

Making a Difference:

Selection in nursing

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For, of course, C.P.

With thanks for everything.

Declaration

I hereby declare the work in this thesis, except where explicit attribution is made, to be entirely my own.

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Abstract

Selection in healthcare in the UK has in the past been dominated by approaches related to ideas from the field of work psychology. Work psychology positions selection as a method which, if designed appropriately and followed exactly, can predict particular outcomes, such as “the right applicant” (or the wrong one). Methods are discussed (and researched) as having properties such as reliability, validity and fairness, and such properties as independent of the actors who design and “apply” the method.

This thesis attempts to understand selection differently. Drawing on ideas from Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), an ethnographic study was conducted of selection events in nursing degree courses. At three universities selection events were observed and interviews were conducted with academic staff, administrators and service users and carers who were involved with interviewing prospective students. Data generated was analysed using immersive approaches, continuous and reflective writing and concurrent reading of literature that became relevant through engagement with the data.

Undertaking an ethnographic study, thinking with concepts from ANT, allowed for selection to be understood differently from the tenor of current research. In this version selection becomes a social practice with entities such as methods, applicants or selectors effects of a series of negotiations during which more or less stable connections are formed. Difference or same-ness, treated in the literature and by selectors as preceding selection encounters, become visible as the effects of translation.

As practices vary across different locations and people, effects of interactions (be that methods or ideas of “right or wrong applicants”) become highly localised and contingent. Here this study makes an original contribution to the empirical field of selection practice as well as to the theoretical field which seeks to understand and classify selection as mere observation.

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Reflective Statement

Introduction

Throughout my studies for the doctorate in education I have built foundations for my own academic and otherwise professional work, developed my understanding of theory and my skills as an active, practical researcher. In every phase of the doctoral programme I have (first through mere interest and later by design) combined learning and interrogation of theory with empirical research on topics both important to me at the time and (as evidenced by the published work of other authors) of importance to the wider professional community of healthcare practitioners. In the following I will outline my development, using the stages of the Ed D as a framework.

Foundations of professionalism (FoP)

I came to the doctoral programme with no clearly framed project and no substantial knowledge of sociology. The latter was one of the reasons for my feeling overwhelmed at the start of the FoP module. It felt like I had never engaged with theory before. My colleagues seemed to be versed in Durkheim, Weber, Marx, leaving me intimidated and feeling inferior. Lecturers spoke in a language that felt unusual and, at times, as difficult to penetrate as the set texts students were asked to read. In addition, the concept of “professionalism”, to me, appeared a very English thing, akin to the notion of class. I had not thought about the boundaries created within and by this concept.

In order to address some of my perceived shortcomings I started reading sociology and methodology primers. In addition, in order to give my learning some anchor, I designed a small research project on competition amongst medical students which helped me to work with what I read and contextualise it somehow. Working on the FoP assignment (through conducting a study) was the first time I integrated theory and my own empirical work and although the result was limited in terms of quality, it constituted a significant step in my development. As a nurse working in medical education I began to see the professional barriers affecting my work as well as a space that could be available for people like me despite such barriers. I began to see medical students differently as I had engaged with them differently; less as a teacher and more as a person with an interest in their experiences. Academically, I was introduced to ethnographic monographs, namely “Boys in White” (Becker et al., 1961) and “Making doctors” (Sinclair, 1997) and the notion of theoretical frameworks, such as “Total institutions” (Goffman, 1961) or “The hidden curriculum” (for example Hafferty & O'Donnell, 2014).

Methods of Enquiry 1 (MoE1)

In this module I was asked to propose a research project. Having done a small study on competition I now tried to engage with another, seemingly pertinent, issue in medical education: mistreatment of students. During my engagement with MoE1 I built on learning from FoP as well as developing new insights and skills. I proposed to frame my analysis around Bourdieu's concept of “Field” (Bourdieu, 1977) as well as working again with the notion of the hidden curriculum. MoE1 introduced me to the concepts of ontology and epistemology and made me take and justify a personal and political stance

through which my research should be read. I began to engage with ideas of hegemony, reading (but not really using) Marx and Gramsci. I read Elias and Foucault in an unfocused but interested way. Although the aforementioned theorists (apart from Bourdieu) did not feature significantly (or at all) in my submitted work, I feel I somewhat learned to read dense texts, moved further and further away from positivist thinking and gained an idea of what “was out there”.

In addition, I thematically ordered literature into a coherent argument for the first time, learned to edit my work to meet a required word count (preparing me for the much more substantial pain of having to let go of content I would experience during later doctoral work) and mastered a referencing programme, thereby simplifying work on future submissions both for the doctoral course as well as for journal publication.

Professionally, during MoE1 I, for the first time, analysed professional guidance and policy in relation to a specific enquiry. This not only helped me to position my research but also gave me a much greater insight into the field I had been working in for more than six years at that time. This gave me confidence and, as I felt at the time, clout to participate in discussions and projects I would have been (or seen myself as) disqualified from before.

Using psychoanalytic perspectives to make sense of education and educational research (PsychEd)

This module changed the way I understood and conducted doctoral study. After finishing the PsychEd module, I felt more secure in working with theory and convinced that the research questions I would want to ask could not be answered through quantitative or positivist approaches.

Everything in PsychEd was new: the lecturers, their approaches, the concepts they talked about and the way they talked about those concepts. The module introduced me to psychoanalysis in various guises and, amongst other things, taught me that a concept or an author might not be fixed. Early Freud might not be late Freud and my reading of Freud might not be that of others. Although this may seem an obvious observation, it was not to me and opened a world of creativity. I believe it was then that I became interested in methodology not as prescription but as a way of interrogating the world. During the module, I was introduced to authors such as Melanie Klein, Jaques Lacan and Slavoj Zizek, all of whom influenced work I have done since in more or less formal ways. In addition, I was introduced to notions of structuralism and poststructuralism which, although not adopted in my PsychEd assignment, would prove to be material for both my institution focused study (IFS) and my thesis.

An important aspect of PsychEd was the freedom students were given in designing and conceptualising their argument. This created substantial problems for me. As had become habit now, I conducted a small focus-group based study on a matter of professional concern (ritual humiliation in medical education, linked to the work I had done for MoE1), data from which I analysed using object relations theory. However, the freedom I had made my work unfocused, I read and read papers and books and felt as though I was drowning in theory. A lecturer who later became my doctoral supervisor helped me to organise my ideas into a coherent argument. I have since supervised many post-graduate students myself and my approach to supervision is modelled on the kindness and focus on productiveness I experienced then.

Methods of Enquiry 2 (MoE2)

During MoE2 I conducted another small study on mistreatment in medical education, this time based on individual interviews with medical students. During this study, I mainly developed technical and analytical skills. I learned about and “tried out” different approaches to interviewing, transcribed and, using NVIVO for the first time, analysed interview data creating a concept map from both literature and my data in order to establish what my research could add to the overall empirical and theoretical canon. Although an insight I had developed earlier, the work on MoE2 emphasised the difficulty of conducting research. I struggled with design, recruitment of participants, ethical implications, transcription and analysis, and turning work into a coherent argument.

By the end of the four taught modules I had gained and developed a number of insights and skills, and had engaged with a number of theories and approaches. A clear statement as to my development as a doctoral student can be seen in my change of doctoral supervisor which was based on what I perceived as a methodological disagreement. Actually being able to argue a methodological position felt like an achievement in itself. Professionally my work on student mistreatment had led me to get involved more in personal and professional development sections of the curriculum.

Institution focused study (IFS)

My initial idea was to explore in an IFS whether medical education favoured a particular type of student which I described in terms of gendered traits.

The idea of traits as an analytical tool (although I did not see them as such at the time) stemmed from a combination of my own experiences of working in an environment dominated by female colleagues whom I perceived to have masculine traits (a concept I had engaged with during the MOE2 module). Discussions with my supervisor led me to question the notion of traits as fixed entities *per se* and led me to ask what fixity actually means. In order to explore this I investigated a prevalent concept in health care, patient centredness, and the way it is performed in practice. Although I had been prepared in PsychEd for thinking about performed entities, during the IFS I, for the first time, engaged more substantially with poststructuralist ideas and adjacent methodologies. I read about, learned about and practiced discourse analysis, namely in what I understood to be Foucauldian genealogy. One reason for this was that although I had engaged with some of Foucault's ideas before I felt as though I wanted "to do something" with Foucault in order to understand concepts better. Along the way, I engaged with various forms of discourse analysis and conducted what I believe to be my by then most complex research project. Combining analysis of curriculum and policy documents, lecture transcripts and focus groups I created what I believe to be an original argument that framed patient centredness as discursive practice. This project vastly increased my technical and analytical skills as well as (in hindsight) confidence in my work. This project influenced my professional work in at least two ways: teaching of patient centredness became exploratory rather than didactic and I began to look for a

different job as my academic and personal self-image did not seem to correspond any more to that reflected back at me by my medical colleagues.

A major factor in my academic development, in addition to the formalised approaches discussed so far, were the reading groups run by my supervisor and colleagues as well as those by other students of the IOE, namely those by the LGBTQ group.

In discussions, I was not only introduced to literature and research approaches that focused on practice but could also learn how other people understood and enacted various methodologies and ideas.

Thesis

By the start of my thesis project I had successfully applied for a post in nursing education. I was now called an academic. This would not have been possible had I not been able to convince an interview panel of my abilities. Studying on a doctoral programme for four years had clearly given me ideas and skills which I had learned to communicate and apply, not only in research projects but also in my approaches to lecturing. The thesis project itself is discussed in detail below. To me the most important addition was that I now added observation of practice to the methods I employed. Worried that employing discursive analytical methods again would lead me to make similar arguments to those made in my IFS about a different topic, I chose to engage with a different but related idea of Actor Network Theory. It was through the work on my thesis that I came to realise that my research interest, for now anyway, lies not in describing or establishing principles but in observing and analysing enacted practices.

Conclusion

My doctoral studies were not guided by an overall approach, following one line of interest. I believe to have demonstrated above that the Ed D, for me, was research training and a way of identifying a place within my professional and research community. Over the course of the doctorate I have developed an interest in methodologies and their application to issues of practice that affect me personally/ professionally but are also of concern to the wider research or professional communities.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis aims to explore selection into nursing degree courses as a social practice. The inspiration for conducting the ethnographic study which formed the basis of this thesis stemmed from the political and professional responses to what is commonly referred to as the “Mid-Staffs Scandal” and my parallel professional move from being a medical educator to becoming a senior lecturer in nursing.

The Francis Report (Francis, 2013b) is concerned with establishing the mechanisms that had contributed to the failings in the Midstaffordshire Foundation Trust, which had led to the unexpected death of 400-1200 people between 2005 and 2008. A main contributing factor to these failings was seen to be what Care Minister Norman Lamb called a “cover-up culture” in the NHS (Butler, 2013). Although the report acknowledged the impact of “structural changes” on patient safety (Francis, 2013a, p. 17) recommendations were largely concerned with addressing “negative aspects of a culture” (ibid., p. 65).

In the executive summary (ibid., pp. 4-5), amongst others, the following key recommendation is made:

Enhance the recruitment, education, training and support of all the key contributors to the provision of healthcare, but in particular those in nursing and leadership positions, to integrate the essential shared values of the common culture into everything they do.

In support of the Francis report the UK government published a series of policy papers in which it introduced processes that it stated would lead to the fulfilment of the key recommendation stated above, and with Health Education England (HEE) a regulatory body to supervise such processes. In “Patients first and foremost” (DH, 2013) the government emphasises the notion of values to accomplish such a cultural change and introduces Value Based Recruitment (VBR) as the technology with which the presence of values should be assessed and assured. HEE (2014) defines VBR as follows:

Values Based Recruitment is an approach which attracts and selects students, trainees or employees on the basis that their individual values and behaviours align with the values of the NHS Constitution.

“Patients first and foremost” states that recruitment should be based on values and declares what these values are. Ways in which values should be *assessed* (my emphasis, DH, 2013, p. 70) during the recruitment process are suggested to be “face-to-face interviews and scenario testing to assess candidates’ attitudes towards caring, compassion and other necessary professional values” (ibid.).

As a lecturer in nursing part of my job entails involvement with selection in nursing and so, to me, an opportunity was presented to explore an issue both new to my professional field as well as to myself as a practitioner. This, to me, constituted a justification for conducting research. In addition, a brief initial scope of the literature suggested that at the time this study was conceived no extensive literature into VBR existed either in the UK or elsewhere, neither in nursing nor in other professional fields. What did exist was literature into selection methods.

Empirical research into selection appeared to be chiefly concerned with methods of selection, their validity and reliability in predicting academic success. A large number of researchers seemed concerned with these qualities in relation to specific tests, such as interviews (for example Cliffordson, 2002; Ehrenfeld & Tabak, 2000; Moscoso, 2000) or situational judgment tests (SJT) (for example Boursicot et al., 2012; Patterson et al., 2012; Strahan et al., 2005), and multiple mini-interviews (MMI) (for example McBurney & Carty, 2009; Perkins et al., 2013).

The research conducted, however, appeared to be based on measuring numbers or entities before and after selection had taken place. In that, the research on selection seemed to demonstrate a desire to predict success and future events in general. This desire seemed often to lead to an expression of statements as numbers or measures that could be listed, presented and examined, away from the context in which they were produced. Numbers in one location were compared with numbers in another location. Research seemed to be concerned with observing predictable patterns with which people's actions could be anticipated, with selection method being given an ability to predict "right" or "wrong" applicants.

What seemed to be missing from the literature were accounts of selection as it happened, rather than reports of selection outcomes, which seemed always one or two steps removed from action; what seemed to be missing was the practice of selection. I therefore decided that there was a clear space to conduct observational, ethnographic research on the practice of VBR.

When I first contacted sites which seemed suitable for observation and asked what kind of selection approach was taken, I was often told; “We’re doing MMI” or “We’re doing group interviews.” Admissions tutors seemed to think that this explained their entire admissions approach and, and this is important, I understood. A shorthand explained to me everything that was going on. I had read about different interview approaches and knew (or so I thought) what they entailed.

When I started fieldwork two things happened.

One, VBR seemed to be just one of many things that selectors focused on. I was often told of one or two specific questions that dealt with values or that the whole approach was somehow value-based. People debated the value of VBR but in their everyday practice it did not seem to be as prominent as I would have expected.

Two, selection appeared to be much more complex than could be expressed by reference to a selection method. While before I took selection as something that academics do, I now became aware that other people were involved as well, for example administrators and service users. Academics and other people also seemed to be doing much more than asking questions and ticking boxes on forms in response to answers. They bickered, complained, asked for help with the way forms should be used and judgments should be made. People talked and wrote and but how talking and writing related to each other, when observed, to me seemed much less obvious as the reports in the literature had me believe.

Over time the focus of my enquiry therefore changed from looking at a specific method (VBR) to selection in nursing more generally. I became interested in describing and analysing the practice of selection, trying to discuss more than methods or individual people.

This thesis is the product of this engagement with selection as a practice. It is situated in fields of practice which have all been ethnographically researched before: nursing (Allen, 2004) and more general healthcare (M. Bloor, 2007), education (Gordon et al., 2007) and work (V. Smith, 2007). Although there exist ethnographies on becoming a nurse (for example Simpson et al., 1979) and a number of seminal studies on becoming doctors (most notably Becker et al., 1961; and Sinclair, 1997), such ethnographies make, if at all, only fleeting comment on selection. Other ethnographies (for example Chambliss, 1996; Porter, 1995; Savage, 1995) explore nursing work but focus on the relationships between people, either between nurses and patients or nurses and members of other professions.

This thesis, following ideas of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) treats work as more than that which people do or do to each other. Treating selection work as inter-relational it discusses effects of actions as observed rather than hypothesised. In doing so it makes an original contribution to the fields of nursing selection and nursing education as well as a theoretical contribution to the research of (professional) practice.

In Chapter 2, I will develop the empirical and theoretical basis of my argument.

Critically engaging with literature on selection I will argue that the tenor of research into selection has followed specific assumptions uncritically, leading to an emphasis on

research that focuses on methods and neglects the practices that make methods work or not. Drawing on analytical tools employed in the field of learning technology, I will juxtapose the notions of affordances and social practice, arguing that if selection is treated as the latter, different insights might be gained. In doing so I will further justify the conduct of the present research. In addition, drawing on ideas from ANT, I will present analytical entities which aided engagement with the data generated in ethnographic fieldwork. Finally, I will describe the conduct of the study underlying this thesis by outlining the design and methods, as well as the process of analysis and ethical concerns.

Chapters 3 and 4 will present both data and analysis thereof. The overarching argument of Chapters 3 and 4 is that methods do not work in and of themselves and neither do people.

Integrating records from interviews, observations, fieldnotes and preliminary analyses with concepts derived from ANT and empirical studies, I will demonstrate how, when selection is treated as a social practice, actions and tensions can be made visible which, in non-ethnographic research which treats selection purely as method, remain hidden from sight.

Chapter 5 will conclude this thesis by emphasising some of its main arguments as well as discussing potential changes to the study in light of the experiences had during its conduct, implications for my own practice and the wider field of nursing and healthcare education. In addition, I will discuss how some of the arguments made in this thesis will be shared.

Chapter 2: Analytical strategy

Introduction

This chapter will outline an analytical strategy with which to explore selection to nursing courses.

The term analytical strategy is taken from Andersen's (2003) discussion of research focus, in which he distinguishes between ontologically and epistemologically over-determined positions. In this conceptualisation, ontologically over-determined positions are concerned with what is "out there". Andersen holds that rather than enquiring about the assumptions that permit for a thing to be understood as existing in the first place, ontologically over-determined research almost exclusively engages with the methods that help establishing the existence of that thing. Those methods determine "what exists, or what reality is" (Andersen, 2003, p. XII, citing Pedersen, 1983) thereby analysing the world as clearly delineable, unquestionable entities. What is "out there" *is* out there and is out there in *one* form. In contrast, epistemologically over-determined positions are concerned with enquiries how an "out there" can become to be seen as being "out there" in the first place. For Andersen, such positions de-ontologise the object of interest, make it possible to ask different questions and allow for insights precluded by essentialising approaches.

These contrasting positions Andersen aligns with contrasting approaches to research.

Where ontologically over-determined positions follow a *method* which helps to

“produce true knowledge about a given object”, epistemologically over-determined positions follow *analytical strategies*, approaches designed to “question presuppositions, to de-ontologise” (2003, p. XIII). Where a method reproduces assumptions through an attempt at proving or disproving the same assumptions, a strategy can generate knowledge “critically different from the existing system of meaning” (ibid.).

The differences between these two approaches to enquiry will frame this chapter (and, in some way, this thesis at large). I will argue that selection in nursing, both in applied practice as well as in research, has so far been understood from an ontologically over-determined position. This position has made it difficult to attain different insights, something that this study attempts to address by taking an epistemologically over-determined position. For while there is a wealth of research on selection methods and their functionality, the problems discussed in the literature about selection have been persistent. It may therefore be meaningful to look beyond methods *per se*.

In this chapter I will thus not discuss a method by which selection was performed or observed. Instead I will discuss an analytical strategy that permits the observation of selection without a-priori definitions of what selection is or entails and without making value judgments about what selection *ought to be*. In doing so I do not claim to be starting without any ideas, as “one needs to assume *something* in order to recognise and observe the object” (Andersen, 2003, p. XIII, original emphasis). This chapter will therefore discuss the assumptions that guided my observations of selection. This will be done in three sections.

First I will discuss the selection as it is presented in practice and research, making reference to its ontologically over-determined conceptualisation as method. By drawing on the concept of *affordance* (M. Oliver, 2005), I critically discuss the literature, emphasising spaces that are precluded in its general tenor. In the second part I will discuss Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) as a conceptual basis for understanding selection *differently* and as part of a process that permits asking questions about selection without categorically imposing answers. In the third part, discussing the design of the study which formed the basis of this thesis, I will present in ethnography an approach consistent with epistemologically over-determined enquiry in general and specifically with the exploration of selection in this thesis.

Part 1: Literature

Selection in practice and research

In this section I will discuss in work psychology the tradition the presumptions of which most research into selection is based upon. By reference to some of the literature on selection in healthcare I will demonstrate how these presumptions are operationalised in research and selection practice. I will discuss the claims generated through such practices and their importance for the argument developed in this thesis.

By and large, selection practice and research adhere to positions established in the field of work psychology. The purpose of selection has been described in the literature on work psychology as establishing an organisation/person or person/organisation “fit” (Arnold et al., 1991, p. 29), that is, matching an applicant to an organisation that is “right” for them or an organisation to an applicant that is “right” for it. According to Arnold et al. (1991) work psychology is interested in traits or people’s characteristics, which it treats as unchanging and rooted in biological processes (ibid., p. 22). Arnold et al. (ibid., p. 36) discusses work psychology practices as observant, non-interfering in what he considers naturally occurring events. “Snapshots” are taken with specifically and carefully designed tools, such as questionnaires which look at “the world as it is” (ibid., p. 37).

Work psychology here adheres to a positivist and deterministic paradigm in both assumptions and method: it treats the world as knowable and independent of observation.

In addition, work psychology treats the tools it uses as yielding direct, knowable outcomes.

Following what it considers a scientific approach, work psychology utilises experimental or quasi-experimental techniques which allow researchers to claim control over events, permitting the establishment of correlations and predictions between clearly identified variables (ibid pp. 98-99), where one or more variables can be found to have contributory relationships. Where selection methods are concerned, work psychology is not only concerned with such correlations. Of equal importance are the properties of methods, such as reliability; that is, repeatability across various locations and participants or validity, which is an indication that a method assesses what it is meant to assess (ibid., pp. 101-102). Research based on the assumptions of work psychology therefore focuses on methods and their effectiveness. This effectiveness is often expressed as a direct relationship between the method and one or more outcomes. In research in selection the focus is often placed on *predictive validity* through which a relationship between two variables can be ascertained (Breakwell et al., 2006, p. 201). The majority of the research into selection employs experimental or quasi-experimental approaches, in which situations are created in which one or more factors are understood as stable (the method) whilst others are understood as determined by the method. This correlational research (which forms the largest part of the available literature) in general statistically analyses various test results (Breakwell et al., 2006). Studies are either performed retrospectively, that is results at the end of a course are compared to selection tests, or prospectively and longitudinally, where a specific test is performed after recruitment of applicants and a number of measures are performed during the course of the nursing programme.

Here a number of the presumptions of work psychology become apparent: applicants and organisations are treated as discreet entities with specific properties. These properties can be identified and observed. Observation does not affect such properties and selective observations (snapshots) allow judgments on occurrences outside of what is being observed. Observed entities are treated as measurable as they are more or less fixed and unchanging: what is measured at one point in time is treated as *identical* to what is measured at another point in time, both earlier and later. Context is treated as subtractable so long as the tools with which observation is performed are skilfully designed.

These assumptions are reflected in the published literature on selection in healthcare. Most of this literature is concerned with correlations between pre-established applicant qualities and equally pre-established outcomes. Snowden et al. (2015) and Rankin (2013) established a relationship between scores taken from an Emotional Intelligence (EI) inventory (Schutte et al., 2007) and attrition (leaving a course before completion), academic and clinical performance (with clinical performance measured in grades given by clinical supervisors) with Rankin suggesting that EI scores can be linked to compassion in clinical practice. McLaughlin et al. (2008) employed an established self-efficacy inventory (Betz & Hackett, 2006) and a psychological profiling questionnaire (S. B. Eysenck et al., 1985). They found correlations between attrition and the psychoticism trait, a negative correlation between extraversion and academic performance and occupational self-efficacy to be a predictor of final grades.

All the methods discussed are designed based on the premise that a specific truth about applicants (often categorised as aptitude or attitude, see Arnold et al., 1991) exists and

can be elicited by way of application of method. An important assumption made is that through application of specific methods direct access can be established penetrating surface levels of applicants. Traits or characteristics (such as emotional intelligence) are treated as existing within but independent of an applicant, detectable by selectors (with the help of questionnaires) but not manipulable by applicants themselves.

Such assumptions are also observable where research into other supposedly a-priori qualities is concerned. Wilson et al. (2011), for example, established a relationship between previous nursing experience or knowing a nurse personally and attrition. McCarey et al. (2007) found that mature entrants and students with higher entry qualifications achieved higher assignment grades and that gender posed as predictor for assignment grades. Again, qualities here are treated as unchanging and, importantly, as equivalent to other qualities, which, although they take a different form and are temporally and spatially differently situated, are treated as being the same thing.

Method is discussed in similar vein: it is treated as an unchanging a-priori entity with direct, predictable consequences. Ehrenfeld and Tabak (2000) found correlations between the type of selection method used and attrition, with the highest amount of programme leavers associated with psychometric tests, followed by group interviews and traditional interviews. Gale et al. (2016) found multiple mini interviews (MMI) to be predictive of academic success if applied in conjunction with numeracy tests.

Effectiveness of methods has also been examined through comparisons. Although a few studies of direct method comparisons exist (for example Ehrenfeld & Tabak, 2000; or Hazut et al., 2016) most comparisons are presented in narrative literature reviews, focusing generally on issues of reliability and validity (although other properties of

methods have been discussed, for example “candidate acceptability”, “cost”, the promotion of “diversity” and “susceptibility to coaching” or “fake-ability”, see HEE, 2014). Reliability refers to the stability of results across different applications of a test or between different testers or participants (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 146). Validity in general refers to whether a test measures what it has set out to measure (ibid., p. 133). Land (1993) discusses interviews to have poor reliability and validity, and claims (citing Wonderlic, 1942) that the “little” (my emphasis) interviews can measure are “appearance, manners, likeableness and attitudes” (p. 34). She understands pre-screening methods as valid approaches for applicants’ self-selection and what she calls “biodata” (p. 33), statements on experience; leadership qualities; reliability; aptitude and motivation as “easy to collect” (ibid.), potentially capable of replacing interviews. Psychological testing is seen to be open to be subject to the experience and training of the people employing it but can be effective if standardised and “carefully chosen” (p. 35). References are problematic as they are often lenient and assessment centres (a composite of various selection methods) are said to eliminate bias as multiple scores given by different assessors compose the final grade. These centres however are expensive to implement and, according to Land, not used in nursing selection. Land finishes by asking for more standardised and structured approaches, stating that “simple improvements” (p. 37) would go a long way:

the use of structured interviews, greater objectivity in rating and measuring the answers given, stating the criteria by which candidates will be selected and matching the criteria with the candidate. Interviewer training needs to be assessed and specific personnel selection undertaken.

These sentiments are virtually repeated in the literature reviews of Salvatori (2001), Schmidt and MacWilliams (2011) and HEE (2014) with the former two papers adding comments on qualifications acquired before the start of training as being reliable predictors of academic ability across various studies and the latter adding situational judgment tests to the canon. These literature reviews demonstrate that for 25 years or so selection methods have been discussed as having the same problems: they are not standardised, reliable or valid enough. A lack of structure is decried, but structured methods are either not implemented or not implemented “correctly”. Interviews, although seen to be a poor method to select (unless used in highly structured guises) are still used widely and psychological inventories and other structured forms of selection are used rarely. However, research into selection does rarely move away from focusing on methods. It makes the same suggestions over and over again: methods have to become more structured.

Here methods are treated as responsible for outcomes. If the method is designed well, outcomes can be predicted. The more a method can enforce synchronised approaches, the more likely it is to access the truth about an applicant. This positions designers of methods as particularly skilful in a number of ways: they have access to the truth of the world and ways of accessing this truth that, and this is important, other people such as applicants or selectors do not have. Only few studies on the development of selection methods exist. Zysberg et al. (2011) developed, by employing people with PhDs in education and psychology, an EI instrument which measured the ability of applicants to identify specific emotions from video vignettes. A list was developed consisting of “primary emotions”, referring to emotions “common to most mammals” (ibid., p. 30) as well as “secondary emotions”, referring to those needing a “more sophisticated

appraisal of the situation” (ibid.). Different levels of emotions were identified and vignettes of five minutes filmed during which these levels were acted out. Applicants were asked to identify the correct assigned level.

Mazhindu et al. (2016) created a “nurse match instrument” in order to allow for applicants to be tested on values based on “evidence”. They performed a literature review and conducted various focus groups in order to identify nurse ideals as purported by actual practitioners. These ideals, further processed through qualitative and quantitative methods (thematic analysis and word frequency count) then established a tool against which applicants could be assessed for their congruence with said ideals.

The result of such exercises is treated as independent of the exercise itself. Things that were already existing, such as emotions and values, were merely recorded and shaped into an instrument with which to observe. Research that employs these instruments rarely debates their genesis; the methods themselves and that which they measure are treated as taken for granted. In fact, the literature on selection rarely debates how methods are implemented beyond giving a description of the method itself. How a method is designed is often treated as equivalent to how the method is used in practice. This can be seen where research includes “views” on selection methods. Such views are generally appended to research studies as a “qualitative aspect”, for example by adding a questionnaire to studies otherwise based on calculating statistical relationships between entry qualifications and interview scores (Perkins et al., 2013) or the correlation between scores generated by several selectors (Wilson et al., 2008). In both studies selectors largely agreed with the interview process. Although there were “issues to address” (ibid., pp. 482-483), such as the duration of interview days, comprehension

of interview questions, issues with training or the scoring system, these are somewhat side-lined and do not seem to have affected the rating of the overall process as “straightforward” (ibid., p. 482). In addition to studies on views about method, some research has discussed the function of users and views thereon, such as service users (for example Morgan & Jones, 2009; Rhodes & Nyawata, 2011).

When interrogating the literature on selection it becomes apparent that selection is discussed in terms of fixed entities unaffected by the selection itself. Research into selection focuses on methods which are seen to elicit a truth about the world, either in terms of applicants or in terms of research methods themselves or their users. Observers are positioned as experts with specific skills in picking up what is already there. These skills pertain to using a method expertly, that is according to its design. Here a method becomes a thing of purity, independent of the context in which it is used. However, once some of this context is reintroduced, different practices become visible.

In their study of selection processes across all Scottish higher education institutions (HEI), Taylor et al. (2014) and MacDuff et al. (2016) identified varying approaches to methods used. More importantly, they identified from interviews and focus groups with both applicants and selectors different practices in scoring, weighting of interview concepts (some were more important to some selectors than others) and issues with isolated training. Selectors talked about the importance of intuition in making decisions and gave anecdotal evidence of the relationship to “distal” outcomes (Taylor et al., 2014, p. 1159) such as academic success or attrition without providing evidence of evaluations of such relationships. Neither Taylor et al. (2014) nor MacDuff et al. (2016) suggest that the approaches taken are right or wrong and are at pains to demonstrate that

views on selection methods may have effects on the method itself, turning them into locally operationalised processes. Their argument portrays selection as somewhat contingent, doubting the direct relationship between method and desired application. Taylor et al. (2014) and MacDuff et al. (2016) are, to my knowledge, the only two studies from the field of nursing that attempted to research selection differently. However, being based on interviews, their claims pertain to accounts of practice, not practice itself. Nonetheless, similar arguments were made in different fields, most notably in organisational studies. For example, Llewellyn (2010) used conversation analysis in order to show how verbal interactions during recruitment interviews, rather than reflecting pre-given knowledge, construct knowledge *in situ*.

This research stands out from the general canon of ontologically over-determined approaches to selection. It demonstrates that selection can be conceptualised differently leading to different insights, often incommensurable with those generated through research underpinned by assumptions of work psychology. Especially Taylor et al. (2014) and Llewellyn (2010) demonstrate how selection, when seen as a local practice rather than as purely a method, affects people involved in selection and the selection method itself. In this research, neither applicants nor methods are treated as having a-priori qualities but as entities which come about in the process of selection. This notion of contingency is absent from most other literature. The present study will therefore attempt to reintroduce this contingency. In order to do so, selection needs to be understood differently to work psychological notions. In the next section I will develop what has, so far, been largely an empirical discussion of selection, into a theoretical discussion.

Selection as technology: *affordances*

In this section I will attempt to theorise the concept of selection. I will here draw predominantly on Oliver's (2005, 2011, 2016) discussions of the concept of *affordances*, first developed by Gibson (1979, cited in M. Oliver, 2005).

Affordances pertain to properties of the environment which force specific, predictable responses from humans. According to Gibson, by way of "invariants" (ibid., p. 403), unchanging carriers of specific signals, such as (that is existing independently of their observation) properties become directly accessible and *are acted on* in specific, predictable ways. Affordances therefore are seen to hold a controlling function as they can determine actions and outcomes.

Oliver (2005, 2011) critically discusses affordances in relation to learning technologies: technologies such as computer programmes or e-learning packages are treated as having affordances, as controlling their users (or are being controlled by users in specific ways which are already inherent in the technologies themselves). This move of Oliver's of using affordances as an analytical concept to interrogate the field of learning technologies allows me to make a similar move in relation to selection.

Recontextualising Oliver's ideas helps to understand that selection so far has been treated in the literature as a technology with specific affordances, that is with essentialised and predictable outcomes. In the following I will outline this argument in more detail.

Adapting Oliver's introductory exploration of the term technology, selection can be seen as an ordering craft (M. Oliver, 2016, p. 38), can be understood as a technology in and of itself, as in its simplest form selection orders applicants into "in" and "out". Selection can analytically be treated (and is treated so in the assumptions made in the work psychology literature) as a technology which affords access to pre-determined entities. Selection so conceptualised shares some of the issues emphasised by Oliver in relation to learning technology: it is under-theorised, often only discussed in tautological terms (selection is that which selects) and is discussed in terms of *self-contained artefacts* with *inherent*, that is, given, affordances (M. Oliver, 2016). Qualities of applicants, such as traits or behaviours, treated as *unchanging* parts of the world, can be observed precisely because the world gives them away. Without an affording world, all observations would be based on interpretation, or *mentalism* (M. Oliver, 2005, in reference to Gibson, 1979). It is this understanding of the world as affording that allows selection to be seen as a technology incorporating a scientific method such as that outlined by Cohen et al. (2007, p. 16) who discuss the data collection or the observational phase of research as

relatively uncomplicated [where] the researcher is content to observe and record facts.

The tools of selection in this way of thinking are merely recording devices for what is already there. Meaning is contained and easily transported. An afforded entity such as A-level results or scores on an EI inventory *mean* the same thing as degree results or compassionate care in clinical practice.

However, the focus of the literature on selection on reliability and validity of methods suggests that the world can be (and is) recorded differently in different circumstances. But, if things are given universally, afforded, why are they not universally understood? For Oliver (2005) this problem of affordances is never resolved. He discusses Norman's (1999, cited *ibid.*) attempts to separate affordances from *perceived* affordances, an attempt which folds the thing and how it is understood into one. Norman holds that essential affordances still exist but need to be accessed through specifically designed methods.

This is an important move. It is with this "special design" of tools that some of the problems of affordances become visible. The methods which "record" affordances (the facts of the world) and the designers of such methods become the focus of how the world is understood. In this sense affordances are a property of technocentric determinism, a way of understanding the world as afforded by technology.

In selection conceptualised as technology, not only does the world afford access to its essential properties, the method which allows for affordances to be accessed also affords its own implementation. Special "designers" imbue a method with the capacity to control users. In order to prevent misinterpretation of the world (a shortcoming of humans), technologies have to reflect the affordances of the world. Like the theorists of affordance (M. Oliver, 2011), research into selection addresses such problems through the creation of a dichotomy between essential, natural designs and those which are mediated by human beings. Both designs still hold that essential entities exist out there. But whereas natural designs do not require interpretation (there is only one way to understand the signals from invariants), mediated designs, accessing the same entities, require a specific kind of attention of their users in order for those not to be misled.

Selection tools are treated by work psychology as allowing for the world to be understood as it *ought to be* understood and control their users. This technocentrism becomes especially apparent where methods are said not to work, for example in the discussion of interviews (for example HEE, 2014; or Land, 1993). Here, selectors are allowed, afforded to be biased, by the method. A different method would prevent the level of interpretation associated with some forms of interviews.

Here the ultimate aim of selection appears to be the elimination from the process of the human being altogether. A somewhat extreme advocacy (although in keeping with the general tenor of selection literature) of this desire for exclusion can be found in Hubbard's (2015, p. e1) promotion of algorithms over experts:

Experts are inferior to algorithms, [they] try to be intellectual and mull over multifaceted amalgamations of characteristics when making their predictions.

In this understanding human "interpretation" of facts is the sole problem of the inefficiency of selection methods. Like the "anti-mentalist" stance (M. Oliver, 2005, p. 405) of proponents of affordances, this anti-interpretation stance promotes what are seen to be natural, unmediated designs, such as trait inventories.

Selection, in the field of work psychology, which is, more or less, adopted where selection in nursing is concerned, can therefore analytically be understood as a technology which is one-directional and deterministic. The world is structured and limits the ways in which it can be understood. Selection is treated as a structured and structuring technology, limiting the ways in which selectors or applicants can respond.

It is from over-emphasis of structure that selection in the general tenor draws its capacity to function as a panacea to deal with problems in healthcare at large as is the case with learning technology (M. Oliver, 2016; Pelletier, 2009).

This understanding of selection as a technology which claims to access affordances and affords itself, that is it records the world and controls its users in a specific, predictable, way, is only possible through actions which are not acknowledged in the selection literature. I will discuss the consequences of such omissions in the next section.

Selection as social practice

In the preceding section I have outlined how the current literature on selection can be analysed using the concepts of technology and affordances. In this section I will argue, again drawing on the work of Oliver, that selection, contrary to its conceptualisation in the literature, can analytically be treated not merely as a technology with pre-determined affordances but as a social practice of which technologies are only a part.

According to Oliver (2005), for affordances to have practical meaning for developers and users of technologies, the world needs to be understood as a collection of fixed entities. As with learning technologies (M. Oliver, 2011), the literature on selection takes the essential nature of entities as given. This is observable in what selection is said to “observe” as well as in the way tools are designed. This however does not mean that technologies cannot or should not be researched *per se*. I am however, like Oliver in regards to learning technologies, pointing to the problematic of understanding technologies *purely* in terms of essentialised affordances. As the research of Taylor et

al. (2014), MacDuff et al. (2015) and Llewellyn (2010) as well as sections on “views” about selection have demonstrated, it is not necessarily obvious to people who are doing the selecting that the world consists of what methods claim it exists of.

A method can only work as a method if it has universal affordances, that is, if it is understood in the same way by all its users. In order to do this, it has to appear the same across space and time differences. This form of appearance is often discussed in the selection literature as standardisation. However, as, for example, MacDuff et al. (2015) have shown, things do not appear the same in the same way. But, although the local nature of tests is sometimes acknowledged (for example Gale et al., 2016; or Rankin, 2013), the conclusions made in the general literature on selection are about the method *in general*. Here a form of differentiation allows for claims of universality to hold.

Standardisation is achieved through emphasising some and bracketing out other processes, often by only presenting a beginning and an end. Where entry qualifications and degree results are concerned, three years of education are ignored.

How applicants’ words become scores is never discussed, and neither is how scores become to mean compassionate care (as in the case of Rankin’s 2013, study). Whatever else happens before an applicant takes a place at a university is never part of the research. This bracketing off can be seen in the treatment of “views” in the selection literature. The literature often discusses the implementation of methods as “straightforward” (Wilson et al., 2008, p. 482) or “uneventful” (Callwood et al., 2014, p. 5). Questionnaires are merely handed out, questions are asked and answered or grades recorded. Both cited researchers (but also others, such as Gale et al., 2016), after having made such statements on the uneventfulness of the application of a method, then go on to list difficulties experienced by selectors. These “views” however are,

analytically, separated from the method, they are (except in the cases of Taylor et al., 2014 and MacDuff et al., 2015) not taken as part of the method but as *something else*, to be dealt with at another time. It is in this separation that method can remain pure, unaffected by the way it is used. What users have to say, what they do, becomes unimportant, as do the things that happen before, during and after a method is employed. It is because a method is separated from the context in which it is operationalised that claims about neutrality can be made in the first place.

This is also evident in the entities treated in the literature as merely observed by methods. For example, personality traits as those promoted by Eysenck (1967), although clearly a product of academic work, are *treated* as a part of the world independent of the way they originated. The “big five” personality traits are, where they form the basis of a selection approach, uncritically discussed and *taken for granted*.

As is the case with the “big five”, the genesis of essentialised parts of the world is rarely (if ever) discussed. They are treated, *become*, generally accepted facts of the world. That such taken for granted entities were indeed once not fixed at all can be seen by taking a closer look at studies which deal with the design of selection methods (for example Zysberg et al., 2011 or Mazhindu et al., 2016). Authors of such papers do not discuss how agreement was achieved, only *that* agreement was achieved. This form of “tacit communitarianism” (M. Oliver et al., 2007, p. 123, citing Baumann, 2002) or “common sense” in the understanding of work psychology (Arnold et al., 1991, p. 34) does not elicit an essential truth accepted by everyone; it mistakes something accepted by a group of people as essential truth. It is this removal of authorship of methods (and

in some cases the removal of a human when it is operationalised) that allows for designs to become “natural” or “mediated”.

The process by which people arrive at a shared understanding may be understood as learning. As Oliver (2005) states, affordances have to be learned however the theory of affordances does not provide for how learning takes place and what would constitute such learning. The literature on selection is vague about learning as well. Training, if mentioned at all, is never discussed in detail. In addition, it always seems to be one event taking place before a method is used for the first time. However, the claims made are those of affordance: training standardises actions, that is makes them equal across different applications of a method. Like the appreciation of affordances, “standardisation [...] has to be learned only once” (M. Oliver, 2005, p. 407, citing Norman, 1988). Training, like all other facets of selection is fixed into one instance, conveyed and understood by all actors in the same way.

The processes discussed here are an elementary part of claims about reliability, validity and prediction. The literature into selection is at pains to refer to correlations rather than causality, but what would be the point of such research if causality could not be assumed? It is through understanding entities as static that causal relationships, which are the desired outcome of selection, can be established at all. Bracketing out parts of selection, reducing instances to numbers, reducing the world, allows for claims about universality and comparability in the first place. Callwood et al. (2014) demonstrated this involuntarily when they argued that they could not compare the results of MMI and traditional interviews as for the latter no scores were produced. Prediction is, again, an achievement of bracketing out processes that would be difficult to statistically “control”

in their entirety (if indeed they could be known in their entirety). But prediction is also a kind of confidence trick played by psychologists. Oliver, asking the question about entities that afford, discusses his concepts of historical affordance (something is seen to have been afforded) and normative affordance, where something “typical” or “expected” comes to pass (2005, pp. 403-404). Like historical affordances, selection methods do not predict but make judgments in hindsight. Most studies are performed retrospectively, that is variables are measured at one point and compared to variables that existed in the past, creating a relationship *after the effect*.

Oliver (2005) holds that similarities between entities need to be assumed in order for affordances to have any practical value. As Oliver discusses in relation to learning technologies (2016), users and methods are treated as homogenous populations. All people have qualities that become observable in the same ways. However, here a logical problem of affordances becomes visible again, a problem instantiated by the concepts of “special designs” and experts. HEE (2014) clearly state who should design and evaluate methods: psychologists. Based on the assumption that the inner truths of people are afforded to such specialists, a specific kind of expertise is created which out-does other expertises, such as those of professional nurses. What such a conceptualisation does not acknowledge is that if making assumptions based on misinterpretations of facts is a common trait in humans (Arnold et al., 1991) then psychologists are either *differently human* or their theory does not hold for *all humans*, which in turn contradicts the assumptions psychology is based on. This making of exceptions in order to explain specific relationships is an elementary component of selection research.

The problem with this understanding of selection (as the problem with affordances per se, see M. Oliver, 2011) is that although it persistently deals with interactions of people and the world, in its final analysis it removes the interaction component. A method is purified and a “category error” (M. Oliver, 2011, p. 375) is performed: *a social practice* is observed but claims are made about the method which is only part of such practice. Although such research assumes pre-given entities, it does not actually study them. Research into selection does not deal with pre-defined entities, entities *become* through interactions with other entities, however, these interactions are not part of the literature. Through this selective elimination not only can methods be treated as pure and neutral but particular hierarchies can be formed: some people’s expertise weighs more than others’; methods supersede people in their importance. Designers and evaluators (for example work psychologists) are treated as active and important whereas other actors are treated as docile. It is in this that treating selection as a social practice constitutes a political move and where the study underpinning this thesis gathers purchase.

This study is an opportunity for me, as a nurse academic involved with selection, to explore selection differently. Treating selection as purely a method and as pure method a hegemony has been created in which selection as practice is not debatable anymore. Things have become taken for granted (selection does things, people are things). In order to make selection debatable again, what has become invisible in the literature on selection needs to be made visible again. In this way, this study constitutes an experience in the Foucauldian (2002) sense: it allows me to experience selection anew. It does not make the same assumptions that have underpinned research in selection for the past three decades and, in doing so, constitutes an experience that changes me and, potentially, the readers of this thesis, “preventing them from always being the same or

from having the same relation with things, with others, they had before reading it”
(ibid., p. 246).

In the next part I will discuss some of the theoretical concepts that aided the re-conceptualisation of selection and helped its empirical interrogation.

Part 2: ANT

ANT as theory

In the second part of this chapter I will, in Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), discuss a theory which aided conduct of the study which forms the basis of this thesis as well as analyses of data. I will begin by briefly explaining why ANT constitutes an appropriate approach to theorising selection. Some of the principles of ANT that have purchase in this thesis will be outlined and the final section I will discuss how these principles have been recontextualised to selection in nursing. I will end this part with presenting the questions this thesis will attempt to answer.

There are various approaches which de-ontologise (de-centre or de-essentialise), the object of their enquiry, for example Foucauldian discourse analysis (Andersen, 2003; Foucault, 1972) or symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986; Law, 1994). ANT is one of those approaches which has, in the past, specifically been concerned with technologies, in particular their genesis and effect on the world in the moment of their application (Greenhalgh & Swinglehurst, 2011; M. Oliver, 2016). It appears therefore, to be a suitable starting point to theorise selection *differently*.

ANT was first developed by Bruno Latour (1993) and has since undergone significant changes. However, a number of positions which may be understood as its core principles, are important for the conceptualising of selection in this thesis.

ANT rejects absolutely a-priori condition that would explain instances in the world; no order exists that precedes knowledge of the world.

All order is understood to be effect; an effect of *ordering* (Law, 1994). Where there are no essential positions, according to ANT, actors cannot have clearly identifiable causal effects as “entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entities” (Law, 1999, p. 3). This in turn means that, in principle, outcomes could be different, depending on the configuration of actors and their interactions (Law, 1999; Mol, 2002).

This assumption on difference based on interrelation rather than essential differences makes ANT ontologically relativist. Latour highlighted the conundrum of relativism as an anti-essentialist stance: in order to understand the world as different from different perspectives it has to be *essentially* different. The relativist position of ANT, or, as Latour termed it, its “relationalism” (1993, p. 113) circumvents this conundrum by emphasising difference as a result, not a starting point. ANT is concerned with how differences in understanding or meaning become possible in the first place. It’s not a matter of “anything goes” versus “only one thing goes” or whether things “can mean the same for everyone or some people” (ibid.). ANT is about untangling effects: what made them. Latour (1999b, p. 18) calls the effects of interrelations “networks”, a:

summing up of interactions through various kinds of devices, inscriptions, forms and formulae into a very local, very practical locus.

By unpicking this definition, focusing on what constitutes interactions, who or what interacts and the effects of interactions, I will further demonstrate how ANT will help to theorise selection differently and how ANT assumptions can form a strategy in an epistemologically over-determined approach to researching selection.

Work and actors

ANT is not concerned with essential things but with how things can become to be understood as essential. Essentialism, or in the language of ANT, durability or order are effects of interaction, or of work done by actors. In this section I will discuss how this “work” is conceptualised in ANT.

Work becomes visible through its effects: things are given forms or shapes and, importantly, changes to these forms and shapes can be observed across space and time. Where there is no observable change, no work is being done (Latour, 2005). Latour (1993, 2005) conceives the potential for an actor to act, to form “associations” (Latour, 2005, p. 69) and change other actors (and be changed by other actors) in the concepts of *mediators* and *intermediaries*. Mediators change and are changed whereas intermediaries do not change or change anything themselves. Intermediaries are premeditated carriers of intent, they act in predictable ways. Input into a system and output from the system are the same (Latour, 2005, pp. 37-42). Work consists of the making of links or associations between actors, actions where actors form connections with some actors but not with others at the point of interaction. ANT removes the concept of individual agency and substitutes it with “collective action” (Latour, 2005, p. 74), or “practice” (Mol, 2002); removing the idea of a predictable outcome and substitutes it with “effect”. In order to clarify this practice, the term *enactment* is used rather than the term construction, as, for Law (2009) construction implies agency, an intent to construct and for Mol (2002) construction implies finality.

Timmermans and Berg (1997) demonstrate this practice in their study on the enactment of research and resuscitation protocols. By observing how protocols are used in practice (rather than by taking them as a starting and endpoint) they show how such protocols, although designed to suppress individual agencies of their users, are changed to suit individual and local needs. Protocols and their users change in the process of operationalisation of protocols and *how* they change only becomes visible during such operationalisation. The effect of protocols can therefore never be absolutely predicted. The possibility of different associations makes actions orientated towards outcomes: associations are not formed randomly but for specific reasons. This however is not the same as agency or intent: actors are not pre-loaded with a final trajectory, action is not a teleological process. This makes practice *negotiated* (M. Oliver, 2011), that is multiple trajectories need to be (and are) often organised in unpredictable ways.

In the preceding section I have begun to discuss how work can be studied empirically. In this section I will discuss the entities that, according to ANT, do this work; *can act*. ANT follows a strategy of *generalized symmetry* (D. Bloor, 1976; Latour & Crawford, 1993) which treats all actors as having, at least in principle, equal capacity to act. However, in non-ANT research, the world is often divided into human actors who have agency and non-human objects, that don't (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). ANT, according to generalised symmetry, treats all actors as material: in the moment of action they *do something*. Objects are, analytically, treated the same as other non-humans; ideas, definitions, grades or indeed actions (Bowker & Star, 2000) or humans alike; nothing is given explanatory privilege over another.

For Latour (2005) the focus on the interaction between human and non-human actors allows to unravel taken-for-granted assumptions to be unravelled. In the concept of *translation*, he demonstrates the multitude of actions that need to be taken first to create equivalencies between actors and then to remove the work that led to these equivalencies, allowing for a thing to be taken-for-granted or to be seen as independent of action. For him non-human actors play an important role in this process as their forms can help make durable things that can be attached to them. They become *inscription devices*, actors which translate something from one state into another, therefore making it possible for an actor to be transported out of the moments of immediate interactions into different situations where an actor can act *on behalf of* the thing it was translated from (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). Such tools are reified (Latour & Woolgar, 1986) assumptions and practices, that is they are assumptions in the shape of a material object.

In their seminal study “Laboratory Life” (1986) Latour and Woolgar observed the practices of scientists. Here they demonstrated the steps necessary to translate an element from a doubtful existence into a fact of scientific life. It was only through changing the states of things with the help of inscription devices, through turning specimen into graphs, graphs into numbers and numbers into research papers that these separate entities could convincingly be treated as being *the same* thing. Such inscription devices, like machines that turned biological matter into statistics or scientists themselves who turned their daily work into research papers, do, however, exist by virtue of scientific practice. They are an effect of assumptions about science or economic considerations and therefore cultural artefacts rather than neutral tools of measurement or record.

The important move Latour and Woolgar make is that this treatment, this translation, is removed from the process. Local scientific work becomes a truth of nature as the localness and the debate disappears from, for example, research papers. Action can therefore be performed “at a distance” (Law, 2009, p. 7) and the portability of objects is a major factor in such action. The local, specific and contingent *becomes* the general and that which had an effect, which acted is designated an un-acting, neutral status.

Mol (2002), in her study on arteriosclerosis develops the concept of subject/object divides that underpin Latour and Woolgar’s study. Mol (2002) describes the enactment of atherosclerosis. Through descriptions of encounters between doctors, patients, notes and other documents, knives, ultrasound machines and other actors, Mol claims that atherosclerosis is *enacted* differently precisely because of the different practices used, precisely because actors form relationships that they cannot form where other actors are present or absent. Atherosclerosis, in the hospital, remains one condition, but in the various departments, it is *different*, although those differences are connected. Mol not only describes how arteriosclerosis exists as, and through, different objects, she also describes the processes that allow for atherosclerosis to remain to be seen as one; to hide its multiplicity but also the processes that allow for atherosclerosis to remain different.

ANT and this study

Selection in nursing has so far been researched from ontologically over-determined positions, asking questions about methods and their relationships to specific outcomes.

ANT concepts allow for selection to be theorised differently and therefore, to ask different questions: not about methods but about the enactment of methods, not about technology but about practice.

The focus of selection as affording technology rather than a social practice, the knowable object (as intermediary), is, thinking with ANT, an effect of work being done: the actions of “observers” are deleted from accounts until only the object remains. The observers or their tools appear to have had no impact on the constitution of the observed object. They become a “blackbox”, “[knowledge rendered] distinct from the circumstances of [its] creation” (Latour & Woolgar, 1986, p. 259). Agency does not precede action but is a result of designation of action: of who or what is designated to be working (Latour, 2005). If traces of work can convincingly be removed, agency is established or taken away. This means that the *designation* of action is action in itself. Emphasising the work of actors produces subjectivity, but this emphasising is work itself. In declaring some actors to be intermediaries a world is produced which does not act, is objective. But, as Latour and Woolgar (1986) have shown, objectivity is the absence of traces of work, not the absence of work itself. The world is successfully constituted as stable, as out there, as observable when all the work that makes it so is deleted from record. Only in theory can the world afford independently of the enactment of affordance. Only in theory can entities be designated as intermediaries; as

soon as practice is researched, the existence of mediators, the manifestation of work, becomes evident. The world is produced in practice (Latour, 2010b).

This study will therefore explore the work of actors, both human, such as applicants and selectors but also non-human such as the protocols of selection method.

It will explore the orientated actions of such actors, and the effects produced in such actions. Research following such a strategy will not be able to make universally explanatory claims about selection (as ontologically over-determined research does) and will not focus only on methods, proclaiming some of them right or wrong. In fact, this research cannot impose positions of right or wrong but attempts to let actors speak about their world in their words (which of course includes the literature discussed in this chapter, my reading of it as well as my reading of the world I interrogate).

This study, therefore, does not give privilege to a specific group of actors. Both humans, such as applicants and selectors, as well as non-humans, such as interview forms or furniture, are treated as having a potential to act. Explanatory privilege will also not be given to specific knowledges, nor that of specific actors (such as experts in psychology) or that of the researcher. Although expertise is discussed, it is discussed in its function as actor, as part of a process, not as its explanation. Conceptualising selection as series of translations, as steps that *make* different things the same, this thesis will focus on interactions between people and things, humans and non-humans, as they become important through the effects produced in such interactions. What this study will not do is to treat selection as a method, as a protocol *per se*. It will ask how treating selection as fixed protocol affects the users and the protocol itself.

What this study seeks to understand is how the interaction of various actors helps to constitute durable or less durable effects, such as the notion of a method in itself or the notion of a “selector”.

After interrogating the literature on selection and discussing in ANT a conceptual basis for engaging with selection *differently*, it is now possible to formulate the questions asked in this thesis.

How is selection done in practice?

In order to answer this question, the following additional questions will be asked:

1. What is the work of non-human actors such as interview forms and protocols in selection?
2. What is the work of human actors such as applicants and selectors in selection?
3. What are the effects of the inter-relationships between human and non-human actors on selection?

In the final part of this chapter I will, discuss the ethnographical approach underpinning this thesis and outline the way in which this study was conducted

Part 3: The study

In the preceding parts of this chapter I have begun to outline the strategy which underpins my engagement with selection as a complex social practice. In this final part, I will discuss the study that provided the basis for the thesis.

Methodology

Swain (2017, p. 45, citing Robson, 2011), understands a methodology to be:

a system of principles that guides the research, which are based on the researcher's understanding of the world, their theories and their beliefs.

A methodology, therefore, is concerned with what research can do and how research can be done. It is more than a set of methods; rather it is an understanding of the relationship of theory and its enactment in research practice. Epistemologically over-determined research strategies necessitate methodologies and related methods which do not ontologise the object of interest and understand the researcher as part of the research produced.

In order to work with and learn from actors, proximity to the action is required. It is for this reason that most studies in ANT tradition use ethnographic approaches. So, although ANT helps to understand that selection *could* be researched differently, it does not frame *how* this could be done. Ethnographic principles however can guide a researcher without necessarily precluding the outcome of his or her research.

Atkinson (2015, referring to Blumer, 1954) understands ethnographic research as making “general intellectual commitments” (ibid., p. 58) based on “sensitising ideas” (ibid., p. 9). In what he calls “ethnographic abduction” (ibid., p. 56, original emphasis) he outlines the general approach to ethnographic designs:

... on the basis of observation (in the most general sense), one draws out possible analytic ideas that speculatively answer the question: What might this be a case of? One considers what general pattern or configuration might give rise to the observed phenomena.

The study’s design, although guided by engagement with ANT, therefore followed such ethnographic principles, the nature and application of which I will discuss in the next section.

Design

The present study follows ethnographic abductive principles in that it proceeded from an interest in selection in nursing courses to the specific research questions outlined above. The study was designed flexibly (Swain, 2017), that is issues of importance and resulting responses (such as identification of applicable theories, empirical literature and research sites, participants and methods) were generated throughout the research process and not performed in linear fashion (but see below on the limits of such flexibility). Abductive designs cannot follow clearly prescribed formulae. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) have argued, neither can ethnographic research be left in some magical realm of the incommunicable.

I will, therefore, outline what happened during the conduct of this study without claiming for it to have taken place necessarily in the order in which it does appear in this text.

Designing the study required decisions to be made about where it was that selection took place, how it could be interrogated and in what form it might materialise. As my understanding of selection developed and changed over time (owing to insights generated from data analysis), decisions taken at the point where the study needed to be fixed into an approach that could be communicated to, for example, ethics boards, proposal judges or study participants, reflect early assumptions. So, although the design was overall a flexible one, some decisions produced a specific trajectory which could not be reversed later. Several of the decisions were based on pragmatic considerations, that is what seemed possible to achieve at the time within the constraints of a doctoral programme.

However, pragmatic considerations were not the only ones that informed the study design. In principle any network (in ANT terms) can be extended indefinitely as connections between entities are made and re-made (Strathern, 1996). In the case of this study, selection to nursing could be seen to be happening at, for example, schools or Further Education Institutions where students are prepared for specific trajectories and in specific ways. It could happen in the offices of deans who make decisions on dissemination of funding to specific university departments, or in government departments concerned with the funding of nursing courses. Selection could happen in the talk between family members, in television programmes (both those that are called factual as well as those that are called fictional), in curriculum documents, bank

statements or pregnancy tests. Selection could manifest itself through the presence of direct reference to selection and through absences thereof. The network of selection into nursing may extend to all these spaces and beyond.

However, as Strathern (1996) has argued, this network has to be “cut” (ibid, p. 523) in order to make analysis possible. As has been argued (for example by Fenwick & Edwards, 2010), this cutting of a network privileges one instance of a network over others and therefore may privilege the voice of the researcher.

This challenge can be levelled at the present study. My decisions of where to observe selection were pragmatic in the sense that access needed to be established in a relatively short time and with relatively few obstructions. My work as a lecturer in nursing made me, therefore, look at selection as enacted in universities. Framed by the discussions in the literature and my own experiences, I focused on selection as enacted in methods (as I have discussed above, the literature on selection deals almost exclusively with such methods). In addition, I decided to compare selection events at different universities.

This decision may, at the time the study was conceived, have been based on a notion of hoping to find a “good way” of doing selection. It was only through subsequent analytical work (described in more detail below) that I started to understand this notion to be not as productive as the argument followed in this thesis. However, my initial focus on different sites, the methods used and their ascribed qualities, as well as the restrictions of the word count, framed my analysis which eventually produced an argument along the lines of symmetry of human/non-human actors (as discussed above), an argument exemplified in the titles of Chapters 3 and 4.

There are, however, different ways selection could have been researched. This study could have “followed actors” more explicitly and interrogated more deeply practices at

one site. One way of achieving this would have been to see how the network of selection stretches out within and outside one organisation, where selection is transported to or prevented from going: when something *becomes* selection or *other*. Although there are instances in this study where I did just that (for example in my fieldwork at HEE workshops or administration offices), the focus on the enactment of method made these instances invisible in this thesis. In the following I will detail more explicitly the choices made in the conduct of this study.

Sampling

Sites

A study seeking to understand selection as a complex social practice requires some degree of participation in that practice, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 3, my emphasis) term it, some work *in the field* (the context of the phenomenon of interest), with a focus on a limited number of sites to allow for in-depth analysis.

Initially four HEI were contacted with requests to access to their “selection events” (discussed in more detail below). One site was approached after I discussed my thesis ideas with a fellow doctoral student who put me in touch with a senior member of staff at an HEI that was using an, at the time of writing, *en vogue* approach to selection (“Multiple Mini Interviews”; discussed in detail in Chapter 3). This site had published several papers and had been lauded by some commentators. Another HEI was approached after I secured a position as senior lecturer in nursing at this university. A third, fourth and fifth site were contacted (the latter out of a sense of panic as fieldwork

had gotten more and more delayed at other sites) as they were situated geographically close to where I live. Two of those sites replied with one permitting access (one other site signalled agreement in general but e-mail exchanges became prolonged and finally responses tailed off with no clear decision ever being communicated to me).

In general, the identification of these sites may be considered as largely following convenience and purposive sampling strategies (Swain, 2017, pp. 133-140), that is I contacted sites that were near me or where contact could be somehow established, however in the case of one site with some idea that the selection approach implemented there would be worth observing because of the status it was (and still is) given in the selection literature. A more theoretical sampling approach (Dowling & Brown, 2010) was taken when, in addition to HEI, I contacted (facilitated by an ex-colleague) Health Education England (HEE), then the funding body of nursing education and regulator of selection processes, who at the time had instigated a publicity campaign to make VBR a non-negotiable part of the selection to nursing processes in HEI. The approach was theoretical in the sense that it was informed by my engagement with publications in the media and conversations with colleagues pointing to a particular position of HEE in the construction of selection sparking my interest in how this position was enacted in practice.

Apart from main sites (constituted by HEI and their nursing departments), sites “within” sites (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 35) were sampled, again following a somewhat mixed strategy. Over the course of the study it became apparent to me that nursing departments are but one part of the complex practice of selection. Administrators (both local to nursing departments or more “central”, that is concerned with more than one

subject) played a substantial part in how selection was enacted. Part of my fieldwork was therefore conducted in local administration offices, I never sought access to central administration offices for fear of making the study unmanageable (and in one case for fear of causing problems for staff and myself as the relationship with a senior administrator had started badly). This example of including administration in the research approach also highlights the difficulty of clearly delineating the notions of convenience, theoretical or purposive sampling in ethnographic research: although I developed a hunch of the importance of administrators which may have been originally triggered by my being “parked” in an administration office at a site where senior academic staff seemed little inclined to engage with me.

Although the overall approach to sampling proved to be successful in the sense that a manageable strategy was implemented, engendering fieldwork without necessarily sacrificing depth of analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), over the course of the study it became apparent that some possibilities had been promoted whilst others foreclosed by the approach taken. While the sites emerged as pertaining to analytical differences and similarities, this was not obvious to me from the outset. For example, each site happened to be using a different formalised approach to selection, a difference which became an important focus of my study (see Chapter 3). In contrast, each site was part of a post-1992 university rather than those commonly known in the UK as “redbrick” or traditional Universities (for a discussion of the differences see, for example Chapleo, 2007; or Kok et al., 2010). Although problems associated with being a post-1992 university were sporadically mentioned by staff, I did not follow up this line of enquiry as I had not sought access to any of the “redbrick” Universities.

Participants

The recruitment of participants followed similar strategies to the sampling of sites. As the main focus of the study was the practice of selection, academic staff (and later administrative staff) at HEI, as well as applicants, were approached to participate in the study. In addition to people being present in HEI, key personal involved in HEE's promotional activities regarding VBR were approached. Over the course of the study another group of people became meaningful: service users and carers (discussed in detail in Chapter 4).

Participants were recruited not only based on their professional roles or supposed functions in selection but also, again following a more theoretical sampling strategy, based on actions that had become observable such as the voicing of contradicting beliefs about the usefulness of specific approaches to selection.

People were approached formally and informally (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), for example formally by first approaching a "gate keeper" (ibid., pp. 49-53), such as heads of departments or admission tutors through e-mail requests or introductory telephone calls. In some cases, this led to snowball sampling (Swain, 2017, p. 134) with gatekeepers suggesting other members of staff who would be "good to talk to", for example former colleagues or people working in other departments. Where formalised selection events were concerned, participants were people who were present at such events. Participants were informally approached through requests for chats for example during selection events, after meetings, whilst having a coffee in the office.

As this study is concerned with the interaction of human and non-human actors, a note is necessary on the sampling of non-human participants. Although materials were not approached in the same way as human participants, they were enrolled, became part of the research, through the action of others or me. Here I refer to the material entities which became important during the study.

This importance was manifested through being pointed out to me (like in the case of a website which applicants were said to be using to gather “unfair” information about selection processes), through observable effects as in the case of interview forms or furniture, or simply through being there and *being useful* in some way or another. In addition, websites, HEE publications, computer programmes, conference presentations and workshop materials *became* participants in this research.

Methods

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 3) give the following definition of ethnography:

[E]thnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/ or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of enquiry.

For Atkinson (2015) pursuing only one line of data collection would severely reduce the complexity of the world about which knowledge is being sought. A summary of data collection can be found in table 1.

	Sites of data collection				
Method of data collection	<i>HEI 1</i>	<i>HEI 2</i>	<i>HEI 3</i>	<i>HEE</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Participant observation</i>	8 selection events (full day)	8 selection events (1/2 day)	6 selection events (full day)	2 VBR workshops	
	Participating in daily academic office routine (throughout study)		Participating in daily administration office routine (on six separate occasions)		
	5 meetings related to selection				
	3 open days				
	1 workshop related to admissions software				
<i>Interviews</i>	8 semi-structured individual interviews with academic staff (60 min - 150 min)	6 semi-structured individual interviews with academic staff (60min-120min)	4 semi-structured individual interviews with academic staff (30 min - 110 min)	4 semi-structured individual interviews with staff (2 telephone interviews; 30-120min)	

	2 semi-structured group interviews with service users and carers (50min, 180min)	1 semi-structured group interview with service users and carers (150min)			
	1 semi-structured group interview with administrative staff (66min)	1 semi-structured interview with administrative staff (55min)	1 semi-structured interview with administrative staff (100min)		
			1 semi-structured interview with associated staff member (90min)		
	Numerous informal conversations during selection events	Numerous informal conversations during selection events	Numerous informal conversations during selection events		
	Numerous informal conversations outside of selection events		Numerous informal conversations outside of selection events	Some informal conversations during workshops with NHS nursing and administrative staff	
<i>Documents</i>	Interview forms:	Interview forms:	Interview forms:	VBR framework	NMC standards

	templates and copies of completed forms after interviews (approximately 16 with data for approximately 10 applicants each)	templates and copies of completed forms after interviews (approximately 80 with data for individual applicants)	templates and copies of completed forms after interviews (approximately 270 with data for 45 individual applicants)	VBR literature review VBR case studies Scenarios used in workshops Local NHS trust VBR material supplied by workshop participants	Web-based material suggested by HEI staff such as nursing forums and UCAS website
	Standard invitation e-mails for applicants	Standard invitation e-mails for applicants	Standard invitation e-mails for applicants		
	Online promotional material (Prospectus)	Online promotional material (Prospectus)	Online promotional material (Prospectus)		

			PowerPoint presentation of introductory talk		
<i>Photos</i>	Selection procedure set-up	Selection procedure set-up	Selection procedure set-up	Workshop set-up (one workshop only)	

Table 1: *summary of data collection*

Participant observation

Atkinson (2015, pp. 39-40) understands participant observation as entering the world of others, interacting and engaging in their everyday lives.

For this study, I observed various “selection events” across the three main sites. A selection event consisted in general of a form of introductory talk, interview procedures and, in two cases, maths and English tests. At one site a selection event lasted a full day, at the other two sites half a day. My observation entailed “everything that was going on” whilst I was there, not just interview encounters. In total I observed 24 selection events (eight, six and eight per site respectively) between November 2014 and May 2015.

For Atkinson, it is important for the researcher to attempt to view things from another’s perspective, “however imperfectly”, (2015, p. 40).

For this study, this means that although I did not (with a few exceptions) get involved in “actual” selection, I participated, observed and talked about my observations. I did not just turn up for the moment where applicants met selectors, I was present before applicants arrived, set up camp in offices where I photocopied, made coffee, chatted about my life and the lives of people who participated in my research. I invigilated and marked maths and English tests, gave applicants good news, became a tour guide for applicants and a sounding board for academic staff.

In addition, I took fieldnotes during and after meetings related to selection (for example during a nursing course redesign phase), after chats in the office,

university “Open Days” or teaching sessions concerned with a computer programme with which applications were screened. These observations only took place at the university I was employed at. Although I would have liked to observe similar events at the other two sites, the need for travel, the differences in working relationships and treading the fine line between being perceived as an ethnographer or a “nosey bloke” from a competing organisation, prevented me from requesting access (both formally and informally) to such events. In the same vein, I established over time what I felt was good rapport with one group of administrators which I would have liked to replicate at the other two sites. My position as a senior academic at one site and as a transient researcher with a “base” in a university coffee shop at the other, again prevented me from pursuing this line of participation.

Although the literature on ethnography suggests an extended period of immersion in the field of more than a year, the feasibility of conducting research of that length is questionable in the current educational and funding landscape (O’Connell, 2017). This study was limited by being part of a professional doctorate with time pressures, my requirements to travel to sites, as well as the fact that selection events were sometimes scheduled late or cancelled. My approach to ethnography can therefore best be described as what O’Connell (2017, p. 159, citing Jeffrey & Troman, 2010) refers to as “selective-intermittent”, that is a number of visits were made based on specific events or analytical categories, with focus becoming more refined over time.

I followed this approach in two ways. One way was spatially and temporally “selective-intermittent”, as I was only participating in selection events on a number of occasions at specific sites.

In another way research was “selective intermittent” as, especially at the site where I am employed, I *zoned in and out* of being a researcher. In effect, everything could have been a part of my study as it, at least in the beginning, had the potential to be or become part of the process of selection. This however is an overwhelming position to find yourself in, so at times I zoned out, that is, treated things as purely work and *not* research related, at other times I zoned in, analysing things for their potential to be important for my study. Being a resident participant observer required me to decide on a point on which to end data generation, although such generation was, in practice, ongoing. In one sense data generation finished in June 2015, in another it finished when this thesis was submitted.

Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are both a way of recording *some* of what is being observed or otherwise experienced by the researcher *and* a form of analysis (see section on analysis below) (Atkinson, 2015). O’Connell (2017) suggests fieldnotes to be recorded systematically to aide later analysis and to be extensive in order to capture context rather than pure interpretation.

During selection events, I scribbled notes about set-ups, recorded words of selectors and applicants, first verbatim, then, later in the process, as summaries. In addition, I wrote about my feelings, experiences, anxieties and fledging ideas about what might be going on.

I wrote during observations or just after and, occasionally when hand-writing became too exhausting (or I felt I needed a change from one way of doing research) I recorded my observations on a hand-held recorder and transcribed some of them using voice recognition software (Dragon®). As suggested in the literature (O’Connell, 2017) I attempted to expand my notes after observation had been completed for the day (at times amounting to texts of more than 10000 words). This became, to me, unmanageable and my summaries became shorter over time, especially after some foci of interest had been identified.

Interviews

According to Hamersley and Atkinson (2007), participant observation in isolation does not always allow the researcher to make sense of the world they are observing.

Interviews are necessary in order to gain access, information and test ideas (and to understand how participants make sense of their world).

In this study, in line with ethnographic principles (O’Connell, 2017) a number of interview approaches were taken, both formal and informal.

Formal conversations were held at each HEI where I conducted a number of semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009) with academic staff, administrators and service users and carers. The interviews usually began with what O’Connell (2017, p. 154,) refers to as “grand tour question” about selection in general. The interview schedule, over the course of the study, was extended, depending on observations I had made and foci that had developed.

The schedule remained flexible in that I tried to follow what participants wanted to talk about whilst still retaining some focus on selection. Although most formal interviews were conducted with individuals, two group interviews (Cohen et al., 2007), both with service users and carers were held. Although methodologically interesting in terms of how meaning is negotiated within groups (Pelletier, 2007), the main reason for conducting group interviews here was the problem of organising individual interviews.

In total I conducted 11 formal interviews at the site where I am employed, eight at the second site and six at the third, all lasting between 30 minutes and 3 hours. The difference in numbers and duration is due to issues with participant availability (clashes of schedule or refusal).

In addition to HEI (and affiliated) staff, four formal interviews were conducted with HEE staff. Apart from two interviews with HEE staff, which were held over the phone, all interviews were conducted in person. Interviews were recorded using a hand-held recorder and in the case of phone interviews either recorded via an app or transcribed in parallel. All recordings were stored on a password secured laptop.

A large number of informal interviews were conducted throughout the study. These often took the form of chats. In the case of my colleagues these chats could happen during coffee breaks or in corridors or, more specifically in our open-plan office when discussions had turned to (or had been turned by me to) selection. At the other sites chats happened before, breaks between and after interviews, in the administration office where I had been allowed to stay or on the way home.

I also chatted to applicants, often after selection had finished, but these chats were rare and generally initiated by applicants themselves. Informal interviews, with a couple of exceptions, were written about in fieldnotes rather than formally recorded and transcribed.

Documents and other materials

As this study is concerned with the interaction of human and non-human actors, a note is necessary on the sampling of non-human participants. As this research draws on ideas of ANT I was mainly interested in materials through which things could be translated, that is, take on a different form whilst, supposedly, retaining meaning. I therefore collected photocopies of interview forms in their completed form for each interview I had observed at all three sites.

Apart from interview forms, HEI provided me with standard e-mails by which selection was communicated to applicants and, where applicable, with Microsoft PowerPoint™ presentations used during selection events. In addition, I accessed online prospectuses at each site of observation and took photos of room set-ups and furniture. I also collected web material relating to selection in nursing. HEE documents formed the major part of these materials, but I also visited UCAS websites (the charity which administers applications to HEI in the UK) and nursing or student forums. All web-based materials were data-captured via NVIVO® and then exported from NVIVO® as pdf.

Analysis

The overall abductive design is reflected in the approach to analysis taken in this study. In ethnographic research data collection and analysis cannot be clearly delineated (O'Connell, 2017; hence the term "data generation"). For O'Connell (*ibid.*, p. 160) data is used to both "think with" and "write with". This means that fieldnotes and interview transcripts are not data in themselves but "reconstructions of the social world that feed into further translations of reconstructions" (Atkinson, 2015, p. 41). Fieldnotes and interviews were extended through the use of analytical notes (often written as footnotes in transcripts or in specific note books). Interviews were, in general, repeatedly listened to and only parts that were seen to exemplify developed ideas were transcribed. Transcriptions are verbatim, however pauses and intonations like "hmm" or "err" were removed. This is both owed to the methodological basis of this study which is concerned with complexity and inter-relations rather than specifically linguistic practices as well as a lack of skill (I cannot touch-type), time and funding.

Writing about specific events, asking specific questions and elaborations in fieldnotes are already analytic choices, directing the research one way or another. These directions are, however, not accidental. This study, largely, followed what Atkinson (2015, p. 56) described as a comparative method. Through concomitant fieldwork, engagement with theory and empirical literature, patterns were sought to observe which were then, again, subjected to further engagement with literature, and related through further interaction to participants. Comparisons were performed in three ways. One was the comparison between the three sites and their selection approaches. Each site, for example, stated to be employing a distinct form of selection.

Through comparative analysis other distinctions, but also unexpected similarities between selection approaches became apparent to me (see Chapter 3). Another form of comparison was that between the literature (both theoretical and empirical) and the observed actions during fieldwork. Observation of practices or discussions with participants pointed to preliminary ideas which I then needed to compare to what was already “out there” and vice versa. This interplay between the substantive and the formal is a persistent feature of ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 25). A third form of comparison is that of analytical categories developed during the research with data from the field: where does a new or earlier experience fit (Atkinson, 2015)? In Chapter 3, for example, I discuss the concept of “pre-structure” which I developed in order to make sense of the tensions observed.

As O’Connell (2017, p. 156, citing Eisner, 1985) states: “You write yourself clear.” Although I had developed a number of ideas during fieldwork, which in term influenced the way fieldwork was conducted (see Appendices 1 and 2 for examples of annotated versions of interview and observation schedules, which emphasise the development of fieldwork), most analytical work took place after fieldwork was completed (in the loose sense discussed above). First, I had to perform something that Hammersley and Atkinson refer to as *strangemaking* (2007, pp. 231-232), that is the de-familiarising of processes and ideas.

This “strangemaking” was related to the fact that this study was conducted as participant research. Such research comes with a number of challenges which are derived from the positionality of the researcher, that is the various ways of meaning-making depending on the positions taken within the research process (Bourke, 2014). In

this study I played, as Chaves (2008, cited in Greene, 2014, p. 5) holds “two roles simultaneously: that of researcher and that of researched”.

The challenges related to the negotiation of these positions have been documented as familiarity with people and settings leading to assumptions being made based on a researcher’s prior knowledge and prior or current experiences in the field (Delyser, 2001, cited in Greene, 2014) or “bringing your own unexamined interpretive frameworks in making sense of what you see” (Dowling & Brown, 2010, p. 50). In this study these challenges were particularly apparent in my professional position as selector and (later) admissions tutor, interviewing (at least at one site) colleagues I work with on a daily basis. Although fairly new to the team and to nursing education when fieldwork started, I was not new to the practice of selection per se, having participated in selection events in Higher Education before. I had therefore developed ideas about what constitutes “good” or “bad” selection approaches and what I considered “good” or “bad” applicants.

These preconceptions clearly influenced my early analysis; in my writing I made comments about the fairness of particular approaches or the arbitrariness of some of the categories used by selectors. In order to address this issue I followed what is generally seen to be a reflexive approach (for example Atkinson, 2015; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), or, in answer to Dowling and Brown’s challenge, I did not leave my interpretive frameworks “unexamined”. Here a theoretical position (outlined in detail above), which became more crystallised over the course of data analysis, was of importance. This position focused my study not on philosophical, essentialist points about whether something was “really” good or bad but on the processes that led actors to see something as good or bad.

The research questions guiding this study therefore were not concerned with what made good or bad selection methods. In order to focus data analysis on answering these questions, some of my prejudices needed to be identified in the first place, in order for me to be both “self-aware and researcher-self-aware” (Taylor, 2011, cited in Greene, 2014, p. 9). I therefore wrote reflexive notes throughout the study (either in the form of a diary or in form of annotations to data or literature, as suggested by, for example Silverman, 2016). Most helpful however were frequent consultations with my doctoral supervisor (as suggested by Greene, 2014) during which analytical work was discussed and advice given in relation to whether analysis was grounded in the data I presented or seemed to be grounded in my own prejudices (see Appendix 7 for an example of such supervision) and whether analysis was focused on the research questions asked.

In addition, I had to make my own writing strange or *stranger* to me, as I was too much inside my own study. Whilst early drafts were limited on analytic content, often describing processes without connecting them to wider, more general analytical concepts, later drafts exhibited the relationship between the specific and general in much more depth. Whilst, in the beginning, I often wrote with the data generated through fieldnotes and interviews, later I wrote with earlier drafts, often trying out how my analysis would be illuminated by specific theories.

Having to make my writing strange in order to analyse (or to create a coherent argument at any rate) made it problematic for me to fully return to the field after ideas had been developed into an argument. This thesis, therefore, is a representation of selection. Taking a reflexive approach (Atkinson, 2015) I have attempted to emphasise and explain my “reactivity” (ibid., p. 27) both in terms of data generation and analysis. My

role as a researcher and therefore as part of the production of this thesis is both, at times explicitly stated but always implicit in my writing. This does not mean that what appears in this thesis is to be understood as a somewhat rebuilt truth or objective version of selection, as if my influence could somehow be subtracted to restore what was “really there”. However, this thesis is not “just” a summary of “my opinion”, is only one view amongst many others. Through using “thick description” techniques (Atkinson, 2015, p. 67), focusing on the complexity of ways in which selection is enacted, observing interactions rather than individual incidents (ibid.), by continuous reference to empirical and theoretical literature, this thesis can claim a form of generalisability. This thesis is not generalisable in the same way as statistics are, as it does not make inferences about a population based on a stratified study population (Atkinson, 2015). The form of generalisability aspired to is the production of an argument

whose general value is to be judged by readers when they use [thick descriptions] to understand new situations in which they are interested and involved.

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 234)

Ethics

This study was approved by the IOE ethics board before fieldwork commenced (Appendix 3). It follows professional research and ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011). However, in keeping with the methodological assumptions of this study, ethicality is not assumed to be an a-priori condition of research but an effect of the interactions taking place during research. Atkinson (2015) discusses research ethics as problematic as guidelines constituted in theory often prove to be ambiguous or contradictory when enacted in practice. I cannot here rehearse the entire argument but will highlight a number of issues I had with following ethical guidelines to the letter.

Atkinson and Hammersley (2007, pp. 209-229) discuss a number of concepts which should be observed during the conduct of ethnographic research; consent, confidentiality, and exploitation. However, they also highlight tensions produced in attempts to *be* ethical.

I had created a number of information and consent forms for participants (see Appendices 4,5 and 6 for examples) which were supposed to be distributed before observations started. In addition, I gave talks to applicants during the introduction section of selection days. However, on some occasions applicants had not been sent information sheets, so that they were not aware of who I was and the nature of my research before I had a chance to speak to them, which at one site was often two hours into a selection day. My position as an *organisational insider* (Smyth & Holian, 2008) also led to ethically ambiguous action. Although staff had been made aware (through e-mails, personal conversations and introductory statements during meetings) that my research would entail collecting data outside of designated selection events, over time

my announcements became rarer as people got used to me and often stopped me when I tried to explain what I was doing. I therefore often made the assumption that people *knew* because they had been told at one time. I was given reassurance when people declined participation or asked me not to record specific things, especially parts of chats over coffee or in the office.

This points to another ethical issue. Atkinson (2015) discusses the problems ethnographic researchers have with having been told things *in confidence*.

On a number of occasions I was told to switch off recorders, interviewees would be looking over their shoulders as if to indicate that someone might overhear what they felt might be controversial opinions and at other times I was told that what was being discussed should not be repeated in my thesis. I was however never told not to use it and, as Atkinson suggests there were probably reasons for telling me in the first place. So, although no such statements ended up as verbatim quotes in this thesis, they nevertheless became part of the analytical process. In effect, I did what one of the participants suggested after telling me that something was “off the record”: I managed to “get it in some other way”, for example by writing about specific ideas in more general terms. Even where I did not write about specific ideas, they clearly influenced my analysis: I could not “un-know” them.

The study upheld confidentiality of participants by anonymising names and sometimes contexts. However, people reading this thesis might recognise *some* opinions. In addition, following comparative methods I *felt* I had to divulge content from interviews and observations in order to develop ideas of patterns. This was partly due to my attempt to “break with some of the shared, but usually unstated, conventions that operate in everyday interactions and to examine the way in which people respond” (Dowling &

Brown, 2010, p. 54). As Atkinson (2015) discusses, ethnography does not research individuals but groups of people in specific contexts. I felt therefore that sometimes individual contributions made during interviews needed to be re-contextualised to the group. For example, selectors in particular voiced opinions about processes and colleagues. In order to understand whether such opinions constituted patterns or were idiosyncratic, but also to see how people would make sense of challenges that were levelled elsewhere, I mentioned them in other contexts, that is interviews with other selectors. Here, although I never disclosed the origin of my information (and sometimes disguised ideas as my own rather than those of participants), others' opinions were sometimes recognised, especially where such opinions were "common knowledge" amongst a group of people. Although I had informed participants that, while anonymity would be kept where possible, because of the nature of my research some comments or commentators may become identifiable. In this case I promised to approach participants which on the two occasions I felt confidentiality was breached I did. In conversations these participants acknowledged my difficulty in relation to keeping all ideas confidential when research is about sharing of such ideas. No participant felt (or so they said) that their confidentiality was breached in a way that should have been avoided.

My presence during potentially stressful interview encounters had the potential to increase stress, especially as I was not only a researcher but also a nurse and academic. I always honoured requests to not be present during interviews; however, such requests were rarely made. Although I made every effort to clarify my position, it is possible that applicants saw me as influential in ways that I felt I was not and, therefore, felt pressured into consenting. The dual position of nurse academic and researcher was problematic in other ways. After a while I was often asked for opinions about applicants

or current practice at the other sites I observed. At times this put me in a difficult position. Talking about other organisations' practices may have been of benefit for participants and was possibly even necessary in order to analyse selection across institutions, conversely in doing so I might have breached ethical guidelines. Similarly, giving opinions about applicants might influence selectors' decisions, while not giving opinions might antagonise participants who had framed me as expert in selection.

Oscillating between different positions allows for the researcher to perform "identity work", to manipulate his or her persona "to facilitate the collection of useful data" (O'Connell, 2017, p. 165). In this study, I did not necessarily choose the positions of insider/ outsider (and did therefore not, contrary to the suggestion of Burns et al., 2012, take the middle ground). Neither did I necessarily choose related "roles" (O'Connell, 2017, p. 165) such as "expert" or "novice" (ibid., p. 166); these roles were effects of the interactions within the field. For example, in order to establish rapport with administrators, I did not talk about the academic aspect of my work or did not talk about theories I was reading about at the time. I did the same with some academic participants as I felt I would be less of a "threat" which, in turn would allow me to conduct research in a less obstructed and obstructing way. Consciously choosing such "roles" could be considered deception (O'Connell, 2017).

Although I did perform some form of "participant validation" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 221), I did so intermittently and informally through chats with participants where I related some of my ideas. As the analytic writing process was very protracted, I did not manage to discuss my "final" ideas with participants in any great detail. Participant validation is a problematic concept. Emerson and Pollner (1988) have

highlighted that checking one's "findings" with participants does not mean that their input would somehow create a "truer" version of events, but a different one, produced through different contingencies. Such validation can also ethically be problematic as through relating ideas back to participants the "informational economy" (Hammersley & Atkinson, p. 221) of a setting can be disturbed: un-common knowledge becomes common. During this study, for example, I became aware of the different ways in which service users enacted themselves and were enacted by academic staff.

Although I had repeatedly been asked to present my study to the service user and carer group at my HEI, I have so far *managed* to avoid doing this (although I have mentioned a few of what I consider to be uncontroversial" observations during group meetings).

My reluctance is attributed to the fear of the consequences a presentation might have.

As discussed in Chapter 4, service users, during conversations with me, spoke of being fully acknowledged members of selection teams and having equal say with academics.

Although this was sometimes the case, some academics spoke of service users as "useless" or "tick-box exercises" and treated service users differently, as having different *essential* qualities than academics. Communicating this to service users and carers might jeopardise the "good working relationship" which was often stated to exist.

Here I might be seen to exploit service users as they contributed substantially to a study whose findings I am reluctant to share with them. Exploitation of participants is, according to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) a difficult issue to overcome. In order to not be overly exploitative I participated during fieldwork in routines: for example, I marked tests, made and bought coffee and chocolates, escorted applicants from one place to another. In my experience people wanted, by way of recompense, to be informed about my "findings" and I am planning to present my research at all three sites after completion of the thesis. I was given the hitherto unpopular position of *admissions*

tutor at the HEI I work for, based on an assumption that I now know “a lot” about selection. Although I made clear to my line manager that I do not, at least not in the way assumed, it was difficult for me to reject the role: I had to give *something* back for all the support I had been given.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined a strategy to researching selection in nursing. By discussing empirical and theoretical literature, clearly demonstrating their relevance for an epistemologically over-determined enquiry, I have presented the assumptions on which this thesis is based and with which the subsequent chapters are meant to be read. I have also outlined how the study on which this thesis is based, was conducted, highlighting some of the issues materialising in ethnographic research in general and this study in particular.

The following two chapters will discuss data and their analysis.

Chapter 3: Protocols

Introduction

In the following two chapters I will describe and analyse the enactment of selection. Data from observations, fieldnotes, document analyses and interviews with various selectors (academic staff, administrators and service users) will be juxtaposed with claims made in the literature on selection in healthcare. In doing so the importance of an ethnographic approach which understands selection as more than the application of a method is emphasised.

The argument with which these chapters critically engage is largely drawn from a literature review (2014) commissioned by HEE in order to establish empirical evidence for selection methods with regards to VBR, which I discussed briefly in Chapter 2. Drawing on this source specifically seems appropriate as the review mirrors the general tenor of research into selection in healthcare and has been used (and understood by selectors) to constitute HEI selection policy. In summary, the review positions selection as a group of related methods. Here I will mainly comment on the methods that are grouped as “interviews”, as these are the methods my observations specifically relate to (although the patterns I describe could also be found during observation and discussions of other methods, namely screening of application forms, personal statements and references).

According to the understanding propagated by “workpsychologygroup” (WPG) (HEE 2014), the consultancy commissioned to conduct the review, methods have properties such as reliability or validity and are related to “outcomes” which they can cause or predict (for example attrition). Research of this kind, discussed in detail in chapter two, is deterministic in its attempt to assess affordances of a method (M. Oliver, 2013). It understands selection methods as what Latour (1993) referred to as *intermediaries*: fixed entities which are the same at the beginning of a process and at its end.

In this chapter I will attempt to demonstrate that selection methods are by no means fixed. Although they may appear so in the literature, they are, empirically, dynamic entities which change the actors they encounter and which, importantly, are changed by those actors. My analysis here is guided by Timmermans and Berg’s study into medical standards (1997).

These authors held that such protocols, when enacted in practice, are embedded into local cultures, views, hierarchies and assumptions. Although designed to control users, protocols both provide control through coordination but are also controlled and changed depending on assumptions on function and outcome of such protocols. In fact, as Timmermans and Berg argue, following a protocol to the letter creates chaos, and inflexibility of protocols creates rejection. For Timmermans and Berg protocols can only ever exist in a “local universality” (p. 297) that is in highly contingent forms shaped by the network of actors in which the protocol is inserted.

Selection methods in this sense are protocols. They attempt to:

standardize a set of practices, actors and situations. They intervene in a specific situation and prescribe a set of [...] interventions which should be performed in a similar way, to achieve results which are comparable over time and space.

(p. 281).

In researching the enactment of protocols Timmermans and Berg found that when such protocols are acted out tensions become apparent. These tensions are based on the reading of the protocol and its understood function or, importantly, functions and will, in the way they are addressed (or not) change both the protocol and its users.

Tensions are of course part of the research into selection elsewhere (for example the availability of resources or disagreements about the content of a tool in its design phase). However, these tensions are rarely researched in the same way as properties and outcomes. Disagreements are overcome, but it is not clear how; resources are stated to be an issue but it is unclear how this issue is approached *during* the implementation of a method. Tensions become “limitations” or “views” which have to be addressed elsewhere, before or after, but always *outside of*, an interview (or a research project).

Although selection methods are understood to communicate a particular process (discussed by WPG in terms of standardisation, that is prescription of actions to be performed during interviews; and of content, that is the concepts under discussion in interviews), they do not do so by themselves. When a prescribed protocol, for example in the shape of an “interview form”, is used, that which is seen to be standardising causes tensions. And although WPG (HEE, 2014) insist on a protocol only being as

good as its content, which should be based on a “thorough job analysis” (ibid., p. 19, but also on multiple other occasions), this content is as problematic in practice as using a method.

As has been demonstrated in research inspired by ANT, tensions are addressed in situ. Geoffrey Bowker, Susan Leigh Star and colleagues (Bowker & Star, 2000), in their examination of the creation of a classification system of nursing work, developed concepts in order to illuminate the nature of such tensions. The concepts of importance for my analysis of the present data are control, visibility, manageability and standardisation. Control refers to the amount of flexibility a classification system allows its users, with no or limited control referred to as external control and high levels of user control referred to as internal control. As Bowker and Star (2000) have highlighted, characteristics in classification systems are never evenly balanced. They argue that attempts to maximise visibility and external control may lead to a rejection of the scheme by some of its users. Equally, enhancing visibility and standardisation will make the system less manageable, whereas enhancing internal control will affect standardisation. The tensions created by these imbalances may create conflict which needs to be addressed *in some way*.

In this chapter I propose that the same tensions are created when a selection method is used. Although interview scripts exist, they never tell the whole story. Selectors have to fill in gaps or make decisions about which instructions to follow where the protocol lacks (in their view) important information or asks them to perform (in their view) contradictory practices. Although the way selection is conducted and what selection assesses is, in general, researched separately (with content never researched as part of

interviews, only ever as precursor or evaluation), process and content are intertwined and both change or can change during an interview. And although content is understood by WPG as a highly local entity, claims are still being made about generalisable interview methods, again positioning content outside of what is considered a method. In doing so, selection protocols, in theory, remain “pure”, clearly distinguishable entities and claims about relationships to outcomes can be made. In practice, this divorce from everything but the method does not exist. In fact, what has been understood as a “property” of a method, such as reliability, in practice becomes a function of “negotiated practice” (M. Oliver, 2011). A method does not do the same thing regardless of context. Whether a method appears the same or not is a product of the interactions of the method with other actors; whether it measures what it set out to measure is, to a large extent, dependent on what idea can be translated into another without resistance. Whether a high score in an interview *means* the same as a prediction of a final degree result is subject to the belief or experience of selectors *and* depends on certain assumptions never being put to the test.

Contrary to the picture painted in the literature, which situates “views” outside of the enacted protocol, selectors will act upon such tensions in situ and follow various “trajectories” (Timmermans & Berg, 1997) in the enactment of a method. And although WPG (HEE, 2014) suggest that idiosyncratic behaviour and non-standardised use of protocols can be limited through training, in practice this training rarely takes place before selection protocols are used. Instead, as in Timmermans and Berg’s study (1997), “training” is part of the enactment of methods: it takes place *during* interviews.

Pre-structure and enacted structure through materials

In the literature, exemplified by WPG, interviews are discussed as “methods”, a form of prescribed practice. This practice can be understood as a combination of arrangements of actors, such as furniture, people and documents, which are treated to have one generally accepted and understandable meaning. This meaning in return fixes, for WPG, the practice into something generalisable and unchangeable that can be called a method. This understanding of a method as prescription with particular, fixed outcomes was often shared by selectors at all three sites of observation. Selectors would frequently use the name of the method as a shorthand for the admissions process and as an explanation for effects as well as a way of emphasising the superiority of one approach over another (“We’re doing group interviews because they are fair and we can get a good idea of applicants’ personal skills” or “We’re doing MMI as they reduce selector bias and are much fairer to students”).

Research into selection interviews rarely discusses physical set-ups but focuses on interview forms and scoring mechanisms. An exception to this can be found in discussions of multiple mini-interviews (MMI) where the physical arrangement of furniture is seen as a part of the method (for example Callwood et al., 2014; Eva et al., 2004; Perkins et al., 2013). Analytically it is helpful to understand this combination of forms and other materials as part of what Latour and Woolgar have termed “formal communication” (1986, p. 252), that is a filtered, simplified version of a complex practice that nonetheless becomes the predominant version of its reality. It is shared between the people enacting these practices, telling them what to do and how to behave as well as informing observers (either present or readers of reports) of how interviews were conducted, what questions were asked, what counted as acceptable or

unacceptable responses and how such responses were dealt with. Through this process an abbreviation (for example MMI) can come to be seen as a clear description of what is being performed, and the initiated observer will immediately recognise (and judge) the type and the merit of an interview by looking at its physical set-up and the forms used.

This, which I will call *pre-structure*, is a very important concept in understanding selection interviews. I use the term pre-structure purposefully to separate it from the notion of structure discussed in the literature. For WPG (HEE, 2014) the amount of structure provided by an interview method is paramount to its success. The more structured a method, the more reliable, valid and standardised it becomes, leading to better and fairer outcomes. Selectors at all three sites often discussed the methods used in precisely such notions. Structure or standardisation of methods was discussed (in interviews with me as well as in conversations between selectors) as somewhat paramount to the success of an admissions process.

However, the structure communicated by an arrangement of furniture, instructions on forms, or stories of interviews in research papers, which can all be seen as preceding events (as they explain a method and therefore in/form opinion and practice), is not the same structure as performed during the enactment of a method, which I will call *enacted structure*. Although there is no doubt that structure exists and that it is in part related to a prescribed method, enacted structure varies at times significantly from its prescribed notion. In addition, tensions are created not only by low amounts of pre-structure, as claimed by WPG, but also by high amounts.

In the following I will discuss some of the materials forming a method, including furniture and interview forms. I will outline the way in which they constitute pre-structure and how this pre-structure affects actors during the enactment of methods, forcing them to respond to the tensions created. Through this response, methods become re-structured and *different* not only from their prescribed versions but also from what may be understood as a method's identity: interview methods *in practice* are similar and different at the same time.

Physical set-up and pre-structure

At all three sites a pre-structure existed which had been inscribed in durable materials, that is materials that could be transported across space and time and which communicated the method used to the people involved (for example selectors and applicants) and other "stakeholders" such as the NMC, who validated selection processes as part of the nursing course.

One site used group interviews (GI) as the method for interviewing. During selection days, tables were pushed together to fit two selectors and up to eight applicants. I was told this set-up would help interaction between applicants, an interaction which could then be observed and measured. Another site used both GI (eight chairs set in a circle), again to stimulate a "group discussion" in order to observe and measure interaction between applicants. In addition, this site employed 1-2-1 interviews (1-2-1), where two sets of two selectors, each sitting on the side of a small table, talked to one applicant, placed on the other side.

The third site employed MMI for which room dividers and chairs were positioned so that they formed five “stations”, each dedicated to one task or question. Four of these stations were staffed by one selector each; the final one, which constituted a role-play station, was staffed by two selectors: one to act a role, the other to observe. In addition, a timing programme was displayed via a PC and a projector. This programme counted down six-minute intervals and gave announcements to applicants such as “30 seconds left” or “move on to the next station”.

According to the literature (for example Perkins et al., 2013) such a set-up is advantageous in limiting individual selector bias, as interviews are compartmentalised into equally weighted and timed sections, allowing the method to be reliable and standardised. As can be seen from the description above, the physical set-up of various types of interviews differed in the amount of structure it provided. Interviews were pre-structured not only by furniture and paraphernalia, but even more so by interview forms, which existed at all three sites, although in different forms and differently elaborate designs.

Interview forms and pre-structure

One site employing GI used one sheet of A4 paper on which three questions were printed asking for a justification of the desire to becoming a nurse, an account of work experience and “qualities” related to nursing. Answers were scored “out of five” and at the bottom of the sheet a list of “NHS values” (DH, 2012) had been printed which selectors were supposed to match applicants’ responses against.

The site employing 1-2-1, also using an A4 sheet, had listed four questions, two of which asked for an understanding of nursing and related qualities, the other two enquiring about knowledge of healthcare related news and identification of predicted problems when studying nursing. Contrary to that used in GI, this interview form contained a typology of responses with indexed scores (see Figure 1).

Question	Score 4 - Excellent	Score 3- good	Score 2 - fair	Score 1- weak
Why have you chosen Adult nursing?	Discusses role and values rather than tasks i.e. care, compassion, courage, Leadership, assessment and evaluation, communication	Discusses values and tasks i.e. care, compassion, toileting drug rounds	Discusses mainly nursing tasks i.e. Toileting but may refer to some values such as care compassion and communication	Describes caring experience focusing on tasks

Figure 1

At the site where MMI were employed, each of the five stations was allocated at least two forms, not only detailing a question or task (again about ideas on nursing but with additional identification of emotions, strengths, leadership qualities and integrity) but also telling selectors how these questions should be communicated. In addition, typologies of responses had been created with indexed scores, this time also with example answers that illustrated the prescribed categories (Figures 2 and 3).

Please read the question to the candidate.

“What does being a professional nurse mean to you ?”?

NMC Competency Framework Domain 1: Professional Values

- 0 Not related
- 1 Superficial response. No objective data
- 2 Identifies a strength, but no objective data
- 3 Identifies a strength and relates objective data
- 4 Describes a strength and relates objective data
- 5 Extensive description of strength with related objective data

Please consider which categories apply and use this information to make your final score. Please mark out of 5

Poor 0 1 2 3 4 5 Excellent

And identify a qualitative comment

UNACCEPTABLE

ACCEPTABLE

EXCELLENT

RED FLAG option

Only to be used if candidate demonstrates discriminatory, aggressive or other personally offensive behaviour. You must justify your comments and, if applicable, note any direct quotes.

Comments: Please write any additional comments that you think might be helpful on the reverse

Figure 2

0	Not related	Being really, really good at caring for someone.
1	Superficial response. No objective data	It means everything. I have always wanted to be a nurse. It means everything to me. I would such a good nurse.
2	Identifies a strength, but no objective data	My tutor says I am very professional in everything I do. I am neat, tidy, and I never gossip.
3	Identifies a strength and relates objective data	I need to be able to recognise some of the challenges in nursing such as . . . (ethical, legal, etc.)
4	Describes a strength and relates objective data	As a professional nurse I should be able to work with others to address people's needs in different healthcare settings.
5	Extensive description of strength with related objective data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All nurses must care for and safeguard the public. • They must be responsible and accountable for safe, compassionate, person-centred, evidence-based nursing. • They must work within recognised professional, ethical and legal frameworks. • They must work in partnership with other health and social care professionals and agencies, service users, their carers and families.

Figure 3

There are marked differences in what is being communicated through the forms utilised at different sites. The form used for GI did not provide any information on how to conduct GI, what would constitute acceptable answers and how such answers should be translated into scores. The form used for 1-2-1, although giving some instructions on how scores were linkable to applicant responses, used abstract or general terms as model answers whereas the forms used for MMI appeared very explicit with information given not only on desired response-descriptors (“Superficial response. No objective data.”) but also with examples of how these descriptors might be found in actual words an applicant might use. In addition, the instructions to selectors (“Please read the question to the candidate”) seemed explicitly to tell selectors what to do every time they interviewed an applicant.

For WPG, as well as the proponents of “structured methods” in my study, such differences in pre-structure are important.

A number of selectors, often those in senior positions, held that the more pre-structured a method, the more reliable, valid, fair and manageable it is. In principle, therefore the MMI approach employed is the most reliable as not only are the same questions asked to each applicant, but also applicants' responses are categorised and clearly related to a score. The selection materials (forms, furniture and paraphernalia) enhance standardisation as they communicate method and concepts across space and time and different selectors. Selector bias and stereotyping of applicants (according to WPG more likely to occur as part of less structured methods) is limited through the description of method and concepts inscribed in forms. 1-2-1, although less structured than MMI and therefore less reliable (as improvised questions can be asked and applicants could be guided) is more structured than GI, where no typology of example responses existed, therefore leaving judgment entirely to selectors during specific events.

However, as Timmermans and Berg (1997) have demonstrated, a prescribed method does not equal its enacted incarnation. When a method becomes enacted in practice, tensions become visible beyond those predicted (and therefore addressed) in the literature and by selectors. In the following sections I will discuss such tensions and the effect they have on pre-structure.

Enacted structure through interaction with materials

Enactment of methods with low pre-structure

According to WPG and the local proponents in my study, a highly pre-structured method, such as MMI, allows selectors' actions to be repeated across multiple selection events, thereby creating an approach in which every applicant is treated the same.

Although the forms and other materials communicated (in differing amounts) what selectors had to do and how they had to do it, this communication was never complete.

At the beginning of many an interview event I observed selectors chatting to other selectors, telling each other that they "hadn't done this in a while" and asking others "what to look for" in specific questions or how to interpret them. This observation supports the challenges levelled by the proponents of MMI in this study at methods with low levels of pre-structure such as the GI observed in this study. Here selectors asked how much time they had to spend per applicant or what others would consider to be a "vulnerable adult". At the site using 1-2-1, questions revolved around the set-up, for example how applicants should be shared between selectors and how the GI exercise conducted before 1-2-1 should inform overall results. Furthermore, at the start of the GI exercise, usually allocated five minutes, selectors often spent one to two minutes with one selector explaining how to use the score sheet and what to look out for.

What becomes evident here is that materials in and of themselves did not communicate a method sufficiently. People were needed to add, to fill in gaps, to make interviews work *on the day*. As predicted by WPG, this led at times to "unreliable" and "non-standardised" practice.

One example of such non-standardised practice could be found in the practice of “scoring”. The site using GI materials provided little pre-structure on scoring. Selectors were asked to mark “out of five” with no criteria given other than that five constituted the higher end of desirable responses. Self-identified “hawks” and “doves”, therefore, in principle, had great control over the way they graded applicants. This led to differences in which applicants could be offered a place. One selector told me “I know my 9 is someone else’s 13”.

However, these grades did not always constitute the final result. A lead selector often intervened, asking selectors questions such as: “Did you really mean to mark them so lowly?” and “Do you think they should have a place?”. Consequently, grades were often raised and frequently selectors appended their scores with a “yes” or “no” indicating their preference. Some selectors ended up only writing “yes” or “no” and forgoing scoring completely. Similar negotiations were observable at the site employing 1-2-1, where two selectors interviewed one applicant at a time. Although some points of reference were available from the interview forms, these were not often consulted and, in general, applicants were grouped by whether they should definitely get a place, might get a place or should definitely be rejected. In addition, at both the sites employing GI and 1-2-1, score negotiations were observed. Selectors discussed applicants’ behaviours and statements, and suggested scores, sometimes agreeing immediately, sometimes arriving at different scores. The final score was often the result of a mix of horse-trading (if one selector had “given way” in an earlier disagreement they were asking for another selector to do the same now), “meeting in the middle”, pointing out selective statements that would relate to their envisaged scores but ignoring others that would not or using professional hierarchy (more senior academics outvoting junior academics for

example). Scores therefore depended on which selector was present on the interview day and negotiations, and not necessarily on the structure prescribed in interview forms. These examples show that limited pre-structure allowed selectors to make inconsistent decisions. In principle, a higher amount of pre-structure would therefore limit tensions and, through controlling selectors, would lead to a more synchronised approach.

Enactment of methods with high pre-structure

It is possible to argue that it is precisely the lack of pre-structure that led to differing practices. However, the same practices could be observed when the highly pre-structured method of MMI was enacted. Here, administrators and a lead selector explained the different tasks to selectors who were sometimes unsure of what was required in each station. In addition, contrary to practices observed at the sites employing GI and 1-2-1, applicants had to be briefed about the MMI method. A 10-minute presentation not only detailed the format but also how applicants should behave (“Keep eye contact, keep talking; even if a selector is busy writing and not looking at you, they *are* listening). But, similarly to selectors who sought or needed some advice during or after interviews, not all applicants understood when they were supposed to talk or to role-play, for example when they could ask for assistance or a repeat of a question. Time was therefore sometimes spent *during* interviews explaining to applicants what their task and their roles would entail.

Another tension created by the high amount of prescription became observable when applicants did not respond in the way inscribed in interview forms. In Figure 3 a number of references to “objective data” are made with some example answers given.

One problem here was that the term objective did not seem to carry any definitive meaning, as the examples across the various categories differed. Was objective to mean what applicants said about themselves or what others had said about them? Or was it to mean a list of bullet points copied from the NMC “Code” (NMC, 2010a), which was worth the highest grades? Or something different? In the event, selectors hardly ever commented on the notion of “objective” in their notes or in discussions with me. Selectors often rewarded or penalised answers that were not stated on the form, such as talk about “patient-centeredness” or mentioning the “6 Cs” of nursing (compassion, courage, caring, commitment, communication and competence). Some selectors rewarded such answers but others did not (for example stating that the 6 Cs had become a cliché that applicants only rattled off without understanding them).

Scoring in MMI, although indexed to categories and descriptors, was also not free from idiosyncratic behaviour by selectors. One selector told me that they always started at “3” and then worked either left or right (towards 0 or 5) depending on applicant responses but not necessarily on the descriptors stated on the interview form. Others, in-between circuits, talked about applicants (“Did you see her? I gave her a five. I *never* give a five!”/ “He said a nurse is a doctor’s assistant! I obviously gave him an unacceptable!”) indicating both a preference for not marking at the upper end of available scores (being a “hawk”) and sharing their ideas of what would constitute good or not so good responses, not all of which were available from the prescribed forms. In interviews with lead selectors such actions were sometimes called “rogue” and it was explained to me that they were rare.

It is important however to emphasise the position from which statements about rareness or frequency were made: they could not be empirically verified by the people who made them as there was no close observation of the interview process. An important point in which GI/1-2-1 and MMI differed was that actions were not necessarily visible during interviews to anyone other than the interviewer him or herself, as most stations were staffed by one selector only. How they arrived at scores could not be verified. What could be observed was that where actions became visible such as during the role-play station, which contained two selectors, the same negotiation practices observed during GI and 1-2-1 (discussed above) were conducted, demonstrating the limited capacity of translating a prescribed structure into an enacted one and the somewhat blurred lines between methods which the literature understands as specific and therefore separable.

Again, it could be argued that even more pre-structure could alleviate these issues. However, providing instructions in ever more detail may not have led to a more standardised performance. Already there was an observable tension in relation to managing all the paraphernalia and applicants during an MMI. Selectors had to negotiate two or three forms per applicant, with those forms telling them what kind of answers would be permissible or not, how to judge applicants' responses and how to translate those responses into scores. In order to meaningfully match applicants' responses to prescribed content, selectors either had to have memorised such content or do the matching during the interview by looking at the forms. In addition, selectors were asked to keep notes in order to justify their decisions. Further instructions would have complicated this process further.

Although the three methods of GI, 1-2-1 and MMI differ substantially in their pre-structure and their potential to lead to synchronised and standardised practice, there are a number of parallels to be observed when prescription becomes enacted practice. In the section above I discussed examples which may be summarised as issues of visibility and manageability. For one, materials such as interview forms did not make everything visible which selectors needed to select. For example, the absence of categories indexed to scores led to an increase of selector control over scores, but even where those categories were present, selectors did not *treat them* as sufficient and acted in ways that were not part of the prescribed method. In addition, a high amount of prescription could not account for all the possible directions an interview might take. However, a low amount of prescription by design gave control to selectors where a high amount of prescription limited such control. This created further tensions as selectors were set up to breach the method by employing the method itself: where judgment was required in order to make a decision, but not permitted, selectors could not fulfil their brief. I will discuss this phenomenon in more detail in the next section.

Control and enacted structure

In declaring that methods have properties such as reliability, standardisation and validity, a method is posited as controlling a practice as if what should be an outcome of an interaction (repeatability for example) is already inscribed in the method. If the method is well designed and people adhere to it, an outcome is inevitable.

However, as Timmermans and Berg (1997) have shown, a prescription, although organising, is never translated into an identical practice. This is because designers of, for example, methods and the people who employ such methods, may have different ideas and want different things. Such tensions become visible (“crystallize[]”, *ibid.*, p. 275) only when a prescription is enacted and where the aims of users differ from those of the designers (or where the aims of designers are not clearly visible). Here users will orientate their actions towards their own aims. This was not different in selection interviews.

At the site employing MMI, selectors were instructed to either read from or hand over a piece of paper containing a question or a task. These instructions were supposed to elicit comprehension skills from applicants and illuminate selector input: every applicant would be exposed to the same practice; no supplementary questions could be asked or otherwise “prompts” given. Selectors were only permitted to repeat the task or question, or hand over the paper again. In addition, selectors were given categories by which to evaluate applicants’ responses, including example answers and indexed grades, again standardising selectors’ judgments.

Where the point of an interview is seen to be to elicit applicants’ responses in order to match them to prescribed ideas, an absence of response or a response that does not match prescription creates problems for selectors. Applicants often stopped talking after one or two minutes, or talked about something that was not part of the prescribed examples available to selectors. Selectors had varying explanations for this. I was told that applicants may have a poor grasp of English and therefore not understand the question, that they were going off on a tangent, that they were nervous, unfamiliar with the

method of MMI, or that they had run out of things to say. Selectors reacted to this visible lack of usable information in different ways. Some selectors adhered strictly to the prescribed method and only repeated questions until the allocated time had passed, at which point they asked the applicant to move to the next station. In those situations, applicants often repeated what they had already said before going quiet again. Most frequently selectors would, when an applicant “dried up” or “went off on a tangent”, repeat the question, *emphasising* specific parts. Where questions could not be read out and especially when applicants talked about something that was perceived to be unrelated to the question, selectors would *interrupt* the applicant, either repeating the question without invitation or *asking* whether an applicant wanted “to have another look at the question” or have the question repeated. To me, these interventions clearly functioned like “prompts” as applicants often discussed ideas different from the ones voiced before and at any rate kept saying something until another intervention (including emphatic nodding or smiling) was performed. When I mentioned that observable practices might constitute prompts which are prohibited by the prescribed method, some selectors told me emphatically that they “do not prompt”. Others, such as the lead selector, told me “We know that some people still prompt and we’re working on that”.

A number of selectors however discussed what they perceived as a loss of control over interviews and results. Being only “allowed” to ask particular questions and nothing else they felt was “unfair” and not “applicant-centred”. I was told applicants were not given the chance to perform to their best ability when selectors could not be sure that applicants had understood questions or tasks in the intended way, and whether this lack of understanding was a problem based on applicants’ poor grasp of English or whether the problem was based on the way questions were formulated and interviews conducted.

One selector told me that they felt they were “nothing but recorders”, scribes who were only there to record what applicants had said, and that all judgments were predetermined by the forms.

Several selectors seemed deeply unhappy with this situation. During every single observation, there would be selectors who approached me, asked what I thought about “this MMI thing” and then told me that MMI would disregard “professional expertise”. Selectors felt this was problematic in two ways: first, selectors did not seem to have a role that required them to be registered nurses (“everybody can look at these forms and ask those questions”), secondly, selectors felt this approach to interviewing contradicted the ways nursing was taught during the degree course. As one selector put it:

We are meant to teach students to use their professional judgment, yet we are not allowed to use ours. Nurses are supposed to look at patients holistically, to help them identify their ideas and not just see how what patients say fits a preconceived idea of health or illness. We aren't very good role models here.

As became evident, selectors did not only talk about such misgivings, they acted upon them. Asking supplementary questions constituted a clear violation of the prescribed method, but selectors felt that if they did this, a more holistic view of applicants became available. Some selectors told me that they could still do whatever they wanted and, as if to demonstrate this form of agency, one selector, whilst I was observing, marked every single applicant with the highest possible grade.

Such actions, orientated towards an aim that was not necessarily part of a prescribed method, threatened the method itself, as, if everybody had done what “they wanted”, it would have been impossible to talk of a method at all. As in the study conducted by Timmermans and Berg (1997), selectors acted to realign their actions with the prescribed method. For example, the idea of prompts as clearly prohibited was transformed into what may be termed legitimate and illegitimate prompts: prompts that were permitted (asking questions again) and prompts that were not (asking supplementary questions). The timing of such interventions or the way in which they were conducted was not prescribed in the method, therefore allowing selectors to be seen to adhere to the method in principle, even though in practice they clearly had an effect on applicants. Another category that is redefined is that of “fairness”. Although MMI are by design meant to be fair because they treat all applicants the same, it was precisely this generalised approach that for some selectors constituted “unfairness”. Selectors here acted on what they understood to be the function of an interview (for example mirroring perceived attributes of nursing), not on what was prescribed by the method.

What becomes apparent again is that the amount and form of pre-structure is not reflected in the enactment of a method. High external control in the case of MMI had led to tensions which were addressed during interviews, either by reformulation of categories or deviance from the method, in either case leading to change in the enacted method. More external control, for example through more detailed instructions, prohibiting certain ways of interacting with applicants, may be seen to alleviate these problems, but as I have shown this would affect the manageability of the process and cause different tensions.

In fact, controlling selectors, an implicit function of the MMI method, was actually made difficult by the method itself. Only one selector was present at most stations (where two selectors were present, practice mirrored that of 1-2-1 interviews, including the negotiation of scores discussed above). As applicants needed to negotiate a circuit in 30 minutes, all stations were very close together, separated by screens. These screens however made it very difficult to observe selectors with the absence of a second selector further limiting external control. So although materials controlled selectors (the timing and proximity of stations prevented overrunning and therefore differing amounts of time spent with applicants), the same materials made it difficult to control selectors *unconditionally*. “Knowing” that some selectors prompted hardly ever led to observable action; deviance was either not verified or largely ignored. Selectors had to be *trusted* to do “what they were supposed to do”.

I have so far predominantly discussed ideas of control and orientated actions in relation to the highly pre-structured method of MMI. Orientated actions however were observable at all three sites. For example, following the prescribed method did not seem always to produce the effect desired by selectors. In these situations, they either changed their actions in order to yield the effect or *challenged* the method *per se*. At the site employing 1-2-1, for example, selectors were keen to offer a place to an applicant but were prevented by the low score accumulated from shortlisting and a communication exercise. A debate ensued during which the effectiveness of the method was frequently doubted; in the end the shortlisting scores were changed in order for the applicant to be eligible for an offer, justified by professional expertise which was said to outweigh the selection method. At the site employing GI one selector threatened (“in jest”, as he later told me) to resign if an applicant were not offered a place.

Although such interventions did not always lead to a change in decision, they were frequently made after an interview had finished. In fact, at all three sites discussing the merits of the prescribed method formed a regular part of a selection day, not always relating such merit to outcomes discussed in the literature. At the site employing GI the notion of widening participation was often discussed, but not, as is often the case in the literature, referring to applicants from so-called non-traditional or hard-to-reach backgrounds (which in general means applicants with limited social and financial support networks). Widening participation at this site was referred to as trying to recruit more people with A-levels as some selectors felt the selection approach, including the interviews, would advantage people with “lesser” qualifications. At the site employing 1-2-1, a number of selectors were very vocal about the potential of the interview process to help avoid “going into clearing”. Often during or after interviews selectors would discuss whether the method was good at all if it didn’t prevent having to recruit applicants who had been rejected elsewhere or “had only just made their mind up in August”. Having to go into clearing, for those selectors, was a clear indication that the interview process did not work.

The observations detailed above make it difficult to agree with the idea (presented by WPG as well as by selectors in this study) that GI, 1-2-1 and MMI are clearly delineable, universal practices, communicable through material containing differing amounts of prescription. At all three sites the enacted method deviated from its prescribed version as tensions produced by the interaction of materials and people first became visible and second had to be addressed. In doing so, although differences between sites became more palpable, differences between methods became less so.

In the next section I will briefly argue that even the established differences between interview format, that is GI, 1-2-1 and MMI, are not secure.

Reducing delineation of prescribed structures in enacted structures

Assuming that the amount of pre-structure equals the level of external control, there was a clear difference in external control between the methods employed across the three sites, with GI having the lowest level of external control, 1-2-1 more and MMI the highest level. Low level of pre-structure caused tensions similar to those described by WPG, namely a strain on selectors' attention. At the two sites employing GI (although in different formats) the declared purpose of this approach, namely to observe applicant interactions with each other, was at odds with observed practice. At one site, where GI took the form of an interview, a question was supposed to be asked to "the group", generating a discussion. This practice was rarely observed; where selectors followed this approach they only did so for one question. Most selectors asked an individual applicant one question and then moved on to the next applicant, asking the same question again until everyone in the group "had a go". As the penultimate and final applicants in such a turn often stated that their contributions had already been made (again, a problem acknowledged by WPG as well as selectors who did use GI but also those, by way of discrediting, who did not) selectors often changed the order in which individual applicants were asked. Another site used GI as a form of exercise during which applicants were asked to discuss a scenario "amongst themselves". Selectors had a crib sheet, detailing the applicant actions to be observed and how they should be marked. Selectors walked around the group of applicants for five minutes and ticked boxes for actions.

They did so by either marking all actions for one applicant in one go or by ticking boxes for one action for all applicants at the same time. In both examples the prescribed method had been adapted and changed. GI interviews, being to some extent unmanageable in the way prescribed in the method, had been turned into something closer to 1-2-1: either in the way applicants were assessed or particular criteria were matched to applicants.

At the site employing MMI, selectors also changed the format of the interview. Some selectors scored and wrote notes in the five-minute breaks between circuits, after having seen six applicants. It could be said of this practice that it may be closer aligned to the concept of group interview as decisions were based on (or at least influenced by) contributions from a number of applicants which could then be compared.

In fact, at all sites selectors talked about groups of applicants, regardless of whether a formalised group-based method was employed. Applicants, for example, were grouped by arrival time (“The ones who come early are the keenest. You can really tell the difference”) or time of application (“People applying in September are usually useless; they didn’t get in anywhere last year!” or “The earlier applicants are usually better; they are organised and know what they want. People coming in March have just not been snapped up anywhere else”).

These examples demonstrate that GI, 1-2-1 or MMI in principle may not clearly be aligned with a prescribed method in practice. Selectors take elements of other methods in order to perform interviews and make sense of the process and applicants.

Furthermore, not only does a structure inscribed into a method not result in the same structure (or amount of structure) in a method’s enacted guise; low amounts of pre-

structure as in the case of GI can actually lead to an increase in enacted structure if selectors feel they require such. Standardisation or reliability therefore are not properties of a prescribed method as held by WPG and the proponents of specific selection methods in this study, they are an effect of the interaction of people with said method, are an effect of enactment. And what I have termed so far an enactment of structure is much more than that: it is an enacted practice, a practice that is an effect of an interaction with a prescribed *principle*, a structure or method which is never fully translated in the way it is designed.

Content and enacted practice

In the preceding sections I have largely focused on what materials and selectors do in relation to the process of interviewing. In the next section I will discuss the importance of the “content” of interviews. Although what I have discussed so far clearly is content of a method (instructions for example) what I will focus on in the next section is content in terms of concepts under discussion which are used to identify “right” or “wrong” applicants and the environments to which those right or wrong notions apply. I will show that content is not separable from method and that the differences in understanding concepts between sites and individual selectors make it increasingly difficult to speak of interview methods as universal entities.

In the literature, selection methods are often discussed as being only as good as “the development of its content” (Rees et al., 2016, p. 453), with WPG asking for a “thorough role analysis” (HEE, 2014, p. 48) prior to implementing a method. However, when observing interview practices, it becomes clear that a prescribed method only

contains a limited amount of what is seen to be part of the role of a future student. All three sites formulated notions of nursing, applicant qualities and preparedness for the profession. The concepts of nursing and qualities were often formulated in abstract terms on interview forms. In the following I will discuss in detail the tensions created by this approach in relation to nursing; the formulation of qualities as abstract had the same observable effects.

Nursing

Nursing has been very difficult to “pin down”, although ample attempts have been made (for example S. D. Edwards, 2001; Morrall, 2001; Watson, 1979) and there are various models creating abstract notions of nursing (Carper, 1978; Neuman, 1996; Orem, 2001, and others). In practice, as identified by Bowker and Starr (2000), nurses themselves struggle to agree on what constitutes entities that are specific to nursing alone and, in their study, had to settle for very specific tasks as the only commonly agreed denominators of nursing. The more abstract a concept had become, the less it could be said to pertain to “nursing” exclusively. That this is a problem in interviews may be illustrated by the following exchange of two selectors:

Selector 1: *She said she was a good communicator and I think she demonstrated that.*

Selector 2: *She can be a good communicator in a shoe shop, that doesn't mean she's a good communicator as a future nurse.*

Two sites had developed typologies of acceptability of applicant responses in relation to nursing (see Figures 4 and 5). The same forms I discussed earlier in terms of differences between the three sites, in particular how they communicated how to select and what to judge applicants on. Here I would like to emphasise particularly how the notions of nursing and knowledge of nursing are enacted in such forms.

0	Not related	Being really, really good at caring for someone.
1	Superficial response. No objective data	It means everything. I have always wanted to be a nurse. It means everything to me. I would such a good nurse.
2	Identifies a strength, but no objective data	My tutor says I am very professional in everything I do. I am neat, tidy, and I never gossip.
3	Identifies a strength and relates objective data	I need to be able to recognise some of the challenges in nursing such as . . . (ethical, legal, etc.)
4	Describes a strength and relates objective data	As a professional nurse I should be able to work with others to address people's needs in different healthcare settings.
5	Extensive description of strength with related objective data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All nurses must care for and safeguard the public. • They must be responsible and accountable for safe, compassionate, person-centred, evidence-based nursing. • They must work within recognised professional, ethical and legal frameworks. • They must work in partnership with other health and social care professionals and agencies, service users, their carers and families.

Figure 4

Question	Score 4 - Excellent	Score 3- good	Score 2 - fair	Score 1- weak
Why have you chosen Adult nursing?	Discusses role and values rather than tasks i.e. care, compassion, courage, Leadership, assessment and evaluation, communication	Discusses values and tasks i.e. care, compassion, toileting drug rounds	Discusses mainly nursing tasks i.e. Toileting but may refer to some values such as care compassion and communication	Describes caring experience focusing on tasks

Figure 5

It is interesting that the examples to be valued highest (according to the prescribed method) are exclusively phrased in abstract terms, that is in terms that state concepts rather than actions, terms that allude to outcomes rather than practice.

The third site did not have any typology inscribed on what counted as a valid or invalid response to the question “What is adult health?” (which always resulted in a discussion about what is adult nursing). However, selectors regularly asked about the differences between the work of healthcare support workers and nurses, and, at the site represented in Figure 5, looked for differences between tasks (that is descriptions of, for example, taking a blood pressure or “toileting patients”) and roles, here looking for references to autonomy and knowledge.

The reliance on abstract concepts (in the sense discussed above) to explain nursing caused a number of tensions during interviews. For one, abstract concepts seemed to be well known amongst applicants, making it difficult to differentiate between them. Selectors would often ask for elaboration if an applicant talked about themselves as being caring or compassionate. However, explicit references to tasks were also problematic as they did not always seem to fit current ideas of nursing as an autonomous profession. During interviews selectors therefore seemed to create their own concrete entities in order to assess abstract notions. At the site employing GI, several selectors steered the conversation towards the differences between healthcare assistants and nurses, looking for (as they told me during conversations) notions such as accountability, knowledge and understanding (“nurses think about what they do, support workers just do”). Another topic people wanted to have (or manoeuvred to have) addressed was that of adult (or mental health) being different from other specialities of nursing. Other topics, however, became purely idiosyncratic: some selectors, in interviews, told me how they were looking for some understanding of nursing in relation to the selector’s professional background. To be precise, selectors did not state that they were looking for references to their own professional background

but kept talking about facets of that background in answer to my question about what they would be looking for. It is possible that the lack of visibility of prescribed answers and the related increase of internal (selector) control afforded this emphasis of the idiosyncratic. However, at the sites that provided prescribed topologies, similar processes were observable. Selectors at the site that employed 1-2-1 often asked applicants about their understanding of the difference between adult and other forms of nursing and discussed applicants' responses in relation to a selector's nursing background. At the site that employed MMI, a number of selectors scored applicants highly if they talked about their work in a healthcare environment or mentioned words like team-work and referred to the 6 Cs. Others seemed to insist on applicants talking about patient-centredness. Others again scored applicants lowly even though the term patient-centeredness was mentioned and discussed. To me it did not always seem obvious on what considerations scores were being produced, because hardly any selector *wrote* at this particular station and there was no time for me to enquire what had led to giving a particular score. What became obvious was that although each site used similar abstract definitions of nursing (which were often inscribed in the materials of the prescribed method), the specifics which were rewarded (or not) differed (at times greatly) between sites and instructors. In fact, it seemed that it was precisely the use of abstract notions of nursing stated on forms that allowed for different methods across different sites to be seen to refer to *the same thing*, when that thing in enacted practice was different, however slightly.

In this section I have demonstrated that although each site used versions of nursing, these versions varied in assumptions about what constituted nursing and how it was constituted.

Although a notion of similarity is achieved through the employment of abstract notions, concepts and their acceptance differ in actual practice. This makes it difficult to speak of nursing as a general concept. In addition the link between a prescribed method and its enactment becomes even more spurious. The claim that, for example, GI has particular properties in relation to nursing (getting the right applicant for it) becomes less sustainable where both the method and the concepts under discussion appear to be local practices. Another concept which differed to an even larger extent between sites was that of work experience.

Work experience

In this section I will discuss work experience as an example of a concept that is seen by some to be important as a marker of preparedness for a nursing course, but not by others. What is clearly an unresolved debate in the literature (see for example Carty et al., 2007, who argue that exposure to work in a healthcare setting prior to commencing a nursing programme is not advantageous and; Shulruf et al., 2011, who argue that it is) is reflected in selection practices.

Differences in what would constitute the right kind of experience and whether it was necessary at all existed across the three sites. At one site work-experience was understood to be synonymous with having worked with “vulnerable” adults. Caring for family members or working in the service industry, both forms of experience accepted by the site that employed 1-2-1, was not deemed satisfactory. I was told this was because of “evidence” that students who had limited or no experience of working in the healthcare sector were likely to leave the course before completion, often in the first few

weeks of placement. This approach to work experience however caused some selectors problems as they deemed it unfair. I was told that in the UK it is very problematic for people younger than 18 to actually get work experience in formalised employment. Most applicants were only allowed to “shadow” a nurse or doctor for a couple of days. Demanding formalised work experience therefore appeared to discriminate against younger applicants or those that were doing A-levels. One selector told me that “the whole system is geared towards mature applicants, which is a shame”. As most applicants were however not in the “mature” category, selectors had to use their own judgment on what counted as acceptable work experience and what did not. At all three sites, selectors appeared to create a number of categories which were not inscribed in prescribed materials. At the site employing GI, having “learned from work experience” (without detailing what would constitute such learning) was seen to be important. Some selectors considered work experience that was taken as part of a course (BTEC for example) as sufficient; others did not. The site that employed MMI had no nominal way of assessing work experience and I was told by selectors in interviews that although work experience was desirable, not having had any was not a “deal breaker”. However, applicants were sometimes given higher marks when they talked about explicit examples from their own work rather than abstract or hypothetical examples. This was also the case at the site which employed 1-2-1. In addition, selectors at this site created differences between the nature of experience: some felt working in a fast food restaurant to be a good preparation for the stressful work of a nurse; others did not accept this as meaningful work experience. Some felt that nursing a grandmother counted as work experience; others disagreed. Other selectors again did not see a value in work experience at all (as one selector told me: “There is no evidence that working in healthcare makes any difference. Having done proper research is enough.”).

What becomes observable is that sites and individual selectors differed in their ideas of what constituted nursing and preparedness for a course. Although all three sites can be said to look for similar things in principle, in practice these concepts were understood differently between sites and between individual selectors. It is also not clear how the prescribed method relates to the understanding of concepts, as no method seemed to have the capacity to make a concept sufficiently visible. In addition, when WPG ask for a “job analysis” it is not necessarily clear to the people doing the selecting which job it is that needs to be analysed. Most prescribed methods asked for concepts in relation to nursing but there were only a few references to the ability to study. Ideas about student-ness were either removed from an interview (with maths and English tests dealing with “academic ability”) or featured in a slide show as a job description full of abstract entities such as flexibility, maturity, commitment. Only one site asked a specific question about envisaged challenges which almost always amounted to a discussion about access to a car which would make travelling to placements easier. Apart from these examples, questions about university did not feature in any of the interviews. In discussions *after* interviews however, selectors always discussed applicants by way of their propensity to “last the course” or create some sort of problem (often discussed in terms of extra work) for selectors.

In my discussion of “content” as somewhat separate from method I have mirrored the general tenor in the literature. There are only a few examples of specific research into the contents of interviews, which often exclusively deal with how they were designed (for example Callwood et al., 2014; or Mazhindu et al., 2016) and/or how they were judged before or after a selection episode (for example Perkins et al. 2013).

Such research rarely deals with how presentation, interpretation or acceptance of content affects the practice of interviews in situ. Problems are discussed as limitations which have been or will be addressed, but rarely as tensions within an enacted practice which are addressed during enactment, thereby clearly affecting “outcomes” (although Taylor et al., 2012 and Macduff et al., 2016 discuss the effect of views in principle). As my examples show, prescribed content provides the same tensions prescribed structure does in terms of visibility, manageability and control. Selectors want to or have to make decisions either because a concept is not visible enough or individual ideas cannot be aligned with those communicated by the prescribed concept. Conceptual content and that which imposes a structure can therefore, empirically, not easily be separated as interaction with either forces selectors to restructure approaches and redefine concepts. How a selector deals with prescribed content will affect the way they conduct interviews and make sense of an applicant. It is therefore even more doubtful that methods such as GI, 1-2-1 and MMI should be discussed meaningfully outside of their content. However, in stipulating the existence of “methods” in the first place, the literature does precisely that.

In the next section I will develop this argument by demonstrating that multiple elements of interview practice cannot meaningfully be related to any available specific method, as they are common to all three approaches under discussion.

Enacted practice devoid of methodological identity

So far, I have discussed how actions and content inscribed in materials (and therefore prescribed as method) were affected by their enactment and affected selectors in turn.

There were however a number of notions which seemed to exist independently of any material inscription. Such concepts were present irrespective of a particular declared method and appeared at all three sites. I separate such notions by the way they appeared to be legitimised and acted upon, as several notions were clearly of interest to selectors but were not permitted to form a basis for a decision where others, equally of interest, became legitimised through lack of challenge. In addition some actions which were performed in order to make decisions seemed to be so normalised that they were neither discussed nor formally applied: they had become part of an intimate selection process.

Illegitimate concepts

One of the most discussed concepts before and after interviews was that of applicant attire (“She wore a nice suit; you can tell she was taking this seriously.” or “How can he turn up in trainers and holes in his trousers? Doesn’t he have anybody to tell him how interviews work?”). Some selectors tried to formalise the importance of attire by creating tests such as the “shoe shine test” (by which the level of shine on applicants’ shoes determined their suitability for nursing *per se*). Such concerns were however, when voiced, although acknowledged, rebutted by other selectors. I was told:

We cannot make assumptions based on how somebody dresses. This would discriminate against applicants from poorer backgrounds.

Similar concerns were voiced if selectors enquired about personal circumstances such as the number of children or the financial situation of applicants. These issues were clearly of concern to selectors, especially once an applicant had become a student and started the course and became an attrition “risk”.

As the general literature on selection (for example Andrew et al., 2008; HEE, 2014; Jeffreys, 2007; Mooring, 2016), and selectors in my study have frequently stated, selection is meant to reduce attrition, which can be related to personal circumstances. As one selector told me:

We don't lose a lot of applicants anymore because of their struggle with the academic side. We lose most of them because they cannot afford to study any more or they have issues with childcare.

In interviews however, these issues could not often be addressed (although there was a clear desire to do so).

Irrespective of their problematic nature for selectors, these concerns were prohibited from becoming part of the “decision process”. However, where an applicant volunteered information of this kind (often to state that they would be able to cope with the added stress of, for example, having a family), selectors felt permitted to base decisions on suitability thereupon, discussing this, for example as “having thought things through” and being prepared, thus aligning it with prescribed methods and therefore legitimising their judgment.

Legitimate concepts

Other issues were generally accepted as *legitimate parts* of selection, although these did not form part of the prescribed method either, nor were they, to my knowledge, ever challenged by selectors as unethical or inappropriate. One of those issues was that of “authenticity”. Although none of the protocols made any reference to this concept, selectors frequently talked about applicants being “rehearsed” or that they did “not really mean” what they were saying. When I asked how selectors could tell whether an applicant was being authentic (or, as some selectors called it “genuine”), I was sometimes told that authenticity was related to the way applicants spoke (for example, monotonous, not “in the moment”) or that the examples they brought seemed unbelievable. As discussed by Van Leeuwen (2001) authenticity can be understood as a culturally specific concept and what counts as authentic in one context may not do so in another. However, during interviews it was not only the “fact” of authentic delivery that was discussed but the value of authenticity *per se*. During interviews, it was obvious that authenticity was a concept that was often used to guide decisions when selectors were in disagreement or when the categories inscribed in materials did not allow for sufficient differentiation. However, sometimes the concept was employed before any other, making concepts inscribed in materials superfluous. In addition, what counted as authentic behaviour and how that behaviour should be translated into a decision was often a purely idiosyncratic move, as some selectors rejected “over-prepared” applicants whilst others felt applicants should be as prepared as possible and demonstrate this preparedness. Similar issues were observed with ideas of body language or tone of voice. Although only prescribed as part of one GI exercise, the concepts relating to body language were used at all three sites to differentiate between applicants, and this

differentiation was clearly legitimised through the lack of concerns voiced about these practices.

The notion of a well-defined (and therefore “employable”) “method” becomes less and less attainable. What constitutes GI, 1-2-1 and MMI may be well-defined *in principle* but looking at enacted practice one sees an amalgamation of bits of each method in conjunction with elements that do not appear in any of the prescriptions.

Although, as demonstrated by Timmermans and Berg (1997), materials perform organising work, such work is incomplete and never only the work *intended*, as other actors are by no means “docile” (ibid., p. 292). In the final section of this chapter I will detail how the work done by selectors and materials functions both to change a prescribed method and keep it recognisable, depending on the perceived outcome of actions.

Enactment work

The literature (for example HEE, 2014) discusses selection interviews as having mainly the following purposes: reducing attrition and attracting and recruiting people with the right cognitive and social abilities. A selection method is said to be designed in ways to best achieve these “outcomes” and its success is measured by how well such outcomes are realised. Should an outcome not be achieved, critique is usually levelled at the design of a method or at the people who did not implement it according to a designer’s intent. This positions selectors as what Berg and Timmermans (1997) term docile actors: actors which do not have agency and whose actions are solely determined by a prescribed method.

During observation of selection interviews, discussions of the outcomes stated above were frequently observed. All selectors were looking for right or wrong applicants and talked about “keeping people on the course”. In addition, as proposed by WPG (HEE, 2014), selectors wanted selection to be fair and in some way standardised and were looking to the selection method to achieve these outcomes. At all sites prescribed practices seemed initially to do just that, albeit in varying ways and to varying extents of structure. But as I have demonstrated above, no prescribed method was explicit enough in communicating designers’ intents completely, which forced selectors to choose a path of action that they understood to be the right one in conjunction with prescribed outcomes. One further example here should suffice: selectors often spoke about questions not having a “right or wrong answer” (see also Perkins et al., 2013) with interest being assigned to how applicants would interpret a problem. However, in order to judge an applicant’s response, notions of right and wrong had to be created, either in the prescribed material or by the selector themselves. In fact, the idea that no right or wrong answer existed invalidated the finiteness of any inscribed answer immediately and selectors were forced to disregard inscriptions as only one of many possible answers.

WPG (HEE, 2014) suggest that training will alleviate problems such as those discussed here (for example selectors not understanding questions or actions). Training is supposed to synchronize selectors’ actions, making them standardised and therefore fair and reliable. Although selectors spoke about having received training, *planned* training seemed to have taken place long before interviews were conducted. In fact, as I have stated above, all interviews started with people being briefed about what to do and how

to do things, not only before an interview, but often during, especially where scoring was concerned. In addition, training was conducted in a much more informal way than possibly acknowledged by selectors. Selectors consistently performed what Latour and Woolgar refer to as *informal communication* (1986, p. 257). They talked about interviews and applicants before, during and after interviews, sharing views, positive or negative, detailing their own approaches. In staircases and offices, characteristics of good or bad applicants, of useful or useless selectors were discussed and thereby transported *alongside* the prescribed method. In doing so, over time, a prescription was adjusted, and although something might later become part of the prescribed method, this transformation had already begun much earlier. For example, the site conducting 1-2-1 asked applicants to talk about their “attributes”, but selectors found that applicants often either did not know what attributes were or that applicants presented notions that selectors did not accept to be attributes. During interview discussions, some selectors mentioned that the question should be changed to ask, for example, for “qualities”. This never happened during the time I observed, at least where the prescribed method (questions as inscribed in an interview form in this case) was concerned. However, some selectors started to change questions during interviews but others insisted on asking for “attributes”. Such adaptations of prescribed materials were observed at all three sites, often related to abstract concepts that were either seen to be clear identifiers of some applicant ability or knowledge, or, as they had seemingly become common knowledge amongst applicants and selectors (such as the 6 Cs), as clichés.

The literature seems to suggest that once a material is designed, all problems with acceptance and interpretation are alleviated, or that such problems, if they are acknowledged during interviews, are dealt with afterwards during a redesign process

(for example Callwood et al., 2014; Perkins et al., 2012; Rhodes and Nyawata, 2010) but when observing interviews it becomes clear that redesign takes place during interviews. Importantly, actions were not always related to outcomes prescribed in the method or by the literature. A vast number of ideas existed about what selection could or should achieve and how selection could or should affect individuals. Some of these outcomes appeared to be shared amongst several selectors, such as that interviews should be “protecting the public” or “protecting the standard of the course”. Other outcomes, although shared by some, were not shared by everyone, as in the example of fairness discussed above, or the notion that selection interviews should reflect the course rather than contradict it. Some selectors appeared to see the function of selection as avoiding recruiting students who may prove to be “a lot of work”, either in a pastoral or academic sense; some selectors were worried about recruiting enough applicants from “disadvantaged” backgrounds; others exclusively wanted applicants with A-levels. And further, more idiosyncratic outcomes existed: job security played a part for some selectors (“If we get this wrong, the course might not be recommissioned as it doesn’t bring in the money or gets bad results in the National Student Survey”) as well as the fear of being told off for “getting it wrong”. Finally, an outcome often discussed by selectors, but when mentioned explicitly always rejected, was that selection served to reduce a large number of interviewees into a much smaller number of available “places”. When I told one selector that this, to me, seemed one of the main functions of interviews, she simply said “thank you” and walked out of the room, not being available for any further conversations from then on. Yet selectors performed extensive work in order to adjust numbers, for example creating holding piles of applicants who might be offered a place, creating quotas of the number of applicants who could be offered a place during one interview day, creating algorithms. And still

they were over- or under-recruiting, both of which yielded a penalty from the funding body. Not many of these alternative outcomes are discussed in the literature and yet they are important as they not only change what is perceived as getting selection “right” or “wrong”, they consequently change selectors’ actions depending on which of these outcomes is seen to be important.

For not all outcomes can be achieved at the same time. Not all outcomes were achievable at all times and which outcome was deemed important depended on the selector, but also on which selectors worked together, or the time of year (as discussed above). A course lead for example will be looking for a reduction in attrition whereas an admissions tutor will be looking to get as many people on the course as possible as their job is measured by recruited numbers (and not by the number leaving the course early). As I have shown, where different ideas of fairness exist, different actions will be employed. Where the prescribed method forces selectors to violate prescriptions, new definitions might be sought, as the example above on prompts has illustrated. Some selectors saw the most desired outcome of interviews to be avoiding “clearing”, the process at the end of the academic year where unsuccessful applicants apply for “left-over” places. If a site went into clearing, a whole interview approach was questioned and selectors became more vocal in their criticism of a method although a number of other outcomes were still achieved.

Outcomes, or “trajectories” as Berg and Timmermans (1997, p. 276) label them, therefore were not necessarily prescribed in formal communication, such as materials, but “crystallize” (ibid., p. 273), become visible and important, during interviews

themselves. In order to align practice with such trajectories, selectors performed a number of actions which can be theorised as follows: *creation, reformulation, stabilising and destabilising of categories*. First, selectors created categories such as that of “authenticity” in order to, for example, make a decision that was not possible to make based on the prescribed method.

Second, they reformulated categories such as those of fairness or prompts, where the original definition would not suit a particular outcome (see also Timmermans & Berg, 2003 for a discussion of the practice of such reformulation). Third, they destabilised or stabilised categories, such as in the example of the 6 Cs, which could either be performed as a clear representation of nursing or as a cliché. (It is this example that demonstrates that applicants are by no means docile actors either. Only through interactions with applicants it becomes possible to acknowledge the reduced capacity of a concept to discriminate between applicants. Applicants therefore “teach” selectors as much as selectors teach applicants, for example about the conduct of an interview practice, which the applicant can then use in a different interview location.) However, selectors stabilised (through, for example, repetition or emphasis) categories related to outcomes deemed important.

Taking into consideration the work outlined above it becomes impossible to speak of three clearly delineated methods. As I have demonstrated, not only do practices overlap, so for example elements from 1-2-1 and GI feature in MMI, but they also differ greatly in the way they are enacted locally. Depending on which outcome is emphasised, practices will change and although an organising principle is inscribed in material, this principle changes significantly when it becomes enacted practice. It is therefore more

accurate to speak of multiple practices or, as Timmermans and Berg (1997) labelled them, “local universality”, practices that depend on local needs and interpretations rather than reflecting a prescribed order. Each site enacted a dynamic set of approaches and thereby created a paradigm in which multiple possibilities of interpretations, actions and outcomes existed. There was no such thing as one method.

How is it possible then for selectors to claim, as they do, to be using specific approaches? One of the reasons prescribed methods were not challenged more often *per se* lies, as Timmermans and Berg (1997) have shown, precisely in the fact that work is being done. In making the method work by reformulating concepts, ignoring supposed inconsistencies (such as the notion of “objective” in MMI or the problem with actually generating group discussions in GI, discussed above) and by imposing one’s own interpretation on concepts, selectors protected the overall “method”. In fact, as discussed by Timmermans and Berg (1997), working to the letter of a prescribed method would have created chaos as, in the examples above, selectors would have struggled to judge applicants meaningfully had all applicants talked at the same time or would have had to reject too large a number of applicants, as not many would have fulfilled the notion of “objective” as displayed on interview forms.

Of course, if actions that restructure or change prescription grow out of perspective, the claim that one method is used cannot hold anymore. Regular or senior selectors here often *reminded* other selectors of the point of selection (“We have to keep this fair!”) or of the success of the particular approach used (“This new scientific approach really works”), therefore reinforcing the prescribed method and some of its outcomes. One major practice in support of maintaining the notion of a unified method was therefore

“ignoring” as discussed above in the example of “rogue” selectors who did not adhere to prescribed actions but also ignoring the differences between an interview situation and a situation that was not an interview (which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter). In doing so it becomes possible at all to speak of a method’s ability to predict.

Only by performing interviews *into isolation* can claims be made about their ability to elicit generalisable opinions about applicants. In fact, the claims about the validity, reliability or predicative ability of methods lose their purchase when context is added or assumptions are made that cannot be tested. This inability to test is an integral part of the isolation of a process that allows a deterministic (or cause/effect) relationship to be established in the first place. Applicants rejected during interviews are never tested again (this would make the process unmanageable), but, just as importantly, assumptions about applicants who are offered a place are not taken forward either. Only parts of an enacted practice (the parts containing numbers and limited amounts of written words) are actually being transported. Everything else will be lost. Through this deletion, again, the prescription becomes that which predicts, which functions in repeatable, reliable fashion.

What becomes clear is that a large part of interview time is given over to *do interviews*, that is, to make interviews work, changing them *and* keeping them the same. What appears in principle to be a fixed entity performed in materials such as interview forms, research papers or other types of formal communication, in practice is shown to be a dynamic practice which depends on the *interrelationship* (M. Oliver, 2016) of materials and people. In the next chapter I will demonstrate that those people, although treated as

“fixed entities” themselves, are by no means less dynamic than the methods with which they operate.

Chapter 4: People

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I have discussed selection methods as enacted practices. Although understood in the general literature on selection into nursing as fixed and clearly delineable entities, methods are effects of interactions between materials and people who engage with them. However, this literature (for example WPG in HEE, 2014) does not only understand methods to be such intermediaries, preceding and being left unchanged during interviews. All actors involved in selection processes are analysed based on this premise. This is a logical consequence of the assumptions made in the field of work psychology and, in turn, a precursor of such assumptions. Actors *must* be unchangeable and *remain* unchanged in order for a cause and effect trajectory, as proclaimed by work psychologists, to take effect.

In this chapter I will conceptualize human actors differently. Human actors are not unchanging or docile subjects of interest and observation but active parts in the construction of these subjects. Furthermore, what is understood to be the starting point of observation, an entity devoid of the influences of the practices classed as observation, is a result of such practices rather than their starting point. In this analysis, I will draw on concepts developed by Latour and Woolgar in their seminal study on “[t]he construction of scientific facts”, as well as Law’s reading (2004) and Berg’s contextualisation into medical decision making (1997) of Latour and Woolgar’s study.

In “Laboratory Life” (1986) Latour and Woolgar develop, albeit without defining, the concept of *translation*, which I have touched on in Chapter 3 but will discuss in more detail here. Hamilton (2011, p. 59) provided an evocative summary of the concept as an ordering

of the messy complexities of everyday life [...] for the purpose of the project at hand.

In their study, Latour and Woolgar (1986) detail how scientists do not “find”, or simply “observe” nature for the existence of, a specific substance. Such substances are brought into being through a series of scientific practices. Firstly, a substance cannot be easily accessed; it is, for want of a better word, an assumption which has to be proven.

Through this process what has been invisible or inaccessible *becomes* visible and accessible *in the first place*. An entity “out there” (ibid., p. 182) is transported into an “in here”.

In order to generate this proof, scientists generate visible traces, representations; they have to turn blood samples into graphs and numbers, which can then be further processed.

Selection into nursing does not take place in a laboratory. However, the metaphor of scientists bringing into being entities which they say are merely discovered or observed can analytically be useful in understanding selection. As I have discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, selection and specifically interviews are generally understood as methods which “test” what is already present: qualities of applicants.

Selectors treat such qualities as observable. When researching selection ethnographically it becomes obvious that selectors, like scientists, perform a series of translations in order to access such qualities. Representations need to be and are created in order to establish prevalence of qualities. In fact, such translations begin long before an applicant and a selector meet.

In order to express this “chain of translation” (Latour 2010a, p. 606) Latour and Woolgar (1986, p. 51) introduce the concept of inscription devices. Inscription devices are:

item[s] of apparatus or particular configuration of such items, which can transform a material substance into a figure or diagram which is directly useable.

In “Laboratory Life” the machines that turn the blood of rats into points on graph paper, points which can then be compared and understood as evidence of the existence of a substance, constitute inscription devices. For Law (2004, p. 29, original emphasis), inscription devices are:

a set of arrangements for converting relations from non-trace-like to trace-like form .

Law here emphasizes that inscription devices are not only machines, such as centrifuges, but also the way in which they are understood to be working and used.

I have already begun to discuss what can be considered inscription devices of selection: the “methods” and their enactment analysed in Chapter 3. In this chapter I will demonstrate how such selection “arrangements” work to make qualities of applicants accessible by turning ideal notions into words and “extracting” words from applicants which are then further manipulated until the presence or absence of a quality is established.

As Latour and Woolgar show, translation is a framed and a framing process; substances take particular shapes because they are “researched” in particular ways. In laboratories, scales can be adjusted: what is small/ invisible (a substance) becomes large enough to be a point on graph paper and what is big/ difficult to handle (the world out there with uncountable interferences) becomes, in a laboratory, small and accessible (see also Latour, 1999a). In addition, inscription devices already contain the specific shape of the substance to be “detected” as they are built on specific assumptions about the properties of such substance and the way in which to “do science”. Law (2004, p. 160) used the term “hinterland” for this set of assumptions and practices, this *frame* for understanding the world and therefore the practices that *lead to understanding* the world, which he sees inscription devices to be part of, this

bundle of indefinitely extending and more or less routinized and costly literal and material relations that include statements about reality and the realities themselves.

Law here makes an important point. Hinterlands *frame* understanding of the world and therefore the practices that lead to *understanding* the world. What can be known is already contained in the assumptions preceding the production of knowledge. In this

sense hinterlands, for Law, are “out there”, preceding their enactment. But they do not constitute structure in the sense that structure functions independently of its enactment and determines outcomes. Hinterlands affected and are affected through and beyond interactions during which they become traceable. In the preceding chapter I have already begun (although not using this terminology) to discuss the hinterlands of selection. Methods and ideas about what selection is and how it should be done clearly frame the practice of selection and in turn, its product as the right or wrong applicant. In this chapter I want to show how selection, when understood as a series of translations, is the negotiation of hinterlands which differ and have to be aligned in order for a decision to be made. In fact, which part of the hinterlands are or can be drawn on becomes an important part of the negotiations itself.

Selection in nursing is framed by its own hinterlands. There are assumptions of how to do interviews, inscribed in the “methods” extensively discussed in Chapter 3. In addition, as I will show in this chapter, there are notions of what constitutes a good or bad nurse, a right or wrong applicant and how to make these qualities or absences thereof visible. In fact, a major component of the hinterland of selection is the assumption that qualities can be made visible in the first place.

What is made small and contained are all the other qualities a person might be assigned and all the other situations in which they may find themselves. An interview *becomes* the world.

It is important to emphasize that translation is making equivalent (Law, 1999) entities which have not been equivalent before. The product of this same making however is always an incomplete *summary* (Berg, 1997). Latour and Woolgar (1986) show how

scientists perform work in order to make credible or discredit the graphs, numbers, research papers produced in laboratories. Scientist negotiate what is *being* represented by the reports, the results of translations. This *persuasion* (ibid., p. 76) establishes, severs and questions links to ideas of science, both within and outside the laboratory. Translation here becomes the successful creation of *some* connections where others would have also been possible. This persuasive work however is deleted from the research reports. In fact, once the substance is established to exist, all traces which could show scientists' effects on their "discovery" have drifted into the background or have been lost to view completely. Berg (1997) demonstrated in his study on decision-making technologies in medicine that through summarizing (for example in handovers) the content of multiple sources of information is reduced to one statement about a patient. This statement then forms the basis of further actions. Through summarizing, attention is directed to one specific concern; all other concerns as well as the conditions in which other concerns were presented, drift into the background. Berg also shows how there is never just one "purpose at hand" but that the orientation of action changes depending on the assumptions they are based on.

In this chapter I will demonstrate the consecutive summarising of contributions, first through discussions and later through writing, and the orientated nature of such summaries. Like the scientists and technologies in Latour and Woolgar's study and the doctors in Berg's, selectors and applicants and the materials of selection perform consistent work in order to orientate applicants' contributions to notions of, for example, nursing, right or wrong applicants or adequate interview technique. Whether such alignments are successful or not depends on how credible a link to nursing or other ideas can *be* made, what kind of representation can be and is established. For Latour and

Woolgar, the consistent summarising, this emphasising of some things and de-emphasising of others, allows for entities to be understood to exist “out there” in the first place. Traces of negotiations, of translation, are progressively removed from records. In doing so the thing *being represented* (in graphs, numbers and other texts) becomes *the thing itself* (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). For Berg (1997) it is this process which allows for medical decisions to be seen to be solely aligned with doctors and, as I will show, in selection this process of selective summarising allows for responsibility to be assigned in varying ways, depending on the “purpose at hand”. As Berg demonstrated, where different assumptions and different technologies are enacted, different outcomes come about. Different hinterlands with their different technologies *produce different entities*.

Selection in nursing therefore produces a number of differences. Different methods and their enactment produce different applicants, make applicants different from each other and from different ideals in different ways. But selection also makes applicants disconnected, different, from the selection process itself. In order for an applicant to become “different” from the processes in which they were enacted, to be seen as “having” qualities, rather than having been assigned qualities through the translation process in selection, all work done by selectors and “methods” is deleted.

In addition, selection *creates* differences between selectors. In order for one type of selector to become different from another, different deletions take place. Because, as I will show, it is not only applicants who are the product of transformations during selection; so are other human actors, such as service users and carers (SUCs), a particular subset of selectors. However, where the translation of applicants starts from a

position of uncertainty which *has to be* resolved into certainty, the translation of SUCs starts from a position of certainty which becomes more and more precarious. What is represented by SUCs is the outcome of constant negotiations, of orientated work. For selection to be possible, these negotiations can never be fully resolved.

Hinterlands of selection

The literature of selection processes, in general, discusses interviews as a process in which applicants are asked questions with their answers being matched against pre-existing (more or less structured) categories. This match is then turned into a score which will give a result. When observing interviews this straight-forward process becomes more complex. Applicants' statements do not just "drop from heaven" (Law, 2004, p. 28), they come about because of the hinterlands of selection. Applicants do not just say anything and selectors do not just "look" or "listen"; what can be and is said and how words are and can be understood is framed by a set of assumptions, partly preceding selection interviews.

This set of assumptions include the notion that nursing is a specific thing, that nursing applicants *have* specific qualities which are *the same* as those of nurses and that these qualities can be extracted through specific methods, which should be performed in specific ways. Such assumptions however do not come from nowhere either, they are effects of negotiations elsewhere which may have been settled or not. In the following I will detail how some assumptions are imported into interview configurations and others are not by the example of value-based-recruitment (VBR), the dominant discourse underlying nursing selection in the UK at the time this study was conducted.

VBR can be understood as a direct result of some of the failures of care in UK hospitals, the most notorious being the “Mid-Staffs- scandal”, discussed in Chapter 1. The idea of a “value-base” for nursing (in its current form, for example Codier, 2014; HEE, 2014; O’Sullivan, 2016; Traynor & Buus, 2016) is a direct consequence of the publicized failings: the public outcry, the media coverage and the subsequent investigation with its recommendations. Consequently, a set of values was established, values that were meant to exemplify nurses, such as the NHS values (NHSE, 2015) or the “6Cs” (DH, 2012, p. 5): care, compassion, competence, communication, courage and commitment. In addition, HEI were instructed by HEE, based on the evidence provided by WPG (HEE, 2014), that a “value-based-element” had to be incorporated into selection events.

It is here that, through a series of translations, the scale of an issue is manipulated (Latour, 1999a). An issue that is declared a largescale problem (care practices in the NHS) is *made* manageable by emphasising some of the components that may contribute to it and de-emphasising others. By declaring practising nurses responsible for shortcomings and nursing applicants as the solution that will bring in the change (HEE, 2014), nurses *become* the problem and not-nurses the solution. Introducing the notion of value is an important move in this translating practice: values are treated as the sole basis of action, as specific to individual actors (applicants, NHS trusts, HEI), as based on individual agency and as durable (HEE, 2014). Through the notion of values as personal and unchanging an applicant is translated into a future nurse and the two are made equivalent: nursing and applicants for nursing *become* the same, as values are already in place. This makes it possible for an argument to be presented such as: if HEI recruited the people who already had the “correct” values, these people could resist the structural and cultural pressures and maintain values in the face of adversity. Other

possible reasons for problems (staffing levels, steep hierarchies and focus on targets) have drifted into the background.

Once the notion of values is accepted as a “faithful translation” (Latour 1999a, p. 266) of care practice, it is turned into statements (which in turn enhance the prominent position of this notion) and, through inscription devices such as interview forms, imported into selection events, as the following example shows:

Value-based Outcomes: self-awareness, ability to effectively and realistically assess own strengths and weaknesses. Insight into how self-awareness affects abilities.

The idea of values is then turned into questions (“One of the ‘6Cs of nursing’ is courage; what does courage in nursing mean to you?”), with these questions standing for “the hope of a country’s future” (Gorur, 2011, p. 82).

An extensive issue has now been scaled down to an extent which allows for applicants to be “measured” for their appropriateness as future nurses. Values are turned into more or less specific statements of actions or sentiments and a map is created (Law, 1999) which limits what can count as the right or wrong applicant. It is this last move that makes values *visible* in the first place, that turns an abstract notion into a *quality of an applicant*. Before, qualities existed in principle, now they can exist in practice.

The hinterlands discussed in this section (and in Chapter 3) frame selection methods and selectors’ action; they frame how applicants can perform, what they can or cannot do but mostly, what they can or cannot say. I will discuss this “talk” in the next section.

Talk

Applicants about themselves

Nursing qualities are not material in themselves but abstract notions. They have to be translated into materials; in the case of interviews these materials are words. In order to be able *to observe* the presence of qualities, applicants have to be *made to say* something. Applicants did not just say anything. For one, they seemed to be bound by ideas of how to behave at interviews, which could be observed in the synchronicity of actions (for example no competitive behaviour was observed, people often wore formal “interview” attire, applicants always seemed to have prepared questions for selectors or stated that all their questions “had been answered already”).

Applicants, in part, drew on the same hinterlands as selectors. Applicants often mentioned the 6Cs or, even where they were not explicitly stated, used them as an aide memoire to discuss important features of nursing. In interviews applicants often talked about why they wanted to become nurses, what made them different from people who are not nurses and different from people who are already working as nurses.

Through such talk, nursing and applicants were enacted as *exclusive* and *heroic* propositions, with exclusivity establishing an applicant as being like a nurse and heroics establishing an applicant as being different from a practicing professional.

One way in which exclusivity was performed was to talk about characteristics or actions that made applicants different from their peers who would not be studying nursing.

Some applicants said that they were “the mum of the group”, that they were able to deal with vomit and faeces, that they did things that others would not do. Another way of performing exclusivity was to talk about characteristics or traits as if they were particular to nursing. They talked about being caring, empathetic, compassionate, respectful, “going the extra mile”, wanting “to make a difference”. A heightened form of this strategy was the insertion of the term “natural” as in, for example, “I am a naturally caring person”. This positioned applicants as not only caring but as someone who cannot do anything other than being caring, and, importantly, will remain caring as this trait formed part of their make-up. A third way of performing exclusivity was that of differentiating nursing from other professional fields, positioning nursing as “the better option”. Applicants would talk about appreciating the irregularities of a nursing job (“I couldn’t do a 9-5 job” or “I love the fact that no day is the same”).

Other professions were said to do things differently, for example doctors would not be as good at talking to patients as nurses and health care support workers had no responsibility or could not do everything a nurse does, such as giving medication.

The strategy of *heroics* was observable in two ways. Here applicants, specifically referring to themselves rather than to more abstract ideas of nurses or nursing, talked about how they had done things better than people already employed in healthcare settings. Either they emphasized being able to do things other nurses had failed to do (for example engaging a lonely resident in a nursing home who had been treated as a lost cause by the regular staff). Or applicants talked about identifying “bad practice” and raising concerns which led regular staff to change their practice. It may be interesting to note that these examples of “whistleblowing” often related to people who

were not necessarily registered nurses but healthcare support workers or doctors. Where registered nurses were indicated, often excuses, such as lack of time, were given.

In the strategies of exclusivity and heroics traces of the hinterland of VBR becomes visible. Without the concept of “courage” and the nation-wide publicising of the effects of culture, of not raising concerns because of fear of reprimand, it may not have been possible for applicants to display *heroics*. Without the insistence of WPG (HEE, 2014) that values are durable and not subject to being faked, the idea that applicants are “naturally” caring or compassionate, that nurses are born not made (an idea which has for years been contested, for example Muncey, 2000; or Street, 1992) may not have been as easily imported into a selection event. In addition, through the construction of applicants as a solution to problems some assumptions became difficult or impossible to mention or, where they were stated had to be qualified immediately.

Downsides to nursing, widely researched, for example that nursing can be stressful (D. Edwards et al., 2010; Evans & Kelly, 2004; Gibbons, 2010), with long hours and shifts detrimental to personal health (Caruso, 2014); students can suffer from financial problems (Timmins & Kaliszer, 2002) or isolation in workplaces, being silenced and excluded (Jackson et al., 2011) and newly qualified nurses can lack support (Parker et al., 2014) and suffer from bullying and burnout (Laschinger et al., 2010), if known to applicants at all, were summarized as “stress” and immediately qualified by statements such as “but I can cope” or “I like a challenge”, accompanied by a reassuring smile. Selectors, clearly aware of some problems associated with nursing, did not mention these of their own account. I was told that this might inhibit the enthusiasm of applicants and that there was enough negativity in nursing already.

Applicants also came to selection events with ideas and assumptions about nursing and interviews that are different of those of selectors. Some applicants would bring portfolios of achievements, with selectors stating that such applicants had not understood how interviews work or were too young and inexperienced. Applicants would talk about themselves as “mums” or “always smiling”, ideas rejected by some selectors as constituting nursing predispositions but clearly *possible* assumptions (see for example P. Smith & Allan, 2016, for a discussion of the nursing ideal in relation to motherhood and the promotional material of HEE in relation to VBR, where patients and nurses are always depicted as smiling).

As I have demonstrated, applicants do not “just” talk. Such talk is produced by assumptions about nursing as well as by the ways talk is elicited. Talk in and of itself however did not provide certainty about an applicant.

In the next sections I will detail how differing assumptions (hinterlands) are negotiated and how, within this negotiation, notions of “right or wrong applicants” become more and more solidified.

Conversations with applicants

One of the problems of selection is that establishing a set of qualities consistent with all nurses constructs applicants as similar in precisely those ways that form the basis for the categories which are designed to establish their difference *from each other*. Applicants have to be the same in terms of nursing qualities in order to be selected but different from each other in order to be distinguishable. In addition, as applicants seemed to be reluctant to compete (I was told by both applicants and selectors that this would reflect

badly on applicants as nurses are “team players”), the difference between applicants seemed to diminish. This was reflected in selectors’ talk. Some told me that applicants “are all saying the same thing” or that “they could all get a place”. However, with 10 or so applicants for each available place, giving everyone a place was not possible. Even when comments about applicant similarity weren’t made, simply producing applicant talk did not lead to a decision. This talk had to be transformed further for selectors to assign notions of right or wrong. This was not a simple exercise of checking what was written on an interview form against an applicant’s words. As I have shown in Chapter 3, these forms never completely inscribed all possibilities: concepts under investigation, applicant talk or selector action. Because of this overflow (Callon, 2002, p. 200), this variety of assumptions which can never be fully regulated through pre-structure, negotiations become necessary.

The following excerpt demonstrates several features of such negotiations:

Interviewer: *What would I hear from your friends if I asked them about your strengths?*

Applicant: *I’m the mum of the group; I am always caring. Whenever anybody has a problem, they know they can come to me and they do.*

Interviewer: *What do you mean by “mum of the group”? How does this fit with strategies like the promotion of independence and self-care?*

Applicant: *You’re right.*

In this example, the interviewer first places the object (strength) into a specific *non-nursing* context, only to move the statement, once an answer is given, into a different, *specifically nursing related* context. The applicant's answer is not wrong in itself, in particular when the interviewer cannot know the opinion of the applicants' friends. In addition, being approachable and caring are qualities which could reasonably be associated with nursing. However, by focusing on the term "mum" and linking it to a *specific feature* of nursing, the applicant's statement becomes discredited. Being caring and approachable *becomes unrelated to nursing* through the assignment of different contexts by the interviewer. It is therefore in the work of the interviewer that the credibility of the applicant's statement is established. The agreement at the end of the conversation can be seen both as settlement of the negotiation (nurses are not like mums) but also as an attempt by the applicant to take some control over what was said: the statement has become the opinion of both the selector *and* the applicant.

Such negotiations of meaning were frequently observed where applicants were permitted to talk about ideas rather than simply respond to questions. However, selectors often finalized statements (Bakhtin, 1984) and thereby meaning without giving applicants the opportunity to respond. Finalized meaning was established through paraphrasing or summarising (Berg, 1997), actions by which selectors orientated applicants' and their own accounts to a *specific meaning*. Selectors re-stated what applicants had said and then gave their own account, which functioned as the final word on the matter (as the interview in general moved on after such an intervention):

Interviewer: *What do you think will be the difference between you now and you in three years?*

Applicant: *As a registered nurse, I have more responsibility than as a healthcare support worker, I will give out medication and may run a ward.*

Interviewer: *You will give medication, yes. I think being a registered nurse has more to do with accountability, with knowledge and the ability to make decisions. You can do observations now, but as a registered nurse you will think about what you are doing. (To another applicant in the group:) What do you think?*

This *tyranny of the interviewer* (Llewellyn, 2010), this imposition of meaning, may not be a rare occurrence in interviews *per se*. But the exchange above clearly demonstrates the function of summarising. The selector states her own view on what the difference between pre and post-degree course should entail. Through this summary, a somewhat reduced version of the applicant's contribution remains which is in addition juxtaposed to the selector's version of the "right" answer. By emphasising one concept (medication) and ignoring others (responsibility and running a ward), the selector *makes* some concepts less important than others. Moving on, in addition, makes it impossible for the applicant to further qualify their statement.

It is important to note that both selectors and applicants have choices here. These choices are, as Law discussed (2004, p. 33) shaped by hinterlands. Applicants draw

their ideas from specific contexts which are different from those of already practising professionals. Applicants often demonstrated a general idea of nurses as helping and caring but could choose between various ways of communicating these ideas. They might give a list of qualities, might explain one quality in detail either with an example from their family life, or, where possible, work experience or might say how they know they have this quality. Selectors seemed influenced by professional discourses. For example, selectors in interviews with me talked about issues in relation to the professionalization of nurses, the problems with the public view that “anybody can do nursing when they would not dare say this about medicine”. Furthermore, the continuous introduction of additional nursing roles into the healthcare system (Traynor et al., 2015) was seen by some selectors as an example of de-professionalization. For those selectors, talking about “mums” and not clearly defined boundaries between healthcare support workers and nurses may have been proof of the threats they had experienced and in their response enacted or re-enacted precisely the boundaries they saw as being threatened.

Importantly, only applicant talk employing *exclusive strategies* was challenged. Selectors argued with (and later, when applicants had left the interview about) applicant’s ideas of nursing as being different from other professions and of themselves as being different from people without nursing predispositions, forging or prohibiting such connections. Where applicants used *heroic strategies*, selectors left these uncommented or gave supporting statements. Although outside of interview contexts selectors sometimes doubted the truth behind the stories of challenging authority (“They never want to rock the boat once they’re students”), such

assumptions were never introduced in an interview context. Here the notion of the applicant as the solution to the problem of malpractice was (re-)enacted by applicants who provided hope, selectors who sustained hope and the VBR method which provided the basis for such hope in the first place.

In conversations between applicants and selectors therefore the translation of specific hinterlands into notions of nursing were negotiated. Both applicants and selectors attempted to form meaningful links to nursing. Selectors, being already part of the profession applicants were trying to gain entry to, here used a much wider variety of assumptions than applicants and established the contexts in which connections *became successful*. Selectors manipulated the words of applicants in order to orient them towards a specific outcome (Berg, 1997). As long as applicants were present, they could be part of such negotiations, re-orienting their statements (Llewellyn, 2010) towards ideas of nursing. Applicants however did not stay an active part of negotiations. Either they were prohibited by the “method” to qualify their statements (although, as I have shown in Chapter 3, this prohibition was not always performed as per design) or they were physically removed from the interview.

Conversations about applicants

The removal of applicants from negotiations is an important move in selection. Selectors, after they had finished talking to applicants, were often still unsure about whether a place should be offered. Sometimes they would exclaim negative (“This was nothing!”) or positive (“That was easy! Excellent candidate!”) ideas, but much more often asked each other “What do you think?” or indicated that an applicant was “a

possibility”. These ambiguities, these instances of uncertainty were turned into certainty through further manipulation of applicant words, as the following example demonstrates:

Interviewer 1: *I wish she hadn't said so many negative things about nursing, especially with her experience.*

Interviewer 2: *I think she realized in the end by the way you were asking the questions.*

Interviewer 1: *Yeah, I think she changed tack a bit.*

Work experience, in general understood by selectors as a positive quality (albeit, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, not always seen to be necessary for an applicant to be successful), is here discussed as having a negative effect. Using one concept either for or against an applicant was a frequently observed practice. Work experience for example could be seen to give applicants clear insights into the “realities of nursing” or corrupt their “lovely values”. Applicants could have had too much, too little or not the right work experience (in one conversation an applicant was stated to have had experience with dementia, but only *one form* of dementia). Another instance of orienting one category to different ideas could be found in the discussion of regional accents. Some selectors treated such accents as lack of academic ability where others saw them as signifying the ability to interact with patients “at their level”. Again, both connections were treated as possible by selectors, therefore making it necessary to orient applicant talk one way or another. Such concepts and the way they were

employed could be derived from the prescribed method, be based on selector idiosyncrasies or be just part of a generally accepted way of doing interviews. Referring to the concept of authenticity for example, applicants could be discussed as over-rehearsed or under-prepared, having done their research or having been coached, being genuinely caring or “faking it”.

It is important to emphasize that all these assumptions which were treated as fact were a product of the interaction with applicants but more often of the talk about them.

Whether someone is genuine or not is a product of emphasising particular words and relating them to a particular understanding of reality. The effect of work experience on a person outside of the context of an interview, where an applicant may have different reasons to *talk* about their work (for example being selected for a nursing course) than those a selector has to *listen* (analysing applicants) is not a part of an applicant’s statement but is *brought into being* by the talk about this statement being used to argue *against* an applicant.

Another practice observable in the conversation above is the *pointing out* of the influence of the selector on the applicant’s statement. However, an applicant’s statement is always the product of interactions. As Callon (2002) discussed, it is empirically impossible to verify the truth of such statements at the time of making them.

Mentioning a selector’s influence on applicants’ words is therefore a strategy to discredit the applicants as authenticity is brought into question. Selectors applied this strategy frequently, be it through pointing out specific styles of behaviour such as prompts or the influence of schools and parents on applicants’ responses. In these practices, qualities, rather than pre-given, but are *assigned* to applicants.

This sometimes led to applicants being forced to contradict themselves when answering different questions. For example, at one MMI station applicants were asked to provide an example for being courageous to which applicants often responded with a story of having challenged “bad practice” in a clinical environment. At another station applicants were asked to take responsibility for something that (in the eyes of some selectors) was not really or not only their fault. Here applicants were judged on how quickly they would apologize and what they would offer as recompense. These two stations only work because they are separated. Courage to speak up (for example highlighting that the second person in the role play was as much, if not more, at fault than the applicant) would have led to lower marks. However, statements about not wanting to “rock the boat” to preserve professional relationships would have led to lower marks where courage was required.

What is demonstrated in the two examples above is the contingent character of qualities that are treated, in principle, as universal. Like the methods discussed in Chapter 3, however, universality is an achievement of work: separating questions, people and circumstances and *not talking about applicants* or talking about applicants in specific, selective ways. This work is important to enact certainty about applicants as the following examples will serve to demonstrate.

At only two sites of observation did the methods permit selectors to talk with applicants (rather than at) and to talk about applicants. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, the rules of non-engagement set by the MMI method were not always observed and legitimate (or illegitimate) “prompts” sometimes changed how applicants talked and what they talked about. Where two selectors interacted with applicants, the way

applicants were talked about mirrored those at the sites not employing MMI. But even where selectors were on their own with applicants and therefore had no-one to talk to about applicants, statements were not left “unadjusted” as can be seen from the following conversation I had with a selector:

Selector: *It is very difficult not to say anything. I can tell sometimes that they have more to say.*

MK: *How can you tell?*

Selector: *I can tell they go off on a tangent. They start saying things that are not relevant. Some of them have come so far. They talk about nursing with such passion and then I can tell when they lose that thread and I ask whether I can repeat this question and they can gather their thoughts. She was actually very good.*

What applicants have said here becomes re-formed by emphasising that *more could have been said*. The way in which something is said (with passion) and an assumed journey all act to give applicants’ statements credit which in turn the selector understands as permission to manipulate the conversation. All that is different to other methods such as GI and 1-2-1 is that this manipulation of statements remains invisible to the observer. The following example is taken from a conversation after a group interview.

Selector 1: *But I am not sure mental health nursing is the place to do it from for her.*

Selector 2: *No, I am not sure it is.*

Selector 1: *And, partly her body language as well, she was very forward and didn't really, apart from kind of joining in discussions in someone else's bit, I think it really put off (name) next to her*

Selector 2: *I think she really almost, I don't know whether it was conscious or unconscious but she excluded the other members*

Selector 1: *And if we talk about team working and interpersonal skills*

Selector 2: *There wasn't anything about team working; actually, she's going to be the saviour, that sounds a bit weird, but that's, you know, I've worked with people like that and I don't want her to come through my door, actually.*

Selectors often treated their beliefs as certainty. In the conversation above, certainty is created by reference to "past experiences" which "provide the basis for conclusions about the presence or the future" (Simon-Vandenberg, 1996, p. 400). This strategy was frequently observed, often performed through selectors discussing "intuition", "professional expertise" or through invoking the "protective function" of an interview ("It would ruin her life if we accepted her."). These strategies were also employed in order to support applicants' applications, for example through emphasising that they were "made for nursing" or would do "well on the course". Although the conversation

above starts from a position of uncertainty, over the course of a few lines it arrives at the certain idea that an applicant “will be” something, a saviour. During the conversation, more and more elements are added that make it more and more impossible to disagree with the eventual outcome. This was a frequent observation: selectors emphasised some of the words applicants had spoken thereby de-emphasising others. At some point selectors would then start adding content to the words applicants had spoken by inserting ideas from their hinterlands. In this practice, added ideas became part of what an applicant “had said”, they constituted successful translations (and not additions any more). The metaphorical nail in the coffin, service users and patients are invoked through the phrase “I don’t want her to come through my door, actually”. In an environment that puts patients at the centre of everything (NHSE, 2014), not wanting to be cared for by a future nurse makes an applicant’s position unattainable.

It is now not only *one selector* who speaks but *all of the patients and service users*.

Through this *mobilization* (Callon, 1986), through this linking up of actions produced in very specific contexts with ideas and practices outside of this context, selectors come to speak for all lecturers, all nurses or all patients (“Can we teach her?”; “We don’t want someone like this in *nursing!*”).

At all sites selectors acted *as if* what applicants did or said (for better or worse) during interviews could be translated into words or actions outside of the interview context.

These assumptions were made not only, for example, in relation to authenticity or body language, but about *everything* that happened during an interview. This may be an integral part of any interview process: people have to *believe* that elicited ideas or behaviours apply outside of the context of interviews, otherwise the whole exercise of

interviews becomes meaningless. However, it was by no means obvious to me how body language or tone of voice employed during an interview related to body language or tone of voice employed during a nursing activity or, as in the example above, how talking in a group of applicants related to “team working”. Most selectors told me: “You can tell if you’re an experienced interviewer” or referred to their “gut feeling”, a concept that, again, was often left unexplained (“You just know”) or was referred to as some sort of comparison with people they had encountered in the past and who turned out to be great or not so great nurses.

Another example: Applicants clearly behaved differently when they were not being interviewed. During my observations, I sometimes helped with giving out test papers, a job that was usually performed by administrators. Often applicants would not look up and even less say thank you when papers were handed over.

The same applicants, later, when they met selectors, would be “on their best behaviour”, engaging, polite, keeping eye contact. Selectors were either isolated from applicants outside of actual interviews or, where they did observe applicant behaviour and discrepancies between what applicants did during an interview or in outside contexts, they hardly ever acted upon such discrepancies to the extent of changing their mind about suitability.

It is here that translation serves to change the scale of an issue again. Local incidents, words uttered in response to questions, conversations held between an academic and a service user in a room somewhere in the UK, *become equivalent* to future academic achievement and care practice. None of the assumptions made in the conversation

can be verified at the moment they are made (neither are they later). Latour and Woolgar (1986, p. 182) used the term *extension* for this untested (and in effect untestable) belief that things that have been verified to happen or exist in one clearly defined space will happen somewhere else. Extension was a major practice in all interviews at all sites. Selectors acted *as if* what applicants did or said (for better or worse) during interviews could be translated into words or actions outside of the interview context.

So far, I have demonstrated how manipulation, first in the presence of an applicant and then in their absence, translates applicant talk into words orientated towards specific aims thereby creating differences and sameness. Words become different words, with meaning changing again and again. Another technology, which performs similar work, is writing. Writing however is a technology which has an additional function: it transforms an applicant from an object that is written about to a subject that does (all) the work.

Writing

For Latour and Woolgar (1986), the major function of writing is the reduction of various possibilities into a clear directional narrative where the ending is determined by the beginning and where each action is based on a preceding one. These reductions constitute further *summaries*; these summaries however are more durable than spoken ones, precisely because they are inscribed into interview forms. They become a lasting report.

Selectors often wrote during selection events. However, what they wrote and what meaning was attached to the writing was to some extent determined by the materials employed in selection. Inscription devices only allowed for specific texts to be created. This was partly due to the space selectors had to write things down. Some forms had little 1” squared boxes, others had no allocated space at all. Some selectors used the back of selection forms or wrote very little or nothing at all. Equally to what could be talked about or not, writing was formatted by what was written on the forms or had been discussed elsewhere. Writing therefore constituted the production of summaries similar to those created during talk about applicants but with one major difference: what selectors did during an interview, even if talked about during conversations, and most of the assumptions about applicants, were not recorded. What was recorded were words applicants had said, as in the following example taken from my fieldnotes.

At the site where 1-2-1 were employed, one applicant, talking about her qualities, mentioned that:

...you have to be tough; it's not an easy job. You can't cry in front of patients.

On the interview sheet the words written down are:

Emotional resilience.

This is not just an example of efficient note taking. A number of functions of writing can be observed here. The translation of words into a summary can be seen to be framed by specific assumptions. “Resilience” was talked about by selectors and in the literature as a highly desirable quality in nurses and nursing students (Jacelon, 1997; Stephens, 2013). The selector here therefore translates words that describe particular ways of being with patients into a desirable trait. What the statement “emotional resilience” does not declare is agreement or disagreement, presence or absence of this trait. This was a frequently observed strategy. Selectors rarely recorded what applicants had said with any traces of judgment. This however did not mean that judgments did not exist (they were very much observable in conversations between selectors); it means that judgments were not recorded. Even where selectors wrote much more than in the example above, they only ever recorded *some* words applicants had said and/or the translation of those words into nursing concepts. Selectors never recorded what they *did* even if, as in my earlier example, they discussed their own or another’s influences on applicant talk or if they were seen by others to be doing something, for example transgressing protocol.

Not all selectors wrote things down. Selectors, where they did not write, either gave as a reason the fact that they needed to pay attention or that they only wrote when an applicant was to be rejected. As this judgment can only be made *after* some time during the interview, transcriptions in these cases constituted further reductions: in only transporting the reasons for rejection, everything that could be understood as a counterargument disappeared from record. Writing therefore is a *selective* action and for Latour and Woolgar (1986) it is precisely this selective recording, this emphasising of what is *made important* through translation and *made unimportant* through omission

that orders actions into one narrative where other narratives are possible. This process is accelerated through repeated translations which make their origins less and less detectable. Worded summaries, as I have shown already a reduced and orientated version of statements, are turned into “scores”, numbers that represent certain assumptions about applicants. A multitude of possible statements is reduced to four or five numbers. Scoring was performed identically to other forms of writing during selection. Selectors talked about applicants’ statements and then allocated a score. Often discussions followed the principle that a score was declared at some point and then reasons were brought to justify the score. Sometimes these reasons were taken from the statements printed on interview forms but more often they came from ideas that were not inscribed in interview materials.

Scoring however performed additional functions to the “recording” of applicants’ words and actions. Scores allowed selectors to compare applicants. Such comparisons would have been difficult to perform based on words alone because written records were mostly devoid of judgment. Translating written words into scores reintroduces this judgment.

The following examples, all statements written in response to the same question, should demonstrate how difficult it is to compare written records and how easy it is to compare numbers.

- *It is difficult/ hard to do; confidence comes hand in hand with courage; maybe nurses didn't know their job; lack of compassion; staff may be afraid because they could be singled out. (3)*

- *to see something but immediately raise concern about practice, fear of what might happen to you for doing it, being bold. (3)*
- *6Cs; doing good for patients/ staff; talk on behalf of patients; shortage of staff-talk to manager; more staff core; example to challenge Dr wash hands. (4)*
- *one of 6Cs, stand up for right; undone-back to normal; Francis; duty of care. (2)*
- *remember why? Important things in nursing; choice; policies are in place; best care. (1)*

It is only through the translation of text into numbers that the first two statements *become* equal, the third statement *becomes* the best and the last the worst. Meaning does not precede actions, it is a result of the action itself.

Identically to other inscriptions during interviews, the traces of how scores had been generated are completely removed. A number 3 says nothing about nervousness of applicants, indecisions and negotiations of selectors or how a pre-stated statement such as “Identifies a strength and relates objective data” (the descriptor for the score 3 at the site using MMI) *is made* to relate to the number itself.

Furthermore, scoring allows statements about applicants to be transported outside of interview contexts. Here again, local practice is scaled up and becomes larger and more general. In Law’s (2004) terminology effects of the enactment of hinterlands become

hinterlands themselves, transporting both the original hinterland and its effect as assumptions on which further practices are based. For example, I was often told by selectors that they were planning to assess the effectiveness of their method through follow-up studies, in which selection scores were compared to essay or overall degree grades, letting the summary of a series of complex interactions become its sole carrier of meaning. Similarly, the literature of selection (for example Rees et al., 2016) judges effectiveness of methods on inter-rater reliability, a statistical method which analyses the similarity of scores given by different selectors. The scores in themselves no longer contain any information of how they were produced; however, for scores to *look* similar is enough to assume equivalence of genesis. However, this equivalence is a product of the deletion of the work selectors do – is the effect of the disappearance of the traces of translation itself. This is why, empirically, MMI which employ five or six selectors all generating scores for the same applicant, do not give “truer” assessments of applicants than those methods that only employ one or two selectors. What is being generated in MMI are *five or six* different *scores* which become the same applicant only by reducing everything to easily transportable scores.

For Latour and Woolgar (1986) out-there-ness is the effect of the practices of deleting, splitting and inversion. Deleting removes traces of the work done to create particular statements about an entity, in the case of selection of applicants. In numbers (or indeed written feedback) no selector input or “method” can be detected, only reference to the applicant remains, as in the following example of feedback given to an applicant after her interview performance:

Did not attempt to make decisions/make conclusions.

This statement existed as a tick box option on interview forms, but even where such pre-stated feedback was not inscribed selectors often used routinized responses. During one deliberation for example a lead selector asked for reasons they could give to an applicant as to why they had been unsuccessful. It was suggested that they should write: “Hadn’t thought things through”, one of the mantras at that site. Elsewhere standard feedback given was “Didn’t answer in enough depth”. Through these statements responsibility is absolutely given over to the applicant. Everything that happened, happened in direct response to what an applicant said or did (or did not say or did not do). Selectors often demonstrated these practices in conversations about other universities having “better” applicants which needed to be attracted. But, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, there is a difference between an applicant, who is part of a process and an applicant, which is the outcome of this process. Deleting parts of the process from the records allows the allocation of responsibility described above. In doing so, deletion splits off the product of a practice from the practice itself. By deleting all the work of selectors and all the assumptions which affected this work and made some things possible (but not others), only the applicant remains as an entity to which the outcome of selection can be linked. This is, then, the final step in translation, words, having been transformed into different words and different words again, now *become world* (Latour, 1999c), become the applicant. However, even this delegation of responsibility is an orientated practice. Agency, intent and responsibility, are not given as a precursor of actions but an outcome of the practices of translation (Latour, 2005). Depending on the argument in which responsibility becomes important, responsibility could be given over to the method. One selector repeatedly declared at the end of interviews that the new “scientific” method “worked”, often stating that she liked an applicant but couldn’t offer a place as the numbers “did not lie”. Here both the work of

selectors and applicants is deleted and, as all that remains is the method, the method is being given responsibility. Where MMI were used, the responsibility of specific selectors disappeared in the generation of multiple scores which were then added up, even more obscuring an individual's contribution to the generation of such score. As one selector told me: "You cannot be told off if you recruit a dud." Where no *one* can be held responsible, *no-one becomes* responsible.

In this chapter, so far, I have demonstrated how applicants are enacted in interrelations of people and materials through technologies of talking and writing. Applicants, of whom not much is known before a selection event, are made to talk, are talked and written about and are turned eventually into statements of certainty, into facts of the world. This work is necessary for selection to be possible at all: uncertainty (although easily re-introduced once applicants become students) has to be removed in the process of selection as otherwise claims about having selected cannot convincingly be made. However, applicants are not the only human actors which are enacted during selection. I will discuss another group in the final section of this chapter.

Service users and carers

As suggested by Latour (2005) all actors are both implicit as well as changed in translations. To emphasise this point I will discuss another set of human actors involved in the practice of selection: service users and carers.

At two of the three sites of observation I watched, met with and talked to a group of people who were called and called themselves "service users and carers" (SUCs). SUCs are talked about (by faculty as well as by themselves) as members of the public who

bring something different to selection. “Service user involvement” in selection processes is stipulated and demanded by the NMC (2010b) and NHS England (for example NHSE, 2015). A number of “good practice” examples are posted on the HEE VBR website (HEE, 2016). There is limited literature about service user involvement in selection (Morgan & Jones, 2009; Rhodes & Nyawata, 2011) all of which treats SUCs (unlike applicants, which at the beginning of an interview cannot be easily classed as right or wrong) as entities which enter a selection process fully formed, with clearly defined traits and functions. One of the functions of SUCs, as inscribed in the hinterland of policy (HEE, 2014; NMC, 2010b) is to represent the public in order to include a specific view which is supposedly different from other selectors as it includes personal experiences of healthcare. Such texts treat involving “the public” as a good thing as SUCs can look at the “human side” whereas academics look at academic ability. This notion appears to be so generally accepted that a clear statement about the purpose of SUCs in selection seems often not to be required any more (see for example Rhodes & Nyawata, 2011, who in their report on SUCs involvement only make references to policy without justification for such policy).

Here processes of translation can, again, be observed. A general, nation-wide issue (the absence of the patient voice in healthcare, often manifest in discussions about patient-centred care, see, amongst many others, for example Bleakley, 2014; Bleakley & Bligh, 2008; Illingworth, 2010)) is scaled down by translating “the public” into a number of people with personal experience of healthcare. Being a SUC is linked to specific skills (observing the human side), thereby creating a “human side” in the first place. Because, in order for this separation of people into SUCs *but not academics* to hold, work is being done. SUCs become different through a process of translation in which everything

that differentiated them from other actors becomes emphasized and everything which could connect them to other actors is de-emphasized or deleted.

For example, academic staff would point out SUCs in introductory talks and explain their presence, often referring to their function of looking at values or “the human side”. The presence of academic staff was never justified nor their function explained. In addition, academics, as I have shown, quite clearly “looked at” values, being instrumental in their assignation in order for applicants to become right or wrong. SUCs themselves often in introduction talks made reference to their role and their own condition or the reason they used services, something which academic staff did not do. SUCs asked questions academics didn’t ask and all had their own, personal mantras, which were often different from those of other selectors. There was the “shoe shine-test” one service user applied, looking at the state of shoes and judging applicants’ suitability for the course. There was the “would I let them through my front door-test”, which I observed at two different sites, and a variation of it, the “would I like to see their face when I open my eyes after an operation-test”. There were further observable differences in actions between service users and academics.

For example, at one site, some service users did not want to put scores against applicants but might, on invitation by academics, rank applicants. Academics always scored. The importance of these differences in behaviour for my argument is that they were legitimized through academic action. SUCs were permitted to voice criteria not inscribed in interview forms. Not scoring, although problematic in terms of recording a SUC’s judgment, emphasized the conceptual difference between SUCs and academics. SUCs *were permitted* idiosyncrasies as it was idiosyncrasies that made them different. This difference seemed to me the major currency of SUCs, something both academics

and SUCs were aware of. This awareness was enacted for example where the difference was in jeopardy. As one SUC told me:

We are all service users, but one of the academics told me I can't say this anymore.

This reprimand alludes to the possibility that academics could *also* be service users, threatening the special status which gives the notion of SUCs such purchase in selection. Selectors were likely to have used healthcare services themselves and had their own experiences, which they often talked about *outside* of interview contexts. Office talk was saturated with examples of what mentors or students had done, how a GP appointment could not be attained or how kind or unkind a nurse or doctor had been to an academic's relative. These examples rarely featured in interviews or discussion of applicants.

SUCs behaved differently from academics. SUCs could not remain different however as difference often became problematic. If difference was an effect of interactions, so was commonality. At one site, during group interviews, SUCs hardly ever spoke or asked questions. An academic would lead the discussion and every so often a SUC might say something. They might talk about themselves, their experiences, or they might answer the question meant for applicants. Some SUCs would apologise to academics for what they said. This is because academics regulated SUC. One SUC told me:

I was told I was not allowed to say anything, just sit there.

Another one told me how he used to talk too much and asked the wrong question, but he was spoken to “in a nice way” and had learned from his mistakes. I had heard about this SUC and his behaviours before I had met him. One of the academics, on my first day of observation, briefed me about SUCs:

With him you have to be careful, he can take over. She sometimes talks too much. She never makes any decisions; she loves everyone.

Academics (when SUCs weren't present) often talked about some SUCs as a waste of space or a tick box exercise (see also Stewart, 2015).

Here difference is actively removed from the interview context. Idiosyncrasies interfered with ideas about the correct conduct of interviews. Although service users had their own tests, and sometimes their own questions and their own ways of talking about applicants, these things rarely determined the outcome of an interview.

If a service user asked how an applicant would cope with having three children, they were told off for asking inappropriate questions. If a service user tried to apply the “shoe-shine-test” they were either humoured or told that, although the test had its merit, it could not be applied.

Service users could mention their ideas of whether they “would let somebody through their front door”, but they were often only heeded when enough other arguments had been produced to accept or reject an applicant. On their own these arguments did not force a decision either way. Service users therefore ended up making decisions precisely

based on the ideas inscribed in interview protocols or adapted from faculty. They would use the same criteria. They talked about body language and respect where academics talked about body language and respect. They talked about “thinking things through” where academics talked about “thinking things through”, the talked about the importance of work experience where academics talked about the importance of work experience. Things that academics did not talk about, often just passed through an interview without having impact.

What becomes obvious here are the different tensions affecting and orienting selection. Policies on SUC involvement required SUCs to be different and actions orientated to such policy emphasise this difference. Guidelines on reliable and fair selection as well as the necessity to arrive at a point of certainty, to actually pick an applicant and reject another, made it necessary for SUCs to *act* like academics or to be silenced.

SUCs became like academics in other ways, too. Universities had their own service user and carer groups. These groups had regular members who had diaries filled with appointments for teaching sessions and selection events. SUCs were reimbursed for expenses. This was often a flat payment with travel costs paid in addition. This is not too different from other university departments and employees. One academic, when I mentioned these observations, said to me:

They are just like us.

My point here is that SUCs are *and* are *not* “just like” academics. Where a SUC has to be different from academics in order to constitute public involvement, they are *made*

different *in a specific way* as not all differences are valuable. Challenging a SUC's position by questioning their merit for selection would have jeopardised the smooth functioning of selection events. However, making SUCs too much like nursing academics would have challenged nurses' professional expertise. If SUCs are like nurses and represent *anyone*, then anyone can select nurses.

SUCs constitute different sets of summaries (Berg, 1997). In order for selection to "work" both in terms of adhering to guidelines and policy and in terms of the impositions of method and organisational requirements, SUCs have to be both: the same *and* different. Being one or the other would make doing selection "right" impossible.

Actions have to be constantly orientated to the purpose "at hand" (Hamilton, 2011, p. 59). It is here that applicants and SUCs share similarities. Like SUCs, applicants, in order to fulfil their function as bringers of hope *and* carrier of qualities specific to nursing, have to be both like current nurses *and* different from them at the same time. Applicants have to be *like nurses* by displaying *the same qualities* and have to be different from nurses by first acting differently from "bad" nurses (Traynor & Buus, 2016) and second by being incomplete in order for professional nurses to retain their difference from untrained people. However, although both applicants and SUCs oscillate between potential positions in selection, applicants have to be fixed in order for selection to be possible whilst SUCs cannot be fixed, for the same reason. In either case certainty becomes an achievement of actors' work.

Just as the methods discussed in Chapter 3 cannot do things by and of themselves, neither can the people discussed in this chapter. Both applicants and SUCs are shaped

by the crediting and discrediting moves of themselves and other actors, such as academics and their hinterlands as well as the associated inscription devices. In this sense, neither applicants nor SUCs exist “out there” but are entities performed in selection. As Mol (2002) has demonstrated, where different assumptions about an entity and therefore different ways exist to trace such an entity, the entity becomes a different one. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 3, the hinterlands of selection constituted local practices. Therefore, an applicant who is “right” at one site is not “right” at another site where those criteria did not exist or were understood to mean different things. Similarly, SUCs are effects of local constellations. Applicants and SUCs, like methods, are therefore localised and contingent practices, which may not be easily transported outside of the context in which they are enacted.

Conclusion

In Chapters 3 and 4, I have presented data generated through ethnographic research and their empirical analysis (see also Appendix 8 for excerpts from fieldnotes illuminating the claims made in these chapters). What these chapters have emphasised is that the position taken by theorists from work psychology and by selectors in practice which understands selection as a set of clearly identifiable methods and materials and people as subordinate to such methods is, empirically, problematic. Observation of selection events points towards the understanding that selection is by no means a fixed entity which predicts and can be predicted. Rather it can be seen as a series of local, contingent practices in which various positions become legitimized or de-legitimized, at times in the same interactions. Work experience can function as advantage and disadvantage, academics become deviants or conformists and SUCs useful or obstructive, patients or university employees, depending on the orientation of action during selection events. In light of these observations it is difficult to see selection as the mere observation of external facts that the literature and the participants in selection events claim it is. In order to treat selection as mere observation, in order to make selection work at all, all actors perform an immense amount of work, work that here, through ethnographic observation, has become visible *again*.

In the final chapter of this thesis I will discuss the various contributions this thesis has made.

Chapter 5: Making a difference

In this final chapter I aim to summarize the original contributions of this thesis to the fields of practice and theory in which it had been situated in Chapters 1 and 2. I will discuss implications for my own professional practice, both as lecturer in nursing (and recently appointed admissions tutor) as well as an active researcher and research supervisor. Further potential research as well as hypothetical changes to this study should it be repeated will be considered and, finally, future dissemination of ideas based on this thesis will be contemplated.

Original contributions

Swain (2017, p. 29) lists a number of ways in which a doctorate might constitute an original contribution. I believe that this thesis meets the following of Swain's criteria:

- It says "something that has not been said before".
- It interprets "someone else's findings in a new way".
- It uses methodologies in an original way.
- It is based on "empirical work that has not been done before".

Contributions to theory

I have argued that selection in nursing is under-theorised. It is generally positioned in the field of work psychology, the assumptions of which I discussed in Chapter 2.

I argued that work psychology, by treating selection methods, the users of such methods and the objects of selection as fixed entities organises these entities in ways that allow work psychologists (and their followers) to treat selection methods as solely determining of outcomes, and users of methods as independent observers of an essential reality. In order to imagine selection differently I first discussed Oliver's (2005, 2011, 2016) critical re-contextualization of the concept of affordances to the field of learning technologies and then moved to re-contextualize the concept of affordances to the field of selection. Adapting some of Oliver's ideas allowed me to present an argument for selection to be, analytically, understood as a social practice. To my knowledge selection in nursing had not been framed in this way before, although research from different empirical fields has made similar moves (for example Llewelyn, 2010) and research from within the field of nursing has pointed to the possibilities of selection being framed differently (for example Taylor et al., 2012).

In order to operationalize the theoretical assumptions produced in Chapter 2, I drew on ANT to provide analytical concepts. Although ANT studies prevail in health care and educational studies (for example Burgin et al., 2014; Crosbie, 2014; R. Edwards, 2011; Harding, 2016), to my knowledge no study has so far drawn on ANT concepts in order to analyse selection practice. By recontextualizing concepts such as translation, protocol, inscription device and scale I demonstrated their analytical potential for, and in turn created a theoretical space in which can be placed, future studies on selection in nursing. It is important to point out that by conceptualizing selection as a social practice I am not making any essential claims. Although I have, I believe, justified the positions taken in this thesis, to state that selection *is* practice rather than method would be methodologically inconsistent (and empirically impossible to verify).

The point I am making throughout this thesis is that selection can be, analytically, treated as something other than pure method and that such different analytical treatment opens spaces for empirical research that is different from that conducted in general on the subject of selection in nursing.

Contributions to empirical practice

In Chapter 2 I have outlined, drawing on Andersen's (2003) conceptualisation of research methodology, the differences between ontologically over-determined research which focuses on method and its accuracy in measuring essential entities and epistemologically over-determined research which focuses on observing how the entities under investigation are constituted. I have, in reviewing some of the literature on selection, demonstrated that research into selection in nursing largely follows ontologically over-determined approaches, researching methods and their capacity to produce right or wrong applicants whilst remaining reliable, valid and just. Arguing that such research only focuses on specific elements of selection practice, I proposed and conducted an ethnographic study which, to my knowledge, is the only one of this kind. Although Taylor et al. (2012) and MacDuff et al. (2016) labelled their study of selection into nursing courses in Scottish universities as ethnographic, their analysis was solely based on interviews with academic selectors and applicants. My study employed multiple methods of data generation, including participant observation, interviews with not only academic selectors but service users and carers and administrative staff, and document analysis.

Observing and participating in selection in this way allowed (in conjunction with the theoretical concepts derived from ANT) for interactions to be made visible which would not have become so had an ontologically over-determined approach been taken.

This study therefore emphasizes the productivity of ethnographic approaches. By conducting ethnographic research, different and (hopefully) interesting insights were made available. I will summarise these insights in the next sections which will focus on contributions to professional practice.

Professional practice

A professional doctorate requires explicit statements which identify actual effects on my own and general professional practice. In order to emphasize the professional significance of this thesis I will first re-visit the fields of practice to which this study contributes, and by summarising some of the arguments made in this thesis, demonstrate their substance.

This study has been positioned in three fields of practice: work, nursing and healthcare, and healthcare education.

Contribution to work

In this section I will be drawing on the thematic divisions of ethnographic research on work formulated by Smith (V. Smith, 2007). Smith (2007, pp. 221-223) discusses several foci of ethnographers of work:

- Showing how routine jobs are complex
- Showing how complex jobs are routine
- Emphasizing issues of power and conflict

In Chapter 3, drawing substantially on work by Timmermans and Berg (1997) and Bowker and Star (2000), I have discussed selection methods as protocols which are designed to control both their users and the objects which they are supposed to measure. The general literature in selection treats methods as more or less easy to implement and rarely makes reference to tensions which become visible when methods are being “applied”. In this sense, this literature treats using a method as a “routine” job which, once learned, can be and is repeated identically. In Chapter 3 I have shown how this understanding of method as routine is empirically difficult to justify when the enactment of methods in practice is observed. Methods that in theory are clearly delineated as specific forms of interview with clearly assigned benefits and disadvantages, in practice lose their shape and bleed into one another. Pre-structure designed to control users leads to tensions which are addressed whilst selection takes place, not only before or after. Methods, treated by their designers and proponents as sufficiently detailed to elicit specific outcomes, do not communicate those *affordances* sufficiently to users. Selectors agree or disagree with what they feel is imposed by, and applicants do not behave identical to what is inscribed in, interview protocols. In addition, the form and shape of materials used in selection although, again, sometimes designed to restrict or promote particular selector or applicant behaviour, appears to work against desired selector actions. In order to be able to speak of a unified selection approach or method at all, selectors consistently perform work, addressing tensions, orienting their actions either towards the protocol or issues that they see as important.

In Chapter 4, drawing substantially on work by Latour and Woolgar (1986), I have discussed how, through the enactment of methods, applicants and selectors are assigned a particular form which, although treated in principle as independent of selection practice, appears, empirically, to be a product of that practice. I have shown how selection does not operate in a neutral vacuum. It is affected by and affects particular *hinterlands* (Law, 2004), sets of assumptions and practices which shape and are shaped by selection practice. Such hinterlands can be organisational, individual, prescribed or idiosyncratic. Although the assumption that applicants consist of specific qualities independent of selection method, selector and applicant action underpins the idea of selection as method, in practice these qualities can be seen to be assigned, both by applicants to themselves but, more often, by selectors. Whether a quality “sticks” is the result of negotiations between applicants, selectors and the materials of selection. However, in order for such qualities to be seen as essential properties of applicants rather than contingent effects of the circumstance of selection, the work that allows for qualities to be assigned is progressively deleted from record, purifying method, selectors and applicants alike. Chapters 3 and 4 in conjunction, emphasize how method does not work by itself and neither do people. Selection can be seen to be an effect of the interrelation of actors, both human and non-human. It is because of this that Chapters 3 and 4 are not always exactly delineable as discussing method with the people using it and discussing people who are measured by method without referring to method and its users would create, again, the image of independent entities.

Through observation selections can be seen to be local approaches, contingent on how specific methods are enacted based on local knowledge, culture and politics.

They are not simple jobs of observation and recording but complex arrangements in which a variety of actors interact to make selection possible. Doing selection *becomes* a complex job where the (inter)actions of actors are researched.

Observation however allows to treat selection as routine where it is stipulated to be complex. Work psychology (especially in HEE, 2014) promotes the position of work psychologists as experts who can judge methods, their users and those that are measured by methods *better* than, for example, nurses or applicants themselves. Through the creation of psychological entities such as traits and through claiming that specific skills are necessary to *identify* those traits, psychologists establish themselves and their approaches as essential to selection. Method, in whatever guise, is performative, creating different versions of the world. It is not innocent or solely a technology (Law, 2004). For Law (ibid.) this makes method political as certain arrangements become more probable than others. Treating selection as a social practice, one effect of which is the assignment of qualities (rather than their detection), permits one to understand the expertise of psychologists as an effect of the network in which they operate.

Psychologists (and their followers) use specific tools based on specific assumptions which allow them to make specific claims. In that they are, as I have shown, not different from anyone else who *does* selection. However, through systematically removing traces of their own actions, method is purified and *becomes* neutral, allowing psychologists or their followers to position themselves as experts with specific skills in the first place. It is this neutrality, being an effect of the removal of traces of actions, which creates a hierarchy of evidence, turning some research into an objective observation of realities “out-there” and other research into subjective or biased enquiry.

It is this neutrality which turns some actors into docile intermediaries, who follow instructions or remain the same throughout the process of selection and others into experts who control both method and that which the method assesses without ever being seen to control anything.

Here I do not reject the assumptions of work psychology *per se*. The point I am making is that those assumptions are, like the work of selectors and like this thesis, based on specific constellations of actors and their interrelated work. However, through deletion of work some actors become associated with agency and others, such as the nurses, academics, SUCs who do the selection (as well as applicants who are being selected) lose agency. This thesis has argued that the work done by all actors should be emphasised, therefore allowing professional expertise and individual knowledge to operate in parallel to that of psychological and methodological experts. By using a different methodology, based on different assumptions and employing different tools I have created a view of selection alternative to that promoted in the general literature. I have, with the help of the people and materials collected in this study, *made this difference*. This leads me to the discussion of some contributions which are specific to nursing and nursing education, my own professional field.

Contributions to nursing and nursing education

Nursing, as I have shown, is a concept difficult to pin down and this difficulty is re-enacted in selection. What can count as nursing (and what cannot) is negotiated in materials, selectors and applicants consistently moving nursing between a set of abstract concepts and specific tasks without ever being able to settle on either.

Abstract concepts threaten the specificity of nursing as a profession whose members have qualities different from those of other professions or the non-nursing public; specific tasks threaten the idea of nursing as more than a skills-based profession. In selection, therefore insecurities of the nursing profession become manifest, which actors need to negotiate in order to select and be selected. Nursing selection is positioned as a magic bullet through which it is supposedly possible to alleviate larger issues in healthcare. Applicants become responsible for changing the future of the NHS as do the people who select them.

This has a number of effects. Education and therefore the work of educators, such as me, becomes a secondary feature. Applicants, in this perception, do not come to university to learn but to stabilise the qualities they already had. Formal education becomes secondary to “natural traits” or pre-university education. Treating applicants as fixed in this way could, potentially, have implications for funding and for the professional status of nurses and nurse educators. The discussions about whether nursing should be a degree profession or not continue (nursinginpractice, 2009) often focusing on an argument that is exemplified by the slogan “Too posh to wash” (see both D. Oliver, 2017; Scott, 2004 for critical comments). Emphasizing method over practice therefore could constitute a threat to nursing as a degree-based profession and the job security of nursing educators.

By positioning method and its users as more or less neutral the politics of selection are denied. However, as I have tried to show, tensions within nursing are not alleviated by selection but reproduced.

Nursing and nursing education are complex systems which are simplified in order to make specific points: responsibility can be assigned *because* entities are treated as fixed or fixable. With this doctoral thesis, therefore I should like to provide a starting point for a fresh debate on issues of responsibility for healthcare, the value of education and educators and the problems associated with supposed quick-fix impositions such as a specific approach to selection as the solution to wider national issues. The debate should involve regulators (such as NMC), education funding bodies (HEE) and research funding bodies. More emphasis (and money) should be given to researching practice and regulators should be engaged in a discussion on standards and their enactment in practice.

This debate should also include considerations of the local nature of selection and the associated tensions. Currently, as an admissions tutor, the position I have been given based on the assumption that “doing a doctorate in selection” will provide me with special insights, I can be made responsible for everything that happens after selection: not getting enough students, their grades and behaviour alike. Equally, a method can be designated the right or wrong method, again exposing the people who choose or use the method to specific criticism. The tensions here are similar to those discussed above: through removal of some work from the debate (for example the different pressures deans, course leads, administrators, applicants and selectors *import* into the selection process) specific actors are assigned responsibility. Through this some people *become* more responsible than others. Again, this thesis seeks to stimulate debate on these political issues.

Personal learning

Following Foucault (2002) through this thesis I have attempted to gain a new understanding of something. Selection had been for me always associated with the methods used. Through this thesis, I have come to see selection differently both in terms of practice and in its political connotations. This has already led me to emphasize complex issues where I am being asked as admission tutor to make decisions on one-directional arguments. I point out issues that I have observed during the study that formed the basis of this thesis and discuss the inter-relatedness of people and materials with the people to whom selection is important, in whatever way. In this sense, I have *made a difference* for me and, potentially, for people interested in and working with selection in nursing.

Through the work in this thesis I have also developed a current, specific understanding of ANT and ethnographic research. As I had not done ethnographic research before I am now better prepared not only to conduct but to promote this methodology. Conducting an ethnographic study has given me some insights into this methodology (both in terms of the intermitted joy it can generate as well as the problems associated with it), which, as a current Masters degree and future PhD supervisor, I can use to inform and guide future students.

Here I need to mention a number of things that I would do differently had I conducted this study again. As discussed in Chapter 2, I had to “cut the network” of selection in order to be able to manage data and analyse practice meaningfully. Comparing methods of selection is part of the practice, is what some actors do in order to legitimise one

approach over another, thereby creating the possibilities of “good selection methods” and “right applicants” in the first place. The three sites I observed were all “new universities”. Selection in “red-brick” universities may be enacted differently and, given the opportunity, including one of those organisations might have been useful. It might also have been beneficial to talk to applicants more formally; however this would have complicated approval of ethics and might have delayed the study.

The way I cut the network however privileges particular instances of selection. It deals with largely visible instances, for example observing applicants who “made it” to university interviews but not (in any great depth) with the practices that promoted or prevented a person from applying to university (or considering nursing as an option in the first place), all potential instances of selection. This study also does not explicitly follow applicants beyond selection events, although it did follow, in limited ways, other actors such as scripts or selectors, outside specific interviews. However, other actors, such as administrators and their work, although visible in fieldnotes, have become almost invisible in this thesis.

The way the network was cut in some way serves to perpetuate the privilege of method in selection events. Although method is conceptualised differently from the general literature and although this thesis clearly provides original and important insights, following different actors differently (as alluded to in Chapter 2), might have illuminated new connections rather than shedding a different light on existing ones (an example being the work of administrators, which, although present in fieldnotes, has become almost entirely invisible in this thesis).

Researching the practice of selection at only one HEI may have therefore allowed for a deeper interrogation of the phenomenon itself, however at the time of planning the

study I felt conducting research at more than one HEI was necessary due to the prevailing discourse in literature and professional guidance/policy of comparing selection methods.

I found conducting ethnographic research very difficult. Every step (planning, data collection, analysis/writing up) seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle. As analysing data/ writing up took up much more time than initially planned I did not have the opportunity to go back “into the field” to share my theories more formally at all sites of observation. However, as I was working throughout this doctorate I could at least discuss some of my ideas with colleagues, students and service users and check whether what I considered to be patterns appeared as such (or not) to actors in practice. In addition, my research generated a wealth of data, some of which I could not incorporate into this thesis (this is typical for ethnographic research, see for example O’Connell, 2017). A case in point is the numerous semi-structured interviews I conducted with selectors, administrators and other participants. These interviews influenced the study, focused my observations and, for example, made me aware of conflicts or taken-for-granted notions. In these interviews, I could (in a way) share ideas between actors that otherwise did not seem to be shared. And although statements from interviews are used to illuminate the practices, the work of selection throughout this thesis, a more formal approach to analysis (such as conversation or discourse analysis) may have produced other important insights. In particular, the differences between selection as enacted in talk and selection enacted in action could have been discussed much more profoundly. I will endeavour to analyse interviews in future engagements with the data generated in this study.

Future research

Apart from a different approach to analysing interview data, this thesis could have created a number of different arguments, some, for example focusing more on the interrelationship of university processes with UCAS guidelines or the politics of separation of academia and administrations. The issues discussed in relation to nursing are unlikely to be nursing specific and similar tensions may be present in other healthcare related and value-driven professions. Selection could therefore be researched ethnographically in fields such as physiotherapy, medicine and law. As mentioned above, different types of HEI, such as those belonging to the Russell Group, but also Further Education Institutions may constitute interesting sites of observation. In addition, the enactment of protocols or standards in healthcare could be researched more specifically. Here the forthcoming implementation of the “new nursing standards”, which, at the time of writing, are being discussed by HEI and NMC, could provide a useful location of research.

Dissemination

I will offer to present arguments from this thesis at the three sites of observation. This has the potential to provoke rejection, support or indifference. Presentations are not meant to verify whether “I got it right” but should be understood as another part of enactment of selection (this argument is based on Bloor, 2007). However, presenting some of my arguments could have detrimental effects, for example on the work relationships between service users and academics, which I have discussed in Chapter 2.

At the time of writing I have yet to make a decision whether the ethical implications of not sharing information outweigh those of the consequences of sharing.

This highlights a more general problem with my dual role of researcher and academic, discussed in Chapter 2. Ethnographic research is, in general, concerned with impacting minimally on the research setting (Dowling and Brown, 2010). However, the orientation of practitioner research, especially that conducted for a professional doctorate, might contradict this principle.

Remaining in the field, as I am at one of the sites of research, has a number of ethical implications. Some of these are not different from any other ethnographic research. The notion of not impacting on the research setting has been shown to be somewhat aspirational. Especially after publication of ethnographic studies there are what Murphy and Dingwall (2007) refer to as risks, for example in relation to the use of published findings as a means of power but also in terms of the effects of participants recognising themselves and the potential for shame and humiliation involved in such recognition. Murphy and Dingwall (2007) also highlight the potential for published ethnographies to disturb participants' (but also others') assumptions about the world they inhabit, clearly challenging the possibility of absolutely non-disruptive ethnographic research. Snow (1980, p. 114) emphasises the problems researchers have when disengaging with the field: where should their allegiances lie, when they are "ensnared in a web of multiple loyalties and competing claims"? For example, do they observe the rights of participants or the requests or demands of their sponsor?

These issues are also present for an insider researcher. One difference here is that such a researcher remains in the empirical setting. Being a researcher and a participant/insider

is not a dichotomy but a continuum (Mercer, 2007), therefore these positions need to be negotiated even after the research project has “officially” finished (such as through submission of this thesis).

Practitioner research is often concerned with some improvement in professional practice (Dowling and Brown, 2010) or at least some sort of change (in the case of this study a difference in understanding selection). As this study is part of a professional doctorate there are expectations that the thesis will impact professional practice. This is problematic where minimal disturbance of the field is desired. However, my colleagues and the applicants I worked with (as well as those participants from other organisations) may expect that this thesis addresses some of the problems they have shared with me throughout my research. There is an advantage of staying in the field as I can be seen as accountable and can instigate changes. In fact, it may be an ethical duty for me to do so. Balancing this need for beneficence with the need to avoid harm, I have started to introduce elements of this thesis into selection practice. I have begun, without disclosing names, to discuss idiosyncrasies of selection practice, in order to make them debatable, not in order to challenge or discredit colleagues but in order to illuminate practice. I have also introduced discussions after selection interviews to provide opportunities for selectors to air problems and tensions as well as learn from each other’s practices and ideas. In particular I have started “making a point” about talking about applicants not in terms of general suitability for the nursing profession but emphasising our role as selectors in making local, temporary decisions.

However, as this study’s claims may not be uncontroversial (as I have already highlighted with the above example concerning SUCs) there may be a need for

tempering my claims in order to continue “fruitful professional relationships” (Mercer, 2007, citing Preedy and Riches, 1988), not only to protect myself but, importantly, to protect participants from repercussions. It is therefore important not to forego the role of the researcher completely. I need to, even if sharing findings and making claims, retain the ethical principles of confidentiality (within the difficulties discussed in Chapter 2). I now know more about my colleagues, their opinions and practices than they might know about each other. Remaining a researcher in this sense will ensure that what I have been told as a researcher will not become “office chat”. There is also a risk involved in retaining too much of the researcher role, especially where participants’ need for closure is concerned. Remaining in the field may make it easy to continue treating colleagues as constant participants in research when in fact they might not be interested in such continuation at all (Murphy and Dingwall, 2007).

Outside my organisation and the research sites, in print (or its online equivalent) this doctorate will be made available to the UCL library and via ethos. A proposal has been submitted and accepted to the “12th Annual International Ethnography Symposium” taking place in Manchester in August 2017. I am planning to publish a number of papers in peer-reviewed journals focusing on the importance of ethnography as methodology as well as publicizing the alternative view on selection outlined in this thesis (as well as papers that present arguments not explicitly developed in this theses). I am also planning to co-write a paper on the position of service users in selection with two authors, both of whom have discussed “in-between-ness” in different fields (Stewart, 2015; Young, 2014). As stated above, dissemination is intended to promote debate. As with the presentations mentioned above I expect rejection, support and indifference. Especially supporters of VBR as an effective solution and proponents of

scientific methods in selection may attack my argument. This however I see as productive in generating discussions on alternative views and thereby challenging taken-for-granted assumptions.

Concluding words

In the title of this thesis I have alluded to the notion of “making a difference”. Although I hope (like applicants who used this notion frequently) that this thesis does make a difference in the ways discussed above, what I have tried to do is to describe how differences are not, empirically at least, essential and observed.

Differences such as those between applicants, pre-conceived ideas, selection methods, academics and non-academics, work psychology and this thesis, *are made*: by, amongst others, academics, by applicants, methods and their materials, work psychologists and their tools, this thesis *and by me*.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Example of interview schedule

Interview questions

I think these questions can be used for all interviews, in particular those ones that I run with people who are interviewing or selecting. I will try to explain in the footnotes where the questions came from, when I edit the question and why. The questions I actually ask will be in the interview transcripts.

Tell me about the selection process.¹²

- Can you talk me through the way you process applications?³

¹ This question is meant to elicit general opinions and may be show what is important to the interviewee. It was quite interesting that (participant name), answering this question, covered, I think, all the points I had planned to talk about. This could mean a number of things or nothing. It could mean that I had a good idea what was important to (participant name), because we had several conversations over the last few months about selection, it could mean that my categories, if they are such, aren't very original, quite obvious. It could mean that (participant name) had read my interview questions because they were lying on my desk all morning.

I might have to compare this to other people's responses.

² If people talk about a change of process at any point (how we did it in the past) follow this up, either here or when it occurs). I added this prompt on February 22, but thought about it on multiple occasions, for example during the (participant name) interview and when (participant name) talks about the improvements (my word) the new, statistically verified (my words) selection system (my words) makes.

³ In the interview with (participant name), this question was: what do you think about personal statements? During the interview I didn't feel that worked so well because it focused the evaluation of applications on the personal statement initially, but I don't think that's where (participant name) starts, nor is it where I start. So I think it may be better to get the order from the person who does it which this question is supposed to facilitate. There has to be a question about the personal statement later anyway, which needs to be asked when the interviewer mentions the personal statement. I think probes have to come for every stage of the application process that is if an interviewee mentions looking at UCAS applications, I need to ask: what do you do, what you think about it, or let them just talk about it. What I want to find out is what role academic ability place in their judgment, how they assess it (for example I was quite surprised that (participant name) has a similar way of assessing academic ability to what (participant name) has; (participant name) talked to me yesterday, intimating that the whole process is very subjective, she said this a few times now; (participant name) also says, like (participant name), that she looks at candidates, what is a good word here, "journey" maybe, when day achieved academically, when improvements came or didn't, not only the grades in themselves). I also want to find out the role the personal statement place, what interviews gain from reading the personal statement and how they value it. This goes for any other section of the UCAS application.

- What do you think about the role of admissions?⁴
- What do you think about personal statements?⁵
- What do you think about references?⁶
 - Tell me about when references talk about the candidate's ability to become a nurse.⁷

⁴ this question is based on the notion that seems to be quite prevalent in our office (I've got data from (participant name), (participant name), (participant name)) that admissions sometimes do things they should not do or don't do things they should do. This relates to judging academic ability, agreeing or disagreeing with faculty tutors judgments on applications, which can all have an effect on selection: judging academic ability can prevent people from being invited to interview, solely on the basis that faculty tutors will not make a judgment about them because they never know of them, or, especially in the case of predicted grades that aren't 300 tariff points, where there, according to (participant name), is a notion of "they could still reach 300 tariff points", candidates are forwarded to faculty, and faculty may not, like I, look at academic achievements predominantly, as they think it's the admissions job to screen for academic ability, in which case candidates get invited that "shouldn't be"; disagreeing with faculty tutors judgments, that is sending back rejections as they are seen to be unfair, will lead to for example faculty tutors changing the reason for rejection, or, possibly, re-evaluating their judgment. ((participant name) in his interview talked about professional expertise I think. This is interesting, because the expertise he is talking about, is largely concerned with the judgment of academic ability. It wasn't clear to me, and maybe I should have asked, how academic ability reflects professional nursing knowledge, and how he spots that from an application or from grades.)

⁵ apart from wanting to know how personal statements are judged, this question serves as a trigger or reminder for me to discuss the notion of: who writes personal statements? Which, again in our office, but maybe not so much on other sites, not that I can tell anyway, seems an important issue. Like I described in some notes before, but also said to (participant name) yesterday: it is tricky because apparently some people get their personal statement written for them ((participant name): you can definitely tell who had a lot of help with their personal statement) and we kind of hold that against them, at least (participant name) and (participant name) imply this and (participant name), who I will interview today has also mentioned concerns about people not writing their personal statement, but if a personal statement is an edited, with some grammatical errors, some awkward phrasing, or maybe not in the format we would "expect", we hold it against candidates as well as still not fulfilling the required standard of writing. (participant name) said to me yesterday: "but do we want to read this for free years?" This, I'm sure is important. (participant name) kept saying, at least twice: it is a very subjective process.

⁶ I think this question was in the interview already; I kind of ask it as a follow-up prompt to the application process discussion. I inserted it as an official question on February 9, 2015 as I decided on another follow-up question to this, which I will discuss in a footnote in relation to that follow-up question.

⁷ I inserted this question on 9 February 2015 to elicit some thoughts about what the nursing ability is based on, and what colleagues think about that. My theory is that, maybe similar to interviews, the ability to be a nurse is based on an ideal, but not necessarily in the nursing practice. I know I have to at some point decide what I mean by nursing practice because everything is a practice in some way, but I'm still dabbling with the idea of nursing as academic practice. The judgments are made on words, maybe on the possibility of being a nurse. Because I don't use references for my study, I have to ask colleagues. I think often times it comes through when they talk about references, but I have to ask more explicit questions about the nursery bit in the applications.

- Tell me about work experience.⁸
 - What kind of work experience do you expect?⁹
 - What kind of work experience do you accept?
- Do people apply for adult health only?
 - Follow-up: do some apply for multiple sub- specialities?¹⁰

⁸ this question is based on the, to me surprising, idea that work experience is overrated ((participant name)) or that people on access courses are at advantage to against people with A-levels. It's also based on the idea that 17-year-olds can't get meaningful work experience, as is being said for example by (participant name) in (HEI name) but am almost convinced it somewhere else in the data as well. This links into the category of maturity, and into the idea that we asking people to apply that we don't actually want. The same question may be asked when talking about interviews. The question is also important as HEE make a big point about people "knowing what they're going in for" to reduce attrition, which for some reason and not quite logically is part of value based recruitment. I find it illogical because if values are seen to be stable how would work experience change them?

⁹ I may have talked about this prompt/ thought about this prompt before but I added it "officially" during the transcript of the (HEI name) observation from February 16. This is because there are different conditions in relation to work experience (even within one course as the (participant name) interview and his recurrent statements show).

¹⁰ I added this question on February 17, 2015, based on seeing one candidate from (HEI name) who was therefore a mental health interview at (HEI name) in an adult health interview. I remember (participant name) saying that he cannot accept people who apply for both because they wouldn't meet either speciality's criteria for the personal statement. So I wonder whether other sites have different rules, or whether that's just (participant name)'s rule?

- How do you do interview?¹¹
 - Do you ask for specifics to adult health, mental health or any other branch of nursing? **What answer are you expecting?**¹²¹³

- What do you think about the selection day?
 - Can you tell me about the interview, what do you do? (Prompt about questions, work experience, involvement of candidates, score sheets/writing, judgments)

- How do you make judgments? What influences you?¹⁴

¹¹ this question, and related prompts, are meant to elicit ideas about process. I know that it is more to do with principle and practice (Mol), but maybe people talk about what they're doing in a particular way. It may also help me to actually focus my observation a little bit, because I'm slightly lost, especially as at (HEI name). I'm worried that I can't get interview enough people on the other two sites to understand their process of interviewing. The probes should deal with what interviews do during interviews in general, what questions they ask, how they asked the questions, how they involve the candidates, how they use the score sheet, how they do the scoring, how they made judgments about candidates. If the talk about service users, that's fine, but there needs to be a separate question about the purpose of service users afterwards. Maybe not purpose to begin with, but some open phrase like "and the service users?".

¹² I added this on March 8 2015 during going through my transcript of the (HEI name) selection event of March 3. The first part of the question is based on my lack of data (or presumed lack of data) that shows what selectors are looking for in terms of difference between particular sub-specialities of nursing. The second part (in bold) could actually apply to all questions selectors ask: **what do they want to hear? I need to include this into the SUC (HEI name?) focus group and into all my interviews from now on in.**

¹³ 17.03.2015: In preparation for the (HEI name?) interview I added the concept of "borderline" to this question. I thought about this on my way to work whilst listening to the pilot interview with (participant name) and (participant name). The word borderline was mentioned ((participant name): that's what I am taking notes for). **I would like to use this interview to maybe define this concept a little more.**

I was also reminded of the calculation method in medical school OSCE: borderline regression. Here pass and fail candidates are removed from the calculation, only borderline candidates are sued. Although this is a substantially different concept methodologically, it may be interesting to see philosophical similarities.

¹⁴ this question is meant to elicit ideas of how people are picked, at least in theory. Interviews might have already touched on the subject or talked a lot about it in relation to the earlier question; what I am, in addition, interested in here is influences outside of the actual selection process: for example (participant name) talks about age, talked about (placename) access school courses being problematic, (participant name) talks about his son, (participant name) talks about her son, (participant name) talked about people dropping out of the course which may have affected his selection on one selection day where he didn't "offer" anybody a place, my application processing is quite influenced by my experience with the second year nursing students a couple of weeks ago, and my marking of the first as a of the first year students. If an interviewee is doesn't bring examples themselves I may use these examples to prompt, but I need to acknowledge that the prompt came from me.

- If there is talk about “amount of communication”: how much talk is enough/ too much/ too little?¹⁵
- How do you know you are right?
 - Do you check with something/ someone?¹⁶
- Tell me about service users.¹⁷
- Tell me about interviewing candidates for mental health and adult health courses in the same interview.¹⁸

¹⁵ Added 09.03.2015, writing about (participant name)’s interview. I added this to find out what people think would be a desirable amount of talking but also to see “the point” of this observation: why is it important ((participant name) I think made some interesting comments already). I need to know the point to, amongst other things, compare this with (HEI name) where those mechanism cannot be played out in the some way. I need to definitely ask service users this question next week as I feel they often comment on the “amount of communication” in relation to the idea of “respect”.

¹⁶ Added 09.04.2015, in preparation for 1st (participant name) interview (reading through my (participant name)-related notes; the one where she said to me it’s difficult if there isn’t a second person). I thought I had a question similar to this, but I couldn’t find it. As always, I wish I had “found” this question earlier so as to be able to ask more people, but there’s still (participant name) and (participant name) and (participant name) (and most at (HEI name) and (HEI name)). I think I ask this question in a “roundabout way” in my interviews and people talk about their ideas of right or wrong choices.

¹⁷ this question is based on the notion that service users are used differently by different interviewers, maybe, and that their role is not clear to me. From observation and from conversations I had with colleagues, and discussions during meetings, service users may have a nominal role but their effect on decision-making is not clear. I find it interesting to hear what people say about service users. I will then compare this to what service users say about their own role in a focus group which I will use the interview with (participant name) and (participant name) as a pilot for. However the questions might be very similar to the ones and asking interviewers, in fact I will probably use mainly the same questions as am asking about the same process, practice.

¹⁸ This question I added on February 4, 2015 which means I didn't ask (participant name) that question or in the service user pilot with (participant name) and (participant name). I think this question might be interesting because (participant name), in a conversation about mental health and adult health and essentialism per se, asked me whether I think that mental health and adult health nurses to the same job to which I said no. Some interested in what people think about them being on the same course but more so going through the same selection process. I think this says something about selection processes, maybe even values, but I'm not sure what. Yet.

- What do you think about adult nurses interviewing for mental health places and vice versa?¹⁹
- My research is about values based recruitment.²⁰
 - What values are you looking for?
 - How were these particular values decided upon?²¹
 - How do you spot these values?
 - How do you ask candidates for qualities or values?²²
 - Will your selection process change next year?²³
 - Experiment: Name one value and tell me what a candidate must do or say for you to think they have it. Name another value. So on.

¹⁹ I added this question on 11 February 2015. I thought about the notion of professional expertise, something that (participant name) has talked about, (participant name), (participant name), (participant name) I think at (HEI name) and maybe (participant name) at (HEI name). There was also something related to that, but maybe just intuition, and maybe intuition and professional expertise are related, at least (participant name) talked about intuition as a form of pattern recognition, something about that at (HEI name). I think the idea of intuition, or something related to it, always comes through when I asked people to be precise about their reasons for picking somebody or not.

²⁰ this is probably the most important part of the interview. I put it last because I want the theme of values to emerge from the interview. Or I want more proof that the notion of values has to be mentioned to be discussed. Which is a bit tricky because people know what my research is about generally, but the experiments should be fun. It was definitely interesting to see (participant name) thinking about the process and (participant name) saying the same thing over and over again: respect, communication. In that sense I find it interesting would (participant name)said about service users: they judge candidates on interpersonal skills, is what I think he said. But isn't that what values based behaviours about? Maybe this, maybe not to him, he didn't buy into value based selection anyway.

²¹ I added this question on February 16 (Hot Fuzz Day), whilst actually trying to plan an observation at (HEI name). It may be mainly applicable to admissions tutors ((participant name), (participant name), (participant name)), but it might be interesting to see how other selectors think about the origin of values. I am not sure why I thought of this question so late in the process, but today I thought: I cannot observe for this.

²² I inserted this question on February 16. This was because I realised that (participant name) and (participant name) and me as their copier asked candidates what their friends would say about them on Facebook or in person. (HEI name) and (HEI name) don't seem to do that. And I would like to know why, maybe.

²³ I added this question on February 22. I had thought about it before and actually asked (participant name) in person, but it may be useful to have this as an interview question to see, maybe, what the focus of the current process is said to be and how the policy change impacts on the processes (at least in principle). Problems and advantages with current and former “set-ups” can also be discussed from a “different angle”.

- What values do you think are displayed during the selection process
(prompt later: by the selectors).²⁴
- Did you have interview training?²⁵
- (What happens after the selection event)?²⁶
- What do you think about feedback? ²⁷
 - How is it given/ should it be given?
 - What do you think about the fact that no positive feedback is given.

²⁴ This question was added on May 16, after transcribing (HEI name) SE 24.04.2015. The admissions meeting on May 13 also played a part.

²⁵ this question is related to the idea that people should have interview training (HEE), but also to the idea that value based recruitment is purely based, or at least based to a large extent, on ideas from psychology, but that people who do interviews do not have any training in psychology (I actually did ask (participant name) who was almost appalled when I suggested she was a psychologist, ha ha). To me, this seems to devalue psychology (that's at least one way of looking at it) as kind of anybody can do it, or what Deborah Cameron calls "hobby psychology". On the other hand it may position psychology itself as a truth or psychological truths as not contingent to contexts, to persons performing it. And of course it position psychology is one directional, applied to someone by someone. As the skill, a skill which's attainment is never asked to be proven. Which fits into the category of prove: what do we want to prove for, what do we not want proof for? The whole thing may also relate to the idea of intuition, something I will not ask in interviews about, other than (participant name), but not in the interview about interviews. I will however probe if the concept of intuition is mentioned by the interviewee. Intuition is important because it has been mentioned a number of times, by (participant name), who has a personal/research interest in it, I think it's been mentioned by (participant name) or at least alluded to, (participant name) that is and I think (participant name) and (participant name) mentioned it, so it has to be some sort of part of the focus group with service users. It's also been alluded to at (HEI name).

²⁶ I'm planning to only ask (participant name) and (participant name) this question as they are the admissions tutors and process something. (participant name) does some marking for the maths and English test and (participant name) puts in the final results into some UCAS forms. Asking other interviewers this question may only elicit whether they know things or not but maybe not what they think about it, and the interviews already quite long as it is.

²⁷ This question was added on May 16, after transcribing (HEI name) SE 24.04.2015. The admissions meeting on May 13 also played a part. Feedback is only ever negative: reflection of processes in practice?

- Tell me about your ideal candidate.^{28 29}
 - If you could do whatever you want, how would you go about finding them?³⁰

- Is there a time when candidates are stronger? (If not talked about unprompted, which is preferable).³¹

- What is the purpose of selection?³²

²⁸ This question I came up with during the interview with (participant name). I think it may be a good question for people to summarise their thoughts but also to compare everything they said before against. When I interviewed (participant name) I thought he wants a candidate he wants to teach, but I never got round to asking that, and maybe it's to leading a question anyway. It will also be quite interesting to see where people talk about "students" or "nurses" in the interview or in their "ideal candidate" talk. I think this may be quite important because of my idea of what or who we are selecting for: University or profession. And this is a difference that I don't think I make, I think it's in the data and it may come out in the interviews as much as anywhere else. For example (participant name) used the term students any use the term nurse, but maybe as a question more so: do we know whether they become a good nurse, I don't think so. That sort of thing.

²⁹ Added 06.03.2015, after thinking about the issue of HCA and nursing and nursing "being like medicine" in discourse anyway. When interviewing SUCS (or anybody else for that matter?) I might ask what the difference is between HCAs and nurses. A kind of reverses (or exactly the same) that some interviewers do at (HEI name).

³⁰ This question was added on 39 2015 after I wrote and thought about my conversation with by (participant name) about the interview process. I thought it would be a good question to match ideal candidate and ideal processes, to elicit, in another way maybe, what people like and dislike about the process without actually asking them, but also to compare idealised versions with what's going on. Maybe also to compare how far people shape their own practice to get near to their idealised version, or what they say they would like to do.

³¹ Added 20.04.2015 whilst transcribing (HEI name) SE from 17.04.2015. I remember comments made about candidates being stronger around Christmas in (HEI name), but there were others as well. I am not sure whether I can find out "actual correlations" (surely this must be possible), but the more important thing would be *how people talk about it or perceive the position of candidates within a particular temporal frame*.

³² This question I added on 05.02.2015 and have therefore not asked (participant name) or (participant name). I think this question is important to elicit what people think selection processes are meant to achieve and compare this to how they talk about it earlier and the practices (in the very widest of senses) I observe.

- Is there anything you would want to change in terms of the selection event (maybe precede by observation: selectors sometimes ask me whether I have found out about “good practice”) ³³
- Tell me about your ideas for next year.³⁴

Specific interview questions:

- Can you explain how specific tools came about? (This refers to all the scoring sheets, especially at (HEI name), whether use specific taxonomy, but also the scoring sheet “created by a statistic(participant name)” at (HEI name).)³⁵
- What is the effect of under recruiting, over recruiting, attrition? (For example (participant name)³⁶, (participant name), (participant name), by (participant name), (participant name), (participant name)).

³³ Added 28.04.2015 after transcribing (HEI name) SE 24.04.2015, during which another selector asked me about my “findings”; it was actually two selectors, I think.

³⁴ Added 17.03.2015. I am not sure why so late, maybe it’s in there already and I just haven’t spotted it. I added it after thinking about the SUC focus group and writing about the “office chat” with (participant name). I am wondering what people want.

I wonder whether I need to get involved; whether my research should inform new processes. But what would I say? That I don’t think it matters? I don’t really want to get involved because I think that form is being put paramount to content (as in the interviews themselves). **What is being done is determined by the number of applicants, not by how we can get the best applicant.** If I say this in the meeting, what would happen? I can discuss this with (participant name) next week in the interview and see what he thinks.

³⁵ I added this on February 22 during the transcription of the last (HEI name) observation. But I had these forts before, (participant name) has spoken about the scoring sheet being statistically sound before and at (HEI name) remarks have been made about items of the taxonomy not been in the right order by (participant name) and by (participant name).

- What is it about clearing? (For example (participant name), (participant name), (participant name), (participant name), (participant name), by (participant name))³⁷
- Selection process of support workers. Nursing students having to work as HCA's prior to application (is this being dropped). ((participant name))³⁸

³⁷ I added this question on 17 February 2015 when I dictated notes from the (HEI name) observation the day before. It was the way that (participant name) said: and we still had to go into clearing. It reminded me of my idea that people are worried about clearing.

³⁸ This is added on March 6, after my interview with (participant name) and brief conversation with (participant name): **I need to talk to (participant name) mainly about the HCA issue: how are they selected, what are we looking for, what is the future of the health care support worker and the impact on nursing and vice versa? Does he have any interesting literature?**

Appendix 2: Example of observation schedule

- Observe for identifiers by faculty of different specialities, such as mental health or adult health³⁹

- For (HEI name) only: how is the group interview conducted⁴⁰:
 - people talking to each other,
 - the facilitator asking individuals,
 - a mixture thereof?

- Observe for responses of selectors to candidate statements:
 - probes⁴¹
 - summaries⁴²

³⁹ This was triggered by (participant name) and (participant name) going around asking candidates whether they are mental health, having conversations with them before the interview. Into this category, which I'm not sure whether it's important, also fall different colourful this at (HEI name), separation of events at (HEI name), but maybe also using the same interview approach at (HEI name) and (HEI name), but different approach at (HEI name).

⁴⁰ Added 11.03.2015, thinking about the (participant name) interview. I am sure I made notes about this (although I can't say this is important right now) somewhere, but today is my last chance to observe this at (HEI name). So I better had.

⁴¹ I'm not sure probes come from, this must have been inspired by the framework already, by the idea that structured interviews should be used, with probes inserted; (participant name) from NHS England last week at the VBI workshop acknowledged that the interview stairs adjusting should rather be called semi structured interviews.

⁴² this was triggered by (participant name), I think, on February 11; I wrote down that she is summarising what people say, but she also gives context every now and again; I have to describe what context is

- giving context to what has been said⁴³
 - talk about their own family⁴⁴
 - talk about their own practice⁴⁵
 - making a positive or negative comment about but been said⁴⁶
 - making short sounds like: mmm or yes⁴⁷
- Length of hair⁴⁸
 - Clothes (if they are commented on)⁴⁹
 - Triggers by selectors⁵⁰

⁴³ This is tricky; I think I came up with this this morning (16 February 2015). I'm not quite sure what I mean by context, may be fleshing something out, maybe talking about a particular policy like (participant name) sometimes does, or (participant name); maybe I mean adding what candidates should be talking about? It's qualitatively different to the following responses, e.g. family and own practice; those I feel a more specific to the selector.

⁴⁴ This was triggered by (participant name), would talk about her son or her daughter during interviews.

⁴⁵ I'm not sure why this was triggered. But I remember (participant name) last week talking about her experience with dead people, even though this was I think in response to a question by column, a candidate. I also observed something that I would guess for is into the same category in (HEI name) today: (participant name) was talking about basic life support and related issues. He had told me before that he has a background in intensive care and resuscitation so I assume that's his area of interest or specialty.

⁴⁶ Again I can't identify a specific trigger for this question. But positive or negative comments are being made to, such as brilliant. Maybe it's more positive comments to negative comments, maybe I should observe for that.

⁴⁷ This is just based on general observation of people making noises, maybe often service users and carers.

⁴⁸ This I came up with last week at (HEI name), where it suddenly occurred to me that students mainly have long hair. I have recorded my conversation with (participant name) (from 11 February 2015) in regards to this.

⁴⁹ This was triggered at (HEI name) when we talked about the "shoeshine test". There was another example at (HEI name) on 11 February 2015 about a girl in a suit which triggered a conversation about clothes. Maybe a have to make clear why I wanted the clothes thing to be coming out of my data and that that I want people to comment on it but the hair thing I don't. I'm not quite sure why that is at the moment, I can't give a good idea or reason for it. I just find the hair issue interesting.

⁵⁰ I'm not sure where this comes from. Very early on in my data collection phase I thought about this. I thought about this after my first visit to (HEI name): what do selectors do, how are they encouraging people to talk or not encouraging people to talk. Then I thought I could quantify this by the time that is spent on each interview but failing to keep a stop watch on it.

- Original questions
 - questions about the question that is been answered (probes)
 - lead ins: for example scenarios, such as friends on Facebook, or friends in a pub
 - un-triggered statements by candidates
 - is there regularity or irregularity in terms of when triggers are more likely to appear: earlier candidates, middle candidates, later candidates?⁵¹
- Values
 - is the term used⁵²
 - in what context is the term used⁵³
 - what other words are used⁵⁴
 - how are values talked about by candidates

⁵¹ I added this transcribing the observation from (HEI name) from February 16; this is because I thought of the candidate to, that is candidate three, (participant name) started to ask more prompting questions, and my hypothesis at the moment is, that people when pressured for time will ask fewer probing questions, but that probing questions or triggers are also related to personal interests.

⁵² This comes out of my observation so far: values as a term are not used all that often. (participant name) uses the word in her intro, (participant name) uses the word in intro, I have not heard in (HEI name). I'm not sure whether it's important but it's interesting.

⁵³ This links to the first question in this section: who uses the term values when. So far, like I said above, I can only remember it being used in introductory talks.

⁵⁴ This is a tricky one. I think this is triggered by the lack of the use of the term values, or the desire to show how difficult it is to delineate terms like values, attributes, skills, qualities in practice. In (HEI name) we use the term qualities to ask people to talk about themselves and what it is about them that is good for nursing, and (HEI name) when I first observed they asked for the term of for attributes and then said at candidates wouldn't understand attributes to the no use a different term.

- one directional: as in I'm good at caring for someone;⁵⁵⁶
 - interactional: as in I'm good at being compassionate with someone
 - intersubjective: as in communication is a product of the experience of all parties involved
 - values as a concept/principle: as in I'm good at communication
 - values is practice: I'm good at listening
 - using "I"
 - not using a personal pronoun
- How are values talked about by selectors and candidates⁵⁷
 - As a universal/ general term (ie "my values...")
 - In terms of *specific* values (ie "education should be free...")
- candidates talk about their values in terms of interview practice⁵⁸

⁵⁵ The ideas of one directional, interactional, and intersubjective stem from my lecture in approaches to nursing from 10 February 2015. I have written about that lecture. The idea of one directionality probably originated in my IFS, I have also spoken about this to (participant name) when marking the ethics workbooks. So this is in me and I might be imposing this onto my data, but because people are doing it I think it is also in my data. I don't think I've delineated the concept of one directionality, interactionality or intersubjectivity sufficiently. **(I just explained this to Peter. I asked: do you think this sounds like a doctoral study now. He: Yes, it's full of xxx.)**

⁵⁶ The ideas of values as concept, practice, using the I, I think always simmered in me; and when is it always, I'm not sure when they started. But formulated them this morning thinking about what I could observe for.

⁵⁷ Added 11.03.2015. I added this thinking about the (participant name) interview. It seems odd that I have not thought about this before, and maybe I have. **Are values becoming *one thing*, are they becoming an empty signifier in the sense that they bind more and more and that the signified disappear behind the nodal point** (or just move too quickly)? I know what I mean by that today, but will I know this tomorrow?

⁵⁸ I think this might need better label. I think I first thought about this last week at (HEI name), and I have surely not observed for the properties I'm talking about here, before. But I must have thought about people "getting it out quickly" or stuff like that. I have to check my notes but this does nothing else there then today is the original of that particular category.

- giving lists of qualities (for example: I am caring, compassionate, good communicator, a team worker)
- giving one quality plus an explanation of the quality (for example I am a good communicator, because I can talk to people well)⁵⁹
- giving one quality plus an example from work or family (I am compassionate, I have shown this when I brought somebody a class of water)
- not specifying qualities of values
- the original of understanding of qualities: my friends say, I am, I've been told at work and so on⁶⁰

- I **am something** with *somebody*
- I **am giving** something to somebody I am doing something (abstract) I'm doing something because I like the effect the same thing would have on me
- I **have...** skills
- I do something (**in an abstract way**)
- I do something (**in a particular way**)
- I do something with someone

⁵⁹ Because I can't write that quickly, after transcribing the observation from (HEI name) of February 16, I decided that my observation may be more structured, so I'll be looking for explanation and structure that while some observing into: example present, example from work, example from family, example from friends, just example, extended story.

I added on March 25, after (participant name) Interview: examples in talk (not only from candidates) **look for instances of the properties of "exact" and "hypothetical" for the category of example.**

⁶⁰ This of course may have something to do with the setup of the interview. At (HEI name), I think you may get lower marks if you say my teacher says, where is at (HEI name) the trigger comes from the lead-in of the selector, what would your friends say about you if. I wonder why (HEI name) does it this way. (HEI name) asked for qualities directly and I think (HEI name) do the same. So far I can only remember (participant name) and (participant name) asking about friend's opinion, so need to interview them about that. I have copied them in that regard.

- I'd do something to elicit an outcome/response in somebody (no evidence this giving that this outcome or response has been achieved, checked or otherwise, it is assumed)⁶¹
- I'm doing something to make people have an idea about myself (this may be similar to the point above and may link to the same footnote/ memo⁶²

- What conditions are talked about, for example cancer, dementia, any other conditions?⁶³
- What stories are told?⁶⁴

⁶¹ This could be linked to my ideas about patient centredness in my IFS: a method to elicit a response; the discourse of *making people feel* also crops up in values-based talk. To do: find those instances where people do things to *make people feel*

⁶² This box was inserted on March 8, when going through my transcripts of (HEI NAME) selection event 03.03.2015. I put these things in as they clarify slightly some categories that may be present in the talk of candidates (or they may be properties of the category: how to talk about values).

⁶³ I'm not sure when I first thought about this. Again, it could be rooted in my IFS where I write about extreme case examples. But I find it interesting how many people have experienced cancer in their family, or looked after people with dementia. I wonder whether I can create a list of conditions, and I wonder whether it means anything.

⁶⁴ I added this on February 17, after looking at my "condensed" observation schedule from yesterday again. The word "stories" was on there. I am not sure why I make this a category, but the stories people tell may be interesting. I need to write down in what way those stories are commented upon by faculty and other people. For example (participant name) saying in a dismissive way: "she saw a person with a hypo and taught her to play cards" or (participant name) talking about "these sob stories" that mustn't affect judgment.

- Are there themes that seem particular to specific events (for example all candidates talk about adult health in a particular way or themes that are generated by selectors [and their interests])⁶⁵

- How is learning talked about?
 - Where is learning said to originate (in work experience, in family, somewhere else)
 - how is learning talk triggered (no trigger, question by selector, question by service user carer)
 - what kind of learning is described (improvement, new learning, for example skill; different understanding of the concept)⁶⁶⁶⁷
 - is learning expressed as a practice or as a concept/principle?

- Learning as the exposure to a skill (or quality, or value)
- Learning as the taking up of a skill (or quality, or value)
- Learning as the improvement of a skill (or quality, or value)

⁶⁵ Added on March 8 2015 whilst going through transcript of (HEI NAME) selection event from March 3. I added this because I thought during that particular event a number of candidates talked about adult health in particular way (being more comfortable talking to older people). **It obviously links quite closely to my ideas that themes (and notions of selection) are generated by “the interests” of individual selectors, which I discuss in another footnote somewhere.**

⁶⁶ These properties I just came up with now, they might be influenced by my observation and (HEI name) today.

⁶⁷ This observation point is also triggered by my ongoing question about the position of "learning talk" in interviews. As I have discussed elsewhere in my notes I feel always surprised that people saying specific examples taught them the importance of for example, and almost exclusively, communication skills or team working skills. At (HEI NAME), during interviews with people had written such things in the personal statements, I always try to follow this up with the question such as: and what did you think communication was before, what did you think about its importance? I have discussed this with (participant name) during the ethics workbook, I believe and also observe this during the interview at (HEI name) on 11 February 2015. At (HEI name) people are asked what they've learnt. I don't think at (HEI name) people are asked and I haven't observed enough at (HEI name) yet.

- Learning as the demonstration of a (fully developed?) skill (or quality, or value).
- Academic skill, practical nursing skill, skill based on the 6Cs, ⁶⁸

- How is nursing, how are nurses talked about in interviews?⁶⁹
 - when candidates are discussed, are links made specifically to events after the interview, such as how they will perform in higher education, or how they will perform as a nurse?⁷⁰
 - What reasons do candidates give to become a nurse
 - what is described as particular to nursing⁷¹
 - what is described as particular to nursing sub- specialities
 - how is this talk about differences triggered (by selectors in questions, by candidates themselves, other)

⁶⁸ Added 09.03.2015 going through transcript form (HEI name) selection event 03.03.2015. I added these as I find this quite interesting: how is learning talked about? This should give some insight into what the function of HEI are seen to be by selectors and candidates. Unfortunately I do not have a lot of PS or approval to use them... but there must be at least a trend... there are properties of the category learning. **I also need to talk to (name) today about “making different” from support worker idea. Sinclair (name) (?) “Why do you not become a nurse then?” (participant name): “Why not stay a support worker?”**

⁶⁹ This set of observations was triggered firstly by (participant name) asking me how selection is constructed or what selection is, which made me think about what nursing is in interviews. I then kept on looking for some throwaway comments and especially at (HEI name) (participant name) relates nursing to eating, (participant name) relates mental have nursing to biscuits, stuff like that. There's also always vomiting talk at (HEI name), and sometimes at (HEI name), although there wasn't much at (HEI name) today, but then I didn't pay much attention to the intro and outro. But (participant name) has given permission for me to record these next week which is grand.

⁷⁰ I added this on February 22, transcribing the every 16 selection event. Doesn't quite fit the section I put it in here, but I needed it to go somewhere. I added it, because I'm not sure there when shortcomings or advantages of candidates are discussed a link is made to nursing. People might say: she's not gonna be a good nurse or she's going to be a problem student, and obviously he, but on 16 February I didn't take any specific notes, as I have to start doing this.

⁷¹ transcribing the observation from (HEI name)'s every 16, I added the idea of essentialisation of nursing, in terms of only good qualities, nurses listen, nurses are flexible, nurses are friendly and the distinction from other professions who are not that, if examples are given the talk about healthcare professionals as bad, for want of a better word, those healthcare professionals are often HCA or doctors, this needs to be tested

- whether nurses said to be a good/bad and how is nursing separated from other healthcare professionals
 - what is being discussed: what nurses **do** or what nurses **are** or both?⁷²
 - how do selectors talk about nurses or nursing outside of the actual interview what during the interview but away from the interview schedule (throwaway comments)
- Who selects?
 - What is their background/interest?⁷³
 - in terms of service users, what is their background, interest (summer retired doctors, or retired nurses, some are service users in a more actual sense, even though as (participant name) at (HEI name) said today “we all have experience with hospitals et cetera, we are all service users”).
- Note taking
 - who writes
 - how is the written used

⁷² I added the do versus are bit whilst transcribing the observation from (HEI name) February 16. It may have occurred to me before, it's a kind of thing I have with Foucault: where what people do turns into what people are, that's where you find discourse.

⁷³ This observation point is triggered by my idea that people might be influenced by the personal interests. I have thought about this in relation to (participant name), who talked about physiology, my slightly sociological talk when I interview, (participant name) at (HEI name) talking about life-support when his background is resuscitation. (participant name) at (HEI name) asks candidates what they apply for and then talks about her background, but dust is at the end of the interview. Which doesn't mean that it won't influence her decision.

- how is writing/not writing justified if it all (before or after me asking a question about it)
- What mechanisms of seeking “reassurance” are employed, if any?⁷⁴
 - is the need for reassurance acknowledged
 - what people or artefacts are used to gain reassurance
 - who all want is referred to/delegated to when decisions are made
- What parts of the selection day are discussed?⁷⁵
 - For example: in (HEI name) how is the communication exercise discussed by selectors. Only in terms of behaviour or words mentioned?
- Is the “amount of talk” commented on?⁷⁶

⁷⁴ The idea of reassurance was developed fairly early on in my observations. I think it originated in (HEI name), where reassurance came from the score sheets. Or was set to come from the score sheets or people behaved like it came from the score sheets. And when I see people are mean mainly (participant name). However reassurance has been a theme, lack of reassurance I feel when I interview on my own for example, the lack of reassurance I get from service users who want me to make a decision, yet I try to let them make the decision, under the guise of research maybe. Maybe to disregard for the need for reassurance that comes through in (participant name)’s interview (I am imposing this on my data, I have to re-listen to the interview to have any idea whether any of this is right)?

⁷⁵ I added this on February 17, 2015 when I went from my notes from (HEI name) the day before. I don't actually know whether it merits a discrete observation item. It might only apply to (HEI name) and only apply to my idea that what has been said during the communication exercise does not matter as there is no way to record it. **The communication exercise seems to be solely about non-verbal communication and non-verbal communication with selectors at that. This is important. The selectors read body language that isn't intended for them. I'm not sure whether there are similar things going on it (HEI name) or (HEI name) as people in different components of the selection event generally do not know about other components, how they were performed for example. But the thing, who is being communicated with, do candidates have to communicate twice, with each other and with the selector?**

⁷⁶ I added this on March 09 2015, writing about the interview with (participant name). Although I discuss the notion of quiet and “taking over” in my notes somewhere I have not yet made this a point proper. The category would be “communication” and the amount would be its property.

- Is expertise mentioned?⁷⁷⁷⁸
 - Expertise from practice, family or other when making decisions for example
 - general comments and expertise, such as “we are all experts a service users” or something like that

- What do people (service users, selectors, practice partners, applicants) do during the interview⁷⁹

⁷⁷ I'm not sure where this comes from. I think it might be (participant name) been my supervisor and I'm sure she's interested in the idea of expertise. But it is also my data: (participant name) for example talked about professional knowledge or professional expertise in detecting the right people for the course.

⁷⁸ Added 09.03.2015, writing about (participant name) interview: I wonder how this professional expertise (or notions thereof) that is sometimes alluded to at (HEI name) and (HEI name) will “work” at (HEI name)? There was already some talk about not being able to use professional expertise (I think (participant name) said that). So it will be interesting to see how decisions are justified there. Or whose expertise is called upon (the people who “wrote” the crypt sheets maybe?

⁷⁹ This point of observation originated early in my data collection; I thought that service users often used as secretaries, something I mentioned today to (participant name) and (participant name), which probably had the effect that (participant name) was not used as a secretary solely. But (participant name) kind of agreed.

- for example in terms of writing
- talking
- making decisions
- where do selectors look/ what do they look at?⁸⁰
 - For example when applicants read questions
 - When applicants answer questions
 - Check about the “mask look”; is it intentional?
 - Hand use?
 - Blinking?⁸¹
- what do I do during selection events⁸²
 - how is my presence acknowledged and when
 - how do I interfere, especially at (HEI name), but also somewhere else

⁸⁰ Added 28.04.2015 whilst thinking about (HEI name) SE 24.04.2015; for example the selector on station four looked down and to the side whilst applicants were reading the scenario. I also really need to ask for interview training in my interviews!

⁸¹ The blinking bit may be interesting in terms of “focus” or “concentration”. I have not observed this in other places, other than (HEI name) during the communication exercise. But then: I didn’t much look for it. I am such a rubbish ethnographer...

⁸² I added this on February 22. I transcribed the February 16 (HEI name) observation, during which (participant name) acknowledged my presence as the one who is writing things down. But at presence has been acknowledged before: (participant name) at (HEI name) sometimes asked me my opinion about candidates that she is just discussed, there was talk with (participant name) and (participant name) at (HEI name) about my interfering with the MMI because of space issues. But also marked at (HEI name) which is doing something for the selection process.

- What do candidates and selectors do when they are not “officially” selecting or being selected⁸³
 - What is talked about?
 - In relation to the selection event
 - In relation to the job
 - In relation to particular people
 - What is done?
 - Bringing people to rooms
 - Being brought to rooms
 - Gathering of forms
 - Filling in forms
 - Hurrying people up ((HEI name), (HEI name), (HEI name))
 -

⁸³ Added March 8 2015 when going through transcript of selection event (HEI name) 03.03.2015. I added this point as candidates ion (HEI name) were talking about the questions. I also remember being rushed by (participant name) at (HEI name) which made me ask questions *differently*, (participant name) talking to (participant name) about a candidate being a national wrestler, that sort of thing. I am not making a claim about objectivity, more about how some things are *made important* and others maybe not. That sort of idea; not really developed right now.

I think that I can use my time at (HEI name) (a place I am not too keen to spend much time in, but hey) looking for those sort of things. I have some data already, which I think I may have collected *by accident* or *by chance*.



Ethics Application Form:

Research Degree Students

All research activity conducted under the auspices of the Institute by staff, students or visitors, where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants are required to gain ethical approval before starting. Please answer all relevant questions. Your form may be returned if incomplete. Please write your responses in terms that can be understood by a lay person.

For further support and guidance please see Ethics Review Procedures for Student Research <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/studentethics/> or contact your supervisor or researchethics@ioe.ac.uk.

Section 1 Project details

a.	Project title	
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b.	Student name	Michael (Klaus Ronny) Klingenberg
c.	Supervisor	Dr Caroline Pelletier
d.	Advisory committee members	
e.	Department	Doctoral School
f.	Intended research start date	01/10/2014
g.	Intended research end date	01/10/2016
h.	Funder (if applicable)	
i.	Funding confirmed?	
j.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If research to be conducted abroad please check www.fco.gov.uk If the FCO advice against travel a full travel risk assessment form should also be completed and submitted</i>	United Kingdom
k.	All research projects at the Institute of Education are required to specify a professional code of ethics according to which the research will be conducted. Which organisation's research code will be used?	BERA and BSA

<p><i>If your research is based in another institution then you may be required to submit your research to that institution's ethics review process. If your research involves patients recruited through the NHS then you will need to apply for ethics approval through an NHS Local Research Ethics Committee. In either of these cases, you don't need ethics approval from the Institute of Education.</i></p>			
I.	<p>Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?</p>	<p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>No X ⇒ go to <i>Section 2</i></p>
<p><i>If so, please insert the name of the committee, the date on which the project was considered, and attach the approval letter in either hard or electronic format with this form.</i></p>			
<p>External Committee Name:</p>		<p>Date of Approval:</p>	
<p>⇒ <i>If your project has been externally approved please go to Section 9 Attachments.</i></p>			

Section 2 Research Summary

Please provide an overview of your research. This can include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection, reporting and dissemination. *It is expected that this will take approximately 200-300 words, and you may write more if you feel it is necessary.*

In the wake of the Francis report on failures at the Mid-Staffordshire Foundation Trust the government in Health Education England (HEE) introduced a new body overseeing health education. One of the mandates of HEE is the introduction of a “value-based-recruitment” element into the selection process into undergraduate nursing programmes.

Although some research has been done into value-based selection processes, this has largely been concerned with psycho-metric measurements and ideas of reliability and validity of specific selection tools (for example interviews or situational judgment tests). There is however a paucity of empirical inquiry concerned with *the practice of value-based-selection*, that is how it is being done.

This study’s value lies in its potential to contribute to professional, empirical and theoretical knowledge. New insights can be developed for my own professional practice as a senior lecturer in nursing who is involved in selection processes. I also hope that such insights, when shared, will inform the practice of colleagues and the wider professional community. In addition this study has the potential to add to and inform the wider field of criterion-referenced, observation-based selections, such as assessments in healthcare-education (for example OSCEs) or structured recruitment in other organisations. I hope to therefore contribute in a way not only useful to selectors (or recruiters) but also, importantly, those that are or will be selected and recruited. The contribution to empirical knowledge (and theories based on the analysis of such data) lies in this study employing the method of observation, an angle that produces data different from those so far reported in the literature.

This research project therefore understands as its aim to develop an understanding of the processes involved in this selection practice and answer the following preliminary questions (in the hope to develop a more theoretical and general understating of such processes:

- What happens during value-based selection events?
- What instruments, materials or people are required to spot and record the presence or absence of values?
- How are such processes converted into judgments on people?

Following a purposive sampling strategy three HEI (higher education institute) which offer nursing degrees and self-identify as using a value-based element in their selection process were approached, all of which have preliminary (pending ethics approval by the IOE) granted access to the respective admissions processes. One of these institutions is my current employer.

The methodology guiding this research can loosely be described as grounded theory and the main method as observation. Following the principles of ethnographic research (as initial guidance) I will be observing a number of value-based selection events at each university. These events are (depending on site): group interviews or mini-multiple interviews, where prospective students are discussing hypothetical scenarios, either as part of a group or individually. Apart from informal “chats”, which form part of the ethnographic approach, I will be interviewing faculty and administrative staff involved in selection processes to explore opinions but also to allow my developing a practical and theoretical understanding of the process.

Interviewees will be identified either by their explicit involvement in value-based selection or by their becoming pertinent during the research process.

The number of observations and interviews depends on the development of my theoretical understanding and theoretical saturation. Although therefore I cannot give a precise number, I am expecting to observe 5-6 events at each university and conduct interviews with the admission tutors and faculty directly involved. The formats of interviews will develop from exploratory to more structured forms, as I will develop a better understanding of the selection processes.

Another form of data collection will be the collection of documents that play an active part in the practice of value-based selection. These will be documents that outline procedures, briefing documents, score-sheets, but also HEE and other government publications. Such documents are expected to be either in the public domain or made available by the respective HEI. Finally I have established contacts within the HEE which I hope to continue. This may lead to further formal and informal interviews and opportunities to observe workshops related to value-based selections.

The main method of data analysis will be the creation of field notes from initial “jottings”, and constant spiral reflection on what I observe and my relationship to it. Formal interviews, in addition, will be audio recorded. In the process of analysis, fieldnote data will be reduced (the choices I make about what data to focus on), organised, preliminary conclusions will be drawn and tested for plausibility, sturdiness and validity.

Apart from this study forming the basis for a doctoral thesis submitted to the IOE, I hope for this research to add to empirical, professional and theoretical debates. The results of this study will be made available to the respective admissions units and where indicated practices will be discussed. The aim of this study is to describe processes that without it may not be easily visible, to allow HEI departments to evaluate selection practice based on information they otherwise would not have had access to. It is also hoped that by developing a theoretical understanding of selection processes based on the idea of values, contributions can be made to the wider field of organisational and work theory. This will be achieved through publications of the major in conference contributions and peer-reviewed articles.

Section 3 Security-sensitive material

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a.	Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No X
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⇒ If you have answered **Yes** please give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**.

Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?

Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?

Section 4 Research participants Tick all that apply

<input type="checkbox"/> Early years/pre-school <input type="checkbox"/> Primary School age 5-11 <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School age 12-16 <input type="checkbox"/> Young people aged 17-18	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown <input type="checkbox"/> Advisory/consultation groups <input type="checkbox"/> No participants X Adults <i>please specify below</i> university staff (admissions tutors, faculty, administrators) and other people involved in selection processes
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Section 5 Research methods Tick all that apply

X Interviews X Focus groups <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire <input type="checkbox"/> Action research X Observation X Literature review	<input type="checkbox"/> Controlled trial/other intervention study <input type="checkbox"/> Use of personal records <input type="checkbox"/> Systematic review <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary data analysis X Other, give details: Document analysis
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Section 6 Systematic reviews Only complete if systematic reviews will be used

a.	Will you be collecting any new data from participants?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Will you be analysing any secondary data?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Section 7 Secondary data analysis Only complete if secondary data analysis will be used

a.	Name of dataset/s		
b.	Owner of dataset/s		
c.	Are the data in the public domain?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
			<i>If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?</i> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Are the data anonymised?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
			<i>Do you plan to anonymise the data?</i> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
			<i>Do you plan to use individual level data?</i> Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
			<i>Will you be linking data to individuals?</i> Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
e.	Are the data sensitive (DPA definition)?	Yes* <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
f.	Will you be conducting analysis	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No* <input type="checkbox"/>

within the remit it was originally collected for?	Was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
	Was data collected prior to ethics approval process? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No* <input type="checkbox"/>
⇒ If you have ticked any asterisked responses, this indicates possible increased ethical issues for your research please give further details in Section 8 Ethical Issues	

Section 8 Ethical issues

What are the ethical issues which may arise in the course of your research, and how will they be addressed?

It is important that you demonstrate your awareness of potential risks or harm that may arise as a result of your research. You should then demonstrate that you have considered ways to minimise the likelihood and impact of each potential harm that you have identified. Please be as specific as possible in describing the ethical issues you will have to address. Please consider / address ALL issues that may apply.

A minimum of 200 words is required. Less than this and your application may be returned to you.

Ethical concerns may include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially vulnerable participants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed consent • Assent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data sharing/encryption |
|---|--|---|

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding/child protection • Risks to participants and/or researchers • International research • Sensitive topics • Sampling • Gatekeepers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods • Confidentiality • Anonymity • Data storage/security • Data transfer/transmission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data documentation • Data management plan • Data protection • Reporting • Dissemination and use of findings
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In outlining concerns relating to the ethical conduct of my study I will make use of the main themes outlined in the 2011 BERA guidelines for educational research.

1. Responsibilities to participants.

As participants I regard the following, which I will discuss separately: HEI staff involved with selection processes; staff working for HEE; HEI organisations as institutions; prospective students; me as practitioner observer

1.1. Voluntary informed consent

All HEI staff involved with selection processes that are observed or interviewed during the study will be informed in advance via e-mail by the respective admission leads. A separate information sheet (Appendix 1) and the opportunity to discuss the aims of the project (and concerns) will be available before admission events. A similar procedure will be in place for observations and interviews performed at HEE events (workshops) and

before interviews with HEE staff. HEI organisations will be informed via the admissions lead and, where necessary, through local ethics procedures.

All institutions have given preliminary consent for the study to take place. Prospective students will be informed of the study taking place via their invitation e-mail and by announcement at the beginning of the day. Where sending an e-mail is not possible (either due to HEI-related issues of data protection or added workload to administrators), an announcement only on the day will constitute information. The content of the announcement will be following that of the information sheet for prospective students (Appendix 2) also available on the day. I will talk to prospective students as a group, will answer questions and give prospective students the opportunity to talk to me individually. All prospective students who are willing to participate will be asked to complete a consent form (Appendix 3).

Where documents form part of the data, no consent will be sought where such documents are publicly available. However, HEI and HEE will be informed that those documents form part of the collected data. In all other cases written consent will be sought. Where documents are not publicly available HEE and HEI are asked for permission to access and use such documents. Where documents relate to individuals rather than organisations, for example personal statements, individual written consent (Appendix 4) will be sought. Written consent will also be sought for audio-recorded interviews (Appendix 5).

1.2. Openness and Disclosure

The design of this study allows for its enactment to be transparent. I will discuss the aims and objectives, as well as procedures openly with

participants. Where people want access to recorded data or transcripts of interviews, this will be accommodated.

1.3. Right to withdraw and confidentiality

All participants have the right to withdraw at any point during the study. The implications of this will vary depending on where in the study participants want to decline or withdraw consent. Should participants not want to be observed (HEI and HEE staff; prospective students) or interviewed (HEI and HEE staff) individually, this will be honoured. However; where staff and prospective students are part of a larger process (for example group interviews or administrative processes), they will be assured that no data relating to them personally will be recorded. If any participant wants to withdraw consent after data collection has finished, their contributions (verbal, written, practical) will be removed from recorded data. However; as this study is depended on my reflexive engagement with data, it is likely that my analysis will be influenced (subconsciously) by observations, even if nothing is recorded. Where I am or become aware of this, I will remove relevant data form the analytical process.

All participants are granted anonymity where possible and where desired in all documentations relating to the study (for example fieldnotes, memos, correspondence), the thesis and all subsequent publications. Pseudonyms for organisations and individuals will be created, if desired, in conjunction with participants. Where anonymity cannot be granted or participants could easily be identified, this will be discussed and acted on according to the wishes of those participants. Although I do not expect such cases to occur, anonymity might be difficult to maintain where a combination of attributes may make

participants identifiable (for example project leads at the HEE). Here, in line with BSA standards, such individuals will be reminded of the potential risks to anonymity prior to data collection.

In addition to the above all data will be stored according to the data protection act 1998. Interviews which are audio- recorded will be, if permission is granted, transcribed by an external company that I have used in the past and who follow strict confidentiality guidelines. Where such permission is not granted I will transcribe interviews myself.

1.4. Incentives and detriment arising from participating in this study

No immediate incentives are given and I hope no detriments will arise from participation in this study. However, there are a number of points to consider.

1.4.1. Prospective students

Prospective students may feel coerced into participating in this study as they might believe it affects their chances of being selected. It is therefore of utmost importance that they are informed that this is not the case. This is to safeguard prospective students (for example to avoid adding to the stress a selection process brings with it) and to safeguard the HEI to avoid giving grounds for post-hoc litigation. As this study is concerned with observed practice of something that would take place with or without the researcher being present (and no additional data collection related to prospective students, for example interviews, will take place), I believe no further assurances beyond the ones already discussed need to be given.

If necessary, local ethics approvals will be sought for this study.

1.4.2. Staff and organisations

It is hoped that this study, in researching a practice that has so far attracted little attention beyond its psychometric and projective qualities, will help inform selection practices. There is therefore a potential benefit to be found for staff, organisations and future students. However; there are possibilities that observed practices may give ground for criticism, either internally in specific HEI or externally by regulators or other HEI. It is therefore important to remind participants (and to remind myself) that the purpose of this study is not to verify a “correctness” or “incorrectness” of specific approaches, but to detail these approaches and their observed effects. Where concerns about the effect of the study on reputation etc. remain, they will be discussed in the event.

1.4.3. My role as practitioner/researcher

I understand this study as insider research in that I am an academic in nurse education and therefore knowledgeable about and practically involved with selection processes.

In two of the HEI I am planning to observe selection practices I will be solely observing; in one HEI I will be observing whilst being part of faculty and therefore directly involved with the selection process. This gives me an opportunity to compare and reflect from different experiential vantage points. As an insider I come with particular preconceptions which may affect the way I “see” things when observing. It is therefore, again, of utmost importance, to retain a reflexive practice when engaging with data. This may lead to participants feeling that they are being “judged” in their professional practice. As stated in point 1.4.2. the integrity of this research therefore depends on an honest, reflexive

approach and on research aims and objectives as well as conduct being transparent to all involved.

2. Responsibilities to sponsor

Although I am self-funding my EdD, my current employer allocates me protected time in my work-schedule to conduct and complete this study. My responsibilities beyond those discussed above therefore include to keep my employer informed of my general process and to use the allocated time effectively so as not to waste resources. My employer has not requested input into research methodology; however the thesis upgrade acknowledged its appropriateness.

3. Responsibilities to the community of educational researchers

I will not conduct research in a way that could be considered misconduct. I will be consistently reflective about my methods, practice and impact on others. In addition I will seek guidance from my supervisor, senior academic staff in my department and, where issues of potentially unethical research may become apparent, clarification from the IOE and local ethics committees. In all subsequent publications I will ensure that authorship is given to contributors in accordance with their involvement.

4. Responsibilities to educational professionals, policy makers and the general public

As stated above, results of this study will form part of my thesis which will be made available via the IOE library and the ethos database. I am hoping to share findings via publications in peer-reviewed journals. The findings of this study will be discussed with all organisations involved (specifically admissions teams where

HEI are concerned and project leaders for VBR at the HEE. Future nursing students can benefit from this study where HEI and HEE feel the need to implement changes or retain current practice based on findings.

Section 9 Attachments Please attach the following items to this form, or explain if not attached

a.	Information sheet and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b.	Consent form	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
c.	The proposal for the project, if applicable	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
d.	Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee, if applicable	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Section 10 Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project

Name	Michael Klingenberg
Date	18.08.2014

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor/course administrator.

Departmental use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, you may refer the application to the Research Ethics Coordinator (via researchethics@ioe.ac.uk) so that it can be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A Research Ethics Committee Chair, ethics representatives in your department and the research ethics coordinator can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the Research Ethics Committee.

Also see 'when to pass a student ethics review up to the Research Ethics Committee':

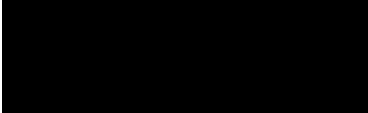
<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/policiesProcedures/42253.html>

Reviewer 1

Supervisor name	Caroline Pelletier
Supervisor comments	
Supervisor signature	CP X

Reviewer 2

Advisory committee member name	Tristan McCowan
Advisory committee member comments	There are some ethical issues raised by the observations being conducted as part of this research, but the project has acknowledged these and provided necessary safeguards.

Advisory committee member signature		
Decision		
Date decision was made	12 th Sept 2014	
Decision	Approved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Referred back to applicant and supervisor	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Referred to REC for review	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recording	Recorded in the student information system	<input type="checkbox"/>

Once completed and approved, please send this form and associated documents to the faculty research administrator to record on the student information system and to securely store.

Further guidance on ethical issues can be found on the IOE website at

<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/ethics/> and www.ethicsguidebook.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Example of information form for staff

Institute of Education, London

Information Sheet for HEI staff

Title of project:

Value-based-selection into nursing degrees.

Investigator:

Michael Klingenberg

Senior Lecturer Adult Nursing

(HEI name)

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project which forms part of my studies for a doctorate in education. You should only participate if you want to. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or you would like more information on.

1. As part of their selection process (HEI name) uses a group interview.
2. My research is designed to see what happens in practice before, during and after such interviews.

3. I would like to therefore observe as much of this practice as possible.
4. I may therefore be around your workplace for a number of hours at a time, but mostly where the interview is taking place.
5. I may also take notes based on informal chats (coffee room chats) or during meetings where value-based-selection is mentioned.
6. I will write down brief notes about relating to what people do and say, sometimes verbatim.
7. This research is not designed to “find people out”. There is no agenda that I intent to hide from anybody.
8. Where I record (in writing or audio-digitally during planned interviews) I will make people aware of this and ask for consent, either in written or verbal form.
9. If you were happy for me to interview you, I would like to audio- record this and have the recording transcribed by a transcription agency. Please let me know if you do not want me to send off the recording to this agency.

10. I may also ask you to give me access to particular documents which are not in the public domain but may aid understanding of VBR processes.
11. No names will be taken down; unless you tell me you want your name mentioned.
12. In my report only pseudonyms will be used.
13. If you do not mind to participate, no further action is necessary. I will check again before I start observations or will remind you when I am taking notes about conversations or during meetings.
14. I will also relate the notes taken to you and hopefully will discuss them in more detail during interviews, should you be willing to be interviewed.
- 15. If you would rather not participate, please tell me and I will not record anything you say or do. I will however still be present and conducting research.**
16. This research is not designed to find out whether people are doing things “right” or “wrong” but what specifically people are doing and saying.
17. If you change your mind later, just drop me an e-mail and I will remove anything you said or did from my records.

18. If you have any questions, please ask them either via e-mail or in person.

Thank you very much,

Michael

(Address, telephone and e-mail address supplied on original form)

Appendix 5: Example of information form for applicants

Institute of Education, London

Information Sheet for Candidates

Title of project:

Value-based-selection into nursing degrees.

Investigator:

Michael Klingenberg

Senior Lecturer Adult Nursing

(HEI name)

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project which forms part of my studies for a doctorate in education. You should only participate if you want to. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or you would like more information on.

19. As part of their selection process (HEI name) uses multiple mini interviews.

20. My research is designed to see what happens in practice before, during and after such interviews. Although what you say and do is important to me, I am interested in how things are being done, not how you perform as an individual.

21. This research is not part of the selection process and will not influence any decisions made.

22. I will therefore observe as much of this practice as possible.

23. I will write down brief notes about relating to what people do and say, sometimes word for word.

24. In my report only pseudonyms will be used to protect identities.

25. You are not going to be asked to do or say anything that you would not normally be asked to do or say if my research were not taking place.

26. If you are happy to participate, please tell a member of staff or me at the beginning of the day or indicate this on the consent form which will be given out at the beginning of the day.

27. If you do not wish to participate, please tell a member of staff or me at the beginning of the day or indicate this on the consent form which will be given out at the beginning of the day. You will not be disadvantaged in any way. I will

still be present, either observing or being part of the selection team, but the research will take place with a different group.

28. Whether you agree or disagree to participate will not affect the outcome of your application.

29. If you agreed to participate but change your mind later, just drop me an e-mail and I will remove anything you said or did from my records up until one month after the selection event.

30. If you have any questions, please ask them either before or after the selection event.

Thank you very much,

Michael

(Address, telephone and e-mail address supplied on original form)

Appendix 6: Example of consent form for applicant

Institute of Education, London

Informed consent form for observation

Title of project:

Value-based-selection into nursing degrees.

Investigator:

Michael Klingenberg

Senior Lecturer Adult Nursing

(HEI name)

Please read the information sheet carefully, ask any questions you may have and then indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements (please sign to indicate consent).

Please sign here

I am happy to be watched during the selection day.

I am happy for Michael to write down things I say or do.

I agree to the use of direct quotations in reports and publications.

I understand my identity will be anonymised.

Investigators Statement

I.....

confirm that I have carefully explained the purpose of the study to the participant and outlined any reasonably foreseeable risks.

Participant's Statement

I.....

agree that I have

- Read the information sheet and/ or the project has been explained to me orally;
- Had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study;
- Received satisfactory answers to all my questions or have been advised of an individual to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and my rights as participant

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without penalty if I so wish and I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purpose of this study only and that it will not be used for any other purpose. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Signed..... Date.....

(Address, telephone and e-mail address supplied on original form)

Appendix 7: Example of supervision

Excerpt of early writing with comments by supervisor:

Such comparisons across space and time were frequently made and can be contradictory: People who apply in September are often “rubbish” as they are the ones who got rejected the year before/ early applicants are the most organised; applicants who are interviewed in March are worse than applicants interviewed in November; the best applicants come around Christmas time.

That allocation of interview time is only to some extent based on time or “quality” of application is not discussed. UCAS may release applications later than expected, applicants’ applications might be overlooked by shortlisters, applicants may not be available for certain interview dates.

In the processes described above it becomes clear that influences other than those relatable to applicants are not taken into consideration. This applies to administrative issues but also issues of concentration of both applicants and selectors. Applicants may be more exhausted in the afternoon than they would have been in the morning. But also selectors may be exhausted, tired, bored by the time the 6th circuit comes around. Although these issues are discussed informally during breaks they do not appear to form part of a discussion where “groups” are considered. Individual applicants are, to some extent, judged by the group they have been allocated to. This is another example of selectors creating a difference that can then inform opinion.

Hi Michael

I've inserted some comments, attached. I really enjoyed reading this, I think this is headed in a very good direction. I have two overall suggestions. First, I wasn't always clear what your analytic focus was. The first couple of pages set off in a really interesting direction, identifying how sameness and differences are established. But then you seem to make points about whether these distinctions have any 'real' basis or not. It read to me like your main concern at that point was highlighting the unfairness or arbitrariness of selection processes. You might make this point, of course, but I think your thesis would then need to be based in philosophy rather than sociology/ethnography, and be concerned with whether selection processes are indeed fair or not, on the basis of philosophical frameworks of ethics. I don't think that's as interesting a question as to how distinctions are made/not made, and how they are justified from the perspective of participants. Bear in mind that a starting point for sociology is that fairness is a social construct, not an abstract ideal, and the same goes for meaning: so showing that meaning is in flux and contingent is, in itself, not really saying much, it's a very starting point for social analysis. These two approaches are not hermetically sealed from one another, but they lead to different primary concerns. I thought you flipped between identifying strategies and then

judging those strategies in terms of fairness/accuracy/solid or hypothetical basis:
hopefully I've highlighted this in the text more specifically, so you can see what I mean.
I said something similar when we skyped last week, and you said you weren't judging
selection processes in terms of fairness - but if that's the case, I don't know what to
make of some of your points.

Best,

Appendix 8: Examples of fieldnotes demonstrating some of the claims made in this thesis

Excerpt 1:

[Applicant name] arrives at 11:15. [Selector name] says he's going to ask some questions, they are "not part of the selection process, just some paperwork stuff". He asks where [Applicant name] comes; from in she says from [Town name]. [Selector name] asks whether she's a car driver and [Applicant name] says no. [Selector name]: you're not contributing to the disappearance off the forests (?). Good. (Some environmental stuff that I haven't heard before). [Selector name] asks why adult nursing and [Applicant name] says: I like to care for people, since I was little I used to play nursing with my brother. I spent a few years volunteering, in children centres for example. Looking at nurses, I'm working in a care home, like the medical aspect, giving drugs. [Selector name]: why adult nursing then, not child nursing or learning disabilities or mental health nursing. [Applicant name] says adult nursing is more generalised, you can broaden your own wings (sic).

[Selector name] asks about attributes and [Applicant name] says: I do listen to people. I always take the point of view into consideration. I am good at communication. (I feel she struggles a little bit here and [Selector name] reassures her). I like active listening. Understanding people from body language, I work in a care home, some residents can't talk, I can tell through the body language whether they are tired. For example when I'm feeding people, I don't rush it, I'm patient. I can tell when they don't want to eat any more. [Selector name] asks [Applicant name]: are you resilient? He talks about resilience being needed in relation to staff in healthcare not so much patients. Then he says this is what he means by attributes. He then asks do you like reading?. [Applicant name] talks about reading fiction. At the moment she reads a book about this drug, you have one week to live. (She doesn't give a name or anything). [Selector name]: this is what I mean by attributes, enough about nursing, do you have a sense of humour? [Applicant name]: I like to think so, I like dancing, she talks a little bit about dancing or something like that and then says: I ask for help if I need it. (There must have been lots in between, maybe not lots but some stuff, but I think my attention had faded out a bit.) [Selector name]: that's what I mean by attributes, if you get asked this again, talk about yourself. I like reading, science fiction mainly, have you read anything about nursing lately? [Applicant name] says she read something about cannabis and there is some talk about cannabis. [Selector name] says what if it leads to mental health issues? [Applicant name] talks about charities that can help with cannabis use and one asked whether cannabis should be banned. [Applicant name]: you can't just burn it, there's a lot of steps required. [Applicant name] no when asked about challenges when coming to [HEI name] and [Applicant name] says about driving. [Selector name]: do you have a plan for the next three years? Have you worked it out, finances, travelling, to studying? [Applicant name] says: I always do that. I always plan my

finances, when travelling to placements. [Selector name]: have you got any questions for us? And [Applicant name] ask when will we know whether we get a place. There is some noise in the room now as [Selector name] and [Selector name] start packing up and everything feels a bit rushed. [Selector name] leaves to get the other candidates in, as instructed by [Selector name], and [Selector name] fills in the form. The students are coming back in, [Selector name] doesn't finish filling in the forms, but I later look at his form and [Applicant name] did get rejected.

I start chatting to [Selector name] with the tape still running. When the mic is switched off, [Selector name] and I keep chatting and I say that other selectors are more happy to explain the term "attribute" and don't seem to mark candidates down for this. I say that [Selector name] said that maybe the term quality should be used. [Selector name] says, after a couple of minutes of chatting about it, that "this may need to be thought about" (I am sure he used the passive tense there). As I am only writing this down a week later, I have not much more recollection of that part of the conversation, but I think I was open *and* guarded about it. It is another sign of people's ideas⁸⁴ and preferences and backgrounds influencing their decisions, ideas and making a difference to how applicants are judged.

⁸⁴ Also about what a candidate should know (a nurse should be? No, what a candidate should know): the word attribute.

Excerpt 2:

The most interesting thing was the different form of “final deliberation”. I will discuss this in more detail below, but basically people were discussed, sometimes in detail. Their pre-interview-scores were not on the mark sheets (academic scores and care experience scores), and the “tallying-up” seemed to happen during the deliberation exercise. One candidate in particular, [applicant name], was discussed at length. [applicant name] is a 59 year old who during the interview said he could be an HCA forever, but wanted a challenge, wanted the accountability. [Selector 2 name] and [Selector 5 name] said they had marked [applicant name] down during the communication exercise, as he, due to enthusiasm, talked over others. He had also scored 1 for academic ability on the shortlisting form. There was some discussion about this; [Selector 2 name] and [Selector 5 name] appeared to be surprised at this low score.⁸⁵

[Selector 1 name]:
What has he got or not got?

[Selector 2 name]:
He said he’s doing a psychology certificate

[Selector 1 name]:
Maybe he’s been scored down because he’s not got predicted grades? Sometimes they won’t get predicted grades if they are at the beginning of a course.

[Selector 2 name]:
He said he has got distinctions?

[Selector 1 name]:
I have to have a closer look at that. Who was shortlisting?

[Selector 2 name]:
[Selector 3 name].

[Selector 2 name] and [Selector 5 name] talk about the communication exercise. “He was a little too enthusiastic; he scored lower as he talked over people a little.”

[Selector 2 name] and [Selector 5 name] then discussed [applicant name]’ interview. “He’s 59.”

They talk about the “logistics” section:
“He was a bit over-positive. He didn’t see any negatives. He was a little bit too positive, a little unrealistic.”

⁸⁵ **difference:** the last couple of times pre-scores were copied and not discussed, not challenged or agreed, only stated

[Selector 1 name]:
(they must have indicted some scores here...) "We're on the cusp of 23."

[Selector 2 name]:
"If that's what dropped him... [indicating that that wouldn't be her intention, she would think he should be on the course, but I don't remember that part of the conversation, but am pretty sure about the jest]... can you be too enthusiastic/positive?⁸⁶"

[Selector 4 name]:
yes!

[Selector 1 name] and [Selector 2 name] check the UCAS forms to look where [applicant name] lost marks.

[Selector 2 name]:
I would like him to look after patients.

[Selector 1 name]:
[Selector 3 name] may have scored him down as his qualifications are very broad in relation to health services, very biological...

[Selector 4 name]:
So, it's non-clinical...

[Selector 1 name]:
No, less clinical

[Selector 1 name]:
I am willing to put him up to a 2⁸⁷⁸⁸

[Selector 1 name]:
We don't have to stick to this of course.

[Selector 2 name]:
He's a unique character. That's what's so good about nursing; you get all sorts of different people.

[Selector 1 name]:

⁸⁶ I think it is interesting that she made the comment about enthusiasm and positivity herself (or if [Selector 5 name] made them she sanctioned them) and now she doubts them.

⁸⁷ **difference:** I had not yet seen a score being changed in the deliberation event. If I hadn't been here to day, I may not have seen it. Is this because [applicant name] is a special case or does this happen more often? If [applicant name] were a special case, it would be good to know what makes him special. I did not ask, but some of my data may give some answers to this question.

⁸⁸ This would give him 24 in total which means "pending pile"

In light of his work experience and the attitudes he presented...

[Selector 4 name]:

“The confidence of maturity.”

[Selector 2 name] and [Selector 5 name]:

“I would like to offer him a place”.⁸⁹

[Selector 1 name] agrees. [Selector 2 name] says: conditional offer and writes that onto the final score sheet.⁹⁰

[applicant name], to me, was clearly a candidate people *wanted*. What counted against him in terms of scores from shortlisting or communication exercise and interview (he had “lost” 2 marks before the selection event, 1 mark during the communication exercise and 3 during the interview, all from the “logistics’ section) people counteracted by discussing him and referring to his attitudes and work experience and age/ maturity?

⁸⁹ So far no candidate has been offered a place with a score of 23. The score had been changed to 24.

⁹⁰ I had actually thought that 24 still means holding pile and that [applicant name] was offered a place despite having scored “only” 24. It was the discussion that made me think that. People seemed to find reasons to give [applicant name] a place. But, looking at my data, the case was less confusing than I thought. 1 mark was discussed, the difference between a pending pile and a conditional offer. I wonder what this pending pile means. Is it, statistically, more likely to amount to a “no”? Are admissions people worried that [applicant name] would go elsewhere, and if so, who else do or don’t they worry about?

Excerpt 3:

The most interesting thing today was the interview I observed that [Selector 1 name] was facilitating with [Selector 2 name] as service user. I will try to write as much as I can remember.

I came back from the library, [Selector 1 name] asked whether I wanted to join his group as he hadn't started yet. I said no. I was still a bit flustered by the walk and the "[Selector 7 name] thing" started to catch up with me. I felt a bit forlorn for a few seconds: I couldn't go to [Selector 7 name], as she doesn't want to be part of my research, so I gave [Selector 3 name] the Dictaphone again and asked her to record the deliberation with [Selector 6 name].

I then grabbed my notebook and sat near [Selector 2 name] to observe the interview. The main things were that I could not hear the candidates very well; there were three of them: [applicant 2 name], long blond hair, white; [applicant 3 name]; ginger hair, white (I couldn't really see her face) and [applicant 1 name], the candidate that became most important, who wore a silvery suit-type-thing; her hair was long, clipped with a thing at the back, some highlights but otherwise dark-blond hair.

During the interview [Selector 1 name] did what I sometimes call clarifying or elaborating on candidate responses. A few examples:

After a candidate talked about dementia or people with dementia, and possibly that they are in vulnerable position (I didn't write this down, as I said, there was a lot of noise and for some reason I couldn't "hear" well): "you are talking about the role of nurses as an advocate", or, after candidates talked about *concepts* such as communication, holistic approach, reaching out to family (with no specific examples or stories given): "so you're talking about sensitivity to people's conduct and behaviour".

[Selector 1 name] gave a few interjections in response to what candidates said, often positive. For example, after [applicant 1 name] talked about work experience and running a programme in a school to raise awareness for people with dementia, and how she was inspired to do this through the fact that a best friend had dementia (she tells a bit of a story which I don't write down), [Selector 1 name] says:

"This is a powerful drive. What do you want to achieve with this programme?"

[applicant 1 name] answers: "Raising awareness of depression; helping people speak out."

[Selector 1 name]: "Brilliant."

[Selector 2 name]: "Fantastic."

[Selector 1 name]: "That sounds like a really good process."

[Selector 2 name]: "It needs more of that."

(Other candidates talk about their work experience).

[applicant 3 name] talks about how her motivation was similar to that of [applicant 1 name]. She makes a number of "referring comments" (she is the only one I note doing this) during the interview: like to [applicant 1 name] "I think you're right" or "what you said". [applicant 3 name] was bullied at school and tells some personal story that I do not write down. She works in a care home, "it's quite sad, there is a patient which is always angry, so angry that you can't approach him." She talks about working "in

surgery” where people also have dementia, not only surgical problems. [Selector 1 name]: “Did you feel people on the ward were understanding the lady? Or were you just seeing it and they weren’t?” [applicant 3 name] says: no, and talks about how “everyone” gets involved, the HCA, the sister, others. [Selector 1 name] (a clarifier again): “Like a teamwork approach.”

[applicant 2 name] talks about working in care home, some residents can’t talk, some scream. [Selector 2 name] asks: “Is it closed or open?”; [applicant 2 name]: “The doors are all locked.” [Selector 1 name]: “A secure unit.” [applicant 2 name] talks about residents not eating (being allowed?) solid food, one of them won’t eat. [Selector 1 name]: “⁹¹Because she thinks people are trying to poison her?”

There is some detailed discussion about work experience in general.

After the discussion of the reasons for wanting to study mental health nursing, [Selector 1 name] moves the conversation to personal qualities: “Can I move on to next stage; people are not very good at saying what they are good at. What qualities do you bring to the party?”⁹² The candidates now talk about their qualities such as: talking to people they haven’t met, being good at communication, which is good for nurses when they meet people ([applicant 2 name]), [applicant 3 name] is also good at something, and [applicant 1 name] talks about communication⁹³, compassion and much more.

[Selector 1 name] and [Selector 2 name] discuss some of these traits.⁹⁴

[Selector 1 name]: “So these are your personal qualities, now think about in four years’ time, you will be in a strong position to potentially lead services, having studied at a great organisation with a great reputation (paraphrased)⁹⁵. What qualities do you have to help with that?”

The candidates talk about their qualities again. [applicant 1 name] talks about trying not to make mistakes, obviously you will make mistakes, and you have to remember you’re dealing with someone’s life, not just your job.

[applicant 3 name]: I think you’re right there. She talks about “motivation”, and having to work with other people.

[applicant 2 name]: “You just have to be passionate about your job every day.”

[applicant 3 name]: “It’s not a 9 to 5 job”.

[Selector 1 name]: “That’s a good point.”

[Selector 1 name] then asks about the wider role of nursing and [applicant 3 name], [applicant 2 name] and [applicant 1 name] talk, but I drift out, not writing anything down.

⁹¹ Typing this, I think there may be different approaches to a group exercise. [Selector 1 name] made it more “conversational”, responding to what people said and telling them what he thought they said (or correcting them, although that is my interpretation). I am not sure what I am trying to say, but my interview the same day was more of a “lecture”, more of request for people to clarify their ideas in “my vein”, taking apart words or concepts such as empathy or caring.

⁹² [Selector 1 name] uses this “term” again in the deliberation with [Selector 2 name].

⁹³ I write: fetish, in my notes and think of Deborah Cameron, who may have to be drawn into this again.

⁹⁴ I write in my notes that I see [Selector 2 name] looking at [Selector 1 name] often when he speaks. As if he were talking *to* [Selector 1 name]. And it is, from the outside, as if they are having a conversation about issues raised by candidates. I think [Selector 2 name] did this in “my” interview as well. He was talking to me, often agreeing with me.

⁹⁵ I wonder whether he says this for my benefit.

From here on in it gets “really interesting”. [Selector 1 name] will be doing something that fits my category of selectors facilitating interviews based on their background, their interest.⁹⁶

[Selector 1 name] asks whether candidates have any questions for him and [Selector 2 name]. One candidate asks about placements (I think, it would have been great to know precisely what triggered the following, if there was a trigger that is).

[Selector 1 name] says: “Getting to the end of the course is obviously a point of the course. But studying is also about evolution and development of yourself.”

“Nursing is exploding in terms of possibilities. Lots of it is done in post-graduate years now. For example non-medical prescribing. It’s not so much about prescribing but preventing people from being over-medicated.”⁹⁷

To a question about available student support [Selector 1 name] says: At the beginning there is self-assessment for dyslexia and others. But there is lots of student welfare available. He then talks about how we can’t just demand compassion from nurses, we have to offer it (paraphrased).

[Selector 1 name] talks about university as “a transitional stage: from the spoon-fed environment in school and from being close to family to more independence. We produce very strong nurses, because of the support network we offer⁹⁸.”

[Selector 1 name] and [Selector 2 name] leave the room to deliberate and I follow. [Selector 7 name] and [Selector 9 name] are occupying the nearest window-sill so we move around the corner for “privacy”.

[Selector 1 name] opens with: They were all very good actually.

[Selector 2 name]: This was probably the best interview I have ever been to. They are all so young.

[Selector 1 name]: They are all bringing something to the party.

[Selector 2 name]: They were not all copying each other.

Then [Selector 1 name] starts talking enthusiastically about [applicant 1 name]. He mentions her personality.

[Selector 2 name]: I think she’s selling herself short.

[Selector 1 name]: I want her on the course, she would be such a great addition. She is the sort of student who will advance nursing research. This sort of people who will lead service in the future.

[Selector 1 name]: So what do you think about marks?

⁹⁶ When discussing [Selector 1 name]’s behaviour and enthusiasm for one particular candidate, [applicant 1 name], straight after the event with [Selector 8 name], [Selector 5 name] and [Selector 4 name], I will say that he fits this category and, maybe a bit carried away by “doing research” I say: [Selector 1 name] talked about the prescribing course, I talk about sociology, asking people to explain words, [Selector 8 name] talks about her Family (and [Selector 5 name] about policy, even though I don’t say that. My colleagues do not respond, which makes me worried that I “overstepped the mark”, whatever this mark is, but I don’t hear anything anymore afterwards.

⁹⁷ This is clearly based on [Selector 1 name]’s own professional interest.

⁹⁸ This is an acknowledgement of the purpose of University: production of nurses. I miss this often in selection events other than in “selling talks”. But then again, this may have been one of those: a selling talk.

[Selector 2 name] says nothing.

[Selector 1 name]: I certainly would give her a 15

[Selector 2 name]: A 16 if that were possible.

[Selector 1 name]: 15 plus, I give her a 15 plus; not sure whether I am allowed to do that (he looks at me).

They discuss marks.

[Selector 1 name]: 5s across for [applicant 1 name].

[Selector 1 name] says how the others were good but lost in the first question, about why they wanted to study mental health nursing.

[Selector 1 name]: [applicant 1 name] got it right.

[Selector 2 name]: They others were copying her a little.

[Selector 1 name]: Are you happy with that?

[Selector 2 name]: Absolutely.

[Selector 1 name]: I would love to have them all. Mental health is the most developing section of nursing. The non-medical prescribing course can only be repeated once every three years. The people who are coming back are mental health nurses, they don't want to necessarily prescribe like doctors but want to protect people from being over-prescribed medication.⁹⁹

[Selector 1 name] and [Selector 2 name] talk a bit about prescribing doctors and

[Selector 2 name] tells a brief personal story of a doctor insisting to prescribe antibiotics. Then [Selector 1 name] says: We better go back in, [Selector 7 name] is strict today.

When the outro is over, I ask [applicant 1 name] whether I can have a word and we go first outside the room and the around the corner as other candidates are leaving the room. I ask [applicant 1 name] what [Selector 1 name] had spoken about and she said he just congratulated her and told her that she was strong candidate. "Which was really nice, he didn't have to say that. But I messed up my maths, I think I got three wrong, how many are you allowed (I say three). And I really would have like to come here. You can tell by the interviewers. I have been to [HEI name] and they were really nice as well." I ask whether I can write about this and [applicant 1 name] says yes. I ask where else she applied: [HEI name] and [HEI name] didn't want her because of her grades, [HEI name] she is waiting to hear from and. I say good luck with the maths and go back to the room.

I instigate a discussion about [applicant 1 name], how keen [Selector 1 name] was, [Selector 3 name] thought she was the ginger woman, I say, not he girl who just left. I say [Selector 1 name]'s really keen but she thinks she messed up her maths and [Selector 5 name] says: and she probably has. [Selector 5 name]: We want them, but they have to bring the goods. [Selector 5 name]; [Selector 1 name] said he's going to leave nursing if [applicant 1 name] doesn't come to Beckett (or something very close to these words).

⁹⁹ This is a repeat from earlier on.

We go back to the office. In the lift we meet [Selector 1 name] who corners [Selector 4 name]: can I have word, to which [Selector 3 name] replies: I know. They then have a chat, which I am not privy to. [Selector 3 name] checks the maths results and [applicant 1 name] had three wrong which means she can be offered a place. After a while [Selector 1 name] comes in, asks [Selector 5 name] who's got the morning documents, and [Selector 5 name] says: Ian for mental health. [Selector 1 name] goes to [Selector 3 name] and [Selector 3 name] says: she just scraped it. [Selector 1 name]: She's just the kind of person we want looking after people. She's assertive and positive. She will be asset.

During all this I have a feeling that [Selector 1 name] is stalking [applicant 1 name]. It feels like this.¹⁰⁰

Later in the office I talk to [Selector 4 name] about [Selector 1 name]'s enthusiasm. I say I couldn't quite see what he saw in [applicant 1 name]. She was very nice and sweet, I say, but other than that? We talk about how we choose. I say I wish I could see what it is about those people who are talked about like "the second coming". [Selector 3 name] says sometimes what goes through his head are things like: do I want you to care for me or my relatives (his father is ill, does that matter?). He says not always the academic stuff. He also says: if they make sense, if I feel they have thought this through.¹⁰¹ He also says: we skew this.

I say, I agree, I turn everything into a mini-discourse analysis. As soon as someone says: I like caring I want to know what this is, what they mean. Today I first translated something a candidate said into empathy and then grilled her on empathy. She said something like being in a position to understand the other person, having gone through the same. I (not very originally): so do you have to have cancer to understand people with cancer. And when she didn't immediately answer, I moved on to [Applicant 4 name] and then, when time had run out well and truly, said: we'll leave her in limbo. [Selector 2 name] didn't want her that much, I think, but maybe out of guilt, out of the knowledge that it may have been my questioning that made her struggle, I gave her place. She was quite good at the beginning. I relate some of this to [Selector 4 name].

¹⁰⁰ Typing this I also ask myself whether there is a connection between [Selector 1 name] having one these interviews for the first time today (or at least the first time this year). I am inclined to interview him purely about [applicant 1 name]: what was it that made him go so enthusiastic?

¹⁰¹ This feels like avalanche of major discourses, but he said all these things in the span of 2 minutes. Maybe I reduced them to these topics a little, but this is what I remember.

Excerpt 4:

The following excerpts are in relation to an MMI station where applicants are shown a photo (below) and are asked to do the following:

“Take a moment to look at this photograph. When you are ready I am going to ask you two questions:

How would you feel if you would into a room and saw this?

What do you think is going on in the photograph?”



Before the interviews

In the MMI room before the interviews start; Name and I had a conversation about my t-shirt which says “Made In Peckham” and about “English humour”; how I don’t find “Only Fools and Horses funny” and how she had one of the worst evenings in a Ken Dott show. Name, a gentleman who was then actor/selector on station B5 on Wednesday (29.05.2015) is looking at his pack and asks Name: “How many rounds today?” Name; “Six.” Name: “You are joking!” Name: “You know what I just said to Michael about humour. But no, it’s two rounds.” Name laughs very loudly.

A discussion is taking place behind Name. Three selectors are talking about station 1 and how the photo should be interpreted.

Selector 1: I am not sure about this photo, and I am supposed to be the interviewer. What are we supposed to see? I see a confused patient, restrained by two members of staff.

Selector 2: I see an aggressive patient.

Selector 3: I see people having an argument.

Selector 1: Have you done this station before? I can't make head or tail of it.

Selector 2: It's supposed to be ambiguous.

Selector 3: Oh, and this is Professor Name!

Selector 2: No, this is a role-player. It only looks like Professor Name.

Selector 1: And that's Name, a learning disabilities student.

Selector 3: She is wearing a hospital nighty. She must be the patient.

Selector 2: No, I would say this is the patient and this is the relative.

Selector 3: But she is wearing the nighty.

I ask selector 1 whether she know what the station *is about*.

Selector 1 (reading off the instruction sheet): *emotional awareness*...I am really not happy with this.

Observations from some interviews:

[Selector name] shows a photo to [Applicant name]. [Selector name] says: take a minute, when you're ready am going to ask you to questions about this photograph. After about 30 seconds [Selector name] says: when you're ready. And then goes on: "how would you feel when you walk into this room and saw this". [Selector name] reads out loud like badly rehearsed poem, like the people at school told poems that they had learned of by heart but not understood. There is some stiltedness in the way she reads it out and I wonder whether this is supposed to be, what is a good word, the reliable aspect of the interview? That everything is done in the same way? Again [Selector name] writes and [Applicant name] talks. [Selector name] doesn't say much, but she says okay at some point, I don't know to what, but it's the first time she response to anything.

After while of [Applicant name] talking, [Selector name] says: "and the other question that is related to this photograph is: what do you think is going on in this photograph?"

Whilst a nurse saying this, there is a 30 seconds call. I write down that [Applicant name] does a bit of “psychology”. What do I mean by this? I think I mean that she’s looking at a photograph with three people in it and talks about their motivation, what they are being what they are not being, not even what they are doing, although I think that’s what she did answering the first question.

So what does the photo show? I will, hopefully, get the photo, so it will be easier to discuss. But from memory there are three women, two women looking at the one in the middle, the one in the middle raising her hand, her right hand, it looks like award station or a waiting room in the surgery or something like that. My initial idea is, that a blind woman is being helped to walk across a room by two people. Every candidate I see today will interpret this photo in different way, that is, they see aggression, they see people calming down an aggressive patient, they see people trying to dissolve potentially problematic situation. The use terms like violence and aggression or better, being violent and aggressive to describe the lady in the middle. I don’t know whether I’m being facetious seeing a blind woman where other people see an aggressive woman. I will later discuss this with one of the examiners of station one, who says that people see different things all the time in this picture and it’s about their response to it. Is not about seeing the right thing. But I find it interesting that people see aggression and diffusion where I see blindness and help and I wonder how people judge if there isn’t a right thing.

The selector in station one is [Selector name]. A few days later I will have the chance to talk to [Selector name] about how she marked one applicant. She will tell me that she never writes, only if somebody fails a station. I have seen her in the past; I think she wants showed me how she goes through the grid to justify judgement. [Selector name] is one of the selectors who will not prompt in a conscious way; who does not mean to prompt.

The first applicant I see it station one is [Applicant name] again. [Selector name] reads out the question. [Applicant name]’s opening statement is **“I don’t want to judge from the photo because that’s not what nursing is about.”**¹⁰²

[Applicant name] goes on to give some hypothetical, different, possible scenarios. She re-emphasises a number of times that she doesn’t want to judge from the photo: “I just don’t like judging people.”¹⁰³

When [Applicant name] laughs, [Selector name] is laughing. I don’t know what they’re laughing about, I haven’t made any notes of that. There is a brief pause and then [Applicant name] looks at the photo again and starts doing precisely what she said she doesn’t want to do: she started to interpret the photo. “It’s a very tricky one, I don’t like these photos.”

When [Applicant name] leaves, and as there is a break in the circuit, I ask [Selector name] what she was scoring [Applicant name]. [Selector name] says: “In question one

¹⁰² I find this a really interesting statement. I find myself thinking whilst [name] is saying it: does she have a point? Is this my point? As she prepared this? What does she think the station is about?

¹⁰³ I think this is a perfectly sensible interpretation of the *task*, if maybe not the picture or the task but the selectors are concerned. It’s a shame [Selector name] didn’t write more about her judgement.

she needed to talk more about management, teamwork, more on the nursing aspect, more communication more personal care issues.”

In question two [Selector name] says she followed the grid. “As a nurse you need to judge situations.” And, pointing at 3B (“I would be apprehensive about entering the situation as there is conflict between two people. I think they’ve had an argument.”): “She actually falls very neatly into this category.”

[Selector name] circled a 3 (“ Good: Shows an understanding of their own emotions and the emotions of others.”) and the word “acceptable”. No further information is on the sheet.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ I feel that the applicant did not fall very neatly into this category but was made to fall there. Initially she did not want to judge at all (which seemed fair to me as nurses are meant to be non-judgmental, but not apparently in this station), but through the silence maybe she lost her conviction and then saw an argument. If [Selector name] had responded differently (for example accepting her first answer by asking the second question earlier), the scoring category might have been a different one.

Excerpt 5:

Whilst in the office I some of my colleagues are going through personal statements. I instigate a chat because I feel I need to know what I am supposed to be doing when I start screening applicant forms. [Selector name] and [Selector name] are chatting to each other and I pick up snippets. It sounds like they are going through the academic qualifications again. This confuses me. I ask why they do this; don't admissions screen for academic qualifications and we look at references and personal statements? [Selector name] tells me that admissions sometimes get things wrong and forward applicants that don't meet criteria. She also tells me that having the qualifications isn't enough. It is also important to look at when those qualifications were achieved. [Selector name] says it's problematic if an applicant took three goes to get their GCSEs and then only just got them. In this case, it is better for them and for us if they get rejected at the screening stage.

Over the course of the next few weeks I learn that there are a few of my colleagues who look at what they call an "academic trajectory" rather than just presence of qualifications. I also learn that admissions administration does not accept this as a reason for rejection. One of my colleagues, according to [Selector name] had 20 applications returned last year because they gave as a reason: problematic academic trajectory. [Selector name] tells me: we had to change the reason to "insufficient experience" and then the rejections went through.