given the infancy of this subject. This supports calls for more practice examples to support the vision of environmental social work to emerge into practice. It is acknowledged that this research did not advance the production of practice examples and case studies.

Notions of power and empowerment were explored by asking what barriers participants faced when attempting to incorporate environmental social work into their practice. However, what was expressed by the participants went much deeper and elicited strong views on the current context of statutory social work practice in Wales. Participants expressed feelings of restrictiveness which included discussions on the impact of austerity and privatisation. Several were very disillusioned with the changes they had experienced and felt some regret over their career choice. This research question gave insight into what is preventing a visible environmental social work movement from emerging in Wales and captured the dilemmas inherent in the relationship between the social worker, service user and the state, identifying barriers to transforming practice. Whilst the method of semi structured interviews was appropriate to address the research questions, I feel that I could have increased the iterative nature of the interviews by strengthening the interview guide as the fieldwork progressed. Whilst I do not feel that this invalidates the findings in anyway, it is a learning point from undertaking fieldwork.

14.4 Action Stage

Participants engaged with an action planning stage which provided the opportunity to express their ideas about how the visibility of environmental social work could increase. This led to numerous suggestions which included areas such as influencing policy, online engagement, reducing travel and education. As a result of the action planning stage, I was able to move forward with the development of an action stage which was deemed critical, based on the methodological framework. The action stage aimed to raise awareness of the subject. Initially this involved learning if environmental / green social work was currently being taught in social work courses in Wales. This information was elicited through the use of a survey which asked about course content. Five out of the six universities providing social work education in Wales

responded. The universities were found to be providing a variety of courses consisting of MA, BA and BSc and had a total of 476 students enrolled. The survey asked the universities about course content on relevant subjects and from the responses, it was clear that community development was the only subject being taught explicitly. One university commented on the pressure to include 'essential content' which had a focus on individual casework. Another university found innovative ways to include more peripheral subjects. For example, the university had one module which included a book review assignment and Dominelli's (2012) publication '*Green Social Work'* was one of the options to review.

Two universities responded positively to the offer of a lecture on the subject. A post lecture evaluation form was developed to capture the student's views on the subject and their view on the validity of including this subject in the social work curriculum. A total of 32 students attended the lectures. The evaluation showed that students' knowledge on the subject prior to the lecture was low, and included some understanding of community activism and the therapeutic value of nature. A large majority felt the subject should be incorporated into the curriculum, although some were concerned about lack of space in the current curriculum. The extent to which the students felt the subject should be incorporated into the curriculum varied. The majority thought that a one off lecture was suitable. However, the majority of students stated that they would like to learn more about the subject and enjoyed the learning which had occurred. The utilisation of an action stage strengthens the divide between practice and research and offers an empowering framework which is conducive with anti-oppressive practice. Whilst the action stage held limitations in terms of reach and by no means achieved a full participatory action research methodology, it offered the opportunity to engage with every social work programme and raised awareness with both staff and students.

14.5 Reflections and recommendations

This research has contributed to knowledge creation as it has explored how social workers with environmental interests, connect the environment and their profession. From this exploration, the perspectives which emerged provide insight into the necessity for a holistic, anti-oppressive framework, which gives attention to structural factors. Without such perspectives, it is unlikely that wider factors, such as the natural environment, can be incorporated into practice. The identification of barriers which prevent the emergence of environmental social work into practice offers insight into the changes that are required to transform contemporary practice in Wales. The research evidenced high levels of disillusionment and restrictiveness felt by participants. This contribution to knowledge holds value for considering issues of retention across Wales. The research gives insight into the challenges of rural social work becoming sustainable in respect of covering vast areas and the loss of local services. In addition, it has also been evidenced that social work education in Wales is under pressure to comply with curriculum demands, leaving little opportunity for marginalised subjects. However, the students involved in this research clearly voiced a desire to learn more about the subject, recognising its importance. These contributions compliment previous primary research, but they also provide a culturally specific exploration.

In terms of impact, awareness raising of the subject was a major aim. This research has allowed me to engage with both university staff and students to raise awareness of the subject. I have presented at conferences and networked with academics with similar interests. I have recently published a paper in the journal *Critical and Radical Social Work* on climate change and food which emerged from this research and I have jointly published with a scientist in the journal of *Conservation Biology* on the subject of collaboration. I have also set up a Facebook group to support the development of green social work which is an area of environmental social work which I hold a particular interest in.

In respect of impact, this research started a critical conversation in Wales which will I believe will gain ground over the years to come, particularly when the impact of climate change starts to become more pronounced. This subject has the potential to thrive in Wales as the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a duty on public bodies to consider the long term impact of policies which includes economic, social and environmental considerations. In addition to this Local Authorities now have a duty under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014) to promote social enterprises and co-operatives which could become a space for environmental social work to develop and collaborate.

The undertaking of doctoral research has been a lengthy process which has led to a significant increase in my skill base. This hasn't been solely an academic endeavour as it has involved the development of a wide array of skills. I have learnt how to be systematic when reviewing literature and have improved my understanding of how methodological frameworks and methods need to be compatible. However, the main learning comes from the management of an in-depth project as a solo researcher. This has allowed the development of skills such as promoting and networking during the recruitment stage, presenting and defending my work at conferences, learning how to manage and analyse large amounts of data. There have been many challenges in working across Wales due to the rural nature and infrastructure but I have not regretted undertaking Welsh based research and feel that I have upheld anti-discriminatory practice by recognising and responding to the need for culturally specific responses.

Upon reflection, I feel that I should have adopted a more structured approach to the interviews. As this research was exploratory, I initially wanted to offer participants a wide remit to consider. However, the participants were not engaged with environmental social work debates and struggled with some of the questions as they had never considered the connection between social work and the environment prior to the interviews. In respect of my own future research in this area, I am interested in using a green social work framework to undertake more specific

research. The importance of food became apparent from the research and I would like to explore the experiences of food and food poverty amongst certain groups e.g. care experienced young people.

The subject of environmental social work will continue to gain ground as the impact of environmental degradation and climate change becomes more visible. Therefore the following recommendations have been developed:

Recommendations:

- It is important that social work students are educated to understand the responsibilities they hold in relation to ecological justice, as well as social justice. Therefore, this subject should be taught within social work education as part of modules focusing on community development. Interdisciplinary modules hold great potential.

- Providing the opportunity for social work students to engage in environmentally focused practice learning opportunities would enhance social workers ability to envisage what environmental social work looks like in practice and promote a wider approach to learn outside of the statutory sector.

- Recognition is needed of the vast knowledge and skills of social workers situated in the global south. Social workers in the global north would benefit from learning practice methods which transcend an individualised focus and does not separate the physical environment and wellbeing.

- Further research should be undertaken to consider how social work can incorporate community development principles into practice to ensure that social workers are able to re-engage with the community outside of matters relating to risk and crisis.

The future of environmental social work in Wales is unknown, however this research supports its beginnings by raising awareness of the subject and by recognising the potential it holds in an uncertain future, with finite resources but infinite opportunities.

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Appendix One

Keele University

RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES

4th June 2014

Holly Gordon
1 Preswylfa
Park Road
Llanfairfechan
Conwy
LL33 0AE

Dear Holly,

Re: The Nature of Social Work: A critical theorist research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales

Thank you for submitting your application for review. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel. The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Summary of Proposal	2	20th March 2014
Letters of Invitation	2	20th March 2014
Information Sheets	2	20th March 2014
Consent Forms	2	20th March 2014
Consent Forms for the use of quotes	2	20th March 2014
Advert	2	20th March 2014

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application, you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

pp

Dr Jackie Waterfield
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC   RI Manager
       Supervisor

Research and Enterprise Services, Keele University, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK
Telephone: + 44 (0)1782 734466   Fax: + 44 (0)1782 733740

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Keele University

The Nature of Social Work: **A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales. A Call for Participants:**

Are you a Qualified Social Worker living in Wales? Are you interested in the environment and environmental issues?

I am a registered social worker undertaking research on the issue of green social work and I am seeking participants who are able to participate in the research. Your participation will involve taking part in an interview lasting between one and two hours. The researcher will travel to interview you in a place and at a time convenient to you.

I look forward to hearing from potential participants interested in taking part in research about Green social work by responding to this advertisement. If you know of any social workers who you think might be interested in this research, please feel free to pass this leaflet on to them.

For more information about the research project please contact:

Holly Gordon h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk

Information Sheet for Employers of Participants

Study Title: *The Nature of Social Work:* A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales.

Aims of the Research

This research is undertaken as part of a Professional Doctorate in Social Work. Green social work is an emerging issue on an international platform and the UK social work profession has recently begun to consider and join in the debate.

The aim of this research project is to conduct interviews with social workers who have an interest in the environment and environmental issues. The research will ask 'What might green social workers and green social work in Wales currently look like?' It will consider if and how this interest emerges in practice and will explore barriers to integrating the environment into social work practice.

Invitation

Staff from this organisation / agency are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *The Nature of Social Work:* A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales. This project is being undertaken by Ms Holly Gordon who is a registered social worker and is undertaking a part-time Professional Doctorate in Social Work.

Before you decide whether or not to disseminate the request for participants, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

Your organisation / agency has been chosen because you employ or have members who are qualified social workers. A request for research participants is being disseminated across social care and environmental organisations / agencies in Wales. The participants will be qualified social workers who are interested in the environment and environmental issues. They will be interviewed by the researcher on this subject.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether to disseminate the request for research participants or not.

What will happen if an employer / member takes part?

The research will occur outside of working hours and will not impact on your employee's workload. I will travel to their area to complete an interview at a mutually convenient time and in a location convenient to them. I anticipate that the interview will last between one and two hours. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. The interview data they offer will be analysed alongside other interview data from others. A copy of the transcript will be shared with them to check for accuracy and for them to add or remove information if necessary. The findings of the research will be shared with participants and they will have the opportunity to consider taking part in a further phase of the research in the future. I would not contact them again without their permission to do so.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

There are no immediately obvious personal benefits. This doctorate research will contribute to Wales's existing body of social work research. This will be the first piece of Welsh research in this subject area. The research will aim to increase awareness of green social work.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

The participants name, work place details or address/location will not be disclosed at any stage of the research and in the write up of the findings. There are no obvious risks to taking part in the research project.

How will information about participants be used?

The material collected during interview will be transcribed and analysed by me. The analysis will involve looking for important themes across participant interviews. The findings from the interviews will be shared with participants. The findings are likely be published in social work academic journals and presented at social work conferences. The data they provide could be used for future research projects but only with their full written permission.

Who will have access to information about participants?

Participants' names will not be associated with the data provided as data will be anonymised and their identity will remain confidential. Also, in regards to confidentiality, they can withdraw interview content at any time. The data will be stored securely on a password-protected computer. This will be deleted 3 months after the research is concluded and the thesis is finalised. There is currently no intention on including this data in future research.

In relation to safeguarding issues, the research project is situated within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights. This means that legal requirements may sometimes override confidentiality. For example in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to the participant or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Who is funding and organising the research?

This is a self-funded course and I am responsible for organising the research. I receive supervision from an academic supervisor at the University of Keele.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Ms Holly Gordon on *h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk* alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact Mo Ray on m.g.ray@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Research & Enterprise Services
Dorothy Hodgkin Building
Keele University
ST5 5BG
E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk
Tel: 01782 733306

Keele University

Letter of invitation

Dear ……………………,

This is a letter of invitation inviting you to support doctoral research exploring the environment and social work in Wales. I am a social worker working within Wales undertaking a professional doctorate with Keele University. The focus of the research is to ask whether there is evidence of social work practice being influenced by environmental concerns and whether the notion of 'green social work' is in evidence. I am seeking participants to interview who are qualified social workers with an interest in the environment and environmental issues and who live in Wales.

Your agency / organisation has been contacted as you either employ social workers or you may have social workers who are members of your organisation. The interviews do not have to occur within the working week.

I enclosed more detailed information about the research project. I am requesting that the document entitled 'advert: Call for participants' is circulated to relevant employees / members. Please contact me if you require further information, at the following e mail address: h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk. My research supervisor is Mo Ray and if you have any concerns about the research process, do please feel you can contact her at m.g.ray@keele.ac.uk.

Best wishes,

Holly Gordon.

Information Sheet for Participants

Study Title: *The Nature of Social Work:* A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales.

Aims of the Research

This research is undertaken as part of a Professional Doctorate in Social Work. Green social work is an emerging issue on an international platform and the UK social work profession has recently begun to consider and join in the debate.

The aim of this research project is to conduct interviews with social workers that have an interest in the environment and environmental issues. The research will ask 'What might green social workers and green social work in Wales currently look like?' It will examine whether the notion of green social work is at all evident in practice as well as exploring possible barriers to integrating the environment into social work practice.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *The Nature of Social Work:* A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales. Ms Holly Gordon who is a registered social worker and is undertaking a part-time Professional Doctorate in Social Work is undertaking this project*.*

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part in the research, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and

what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you are a qualified social worker and you have indicated that you have an interest in the environment and environmental issues. You have either been made aware of this research by your employers or through your association with an environmental or social care organisation / group. A colleague may have suggested the researcher contact you to invite you to participate, as they are aware of your interests.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

I will travel to your area to complete an interview with you at a mutually convenient time and in an agreed location, convenient for you. An interview guide will guide the content of the interview. This will involve talking about the following key areas:

- Your own interest / experience in relation to the natural environment.
- Relationships between the environment and social work
- Your social work practice area and your approach to practice
- Opportunities and barriers to thinking about the environment in practice

I anticipate that the interview will last between one and two hours. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. The interview you give will be

analysed alongside other interview data from other participants. A copy of the transcript will be shared with you for you to check for accuracy and for you to add or remove information if necessary. The findings of the research will be shared with participants and you will have the opportunity to consider taking part in a further phase of the research in the future. I would not contact you again without your prior permission to do so.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

If you take part in an interview, I will record the interview and then transcribe it. You will have the opportunity to read your transcript through and make sure that it is accurate and you agree the contents. There will be a second phase of the research, which you may wish to take part in. But you will not be contacted about any future phase of the research without your prior permission.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

There are no immediately obvious personal benefits. It may be of interest to you to consider the topic in more detail as you have already indicated that you are interested in green issues. This doctorate research will contribute to Wales's existing body of social work research. This will be the first piece of Welsh research in this subject area and will aim to increase awareness of green social work.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

Your name, work place details or address/location will not be disclosed at any stage of the research and in the write up of the findings. There are no obvious risks to taking part in the research project.

How will information about me be used?

The material collected during interview will be transcribed and analysed by me. The analysis will involve looking for important themes across participants' interviews. The findings from the interviews will be shared with participants. The findings are likely be published in social work academic journals and presented at social work conferences. The data you provide could be used for future research projects but only with your full written permission.

Who will have access to information about me?

Your name and personal details will not be associated with the data you provide which will be fully anonymised. Your identity will remain confidential. You will have the opportunity to check your transcript for accuracy and you can withdraw interview content at that time. Your data will be stored securely on a password-protected computer. This will be deleted 3 months after the research is concluded and the thesis is finalised.

In relation to safeguarding issues, the research project is situated within the parameters of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights. Legal requirements may sometimes override offers of confidentiality. For example in circumstances where I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Who is funding and organising the research?

This is a self-funded course and I am responsible for organising the research. I receive supervision from an academic supervisor at the University of Keele.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You

should contact Ms Holly Gordon on *h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk* alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact her supervisor Mo Ray on m.g.ray@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study, please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research. Ms Leighton's contact details are:

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Research & Enterprise Services
Dorothy Hodgkin Building
Keele University
ST5 5BG
E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk
Tel: 01782 733306

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: *The Nature of Social Work:* A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Ms Holly Gordon e mail:* *h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk*

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.	☐
3	I agree to take part in this study.	☐
4	I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.	☐

5   I agree to the interview being audio recorded   ☐

6   I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects   ☐

7   I agree to be contacted with further information on this research or similar   ☐

                                            ☐

8   I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research projects.

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

*please delete as appropriate

CONSENT FORM

(for use of quotes)

Title of Project: *The Nature of Social Work:* A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Ms Holly Gordon e mail:* *h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk*

Please tick box if you agree with the statement

1   I agree for any quotes to be used ☐

2   I do not agree for any quotes to be used ☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Letter of invitation

Dear Social Worker,

I write to invite you to participate in a doctoral research project which is exploring the environment and social work. I am a social worker working in Wales and undertaking a professional doctorate at Keele University. The focus of the research is to ask whether there is evidence of social work practice being influenced by environmental concerns and whether the notion of 'green social work' is in evidence. I am seeking participants to interview who are qualified social workers with an interest in the environment and environmental issues and who live in Wales.

Your details have been obtained either through your employer or an organisation with whom you are a member. You may have seen an advertisement and contacted me directly, or a colleague may have referred you.

I enclosed more detailed information about the research project. I will be in touch to make the necessary arrangements. Please contact me if you require further information, at the following e mail address: h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk. My research supervisor is Mo Ray and if you have any concerns about the research process, do please feel you can contact her at m.g.ray@keele.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read about the research project. I very much hope to meet you in the near future.

Best wishes,

Holly Gordon.

Interview guide

This has been prepared to help guide participants whilst undertaking the semi structured interview. It will give direction to the interview.

- Tell me about your life / story in relation to the natural environment.

- Tell me how / if the environment and social work are connected for you and in more general terms.

- Tell me about your organisational context.

- Have you ever integrated the environment into practice?

- What barriers do you face? (Comment on power relations / notions of empowerment.

- Do you have any suggestions about how the environment / environmental issues can be more visible within social work? (An action plan will be developed as part of this project).

- Any additional comments?

Pen picture of the participants:

Joseph was born in Zimbabwe and is of black African descent. He was raised in a rural village and describes his family as peasant farmers. His family grew maize and other crops, largely for consumption but they also sold their crops to provide an income. Around 80 families lived in this village which was situated on land which was not particularly fertile. Hunger, flooding, soil erosion, drought and disease were features of this area with the more fertile and agriculturally viable land in Zimbabwe being owned by white British colonials. His father was the kraal head who held administrative governance of the village. As a child he attended a school which was a 10 kilometre walk from his home. Like many others, he later left his village to live in the city. He undertook his social work training in Zimbabwe. His training included community development which incorporated the environment. He went on to practice social work in a refugee camp where he assessed new arrivals, delivered workshops and supported repatriation / family tracing efforts. Joseph moved to Wales in 2001 finding employment as a social worker in a large city, later relocating to another city. He is currently practicing within Children's services'. He enjoys growing his own food and community activities. As a result of Joseph's origins, life experiences and training he believes that social work and the environment are inseparable.

Karolina grew up in a village of approximately 1000 people in East Germany during the Communist era. Whilst her community was economically poor, they sustained themselves well by growing and trading food with each family having land allocated to them. Life was transformed for Karolina at the age of 10 years when communism ended leaving wide scale unemployment and an eroding community cohesion. She left her village at the age of 27 years after completing her social work training in a town 1.5 hours away. Her social work placements

both include outdoor activities. She spent a 6 year period in Ireland working within tourism unable to find work as a social worker. During this time she took tourists on hill walks as well as becoming a coast guard. She has spent the last 2 years living in Wales. After initially struggling to register and find work as a social work, she has recently began working for a children's residential care home which has a strong emphasis on outdoor education. Karolina views nature as a tool for personal growth and the enhancement of wellbeing. She explains that interventions involving nature are popular within German social work practice. She is a keen gardener, hill walker and outdoor swimmer.

Margaret was raised in the South Wales Valley's, spending much of her childhood in nature. As a young adult she became an animal rights activist and an environmentalist which involved being a hunt saboteur and protester. She attended numerous eco camps and was arrested several times during protests and direct actions. She has been a strict vegan for over 3 decades and holds a value base which respects and understands the connection between all forms of life: people, animals and plants. Margaret explained that as she matured she became less active preferring to walk and bird watch. She came into social work through volunteering with adults with learning difficulties. After qualifying she spent her career in children's services'. She currently works in a family centre which supports / assesses contact for looked after children. For Margaret, there is no separation between social work and the environment as her value base focuses on respect for all life and living in harmony with nature.

Gabrielle spent her childhood in towns and had lots of contact with nature. She was raised within a socialist family and became aware of environmental issues at a young age. Born in England, she relocated to Wales in 1990. She spent 20 years employed as a secretary. Upon relocation to Wales she worked in administration for children's services' and became aware of sponsorship opportunities to train as a social worker. Her application was eventually successful and she qualified in 2008. She is currently employed by the Local Authority which sponsored her

as a children's social worker within a small rural generic team. She lives an ecologically aware lifestyle and limits her consumerism as a result of respecting the planet and an awareness of structural global inequalities. Gabrielle feels that the human species has advanced technologically but not emotionally. She has regular contact with nature, living in a rural area and frequently going on forest walks.

Terry was born and raised in Birmingham. His father had a keen interest in the natural environment and his childhood reflections are of the allotment and outings to collect edible berries. His family's food supply was predominantly grown / collected by themselves which is something he now does for his family by way of growing food and owning chickens and an orchid. Terry relocated to Wales 27 years ago. He became heavily involved in a community movement to save a piece of land on a disused quarry used by the public from development. The group went to on purchase the land through funding for community use. Terry makes strides towards an ecological and sustainable lifestyle in his personal life. He began his career as a probation officer engaging in community reparation tasks. After going into children's social work he continued to focus on engaging young people through the outdoors. He later co-founded a therapeutic residential care home for young people with sexually harmful behaviours. Terry has developed numerous eco themed activities and uses nature as a tool for promoting change. He has stepped back from day to day management but remains heavily involved.

Ravinder was raised in a rural area in Trinidad. Her interest in the environment has developed over the last 3-4 years which emerged as a result of meditation and being a member of the Braham Kumaris World Spiritual University. She teaches raga yoga meditation for free to interested community members. As a result of her meditation practice, Ravinder has become more conscious of animal welfare and caring for the planet. Ravinder qualified as a social worker in Canada. She now lives in Wales and works as a social worker in an older people's team. For Ravinder, human beings should serve nature and never abuse the Earth's resources. She

perceives both social work and contact with the natural environment as part of her identity but is unsure how these may integrate together.

Carol grew up in the Midlands, England. She had contact with nature as a child and enjoyed walking holidays. She has been a leader in the Girl Guide's for many years running the Duke of Edinburgh scheme as a qualified leader. Her hobbies include geocaching which includes walking, mainly in nature. Occasionally she walks with the Ramblers association. Carol is employed within a small Welsh Local Authority. She is a qualified AMHP, working within adult services'. Her role specifically focuses on development and service improvement. She enjoys the therapeutic benefits of nature as this contact promotes her emotional wellbeing.

Seren was raised in a family which grew their own food due to economic reasons and were largely sustainable in this respect. She was raised in a small Welsh village with strong community relations. Her childhood was spent in nature, cycling and walking. As an adolescent, Seren became influenced by a more consumer lifestyle. However during her 20's she became involved in protest movements involving environmental issues and nuclear disarmament marches, developing a more politicised outlook. She currently lives in a town on the coast. She enjoys hiking and has recently become very interested in growing her own food which was influenced by economic considerations. She has made other lifestyle changes regarding sustainability in recent years. Seren qualified as a social worker in 2006 and works within an adult mental health service.

Simon spent his childhood in a city, moving to rural Wales as an adult. Simon has always loved being outdoors in nature. His long summer break from school would be spent camping with his family as his parents worked at the local Churches summer camp. Simon trained as a bricklayer then became a dry stone waller. He has always undertaken social work employment on a part time basis and has continued his dry stone walling business. Simon has an ecologically aware lifestyle. He grows most of his food, cycles to work when possible, using alternative energy

technologies as well as engaging in a local community run hydroelectric scheme. For Simon social work and the environment are connected through social justice issues. He has a background in youth offending and is currently employed as an adoption support social worker in a rural Local Authority. Simon utilises the environment in his practice with service users to promote personal growth.

Sue was raised in a Welsh rural area. She spent much of her childhood outdoors in nature walking, playing and horse riding. She has been practising elements of Druidry since her twenties but officially joined the faith a few years ago. Her spiritual belief system leads her to feel that all life is interconnected and cannot be separated. This includes people, nature and work. Sue and her husband attend Druid gatherings and ceremonies around the UK. It is Sue's spiritual beliefs which drive her interest in the environment. Sue initially qualified as a nurse, changing to social work after her 5 children grew up. She has worked in children's services' for the past 13 years and has always worked within the health and social care sector.

Joan was born in a rural Welsh village and remains living within 5 miles of it close to her family. Her parents helped instil an appreciation of nature in Joan. Her childhood involved lots of contact with nature. Joan trained as a social worker at a university a few hours away from her area. For Joan social work and the environment are connected through value base. He is employed by her Local Authority, working in children's services'. She is a regular hill walker and enjoys walking holidays with her family. Joan is about to complete a BA in environmental studies which she has undertook part time over the last 6 years. During this course she has enjoyed exploring the area of structural global inequality.

Einir is a Buddhist which informs her relationship with other life forms. She feels that humans are dominating nature and believes that this same power imbalance is present in social work practice too. Einir's spiritual belief system enables her to reflect upon the interconnection between all life. She regularly meditates as part of her practice and attends Buddhist events.

Einir lives in a rural area with numerous animals. She enjoys kayaking and spending time outdoors. She has been a social worker for many years in a variety of settings within children's services, mental health, and hospital social work. She is currently working within adult services'.

Erina spent her childhood growing up in an ex mining town in the North East of England. Whilst she spent a lot of time outdoors playing with friends and cycling, her family did not promote her interest in nature. She moved to Wales to study marine biology at university and has spent the remainder of her time living in a rural setting. Erina lives in a cottage with her family, owning 4 acres of land. She has planted trees and created a compost toilet on the land. She enjoys the sense of community within the area and particularly enjoys living by the mountains and the sea. She is a regular cyclist and walker. Erina became actively interested in gender equality issues. She volunteered for a rape crisis centre and is now a trainer for a domestic abuse awareness course for practitioners. She is employed as a social work in the charity sector. She has recently delivered a group course for children which utilises nature and growing food as a therapeutic tool as well as for educational purposes.

Sally is from a sheep farming family in North Wales. She felt forced to leave this area due to a lack of opportunities and relocated to England. In relation to this move, she refers to herself as an economic migrant. She is a first language Welsh speaker and is a Welsh based practitioner. She has previously spent time living in a community on a small holding in Shropshire which grew food and produced honey for consumption and sale. Sally continues to live across the border and commutes to her job daily. She has a degree in international studies and an MA in social work. She has a strong understanding of community developmental issues within North Wales and feels concerned about the changes to local communities due to a lack of economic opportunities and poor infrastructure.

Appendix 11

Keele University

RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES

19th November 2014

Holly Gordon
1 Preswylfa
Park Road
Llanfairfechan
LL33 0AE

Dear Holly,

Re: The Nature of Social Work: A critical theorist research project exploring green social work in Wales

Thank you for submitting your application for review. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel. The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Summary of Proposal	2	1st November 2014
Letters of Invitation Email	2	1st November 2014
Information Sheets	2	1st November 2014
Follow Up Email	2	1st November 2014
Survey for University	2	1st November 2014
Post lecture evaluation form for students	2	1st November 2014

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application, you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

pp

Dr Jackie Waterfield
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC   RI Manager
         Supervisor

Research and Enterprise Services, Keele University, Staffordshire, ST5 5BG, UK
Telephone: + 44 (0)1782 734466   Fax: + 44 (0)1782 733740

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E mail to Universities

Dear Head of the Social Work department,

I write to invite you to participate in a doctoral research project which is exploring the environment and social work. I am a registered social worker working in Wales, undertaking a professional doctorate at Keele University. The focus of the research is to ask whether there is evidence of social work practice being influenced by environmental concerns and whether the notion of 'green social work' is in evidence. I am currently in phase two of the research which considers the role of green social work within social work education in Wales.

The university has been contacted as it delivers social work education. I am requesting that the attached brief survey is completed. I am further offering a single lecture on green social work to occur within the current academic year within 4 Universities as indicated in the survey. Students will be asked to complete an anonymous post lecture form relating to the value of green social work education.

I attach more detailed information about the research project. I will be in touch to make the necessary arrangements. Please contact me if you require further information, at the following e mail address: h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk. My research supervisor is Mo Ray and if you have any concerns about the research process, do please feel you can contact her at m.g.ray@keele.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read about the research project. I very much hope to work with you in the near future.

Best wishes,

Holly Gordon.

Information Sheet for Participating Universities

Study Title: *The Nature of Social Work:* A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales.

Researcher: Ms Holly Gordon: Professional Doctoral candidate (Social Work)

Aims of the Research

This research is undertaken as part of a Professional Doctorate in Social Work. Green social work is an emerging issue on an international platform and the UK social work profession has recently begun to consider and join in the debate. The initial stage of this research involved conducting interviews across Wales with social workers that have an interest in the environment and environmental issues. The research asked 'What might green social workers and green social work in Wales currently look like?' As a result of the findings the second phase will now consider if green social work has a place within social work education in Wales.

This research involves a survey to social work departments in Universities in Wales to ascertain the extent to which key concepts related to Green Social Work are currently taught in social work programmes. The survey will take around 5 minutes to complete. Following on from the survey, 4 Universities will be approached to host a single lecture to social work students on green social work being given within the academic year 2014-2015. The lecture will be delivered by myself, and will provide an introduction to the subject of 'green social work' to students.

Invitation

As the Head of the Social Work Department, you are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *The Nature of Social Work: A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales*. This study forms phase two of a research study undertaken by me as part of a part-time Professional Doctorate in Social Work. I am a registered social worker who practices and lives in Wales.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part in the research, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why has this University been chosen?

This institution has been chosen because it is a University / Higher Education Institution which delivers social work education in Wales.

Does the University have to take part?

As Head of the Social Work Department you are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if the University takes part?

Your department is asked to undertake a short survey in relation to course content on green social work. This will ask if key concepts such as ecological justice and sustainability are present in course content. I am seeking to engage beyond the survey phase with four Universities by requesting that the Social Work Department hosts a single lecture on green social work during the 2014-2015 academic year to social work students. This lecture would be given by myself and will be cost neutral to the Institution. I am willing to share resources and materials with social work lecturers. Subject to their consent, participating, students will be asked complete a short anonymous post lecture evaluation.

If the University takes part, what do we have to do?

The Social Work Department is invited to complete the short survey which is also attached with this e mail will take around 5 minutes to complete. If you agree to me providing a lecture on green social work I will need to make the arrangements with a named member of staff e.g. in relation to dates, times, venue. The purpose of the lecture is to expose students to the subject and to establish their views on its relevance to social work education. The University can view the anonymous student post lecture evaluation forms. The research aims to increase the visibility of the subject of green social work across Wales. A follow up e-mail will be sent to the Head of the Social Work department to seek their views on the future of green social work with the curriculum.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

The lecture will provide an opportunity for further learning for social work students. It may support curriculum development in the future and increase interest in an emerging social work subject with a rapidly growing body of knowledge. This will be the first piece of Welsh research in this subject area and aims to increase awareness of green social work. Beyond raising this as an important and emerging area for social work, there are no immediately obvious benefits.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

There are no obvious risks to taking part in the research project.

How will information about the University be used?

By completing the survey the social work department will provide me with a Wales wide perspective on social work course content relating to green social work. This survey can be

completed anonymously if requested. However, as Head of the Social Work department you may wish to highlight areas of good practice in which case, choosing to identify your programme may be desirable to you. In regards to the green social work lecture, the evaluation forms are anonymous for both students and Universities.

Who will have access to information about the University?

The University's name will remain anonymous if requested. The University can withdraw from the research at any time. All data will be stored securely on a password-protected computer. This will be deleted 3 months after the research is concluded and the thesis is finalised.

Who is funding and organising the research?

This is a self-funded course and I am responsible for organising the research. I receive supervision from an academic supervisor at the University of Keele.

What if there is a problem?

As Head of the Social Work department if you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Ms Holly Gordon on *h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk* *alternatively*, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact her supervisor Mo Ray on m.g.ray@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study, please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research. Ms Leighton's contact details are:

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Research & Enterprise Services
Dorothy Hodgkin Building
Keele University
ST5 5BG
E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk
Tel: 01782 733306

Example of completed survey (anonymised)

Green Social Work in Wales Survey

You are being requested to complete the following survey which will be incorporated into the overall research findings of the project. By completing this form you are giving consent for the information to be used by the researcher. Participation is voluntary and your contribution can be withdrawn from the research at any time.

I do agree to the identity of this University and aspects of good practice being shared with the research findings.

I do agree to quotes from this survey being used.

Name of institution (optional): **DETAILS REMOVED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY**

Number of students registered on the:

BA award: 90 (current intake 30 per year)

MA award: 40 (current intake 20 per year)

Are any of the following subjects included in the curriculum?

- Green social work / environmental social work theory
- The natural environment
- Community development
- Sustainability (Environmental, economic and / or social)
- Ecological Justice

- Any other related topics

Yes – community development

If YES, please give a description of the taught content, including the module title the subject is included in:

Community development is a core topic across a number of modules, mainly:

ASQ101 Introduction to Social Work (BSc)

ASQ106 Social Work in Practice 1 (BSc)

SWM01 Theories and perspectives in Social Work (BSc)

Material is delivered by a guest speaker with an extensive background in community development. Lectures tend of be 'one-off' content and include discussion of: what is meant by community and what is community development: principles and values of community development: approaches to community development in an international context.

Other areas listed above are not currently part of the taught curriculum. The curriculum is currently very full due to professional body requirements to cover a wide range of topics mainly centred on individual casework and assessment and working with families. It is challenging to locate space for the above topics, although they remain highly relevant.

If NO, has this subject been considered for inclusion in future modules/teaching areas?

Please indicate if you are willing to be contacted in relation to the offer of a lecture on green social work:

Yes

If yes, please provide details of who should be contacted, including their e mail address and telephone number:

DETAILS REMOVED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY

Please return to: h.l.gordon@keele.ac.uk

Thank you for your time.

Keele
University

Post Lecture Form

This lecture forms part of the doctoral research project entitled *The Nature of Social Work: A research project exploring Green Social Work in Wales*. The initial stage of this research involved conducting interviews across Wales with social workers that have an interest in the environment and environmental issues. As a result of the findings, the second phase will now consider if green social work has a place within social work education in Wales. Your university has agreed to a lecture being given to students on this subject. As part of this process, students are being given the opportunity to give their views below.

The completion of this form is both anonymous and optional. By completing this form you agree to give consent for the responses to be included in the research findings, including quotes. This form may be shared with the University.

I agree to the below feedback being used for this research: ☑

I agree to the below feedback to being anonymously quoted: ☑

Prior to this lecture, were you aware of green social work?

No I was not aware of 'green' being a concept / form of practice within social work.

Prior to this lecture, had you considered the relevance of the natural environment for social work? (Please explain your answer)

Yes, I have considered the relevance of the natural environment for social work, but more as a part of 'therapeutic' support work, e.g. greenspace for communities, service users, not in terms of what was presented today.

Do you feel that the subject of green social work should be part of the social work curriculum? Yes / No (Please indicate and explain your answer)

Yes, as what happens to the environment, affects the person / community. Additionally the SW is asked to support people in their environment, this must be seen as Environment in terms of planet, not just home or neighbourhood.

If yes, to what extent?

To the extent of education for and awareness for stakeholders, Local authorities, universities.

Has this lecture made you want to learn more about the subject?

Definitely

Any additional comments?

Very Informative and thought provoking.

Thank you for your time.

Table of post lecture evaluation responses:

Prior to this lecture, were you aware of green social work?	
Yes – 5	No – 27

Prior to this lecture, had you considered the relevance of the natural environment for social work?	
Yes: 14	No: 17
- Using nature with SU's in the past - Using nature with a MH group / geocaching - Have been involved with local anti-fracking campaigns - I have considered the relevance of the natural environment for SW but more as a part of therapeutic support work eg green space for communities, SU's not in terms of what was presented today - I had considered the natural environment in terms of living conditions and perhaps the benefits of utilising outdoor space for therapeutic purposes. However I had not considered how global the scale of green social work could be - I hadn't thought about the relevance of the natural environment although only in practice if I felt that engagement with nature was something that would promote the Service Users wellbeing - I had considered on a simple level the need for green areas, particularly for children and adults in a therapeutic sense - To some extent in terms of poverty, but not to the knowledge that was expressed to me today about green social work - To some degree, the recent events in Syria had made me consider how global events would have a further impact on SW closer to home - Only the therapeutic side ie walking on the beach	- It hasn't been discussed in lectures - I hadn't connected the two - Not really considered it - Didn't know enough - Not specifically – understand the connection completely now - I had not given it any thought - It wouldn't be a readily obvious subject to consider - I had focussed on the social environment and how that effects human behaviour etc. - It was good to see how variable environments can be - I am aware of the environment in my personal life, but not for social work NB: One student did not answer this question

Do you feel that the subject of green social work should be part of the social work curriculum?		
Yes: 23	No: 4	Unsure: 3
- I feel if GSW was part of the degree it would enable future practice - As it is very educational and very interesting - It would make students aware you weren't previously - Knowledge is power! More information shared will improve the experience - I feel more international perspectives is needed in SW education - It needs to be included as it's not an area explored in statutory SW placements - It's good to be aware of the wider picture – of the wider environment in which we live and global issues we have - What happens to the environment effects the person / community. Additionally the SW is asked to support people in their environment, this must be seen as environment in terms of planet, not just home or neighbourhood - I feel that it was a thought provoking area to look at and was interesting. However a huge amount of stress is placed on reflective practice and I question whether a position like this can be compatible with this. I accept that there are many ideologies but GSW seems particularly driven and may be inflexible when reflexive approaches are prioritised - Our future depends in being aware of what is happening in our environment - I think it's important to have an understanding of GSW as it is something affecting us now and in our future - I believe the subject is critical in understanding aspects of the environmental impact upon vulnerable individuals, however implementing this appears challenging and quite vague - I think it plays a part in people's lives so the environment is important to acknowledge how that could affect our interaction with Service Users	- We do not spend enough time on skills and knowledge required more frequently in practice. However, an awareness presentation is acceptable - I think the MSc programme is so compact and there is so much to learn	- I believe there is a large domain of SW currently, it should perhaps be considered but fundamentals of working as a SW should be prioritised - I feel with the huge range of duties SW have along with admin paperwork, GSW seems more work for already over worked SWs NB: two students left this blank

Has this lecture made you want to learn more about the subject?		
Yes: 21	No: 5	Maybe: 4
- About eco therapy and if this connects with my geocaching group - I will look further into subject to develop on my present knowledge - I would like to learn more about human impact on the environment - The lecture was another perspective and also showed how corporations affect people in different areas of the world - I shall be conducting more research / reading on the terms mentioned today - The subject has given me a perspective I would not necessarily have considered as part of SW before and is still an aspect I find difficult to relate to the role of SW - It has intrigued me, I will perhaps be more aware of the subject going forward - I was unaware of it before and do think it's an interesting and important subject - I will do some additional reading on this subject	- It has raised my awareness of how I can attempt practice in a green way but I don't want to learn more at this stage	- Very important subject - I think I will look at it in the future NB two students left this blank

Appendix 17

Green Social Work Facebook Page: