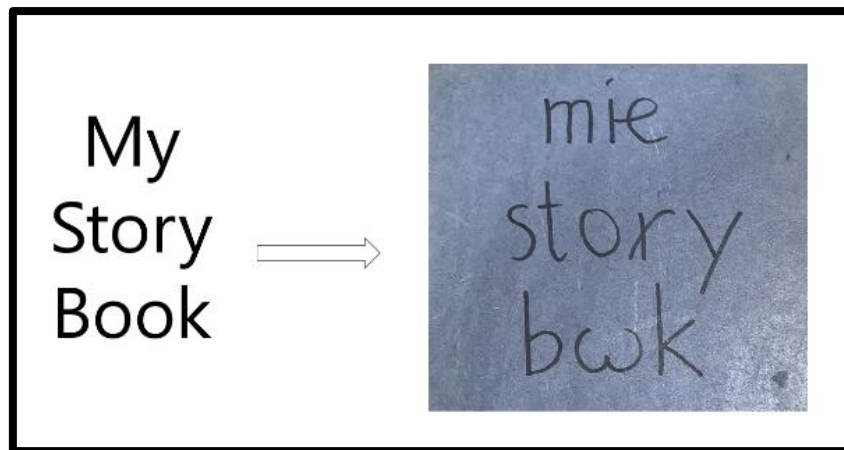




"... they're just words. There's no point to them." Zoya - St. Nurse: Adult

The Lived Experience of Mature Undergraduate Nursing Students with Quasi-Dyslexia: Navigating Ongoing Academic Challenges

An Interpretative Phenomenological Study
through the lens of
Feminist Standpoint Theory

Jacinth Anne Ryan

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Abstract

This study centres on the importance of revisiting institutional practices by exploring the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students within a post-1992 university in the West Midlands. Persistent academic challenges prompted their actions to undergo screening and/or diagnostic assessment for dyslexia to explain their poor academic performance. However, the outcome concluded that they did not have dyslexia. Subsequently, they are considered quasi-dyslexic and would not be eligible for reasonable adjustments through Disabled Student Allowance (DSA), which includes tailored support to meet their diverse needs.

Five female participants, regarded as mature students due to a break in their learning and an increased probability of a 'non-traditional' educational background, engaged in phenomenological semi-structured interviews. Their perspective contributes enlightenment to their thoughts and feelings through deep, reflective conversations. The study uses psychological theories and social theorists, such as Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice to explore factors that influence their self-perception. An interpretative phenomenological approach critically examines and comprehends the nuanced and complex subjective lived experience.

This study uses feminist standpoint theory as a framework for understanding and analysing the experiences of the participants, by critically examining the institutional structures that sustain inequalities and marginalisation. The findings reveal three main themes: A Sense of Uncertainty, The Academically Struggling Student, and A Sense of Inadequacy. These themes emphasise how institutional structures and powerful narratives, such as the archetypal student in university, shape self-perception and influence the educational journey. Consequently, the findings reveal a significant need for universities to adjust the responsibility from students to the educational institutions by demanding a universal recontextualisation of pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, educators need to facilitate the development of

metacognitive study skills and strategies for mature quasi-dyslexic learners and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. Transforming these established ways will empower mature, quasi-dyslexic students to assert their identities as students within the university.

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List of Abbreviations

AD(H)D	Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder
ADCL	Adult Dyslexia Checklist
ARHQ-R	Adult Reading History Questionnaire-Revised
ARQ	At-risk Quotation
BAME	Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (<i>note terminology of the time</i>)
BDA	British Dyslexia Association
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
DAST	Dyslexia Adult Screening Test
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Department of Health
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DSS	Disability Support Summary
EP	Educational Psychologist
GEM	Global Ethnic Majority
HEE	Health Education England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HRD	History Reading Difficulty
I.T.A	Initial Teaching Alphabet
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
NHS	National Health Service
NMC	Nursing Midwifery Council
NRD	No Reading Difficulty
HRD	History Reading Difficulty
SEN	State Enrolled Nurse
SpLD	Specific Learning Disability
SRN	State Registered Nurse
SSSS	Study Skills Support Session
ST	Specialist Teacher
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WP	Widening Participation
YAA-R	York Adult Assessment-Revised

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the study, which stems from a sustained interest in the academic challenges of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students in a post-1992 university. In 2003, the Department for Education introduced a White Paper, *The Future of Higher Education*, aimed at raising the aspirations of under-represented groups from poorer and 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. The term 'non-traditional' is haphazardly used as a catch-all label for the pre-determined recipients of widening participation (WP) policies. Specific groups, such as mature, minority groups, the working class and first in the family, are often included within these categories (Trowler, 2015). WP initiatives further targeted specific groups, including vocational and work-based learners (Moore et al., 2013), with an emphasis on people with disabilities, care leavers and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME)¹ communities. Additionally, learners considered to be educationally disadvantaged were also included (Dawson et al., 2013; Graham, 2012). Such interwoven and diverse experiences overlook the nuanced realities, complexities and intersectionalities of these individual learners.

The Government intended to "double the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering university in 2020 compared to 2009" (Hubble, 2016: 15). In 2021, the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) found an increase of 23% in applicants for nursing courses, with a large rise in prospective mature learners. The House of Commons research briefing considered this a direct consequence of the recession following the COVID-19 pandemic, as people tried to learn new skills and improve their prospects of job security (Bolton, 2024). The nature of the WP targeted groups may have facilitated a model approach to teaching

¹ In March 2021, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended that the government stop using the term BAME. Moving forward ethnic minority groups should be referred to individually, rather than as a single group.

and learning. For instance, a teacher demonstrates a skill and explains, and the students observe and follow. Utilising this structured approach to aid student understanding subsequently increases the probability of a deficit discourse, both of which can negatively impact a learner's overall university experience (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020; Clements, 2023; Lawrence, 2002).

Note on Language, Labels and Categorisation.

Throughout this research, I use a range of terminology and categories to refer to students and participants. Such terms will be used in alignment with the sources cited and to remain consistent with the original context. Where relevant, the specific terminology used by an author or study is retained to preserve the integrity of their work. Language used is not meant to reinforce existing views or to reduce understanding, but rather to encourage critical thinking and meaningful discussion within the scope of the study.

Within an educational setting, the categorisation of individuals and/or groups used within research studies, documents, and theoretical frameworks often creates debate, by the assumption of a deficit or problematic 'norm'. This research study draws attention to the deficit-based social construction of the mature 'non-traditional' student. Although such categorisation is problematic, my choice to use the terminology within this thesis highlights the phenomenon of marginalisation and the ongoing academic challenges faced within an educational system originally aimed at a different demographic. The terms mature and 'non-traditional', used throughout my thesis, refer to students who have taken a break in education and subsequently have an altered educational background. Critiquing such categorisations throughout my thesis conveys an institutional issue and not a student deficit.

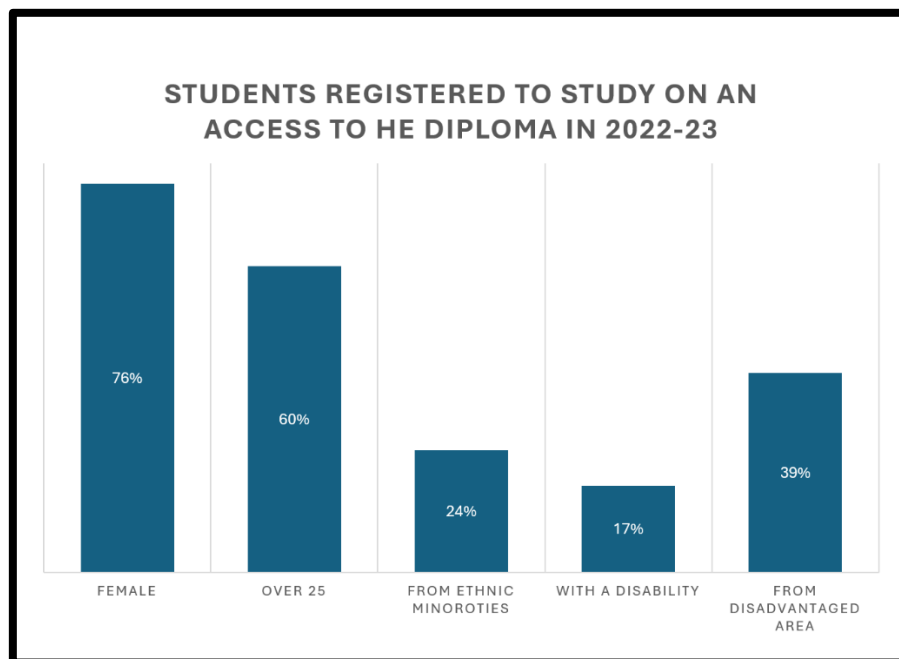
Finally, the repeated use of the label quasi-dyslexia to categorise an individual with traits typically associated with dyslexia, but without a formal diagnosis (Dykes, 2019), is intentional. The label quasi-dyslexia is used as a descriptive term throughout my

research, rather than a diagnostic label. I anticipate such a term to be transitional, as the central aim of the research is to give a voice to those within education who feel marginalised and/or oppressed. For the participants of this research study, their lived experience becomes a crucial starting point for generating new knowledge. An ultimate goal is for an agent of knowledge production's lived experience to be accepted and considered as legitimate towards achieving social change to eliminate inequality. As the phenomenon becomes accepted through rigorous qualitative research standards, it becomes evidence-based. Evidence-based research influences policy; consequently, institutional practices are compelled to make changes.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) key statistics show that in 2022/23, approximately 38,000 students registered to study Access to Higher Education Diploma courses in the UK. Access courses are widely recognised as a level 3 qualification, often delivered in further education institutions. The following diagram shows key information about the 38,000 students registered to study an Access course and how they are representative of the targeted groups specified within the WP initiative.

Diagram A: Access to HE Student Enrolments (2022-23)



This diagram emphasises the overwhelming representation of mature female learners. Even so, Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) consider that the institutional structure of the university remains consistent with a masculinised model, creating barriers for women and other underrepresented groups by constructing men to be more "competitive and assertive" (Khine and Hayes, 2010: 110). In September 2023, out of 38,000 Access students, 7,105 advanced to nursing and midwifery courses at universities (Quality Assurance Agency 2024). Mallman and Lee (2016) explored the experiences of younger adult students in their early 20s to early 30s and found that institutions often classified them as mature-aged students. This is customary practice, where all students in the over-25 category at university are considered mature. The term mature is vague in education phraseology, and rather than referring to age, it suggests a person returning to study after a break in the education system. Furthermore, Mallman and Lee (2017) consider the word mature to be oversimplified, rather than a true reflection of the experience of mature learners.

This oversimplification is more prevalent in WP agendas, where the association of 'non-traditional' and mature learner are combined into one simple category, giving less consideration to the varied needs and learning orientation of the individual learner (Gale and Parker, 2014). The diversity of the mature learner within the educational environment is wide-ranging. Therefore, Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) and Webb (1997) prefer to describe the mature learner as having qualifications other than the A-level, rather than selecting a label to describe the individual as having a long-term disability, of the working classes or from the Global Ethnic Majority (GEM), all of which presume deficiency. Comparatively, mature learners, often female, primarily have multiple roles outside of the learning environment, intensifying the need to balance their studies with caring roles and responsibilities, and employment, which can result in time constraints and role conflicts (Ely, 1997; Lin, 2016).

The BSc (Hons) nursing course is a particularly demanding course and requires perseverance from the student to reach the point of graduation. Students must achieve a minimum 40% pass grade in all theoretical assessments and a required level of competence for professional practice-based learning assessments. Regrettably, these conditions mean that not all mature learners complete their studies as they find the progression of theoretical assessment from further into higher education too challenging and the support lacking. Thomas and Pollio (2002) regard the contributory factors to be multiple, being the first in the family to study at a university, and the uncertainty of unfamiliar surroundings and culture, all of which may negatively impact a mature learner's confidence and self-perception.

In 2014, NHS England, formerly known as Health Education England (HEE), published *Widening Participation It Matters!* The commissioned research applied a strategy and action plan to investigate the specific needs of under-represented groups, which included "older adults, those with literacy, numeracy or learning difficulties and some minority ethnic groups" (Tight, 1989: 480). The research aimed to drive WP forward

"where development and progression is based upon a person's merit, ability and motivation and not their social background or the privilege, extent and effectiveness of their social networks" (HEE, 2014: 5). HEE observed the changes to the population demographic and judged the need to promote equality by ensuring a workforce representative of the general population. Burke et al. (2016: 18) examined the development of student capability and experiences of belonging and considered that.

"To be seen as a 'capable' student in higher education, the student must act in certain ways. For example, being recognised as "academically capable" depends on performing "academic capability" through body language, literacy and communication practices, analytical and critical practices (which might differ across and within disciplines), demonstrating certain skills in particular ways (such as time management and organisation skills) and so forth. Each of these aspects of capability are shifting discursive practices".

Burke et al. (2016) acknowledge how universities' perceptions of students being capable are based on their behaviours and practices; as such, students are expected to behave and practice in a particular way. Subsequently, a student's behaviour and practices are shaped by these perceptions. For universities, there is an expressed importance on the ability to read, write and communicate effectively, to analyse and critique discipline-specific information and to organise and manage time effectively. Therefore, universities need to offer support to all students to enable them to meet the prerequisites, primarily learners referred to in the *Widening Participation It Matters!* publication.

The Equality Act (2010) legislates that students in education should be offered *reasonable adjustments* and support based on their disability and needs, which also includes government funding in the form of Disabled Student Allowance (DSA). The funding can be used to support students diagnosed with dyslexia by providing additional study skills and *reasonable adjustments* for assessments. For instance, the adjustments may include extra time, a change in assessment environment, marking

concessions, and, in some instances, a change to the method of assessment to further support the specific needs of an individual learner. *Reasonable adjustments* are often applied during assessments to ensure the same opportunity for engagement, while support such as that offered by dyslexia tutors or academics considers a breadth of skills and strategies. However, the interpretation of what constitutes a *reasonable adjustment* can vary and be influenced by the tutor or institution's particular understanding of dyslexia and their views on fairness (Cameron and Nunkoosing, 2012).

In 2021/22, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reported the overall number of undergraduate students with specific learning disabilities (SpLD) such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in the UK as 107,960 (Quality Assurance Agency, 2024) . For learners thought to have dyslexia, the disparate definitions and understanding of the term make diagnosis, primarily in mature learners, much more problematic (Department for Education and Skills, 2005; Sadusky et al., 2022). Therefore, for mature learners who are thought to have dyslexia due to their ongoing academic difficulties, diagnosing dyslexia can present consequential contentions, as many may remain undiagnosed or have unspecified learning needs, which creates an imbalance that leaves mature learners disadvantaged and their needs unmet.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study will explore the lived experience of five mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students. It focuses on their reflections on experiences of studying a three-year BSc (Hons) nursing course, while facing ongoing academic challenges so oppressive that they perceived dyslexia to be the cause. The reasoning for such conjecture is based on commonly recognised cognitive or neurological deficits often associated with adult dyslexia, such as reading/writing slowly, difficulty telling left from right, difficulty organising thoughts on paper, difficulty prioritising

tasks, and confusion when presented with several instructions at once (Elbeheri and Siang, 2022). The participants of the study have no explanation for why they struggle academically, but they do compare some of the commonly associated deficits with the academic challenges they encounter.

On that basis, they chose to undergo screening or a diagnostic psychological assessment to define their learning needs and behaviours. The outcome of the assessment stated they did not have dyslexia. Consequently, according to Dykes (2019) they appear as quasi-dyslexic learners with no formal identification of dyslexia but maintain the characteristics of a dyslexia-like learning and study profile. Without a diagnosis of dyslexia, the participants experience systemic barriers like the challenges faced by learners with SpLD. However, they are excluded from the tailored support provided through DSA; therefore, support and resources are considered generalised and available to all students. Due to a misinterpretation and misrecognition of their learning needs, there are overwhelming consequences such as low self-esteem, stress, and anxiety. These internal psychological states further position them as outsiders within the university structure, inhibiting their ability to participate and succeed at university. These experiences raise concerns regarding the fairness and inclusivity of university systems, particularly for mature learners who occupy liminal spaces of misrecognition (Mangan and Winter, 2017).

This study explores the tension between individualised psychological conceptualisations of academic challenges and wider sociological perspectives that consider structural inequalities. The self-perception of mature quasi-dyslexic student nurses in university will be examined by using a mix of psychological theoretical frameworks, such as Deci and Ryan's (1985), Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), sociological models including Tinto (1975) and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice². These are significant to dyslexia, as the essence encompasses both individual and broader social effects and impacts. The

² See Section 3.7 for an explanation of how Bourdieu's theory of practice is applied throughout the thesis.

mature quasi-dyslexic nursing student's lived experience will offer a unique standpoint from which to appraise the institutional structures that reject their diverse learning needs, subsequently creating inequality.

An important way of conceptualising inequality is to theorise it through a political framework referred to as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality highlights how legal systems and feminist discourses appear to overlook the unique oppressions faced by Black women, particularly African American women. Crenshaw (1989) a leading scholar of critical race theory introduces intersectionality in her seminal work, *Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex* (1989), in a critique of anti-discrimination laws and feminist theories. The work uses intersectionality and her understanding of it to explain the oppression of African American Women and how marginalised groups and individuals' social identities create unique combinations of discrimination and privilege. Crenshaw (1994) builds on her original understanding of intersectionality to examine law, policy, and identity politics. This area is often overlooked regarding the experience of individuals who encounter overlapping forms of marginalisation, in particular, women.

Collins (1986: 21) is an African American feminist scholar who acknowledges the "interlocking nature of oppression" and how oppressions are organised. These words by Collins highlight that various forms of oppression do not perform independently of each other but are associated. Collins (1990a) publishes the *Matrix of Domination* to emphasise how individuals within everyday lived experiences occupy positions of privilege and oppression simultaneously. For instance, a mature quasi-dyslexic student at university has lived experience which provides a unique perspective to enhance discussions; at the same time, 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds can lead to impostor syndrome within a university environment, due to, for example, unfamiliarity with academic writing conventions. Collins (1990b) redefines the general applicability of the term intersectionality (to African American Women) and expands the word to acknowledge the commonalities of all individuals

across the differences of race, gender, and class, which intersect and overlap. The understanding explores how lived experiences of Black women challenge traditional forms of knowledge, further emphasising the intersection of race, class, and other social identities. Subsequently, it is this association which brought feminist standpoint theory and intersectionality together. By emphasising the lived experiences of Black women as a source of critical knowledge and the exploration of how the intersection of race, gender and class shapes an individual's experience of oppression and privilege.

By bringing the participant voices to the forefront, feminist standpoint theory provides a lens to shape this study and highlight the importance of understanding knowledge and power from the perspective of marginalised groups. This is particularly relevant to the study, as it recognises the intersections of learning disabilities, mental health, and age within the study's sample, which are further shaped by the context of the research location of a post-1992 university.

Additionally, the study acknowledges that literature has provided some invaluable information and areas of good practice within teaching and learning for students with SpLD. Despite that, surprisingly little is known about mature quasi-dyslexic learners in university who subsequently fall outside of formal diagnostic categories. Therefore, by focusing on the participants' voice, this study affiliates with feminist standpoint theory's commitment to elevate marginalised voices, address gaps in the literature and advocate for institutional change to allow all students the opportunity to succeed.

1.5 Significance

The current literature acknowledges the inconsistency of empirical data used to diagnose mature quasi-dyslexic learners but has yet to examine the consequences for learners who fall outside formal diagnostic categories. With the ongoing increase of undergraduate mature quasi-dyslexic learners entering universities, often with

academic challenges, it is reasonable to redirect the focus away from the individual and to reconsider pedagogy in universities and the need for institutions to meet the demands of today's mature quasi-dyslexic learner.

Introduction to the Researcher

1.6 The Early Years Learner

Reflecting on my early years in education and my current position as a postgraduate researcher has deepened my awareness of aspects of teaching and learning not previously considered. Such self-examination begins with my earliest memories of infant school in the 1970s and how particular events shaped who I am and the centrality of my name. Jacinth, my birth name, was inspired by African-Caribbean heritage and posed a pronunciation challenge for friends and schoolteachers alike, who were unfamiliar with its customary pronunciation. The time I started school coincided with a new government spelling reform, *Initial Teaching Alphabet* (ITA) (see Diagram B), to improve educational outcomes in local schools. Consequently, my school was part of a two-year pilot study which aimed to introduce all children to an experimental approach to reading and writing.

Diagram B: ITA Alphabet³

Consonants													
b	c	d	f	g	h	j	k	l	m	n			
b	k	d	f	g	h	dʒ	k	l	m	n			
bib	cake	dad	fife	gag	hat	judge	kick	lull	mime	noon			
ŋ	p	r	s	ʌ	t	v	w	y	z	ʒ			
ŋ	p	r	s	z	t	v	w	j	z	ʒ			
sing	pipe	roar	sauce	is	tot	valve	will	yes	zoo	vision			
Joined consonants							Short vowels						
ch	ʃh	th	th	wh	a	e	i	o	u	ɔ			
tʃ	ʃ	θ	ð	ɹ	æ	ɛ	ɪ	ɒ	ʌ	ʊ			
church	shush	thin	then	whale	at	egg	in	odd	up	book			
Long vowels / diphthongs													
ɑ	æ	au	œ	œ	ɔ	ue	ie	oi	ou				
ɑː	eɪ	ɔː	iː	oʊ	uː	juː	aɪ	ɔɪ	aʊ				
father	ape	all	eat	oak	ooze	use	ice	oil	owl				
Also, <i>ɹ</i> is used following a vowel letter to write the sound in "earn" etc													

ITA was a variant of the Latin alphabet and consisted of forty-four characters and not the conventional twenty-six. ITA was an abridged writing system considered to teach English-speaking children to read more easily than by using traditional orthography (Pitman, 1969). In 1969, ITA was debated in the UK House of Commons by Patrick Gordon-Walker, a British Labour Party politician and then Secretary of State for Education and Science. The politician spoke of illiteracy within schools and the behaviour of children who were unable to read. He expressed how ITA would also value non-English speaking children learning English. His speech concluded, "Birmingham will be introducing trial materials for teaching English to West Indian children ... it might be thought strange to be teaching English to West Indian children; but, after what I have heard tonight, it will be recognised why that is so necessary" (Gordon-Walker, 1969: 1516).

³ by AnonMoos - Own work (Original text: Self-made graphic, created from scratch based on fonts and publicly-available information.), Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12094872>

He was referring to illiteracy within British schools, which he associated with West-Indian children. With this novel approach to learning, with which my parents were unfamiliar, I quickly began to struggle reading Standard English text and struggled with words that used ITA spelling, which did not account for varying accents and focused on Received Pronunciation, which is considered British. The spelling of my name changed to include new and strange characters.

From an early age, I became part of a research study driven by the power dynamics and biases embedded within the educational system, which privileged spoken Standard English, particularly in multicultural and diverse contexts. Today, such a study would be categorised as racio-linguistic, which Zakariah and Badmus-Lawal (2024: 47) described as “The phenomenon of racism which has expanded beyond the confines of skin colour and now encompasses the domain of linguistics, whereby discriminatory attitudes are directed towards English language usage.” As such, I was taught to read and write using two contrasting alphabet systems (see Diagram C), one at school and another at home.

Diagram C: ITA Transcription Showing Alphabet Differences

(Downing, 1969)

Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA) – Transcribed into Standard English	
ie wos tækiŋ a wauk when ie herd a loud clatter! ie ruŋht into the kitchen tɔ see whot wos the matter.	I was taking a walk when I heard a loud clatter! I rushed into the kitchen to see what was the matter.

1.7 The Registered Nurse

Although I encountered academic challenges, I never shied away from learning and in the mid-1980s, I began my pupil nurse training to become a State Enrolled Nurse

(SEN). During this era, nurse training, now referred to as nurse education, was often delivered by rote, emphasising a memorisation technique based on repetition (Ivie, 1998). This approach was characteristic of the two-year training programme for SENs and different from the three-year advanced training undertaken by the State Registered Nurse (SRN). Similar to the field of nursing, universities also reproduce social hierarchies and shape personal characteristics by utilising Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital to influence the value of knowledge, skills and qualifications. A more advanced form of knowledge and status, granted to the SRN training programme, provided greater opportunities within the nursing profession. As such, my training limited my ability to gain cultural capital⁴, reinforcing my subordinate position within the nursing hierarchy.

I experienced a tension between Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus and field⁵. The profession of nursing prioritised the SRN status over my experiential, skill-based approach to care, which left me feeling inadequate to my superiors and lacking in confidence. My dependence on rote learning further limited my knowledge assimilation, reflecting a habitus accustomed to the hierarchical organisation of nursing, by which SENs were socialised into subservient and compliant roles (James et al., 2015). Freire (1970; 1993) interprets rote methods of learning as part of the banking concept of education. An instrument of oppression that stifles the creativity of learners by limiting the opportunity for critical reflection. Freire (1970; 1993) extends his judgement by proposing critical consciousness (*conscientização*), which surpasses reflection by understanding and challenging the power structures that maintain such oppressive practices (Ćumura and Petrović, 2022). Using Bourdieu's (1984) concept of field, the hierarchy (*agents*) of nursing operates within customary rules (*doxa*) that govern individual roles. For example, according to Seccombe et al. (1997: 36) the report by the *Committee on the Position of the Enrolled Assistant Nurse Within the National Health Service* (1954), Rule 18(2) outlined the competencies for

⁴ See Section 3.7 for an explanation of how Bourdieu's cultural capital is applied throughout the thesis.

⁵ See Section 3.7 for an explanation of how Bourdieu's habitus and field are applied throughout the thesis.

SENs, which “emphasised the role of second-level nurses in assisting first-level registered nurses in the assessment and delivery of nursing care”. The definition was “narrowly interpreted,” consequently subordinating SENs and negatively influencing the deployment of enrolled nurses within their organisation.

The report reinforced the subordinate status of the enrolled nurse, reflecting the wider power dynamics within the nursing profession, something which (Freire, 1970; 1993) conveys involves critical consciousness to challenge and change the culture that maintains such hierarchies. These permitted rules and practices from 1954 were redefined in 1989 by the regulatory body for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, the United Kingdom Central Council (UKCC). The UKCC declared that the aforementioned Rule 18(2) “does not, and should not, be seen as one that limits the enrolled nurse’s competence and practice for all time” (Seccombe et al., 1997: 35). Despite that, the doxa of assistant and subordinate became mutually recognised and was further influenced by the agents and social space of nursing. These formative years shaped the way I nursed and cared for patients, and a newly gained understanding of Bourdieu’s (1984) doxa meant that at the time, I embraced the habitus of my position and conformed to the limitations of my role. As an enrolled nurse, the status of my position became limited, and I subconsciously internalised my prospects and modified my behaviour by learning to appreciate the position I had earned.

Ongoing education and the prospect of promotion were not options for SENs. However, times were changing, and in 1989, the Department of Health introduced a White Paper, *Working for Patients* (Department of Health, 1989), emphasising the importance of health education, prevention of ill health and the improvement of community care. The White Paper paved the way for a dramatic shift in nurse education with the launch of Project 2000 in 1989. Consequently, education moved from hospitals to polytechnics and universities, resulting in an end to SEN training. Critical consciousness made me aware of the outdated systemic power structures,

and I felt empowered to question and resist these dynamics by returning to education as a mature learner and retraining to become a Registered General Nurse (RGN). No longer a mere pair of hands on a clinical ward. New education and knowledge meant a change to the embodied state of my cultural capital and a discarding of the institutionalised, subservient status of the SEN.

1.9 The Postgraduate Student

As my career developed, I chose to study at the doctoral level, focusing on education as my area of most interest. Due to my ongoing academic challenges, which I now recognise as quasi-dyslexia, I undertook screening for dyslexia. A dyslexia teacher examined my profile and suggested I had borderline dyslexia. As an experienced dyslexia teacher, she chose to consider my age and my current coping strategies, and based on her opinion, she recommended a further diagnostic assessment, which gave me the diagnosis of dyslexia. My diagnosis was emotional, as past experiences had led me to believe I was incapable of this level of understanding and had instilled a lack of confidence in my ability to achieve this higher level of education.

My experience aligns with what John et al. (2010: 1) refer to as Academic Capital Formation (ACF), as the “Social processes that build family knowledge of educational and career options and support navigation through educational systems and professional organisations.” Bourdieu’s (1984) academic capital⁶, although not one of the commonly theorised capitals, has been used within educational research as a context-specific extension of cultural capital. Anderson et al. (2022) acknowledge the significance and importance of academic capital in enabling students to obtain agency, such as a degree, which validates their worth and strengthens their ability to make independent, autonomous decisions (Amundsen, 2019; Gale and Parker, 2014).

⁶ See Section 3.7 for an explanation of how Bourdieu’s academic capital is applied throughout the thesis.

This study evolved from my lived experience and the academic challenges I faced, and at times still do. Mature learners in university may experience academic challenges associated with the conventional methods of teaching and learning. To resolve their issues, they may be signposted to seek answers from screening or diagnostic assessments for dyslexia. My own experience illustrates how the recognition of dyslexia contributed to developing my academic capital. Subsequently, if the dyslexia teacher had not recommended a further diagnostic assessment, the outcome would have remained borderline, and I would not have been considered to have dyslexia and would not have received formal recognition of my learning needs.

The outcome of the assessment illustrates the evolving power of education in shaping and expanding cultural capital. By acknowledging my learning needs and implementing tailored learning strategies, education has facilitated my ability to navigate university with increased confidence. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) belief that one form of capital can be transformed into another. In my instance, cultural capital transformed into symbolic capital⁷ by gaining prestige through academic distinction.

Confirming the Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

1.11 The Literature

This study is one of the first to specifically focus on the lived experience of quasi-dyslexic mature learners continuing to study, with an assessment outcome showing they do not have, or, according to Cameron (2021), no longer have dyslexia.⁸ A confirmed diagnosis of dyslexia, when performed by a dyslexia teacher or an educational psychologist, ensures the provision of additional support in teaching and

⁷ See Section 3.7 for an explanation of how Bourdieu's symbolic capital is applied throughout the thesis.

⁸ This research explores the experiences of Beth, a university student in the UK, as she comes to be labelled as 'dyslexic', and as she has her diagnosis taken away. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1902003>

learning, often through *reasonable adjustments* and one-to-one study skills.

However, an assessment outcome may also conclude that, despite quasi-dyslexic characteristics, a diagnosis of dyslexia is inappropriate or borderline.

Borderline dyslexia, in many instances, does not result in *reasonable adjustments* and support, as the dyslexia threshold is not met (Evans, 2014; Pennington, 2006). In addition, the evidence further suggests that such a diagnosis in mature learners is complex and potentially challenging to confirm (Rack, 1997; Sabatini, 2022; Sadusky et al., 2021) due to complex coping mechanisms. Such mechanisms may include relying on oral communication rather than written, internalising personal failings rather than considering learning difficulties and varying educational backgrounds, which can influence skill levels in reading and writing. To reduce the demand for *reasonable adjustments*, Rodger et al. (2015) consider it necessary to maintain an inclusive learning environment and assessment in teaching and learning. An inclusive environment and mode of assessment have the potential to support the increasing number of mature learners in universities.

1.12 Research Question, Aims and Objectives

The discovery of new knowledge related to the following research questions will be used to explore the relationship between power and knowledge. This will contribute to an improved understanding of the mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing student experience at university. All of the participants within the study experience academic challenges which impact their experience of university. Vizzotto et al. (2013) emphasise the potential for assessment outcomes to affect the psychological and sociological dispositions of a mature learner's self-perception. This correlation highlights the association between psychological factors and social environment in shaping the experiences and behaviours of mature learners. Knowledge production, such as research and teaching practices within universities, is shaped by institutional hierarchies. Therefore, determining who has access to particular resources and

whose work is considered proper, such as quantitative in medical studies rather than qualitative in healthcare and nursing. Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2011) acknowledge that feminist research remains underrepresented in higher education journals and excluded from main academic discourses. Consequently, such underrepresentation maintains restricted definitions of valid knowledge and research, subsequently limiting the impact on policy and practice. Feminist standpoint theory scholars hold the principle that the relationship between power and knowledge is closely connected by the acceptance that power dynamics influence what knowledge is valued, who produces it and how it is voiced. Therefore, this research promotes the voice of marginalised mature quasi-dyslexic learners and does so by way of addressing the following research questions, aims and objectives.

Research Questions:

- | |
|--|
| 1. What is the lived experience of mature, quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students navigating ongoing academic challenges in a post-1992 university? |
| 2. What are the psychological and sociological impacts on self-perception among mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students whose diagnostic assessment does not indicate dyslexia? |
| 3. How can feminist standpoint theory clarify the relationship between power and knowledge in a post-1992 university, and challenge the barriers mature quasi-dyslexic learners encounter in their pedagogical experience? |

Research Aim:

To use the empathetic and explanatory approach of phenomenology to understand the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students studying at university.
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Research Objectives:

1. To use an interpretative phenomenological approach to provide a critical examination and comprehension of the nuanced and complex subjective lived experience.
2. To explore how mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students perceive and navigate challenges, focusing on the psychological, sociological, and institutional factors that shape their university experience.
3. To use the nuanced insights to inform the development of more inclusive practices, policies, and support systems aligned with mature quasi-dyslexic learners' needs and experiences.

1.13 Methodology and Methods for the Study

This study will use the qualitative methodology of interpretative phenomenology, alongside the phenomenological method of semi-structured interviews, to gain knowledge of the phenomenon in question. This approach is designed to empower a participant to reflect on an established account of their lived experience, whilst exploring the psychological and sociological impacts on self-perception.

Phenomenological research involves describing and interpreting, rather than explaining, and therefore, the researcher must perform an active role in the interpretative process (Ricoeur, 1981). To underpin the interviewing method, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) will be used to accomplish a detailed examination by which to interpret the qualitative data. To aid this interpretation, feminist standpoint theory and other relevant theorists will be incorporated within the theoretical frameworks to uncover inequity and the relationship between power and knowledge in a university setting.

1.14 Overview and Structure of Chapters

This section outlines the overall structure of the study, which consists of six chapters.

Chapter One	It will be summarised at the close of this chapter.
Chapter Two	Presents literature that explains the complexities of the term dyslexia and considers how the medicalisation of the term and the contested, changeable definitions have influenced our understanding and use of the term dyslexia. An exploration of adult dyslexia debates how dyslexia is recognised, especially among mature quasi-dyslexic learners. The research that contests the use of assessment tools and the assessors' views on diagnosing dyslexia in adults will be examined, amid the speculative continued use of the discrepancy model.
Chapter Three	Outlines the ideas, principles, theories, and practices underpinning my approach to the research. My epistemological and ontological position is examined to decide the suitability of an analytical framework characterised by an interpretative phenomenological approach. The advantages of applying the feminist lens of standpoint theory will be outlined, and its ability to support a critical and theoretical response to the study data. Insight from the influence of principal feminist standpoint theorists such as Nancy Hartsock, Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks and Sandra Harding will be acknowledged in section 3.6. This section will also include sociological frameworks from Bourdieu's theory of practice to explain how behaviour is shaped by the interaction between an individual's disposition and the wider social structures, in particular power, inequality and the reproduction of the dominant social order.
Chapter Four	Presents the research methodology and design. The significant steps used to apply IPA as an analytical framework are considered along with a justification of the data collection method.

Chapter Five	Presents the discussion and analysis of the findings. Demographic information and a brief synopsis will be provided for each participant. The themes are introduced and supported by relevant verbatim participant extracts. The themes and subthemes are designed to flow whilst expanding into a story detailing each lived experience. The literature is woven throughout to develop arguments supported by relevant theories, intent of constructing new knowledge or understanding.
Chapter Six	Draws the thesis to a close. The emergence of new knowledge and understandings specifies recommendations and suggestions to improve the university experience for mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students, and other marginalised learners in similar circumstances to those discussed in the study. The limitations of my research and considerations for further research will also be featured.

1.15 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has supplied a statement of the problem and the purpose of the study. The research questions are introduced alongside the aims and objectives. The importance and originality of the study are highlighted, accompanied by a brief outline of the research methodology. A detailed background to the study provides the reader with an insight into the academic challenges I met from early schooling through to becoming a postgraduate researcher, and how the topic of interest emerged from personal and professional experiences. A structured outline of each chapter provides the reader with a visualisation of the forthcoming work.

Chapter Two will review the literature on key issues relevant to the research questions.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

The literature review is a significant building block for showing the validity and reliability of any research study. The process aids a researcher in discovering key terms and methodologies used by other researchers while acknowledging the constructs and concepts of relevant fields. Furthermore, the activity assists the researcher in identifying key issues of relevance by gathering relevant text to construct a cohesive argument, demonstrating the need for the current research study.

To determine a starting point for the literature review, a pilot study was conducted to discover issues of importance to three voluntary mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students. The small-scale inquiry received ethical approval to uncover the lived experience of undergoing screening/diagnostic assessment for dyslexia, only to confirm that dyslexia was not the cause of the academic challenges experienced. Open-ended questions formed the method for the face-to-face semi-structured interview, whereby each participant was asked to reflect on how they felt about the outcome of the assessment for dyslexia. The questions invited the participants to also consider how the outcome affected their ability to continue the nursing course.

The outcome of the assessment prompted emotional feelings of frustration. The participants expressed *"failure"* and the belief that entering university was a *"waste of time."* Interpreting the outcome to mean, *"I'm obviously not very bright, as why else would I be experiencing such difficulties?"* was a phrase repeated by more than one participant. One particular participant was baffled when the outcome confirmed she did not have dyslexia. Explaining, *"I'm confused now because at school I was told I had dyslexia."* Feelings of uncertainty can lead to self-perception of one being incapable of completing their nursing course at university. Ilgen et al. (2019) conducted a critical analysis of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks to

explore the meaning of uncertainty of medical trainees towards decision-making within clinical situations, i.e., the application of knowledge to practice. The review defined uncertainty as “a state of tentativeness. In contrast, the term certainty refers to the lived experience of the individual, describing the extent to which one feels confident in one’s representation of the underlying cause of a particular problem or situation” (Ilgen et al., 2019: 799).

These findings from the exploratory study were used to support the basis for the review of the literature. Subheadings will be used to structure the literature review, as each section deals with a strand considered relevant to the study and the research questions.

Table 1: Literature Review Content Structure

Subheading	Description of Content
2.2. A Historical Overview of Dyslexia	Provides a deeper understanding of how dyslexia can be perceived by the literature, researchers, educators, and the recipients of the diagnosis.
2.3. What Does Adult Dyslexia Look Like?	Considers the use of definitions and models, and how these may vary within different contexts. i. Biomedical Model ii. Social Model iii. Biopsychosocial Model
2.4. The Challenges of Diagnosing Adults with Dyslexia	Discusses the issues and biases regarding diagnosing an adult with dyslexia.
2.5. The Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST)	Examines the most used screening test in the UK.

2.6. Dyslexia Assessors	Examines the consistency and reliability of professional assessors when assessing adult quasi-dyslexic learners for dyslexia at university.
2.7. Learning and Study Strategies	Acknowledges the use and importance of strategies to enhance learning and studying within the university.
2.7. University and Widening Participation	Identifies challenges faced by mature quasi-dyslexic learners in university who continue to study without a diagnosis of dyslexia.

A historical overview of dyslexia gives further insight into the use of the term and its understanding in a university setting. The overview will examine historical models and their relevance towards the study of dyslexia, as the choice of model may potentially influence how the term dyslexia is used and perceived by others.

2.2 A Historical Overview of Dyslexia

In the early 20th century, the medical profession strongly influenced childhood development and how children learned. Consequently, children who were identified as having literacy and/or learning difficulties were seen as having medical problems. Francis Galton (1822-1911) from Birmingham in the West Midlands was one of the first people to distinguish differences between the plethora of learning disabilities and name what we now refer to as dyslexia. The medicalisation of the term dyslexia continued until the publication of *Special Educational Needs: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (Warnock, 1978). The Warnock (1978) report was commissioned to review the educational provision for '*handicapped*'⁹ children and young people with disabilities of body or

⁹ The terminology used reflects the accepted language of the period, rather than the researcher's personal view.

mind. The report formed the basis of the Education Act (1981), along with the statementing system, which gave children and young people entitlement to educational support.

The report reiterated that only those with specific knowledge and training would be authorised to decide the needs of such children and young people. Ultimately, it was considered inappropriate for medical officers to be responsible for examining the intelligence of children and young people with learning difficulties (Warnock, 1978). Yet, the medical model, which states that people are disabled by their impairments or differences, remains the model frequently considered when specific learning difficulties (SpLD), including dyslexia, are presently defined (Richardson, 2021). The cause of dyslexia remains of interest within research studies, as the data is often seen as revealing the heritability and genetic correlation of dyslexia (Gialluisi et al., 2021; Wang and Bi, 2022). Such interest in the heritability and genetic correlation implies that medicalisation of the condition remains a key consideration in the management and treatment.

To establish historical perspectives from over two decades, the literature review draws on the small-scale study by Macdonald and Stratta (2001), which examined the response of tutors to, as referred to in the study, 'non-standard'¹⁰ students within a single university. The initial research study was conducted in 1994-95 with tutors. The focus was on a student group's progression through a university, and concerns regarding the impact of 'non-standard' students on course delivery. At a similar time, a UK policy report *Learning Works: Widening Participation in Further Education* by Kennedy (1997) discussed a WP strategy, emphasising the need to increase the number of under-represented students in higher education, including those with literacy, numeracy or learning difficulties. The study anticipated that such changes to the student demographic would impact not just the teaching and learning strategy,

¹⁰ The category non-standard was applied to all students over the age of 21 accepted for undergraduate study. Thus, the term referred only to the age of the students and not to prior qualifications. It therefore included students who had A levels, as well as those who came in by the Access route.

but also the public perception of academia. Therefore, the researchers extended the study to include staff perceptions based on the disparity between the attitudes of staff and the student group, since the students perceived themselves to be a problem to the university.

The university had a well-established policy for accepting 'non-standard' students through 'non-standard' routes; therefore, the responses from tutors were mixed. The tutors' varying responses may imply that some tutors thought further widening of participation was a step too far. At the time, tutors expressed concerns that the increasing quantity of 'non-standard' students would result in a large and diverse student body shaped by prior social experiences, such as previous employment or family commitments. This differed from earlier groups of 'non-standard' students, who were often smaller in number and felt they had no choice but to blend into the dominant culture of the institution. Furthermore, tutors preconceived 'non-standard' students to be mature in years with life experiences, which enabled them to be "more articulate and more assertive" (Macdonald and Stratta, 2001: 251) and therefore, bringing lively debates to lectures. Despite such opinions, the Macdonald and Stratta (2001) study concluded that the tutors' perceptions of enthusiasm shown by 'non-standard' students essentially came from a place of anxiety about their academic in/abilities, rather than enthusiasm for their new learning environment. Additionally, tutors considered that the increasing number of 'non-standard' students would have specific learning needs, reduced confidence, and identity conflicts due to family/work commitments. The study highlighted a disconnect between WP policies and real-world academic practices.

The Kennedy (1997) report, although progressive in the focus of WP in universities, can be explored through the lens of Bourdieu's (1986) symbolic capital, power and violence. The concept can examine the planning and implementation of the report by establishing how social structures are entrenched and how inequality is maintained in universities. Symbolic capital in the context of the Kennedy (1997)

report illustrates the social value attributed to a university education, such as a degree. Symbolic power is achieved when powerful institutions, such as universities, determine and control what is considered valid knowledge and behaviour. Applying Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of capital, power and violence to the Macdonald and Stratta (2001) study illustrates how the process of integration involves a change of behaviour, beliefs and values and is therefore more than purely academic integration. Mature quasi-dyslexic learners and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds become structurally disadvantaged, due to the ownership of less recognised capital, illustrating how institutions can worsen inequality whilst simultaneously promoting inclusion.

More recent views by Poldin et al. (2016) consider that within adult learning groups, the implementation of a closed cohort model with pre-determined modules and assessments, which is widely used in nursing (McCarthy et al., 2005), creates a group of learners from a diverse range of educational backgrounds, ethnicities and cultural contexts. The closed cohort model is thought to enable the development of strong psychological and academic support networks, whilst forging companionship and creating supportive relationships. However, there are associated challenges where an expectation to bond and conform to a new learning environment may not always result in deeper connections, which is often due to the anonymity of large cohorts (Bligh, 2002; MacGregor et al., 2000; Spear, 1984), particularly in nursing courses. Large cohorts are frequently associated with passive learning rather than academic gain, particularly for weaker students (Arias and Walker, 2010; Kokkelenberg et al., 2008; Nhokwara et al., 2022). As such, the literature exposes the diverse ways learning takes place and encourages an inclusive learning environment to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

The introduction of WP in the Kennedy (1979) report further highlights the gap between the intention of a policy and the reality of the lived experience of the mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students in this study. Webber (2014) uses the more

familiar term of 'non-traditional'¹¹, customary in this era, to judge that such 'non-traditional' students may be regarded by some academics as unsuitable for university. Behavioural social framing is discussed by Kahu (2013) to describe the relationship between teaching practice and student behaviour, and how this may impact student performance. For instance, students who enter universities with vocational qualifications are often assumed to come from groups with lower academic outcomes and reside in areas where fewer people attend university. In addition, when students enter university with vocational qualifications,¹² they are less likely to achieve a first or upper-second-class degree, despite potentially being more than capable (Shields and Masardo, 2015). These findings have remained probable from the time of Bhattacharyya et al.'s (2003) study, which equally determined that students from ethnic minority groups¹³ were also more likely to have vocational rather than 'traditional' academic entry qualifications.

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of how social structures influence one's behaviour and perceptions is considered by Reay (1998) and Reay et al.'s (2010) study exploring different types of habitus from an educational perspective, not purely individual habitus. Particularly, institutional habitus, which refers to the shared culture and practices of an institution often shaped by history and status, such as the contrast between red brick and post-1992 universities and how each institution transmits class-based assumptions and values. Reay et al. (2010) consider an individual's habitus as the internalised disposition and attitude that is shaped by socialisation, education, and socioeconomic background. The institutional habitus of Reay et al.'s (2010) study of 'traditional' students showed them to be self-assured in their position within a university setting compared with 'non-traditional' students. 'Non-traditional'

¹¹ Non-traditional students were referred to as such, post-The Dearing Report (1997) <https://education-uk.org/documents/dearing1997/dearing1997.html>

¹² The number of students entering higher education with a BTEC qualification has risen steadily, while traditionally a vocational qualification aimed at direct entry to employment.

¹³ The paper focuses on the following minority ethnic groups in England: people of Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Mixed heritage. **Note** - this is the published terminology used throughout.

students were more prone to display signs of insecurity and a lack of confidence. Similarly, McDonough (1997) expands Bourdieu's institutional habitus by considering how a student's choice is shaped by institutional character, particularly regarding access and progression within higher education. These findings are similar to Bowden et al.'s (2021) study exploring the conditions that foster student engagement, success and retention.

Transitioning from further education to university can be challenging for mature learners (Archer et al., 2005; Dumbleton et al., 2008; van der Meer, 2021). Additionally, the 'non-traditional' label can frame a student as deviating from convention, referred to by Collins (2000) as the *outsider within*. The 'non-traditional' label intersects with other identities, such as class, race, gender and disability (Collins, 1990b), further adversely affecting their university experience and exacerbating feelings of exclusion or marginalisation. To improve such feelings, the literature details that a blended approach to learning, with its mixture of online and face-to-face teaching, can better accommodate the diversity of student populations by providing flexibility and improved accessibility in the form of recorded lectures and revisit resources. As such, a blended approach also encourages self-regulated learning within an empowering teaching environment, further enabling students to feel valued and safe (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Su, 2019).

2.3 What Does Adult Dyslexia Look Like?

A plain definition of dyslexia is essential for the progression of research and ongoing studies. Stanovich (1994: 579) states that "*dyslexia* carries with it so many empirically unverified connotations and assumptions that many researchers and practitioners prefer to avoid the term." Lyon (1995: 4) concurs but further claims that "despite the significant role that a definition should play in the scientific and clinical understanding of dyslexia, the field has constructed numerous vague, ambiguous,

and non-validated descriptions of the disorder.” Currently, ambiguous descriptions of dyslexia remain in use (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014a).

The literature highlights the potential for erroneous outcomes in the dyslexia assessment process, when compensatory skills and secondary symptoms may be apparent, in particular, multitasking and communication, time-keeping and concentration (Dobson, 2018; Rack, 1997; Roitsch and Watson, 2019; Snowling et al., 2020). The aforementioned often present as anxiety and low self-esteem that commonly arise with age. Dobson (2018) reaffirms the extent to which dyslexia in some adults may become masked, primarily due to learned compensatory strategies (Roitsch and Watson, 2019). Rack (1997) also considers the complexities of adults who choose to come forward for dyslexia assessments by examining the socio-emotional factors that may further complicate the assessment process, in particular, low self-esteem and low perceived self-efficacy. Snowling et al. (2020) recognise such complexities by further considering the occurrence of comorbidities within the diagnosis of dyslexia, such as dyscalculia and developmental language disorder (DLD), and how they may amplify complexities associated with a singular unitary definition.

Consequently, context becomes paramount to the study of dyslexia, which is often explored through various models within the field of disability studies. Two of the most traditionally applied dominant interpretations of dyslexia are the biomedical and social models of disability (Hoyles and Hoyles, 2010; Macdonald, 2019). The choice of a model could further influence an individual’s belief and understanding. As such, dyslexia characteristics are either interpreted as a “physiological deficit, i.e., biomedical model, or due to structural inequalities, i.e., social model” (Macdonald, 2019: 2).

i. Biomedical Model

The UK government commissioned an independent report, *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties*, by Rose (2009: 30)

considers dyslexia to be:

“A learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory, and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across a range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor coordination, mental calculation, concentration, and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia.”

Although this definition acknowledges the complexities and the spectrum of dyslexia rather than a rigid category, symptoms can vary immensely among individuals with a range of intellectual abilities. The Rose Report (2009) jointly conveys that signs of dyslexia can be observed and measured, together with secondary psychological factors, therefore categorising the model to be biomedical. The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) also identifies common indicators of adult dyslexia, a few of which include: reading/writing slowly, needing to re-read paragraphs to understand them and difficulty organising thoughts on paper (British Dyslexia Association, 2005) .

Itua et al.'s (2012) study with second-year health students found them to struggle with interpreting academic jargon, which they often expressed to be unnecessary language, and words they were unfamiliar with. Surprisingly, the academics showed an awareness of students struggling with words they were unfamiliar with; furthermore, the tutors acknowledged that this had the potential to make answering questions more difficult. Miller and Merdian (2020) drew a similar conclusion where academics considered their students did not independently engage in academic reading, as what was suitable was “sometimes dry and poorly written peer-reviewed academic material” (Miller and Merdian, 2020: 19), which further excludes some

students from reading and engaging. Itua et al.'s (2012) study emphasises the historical-cultural model of writing, which considers the expectation that academic writing needs to be clear, logical and well-referenced (Lillis and Turner, 2001).

My earlier experiences of academic writing were during my enrolled nurse training in the mid-1980s, and during this time, I considered knowledge and learning to be something I received based on the didactic nature of knowledge transfer, referred to by Freire (1970; 1993) as banking. This way of learning hindered my ability to engage with the complexities of academic writing. The literature in this section suggests that pedagogy which fails to encourage student engagement may impact their lived experience of university and their ability to succeed, due to underachievement or the desire to terminate their studies.

ii. Social Model

Social models provide a lens by which to understand and address societal issues by drawing the focus away from individual characteristics and considering the broader social context. As such, social models address issues that affect people's lives by focusing on the interconnectedness of the influential social factors. Deacon et al. (2022) engaged with a social relational model of disability to address the psychological factors and emotional impact of exclusion in the education of adults with dyslexia in the UK. A social relational model is considered an enhancement of the social model, rather than a rejection (Reindal, 2008), by reinforcing the terms of disability and impairment (Deacon et al., 2022). From 2015 to 2017, Deacon et al. (2022) used a mixed-method approach to determine if socioeconomics remained a factor for adults with dyslexia. The context considered the supposed inclusive and anti-discriminatory educational practices. A total of 442 participants accessed an online survey, and the quantitative data were analysed using the social model of

disability. A mixture of females (n9) and males (n6) of ages ranging from 23 to 64¹⁴ were further chosen for qualitative in-depth biographical interviews to create a narrative dialogue of their life story (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). The dialogues were analysed into themes using a phenomenological approach. To complement the study, participants were also grouped by age and gender, as the researchers considered that specific groupings may show similarities within the defined groups.

The findings were indicative of negative experiences of education. All participants expressed feelings of "difference", which they perceived from a "deficit" perspective, with the use of predominant language such as "stupid", "thick" or "not academic" (Deacon et al., 2022: 9). Deacon et al. (2022) further established the lived experience of dyslexia regarding education and the manifestation of such emotions to be encompassed within a "disabling educational system" (Deacon et al., 2022: 9). Several studies, including those by Cameron and Billington (2017) and Henderson (2017) investigate dyslexia and the effects of transitioning into university on adult students, regarding anxieties and challenges around assessments and studying (Deacon et al., 2012; Olofsson et al., 2012).

All the participants within the Deacon et al. (2022) study identified literacy skills (reading and writing) to be significantly challenging and often made worse by the failings of the educational institution. The failure to accommodate diverse learning needs and the participants' academic challenges as an evaluation of their educational ability and intellect. Furthermore, upon receiving a diagnosis of dyslexia, all participants recalled the customary enforcement of being moved to another area in the classroom or an alternative special needs environment. Despite recollections of exclusion, for some participants, the diagnosis of dyslexia gave them validation, but continued to reinforce feelings of being different. These findings bear similarities to the important study by Macdonald and Stratta (2001) in which individual difference was considered as something which needed to adapt to the status quo, i.e., the

¹⁴ The wide age range enabled the inclusion of participants from both pre and post-Education Act 1981.

institutional culture; alternatively, one became segregated from it. From a social-relational perspective, all participants in these studies recalled adverse psycho-emotional symptoms manifesting as a lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, and feelings of failure.

Vygotsky, best known for his work on psychological development in children, theorised the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which he defines as “the discrepancy between a child’s actual mental age and the level he reaches in solving problems with assistance indicates the zone of his proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1986: 187). The theory acknowledges the significance of the social context and the space where learning takes place. Furthermore, how an enforced movement for learners outside of this space reinforces the disposition of segregation and disrupts learning. To support learning, more knowledgeable others (MKO) provide temporary support or a scaffold to assist learners towards independent learning. The term scaffolding was introduced by Wood et al. (1976) as a metaphor acquired from architecture, representing the support a tutor or MKO offers, enabling a learner to accomplish a task.

The ZPD signifies the scope of tasks a learner can achieve with guidance but not yet independently, highlighting the importance of collaboration, communication, and social support. While ZPD is aimed towards developmental and context-specific growth, scaffolding primarily focuses on immediate, task-specific support (Barnard and Campbell, 2005). To support Vygotsky’s ZPD, active learning strategies, such as scaffolding (Coffman et al., 2023), can be used to help mature quasi-dyslexic learners progress within their ZPD. By using questioning and feedback, students’ progress from assisted to independent learning (Theobald et al., 2020), reinforcing Vygotsky’s concept that support should gradually decrease as competence increases.

The sociological model of student dropout introduced by Spady (1971) draws on Durkheim's (1897) theory of suicide, emphasising how social integration of peers and

institutional interactions influence a student's decision to persist or to drop out and leave the university. Tinto (1975) built on Spady's model by expanding a more educational focus to include a student's academic goal commitment alongside the sociological aspect influenced by their peers. The development of the model makes it one of the most influential frameworks for understanding student attrition. As such, a student's persistence becomes shaped by social connections, but by personal motivation, for example, a career goal to become a nurse. Intrinsic motivation originating from the desire to become a registered nurse is significant of the mature learners' attitude, yet the fear of academic failure can undermine their persistence (Burnell, 2015), reducing self-confidence and self-esteem.

Tinto's (1975) model of student integration originally focused on 'traditional' undergraduate students, who were considered young, full-time on-campus learners and became a useful model for considering the level of student integration and how this influenced the continuation of their studies. However, the model received criticism due to its inability to relate to supposed 'non-traditional' students. To address this, Tinto (1994) expanded the model by acknowledging the limitations of the earlier models' narrow focus on 'traditional', residential students. Therefore, the revised model considered how a more diverse student experienced integration, such as mature students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. Tinto's (1994) revision enhanced understanding of student retention and the responsibility of institutions, by stressing the importance of classroom environments, teaching strategies and teacher-student dynamics. The revised model asserted that academic success is an important component of active participation in learning experiences, therefore impacting student persistence (Tinto, 1997). On that basis, Hadjar et al. (2023) consider the model to presently account for diverse individual background characteristics, recognising that students who feel supported are less likely to drop out. The significance of feedback mechanisms alongside tailored

support for diverse student groups, for instance, students from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, is equally considered advantageous.

Over time, the models used to study dyslexia have also transformed with the emergence of the term 'neurodiverse.' Defining neurodiversity is challenging, but as previous definitions of dyslexia acknowledge, context is essential. The term neurodiverse rejects disability and introduces the notion of difference (Armstrong, 2012; Macdonald, 2019). Therefore, the choice of model used needs to align with the aims and objectives of the research study. Azevedo et al. (2022) believe individuals to be neurodivergent when they appear disparate from the neurological mainstream within society. Likewise, to suggest a dyslexic identity is certain, Elsherif et al. (2022); Ne'eman and Pellicano (2022) and Walker (2022) maintain the characterisation of neurodiversity is not assumed by diagnosis, but rather by valuing the adaptability and diverse nature of human neurobiology¹⁵ (Friedlander et al., 2011). Furthermore, suggesting the need for pedagogy to be appropriately adapted, relevant and engaging for all mature learners within universities (Hockings, 2010).

Focusing on race, feminist scholar Ahmed (2007) reflects on her experiences of writing about institutional diversity as an academic and the dichotomy of the insider and outsider world she describes. Ahmed (2007: 157) recalls a conference she attended when four Black feminists arrived at the same time, observing, "Yes, we do notice such arrivals. The fact that we notice such arrivals tells us more about what is already in place than it does about *who* arrives." This observation exposes how traditional norms and structures affect and influence our perception of difference. To notice someone as an outsider conveys more about the current social, cultural, and institutional environment than about the individual. Consequently, the sense of belonging becomes shaped by historical power dynamics, social norms, and expectations. In conjunction with interconnectedness, Ahmed (2007) contends that the established systems which determine who belongs are deeply embedded with

¹⁵ The underlying biological mechanisms that serve learning and memory.

larger societal and institutional values. Therefore, it is these structures which shape who is included, or not and how diversity is perceived, subsequently showing how belonging is associated with power, privilege, and historical context.

By considering differences as opposed to the deficit of neurodiverse learners within universities, Clouder et al. (2020) used a social model towards developing a narrative compilation of corpus literature to examine the experiences of neurodiverse students. Empirical data published between 2008 to 2019 comprised a corpus of international literature of forty-eight case studies from individuals (n22) from the USA and (n14) from the UK towards creating a narrative synthesis for evaluation. Most of the case studies were qualitative and focused on current or past university students with dyslexia (n18).

The findings established that those with dyslexia (n13) experienced “helplessness and hopelessness as a result of a fear of stigmatisation, feelings of inadequacy and a lack of understanding” (Clouder et al., 2020: 768). This sense of inadequacy is particularly prevalent within feminist literature as a deeply emotional and social experience. Seu (2006: 293) states that the term inadequacy is often portrayed as “shameful and hidden,” and mostly in a setting where vulnerability is suppressed. Challenges with academic writing (n18) were also endured concerning “reading, writing, comprehension, decoding, word recognition, pronunciation, grammar and meaning making” (Clouder et al., 2020: 769). All of these relevant challenges are further characterised within Rose’s (2009) definition of dyslexia (Section 2.3.i), giving prominence to identity and self-perception, which feature in the current study’s research questions, by distinguishing quasi-dyslexic students, who “associate strongly with a dyslexic identity” (Clouder et al., 2020: 770).

iii. Biopsychosocial Model

The World Health Organization (2002) (WHO) introduced a third model, the biopsychosocial model, which accommodates biological, psychological, social,

environmental and cultural factors, which are inclusive of disability. The model integrates biological, psychological, and social factors to understand health, illness, and human behaviour. Krahn (2011: 4) states this model to be a “Dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, both personal and environmental. Promoted as a bio-psycho-social model, it represents a workable compromise between medical and social models.” The biopsychosocial model was used by Elftorp and Hearne (2020) to scrutinise the guidance counselling needs of adults with dyslexia within the Irish Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS); however, the study used a non-reductionist perspective which emphasises the psychological and social aspects over the biological. This allows their study to be considered through psychological and sociological lenses, contributing to the interpretation of how individual experiences are shaped by wider social contexts.

A triangulated approach¹⁶ combined the adults with dyslexia and the guidance practitioners’ views. The adult learners (n14), a mixture of males (ten) and females (four) aged 18 to 67 years, described their experiences of further education during semi-structured face-to-face interviews. To focus on misrecognition and transformative experiences, the study draws on Honneth’s (2004) theory of recognition. The psycho-social model was used to explore the social conditions necessary for adults with dyslexia to have an equal opportunity to achieve self-realisation of their ability to succeed within further education. The social conditions of learning can notably affect a learner's emotions to the extent that they can become disassociated with their environment (Badcock et al., 2023). The theory of recognition is founded on three principles: “love, equality and social esteem that collectively determine what ought currently to be understood by the idea of social justice” (Honneth 2004: 355). Honneth considers the three principles to be essential for individuals to develop belief in themselves and to achieve personal and social

¹⁶ Triangulated approach is a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. In this instance initial online questionnaire, followed by an exploratory semi-structured face-to-face interview.

well-being. Previous studies by Honneth (1995) were rooted in moral psychology and social theory, therefore essential for the formation of an individual's identity and self-realisation, by supporting the need for self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. However, educational institutions are challenged by the need to "maintain academic quality and standards, and balance competing demands on limited resources and time, while providing a supportive and inclusive learning environment" (Gouthro and Holloway 2023: 327).

A subsequent theme of Elftorp and Hearne's (2020) study was an experience of misrecognition. The data within this theme described how the adult learners' self-esteem was affected, contributing to them feeling frustrated and anxious. Several adults used the term 'struggle' to express their experiences of completing assignments and exams within restricted time limits. In the instance of Elftorp and Hearne's (2020) study, the theme of misrecognition further reflects the feelings of the participants in this study about being misunderstood and how this prevents them from developing a positive student identity. The rigid structures in universities, such as strict deadlines and standardised assessments, disproportionately disadvantage mature quasi-dyslexic learners. Negative labelling and the self-perception of being "slow," coupled with institutional misrecognition, may further isolate and prevent them from seeking academic help or fully engaging with their studies.

Upon ascertaining the experience of adult learners with dyslexia in social and educational contexts, studies by Caskey et al. (2018) and Collinson et al. (2012) also reported similar outcomes of negative self-perception. The adult learners shared experiences of social ridicule and perceived that the exposure to such dismissive attitudes affected their psychological and sociological self-perception, further reducing their sense of and right to equality. Elftorp and Hearne (2020) study used intersectionality to contextualise the financial constraints of socio-economically disadvantaged adult learners. The term is defined by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the intersection of social identities and the associated system of oppression. In this

instance, the learners had limited financial freedom to access diagnostic services to identify dyslexia as the cause of their academic challenges.

The social ridicule and segregation perceived by the participants can affect their perception of belonging, further influencing their ability to develop meaningful connections and relationships with others. Maslow et al. (1987) characterise belonging as a basic human need and an attachment to others. Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT emphasises the relationship between motivation and environment. An autonomy-supportive environment encourages choice by acknowledging individuals' perspectives. A competence-supportive environment provides constructive feedback and the opportunity to master skills. Lastly, a relatedness-supportive environment creates a sense of belonging by supporting the creation of meaningful relationships.

For the participants in this study, the three psychological needs of SDT, with an emphasis on intrinsic motivation and autonomy, are enhanced by Kolb (1984; 2014) Experiential Learning Theory. The theory is incorporated into many nursing courses and considered crucial, as it allows students to become engaged in the learning process. Performing activities (learning by doing) in professional practice or simulated learning environments facilitates the development of reflecting on that activity (Kolb, 1984; 2014). Subsequently, this mode of learning encourages self-direction and critical thinking (Murray, 2018). This further acknowledges the importance of meeting physiological needs to encourage deep learning (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000). To establish critical and self-directed learning, the environment must be conducive to students. Providing opportunities for mastery of skills through setting appropriately challenging tasks and constructive feedback becomes a principal factor referred to by SDT as a competence-supportive environment.

Defining dyslexia is challenging. The scientific rigour associated with determining dyslexia, including the knowledge and understanding to establish dyslexia from poor reading ability, remains an ongoing debate (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014a). Despite

this understanding, the presence of dyslexia in adults remains complex. Subsequently, to aid such complexities, context is of key importance towards the clarification and use of all definitions.

2.4 The Challenges of Diagnosing Mature Learners with Dyslexia

Recognising a mature quasi-dyslexic learner may appear straightforward; however, the ongoing question of an ability to compensate for the characteristics of their quasi-dyslexia adds complexity. For a mature learner with dyslexia to be able to compensate is multifactorial, and compensation remains dependent on an appropriate foundation of reading ability. In such instances, adequate reading ability still results in a reading deficit primarily with pseudoword word reading ability, alongside an adequate phonological ability (Birch and Chase, 2004; Felton et al., 1990). To that end, Macdonald (2010: 271) contends that “Individuals labelled as having dyslexia cannot be separated from individuals with general reading difficulties.” Elliott and Grigorenko (2014b) and Gibbs and Elliott (2020) use their knowledge in the field of dyslexia to suggest that using the term dyslexia adds little value, but labels a person. This may further affect social factors, including how they are perceived in a learning environment, consequently stigmatising interactions with their peers and the formation of relationships.

Due to the complexities associated with compensation, Parrila et al. (2007) comprised 28 Canadian post-secondary¹⁷ participants. Males (n9) and females (n19) with a self-identified history of reading difficulty (HRD), were compared with a group of males (n9) and females (n18) with no reported difficulties (NRD). The study intended to find which domains of phonological processing skills could be compensated for. Ten of the 28 participants with HRD at the time of the study had recently received a diagnosis of dyslexia. Both groups completed a questionnaire, which included an

¹⁷ Postsecondary education in Canada includes universities and colleges, as well as trade and vocational schools.

AHRQ-R questionnaire, a modified form of the Adult Reading History Questionnaire¹⁸ (see Appendix A). The study found that most post-secondary education participants who self-identified (HRD) and considered themselves to be high functioning, findings were considered to be within the normal range, although the outcomes were of a notably lower level than the comparison group.

When time restrictions were removed and the groups were allowed to decide their own pace of reading, both groups performed comparably. This shows that 21 of the 28 participants with HRD were potentially able to read to learn. Therefore, considered to have the ability to compensate. The study recommended that assessments for *reasonable adjustments* should consider reading and spelling rates in addition to reading accuracy. The likelihood of academic improvement by the removal of time restrictions for mature learners with an HRD or self-reporting has been recognised by several research studies (Mosberg and Johns, 1994; Olofsson et al., 2012; Pedersen et al., 2016). What remains unclear is one's ability to fully comprehend what has been read.

A quantitative study by Hebert et al. (2018) was designed to examine three outcomes: (1) the difference between participants with and without HRD, (2) text reading, and (3) question-answering times. The study also examined whether differences in reading comprehension or reading rate account for the differences in question-answering times. This study intended to identify an adult learner's ability to fully comprehend what they read. The study consisted of 229 students from a Canadian university. 124 participants, males (n25) and females (n99), had NRD and 43 participants, males (n12), and females (n31), had self-reported HRD.

The findings stated that university students with HRD read words and text more slowly. Previous similar studies by Mosberg and Johns (1994), Olofsson et al. (2012)

¹⁸ The Adult Reading History Questionnaire was modified because the original questionnaire does not distinguish between levels of education such as elementary, secondary and post-secondary. The original format, the questionnaire may not be sensitive enough to the severity of the initial problems if an individual has compensated for his/her initial reading difficulties.

and Pedersen et al. (2016) have also shown that participants with HRD read fewer words than those with NRD. Hebert et al. (2018) identified a key difference between the two groups, which involved text reading and answering questions. The group with HRD took longer to read the text, but also longer to answer questions. The same group also found questions based on background knowledge, vocabulary, and inferential and literal questions more challenging to answer. Regrettably, the study could not explain why participants with HRD took longer to answer certain types of questions, but it may be presumed to be related to insufficient metacognition strategies. It could therefore be presumed that such strategies were limited, as to embed metacognitive strategies into learning, one first requires the promotion of metacognition (Cutting and Saks, 2012). Based on similar research findings, Parrila et al. (2007) suggest that students with HRD or who self-report difficulties with reading when faced with time-restricted assessments, that extra time should be further considered to allow for equality of opportunity.

Street (2006) acknowledge the term literacy to be complex and debated by a range of interpretations dependent upon context and space. The judgment of such a term may enable or disable the person in question. At the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Montoya (2018: 17) defines literacy as:

“The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated within varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.”

conveys the value of literacy and the impact on an individual when such skills are limited. Till now, studies in the literature review have compared adults with a diagnosis of dyslexia alongside those with a history of reading difficulties or self-reporting reading difficulties; these categories are challenging to separate and may/do overlap. Moving forward, there is further development within the concept and diagnosis of dyslexia regarding effectiveness (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014a;

Gibbs and Elliott, 2020; Harrison and Nichols, 2005; Ryder and Norwich, 2018).

Therefore, the following section considers the efficacy of the most commonly used UK screening tool to determine the presence of dyslexia in adult learners.

2.5 The Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST)

In 1997, after several years of research, Nicolson and Fawcett developed the Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST), an adult version of the Dyslexia Screening Test (DST). DAST is one of the best-known UK conventional dyslexia screening assessments for adults (Nicolson and Fawcett, 1997). The test was also considered capable of determining deficits in “motor coordination, balance and automaticity in learning” (Nicolson et al., 2001: 424). The tool became popular in universities when the need for a quick and cost-effective test arose to determine if a full diagnostic assessment for dyslexia was required. The test can be completed within 30 minutes by teaching staff following minimal guidance. Based on 11 sub-tests, it claims to be capable of distinguishing between adult learners diagnosed with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) and non-diagnosed learners (Nicolson and Fawcett, 1997). (See Appendix B).

Although the DAST approach is cost-effective, there is a strong emphasis on the need for minimal guidance, which may oversimplify the complexity of dyslexia, particularly for mature quasi-dyslexic learners. The ability of the test to determine deficits in automaticity, for instance, how easily a person can perform a task, may lead to a failure to consider contextual influences, especially for mature learners. These factors may include educational background or individual coping strategies developed by mature learners over time. Harrison and Nichols (2005) chose to replicate the original DAST research study in Canada. At the time of the study, records showed that SpLD represented the largest group of students in the post-secondary education group in the country. As such, there was a demand for a validated and user-friendly method capable of showing differences between students

with dyslexia and those with confounding conditions, such as inadequate education, medical problems, and post-traumatic stress.

The study by Harrison and Nichols (2005) recruited 117 post-secondary students, males (n58) and females (n59) with diagnosed SpLD, with a range in ages from 18 to 41 years, from six institutions. They were compared to 121 students from the general post-secondary population, males (n30), and females (n91) from the same institutions, with no such diagnosis. The data collection was within one academic year, 2002/03, during which period both the SpLD and the comparison group completed the DAST, which was administered by "trained assessors" (Harrison and Nichols, 2005: 427).

The DAST scoring used an At-Risk Quotation (ARQ)¹⁹, whereby a score of 1.0 or more shows high-risk performance on the subtest in question. The incidence is based on the percentage of students showing an ARQ score of 1.0 or more on each subtest. The word risk, I consider to be a deficit term, especially when used through the lens of neurodiversity. The assessment correctly found 87 (74%) of adult learners with SpLD were at elevated risk of dyslexia. This means that 30 (26%) of adult learners with SpLD were not recognised as being at risk. Within the comparison group, 102 (84%) of adult learners were correctly identified as not at risk. However, the assessment "also misidentified 19 (16%) of these learners as being highly at risk for dyslexia, even though the overwhelming majority reported no history of any considerable learning problems" (Harrison and Nichols, 2005: 428). The sensitivity and specificity of the DAST suggest that adequate performance is related to controlled research conditions; consequently, in the real world, there is a probability that up to two-thirds of adult learners with SpLD may go undetected.

¹⁹ Mean ARQ scores are calculated according to the scoring procedure specified in the manual. A score of 1.0 or more shows 'high risk' performance on the subtest in question with the exception of on Verbal Reasoning and Semantic Fluency, which are considered to be areas of relative strength among adults with dyslexia. Incidence is based on the percentage of students showing an ARQ score of 1.0 or more on each subtest.

Despite its popular use as a screening tool, research highlights significant concerns regarding the validity of the DAST as a reliable tool to confirm or accurately assess dyslexia, particularly in mature quasi-dyslexic learners. Upon replicating Nicolson and Fawcett's (1997) study, Harrison and Nichols (2005) found cause for concern regarding the discriminant validity of the DAST. Discriminant validity is a term constructed by Campbell and Fiske (1959) to consider if an instrument, in this instance, the DAST, can accurately measure the intended construct without being misled by other variables. Consequently, discriminant validity is a necessary aspect of research methodology towards ensuring the validity and reliability of research instruments, specifically quantitative ones. Findings also suggest that adult learners with "lower general intelligence are more likely to be identified as dyslexic with the DAST regardless of their level of reading proficiency" (Harrison and Nichols, 2005: 431).

To consider discriminant validity in this instance, the researchers highlighted that "screening instruments for learning disability should not be confounded with IQ" (Harrison and Nichols, 2005: 431). Harrison and Nichols also advise the need for further exploration to clarify the precise explanation for this relationship between lower general intelligence and dyslexia. IQ is contested (Gould, 1996) alongside environmental and social factors, which play a significant role in shaping intelligence (Flynn, 2009). Intelligence comprises many forms; social intelligence (Dewey, 1909), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2020) and more recently, cultural intelligence, which is considered to be an individual's ability to adapt to a socially diverse environment (Khan et al., 2020), which, due to limitations of word count, the thesis cannot discuss further.

By coincidence, the disparity was detected between two distinct cultures, Canada and the UK, within some of the DAST subtests. In the UK, 5% of the adult learners with no history of learning difficulties scored highly at risk within the phonemic segmentation subtest, as opposed to 40% and 52% respectively of the Canadian

group (Ryder, 2016). This suggests it can be problematic to interchange standardised tests which have been created within and for a distinct cultural context. Although the tests use a point scoring system, an assessor is required to analyse the outcome of the assessment tool.

The objective of a small-scale, non-generalisable study in Australia by Sadusky et al. (2021) was to identify how psychologists diagnosed dyslexia in children as opposed to adults. In Australia, guidance for assessors to diagnose dyslexia within an adult population is limited. The findings showed that assessors lacked confidence when assessing adults and subsequently relied upon their clinical judgement rather than verifiable tools and guidelines, further demonstrating the lack of objectivity. Further illustrating the challenges encountered when diagnosing an adult with dyslexia, primarily regarding the capacity to compensate and maintain the required standard of learning associated with universities.

2.6 Dyslexia Assessors

When it comes to diagnosing dyslexia in adult learners, the dyslexia teacher and/or the educational psychologist must have “developmentally sensitive knowledge and skills to identify dyslexia across the lifespan” (Sadusky et al., 2021: 2), which implies subjectivity. It is suggested that such skills are required to establish proof of dyslexia towards the authorisation of additional support and *reasonable adjustments* within universities (Singleton, 1999). Elliott and Grigorenko (2014b) highlight the need for assessment to confirm a diagnosis for intervention, rather than assessment for diagnosis. This perspective needs to be considered from both viewpoints. Adult learners seek a diagnosis to facilitate access to tailored resources and support, which is not available without a diagnosis. Therefore, to consider interventions based on evidence-based, rather than contested diagnostic labels, would be more supportive towards meeting the needs of mature quasi-dyslexic learners.

Rack (1997) found adult learners feared undertaking dyslexia tests or diagnostic assessments, because of what it meant for those who did not obtain a formal diagnosis of dyslexia. Although the diagnosis of dyslexia remains scientifically contentious and theoretically uncertain, a diagnostic label such as dyslexia can have emotional, social, and psychological significance to a mature quasi-dyslexic learner in university. The data produced following my initial screen for dyslexia was interpreted by the dyslexia teacher as spiky. This illustrated both strong and weak abilities. As such, the dyslexia teacher made the decision based on her years of experience to consider the need for a further diagnostic assessment with an educational psychologist.

To further explore the abilities of assessors when diagnosing dyslexia reliably and consistently, Ryder and Norwich (2018) gained the perspectives of 118 professional assessors by utilising 42 educational psychologists (EP) and 76 specialist teachers (ST). Both professionals are equally responsible for diagnosing dyslexia or determining a non-dyslexia outcome. The volunteers' professional experience ranged from 1-45 years (a mean of seven years), and each volunteer was required to complete a questionnaire. Eight participants were also interviewed face-to-face around three controversial assessment themes following the analysis of the questionnaire data. The themes for consideration were: (1) The Disability Status of Dyslexia, (2) The Effects of Diagnostic Assessment on Environmental Factors, and (3) The Discrepancy Concept.

The true meaning of the discrepancy model requires there to be a belief in the intelligence quotient (IQ). If such a belief exists, then the discrepancy model means "the discrepancy between IQ and reading constitutes the appropriate measure" (Siegel, 1992: 618). However, if the theory of IQ is inaccurate, then the discrepancy model means "A low reading score, compared to that of chronological age-matched individuals, constitutes the appropriate definition" (Siegel, 1992: 618). Historically, a discrepancy between reading difficulty and intelligence quotient (IQ) may have been

considered indicative of dyslexia (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020). However, reviews by Fletcher et al. (2018), Siegel (1999) and Stanovich (1999) express significant concern regarding the use of the discrepancy model towards reading difficulty and IQ, since the focus is on past reading ability, rather than actual reading potential.

For readers with dyslexia, the association between reading ability and IQ will be altered due to reduced exposure to text/words and the potential for this to result in limited accomplishment of vocabulary and general knowledge (Mather and Schneider, 2023). As such, Siegel and Hurford (2019: 23) contend that the discrepancy definition of dyslexia is "archaic and inappropriate." Therefore, to accurately consider the findings from Ryder and Norwich's (2018) study, there needs to be clarity on the EP and the ST opinions of IQ. One of the most controversial themes of the study was theme (3) The Discrepancy Concept, which Odegard et al. (2022: 303) states are "intended to differentiate individuals with dyslexia from garden-variety poor readers based on the logic of exceptionalism."

Odegard et al. (2022) express the concept of exceptionalism in similar terms to the theory of IQ, as they consider IQ to be culturally biased by disadvantaging individuals from different social and educational backgrounds. The EP and the ST opinions of IQ can determine a learner's potential based on an outcome. Although less than ten per cent of assessors did not give credit to the discrepancy concept when confirming their diagnosis, subjective views of the concept were clear. Assessors were aware of the discrepancy concept's lack of credibility; however, comments on the subject were noncommittal, such as "It's gone out!" "I think the discrepancy model has been discredited long ago," and tellingly, "It depends on whose camp you're coming from, really, doesn't it?" (Ryder and Norwich, 2018: 117). Consequently, all eight assessors used the outcome of intellectual testing to apply an element of discrepancy, which may further establish their opinion of IQ, in that intellectual testing may be more widely accepted than the discrepancy model.

Findings from the Ryder and Norwich (2018) study also confirmed concerns about the consistency, reliability, and interpretation of literacy difficulties. There was uncertainty about the face validity of psychometric test results, showing a significant difference between the two professional groups, the EP and ST. Almost 50% of the assessors recognised the necessity to determine the need for the assessment, such as for intervention and/or for statutory disability entitlement. 80% of the group also agreed that environmental factors did not cause dyslexia, but may contribute to worsening commonly presented difficulties often associated with dyslexia. Ryder and Norwich (2018) consider the controversy surrounding socioeconomic and environmental factors. Traditionally, such factors were not to be taken into consideration as part of diagnostic assessments. However, according to Ryder and Norwich (2018), the complexity of these components makes it almost impossible to separate them.

More recently, these factors have been considered by EP; however, such variations are difficult to measure, as often based on personal and past experiences of the assessor. As a direct consequence, such differences inevitably result in varying interpretations (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014b). One of the assessors strongly endorsed a socially constructive view of dyslexia and said, "It is extremely difficult to determine whether mature students, particularly those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have an underlying difficulty or educational disadvantage" (Ryder and Norwich, 2018: 212). To resolve such disparate views, two of the largest campaigner groups, the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and the British Dyslexia Association (BDA), have both specified within their definitions that a diagnosis of dyslexia is not a reflection of a person's IQ. However, to include intelligence within the definition shows the concept of dyslexia remains ambivalent and sits within two fields: neurodevelopmental disorders (brain development and functioning) and specific learning disorders, the ability to read and process written text.

The concept of implicit theories of intelligence (ITI), where a person's belief that their level of intelligence is either permanent or capable of change, may further impact their level of motivation, learning and accomplishment. Blackwell et al. (2007) explain the association between believing that one can change their level of intelligence, as it is viewed as developmental, as opposed to a view of intelligence as a fixed quality. Either view impacts positively or negatively, depending on the ability to succeed or fail. For failing mature quasi-dyslexic learners, the societal structure of universities can negatively impact their transition as they contend with the academic conventions and a new/different learning environment. The impact on their psychological and sociological needs, for instance, student identity, belonging and self-perception, reinforces the belief that their intelligence is fixed, and that failure is inevitable.

So far, an exploration of the literature has exposed the complexities and multifaceted approaches considered by assessors as they attempt to diagnose dyslexia in mature learners. Concerns regarding the inconsistency and reliability of diagnoses are apparent, and although the literature rejects the dyslexia label in favour of seeking evidence-based interventions to support learning, there remains recognition of the emotional and social importance a diagnosis can bring. Despite the disuse of discrepancy models, IQ considerations remain influential in dyslexia diagnoses.

The transition to university often disrupts the established identities of mature quasi-dyslexic learners and often results in them struggling to adapt their previous roles and life experiences to the expectations of being a student. This dislocation becomes further magnified when academic challenges are interpreted as personal imperfections, rather than the consequence of systemic challenges, reinforcing negative self-perception and eroding confidence.

2.7 Learning and Study Strategies

The literature has established the complexity and importance of assessment for evidence-based interventions to support learning in universities. The development

of metacognitive knowledge can support learners in understanding and processing their thoughts, enabling them to determine which study strategies best suit their learning needs (Stanton et al., 2021), often referred to as "learning to learn" (Wingate, 2007: 392). Corkett et al. (2006) acknowledge that study skills are necessary for a person to study and learn adequately, for instance, time management and organisation, sourcing of information, and effective reading. These ordering techniques can be taught and may enable a learner to develop a deeper and broader understanding; however, there is no conclusive or best approach strategy (Awada and Plana, 2018). Prior knowledge of learning can no longer be assumed by universities, due to the growing diversity of students enrolling to study in higher education (Haggis, 2006).

Chevalier et al. (2017) conducted a quantitative study comparing the use of metacognitive reading, learning and study strategies among university students with a history of reading difficulties (HRD) and no reading difficulty (NRD) to identify which strategies were linked to academic success. The participants, first-year undergraduate students, studied at a diverse university in the USA. An online survey was completed by 372 students, of whom (n77) had a self-declared HRD and (n295) with NRD. An Adult Reading History Questionnaire-Revised (ARHQ-R) assessment tool created by Parrila et al. (2007) was conducted online to evaluate reading difficulties in adults.

The study found that students with HRD used different strategies than their peers with NRD. The findings differentiated the lower academic achievement of the students with HRD compared to their peers with NRD. Therefore, despite functioning at the university level, those with HRD continued to encounter challenges with decoding and reading rate. For some, this led to avoiding courses that required intensive reading, further limiting their exposure to new vocabulary and consequently reducing the opportunity to improve the automaticity of reading.

The findings further suggest that when time constraints were removed, the performance associated with reading comprehension was comparable between those with HRD and NRD, but when under timed conditions, those with HRD encountered a significant decline in their performance, highlighting the ongoing impact that reading difficulties can have on academic performance. A similar study of students with literacy difficulties and no formal diagnosis of dyslexia by Niolaki et al. (2020) found that students endured increased levels of anxiety, making them reluctant to speak out and express their opinions. This psychological characteristic reduced their self-confidence and self-esteem. Students with poor academic achievements may be an elevated risk for assessment failure or not completing their studies. This signifies the importance of students self-reporting their academic challenges early in their studies.

The psychological impact of ongoing low academic achievement in the first year of university negatively impacts a student's motivation and attitude to studying, whilst impacting their psychological and sociological self-perception, interconnectedness and sense of belonging. Stevenson et al. (2010) characterise a double deficit model in mature learners' self-perception by defining "low aspirations" with a "lack of academic qualifications" (Stevenson et al., 2010: 107), the institutional solutions appear to be limited to "bolted-on" modules, to support students from WP backgrounds (Jones and Thomas, 2005: 618), with limited awareness of independent learning or metacognitive strategies. The study concluded that students with an HRD used fewer metacognitive strategies. However, this was only considered true regarding the selecting main ideas which the study explains as "picking out important information for further study" (Chevalier et al., 2017: 2). Subsequently, this narrow meaning may limit the range of study options, due to other probable relevant strategies used by students with HRD to manage their difficulties not been listed.

Heiman and Precel (2003) found similar outcomes regarding different metacognitive strategies, as students with HRD relied more on writing summaries, which may be

considered a strategy for selecting main ideas. Writing summaries could also be reflective of an adaptive approach to learning, especially for learners who struggle with more generalised strategies. An adaptive learning approach promotes a student-focused learning model which emphasises learning based on prior knowledge, preferences and differences (Cardiel et al., 2022). Similar to flash cards and practice papers, writing summaries is considered self-testing in preparation for recalling information (Dunlosky et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2018; Morehead et al., 2019). This further suggests that students with HRD rely more on alternative methods that align with their strengths.

Chevalier et al. (2017) highlighted the significant need for targeted interventions to improve the metacognitive and behavioural strategies for students with HRD, towards improving their university experience. To gain a deeper understanding of the adult student in university with reading and writing difficulties, Pirttimaa et al. (2015) delved into the subjective descriptions and understandings of ten self-reporting Finnish students. The study used semi-structured interviews to explore the students' difficulties and evaluate how they expressed ways of coping. A coping strategy within the context of learning is defined as a plan of action that is followed, "either in anticipation of encountering a stressor or as a direct response to stress as it occurs, to reduce the level of stress that we experience" (Martin et al., 2009: 765).

The students from three different university institutions all self-reported as slow readers who struggled to understand what they had read. The sample of males (n3) and females (n6) with a mean age of 35 years was thematically analysed. The researchers' theoretical perspective used a sociocultural theory, which perceives that one's identity can be affected by social interaction with other individuals and by what society believes to be of value (Mukhalalati and Taylor, 2019). The findings suggest that to cope, some students would choose to hide their reading and writing difficulties for fear of being labelled as "lazy and stupid" or "careless" (Pirttimaa et al.,

2015: 12). Alternatively, to meet the challenges of reading and writing, a student would have to dedicate more time to studying and/or lower their overall expectation.

The delayed course progression potentially had a negative effect on a student's psychological and sociological self-perception, which is considered an important dimension towards community development in a university. Furthermore, the significance of interconnectedness and social metacognition, which happens when peers work together and share ideas, is evident (Sotardi, 2022; Van De Bogart et al., 2017; Won et al., 2021). In Finland, a student is responsible for their learning, as it is considered to develop autonomy, towards ensuring the necessary adjustments and support are provided. It may be probable that the lack of student diversity within the Finnish education system has the potential to create confident learners. With an awareness of metacognitive strategies and study skills, there is potential to become a self-assured learner in university, whereas in UK universities, this difference still retains an inferred deficit.

Bergey et al.'s (2017) large-scale study included 847 first-year university students at one Canadian university. The research aimed to examine whether students with a history of reading difficulty (HRD) were part of an academically vulnerable community and whether educating them with study strategies would have a favourable outcome. The average age for both samples was 18 years, and more than half of both samples were female. The number of students who reported an HRD was (n244) compared to (n603) students with no reading difficulties (NRD). Up-to-date sources from studies that used self-reporting as a way of obtaining data were utilised (Deacon et al., 2012; Kirby, 2007; Kirby et al., 2008; Leavett et al., 2014; Snowling et al., 2012). Analysis of the questionnaires found that students with HRD obtained lower levels of academic achievement than those with NRD. They used fewer metacognitive reading and study strategies, and their reported strategy use did not improve their academic achievement.

Bergey et al.'s (2017) study shows the academic vulnerability of university students with a past HRD, who continued to struggle despite metacognitive strategy training and subsequently used fewer metacognitive actions. The outcome suggests the students had limited metacognitive knowledge, determined by a lack of understanding of what works best to meet their needs or challenges in effectively applying strategies in the real world. Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition, often described as thinking about thinking, has four distinguishing components: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experience, metacognitive goals (or tasks) and metacognitive actions (or strategies). Applying the concept of metacognition to the university students in the Bergey et al. (2017) study immediately acknowledges that metacognition can be taught, and the application of the concept could significantly improve outcomes for students with an HRD. By use of sustained instruction and scaffolding, Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition would enhance students awareness of their own learning and encourage ownership over the reading process.

Upon further analysis, the results were grouped by Faculty; the highest percentage of students with NRD was in Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and the lowest percentage group was health professionals, journalism, and management. In addition, students with HRD had "lower scores on multiple scales, including attitude, concentration, information processing, motivation, selecting the main idea, testing strategies, anxiety (indicating greater anxiety), and metacognitive reading strategies" (Bergey et al., 2017: 86). Similarly Badger et al. (2001) consider that students who begin university having completed Access to Higher Education courses are more likely to take notes purely to remember. They often used the least number of metacognitive actions/strategies when note-taking, compared with 'traditional' students who use the most varied techniques. The Bergey et al. (2017) study had some limitations regarding the lack of detail of the students with an HRD and the limitations of standardised self-reporting questionnaires. Although the

questionnaires determined that students with HRD were considered academically vulnerable

Adopting Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition to analyse findings from the Bergey et al. (2017) study highlights that, despite the STEM discipline showing a high percentage of students with NRD, versus the high percentage with HRD in health profession courses, comparably, the students were all goal-driven and career-oriented and therefore intrinsically motivated. Flavell (1979) maintains that metacognitive development is determined by experience and self-awareness. Which, Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) found was significant among learners with a 'non-traditional' educational background, where their motivation and persistence were shaped by social connections, goal/career relevance and a strong sense of community. This highlights that with intentional design and support, the concept of metacognition can support adult learners to succeed in university.

This section of the literature review considered learning and study strategies for students who self-identified with HRD. The findings emphasised the importance of detecting such academic challenges early to ensure support was provided to enhance their academic success and well-being. Metacognitive knowledge was considered essential to build confidence and establish friendship groups.

2.8 University and Widening Participation

A growing number of access routes exist to sustain WP in universities; consequently, the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) and Access to Higher Education (AHE) diplomas remain popular for mature learners. Black (2022) debates whether university entry routes for mature learners adequately support the development of academic skills. Universities focus on performative outcomes (metrics), which demonstrate ability rather than equipping a learner with broader academic skills such as critical thinking. Therefore, when the performance outcome of mature learners was compared to students with 'traditional' advanced-level

qualifications, mature learners scored significantly lower (Black, 2022). Likewise, Smith (2018) contends that the support systems for students accessing university, such as BTEC, need to be addressed more closely to prepare for a change in the learning environment, pedagogical styles, and the increased need to become a self-regulated learner, able and willing to engage in self-directed learning in a university.

Nurse education in the UK is very much influenced by performance-based pedagogy, an approach which prioritises measurable outcomes and skill acquisition. This approach is to prepare student nurses to meet the professional standards required for practice (NMC, 2018); however, the literature illustrates that this approach risks increasing the theory-practice gap (Cook, 1991; Landers, 2000; Tappen, 2022), which the profession recognises needs to be “bridged, breached, avoided or negotiated” (Greenway et al., 2019: 1). Ultimately, performance-based pedagogy remains teacher-centred, often assuming the process of learning to be linear and sequential. This structure minimises student autonomy and the opportunity for critical thinking, student engagement and reflection (Mackintosh-Franklin, 2016). The functional approach, Mackintosh-Franklin (2016) concludes, creates nursing courses guided by the acquisition of skills rather than the development of critical thinking skills and personal development.

Conversely, independent learning should equally be utilised to encourage and develop a nurse's ability to think critically when making clinical judgements in the delivery of patient care (Chiang et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2021). Furthermore, reflective thinking and metacognition remain central to nursing and lifelong learning (Bjerkvik and Hilli, 2019; Teekman, 2000). Although the term independent learning is flexible, within a university, it is often regarded as the ability to monitor one's progress and have ownership of one's learning needs while setting clear, evaluative objectives (McLinden and Edwards, 2011; Murad and Varkey, 2008). The Higher Education Academy (HEA) found that many university students were unfamiliar with the true definition of independent learning and therefore likened it to

their experiences of school homework, which adopted a surface approach to learning. Bingham and O'Hara (2007) and Pokorny* and Pokorny (2005) acknowledge the improbability of students becoming autonomous, independent learners when they have limited experience with such learning practices. As such, Briggs et al. (2012) express the importance of supporting students to develop key knowledge for independent learning before starting university, as it is acknowledged as crucial to enhance self-perception and confidence.

The importance of creating learning communities that advocate open communication can further improve confidence and reduce feelings of isolation, which hinder independent learning (Northall et al., 2016). The intent of education is established in the literature of critical pedagogy and liberatory pedagogy in the hope of "equalising the relationship of power between teachers and students, communities and universities" towards the "emancipation of oppressed groups" (Saleebey and Scanlon, 2005: 2). Darder et al. (2017: 1) state:

"Critical pedagogy is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between education and power in society and, thus, uncompromisingly committed to the amelioration of inequalities and social exclusions in the classroom and society at large."

Mature learners with limited awareness of critical thinking skills, metacognitive strategies and learning skills, all crucial for studying at university, may be underprepared for independent learning, navigating institutional structures and engaging with critical pedagogy. Critical and liberatory pedagogies founded by the work of Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux are influential to feminist scholars such as bell hooks, towards challenging power hierarchies to create practical spaces allowing learners to become critical thinkers (hooks, 2003). These pedagogies examine traditional systems that reinforce power imbalances and oppress students perceived to have unique learning styles, which do not align with rigid academic structures. Such pedagogies directly address the barriers faced by mature quasi-dyslexic

learners by emphasising the importance of recontextualising universities as a space where 'non-traditional' learners can flourish.

Despite the concepts of critical and liberatory pedagogy, many universities continue to proceed within frameworks that prioritise standardised assessments and overlook the individual needs of mature learners. Evans et al. (2021) argue that critical pedagogy should challenge traditional and hierarchical knowledge structures to directly address the issues of equity, inclusivity, and empowerment in the classroom, particularly when 'traditional' pedagogical models might exclude 'non-traditional' mature learners. Post-1992 universities remain pivotal to WP initiatives and would hugely benefit from adopting these approaches, due to the increasing number of students with diverse learning needs, for instance, mature quasi-dyslexic learners, including learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. Coincidentally, many students who obtained entry into university through WP, during the initial stages of academic assessments, appeared to struggle towards achieving the required grades (Ryder, 2016; Singleton, 1999). Even though they were considered to be dedicated and capable (Kenny et al., 2011).

Academic integration is portrayed by Katartzi and Hayward (2020) as the considered length of time for a student to adjust from further education to the pedagogical regimes of university, such as modes of teaching and assessment and independent learning. The "pedagogical frictions" which emerge from "the prevalence of the self-directed mode of study, the lack of support systems and the limited personalised academic input" result in students' judging and internalising their academic challenges (Katartzi and Hayward, 2020b: 2378). Understanding students' individual needs and supporting them through challenges as they transition from further to higher education requires more than a single event. Hussey and Smith (2010) mention the discrete aspects of transition and the responsibility of educational institutions to establish courses designed around a student's individual development. Northall et al. (2016) found that the WP agenda left university students in need of

targeted support to ensure they maintain their studies and succeed at university, despite them showing elevated self-control, empathy and resilience (Pitt et al., 2014).

An American study by Richardson (2021) explored the subjective experiences of 30 post-secondary students, female (n17) and male (n13), who exhibited quasi-dyslexic characteristics but had no diagnosis. The study found the dyslexia label harmful, causing embarrassment and insecurity in a non-nurturing environment, leaving the student feeling invisible. Interestingly, the non-nurturing environment was mentioned by 67% (n13) of female students, but was not considered of consequence to male participants, as they did not regard this as a contributory factor towards their negative feelings. The female participants of Richardson's (2021) study referred to the environment as non-nurturing or, as Leathwood and O'Connell (2003: 599) state, based on "masculinist conceptions", which convey a lack of empathy and community building, where exhibiting emotional expression and vulnerability may be frowned upon, further creating a sense of isolation. For some adult learners, the fear and embarrassment of asking for academic support often led them to do so when they underperform or fail academic assessments (Van Hoek et al., 2019). The study concluded that students who displayed dyslexia traits should be encouraged to develop their learning strategies rather than forced to accept the more 'traditional' approach to learning.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) and Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT provides two aspects for analysis. The initial theoretical framework, Deci and Ryan (1985) assert that motivation is viewed as a continuum, from a lack of motivation to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, by the acknowledgement of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The updated Ryan and Deci (2020) SDT emphasises practical implications for education and how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can become internalised, whereby external expectations become gradually accepted as one's own. Furthermore, clarification of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in real-world contexts is considered for a

wider audience, such as education. Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT provides a framework for understanding the findings of Richardson's (2021) study, particularly concerning how student motivation is influenced by the achievement of basic psychological needs. The study emphasises the importance of autonomy through giving students a voice and a choice in learning, while competence can be achieved through respectful communication towards building competence. The study determined that building trusting relationships between staff and students supported feelings of acceptance and connectivity, reflecting SDT's basic psychological need of relatedness.

Rack (1997: 67) further speculates on the psychological impact of dyslexia testing in adults and the "fear that they will be found not to be dyslexic, but stupid. Why else would they be experiencing difficulties which others around them seem not to have?" Some adult learners were reluctant to seek support because they wanted to experience a similar university life to their peers and preferred not to be identified as disabled students. Several studies concur that various factors may contribute to the delay or disclosure of academic challenges (Dobson-Waters and Torgerson, 2021; Ridley, 2011). Students remain reluctant to undergo dyslexia testing due to the fear of ridicule (Mortimore, 2013), perceptions of inadequacy (Sumner, 2015), or when secondary symptoms impact a previous diagnosis of dyslexia, and an altered judgment now considers the previous diagnosis of dyslexia to no longer be apparent (Cameron, 2021).

To explore the nature and extent of lecturers' awareness of, and attitudes towards, dyslexia and students with dyslexia, Ryder and Norwich (2019) studied 164 self-selecting lecturers covering a range of disciplines such as Humanities (50%), STEM (31%) and Artistic/Vocational (19%), across 12 UK universities. An online questionnaire was completed by participants from six pre-1992 universities and six post-1992 universities. A broad range of lecturers were then invited to supply further commentary on the responses to the questionnaire. The outcome, despite the

lecturer's acknowledgement of dyslexia awareness and training, showed their knowledge and understanding to be lacking. The data revealed that 46% of lecturers agreed that they were confused between students with dyslexia and those who had negative prior educational experiences. While 22% of lecturers perceived the difficulties experienced by students in teaching and learning were caused by the "institution's literacy barriers" (Ryder and Norwich, 2019: 167), 8% felt university was no place for those with "poor literacy."

These findings further highlight the importance of commonality-differentiation in pedagogy (Norwich, 2013), where lecturers consider commonality. In consideration of what all students need to learn, we adopt inclusive teaching methods. However, there needs to be continued support to meet the needs of the individual, for instance, *reasonable adjustments* to support specific needs, such as dyslexia. As discussed by Richardson (2021), students within universities should be taught practical and helpful approaches to establish effective strategies and techniques for learning, especially learners with quasi-dyslexic characteristics. Providing adult learners with supportive key information before their studies may enable organised planning and the considered need for additional support.

2.9 Rationale for Further Study

The literature review has identified that the objective or the absolute diagnosis of dyslexia is contested. Recognition of determining factors that may impede a diagnosis of dyslexia in mature learners has resulted in a lack of specific individual support to meet their learning needs. Nevertheless, the challenges they face are real and potentially distort their university experience. From Bourdieu's (1986) perspective, mature quasi-dyslexic learners may lack the established cultural capital attributed to a dyslexia diagnosis, reinforcing their marginalisation within the field of higher education. Such needs create a misplacement between their habitus, for instance, their assumed disposition towards learning, and the academic expectation

of the university, which generates difficulties in acquiring new knowledge.

To address these disparities, the literature suggests that university pedagogies must be reconsidered through inclusive learning environments and inclusive approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. In addition to pedagogy, the re-examination of study skills and strategies used for smooth integration into universities, particularly concerning dominant linguistic and academic norms of the universities, will prove beneficial. The literature review has exposed barriers to mature quasi-dyslexic learners, demonstrating how exclusion from formal support can adversely impact their academic performance, motivation, and attitudes toward learning. Furthermore, societal structures and the language of universities can serve as forms of symbolic power, potentially alienating mature learners and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, affecting their identity, and hampering their sense of belonging and self-worth within the academic field.

2.10 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter has supplied valuable information and illustrated areas of good practice, whilst exploring the evolving definitions of dyslexia in this multifaceted cognitive and neurological condition. The challenges in diagnosing mature quasi-dyslexic learners appear to be associated with factors such as compensatory strategies, self-identification (often delayed), and the coexistence of other conditions such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety, and mental health. Although equality legislation highlights the need for inclusive practices, there is a lack of research regarding how institutional policies contend with the needs of mature quasi-dyslexic learners without a formal dyslexia diagnosis.

The chapter concludes with unanswered questions regarding the reliability and theoretical underpinnings to determine an individual with dyslexia versus a non-dyslexic poor reader (Gibbs and Elliott, 2020). This lack of regard impacts

psychological and sociological self-perception and subsequently the mature quasi-dyslexic learner experiences feelings of inadequacy, social stigma and internalises their perceived and/or actual failings. The ongoing reliance on formal diagnostic frameworks to decide who is eligible to receive tailored support reflects institutional power by defining and controlling what counts as legitimate knowledge of dyslexia. Subsequently, it favours performance-based metrics over a comprehensive understanding.

Chapter Three introduces the philosophical and theoretical perspectives which inform the study, specifically interpretative phenomenology, and feminist standpoint theory.

CHAPTER 3: PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

This chapter will discuss my epistemology and ontology whilst illustrating how this aligns with the research questions. The use of interpretative phenomenology as the preferred approach will be justified, along with the rationale for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to interpret the participants' experiences. To explore the relationship between power and knowledge production, this study uses psychological and sociological theories and structural frameworks that align with the feminist standpoint theory's examination of power and inequality. Combining both perspectives provides a more profound analysis of how knowledge, power and social structures intersect in universities.

Note on Capitalisation:

Throughout this thesis, capitalisation is selectively used to distinguish between formal, named theories and general conceptual terms. The names of established theoretical frameworks, such as Self-Determination Theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Experiential Learning Theory, are capitalised. This is in line with academic convention. In contrast, general or descriptive concepts, such as Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice and feminist standpoint theory are written in lower case, as they are not formalised theory names. This approach aims to ensure consistency throughout the thesis.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Chapter One presented the foundation of this research study: my encounters with teaching and learning, and the consequences of these experiences. Cohen et al. (2011) describe ontology as the nature of reality or a phenomenon capable of extracting multiple beliefs, which are socially constructed. This viewpoint has positioned and guided the study, along with meaningful consideration towards my

ontological position. My reality as a registered children's nurse has always been to seek out truth and meaning through the elicitation of knowledge of children, young people, and their families. Throughout my nursing career, I have used this ability to gather knowledge and information about a child/young person and their family to further understand and meet their holistic healthcare needs. My enquiring behaviour transferred into education and allowed me to consider how best to meet the teaching and learning needs of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students, by recognising their diversity and past experiences, which they bring to their university nursing course.

As an insider researcher with a nursing background and personal insight into dyslexia screening and assessment, I am embedded within the organisation of my research (Edwards, 1999; Mercer, 2007; Smyth and Holian, 2008) which provides a unique perspective and access to firsthand experiences and insights. This researcher position allows for a deeper understanding of the internal dynamics, culture, and context of the university, towards enriching the research and the possibility of a more complex interpretation of the findings. However, throughout the study, I found my positionality fluctuated between an insider to outsider perspective to a greater extent than I had anticipated. During the interview process, I built a rapport with participants and ensured an empathetic and safe environment, where each individual felt able to be open, honest and in several instances vulnerable. Yet, during the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) phase, I adopted an outsider position and used theoretical frameworks such as Bourdieu's (1986) habitus and feminist standpoint theory to critically analyse their lived experience. As an outsider researcher, I had to ensure my own values and academic position did not reinforce the power hierarchy (Chavez, 2008). Therefore, a reflexive approach became consequential. Using a reflective journal assisted me in acknowledging when my empathy may have manipulated my interpretation, rather than allowing the voice of the participant's lived experience to be established independently, as the starting point for research and a vital source of knowledge (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1991;

Hartsock, 1983a; Smith, 2002). Consequently, the research process I use needs to remain transparent through self-reflection and reflexivity (Greene, 2014). As a registered nurse, I am familiar with self-reflection, which guides me to improve and maintain continuing professional development (CPD) (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2018a).

Schwandt (2001: 224) defines reflexivity as "(a) the process of critical self-reflection on one's biases, theoretical predispositions, and preferences; (b) an acknowledgement that the enquirer is part of the setting, context and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand; and (c) a means for critically inspecting the entire research process". Personal reflexivity concerning my values, beliefs and life experiences is also at the root of my epistemology. Reflexivity is crucial within the research process as it permits researchers' to "intentionally reveal to his (sic) audience the underlying epistemological assumptions which caused him (sic) to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers in a particular way and finally present his (sic) findings in a particular way" (Ruby, 1980: 157). This quote illustrates the importance of acknowledging and understanding one's positionality as an insider researcher. Positionality influences aspects of this study, including the research questions, data collection methods, interpretation of findings, and conclusions drawn. Reflecting on my perspectives, biases, and experiences enables thought about how such factors shape the research process and outcomes. This self-awareness allows for more transparent and critical research practices, enhancing the overall credibility and validity of the study. It remains significant to seek originality and uniqueness within research, whilst considering the daily lived experience of a participant (Roger et al., 2018). While appreciating that knowledge is socially situated (Crotty, 1998) and dependent upon an individual's encounters, perceptions, subjective views, different feelings and no absolute truths.

3.3 Interpretative Phenomenology as the Preferred Approach

A unique aspect of phenomenology is that it is considered both a theory and a method of research (Koopman, 2015), whilst it also aims to understand and describe phenomena through the lived experience of an individual. Phenomenology engages with interpretivism and social constructionism by acknowledging the active role of human experience and consciousness in knowledge production, seeing that knowledge is socially situated and constructed through interactions with other people. Phenomenological research uses the state *epoché*, further described by Ness and Fusch (2015) as bracketing, or as phenomenological reduction (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020). Bracketing is a methodological strategy to ensure the researcher does not influence a participant's understanding of their experience. As an insider researcher, this was a challenge as some of the participants knew me in my various roles rather than as a researcher, such as a module leader or a course deputy; equally, I knew them. Gearing (2004) describes the application of bracketing to be ambiguous and complicated, even though it is recognised as unique to phenomenological inquiry. A specific scheme to guide researchers to achieve bracketing is unavailable within the literature (Gearing, 2004; Wall et al., 2004). Upon further consideration of the analytical phase of interpretative phenomenology, Giorgi (2011) considered the analytical phase of interpretative phenomenology and found the inclusion of bracketing to be lacking. Therefore, Koch (1995) considers that when the interpretative approach of phenomenology is applied, pre-understanding cannot be eliminated. Feminist theorists would agree that researchers bring their own lived experience; therefore, the idea of researcher objectivity becomes challenged (Collins, 2002; Harding, 1986; Smith, 2005). Interpretation can never be truly neutral; therefore, researchers are encouraged to reflect on their position, power, and assumptions throughout the research process.

Within phenomenology, there are three divisions: transcendental, existential and interpretative, which is also referred to as hermeneutic phenomenology, originating

from the work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology often incorporates the process of bracketing, whereby the researcher supposedly has no assumptions about the participants' experience and can set aside prior knowledge and beliefs about the phenomena they are studying, therefore viewing them objectively (LeVasseur, 2003). Positivists believe in objectivity, that the researcher can be detached and neutral from their presuppositions and that one should not pretend otherwise (Hammersley, 2000). Insider positionality, along with my subjective experiences of dyslexia, excludes the transcendental phenomenological approach, primarily because of my inability to truly separate from the current study and to create a bias-free understanding of the phenomena. Existential phenomenology considers that an individual is created by their experience and that they have the freedom to adjust their experience using free choice (Von Eckartsberg, 1998). This interpretation was not relatable to the current study, as the participants are not able to alter their experience of teaching and learning, as the course layout is predetermined.

The most suitable division of phenomenology with which to describe and interpret, rather than explain, subjective realities (Qutoshi, 2018), of a mature quasis-dyslexic undergraduate nursing student is the interpretative approach. Interpretivists and critical qualitative researchers tend to consider the researcher to be a part of the data. Within interpretative phenomenology, although reference is made to the concept of bracketing as a technique towards ensuring the validity of data collection and analysis (Ahern, 1999), there remains existing evidence of achievability or even desirability (Gyollai, 2020; Humble and Cross, 2010; Koch, 1995). However, this approach acknowledges that a researcher's past experiences and knowledge are the primary contributing factors that determine the worthiness of the phenomenon in question (Neubauer et al., 2019). Interpretative phenomenology can be beneficial within universities as it can enable academics to gain information from the students' voiced lived experiences, which is central to a teaching and learning environment. Consequently, I have chosen the approach of interpretative phenomenology, as it is

most suited to address the study's research questions. To further underpin the individual meaning-making of phenomenology, Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice will be used to provide a structural and social explanation for the individual's lived experience, alongside feminist standpoint theory to emphasise how the positionality of marginalised groups can be used to challenge dominant power structures.

3.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Guided by Feminist Standpoint Theory Framework

IPA was developed by Jonathan Smith and is an established strategy within qualitative psychological research (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014; Smith and Osborn, 2004). IPA supports the detailed explorations of personal lived experiences, especially when those experiences are emotive (Smith and Osborn, 2015). IPA is rooted in the principles of phenomenology, interpretative and idiography, by which it draws on the phenomenological concepts of Husserl (1964), Heidegger (1927), and Merleau-Ponty (1962). Within this approach, Martin Heidegger's interpretative lens of phenomenology includes aspects of transcendental phenomenology which results in, "a method which is descriptive because it is concerned with how things appear and letting things speak for themselves, and interpretative because it recognises there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon" (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014: 8). The analytical feature of IPA is idiographic, as the individuals' subjective lived experience is at the heart of a study (Love et al., 2020). The approach fully complements the lived experience as it encompasses a phenomenological framework, enabling the researcher to retain the candour of the participants' voices as they reflect upon their experiences. Within this form of analysis, Alase (2017) expressed the usefulness of how an individual recounts an experience and the researchers' ability to also interpret any relationship between their cognition, linguistics and emotions.

An IPA approach provides an additional framework to further guide that analytical process (Hallstein, 1999), while enabling researchers' flexibility to analyse complex information. This flexibility is achieved by the use of multiple analytical methods within a single study and is referred to as analytical pluralism (Chamberlain et al., 2011; Clarke et al., 2015; Spiers and Riley, 2018). Cohen et al. (2022) encourage a pluralist approach that combines different epistemological and methodological perspectives, rather than applying a single mindset. The complexities of educational phenomena, in many instances, demand a fusion of lenses to be fully acknowledged. I consider feminist standpoint theory to be a suitable framework for analysing the voices of women, people of colour and marginalised individuals (McClish and Bacon, 2009), particularly within post-1992 universities, where WP has resulted in a more diverse student population. The intersectional nature of such students creates converging forms of oppression, for instance, class, race and disability (hooks, 2000).

Feminist standpoint theory serves as a tool for highlighting distinct areas of knowledge (Hawkesworth, 1999), for examining sociocultural and historical perspectives (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019), and for exploring the relationship between knowledge and politics (Cipriani, 2020; Viswanath and Mullins, 2020). Whilst feminist standpoint is a theory of knowledge it is also a method of doing research, "an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action" (Hesse-Biber, 2014: 55). The goal of feminist standpoint theory is to promote social change and justice for women and other marginalised groups (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007). Feminist theorist Harding (1986; 2016) created the term standpoint theory and stipulates that complete subjectivity and bias cannot be avoided within qualitative research. However, the value of reflexivity must be primary throughout the study, as qualitative research is reliant upon the development of reflexivity. Jamieson et al. (2015: 5) suggest the use of self as a way for the researcher to produce valid and credible qualitative research. Use of self is defined as: "The conscious use of one's whole being in the intentional execution of one's role for

effectiveness in whatever the current situation is presenting” Jamieson et al. (2015: 5) further describe the purpose of the use of self:

“Is to be able to execute a role effectively, for others and the system they’re in, without personal interference (e.g., bias, blindness, avoidance, and agendas) and with enough consciousness to have clear intentionality and choice. Our use of self should always be thought of in a specific context, exercised through some role, in service of something helpful and aligned with one’s personal intentions (i.e., mission, vision, goals, and values).”

Considering the use of self will allow me to consider the impact my identity, social location, and values may have on the research process and the relevance of the participant experiences I have chosen to recount.

When applying feminist standpoint theory as a framework alongside IPA, certain key characteristics remain ambiguous and reveal areas of misalignment between the two frameworks. Although both approaches have a primary interest in lived experiences, the endpoint of analysis for each approach differs. Feminist standpoint theory, while intent on the lived experience, also aims to connect an understanding of the experience to the production of new knowledge to further examine the relationship between power and knowledge (Thompson et al., 2017). In comparison, IPA uses an iterative approach to delve deep into the experience of an individual to understand how they perceive the experience. By adopting a pluralist approach, IPA allows the researcher to understand how the experience is perceived by the participant, whilst the feminist standpoint theory considers the impact on the production of such knowledge to allow for an examination of the relationship between power and knowledge. The adoption of these approaches has a greater potential to expose a multidimensional interpretation of varied aspects of the phenomenon (Frost et al., 2011).

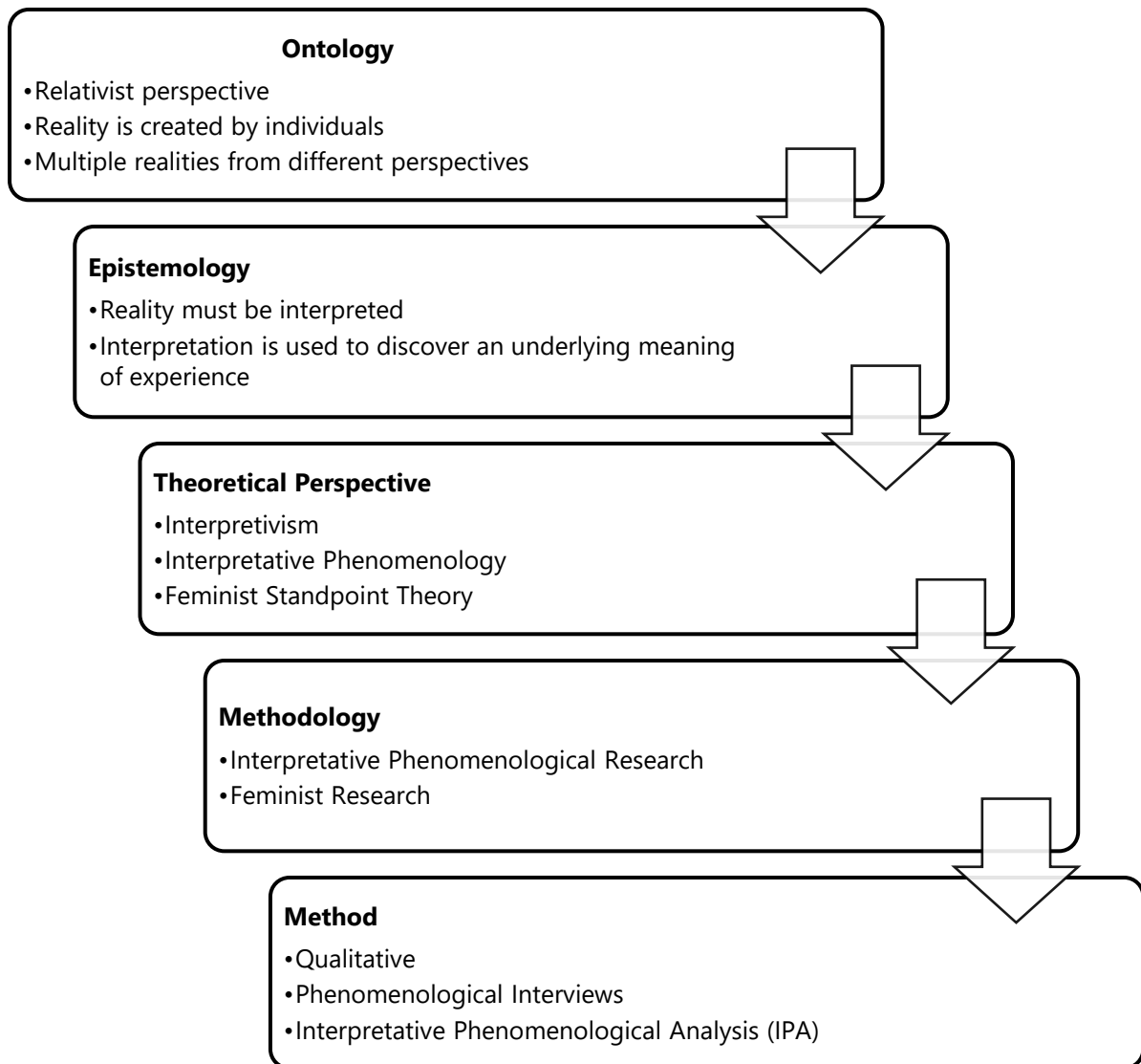
To overcome the disparity between IPA and feminist standpoint theory, an examination of the participant group is essential. When using an IPA approach, a homogenous participant sample for whom the research questions have meaning is

needed. For example, within this study, each participant has experienced academic challenges which they perceived to be a result of dyslexia; however, upon further assessment, none of the participants were considered to have dyslexia. Conversely, feminist standpoint theory welcomes variation within a participant sample by acknowledging the intersectionality within a group of marginalised people (Collins, 2000). Subsequently, each participant's lived experience of starting their nursing course was varied. The diverse entry requirements of the participants, including Access course, BTEC and A/AS levels, provide an opportunity to uncover new knowledge regarding the sociocultural systems of power. This perspective not only reflects epistemic privilege, which signifies the distinctiveness of an individual's personal experience, but also focuses on how the marginalisation of mature quasi-dyslexic learners exposes structural issues within universities (Harding, 2009; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Jaggar, 2004; Narayan, 2004).

3.5 Ontological, Theoretical and Methodological Alignment

The distortion between my paradigm and the positivist knowledge of the dyslexia diagnostic assessment is pertinent to the mature quasi-dyslexic learner experience. Positivism considers knowledge as objective and based on what is observed, measured and factual. My relativist perspective suggests that knowledge, values, and judgements, such as the dyslexia test/assessment, are affected by distinct contexts and subsequently do not apply to all situations or cultures. However, according to the sociological approach, ongoing investigations into creating a better understanding of dyslexia have led to "two incompatible traditional positions on dyslexia, namely the positivistic, diagnostic position, and a humanistic position, or orientation towards normalisation" (Helland and Rommetveit, 2006: 30). As such, my epistemological position considered the need to interpret the lived experience by recognising that each participant's reality is socially constructed. To further understand how each participant perceives and creates meaning in their experience, phenomenological research can achieve that outcome (see Diagram D).

Diagram D: The Formation of my Interpretative Paradigm



3.6 Feminist Standpoint Theory as a Theoretical Lens

Feminist standpoint theory first appeared in the 1970s with key theorists such as Sandra Harding, Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, and Nancy Hartsock. Feminist standpoint theorists consider all knowledge to be socially situated (Hartsock, 1983a), or, as referred to by Haraway (1988), an embodied vision. While feminist standpoint theory prioritises the individual encounter within a socially constructed group, Collins (1997) reinforces that such experiences within marginalised groups can also challenge and reshape societal structures. Wood (2005) regards social location as

significant, considering it shapes the production of knowledge. From this social location, Gurung (2020) also considers feminist standpoint theory as a theory capable of empowering marginalised members of society towards improving situations which may be overlooked by socio-political theories.

Collins (1986), an American sociologist, developed a form of standpoint theory that drew attention to the perspectives of African American women by acknowledging the significance of empowerment and equality for oppressed groups. Collins (1986) challenged dominant power structures by recognising the unique experiences of Black women and their role in resisting oppression. However, to be part of this group, Collins (1986) reiterates the need to recognise what a dominant culture is and to understand oppression. Mature quasi-dyslexic learners can be empowered to understand their oppressions by sharing their lived experiences through research, to impact social change and raise awareness of the importance of equality in universities. Feminist standpoint theory provides a suitable structure as a theoretical framework by which to explore the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students in university who, in this study, are all female, as it enables the researcher to recognise the significance of the social location towards the production of knowledge, which is capable of empowering such learners.

The essence of feminist standpoint theory is that it aspires to support those oppressed groups to take control of their experiences. It is only by changing the environments, discourses, attitudes, positionings, and relationships within universities that it becomes possible to create conditions under which all learners become empowered to achieve and succeed (Shields et al., 2005). People who belong to dominant and privileged groups do not know what outsiders have experienced, and research that focuses on power relations should always begin with those who are marginalised (Toole, 2019). As feminist standpoint theory considers all knowledge to be socially situated, certain socio-political positions of marginalised groups may occupy a position of epistemic privilege, which is an in-depth understanding of

power dynamics, enlightened by lived experience. Epistemic privilege, as stated by Harding (1986) and Haack (1993), also comes with challenges, as some individuals may not always be aware of such systemic biases influencing their experiences.

Hekman (1997) a postmodern feminist who has been judgmental of feminist standpoint, revisits Hartsock's 1980 publication *Money, Sex and Power* and appreciates how this knowledge facilitates the relationship of everyday life with the inquiry of social institutions which shape that life. This perspective extends Hartsock's position that the ruling class's perception of reality is partial and that of the oppressed is closer to the truth. The most crucial step in addressing oppression and inequality is to recognise and assert the lived experience of marginalised individuals, which is often disregarded. Feminist theorists including Collins (2000) and Harding (1991) consider individuals of subjugated knowledge as experts and consequently have the potential to impact change by challenging constructs from a marginalised viewpoint. Collins (2000) views that academic dispositions have the potential to marginalise non-dominant perspectives. Therefore, real change begins by centralising the voices of the oppressed.

Harding (1986) is also well-known for the term 'strong objectivity'. According to Naples and Gurr (2014), strong objectivity states that the analytical relationship between a research participant and the phenomenon of enquiry is what creates strong objectivity by ensuring the voices of those who are marginalised are heard throughout the research process. Brooks (2007) conveys that this approach may result in the researcher intentionally siding with the marginalised groups. To address this matter, a strong reflexive approach alongside strong objectivity is recommended (Harding, 2013). Therefore, researchers must adopt a reflexive approach to their research by acknowledging and incorporating their positionalities. As such, Harding (1986) does not consider standpoint theory to be merely a perspective, but a unique standpoint earned through the lived experience of an individual. This experience is commonly referred to as the epistemic privilege of the oppressed and is a

foundational aspect of the theory, as it positions marginalised individuals as key agents in reshaping societal and institutional structures (Harding, 1986).

Smith (1987) bases her understanding of feminist standpoint theory on her lived experiences of adopting two positions within society: a carer to her children, and simultaneously an undergraduate student. Smith's (2005) exploration of institutional ethnography as a result of her lived experience acknowledges how an individual's daily activities are governed by institutional power structures. Therefore, everyday behaviours of individuals, especially women, are shaped by institutional power structures. My lived experience of the banking model of education would have influenced my belief in the student as a recipient of knowledge. Freire (1970: 72) defines knowledge produced in this context to be "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing." Collins (1990b) and Smith (1987) equally recognise the influence society has on the identity and self-perception of marginalised individuals. For this reason, Smith (2005) used the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to understand how the knower's personal experience was the catalyst for research and the importance of thinking from the inside about what is happening.

Hartsock (1983b) a political philosopher considers the need for both science and politics within her interpretation of the feminist standpoint theory by adopting Marx's theory of how a dominant group's mindset can deform reality. Although Hartsock's perception of the feminist standpoint is established within biology, this should not detract from her understanding. Hartsock (2013) believes the foundation for a feminist standpoint emerges from experiences shaped by the gendered division of labour. However, she also believes that while women may share similar experiences, they may not have the same standpoint, as differences in race, class, and sexuality influence the emergence of individual standpoints. Feminist scholars consider that these social divisions create inequalities within society, which must be challenged and deconstructed.

Essentialism is a notion that dominated many feminist writings in the 1980s, by which it was deemed that all women have essential properties, and it is such properties that women must have to be women (Stone, 2004). Essentialism for feminist standpoint theory can be advantageous, but only when it is critically examined. The essentialist view accepts that traits are fixed and therefore define who we are, but feminist standpoint theory challenges this assumption by observing the influence of social and cultural factors on identity. hooks (2014) affirms that an evaluation of essentialism is crucial as it acknowledges different experiences of Black identity, which establishes the production of diverse cultural knowledge. Collins (2019) likewise, reconsiders essentialism by introducing intersectionality, which, although it has no standard definition, incorporates the idea that the systems of oppression are interconnected, for instance, racism, sexism, social inequalities, and the perceptions of social circumstances are shaped by an individual's position within specific dynamics, e.g., power and/or different locations.

Essentialism results in a unique perspective on social phenomena by applying shared characteristics to individuals or groups. This applies to the participants in this study, who, regardless of their diverse experiences, remain interconnected by the labels of mature and quasi-dyslexia, and the impact these labels have on their lived experience in university. Collins (2019) stresses that her interpretations of essentialism do not imply that all Black women have the same thoughts but are aimed at raising awareness of the marginalised groups and offering ways to improve their positions within society. To ensure that not all women were grouped homogeneously, other theorists, such as Harding (1991) and hooks (2000) chose to extend feminist standpoint theory to accommodate other marginalised groups based on, for example, race, ethnicity, class, and age.

In the early 1990s, feminist standpoint theory became strongly criticised and regarded as "a quaint relic of feminism's less sophisticated past" (Hekman, 1997: 341). Issues around the decline of feminist standpoint theory were primarily

questions opposing the simplistic interpretation of knowledge creation and knowledge of reality, such as truth claims. In *Where's the Power?* Collins (1997: 375) challenges the assumption made by Hekman that "subordinates are less human than their superiors, which makes them less capable of understanding or speaking of their own experiences." Collins (1997: 375) contests the views made by Hekman relating to her belief that standpoint theory is the theory of truth and considers that she may have "missed the point of standpoint theory", which was never intended to be a theory of truth but a considered knowledge/power framework. Collins (1997: 375) concludes, "standpoint theory places less emphasis on individual experiences within socially constructed groups than on the social conditions that construct such groups". Collins' quote means that standpoint theory places more emphasis on social structures and conditions that establish and characterise groups, rather than on distinct individual experiences of particular members.

This viewpoint aligns with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, which explains how individuals internalise societal structures through lived experiences. Although each feminist scholar has a diverse interpretation of the theory, Davis-Popelka and Wood (1997) maintain that there is no unified interpretation of feminist standpoint theory, but multiple distinct standpoint theories. Consequently, feminist standpoint theory and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice both acknowledge the broader social, economic and political pressures. What Bourdieu (1977) terms as the field, which shapes marginalised groups such as women, racial minorities and the working class. Both frameworks highlight how social position within such structures informs knowledge, rather than a person's unique subjective experience within these groups.

Within this study, feminist standpoint theory will present discourse on situated knowledge and power relations based on the mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students' lived experience, whereby the research study gives a platform to the previously ignored and unheard voices of the marginalised group. The theory supports a critical and theoretical response towards interpreting their lived

experiences. Although all of the participants in this study are women, the reason for this may be the fact that within the global health workforce, 90% of nurses are women (Gauci et al., 2022). Their standpoint will be examined to express their lived experience to redefine our social order understanding (Harding, 2004). Each participant will be provided with an opportunity to articulate their experience by using their own choice of words to construct their standpoint, which is influenced by their social and political experience (Harding, 1992; Smith, 2004b). For the principal claims of feminist standpoint theory (see Table 2).

Table 2: The Principles of Feminist Standpoint Theory

Number	Description of the Principle
i.	Knowledge is socially situated in that it reflects the values and experiences of those producing it.
ii.	Marginalised groups are more situated to be aware of their circumstances and therefore ask questions than those who are not marginalised.
iii.	Research should begin with the lives of those who are marginalised within society.

As a well-established practice, feminist standpoint theory will be used as a theoretical framework to understand the experiences assembled from the current study.

Hirschmann (1998: 77) affirms that knowledge is the product of experience and although experiences will generate different bodies of knowledge, different experiences will also bear similarities for all, and therefore “by focusing on standpoint as a methodological and epistemological strategy rather than a particular political positioning, Hartsock’s formulation allows for a multiplicity of feminist standpoints.” To that end, Harding’s (1992: 56) claim remains as such, “starting off research from women’s lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women’s lives but also of men’s lives and of the whole social order”. Upon further analysis of

the works of Hartsock (1983a) and Harding (1986), Hawkesworth (1999) asserts that feminist standpoint theory is an effective analytical tool to explain new knowledge.

3.7 Bourdieu's Conceptual Framework

To explore the conflicts and inequalities identified in the findings, the study uses Bourdieu's conceptual framework. This subsection will define the key terms used throughout the discussions and analysis chapter. The key concepts informing the study include habitus, field, capital, and the theory of practice. Each concept provides a lens through which the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students in university can be understood.

The study uses Bourdieu's (1986) habitus to explore how mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students navigate academic expectations and approaches within the university. Habitus describes a system of internalised dispositions that are shaped by past experiences, in particular social class. Additionally Bourdieu (2000) describes cleft habitus, considered a divergent habitus created when one's internalised disposition becomes misaligned with the expectations of the field

Bourdieu's (1986) field, in the context of the study, refers to a structured space, for instance, a university or a professional practice environment. Within the field, individuals strive to gain various forms of capital, such as a degree.

Bourdieu (1986) elaborates the idea of capital to include cultural, social, academic, and symbolic. Throughout the study, each of these capitals is used to analyse the findings, as follows. Cultural capital considers, for example, one's ability to navigate the university culture and the expectations the new learning environment imposes upon them. Cultural capital can be obtained through family or developed through university peer and academic support systems. The study also considers social capital in regard to the accessibility of resources and academic support provided for the mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students. Additionally, social networks, an aspect

of social capital, promote a sense of belonging and community, essential towards navigating academic and social experiences. Academic capital is more prominent in educational contexts and refers to the use of knowledge, skills and experiences that are valued within the academic university systems. As such, academic capital is often regarded alongside cultural and social capital. Symbolic capital for mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students can be complex, as it is influenced by their pathway into and through the university. Symbolic capital can be regarded, for example, as the respect gained from peers, the establishment of strong connections by participating in activities, and achieving academic success etc. Lastly, symbolic capital, once acquired and applied, can substantiate one's belief in their ability to succeed in university, deconstructing negative stereotypes and assumptions by the university.

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice encompasses the concepts of habitus, capital and field. The framework explains how an individual's practice (actions) originates from the interaction of their internal disposition and external social structures. Using the lens throughout the study offers an understanding of the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students by focusing not only on their actions and behaviours, but more importantly, the systemic and structural inequalities in the university. By considering effective interventions such as challenging misrecognition by creating a more inclusive learning environment and transformative approaches to adapt the fundamental structures and practices, reducing inequality for all mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds.

These concepts are used throughout the thesis to explore the conflicts and inequalities encountered through the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students in university and how their educational experience is influenced by background and interactions with institutional structures.

3.8 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has interpreted the establishment of my epistemology and ontology whilst expanding upon the appropriateness of interpretative phenomenology to elicit the lived experience of the participants in the study. The application of IPA will be enhanced by feminist standpoint theory by way of providing a framework for understanding how oppressed groups experience unique insights into social reality. Supporting literature and a synopsis of how key feminist scholars view standpoint theory underpin my choice of philosophical and theoretical perspectives to facilitate clarity while theorising the lived experience of the participants in the current study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Overview of the Chapter

This Chapter will explain the research methods used in the research, whilst providing context and justification for the study's design. The methods used to collect and analyse the data will also be discussed to allow for the determination of the validity of the study.

Phenomenological research focuses on exploring the lived experiences of individuals to gain insight into their subjective perspectives. It is important to create open-ended questions that delve into the significance of the phenomenon. Through empathetic listening and probing questions, the aim is to uncover the complex layers of meaning embedded within participants' experiences and to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Lauterbach, 2018). This process fosters a space for reflexivity that will allow me to continuously challenge my assumptions and biases, and lead to a richer understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. The feminist standpoint theory will be discussed to establish how it will be used within phenomenological research.

4.1 Introduction

The literature review examined research studies to delve into the issues relating to the research questions. The studies used either quantitative or qualitative approaches, with one study using a mixed-method design. The quantitative studies were primarily used to assess the validity and reliability of various assessment tools for dyslexia with distinct groups, for instance, self-disclosing, history of reading difficulty, no history of reading difficulty and diagnosis of a SpLD such as dyslexia. As such, the review showed that a quantitative approach to research does not allow for the experiences and emotions of the participants to be truly heard. The findings from quantitative research methods remain important to the study as they can be used to further justify outcomes. The qualitative research findings are more inclined

to consider the lived experience, and the psychological and sociological impacts on self-perception, whilst exposing relationships between power and knowledge.

Probing is of key importance towards examining the research question, as it facilitates the interviewee to access specific memories (Robinson, 2023). Probing allows the researcher to further explore interesting and important aspects of the data (Smith and Osborn, 2015). Specific memories rather than generic ones may be idiographic, aligning with the analytical approach of IPA, which begins with an individual's experiences before moving towards a more general ordering (Smith, 1995; Smith and Osborn, 2004). Probing is of value in feminist interviews as it gives voice to the marginalised and oppressed (Collins, 2002). Fontana (2003: 58) states that "interviewees should be allowed to express themselves and their feelings freely ... As the interviewer comes to realise that she is an active participant in the interview, she must become reflexive."

4.3 Research Design

i. Methods

The current study will use a qualitative research approach in which semi-structured phenomenological interviews will be conducted. A phenomenological interview assists a participant in revisiting an experience(s) by exploring the phenomenon whilst developing a deep conversation (Van Manen, 2016b). This research design has the potential to gather rich data, which may lead to important recommendations within educational practices. The literature review discussed research studies which used semi-structured interviews to gather data. Unfortunately, not all studies specified the type of interview used, but for those that did, they were outlined as creating a narrative dialogue or were referred to as biographical interviews.

A narrative dialogue may be considered a type of unstructured in-depth interview with minimal influence from the interviewer (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). As

such, the participant takes the lead, and they tell their story in the way they choose. Corbin and Morse (2003) reiterate the importance of a researcher having the skills to conduct such interviews, as the interviewee controls the events they talk about and the amount of detail they divulge. Not only is the interview process important, but Bihu (2020) also expresses the importance of being highly competent to acknowledge and overcome challenges associated with unstructured in-depth interviews, which may arise after the interview process, such as the interpretation and analysis of data.

Biographical interviews, another type of unstructured in-depth interview, are popular within feminist research as they enable marginalised interviewees to have a voice and to become the focus of research (Clough et al., 2004). Merrill (2021: 149) describes biographical feminist interviewing as a “collaborative interaction whereby stories are co-constructed and owned. Giving the transcript back to interviewees enables them to say whether or not the interview is an accurate representation of their story”. A key difference between a narrative dialogue and a biographical interview is that the biographical interview approach relies on “collaborative interaction” and “co-constructed” stories towards the assurance that the interviewees’ voice has been heard, and the interviewer is mindful that socio-cultural conventions are likely to have affected the narrative (Smith and Sparkes, 2008).

A structured interview is controlled by ensuring each participant has answered the same question, like a questionnaire, giving the researcher more control. Although within the literature review, some of the research methods adopted questionnaires, this was primarily within quantitative research methods or a mixed-method approach, where diagnostic assessment tools for dyslexia were under scrutiny. Semi-structured interviews have a greater potential to encourage the development of a conversation, which may assist the participant to feel at ease throughout the process. I am mindful that mature quasi-dyslexic learners who meet academic challenges often feel embarrassed to talk about these experiences and issues surrounding them.

Phenomenological interviews rely upon an individual's memory and their ability to reflect on events. Van Manen (2016a) forewarns against adopting unstructured or open-ended interviewing in the pursuit of aiding memory. A phenomenological semi-structured interview will further support an opportunity to delve into areas of interest when they arise, as well as the opportunity to follow the interests or concerns of each participant. This style of interviewing can increase the likelihood of building a rapport while showing empathy towards a participant and their recount of the experience. Rapport building is a key aspect of feminist interviews and can be improved when the interviewer shares some personal information or a particular research perspective. Edwards (1990) discovered that as a White woman interviewing a Black woman, the best rapport was established when differences were acknowledged and openly discussed, rather than overlooked. Therefore, I should acknowledge that I had been assessed for dyslexia, which confirmed a diagnosis of dyslexia. As this study is designed to put the voice of the individual participant at the centre, rather than the collective voice of a marginalised group, I will use guided in-depth semi-structured interview questions and prompts (see Appendix C).

The literature shows the ongoing debate concerning the use of focus groups within phenomenological studies, whereby some perceive that focus groups may inhibit the voice of a participant due to peer conformity or fear of disagreeing with others (Daley, 2013). To consider this from a professional perspective, I reflected on my four decades of nursing experience and my perception of the hierarchical nature surrounding areas of the profession of nursing. The hierarchical nature of nursing affects all nurses, but especially student nurses and those who are newly qualified. Fifty per cent of a degree nursing course is experience-based, and therefore, knowledge is gained within a professional practice environment. Within such environments, student nurses collaborate with other members of a multidisciplinary team, including other students undertaking similar nursing courses, all with varying degrees of experience and knowledge.

Within such environments, student nurses may encounter incivility (Ziefle, 2018). Andersson and Pearson (1999: 457) define workplace incivility as “low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviours are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others.” It is important to recognise that “most of this aggression is covert: that is, indirect, passive and verbal rather than direct, active and physical” (Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997: 54). Using a focus group interview method may increase the probability of exposing deep-rooted vulnerabilities of a participant. Alternatively, such methods may limit opportunities to speak their truth for fear of judgment by their peers.

A systematic review by Kiprillis et al. (2021) concluded that newly qualified nurses were particularly vulnerable to the occurrence of horizontal violence. Horizontal violence can place students in a vulnerable position. The phrase horizontal violence has been within the nursing literature for more than three decades and is defined by Thobaben (2007: 83) as: “any hostile, aggressive, and harmful behaviour by a nurse or a group of nurses toward a co-worker or group of nurses via attitudes, actions, words, and/or other behaviours.” A USA study found that 93% of nurses had witnessed lateral (horizontal) violence, and 85% felt they had been a victim in the workplace (Coursey et al., 2013). Lateral violence refers to nurse-on-nurse aggression and has various concepts, including horizontal violence, horizontal hostility, bullying and workplace incivility (Einarsen et al., 2020; Embree and White, 2010).

All participants of the study are in their final year and will soon become newly qualified registered nurses. I considered it in their best interest to avoid the misfortune whereby their lived experience and lack of anonymity could be used negatively against them. A focus group interview may allow participants to observe or be aware of varied forms of adverse communication, such as condescending language, patronising tone of voice, eye-rolling and making faces at responses made

(Birks et al., 2018; Palumbo, 2018; Taylor, 2016). Student nurses and new nursing graduates often experience this type of behaviour (Palumbo, 2018). Guest et al. (2017) established an aspect of similarity within the results from their randomised study. They found that although participants were willing to disclose personal and sensitive information during focus group interviews, the researchers considered that this may be influenced by other factors, such as a similarity between the interviewer and participants or similar cultural backgrounds or past experiences. The authors recommended that preparatory studies be conducted on an individual basis until more exploratory comparative evidence is available to compare focus groups and individual interviews.

In addition to the previously mentioned use of IPA as an analytical tool, Tomkins and Eatough (2010) emphasise the inability to utilise this approach within focus groups without the need for modifications. As described by Palmer et al. (2010) the additional development of an analytical protocol with which to ask further questions about the data is concerning. Likewise, the need for additional protocols leaves Dowling (2007) and Smith (2004c) questioning whether focus groups are genuine phenomenology. To correct the imbalance Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009) considered the use of focus groups and argued for their use within descriptive and interpretative phenomenology. However, they also emphasised a need for clarity in a researcher's understanding of their philosophical structure to explain and justify their choice of research method. Therefore, primarily based on my concern for protecting the anonymity of the participants, I am content with my decision not to use focus group interviews.

This is an ideal opportunity to revisit and summarise Diagram D: The Formation of my Interpretative Paradigm. My research paradigm adopts a relativist ontology, establishing that reality is individually created by each person. My epistemology, however, indicates the need to interpret these personal realities to uncover deeper meaning in their experiences and where these realities meet in a shared social reality.

To achieve this, I acquired an interpretivist theoretical perspective, informed by both interpretative phenomenology and feminist standpoint theory, and used research methodologies aligned with each approach. Feminist methodologies question the traditional beliefs of objectivity and neutrality in research by acknowledging situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), beginning from the experiences of marginalised people (Harding, 1991), and by examining the overlapping identities and how they interact within oppressive systems (Crenshaw, 1994; 2017). Haraway (1988) further challenges how independent learning is appreciated by stressing the association between knowledge and social context. This understanding advocates for social change by challenging existing inequalities and exploring alternatives.

In summary, phenomenological semi-structured interviews will be used to examine the students' lived experience; likewise, as an analytical framework, IPA will be favoured. Respectively, to support a more extensive understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge in a post-1992 university, a feminist standpoint theoretical position will be adopted. This will be used alongside the analytical phase of the study.

ii. Sample

The call-out for participants was across the entire Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences (HELS).²⁰ The faculty is made up of various Schools, the School of Nursing and Midwifery, the School of Education and Social Work and the School of Health Sciences. Each school had a variety of departments such as Adult Nursing, Early Childhood Studies, Operating Department Practice, Speech and Language Therapy, Diagnostic Radiotherapy and Sports and Exercise Science. To gain interest in the study, conventional steps were taken to communicate with all students, such as forum posts via the university virtual learning environment (VLE) and social media such as the university's Facebook and Twitter sites. To prevent interested members

²⁰ Ongoing restructuring within the university has led to changes in the naming conventions used throughout this thesis.

from outside the university, such as the general public, all social media links were automatically diverted to the university's main website, which is username and password-protected.

The qualitative research design used a non-probability sampling technique called purposive sampling to select participants with the knowledge and experience of the phenomenon in question (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Non-probability sampling requires the researcher to make subjective judgments to ensure the sample meets the requirements of the study. A purposive sampling approach has the potential to convey a suggestion of researcher bias, as the participants are chosen by the researcher's judgment. Therefore, to counteract these biases Sharma (2017) stresses the importance of clear criteria, which may include theoretical frameworks. Palmer et al. (2010) suggest, based on the theoretical framework adopted within IPA, that homogeneous sampling is essential. Homogeneous sampling in this study selects mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate participants. Although such sampling limits the generalisability of the study to outside of the localised sample (Robinson, 2014). Purposive sampling allows the researcher the ability to compare similarities and differences within the phenomenon, which further enhances the quality of the findings.

Students interested in volunteering to be a part of the study were provided with a link to a Mahara page (see Appendix D), which is the university's ePortfolio platform. From there, students were able to access the participant information form (see Appendix E), detailing the research study, and information about the researcher, including contact details of both supervisors. To continue the study, students needed to complete an eligibility and research consent form (see Appendix F), which detailed the eligibility criteria. Submission of the completed form confirmed consent to the study, by which they would become a participant. As part of the sampling process, all participants had to be at the undergraduate level; any student studying at the postgraduate level was excluded. Postgraduate learners were excluded at this

point in the study as I considered their previous experience at the undergraduate level may have afforded them insight into in/abilities and an awareness of becoming successful in university. As previously highlighted, all participants must have undertaken a dyslexia screen and/or diagnostic assessment at the university by a Dyslexia Teacher and/or an Educational Psychologist, which confirmed they did not have dyslexia. This ensured that any participant who received a post-16 diagnosis of dyslexia whilst enrolled on the BSc (Hons) nursing course was excluded from the study.

To clarify, an undergraduate student may have received a diagnosis of dyslexia at school or during their further education studies; however, upon entering university, a repeated assessment is needed, and it is this which may further conclude they do not have dyslexia. To address the occurrence of this complex anomaly, a further dialogue between the student and myself via email was needed to clarify their position and to ensure the criteria for inclusion were met. An electronic automated process called branching was used within the Microsoft Form to prevent participants from answering unnecessary questions, only to be rejected upon completion of the questionnaire. Therefore, the eligibility questions were the first questions to be asked as part of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study.

The number of participants, although significant, does not follow the accepted criteria of saturation. Saturation is considered the point within research where data collection can be discontinued (Saunders et al., 2018). "The gold standard by which purposive sample sizes are determined in health science research" (Guest et al., 2006: 60). "The most frequently touted guarantee of qualitative rigour by authors" (Morse, 2015: 587). In the implementation of interpretative phenomenology and the use of IPA to formulate an analytical application, the aim is to obtain in-depth and individual accounts. For this reason, Van Manen (2016a) disconnects saturation from phenomenology. Cresswell (1998) recommends between 5-25 participants, and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. A more recent up-to-date editorial published by

Morse (2000) confirms the suggestion of at least six participants by linking the number of participants to the research method and stating that, within phenomenology, for example, the ability to obtain rich data is achievable by the selection of fewer participants. Saunders et al. (2018) conclude that saturation should be applied using a logical approach with relevance to the research question and the theoretical stance of the research.

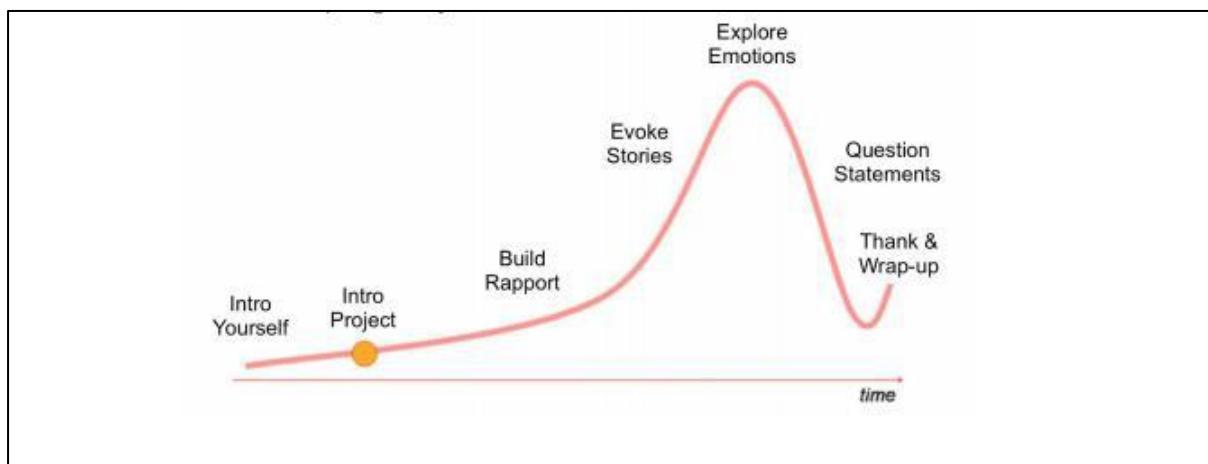
The final purposive sample was made up of five mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students from different fields of nursing. Two from the child field, two from the adult field and one from the mental health field of nursing. Three participants were aged between 18-24, and two were 25-34; there were no participants under the age of 21. The sample consisted entirely of female participants across two age groups; this was not by selection. An entirely female sample group was probable, given that the current percentage of male nursing students is between 8% and 10% (Chief Nursing Officer Commission, 2017).

iii. Setting

The participants were each interviewed from May to September 2020. The face-to-face interviews should have taken place on the university campus, which was often considered the standard practice when conducting semi-structured interviews. In some instances, the use of a telephone interview may also be considered (Barrett and Twycross, 2018). However, on the 26th of March 2020, the UK entered its first legally enforced national lockdown due to the Coronavirus (HM Government, 2020). This imposed a change to the method of data collection due to the stay-at-home and two-meter social distancing rules. Therefore, a re-application and further approval from the ethics committee (see Appendix H) were considered to allow the semi-structured interviews to be conducted via a digital service that helps interactions between two or more individuals, in this instance, Microsoft Teams.

The literature supports the use of phenomenological interviews; unfortunately, there was limited guidance for the structure of such interviews. I became inspired by Bevan (2014) who used a personal understanding of phenomenology and an application to qualitative interviewing practices to create an in-depth guided phenomenological interview schedule (see Appendix I). A pictorial representation is illustrated in Diagram E.

Diagram E: Interview Schedule (Pictorial Overview)



Bevan (2014) decided to publish the schedule as guidance on what to do was available, but extraordinarily little was stated on how this was to be achieved. For me, this diagram illustrates the importance of time within phenomenological interviews, where a rapport is built with the participant to help them relax and feel at ease with the interviewer. As the interview progresses, the interviewer will ask questions to evoke stories by triggering memories of past experiences (Heimann et al., 2023). Seidman (2006: 15) describes the structure for in-depth phenomenological interviews as "primarily, open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants' responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study." Therefore Seidman's (2006) approach of three stages to the interview was considered in Table 3.

Table 3: The Three Stages of a Phenomenological Interview

Stages	Description of Content
i.	Apply context to the participant's experience.
ii.	Establish the details of the experience.

iii.	Request the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experience.
------	--

From the outset, the participants were informed that this was an interview in the loosest sense and that the word interview would seldom be used. Each participant was advised that there were no right or wrong responses to the questions and that the focus was purely on hearing their experience. I remained committed to expressing empathy towards each participant, as this was important towards establishing a trusting relationship, as remaining naturally attentive to their reality may enhance their ability to relax and share their experiences (Sholokhova et al., 2022; Varela and Shear, 1999). To address the imbalance of power between the interviewer and interviewee DeVault (1990) stresses the importance of allowing adequate time for the interview, and the ongoing ability to encourage participants that all aspects of their experiences are of equal importance.

To further guide the dialogue, general prompts were available, as needed. Each interview followed a similar format, whilst also allowing the participant to talk at length. A reflective inquiry approach further allowed for the clarification and exploration of emotions.

iv. Ethics

Informed consent is integral to achieving ethical approval for any form of research. Adherence to university guidelines and principles was needed, and upon such, ethical approval was granted by the relevant parties alongside permission of access (see Appendix J) to approach the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences undergraduate students. To ensure an open and honest approach to the research, participant information was supplied and accessible online and as a download version for personal records. Verification from each participant had to establish that the relevant information had been read and understood. Participants were informed

that they could withdraw from the study at any point and that an excuse would not be needed. All data was securely stored electronically and always remained password-protected.

Each participant was assured that their anonymity would be kept and that a pseudonym would be used post-interview throughout the transcript and note-taking stages. The importance of confidentiality was discussed with participants alongside an explanation as to how it will be maintained. Of key consideration was the vulnerable position of the participants (Crowther and Lloyd-Williams, 2012). The area of study had the potential to create an emotional dialogue, which may have evoked discomfort when talking about such personal experiences. Lewis (2020) found that some nursing students who were failing at the undergraduate level and were required to repeat a year described their feelings as those experienced in the death and dying theory (Kübler-Ross, 1973).

The use of anonymity to protect a participant's identity may also provide them with the confidence to speak candidly about their valued experience (Brooks, 2007; Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Guenther, 2009). However, whilst feminist research advocates anonymity, there is also concern that it has the potential to reduce power alongside the removal of one's name (Berkhout, 2013; Gordon, 2019). Jenkins et al. (2019: 424) conclude:

"An emphasis on recognising researcher positionality and subjectivity as integral to feminist research; involvement of 'the researched' in the process that calls for self-reflexive and participatory approaches; and an emphasis on the importance of research methods that reveal complexity and nuance, with a focus on valuing individuals and ensuring that both the researcher and the research participants retain their human faces and voices."

This quote resonates with the significance of my positionality as both a researcher and someone with lived experience. My personal experience influences how I engage with and interpret the collected data from the participants. For example, my understanding of concepts like confidence and self-worth may be shaped by my

challenges and achievements, which could introduce unintentional bias in the interpretation of data. To better this by self-reflexivity, my thoughts, emotions, and potential biases must be considered throughout the study, such as journaling and peer support from other doctoral colleagues.

v. Trustworthiness

There is a responsibility of the researcher to ensure rigour and validity throughout the entire research process, and not purely the evaluative stage (Cypress, 2017). As a registered nurse, I am familiar with the importance of reflection, reflective writing, and reflexivity as a learning process, as well as the importance this bears on questioning my pre-understanding. As an independent researcher, I must find strategies with which to question my findings. IPA recommends that the analysis of data uphold the theoretical basis of phenomenology, interpretative and idiographic, as in the uniqueness of an individual (Shaw et al., 2014; Smith, 2010). The analytical process needs to concentrate on the individual experience and the context surrounding the experience (Rodham et al., 2015; Sundler et al., 2019). The interpretative aspect includes the requirement of the participant to interpret the phenomenon as they see it, and then for the researcher to make sense of this interpretation, alongside questioning it. Vicary et al. (2017) emphasise the significance of this double interpretation as a way of showing quality and validity.

Although researchers discuss the need to ensure trustworthiness and rigour, along with stating that this has been achieved, there is a distinct lack of quality guidance as to how this is accomplished within interpretative phenomenology (Nizza et al., 2021; Pool, 2018; Rodham et al., 2015; Sundler et al., 2019). Following earlier publications from Giorgi (2011) and Smith (2010) guiding reviewers on how to assess the quality of IPA, the authors have more recently offered details on how to meet such key quality indicators, which contribute to the trustworthiness of the IPA process (Nizza et al., 2021). Such quality indicators are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Key Quality Indicators in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Nizza et al., 2021: 4).

Quality Indicator	Brief Description
Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative	The analysis tells a persuasive and coherent story. The narrative is built cumulatively through an unfolding analytic dialogue between carefully selected and interpreted extracts from participants.
Developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account	Focusing on the important experiential and/or existential meaning of participants' accounts gives depth to the analysis.
Close analytic reading of participants' words	Thorough analysis and interpretation of quoted material within the narrative help give meaning to the data and the experience it describes.
Attending convergence and divergence	The idiographic depth and systematic comparison between participants create a dynamic interweaving of patterns of similarity and individual idiosyncrasy.

4.4 Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as an Analytical Framework

IPA is a methodological approach that guides researchers to examine the data for repeated as well as diverse characteristics within the participants (Smith and Shinebourne, 2012). IPA advocates the acceptance of phenomenology, interpretative and idiography (individual perspective) by focusing on how people perceive and talk about events, rather than describing phenomena to a predetermined criterion (Frechette et al., 2020; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). Therefore, within this study, as the participants reflect on their lived experience, they may have little, or no idea of

how such experiences fit into a wider context. Equally, they will not know of each other's experiences or how similar experiences will capture the bigger picture.

By the use of feminist standpoint theory and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, the lived experience of an individual will be connected to a broader socially constructed reality. The epistemology of the study places me within the context of the participants. Hirsh et al. (1995) furthermore, consider the suggestions made by Harding (1987), who describes the significance of researcher reflexivity along with the researcher's positionality. Such positionality informs one of the inabilities to adopt a neutral attitude to the study. Consequently, the importance and understanding of an appropriate analytical framework with which to analyse, before interpreting the data, are most important. Smith and Osborn (2004) describe IPA as a two-stage approach, first to interpret and second to decode, letting things speak for themselves.

To manage the two-stage approach Charlick et al. (2016) designed seven steps of IPA, adapted from (Tindall, 2009). Table 5 shows the seven steps of IPA.

Table 5: The Seven Steps of Interpretative Phenomenological Data Analysis

Steps	Description of Content
1.	Reading and Re-Reading: Immersing oneself in the original data.
2.	Initial Noting: Free association and exploring semantic content (e.g., by writing notes in the margin).
3.	Developing Emergent Themes: Focus on chunks of transcript and analysis of notes made into themes.
4.	Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes: Abstracting and integrating themes.
5.	Moving to the Next Case: Trying to bracket earlier themes and keep open-minded to do justice to the individuality of each new case.

6.	Looking for Patterns Across Cases: Finding patterns of shared higher-order qualities across cases, noting idiosyncratic instances.
7.	Taking Interpretations to Deeper Levels: Deepening the analysis by utilising metaphors and temporal referents, and by importing other theories as a lens through which to view the analysis.

1. Reading and Re-Reading

Within IPA, idiography has a primary focus by which the researcher is guided to spotlight the individual by exploring each participant separately before generating any generic accounts (Smith, 1995). To become immersed in the authentic data, I read each written transcript multiple times. Furthermore, as the interviews were also recorded, I was able to view the video content to capture a deeper understanding of the words used to describe the experience, as the visual content enhanced my ability to become deeply associated with the words of each participant. Subtleties of body language were acknowledged alongside the language used. The visual content also allowed me to consider the pauses in the context of the spoken word.

2. Initial Noting

The semi-structured interviews were supplemented by field notes in the form of memos (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and observational notes. Memoing is the action of notetaking whilst reflecting, which enables me to keep track of my initial thoughts and reactions to the data (Hope et al., 2019). It is important to consider that all forms of memoing are used in conjunction with other sources of data to add clarity and bring supportive evidence to the study (Birks et al., 2008). Observational notes of what happened in response to questions were noted within the margins, for example, the body language alongside the spoken word.

Such notes, which may be referred to as context notes, are of interest as the primary aim was to capture significant details (Johnson et al., 2021). I became very much aware of the nonverbal communication and the way each participant interacted within their chosen environment. Also, what could be heard, such as sighing, having difficulty articulating words or expressing one's thoughts and feelings? In addition to observational notes, I also reflected and used this opportunity to review and retrace my thinking processes. While maintaining a balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes, such as hunches, impressions, and feelings. Thomas and Pollio (2002) advise the researcher to make notes immediately after the interview and describe non-verbal communication, especially body language.

All notations were added to the transcript, which was auto-generated following the interview. A process of checking was necessary while listening to the audio to ensure accuracy. The notes were organised into three columns. The first column documented my first reflections based on the participant's response to a question, which allowed me to remain connected with the participant's experience and aware of my assumptions at the time. The second column consisted of my thoughts, and the third column detailed the observation of body language. However, Guerrero-Castañeda et al. (2017) stress that body language is not phenomenology, but the knowledge of, rather than knowledge about, the participant. Nonetheless, this further emphasised to the researcher what was visible as the participant spoke, which enhanced their spoken words. Percec (2008) states from a feminist critique of language perspective that verbal and nonverbal communication patterns are not objective but are shaped by societal norms and power dynamics. The use of language which is hesitant or excessively polite may therefore be considered less assertive or authoritative when compared to men's language, reinforcing patriarchal systems reflective of women's historically subordinate position in society.

3. Developing Emergent Themes

IPA considers the researcher instrumental in organising and interpreting the data; therefore, at this stage, the main activity is to extract what I perceive to be of importance to answer the research questions (Tindall, 2009). Familiarity with the cultural organisation and processes gave further insight into the participants' student journey, which can be helpful. While at the same time recognising how my position could influence the outcome, and how participants thought about their experience. As I became more familiar with the data, I used techniques illustrated by Robson and McCartan (2016), such as the detection of repetitions, metaphors, similarities and differences. These techniques were used collectively with post-it notes on a whiteboard to visualise the outcomes more clearly (see Appendix K).

4. Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

To achieve connections, the emergent themes were combined to create subordinate themes. The activity was achieved by physically moving the post-it around and grouping the emergent themes onto the whiteboard. Ongoing modifications occurred as my thought processes altered, considering deeper reflective thoughts.

5. Moving to the Next Case

The step associated with bracketing has been discussed within the present chapter, under the following headings 3.3 and 3.4.

6. Looking for Patterns Across Cases

Step 4 was conducted with each participant's transcript. This process is completed with the development of subordinate themes. The subordinate themes furthermore created higher-order superordinate themes. The continued process of making comparisons across each of the themes supplied insight into universally occurring subject matters.

7. Taking Interpretations to Deeper Levels

To develop new insights and advance knowledge, a feminist lens was used to assist in analysing the data. Feminist standpoint theory further enabled the examination of power and knowledge in a post-1992 university. Damschroder (2020: 2) conveys that

“Such frameworks provide clarity in terms and definitions which allows clear articulation of complex dynamic phenomena that are so common in the realm of implementation science.”

4.5 Data Collection

A total of 24 undergraduate students across the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences completed the online form to check their eligibility for the study. A total of 50% (n12) were not eligible as they had not undertaken dyslexia screening or a diagnostic test/assessment. To ensure they had not misunderstood the question or misinterpreted the eligibility criteria, an email correspondence was sent. A reply in each instance confirmed they did not meet these criteria. The students supplied limited explanations for this oversight, although two students did mention that they saw the word dyslexia and thought it was an opportunity to find out if they had a diagnosis.

See Table 6, which illustrates how the volunteers became research participants, based on the inclusion criteria.

Table 6: Participant Selection Based upon Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participant Number	Q1. Have you undertaken Dyslexia Screening and/or Diagnostic Tests/Assessments?	Q2. Do you have a Post 16 (e.g., since beginning university) diagnosis of Dyslexia?	Criteria Met Yes/No
1	YES	MAYBE	NO
2	YES	MAYBE	YES
3	YES	YES	NO
4	YES	NO	YES
5	NO		NO
6	YES	MAYBE	YES
7	NO		NO
8	YES	NO	YES
9	YES	YES	NO
10	NO		NO
11	YES	YES	NO
12	NO		NO
13	NO		NO
14	NO		NO
15	NO		NO
16	YES	NO	YES
17	NO		NO
18	NO		NO
19	YES	NO	YES
20	YES	NO	YES
21	NO		NO
22	NO		NO
23	YES	MAYBE	NO
24	NO		NO

4.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has shown how my ontology and epistemology have been established and how this awareness is used to justify the approach taken in the current study.

The significance and need for ongoing self-reflection and my ability to adopt a reflexive approach throughout the study have been specified and inform my positionality. The chapter explains the chosen methodological approach of

phenomenology, with a clear justification of interpretative phenomenology. The remaining two phenomenological approaches (transcendental and existential) are interpreted to further show my understanding and justification of the chosen approach. In keeping with this philosophical movement, the phenomenological method of interviewing participants is discussed. The use of IPA to analyse and prove the trustworthiness of the data is declared. To reach a deeper explanatory understanding of the data, a rationale for the choice of theoretical underpinning from a feminist lens perspective is established through the formation of my interpretative paradigm. Feminist standpoint theory and the interpretation of the research data will be considered to elicit issues relating to power and inequality within the researched matter.

The next chapter will present and discuss the findings of the current study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS - Mature Quasi-Dyslexic Undergraduate Nurses' Lived Experience within a Wider Context of the University

5.1 Overview of the Chapter

This study explores the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students in a post-1992 university. Students with quasi-dyslexia often struggle academically without specialist support or *reasonable adjustments*.

Furthermore, Academic support within universities is generally from centralised sources and is often perceived to be for failing students (Bailey, 2018; Lea and Street, 1998). French (2018) determines that many students improve through persistence, while others are ashamed and discouraged by academic ability, which negatively impacts their academic experience at university.

5.2 Participant Demographics

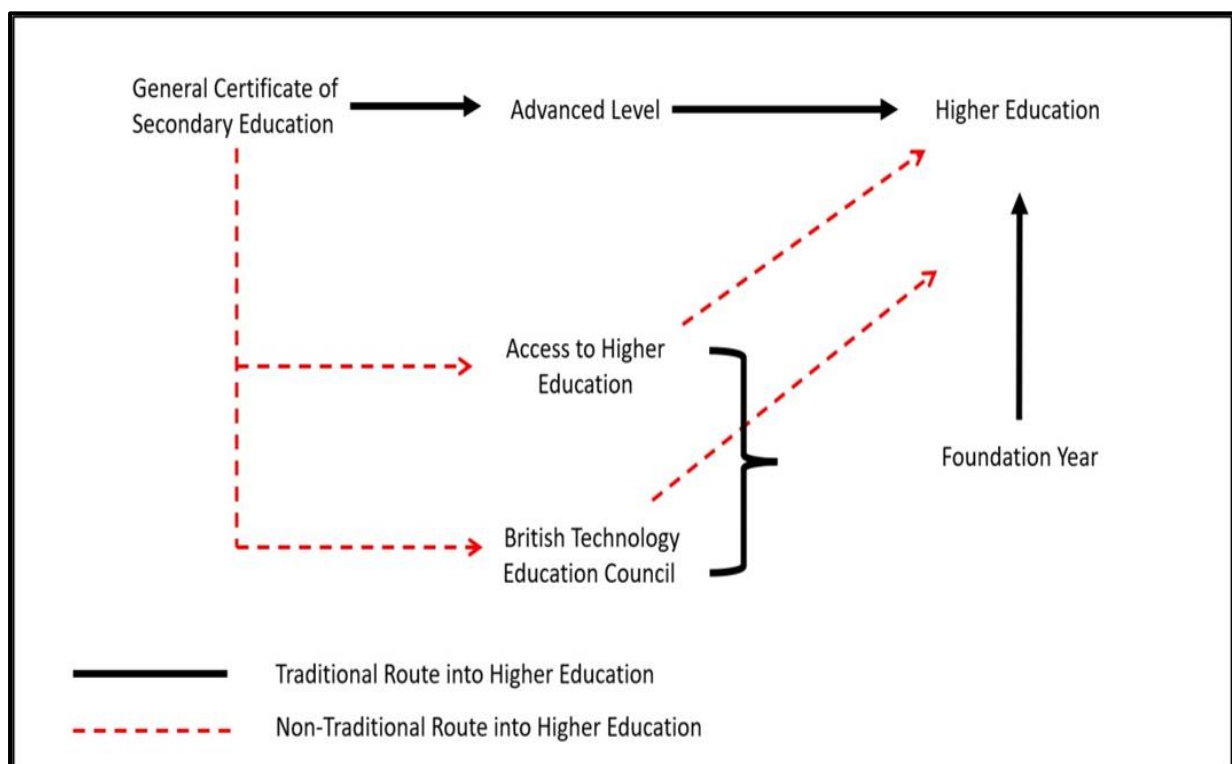
See Table 7, which illustrates important background information about each participant's highest qualification, and at which point in their studies they undertook a screening test/diagnostic assessment for dyslexia. Participant names have been protected, and pseudonyms will be used throughout.

Table 7: Participant Demographic and Academic Information

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Highest Qual
Zoya Adult Nursing student	25-34	White/British	Access to HE. A subject-specific course designed to enable those without A-level qualifications to enter higher education.
Yvonne Adult Nursing student	25-34	White/British	BTEC Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care. This is similar to an Access to HE course but condensed into one year rather than two. Yvonne was part of a pilot cohort. The course was discontinued after she completed her studies.
Wendy Child Nursing Student	18-24	White/British	A/AS Level. Unconditional offer following an interview. Predicted grades for Biology, Psychology and Dance were A, B and C, respectively. However, her final grades were D, D and E.
Verity Mental Health Nursing Student	18-24	White/British	Extended BTEC in Health and Social Care. A post-16 diagnosis of dyslexia with ' <i>reasonable adjustments</i> ' whilst studying at college was rejected by the university, and a reassessment stated that Verity did not have dyslexia.
Ursula Child Nursing Student	18-24	Asian or Asian British/Chinese	A/AS Level. Unconditional offer following the interview. Predicted grades for Psychology, English Language, and Religious Studies were D, C and D, respectively. Predicted grades were achieved. She was first assessed for dyslexia during year six at primary school by an Educational Psychologist and again in year 11. Both assessments confirmed that she did not have dyslexia.

See Diagram F, which illustrates the two most popular routes available for the BSc (Hons) nursing course at the university. Foundation year courses are mostly studied as a preliminary course within a university before beginning a degree course, whereas Access to Higher Education and BTEC are studied within further education. The routes are shown in two distinct directions and commonly referred to in the literature as 'traditional' and 'non-traditional', which can be both limiting and exclusionary to learners.

Diagram F: Routes into Higher Education



5.3 Superordinate Themes

Following the IPA process, three superordinate themes emerged.

1. A Sense of Uncertainty
2. The Academically Struggling Student
3. A Sense of Inadequacy

Seu (2006) defines inadequacy according to feminist literature reported by women as a “constant, underlying anxiety of being exposed, of people seeing ‘*who they really are*’, which is presented as shameful and hidden” (Seu, 2006: 293). See Table 8, which illustrates the subordinate themes which appeared in each participant’s transcript to create the three superordinate themes.

Table 8: Summary of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

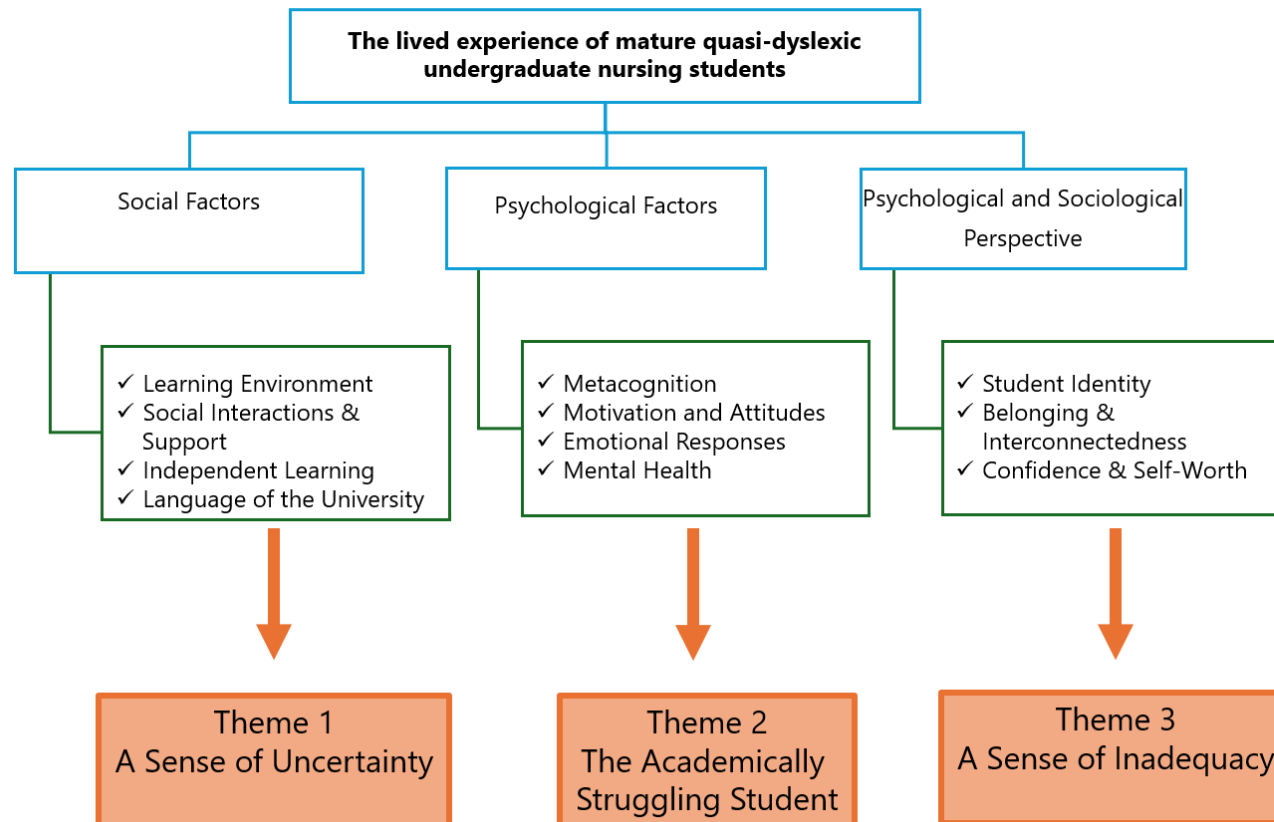
Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Theme	Participant's First Initial
A Sense of Uncertainty	Slow reading ability. Poor spelling. Unable to pronounce words. I don’t understand. Slow processing. Re-reading to understand. They’re just words. Simple/basic words needed.	Y, V, Z, U W, V Y, V, Z Y, V, Z, U W Y, V, Z, U Z Y, Z
The Academically Struggling Student	Unable to study effectively. Struggling academically. Examination anxiety. Overwhelming. Failing or barely passing. Lack of understanding. High effort = Low grade. Scraped 40% pass threshold. No idea what I’m doing.	Y, V, Z W, V, Z W, V, U Y V, Z Y, W, V, Z, U V, Z V, Z Y, Z
A Sense of Inadequacy	Unsure. Doubt the ability to succeed. Self-criticism (stupid, thick, slow). Hiding grades from peers. Confidence waning. Feeling of dread. Feeling unmotivated. Worried/Anxious/Nervous/Embarrassed. Frustrated with oneself. People don’t know my grades.	V, V, Z Y, W, V, Z Z Y, W, V Z Y, V, Z Y, W, V, Z, U W, V, Z, U Z

Each participant's lived experience suggested that their recollections were interconnected and could not be viewed in isolation, as they contained aspects which could interweave across different themes. Such interconnections prompted further in-depth consideration of the effect the theme order would have on the overall narrative of the discussion and analysis of the findings. Although each theme is discussed individually, at the point of analysis, there will be a degree of overlap as the complex phenomenological data interweaves with the voice of each participant. The convergence and divergence will be captured and explored to further show the similarities and differences of experiences. Furthermore, deliberately separating psychological and sociological perspectives, rather than psycho-social, allows for the specific detection of individual experiences and structural influences. This distinction facilitates the interpretation to understand how each element influences and reinforces the other, highlighting the dynamic interplay between individual perception and social context. The illustration of excerpts combined with appropriate in-depth analysis, which is fundamental to the process of IPA, will facilitate understanding (Tuffour, 2017).

Diagram G illustrates the factors relating to each theme, which will be discussed in detail.

Diagram G: Alignment of the Subordinate Themes to Research Question 2.

Research Question 2: What are the psychological and sociological impacts on self-perception among mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students whose diagnostic assessment does not indicate dyslexia?



As discussed in Section 3.6, feminist standpoint theory, which includes the following key elements: situated knowledge, strong objectivity, marginalisation, power relations and epistemic privilege by feminist standpoint theory scholars, will be clarified and used to explore the relationship between power and knowledge. From a feminist standpoint, I will:

“Give voice to members of oppressed groups - namely, women - and to uncover the hidden knowledge that women have cultivated from living life on the margins.” Feminist standpoint epistemology asks not just that we take women seriously as knowers but that we translate women's knowledge into practice, that we apply what we learn from women's experiences toward social change and the elimination of the oppression not only of women but of all marginalised groups” (Brooks, 2007: 23).

5.4 Theme 1. A Sense of Uncertainty - Social Factors

"Yet, when we remain in that other space, we are often too isolated, too alone."

(hooks, 1989: 19)

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) stresses at the point of registration, the registered nurse should have "the confidence and ability to think critically, apply knowledge and skills, and provide expert, evidence-based, direct nursing care, therefore, lies at the centre of all registered nursing practice" (NMC, 2018a: 3). However, Ilgen et al. (2019) highlight a contrasting view where limited confidence in healthcare settings can lead to uncertainty, diminishing one's ability to problem solve, contributing to individual doubt or questioning of ability. A sense of uncertainty is a concealed aspect of nursing practice, in which each participant voiced about themselves, their academic ability and their suitability to become a nurse. The centrality of confidence features in the data from my study, sometimes in its absence.

Ursula reflects on the progression of her nursing course.

*"I think the main thing that I always bear in mind is that I've got this far ...
You know, the modules for this year (year 3) are harder than the other two
years."* **Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.**

Ursula's words suggest she is responding to a sense of uncertainty through self-reassurance and acknowledgement of the course's increasing difficulty and her achievements. Considering "I've got this far," Ursula suggests affirmation of her progress, which is likely a response to feelings of doubt and questions about her ability. The literature acknowledges the challenges associated with mature students transitioning from further education to university and the multiple factors which leave them underrepresented in university, such as limited preparedness, adjusting to the academic and social environment and issues around confidence (Archer et al., 2005; Dumbleton et al., 2008; van der Meer, 2021). The tension between Ursula's

past achievements and future challenges may be affected by insufficient cultural and academic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), considered as the necessary knowledge, skills and experiences required for university. Despite Ursula's fractional capital, her emerging engagement with social solidarity and shared learning experiences with her peers and friends may be of significance towards maintaining engagement in her studies and suppressing uncertainty. As such, in Section 1.7, Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital provide significant insight into how high uncertainty and low confidence are shaped by social structures and prior educational experiences. Subsequently, learners who begin university with beneficial knowledge, skills and experiences often feel prepared and confident. Therefore, owing to the expanded intake of mature learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds commencing nursing courses, universities need to be prepared to respond to an increased prevalence of a sense of uncertainty among such students.

5.4.1 The Learning Environment

The learning environment for BSc nursing courses in universities is often characterised by a diverse student population. Diagram A in Section 1.2 illustrates the diversity of students registered to study for an Access to HE Diploma (2022-23), which is equally as popular a choice for entry into BSc nursing, and reflects the diverse students within cohorts. Within undergraduate nursing courses, it is customary to have large and diverse groups of students begin their journey together, often as strangers. A university learning environment extends beyond physical conditions, such as large cohort sizes and structured assessments, but includes frequently overlooked social influences that are essential for student integration and success. Being part of a sizeable cohort can reinforce feelings of social uncertainty derived from the need to navigate new relationships and peer dynamics. Due to the ratio of students to lecturers, interaction becomes limited, which has the potential to negatively impact assessment performance, while increasing the failure rate for weaker students (Arias and Walker, 2010; Kokkelenberg et al., 2008; Nhokwara et al.,

2022). Large cohorts generally create unique challenges for many students, primarily those returning to education after a break in learning or starting university with a 'non-traditional' educational background, which can be further intensified by limited support or feelings of isolation due to the anonymity of large cohorts (MacGregor et al., 2000).

Wendy began her nursing course based on a 'traditional' educational background, but she did not obtain her predicted grades. Her reflections illustrate her concerns.

"... I left that college because I wasn't, it wasn't the right place for me, and I wasn't doing very well. It was too big, and I wasn't really, I was kind of (she pauses) as if I wasn't being watched over by the teacher, I would have slipped ... it just wasn't the right place." **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.**

Wendy's reflections on needing to be "*watched over by the teacher*" highlight uncertainties of a previous learning environment. Her need to be "*watched*" illustrates the influence of behavioural social framing, where the relationship between teaching practice and student behaviour impacts student performance (Kahu, 2013). Being part of a large cohort may also trigger feelings of anonymity, contributing to uncertainty in student identity and confidence. Upon starting her nursing course, Wendy encounters feelings of uncertainty, which resurface as she re-enters a similar learning environment to the previous one, she left. While Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus explains how social structures and one's ability to act independently and make their own choices become interwoven, Wendy's internal conflict, "*I wasn't*" ... "*It wasn't the right place,*" reflects her self-doubt and uncertainty as she struggles to decide whether her challenges are caused by her abilities or the structured learning environment. This tension emphasises how large cohorts and learning environments, which Wendy considers "*too big*", can intensify feelings of doubt and inability (Ilgen et al., 2019) and negatively impact student disengagement and feelings of disconnection (MacGregor et al., 2000).

In this study, the participants were part of a cohort of approximately 500 undergraduate nursing students. Nursing courses regularly use a closed or pure cohort model, characterised by a pre-determined order of modules and assessments which students' progress through collectively, until the completion of their studies (McCarthy et al., 2005). There are two arguments presented against large-sized cohort teaching. Spear (1984) argues that large cohort teaching encourages a passive learning environment where students attempt to transcribe information considered necessary for their learning, which leads to disengagement. The second argument is outlined by MacGregor et al. (2000), who forewarn that the anonymity of large cohort teaching may hinder student engagement, subsequently reducing their knowledge gain and overall success.

Large cohorts may well accommodate a diverse range of educational backgrounds, ethnicities, and cultural contexts (Poldin et al., 2016). Despite such diverse educational backgrounds, participants in the current study frequently expressed distinct concerns regarding their capability to learn and develop academic knowledge, nursing skills and competence to become registered nurses. These findings confirm the limitations of conventional pedagogical structures by creating a greater understanding of mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. Such students may require more reassurance, structured guidance, and prominence within the learning environment to maintain their engagement and confidence.

Wendy reflects on her feelings at the beginning of the nursing course.

"... I've just had to teach myself ... It was challenging because I'd never written an assignment before in my life. Because everything was exam-based, like GCSEs and A levels. I did pure exams, so I had to learn how to write academically and reference and all of that. And so, I struggled with that in the first year, really." **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.**

Wendy's lack of confidence and feelings of anonymity are further exacerbated by limited skill development, a consequence of an exam-based education undertaken before she began her nursing course. An exam-based approach emphasises short-term learning based on memorisation, rather than independent, critical engagement. While Deacon et al. (2022) examine how educational experiences and societal perceptions shape cognitive adjustment for mature learners with dyslexia. This study extends this understanding by showing that exam-focused education could potentially create lasting feelings of academic uncertainty, subsequently restricting a mature, quasi-dyslexic learner's academic and social integration.

Wendy's reflection, stating, "*I just had to teach myself*," indicates a degree of unpreparedness and uncertainty about how to approach academic tasks, reinforcing feelings of uncertainty and a need to be self-reliant in a new learning environment. While Wendy's circumstances imply a lack of structured guidance and support in developing essential university skills, they further reveal how gaps in institutional support can place the burden of academic progression entirely on the student. This could be perceived as autonomy, but in reality, it highlights the need for mature quasi-dyslexic students to become self-supporting and motivated by expectation, rather than empowerment. Wendy's self-reliance to "*teach*" herself, which is often conveyed favourably in universities, can in reality indicate the limitations of institutional support available for mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds.

The need for universities to widen access by increasing the intake of learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds requires a commitment towards inclusive pedagogical support. An investment towards creating learning environments that support all learners, irrespective of their diverse educational backgrounds and needs, is required. Such a learning environment can reduce feelings of uncertainty and isolation by addressing the unpreparedness encountered by learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds as they begin their university education.

Verity describes her reality of studying in preparation for her nursing course at university.

"So, I did a BTEC in Health and Social Care, the extended one, and that was alright. I found it a lot easier than, say, if I did the A-level version ... Because you had a lot more time and a lot more support. And then I did this City and Guilds in Childcare as an apprenticeship. The work was more descriptive. So, it's a little bit less than level four. I found a massive jump from that level to year 1 (level 4)." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity's reflections specify how her BTEC course was *"a lot easier"* based on *"a lot more time and a lot more support."* This aligns with existing literature, which acknowledges that the removal of time restrictions enhances academic learning (Mosberg and Johns, 1994; Olofsson et al., 2012; Pedersen et al., 2016). Additionally, the pre-determined order of modules and assessments within a large cohort deepens uncertainty (Poldin et al., 2016) conveying how institutional structures within the university nursing course can heighten academic uncertainty for mature quasi-dyslexic students, like Verity. Verity's reflection illustrates some similarities with Macdonald and Stratta (2001) influential work within the field of WP and UK policy. This sociological study is beneficial towards understanding social positioning (marginalisation and exclusion) and institutional culture within 'traditional' university structures. Here we see the circumstances which shape the experiences of 'non-traditional' students who risk segregation and alienation within "the traditional model of learning in HE" (Macdonald and Stratta, 2001: 254).

The lengthened time frame and support Verity received during her previous experience of study have contributed to the development of her habitus, shaped by socialisation and past educational experiences (Bourdieu, 1977) . Although habitus develops over time, it is not fixed; it remains unconscious and can be reshaped

through new experiences. However, the academic structures within the university, such as the pedagogy and the requirement for an independent approach to learning, may not be associated with Verity's past experiences of learning. Consequently, she reflected, *"a massive jump from that level to year 1."*

While habitus is receptive to change, it can also be resistant. Particularly in an environment where the pedagogy and cultural expectations limit opportunities for individuals to feel included or valued. Consequently, students remain uncertain and display prolonged self-doubt in their ability to succeed (Bowden et al., 2021). For students like Verity to change their way of thinking, doing and identity, i.e., their habitus, requires an environment where they feel valued, respected, and supported, as such an environment creates confidence and self-belief. To flex against unconscious habitus is dependent upon more than willpower. Therefore, Verity becomes reliant on structural and relational support, and when this is lacking, she is more inclined to replicate unconscious ways of thinking and doing, such as staying quiet, not asking for help, and remaining uncertain of her social environment.

Verity continues to describe how she feels.

"So, when I started the course, I wanted a first overall, and I was determined I was gonna get that. And then it just went to pot and now I'll probably come out with a third, but I think nursing is hard ... I just think I'll just get a third, not a first, I think." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

An internalised disposition (Reay et al., 2010) could perhaps have contributed to Verity's initial perceived capability, by which she adopted the attitudes and beliefs of those around her. From a sociological perspective, this involves integrating such attitudes and beliefs towards creating one's own identity, therefore accepting the thoughts and convictions of other individuals or groups. In Section 2.3.ii, Spady's (1971) sociological model of integration, addresses how the disconnect from the university culture can impact a student psychologically, whereas Tinto's (1975) model

of integration maintains that both academic and social support are crucial to successful integration into university life. Wendy's reflection of "*teaching herself*" verifies her perception of "*struggling*" alone, which reflects low social and academic integration into the university environment, which heightens the possibility of academic disengagement. To consider the diverse, mature, quasi-dyslexic needs of Wendy, Tinto (1994) highlights the importance of universities adapting to the needs of diverse students, rather than them adapting to the institution. Through the lens of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), Wendy's reflection can be considered a misalignment between her habitus and the assumed expectations of the university. For students like Wendy, whose habitus does not align with the academic field, they may perceive uncertainty and be less empowered to ask for help. This conflict, between habitus and field, escalates the probability of disengagement.

As Zoya reflects on feedback from an assessment.

"I've never felt more. I get really frustrated at myself because I know you shouldn't compare yourself to other people on your course, and they're doing great ... getting all these high marks ... I was sweating in the night, like working through, and I just get, you get like this 35% mark." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya's perception of her subliminal learning environment is instrumental in escalating her growing sense of uncertainty, as her frustration and self-comparison diminish her self-efficacy. According to Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital, it becomes evident that students approach academic environments with varying access to capital. Zoya's insufficient academic capital illustrates the inequality between her and her peers, who she perceives as being more able to meet academic expectations and adjust their learning strategies accordingly. As for Zoya, she recognises that effort alone does not guarantee a successful outcome, which intensifies her self-doubt and reinforces her sense of uncertainty.

This study offers a deeper insight into the self-perception of mature learners with quasi-dyslexia, as their perception is not solely influenced by cognitive ability but significantly shaped by institutional structures, such as large cohorts and assessment practices. Where previous studies have examined the social and psychological impact dyslexia has on self-esteem, Wendy, Verity, and Zoya's reflections show that the learning environment alone can intensify feelings of uncertainty. This becomes more evident when mature learners engage in social comparison, signifying that social interactions may be more important than support, particularly for students like Zoya. In light of these findings, integration models, such as those suggested by Tinto (1994; 1997) must be reconsidered in the context of mature learners with quasi-dyslexia. Such learners are more likely to begin university with a fragmented academic habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) that requires additional support to grow academic confidence and social belonging.

5.4.2 Social Interactions and Support

The role of personal tutors in a university nursing course is of significant importance towards building student confidence and competence. Personal tutors, peer mentoring and peer groups support the ongoing development of social interactions and support systems, which are key in facilitating mature learners to develop their student identity. Peer groups, particularly within closed cohort structures, are considered beneficial as peer support further enhances student performance and the continuation of studies (Stuart, 2006; Tinto, 2017). Nevertheless, Poldin et al. (2016) and Tomás-Miquel et al. (2016) showed that students tended to position themselves with like-minded others, which echoes similarities to the findings of this study.

Wendy reflects on the development of her friendship group.

"I've always been in the lower group because our friendship group, we have like, one of my friends just gets ridiculous grades and we're so proud of her

for it. But it is also quite annoying, and then we have the middle ones and the lower ones, and I'm always in the lower category." **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.**

Wendy's reflections illustrate how social comparisons within her friendship group influence her self-perception, as she views herself as less capable compared to her peers. According to Burke et al. (2016) acceptability is strongly influenced by what institutional organisations recognise and value, regarding behaviours and practices. While Wendy's reflections contribute to a deeper understanding of social interactions in a university setting, this study builds on existing literature by establishing that interactions are more than a source of academic support, but can also reinforce self-perceived hierarchies, influencing mature learners' confidence and self-worth.

The findings suggest that the participating nursing students build informal social hierarchies based on academic achievement and peer recognition. As discussed in Section 1.7 regarding Bourdieu's theory of capital, these informal social hierarchies result in Wendy being positioned, by herself or others, in a lower category, which is key in Bourdieu's (1986) symbolic capital and status. In the context of Wendy's reflections, symbolic capital signifies the academic recognition and reputation acquired by her friends, positioned in a higher category. Wendy's friends have gained symbolic capital through the accumulation of their academic accomplishments, enhancing their perceived status and the respect of others, particularly those in the lower categories, like Wendy.

Verity, similar to Wendy, reflected on her friendship group.

"So, I have two really good friends, and they're very supportive. And I had two other friends too, but when I failed my exam because of a silly little thing, I told them ... And they were like, well, it wasn't asked for. That's not helpful. The way to help is to, oh, don't worry, next time you'll do it, and

we'll help you. So, they weren't supportive." **Verity - Student Nurse:
Mental Health.**

Verity's unique perspective reinforces how social categorisation within student groups can create self-doubt and uncertainty. Verity values the importance of friendships that are both empathetic and understanding, establishing two types of social interactions and support. Friends who offer reassurance and a willingness to help, and those who are dismissive. This suggests Verity's self-perception is intricately linked to her social interactions and the emotional support she receives. Verity is conscious of her academic performance and appears embarrassed by her friends' judgment of her failing "*because of a silly little thing,*" which she viewed as unsupportive and lacking in empathy.

Verity's self-concept and emotions are shaped by her friends' judgements. However, her reflection also aligns with Harding's (1991) and Collins' (1997) feminist perspective, as discussed in Section 3.6, which maintains that individuals from marginalised positions like Verity's offer a unique perspective that provides new knowledge on the emotional significance of empathy and supportive friendships. Verity's position as a struggling mature quasi-dyslexic student, also from a 'non-traditional' educational background, develops an understanding that is further shaped by her social position. Feminist standpoint theory acknowledges the need for emotional support, an aspect often undervalued in an academic environment which prioritises grades and individual academic performance, frequently overlooking the emotional and social aspects of learning.

The principles of the feminist standpoint theory acknowledge that groups are shaped not exclusively by academic capabilities but are influenced by wider social and structural factors, including previous educational experiences (Collins, 1990a; Harding, 2013; Smith, 1999). Wendy's narrative of the "*ridiculous grades*" to describe a high-achieving friend suggests a complex emotional response, which may indicate

internalised oppression by assuming that marginalised individuals adopt a dominant person's values and standards, even though they may be detrimental to their self-perception and sense of worth (Collins, 1986). Harding (2009) and Collins (1990a) affirm that knowledge is socially situated; therefore, Wendy's perceived lower position and marginality are not derived from her inadequacies but the consequence of institutional principles and an educational environment that advantage established forms of academic capital, while diminishing others, therefore reinforcing systemic inequality. This inequality is also established horizontally through peer interactions, which has been considered deep-rooted within some aspects of the nursing profession (Coursey et al., 2013; Einarsen et al., 2020; Embree and White, 2010; Kiprillis et al., 2021; Thobaben, 2007) (see Section 4.3.i). Whereby long-standing hierarchies and norms within the profession of nursing permeate and influence the culture of nurse education.

Such dominant power structures can be further applied to aspects of nursing and nurse education. As discussed in Section 3.6, Hartsock (1983a) emphasises how dominant institutions reinforce hierarchies that advantage certain types of knowledge. This way of thinking can be visualised through the history of nursing, which is structured as subordinate to medicine. Hartsock's (1983a) position can be interpreted as showing that nurse education continues to employ hierarchical structures by the emphasis of particular types of knowledge as dominant over others, such as scientific over relational, emotional, or experiential forms of knowing. This hierarchy is replicated and reinforced in the preference for 'traditional' qualifications, conveying that dominant academic norms within the university reinforce the classification of students. Consequently, this positions marginalised students, such as mature quasi-dyslexic and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, as outside the dominant academic culture and consequently excluded and subjugated within their learning environment. This externally imposed categorising

also becomes internalised by student nurses, reinforcing feelings of uncertainty and further embedding their marginality.

Ursula reflects on her close group of friends.

"Yes, things have really, really changed. I have a close group of friends; we all live together and similar ages. Fresh out of school, started placement together. We all use each other as support, me and my five friends ... Emotional support, friends. Mom and Dad, they're my rock." **Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.**

Throughout Ursula's encounters, she describes the value and importance of emotional well-being while actively engaging in social interactions and support systems to maintain stability. The support she has received from close friendships has developed her emotional resilience, enabling appropriate responses to the stress and failure she has encountered during the nursing course. Simultaneously, the support from her parents suggests a firm foundation and stabilising influence throughout her educational journey. Since primary school, her parents have been instrumental in seeking an explanation for her academic challenges. This early intervention from her parents suggests that Ursula comes from a background where education and academic support are highly regarded. Ursula's cultural and, more specifically, academic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) further highlights how differences in social and cultural capital can influence variations in academic resilience.

In contrast, Zoya reflects on her friendship groups and the apparent emotional burden of her self-perceived difference.

"I've got two very good friends, and of course, they're in HARS (High Achiever Recognition Scheme), and they're like Zoya, what did you get? I can't bear it, Jaye, to tell them, I can't. Even though they're really close friends and even though they would never judge me." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya considers that she is unable to receive emotional support from her peers, *“even though they would never judge.”* Her feelings of embarrassment and being judged are enhanced by the recognised high-achievers (HARS)²¹ status awarded to her peers by the university. Zoya’s internalised fear of judgement, which is not explicit, impacts her perception of self-worth. By manifesting a form of self-regulation, she perceives herself accountable based on what she considers others believe. These internalised perceptions of social expectation further shape Zoya’s feelings of not belonging, limited self-worth and lacking confidence. All of which unintentionally solidifies the stratification of ability within her peer group, referred to by Bourdieu (1984) as academic capital. By recognising high achievers in this way, it has an unintended effect on others.

When internalised social pressures undermine confidence, those affected can exclude themselves to protect against expected judgement. Wendy, Verity and Ursula have forged relationships with their peers and have benefited from the support they can offer each other. However, echoing Zoya’s reflections, the seminal study by Macdonald and Stratta (2001) acknowledged that students who are unable to adapt to an institutional culture often become segregated from it. Zoya’s reflections highlight how structural violence creates conditions for inequality, whilst symbolic violence ensures such inequalities appear standard and expected.

As discussed in Section 2.3.ii, Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) views learning to take place within a social context rather than by sole effort. This study draws on Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory to understand the importance of creating environments for learners that encourage collaboration. Rather than the inequitable institutional principle of HARS, which creates social barriers and academic hierarchy within learning. Supporting institutional favouritism toward high-achieving

²¹ HARS is a university-based scheme that acknowledges High Achievers in a Faculty at the end of Level 4 (year one). This enables a student to pursue further development opportunities across a range of academic, personal, professional, voluntary, and international experiences as they move through Level 5 and Level 6 of their studies.

students adversely positions others, like Zoya, as less capable, illustrating the social nature of learning.

Feminist standpoint theorists recognise that social divisions reinforce structural inequalities and prevent students, like Zoya, from accessing the same learning opportunities. By utilising Collins' (1986) understanding of the *outsider within*, Zoya would be acknowledged as a marginalised student who exists within an academic space. While she remains excluded from belonging within a dominant knowledge system, HARS, due to the division of students into academic hierarchies, separating them into insiders and outsiders. Zoya's academic struggles emphasise the power of institutional academic performance, such as grades and classifications, towards shaping not only self-perception but also the socially constructed consequences of academic classification. Ahmed (2012) would judge Zoya's inability to access peer support as institutional inaccessibility, where strategies are designed to reward excellence, creating further divisions in education.

The concept of HARS creates the segregation of students based on perceived ability, potentially widening social inequalities, reinforcing negative dispositions, and impacting self-esteem and confidence for those segregated from the group. Zoya's experience, contributed to by HARS, suggests that she is unable to use social proximal support within her ZPD due to the imposed segregation of her peers (by HARS). Vygotsky (1978) expresses how a lack of social learning opportunities and support from more knowledgeable others (MKO) reduces one's understanding and academic performance. The deprivation of meaningful cognitive development caused by the lack of collaboration and inclusivity reveals the gaps between what Zoya can do independently and what she can achieve with MKO.

A key contribution of this research is the identification of institutional and social factors that influence confidence and self-perception among mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. These unique perspectives highlight the complexities surrounding social interactions, support

systems and integration of mature learners, and the emphasis that needs to be placed on them by the university in shaping curricula. Wendy and Verity's experiences illustrate the impact of peer feedback on their self-esteem and academic identity, while Ursula's narrative recognises the importance of a robust support network and the resulting resilience she has built. Zoya's experience portrays the potential consequences of being segregated from her peers as a result of her academic ability within a structured learning environment, reinforcing self-perceived hierarchies. Understanding how mature quasi-dyslexic learners and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds manage these challenges, both independently and within their peer groups, provides advanced knowledge of how best to create more supportive learning environments in universities.

5.4.3 Independent Learning within the University

The literature recognises that the transition from schools and further education to university is a lengthy process, and adapting to independent learning conventions is challenging for most students (Katartzi and Hayward, 2020). In universities, the term independent learner is complex but can be described as the ability to monitor one's progress, take responsibility for one's learning, along with setting objectives, and the ability to evaluate and reflect on what has been learned (McLinden and Edwards, 2011; Murad and Varkey, 2008).

Zoya struggles to work independently, and to illustrate the point, she reflects on the following experience.

"I have struggled massively; my assignment grades absolutely show my struggle. It's been a constant battle for me. I try and I try. It's silly things like I'll read it (my assignment), and like it makes perfect sense. My husband reads it, and he's like, what do you mean? And I'm like I meant this, he's like, but it doesn't make sense Zoya, but I read it and I'm like it

does make sense and it takes me a long time to process ... Oh yeah, I can see what he means now, it does make sense what he's saying now, because what am I talking about." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya presents a scene that portrays her at ease, as she exposes her academic challenges to her husband. Her ability to openly share her thoughts enables her to develop a new understanding: *"I can see what he means now, it does make sense what he's saying."* For Zoya, her exposure to one-to-one learning comes from her husband's support. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD suggest that learning is more effective when supported by an MKO; in this instance, Zoya's husband acts as her MKO by guiding her understanding in ways she may not achieve independently. However, her ongoing reliance on support, rather than independent learning, questions whether she is receiving structured support from her university learning environment. When universities fail to understand the social aspects of learning, students like Zoya become reliant on informal support, which does not provide aspects of collaborative learning, critical thinking, and independent study skills, which are all considered crucial for academic success.

When asked how she meets her academic needs as an independent learner, Zoya looked upwards and stared into space, while shaking her head from side to side. She took a deep breath, and at this point, appeared tearful and on the verge of crying.

"I found the lecturers weren't approachable, Um, whatsoever. You couldn't go and see them. You wasn't allowed to go and see them to discuss it. If you want to see them, it's like all on Moodle. And I'd gone to see the lecturer, and they're like, no, we don't see students, it's all on Moodle. And I remember sitting in the place, and I burst into tears. I just remember crying in the place, I just don't understand what I've got to do, and then I failed." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

The lack of access to lecturers made Zoya feel unsupported. Her experience of encountering institutional barriers is reflected in the findings of Pirttimaa et al. (2015), where students' difficulties were exacerbated when teachers lacked recognition of student learning needs. Conversely, independent learning remains of significant importance in the profession of nursing, as it strengthens a nurse's ability to think critically and to make clinical judgements, while embracing the term lifelong learning and the professionalism of nursing (Chiang et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2021). According to the NMC (2018b) Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment (SSSA) state that "learning experiences should enable students to meet their learning outcomes, achieve competence and work towards becoming independent, reflective and professional practitioners within their chosen field or area of practice" (NMC, 2018b: 5).

As discussed in Section 3.6, Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus and field is often used within the context of education. Similarly, the concept is relevant to the profession of nursing by examining how the assumption of independence within an area of professional practice may further reinforce feelings of uncertainty. The NMC (2018b) aspire for all nursing students to work towards becoming independent practitioners. The SSSA supports professional autonomy by accepting that they all embark on learning experiences from an equally equipped position to engage independently. From a Bourdieusian interpretation, the NMC's SSSA neglects to consider how a student's habitus of deeply rooted dispositions, influenced by past educational and social experiences, may fail to align with the expectations of the area of professional practice (field). For students like Zoya, whose learning needs are not recognised or supported, the casual expectation of her independence within a professional practice environment may intensify feelings of uncertainty.

Each participant in the study considered at least one positive feature when reflecting on the field of practice.

"... placements where I've had all passes, erm, like I've had excellent reports on placement." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

"...She's been a brilliant student ... it's things like that, like, just make you feel that it's all worthwhile." **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.**

"... makes me feel valued, because they think I'm capable." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

"... Say in a ward you have 12 patients, and I'm really overwhelmed with that many. So, what they did they kinda started me off with 4 and then maybe 6, and that really did help." **Yvonne - Student Nurse: Adult.**

"... and I really, really, really, like thrive. When I go on placement, I really enjoy it." **Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.**

Learning within a professional practice environment encourages self-direction and critical thinking (Murray, 2018). Through Kolb's (1984; 2014) Experiential Learning Theory, the participants' reflections indicate that active learning by doing enables them to conceptualise and reflect on their learning (see Section 2.3.iii), whilst maintaining motivation by feeling autonomous and competent (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Deeper analysis further suggests that each participant of the study was able to adapt their habitus to align with the expectations and requirements of the professional practice environment (Bourdieu, 1977). Their ability to adjust their dispositions may be determined by the quality of their social interactions and the symbolic support they receive from their peers. Within the practice field, the process of learning new skills appears to offer a form of equality, where students are situated with a degree of fairness based on their shared status as student nurses. As a student nurse progresses, the psychological significance of Vygotsky's ZPD emerges, illustrating how support is gradually reduced as competence increases, confirming independent learning within an active learning environment (Coffman et al., 2023).

However, this perception of equality fades when learning returns to a university setting, and what is considered valuable or credible is redefined. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital acts as a form of power; the higher the capital, the easier for students to navigate institutions. Section 2.2 discusses how, when capital is fragmented or limited, with obstacles, one frequently perceives this as personal failure (symbolic violence), which is the imposition of cultural attitudes in a way that seems equitable. As the institution defines what is legitimate and what success looks like (symbolic power) (Bourdieu, 1991). These dynamics result in feelings of uncertainty and perceptions of being an inactive and incompetent learner. Consequently, for those who do not have the required capital, they blame themselves, rather than the university.

Zoya describes an experience she encountered when seeking academic support, which illustrates Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic violence.

"... No one seems to know what I mean when I say I can't do it. And when they explain, and then, stupidly, I wouldn't go back. I'd sit there going, OK, that makes sense. That makes sense. I'd leave the room and go, having no idea what they've just spoken about." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya revealed signs of vulnerability when she expressed her uncertainty about her academic work, which she perceives as a personal failure, *"... stupidly, I wouldn't go back."* Four of the five participants in the study, including Zoya, found independent learning a challenge, which was further amplified by an apparent limited knowledge and understanding of the lecturers towards recognising the support needs of mature quasi-dyslexic students (Ryder and Norwich, 2019). Zoya's emotional reaction (crying) reflects a further sense of isolation, as she finds the academic language ambiguous and challenging. Literature by Richardson (2021) and Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) established that female participants often perceived the university as conveying a lack of empathy and community building, and based on masculine

ideas, intensifying participants' sense of vulnerability, particularly when emotions are expressed.

Collins (2000) maintains that negative stereotypes of women undermine confidence in seeking support or navigating the education system, adding to the emotional burden, and complicating their ability to become independent learners. The importance of individual achievement as a measurement of academic success can be seen as a masculinisation of the university learning environment. This signifies that emotional detachment and independence are more advantageous than working in partnership and supporting others. Collins' (2000) appraisal of racial and gendered stereotypes emphasises how societal beliefs and bias shape the learning experiences of Black women. As such, Collins' (2000) understanding of dominant academic norms conveys how principles of independent learning become valid when based on white, masculinised, and individualist traditions (see Section 3.6), subsequently influencing the attitudes and behaviours of mature quasi-dyslexic students navigating the learning environment within the university.

Zoya's account facilitates a discussion informed by feminist standpoint theorists, in particular, Smith's (2005) concept of power relations and hooks' (1994) views on systemic oppression. Both conceptualisations can be used to contribute an in-depth understanding of Zoya's reluctance to seek further clarification, which is shaped by a power imbalance between students and lecturers. In the context of independent learning, Smith (2005) examines how institutional hierarchy encourages student conformity, where students feel compelled to show understanding, even when actual comprehension is not present. This illustrates the occurrence of expectation and academic mismatch, whereby the university presumes a level of preparedness towards independence that should be familiar to all learners. Subsequently, when either party does not meet expectations, barriers to effective learning can develop.

hooks' (2003) judgement on systemic oppression examines how marginalised groups are excluded, and a key finding of this study is that mature quasi-dyslexic students are marginalised. They are frequently disadvantaged or excluded in educational settings and inadvertently oppressed by the more 'traditional' student. hooks (2003) might consider Zoya's reluctance to seek further clarification as highlighting the overpowering nature of institutional structures, where students like Zoya, who do not fit the archetypal 'traditional' student, are left to struggle, rather than be integrated into supportive learning communities. Rigid teaching methods, inflexible assessment practices, and a lack of support to meet the needs of mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds hinder the ability to engage in independent learning. The works of Smith (2005) and hooks (2003) argue for the creation of inclusive educational practices that recognise and validate the experiences of all learners. Subsequently, Zoya's experience is the result of power dynamics and structural barriers, which, when internalised, further impact her self-perception and self-worth.

Verity's reflections provide insight into the issue of institutional barriers.

"So, I try and use CINAHL²², but CINAHL doesn't like me. Except the librarian says, oh, it's the way you're using it. I've done all the tutorials with you." Verity - **Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

The formation of an inclusive learning environment acknowledges the importance of educators' understanding the needs of diverse learners. Verity's lack of familiarity with navigating the academic systems and acquiring independent learning skills creates a further barrier to her learning. The librarian's reply, *"Oh, it's the way you're using it,"* lacks empathy or recognition of Verity's diverse learning needs, by not only failing to provide support, but also reinforcing exclusion. As discussed in Section 1.3, critical race theorist Crenshaw (1994) examines policy and identity politics to determine that the concept of intersectionality can reveal how individuals with

²² CINAHL stands for Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature. A database that indexes articles from nursing and allied health journals, as well as other relevant resources.

overlapping identities, like Verity and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, can encounter marginalisation through subtle statements and/or actions. These often subtle and non-intentional microaggressions, such as the librarian's dismissive reply to Verity, might appear insignificant. However, when directed to a mature, quasi-dyslexic student, they emerge as a discriminatory expression impacted by intersecting ways of thinking. While microaggressive statements or actions are often conveyed towards those from global majority backgrounds, Crenshaw (1994; 2017) shows through intersectionality how other marginalised groups' experiences can be shaped by wider intersecting systems of disadvantage, such as being both mature, quasi-dyslexic and from a 'non-traditional' educational background.

Feminist standpoint theorists Harding (2009) and Hartsock (1983a) contend that knowledge is shaped by lived experience; therefore, marginalised students, like Verity, occupy marginalised positions and acquire epistemic privilege, based on their deeper understanding of power dynamics, enlightened by their lived experience. Therefore, Verity's position and experiences provide her with an understanding of a lived experience that others can only assume. However, Haack (1993) acknowledges that this privilege comes with challenges, as some individuals, like Verity, may not be aware of such systemic biases and how such dispositions impact and influence their experiences. Therefore, Verity is inclined to consider this scenario as a personal failure, rather than structural exclusion, subsequently internalising her emotions and feelings of uncertainty.

As discussed in Section 4.3.i Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledges further reconstructs how independent learning is understood by concentrating on the association between learning and the social circumstances. Therefore, in consideration of Verity's situated knowledge, we, as educators, gain a more in-depth appreciation of the specific challenges and biases mature quasi-dyslexic students encounter and the multifactorial layers. Consequently, acknowledging that mature

learners do not engage with university learning from an independent position, but instead from a perspective of lived experience, which may involve marginalisation, past educational events, and/or a lack of confidence.

Harding (2009) and Hartsock (1983a) generally consider gendered expectations and how these may impact women's confidence and self-perception. This study extends such principles to mature quasi-dyslexic students who face similar structural and social barriers by moving beyond independent learning as an isolated skill and framing it as a socially embedded process. This study shows how the university's dyslexia assessment process has exacerbated marginalisation and self-blame. Earlier views by Hartsock (1983b) on situated knowledge would have opposed the viewpoint of the individual by considering it to be insignificant in the broader context of knowledge production. However, over time, more recent interpretations no longer oppose this view. Hartsock now considers that the best production of new knowledge occurs when an interaction between different mindsets is examined (Hartsock, 2013). Applying this shift in viewpoint to mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students would show that these individual differences are beneficial towards understanding their learning process and can be used to improve existing university nursing course practices.

5.4.4 The Language of the University

The academic language used in university can be a barrier to learning for mature students, particularly learners with quasi-dyslexia, 'non-traditional' education, and diverse linguistic backgrounds. A pedagogical approach that considers the diverse learning needs of mature learners in a clear communicative style can enhance the learning experience, which is further challenged when academic language is unfamiliar. Reading anxiety is a term used to explain a negative emotional attitude toward reading (Bergey et al., 2017). The consequence of such anxieties has the

potential to become cyclical; subsequently, avoidance techniques are adopted, further reducing the ability to practise and develop reading skills.

Zoya provides a relevant example of her feelings about reading aloud.

"I dread standing up in front of people. I dread that my friends they're absolutely fine, but when it comes to my bit. I go; you do it. You do it, cause if I read it out, I'm like blur, blur, blur, and I go really quiet, and then I'll get words mixed up, and then I get really embarrassed." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

All participants in the current study expressed how they met challenges when reading. Some described concerns about the language used and expressed how simpler words could improve understanding. These findings are similar to Itua et al. (2012), where health students struggled to interpret academic jargon. Zoya's reflections further suggest the impact of the social environment, which prompts an element of comparison, exacerbating her feelings of uncertainty. The isolation Zoya illustrates within her academic setting can be evidenced through Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, which expresses how Zoya's view of the university fails to align with her past experiences of academic socialisation, resulting in academic isolation and intensified anxiety.

The literature established that Lillis and Turner's (2001) research, which explored the reading and writing experiences of 'non-traditional' students in universities and determined that the use of terminology by tutors often raised more questions for the students than answers. The academic language was fixed in "socio-rhetorical norms," constructed to conform with the values and thinking of the institution, despite being the result of a deeply embedded and unfamiliar cultural and historical setting (Lillis and Turner, 2001: 64), which marginalised those unacquainted with such guiding principles. Today's mature and diverse learners in universities are faced with a language that is distinct and largely confined to the educational environment, and

subsequently excludes them for limited possession of linguistic accuracy, which contributes to their academic challenges.

Within a healthcare setting, nursing students are often supported by an expert, such as a registered nurse, to understand and interpret medical jargon through explanation, repetition, and contextualisation. However, in comparison, academic jargon is rarely explored, often assumed, and predominantly confined to the educational environment, which creates a linguistic barrier. Consequently, placing the burden on students to conform to the academic norms, otherwise, they often experience feelings of exclusion and academic inadequacy.

Echoing the views of participants, Yvonne and Verity reflect on their concerns with reading and struggling to understand what they have read.

"Sometimes they use like these long words. Like I've never even heard of before. And then I have to kind of think or ask people, what does this mean? and then you know ... I can't even pronounce the words." **Yvonne - Student Nurse: Adult.**

"I really struggle with. So, reading something, I really struggle to make an image of it, and then understand ... it's always been like that for me ... especially in articles where they use these fancy words and there's me having to Google what they mean." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Yvonne and Verity struggle with pronunciation and fluency; however, Kirby (2007) acknowledges that the fundamentals of reading are complex and require a combination of processing, fluency and strategy for reading comprehension to become attainable. Bourdieu (1986) asserts that academic success is influenced by cultural and academic capital, where students who possess fluency in academic

language are more favoured to succeed, while learners unfamiliar, like Verity and Yvonne, remain linguistically excluded. This social factor has particular relevance when students have diverse linguistic backgrounds and have limited knowledge of academic jargon.

The exclusionary social construct of academic language is highlighted by Verity and Ursula, who are similarly challenged to confidently interpret what they have read.

"... I don't want to say my thoughts, in case they're wrong. Because, obviously, in lectures you can't take, you can't take your time to read. Cause, if I was me, I'd take time to read and read and go back and read. Whereas they give you five minutes to read and make a summary." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

"My reading is fine. Like I don't struggle reading ... but the issue I do have is I have to go back and read and re-read a few times to understand. If I'm reading a book, I just read the words; reading is fine. It's just the understanding of the text." **Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.**

Verity's reflection highlights how her uncertainty reduces her engagement in social learning (Niolaki et al., 2020) and maintains social hierarchies by restricting her access to knowledge. Four of the five participants reflected similar concerns with the use of language and understanding of what they had read. The literature acknowledges the social conditions associated with higher reports of reading anxiety and lower academic grades (Badcock et al., 2023). Furthermore, research studies show that removing time constraints improves readability (Mosberg and Johns, 1994; Olofsson et al., 2012; Parrila et al., 2007; Pedersen et al., 2016), illustrating how language use can influence engagement and participation. This reinforces an understanding of the social impact of language and how this extends beyond cognition but also shapes experiences of power and belonging.

Applying the principles of feminist standpoint theory, this study uses participants' reflections to expose the power dynamics established in who controls knowledge production and dissemination within the university. Verity's fear of speaking in class due to uncertainty about language does not reflect her intelligence or effort, but rather the use of academic language within her learning environment, which makes her feel like an outsider. This illustrates an imbalance of power where dominant groups (lecturers) who set the standards for achievement, and students who do not conform to the standard, risk further inequality. Section 1.3 discussed Collins' (1990a) the matrix of domination as a framework for understanding how the many layers of one's identity overlap and shape their experience of social inequality, and the unique obstacles faced in different social situations. Collins' (1990a) way of thinking can be used to explain how a university maintains certain norms and standards that reflect dominant socio-cultural values, further disadvantaging those who do not accommodate these values.

Acknowledging the complexities of varied social factors and identities shows how intersections combine to create unique experiences of advantage or marginalisation (Collins, 2019). Based on this theory, Verity's anxiety can be accepted as a consequence of the intersecting pressures associated with her linguistic background and socioeconomic status. The factors collide to construct circumstances where Verity, who aligns with the 'non-traditional' educational background, avoids participating in social learning for fear of being "*wrong*" and therefore becomes disadvantaged. The standardisation of academic discourse excludes students like Verity, as she faces linguistic barriers and socio-rhetorical attitudes that privilege certain ways of writing and the communication of knowledge. As such, the "interlocking nature of oppression" (Collins, 1990a: 547), within universities can be a result of structural inequalities and hidden prejudices embedded in academic language and expectations.

To summarise, the theme titled A Sense of Uncertainty has explored the closed cohort model in nursing to illustrate how feelings of social uncertainty and anonymity are reinforced. Similarly, the academic language of the university was found to be exclusionary and became a barrier to student learning. This finding highlighted an isolating environment, which negatively impacted self-perception and enhanced a sense of uncertainty. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice is used to examine social and past educational experiences towards shaping emotional behaviours and a sense of belonging. The application of feminist standpoint theory shows the need to examine the dominant power structures and advocate for a more inclusive and empathetic approach to teaching and learning in universities. Furthermore, the application of intersectionality reveals how universities maintain discriminatory practices that unfairly disadvantage mature quasi-dyslexic students with varied educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Inclusive learning environments need to extend beyond individual *reasonable adjustments* by recognising and valuing the perspectives of marginalised groups. These findings provide new knowledge evidencing that academic struggle associated with the language of a university is more than a cognitive challenge, but a structural issue where dominant academic conventions reinforce inequalities.

As the participants progress through their three-year BSc nursing course, the findings offer a deeper insight into theme 2, titled The Academically Struggling Student.

5.5 Theme 2: The Academically Struggling Student – Psychological Factors

"I have been working to change the way I speak and write."

(hooks, 1989: 16)

For many years, the focus of inclusive learning has been on disability, but the term neurodiverse is changing the narrative. There is a greater need for universities to be relevant and engaging for all students. Key principles of inclusive learning can encourage independence among mature quasi-dyslexic students at university, but to facilitate independent learning, metacognitive skills such as planning and evaluating one's learning are essential. Without such skills, mature students often struggle to apply effective metacognitive strategies for their learning.

5.5.1 Metacognition (Knowledge, Experience, Tasks and Strategies)

Metacognition is often described as "learning to learn" (Wingate, 2007: 392). It plays an important role in reflective thinking, which is at the heart of nursing practice and lifelong learning (Bjerkvik and Hilli, 2019; Flavell, 1979; Teekman, 2000).

Wendy, who studied A/AS level before starting her nursing course, reflects on her experiences of learning.

"It depends on the lecturers as well like, some are so approachable like for questions and stuff, but other lecturers, they just do a lecture then they don't want to know kind of thing, and that can really make a difference for me because you can, I like to, like fully understand ... I really need to fully understand what you want if that makes sense?" **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child**

Wendy shows a need to understand the task but considers this requirement to be based on direction from the lecturers, rather than her comprehension. Her quote reflects certain metacognitive awareness as she describes the conditions that support

her learning. Wendy considers the importance of lecturers who are “*approachable*” and how the lecturer’s behaviour impacts her ability to “*fully understand*,” both of which show awareness of how her learning is influenced by the environment. As discussed in Section 2.7, Flavell’s (1979) concept of metacognition refers to the ability to assess one’s learning strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in knowledge, and is integral for academic success. Four of the five participants in the study conveyed some awareness of metacognition when describing their educational experiences. Badger et al.’s (2001) research on students studying Access to HE courses was considered to use the least number of metacognitive strategies when compared to ‘traditional’ students. Limited metacognitive awareness suggests a focus on completing tasks, rather than engaging with the learning resources to improve knowledge and understanding (Stanton et al., 2021). Consequently, Wendy’s incomplete metacognitive awareness makes it more challenging to establish areas for improvement or adaptation. The management of tasks shows her limitations, as her initial approach is to establish the thoughts of the lecturer, demonstrating her inability to begin the task independently. A featured reflection within Section 5.4.1. highlights Wendy’s expectation of being “*watched over by the teacher*,” confirming her dependency on external factors, as her strategies to achieve the required task independently were not established before starting her nursing course.

Zoya’s reflection shows her anxiety and confusion as she struggles with an academic task.

“If I’m in lectures, I’ll write notes. I’ve come back, and it’s like, why have I written that? It’s just words that just, are there. They’re just words. There’s no point to them. And I’ll write ‘The,’ but why have I wrote ‘The’? It was just a random word. I was like, what was I meant to write there? So, I have really struggled that way, I really have.” **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

To improve Zoya's method of note-taking by the application of Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition, her approach would require an aspect of questioning, organising information and summarising what has been learnt. The method of notetaking, while a regular practice within Access to HE type courses (Badger et al., 2001), is also regarded as a consequence of large cohort teaching, whereby learning becomes passive, rather than active or collaborative (Spear, 1984), further exacerbating Zoya's "*struggle*". In addition to insufficient metacognition, Zoya, as a mature quasi-dyslexic student, displays some characteristics of dyslexia, such as difficulty organising thoughts on paper, re-reading to understand (British Dyslexia Association, 2005), and challenges with phonological awareness (Rose Report, 2009). Furthermore, Zoya describes her notes as "*just words*," likewise suggesting a fundamental gap in metacognition, as without metacognition, notetaking becomes a passive activity. Additionally, Zoya's challenges with organising her notes and thoughts on paper (metacognition) reflect wider institutional biases that advantage students by assuming prerequisite metacognitive skills, while disadvantaging those who are yet to learn such teachable skills, further embedding inequalities in student confidence and self-perception.

Zoya continues to reflect and provides a comprehensive explanation of her academic struggles when revising with her peers.

"I just sit there. I've got all my revision cards out cause I've done it in the library with everybody else. You're like, oh God, I'm on it. I've got my revision cards; I must be doing something right. And they're like beautiful. And I sit there ... they're just words on a piece of paper to me. I could sit there for hours just looking at them, and I would leave the room, and I'd come back, and I have no idea what it meant." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

As a mature quasi-dyslexic student, to achieve the metacognitive task, Zoya considers the strategies used by her peers and mirrors their actions by making notes, to adapt her perceptions of academic culture within the university. Her account, *"that she must be doing something right,"* provides insight into her fragmented ability for self-assessment and limited awareness of suitable approaches to enhance her learning. Self-assessment is considered a key component of self-regulated learning, as the ability to self-assess one's academic achievement is key towards becoming a self-regulated learner with an understanding of metacognition, i.e., learning how to learn (Stanton et al., 2021). Research by Bergey et al. (2017) acknowledges that students with a history of reading difficulty often encounter an unrecognised disconnect between the effort they apply to tasks, the demands of university-level academic work, and the necessity to modify their approaches to learning.

To improve the learning environment for mature quasi-dyslexic learners, the wider issue of exclusion within universities must be addressed, through which dominant institutional structures promote certain ways of learning while marginalising learners unfamiliar with such conventions. Harding (2009) and Hartsock (1983a) remark on this inequality, by arguing that the production of knowledge is shaped by the privileged, in Zoya's instance, 'traditional' social groups, characterising what is represented as effective learning. Zoya's pursuit to mirror her peers' study habits without fully appreciating their effectiveness, shows a pivotal point of Bourdieu's (1986) academic capital, where students from 'traditional' educational backgrounds start university with a suggested understanding of metacognition, whereas students from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, like Zoya, must manage these expectations without prior socialisation of academic norms.

To further consider how universities privilege particular students while marginalising others, a feminist standpoint would consider Zoya's academic struggle not as an individual inadequacy, but a consequence of epistemic privilege, such as the university's focus on established and often masculinised forms of knowledge. This

occurs when educators assume that all students begin university with the same understanding of learning strategies, thereby instantly marginalising those who lack the dominant 'traditional' forms of knowledge. Feminist standpoint theory maintains that marginalised learners, such as mature quasi-dyslexic students, experience unique and valid perspectives, which are shaped by their social positions, exposing dominant educational beliefs. An interrelated view of Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital magnifies how academic success is not purely based on ability, but on acceptance into the social opinions embedded in the academic field. Conversely, Bourdieu (1984) emphasises the recreation of inequality through habitus and capital, whereas feminist standpoint theory aligns the lived experience and knowledge of those who have traditionally been excluded or marginalised within dominant knowledge systems. Simultaneously, they stress that academic challenges are not exclusively about ability, but about the inequality between university norms and the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds.

The following section examines the motivations and attitudes of the participants and how these elements interact with the university to further shape their academic journey.

5.5.2 Motivation and Attitudes

To ensure the NHS workforce remains representative of the communities it serves, Health Education England (HEE) 2014 published *Widening Participation It Matters!*, a strategy aimed at refocusing the purpose of WP, which is "based upon a person's merit, ability and motivation and not their social background or the privilege, extent and effectiveness of their social networks" (HEE, 2014: 5). The policy, although intended to create a more diverse NHS workforce, has not considered the impact of established structural barriers in universities on mature quasi-dyslexic learners.

Zoya provides a brief insight into her perspective.

"I think the assignment feedback today was. This is not worthy of anything more than 40%. And it just kind of makes me. It's like, really unmotivates me. I'm like, what's the point?" **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya's description of receiving feedback from an academic stating, *"this is not worthy of anything more than 40%,"* shows the association between institutional judgment and dwindling confidence. Similarities were found in Deacon et al.'s (2022) research of adults with dyslexia who described the psychological and emotional impact of experiencing exclusion and painful past educational encounters. Although the study showed outcome similarities, the study's diverse sample of age, gender, social class, ethnicity and pre and post-1992 universities may have established a correlation between characteristics and negative self-perception. In contrast, Rack's (1997: 69) participants were self-referrals and referrals from student support services, which may be considered biased towards "a positive dyslexia outcome." Conversely, this study has explored diagnostic ambiguity in dyslexia and has acknowledged the challenges associated with identifying dyslexia in adults; subsequently, they become quasi-dyslexic and have unmet educational needs. A significant finding of this study is not only the negative impact academic struggles have on motivation, but also the negative impact on self-perception. Specifically, three of the five participants described feeling unmotivated, while four expressed their frustration with their academic experiences.

Zoya's reflection can be further interpreted through Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, which clarifies that an individual's motivation is considered on a continuum, and shows that Zoya's need for competence, one of the three basic psychological needs, is lacking: *"What's the point?"* Her quote indicates amotivation, and appears at the lowest end of the motivation continuum (see Section 2.8). Ryan and Deci (2000) appreciate that this type of negative and non-constructive feedback not only causes

emotional anxiety but also a breakdown of the psychological environment that supports motivation. Mature learners often begin university with an emphasis on autonomy, influenced by life experiences and responsibilities. However, when Zoya is faced with judgmental and dismissive, rather than supportive and constructive feedback, she encounters a lack of control in her learning or ability to improve, which undermines her autonomy.

Feeling overwhelmed and lacking in motivation, Zoya's words capture the emotional distress she experienced.

"I really don't understand, and then it came to the revision, and I went to see the lecturer, and I said I don't think I can do the exam. I think I'm gonna have to like, back out of this, I don't think I can do this ... I very nearly quit the course; I said I'm gonna leave. I went; I'm paying too much money to be here to be told all I'm worth is 40%." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya is left feeling overwhelmed by her perceived lack of competence (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and the lack of available options to support her educational needs. Zoya expresses the university's prioritisation of grades over effective engagement and learning, as her declaration to *"quit the course"* shows how such experiences alienate, disempower and reduce the motivation of mature quasi-dyslexic learners like Zoya (Freire, 1970; 1993). In the context of the study, Deci and Ryan's (1985) autonomy is not solely about control over one's learning; it holds a much deeper meaning for mature learners. An Autonomy-supportive environment for students like Zoya would enable her to connect learning to her personal and professional goals, therefore increasing her engagement and persistence (Ryan and Deci, 2000) (see Section 2.3.iii).

This interpretation aligns with Freire's (1970; 1993) concept of critical consciousness (see Section 1.7) and can be used to examine psychological and sociological impact on self-perception (RQ. 2). To consider Zoya's experience from a psychological

perspective illustrates an institutional power imbalance based on limited learner autonomy and empowerment, leading to reduced intrinsic motivation. From a sociological viewpoint, Zoya's experience highlights inequities in resources and the learning environment, which negatively impact her motivation and attitude towards learning and sense of belonging among her peers. As a result, the significance of Zoya's experience can be viewed through Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT, in particular, the basic psychological need for competence, which, in Zoya's situation, diminishes intrinsic motivation, further impairing self-perception of her ability to succeed, ultimately reducing engagement and persistence in learning.

Despite Freire's (1970; 1993) concept of critical consciousness towards acknowledging psychological and sociological perspectives, there remains a need for critical reflection. To support this, open communication between learners and educators is needed to understand the institutional structures and power dynamics that create the inequalities, which shape the educational experiences of mature quasi dyslexic learners. In light of this, section 2.8, hooks (2003) advocates for liberatory pedagogy, an education strategy which aims to empower learners by promoting critical thinking, further advocating the equal value of life experiences and harnessing them to create community and belonging in education through a sense of agency. Deci and Ryan's (1985) psychological need of relatedness, the intrinsic need to feel connected, supports hooks' (2003) justification for the importance of social connections and educational support. Particularly for mature quasi-dyslexic learners who may encounter further barriers to inclusion and engagement in learning, like Zoya. Consequently, through Zoya's sense of agency and need for relatedness, the principles of liberatory pedagogy endeavour to empower her towards openly expressing her academic challenges and receiving validation of her experiences. By applying a student-centred approach, confidence and motivation can be enhanced as learning occurs through relationships and shared experiences (hooks, 2003).

Verity reflects on her feelings when faced with completing two assessments at the same time, an exam, and a written assignment.

"I feel like I'm letting something slip. So, if I'm trying to write my assignment, say it's taking time out of revising my exam, which my exam is probably the one where I'm gonna not do so well in the most, because it's an exam. Whereas my assignment, I can get at least 40% just from doing referencing, you know what I mean." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity's self-perception, characterised by self-labelling, suggests a belief that she is only capable of achieving a borderline pass (40% grade). All the participants of the study expressed a *"lack of understanding"*, while three suggested an inability to study effectively, which may be impacted by their quasi-dyslexia. Smith (2018) outlines how students like Verity need support systems and flexible assessment formats to assist the transition into university. The literature further outlines the potential for erroneous outcomes in the dyslexia assessment process (Dobson, 2018; Rack, 1997; Roitsch and Watson, 2019; Snowling et al., 2020) as well as the influence of compensatory strategies and socio-emotional factors such as anxiety and low self-esteem on the assessment outcome (Dobson, 2018; Roitsch and Watson, 2019). For mature quasi-dyslexic learners, such factors may have affected the participant's dyslexia assessment outcome.

Having established that quasi-dyslexic learners encounter socio-emotional challenges, e.g., anxiety that impacts academic performance, the psychological framework of SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2000) can be used to explain Verity's unfulfilled need for autonomy and competence. Verity's self-labelling is indicative of wider issues, where mature quasi-dyslexic students internalise their academic struggles, negatively affecting motivation and impairing academic performance. Subsequently, her intrinsic motivation is undermined, as she gains neither satisfaction nor interest from engaging in academic tasks.

As discussed in Section 3.6, from a feminist standpoint theory perspective, Harding's (1991) term 'strong objectivity' contests the traditional (or weak) idea of objectivity, which accepts that knowledge can be observed and regarded from a neutral and unbiased perspective. Alternatively, she argues that research to establish the facts and reach new conclusions must begin with those who have lived experiences of marginalisation. This standpoint reveals power relations to be embedded in both society and the production of knowledge. As a researcher, by critically reflecting on my positionality and assumptions, I can present a more rigorous, socially responsible and inclusive form of knowledge, which creates strong objectivity (Harding, 1991). Accordingly, by accepting Verity's lived experience from the perspective of a marginalised mature quasi-dyslexic student, it produces a more objective approach towards revealing the power dynamics within university knowledge systems.

To specify, Verity has expressed feeling undervalued in academic spaces, *"especially (reading articles) where they use these fancy words, and there's me having to Google what they mean"*, expresses an inadequate sense of capability or worth, *"and then it just went to pot, and now I'll probably come out with a third"*, and emotional disappointment, *"so, they (peers) weren't supportive."* Her experience of feeling undervalued, inadequate, and emotionally disappointed can be understood through Harding's (1991) interpretation of feminist standpoint theory, which challenges dominant knowledge structures for stigmatising the perspectives of those positioned outside of the conventional.

Although Harding (1991) considers the sciences, her reasoning can be applied to academic contexts more generally, where university conventions disregard epistemic contribution, derived from lived experience, like Verity, who began university through a 'non-traditional' academic route BTEC course. Verity's reflections illustrate how her lived experience as a mature quasi-dyslexic student is often ignored within academic settings. Both Harding's (1991) strong objectivity and Deci and Ryan's (1985) and Ryan and Deci (2000) SDT signify the importance of acknowledging and valuing

Verity's lived experience, while appraising the influence that 'traditional' academic structures have towards disempowering her agency and sense of competence.

Having examined Verity's experience through Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, the same can be applied to Ursula, with a divergent interpretation. Ursula's reflection offers a unique and contrasting perspective, shaped by a combination of personal, social, and structural factors.

"I think what I found hardest is when results haven't gone the way you've wanted them to go ... It's really hard, and it's sort of like, quite shocked because it was in the first year when I had to reattempt something ... You deal with it, and then you sort of, you know, get the help you need and then learn from your mistakes." **Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.**

Ursula shows autonomy by using past experiences of academic failure to shape her present learning, describing how her habitus has modified towards navigating the academic field (Bourdieu, 1977) . Contrary to the university's implicit expectations of mature quasi-dyslexic students as academically limited, Ursula claims her autonomy by adapting her academic approach, taking control of her learning, rather than passively accepting the outcome. In doing so, she recognises that academic success requires ongoing learning and development to overcome challenges and demonstrate competence by engaging in self-directed strategies. This approach aligns with Deci and Ryan's (1985) conception of autonomy and competence as essential psychological needs, demonstrating the development of intrinsic motivation, rather than external validation. Further highlighting the importance of reflexivity and ongoing professional development within the profession of nursing (NMC, 2018).

Ursula continues to reflect on the support she has received during her nursing course.

"I've spoken to my personal tutor a lot about the slight issues I had at school. And my new exams and everything. Yeah, and like exam anxiety and things like that, and so a lot of support from them as well, yeah."

Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.

Ursula shows confidence while actively engaging with her personal tutor, discussing past and current academic challenges. Ursula's need to feel socially connected, supported and valued resembles the psychological need for relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The significance of relatedness as a need of SDT is illustrated by the occurrence of a strong student-tutor relationship. Highlighting the importance of learning communities that advocate open communication to reduce feelings of isolation, which hinder independent learning (Northall et al., 2016).

Ursula's mention of *"slight issues at school"* and repeated Educational Psychologist assessments (see Table 7) suggest prior educational support as instrumental in influencing her disposition to learning. Similarly, repeated assessments during school express the strong emphasis her family placed on educational attainment, further suggesting high cultural capital, which Ursula can utilise to ease her transition to university (Bourdieu, 1986; Reay, 2004). Ursula's confidence and academic abilities can be attributed to cultural capital; likewise, she benefits from academic capital by displaying a grasp of university support processes and confidence in managing them. In contrast, Zoya and Verity express increasing perceptions of isolation, fear of rejection and failure, which highlights the social consequences of divergent cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). These psychological and social barriers adversely impact their motivation and attitude to learning, indicating an inequality in how mature quasi-dyslexic students interpret and experience the university environment.

Understanding the motivational dynamics of mature students is crucial towards designing more effective educational experiences that diminish feelings of isolation, rejection, and failure. By applying the basic psychological needs of Ryan and Deci

(2000) SDT: autonomy, competence and relatedness, universities can create learning environments that enhance the engagement and academic success of mature students, while promoting a more confident, engaged and capable NHS workforce. Zoya's reflections provide insight into how unsupportive feedback, *"to be told all I'm worth is 40%,"* can demotivate mature, quasi-dyslexic students and impact their attitude to learning. In contrast, Ursula, who has developed agency and gained a stronger sense of self-worth and autonomy, uses cultural and academic capital to show how metacognitive knowledge can be used to enhance preparedness and the effective use of university support. Zoya and Verity's reflections highlight the importance of considering the psychological needs of course design, which can lead to better engagement and the overall learning experience of mature quasi-dyslexic students.

5.5.3 Emotional Responses

For student nurses, learning within a professional practice environment, such as a hospital ward or community setting, is a key component in the process of critically shaping knowledge, understanding and competence. In Section 2.3.iii, Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT considers the relationship between social context and motivation by utilising autonomy and competence-supportive environments. This understanding reveals how a professional practice (or a simulated) environment impacts mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students. Simulated learning environments enhance self-efficacy by providing mastery experiences and constructive feedback, allowing students to have varied opportunities to practice and improve their skills towards competency in a controlled and safe environment. Furthermore, educators who design simulated environments in ways that reflect inclusive pedagogical principles can support the participation and engagement of diverse student populations in nursing courses.

Wendy excitedly shared her experience of working within a professional practice environment.

"Not to toot my own trumpet, but I get quite good feedback from my placement area, and it gives you a really big morale boost of maybe, maybe I am OK on the course." **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.**

Wendy's reflection showcases the importance of interconnectedness and social metacognition, which occurs when her colleagues engage in collaborative learning and shared reflection (through constructive feedback) within the professional practice environment (Sotardi, 2022; Van De Bogart et al., 2017; Won et al., 2021) confirming that learning is both a cognitive and a socially constructed process. Wendy's self-determination is further influenced by social persuasion and positively impacts her emotional and psychological state. All participants in the study reflected positively on their professional practice experience. This finding is associated with Mukhalalati and Taylor's (2019) systematic review, which reasoned that experiential learning within an authentic environment is shaped by social interactions and societal perceptions of value. The profession of nursing is governed by a performance-based pedagogy, which places a high value on the mastery of practice-associated skills (NMC, 2018). Likewise, for Wendy, her professional practice experience and constructive feedback provide her with *"a really big morale boost"* as she demonstrates mastery skills and assimilates constructive feedback to produce specific attainments regarding her practice encounters.

Wendy's positive reinforcement, within a professional setting, enables her to internalise a sense of competence and relatedness (belonging) (Deci and Ryan, 1985), while also validating her place in the nursing course. For Wendy, like all the participants in the study, the practical aspect of the nursing course maintains their engagement and self-worth, even though their academic challenges remain. This implies that all aspects of Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, autonomy, competence and relatedness can be attained through the professional practical aspect of the nursing

course, rather than the theoretical content. Therefore, for the mature quasi-dyslexic students, practical learning becomes the route towards maintaining intrinsic motivation and maintaining student identity within a university setting.

Wendy's reflections show how competence is validated through her professional practice environment.

"When I'm on placement, they're all like, come back anytime ... that's going to be my actual job rather than writing assignments for the rest of my life. It kind of gives you that positive feeling about it. Because like, if it was all academic, I'd be like, I can't do this ... I can't, I really struggle."

Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.

Although Wendy appears confident in a professional practice environment, the limitations of metacognitive awareness restrict metacognitive actions (or strategies), such as self-regulating her learning and adjusting to improve her academic knowledge (Flavell, 1979). Such limitations may produce a cycle of low confidence and underachievement in her academic work. With diminishing self-belief in her academic work, over time, Wendy may become further disengaged and poorly motivated to take control of her academic learning. This situational mental state may impact her newly qualified nurse role, where critical thinking skills, knowledge and application are essential for providing effective, high-quality care in the professional practice environment (NMC, 2018). Wendy's experience in professional practice is relevant to the ongoing debate in nursing education regarding the theory-practice gap (Cook, 1991; Greenway et al., 2019; Landers, 2000; Tappen, 2022), illustrating the disconnect between theoretical nursing education and the real-world application.

Deci and Ryan (1985) consider that mastery experiences are the most influential forms of competence. However, despite aligning with this, a Bourdieusian sociological perspective of symbolic capital offers a contradiction, through visualising competence as a socially acknowledged ability, rather than an internal belief. As

such, the achievement of competence for Wendy becomes reliant upon external validation from colleagues and other healthcare professionals. This creates the requirement for competence to be externally validated by others and, therefore, prone to fluctuation and remain unstable. The need for external validation furthermore raises critical questions about the sustainability of confidence in nursing students like Wendy, particularly when they return to an academic setting where they may feel less confident.

From a feminist standpoint, theorist Harding (2013) would infer that Wendy's academic struggles are not perceived as individual limitations but a reflection of the disconnect between professional practice (performance-based pedagogy) and the pedagogy of the university. This view challenges deficit portrayals by re-examining Wendy's absence of self-belief in academic contexts. Subsequently, acknowledging the university norms that advantage certain ways of knowing (epistemology), such as learners aligned with a 'traditional', rather than 'non-traditional' educational background. By accepting Wendy as a legitimate author of knowledge, one whose insight from a professional practice environment is often overlooked in academic spaces, it becomes possible to challenge the traditional power dynamics of the university that often marginalise 'non-traditional' students. By appreciating that self-determination is more than a disposition and by understanding how it is shaped by external factors, such as unequal access to support, and assessments that bias certain qualities and attributes. Addressing Wendy's struggles through the lens of a feminist standpoint shows the need for pedagogical change that values diverse knowledge and considers competence beyond the limited academic benchmarks.

Yvonne's uncertainty reflects a contradiction in her lived experience and perspective.

"A lot of its confidence, Uhm, from most of my mentors I've got, like to be reassured that I'm doing it right, I quite agree with that. I do lots to be reassured and I know I can do it, but it's just having someone there just

saying, yeah, you're doing it OK ... Academically, I struggle." **Yvonne - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Yvonne's reflections show an emotional connection between confidence, reassurance, and her academic struggles. The relevance of emotions in learning and metacognitive awareness is recognised to influence student self-perception (see Sections 2.4 and 2.7). However, like Wendy, Yvonne's experience poses a dilemma, as while her professional practice placement experiences support her to build confidence, her academic struggles disempower her. This stresses the need for nursing courses in universities to better integrate metacognitive strategies across academic and professional practice settings. This distinction further challenges the assumption that self-confidence gained in a professional practice environment will seamlessly translate to academic success. This misconception leaves students like Yvonne and Wendy feeling overwhelmed and unsupported within the academic environment.

Based on the findings of the current study and an understanding of Flavell's (1979) concept of metacognition, I surmise the participants in the study do apply metacognition in their professional practice environments, but they are not aware of this way of thinking and how it can likewise be applied to their academic learning. As a student nurse progresses through their nursing education, they are required at each Part (of which there are three, one per year) to show how they are developing towards being newly qualified nurses. Upon reaching Part Three, they should be "practicing independently with minimal supervision and leading and coordinating care with confidence" (NMC, 2018b: 18), which further implies an awareness and understanding of the four components of metacognition: knowledge, experience, task and strategy. Student nurses face increasing emotional demands throughout their education, and the importance of emotional management strategies is key towards developing their ability to cope emotionally, while encountering strong emotions including fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.

As Ursula reflects on her professional practice experience, she describes an aspect of emotional resilience.

"For some people, if they have a bad outcome, they will dwell on it for ages ... If I fail, I won't blame it on the fact that I didn't get extra time or really sad or anything if something goes wrong. Work is important, but where I thrive is out on the ward looking after children, talking to mom and dad, and being part of a team, that's what I've really learnt about myself is that yes when I'm doing the work and being practical is where – if this was going wrong then my sense of self and self-worth then this may be different."

Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.

As a third-year student nurse, Ursula shows an elevated level of emotional intelligence and resilience, which enables her to adapt to the stress and adversity associated with assessment failure. Ursula's emotional intelligence, resilience and self-awareness are reinforced by social and academic integration, emphasised in retention models by Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975; 1994) (see Section 2.3.ii), which are more evident in students like Ursula who actively engage with both her academic and social communities. Her reflection illustrates that managing academic stress and failure enriches her university experience, especially as 'non-traditional' mature students often face additional barriers during the process of integration (Hadjar et al., 2023). Ursula's adaptive coping style facilitates her ability to focus on her strengths and what she enjoys about her nursing course, which creates a feeling of self-worth. Yet, it is important to examine whether this resilience is sufficiently developed and if it accounts for her perspective.

Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT accepts that the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential for motivation, development and well-being. However, this position may imply that Ursula's effort is solely responsible for her success, which can then obscure the influence of any systemic factors that shape

student experiences. Analysis from a feminist standpoint perspective recognises that an individual's performance cannot be detached from the wider context of inequality and power dynamics, reinforcing the fundamental need for SDT to be considered in addition to the social environment. Ursula's emotional intelligence and resilience may be equally informed by aspects of cultural capital, as the qualities she demonstrates are recognised to help individuals succeed in social environments by achieving success and gaining acceptance (Bourdieu, 1986). Ursula leverages her cultural capital through her knowledge and understanding of institutional resources to navigate the academic environment, particularly after an initial failure. Her engagement with support services demonstrates the strategic use of cultural capital, potentially facilitating a smoother transition through university. Well-structured and accessible support can ease the negative consequences of academic failures, such as embarrassment and insecurity about intellectual abilities.

This polarity between the feedback received in a professional practice setting versus the experiences of the mature quasi-dyslexic students' endurance with academic challenges emphasises the urgency for a more integrated approach within nurse education. An integrated approach facilitates equality by connecting professional practice and academic learning. The current situation highlights the emotional and cognitive disparity, which may lead to encounters with mental health issues. The lack of perceived ability and support becomes intricately linked, affecting the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of mature quasi-dyslexic students.

5.5.4 Encounters with Mental Health

While the academic demands of nurse education are challenging for all students, mature quasi-dyslexic students often face unique stressors that significantly impact their mental health (Deacon et al., 2012; Elftorp and Hearne, 2020; Olofsson et al., 2012). Poor academic achievements may impact stress-related issues, where the only perceived option may be to drop out of university, due to challenges with integration

(Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). Zoya describes her struggles with mental health; her eyes fill with tears as she reflects.

"I was very, very down. I started uni, and I did struggle with the assignments ... um. I'm like, I don't even know what you're (lecturers) talking about. I don't. They (her peers) was like Zoya, it's quite easy, and I thought, well, that helps." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya's admission, *"I don't even know what you're (lecturers) talking about"*, shows a significant disconnect between her understanding of the taught content. Clouder et al. (2020) found that students who associated with a dyslexic identity (quasi-dyslexia) encountered "helplessness and hopelessness" (Clouder et al., 2020: 768). Participants in the current study expressed serious concerns regarding their mental health, which became exacerbated by their academic struggles and negative self-perception. A variety of factors could be regarded as influential to Zoya's understanding, including a limited grasp of academic language, inadequate prior educational preparation, and ineffective teaching methods by the university.

Zoya continues to reflect on her feelings.

So, then I'm getting worse. I'm getting more and more stressed cause it was like you just do this and then writing it down for me. I just don't understand, and they said, why? And I was just ... (Zoya wipes away her tears). It was really bad, and I had to go to the doctors." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

When Zoya is further dismissed by her peers and left feeling exhausted, her feelings of isolation escalate. Her reflection highlights how a lack of social belonging within an academic environment can significantly destabilise mental health and well-being. The literature highlights some of the stress-related issues which can negatively impact mental health, and while Spady's

(1971) and Tinto's (1975) models focus on social and academic integration, rather than mental health, the model still offers a valuable framework for understanding how such a disconnect can trigger mental health concerns. Spady's (1971) model, based on Durkheim's (1897) theory of suicide, links social isolation to consequential psychological anxiety by acknowledging how fragile peer relationships or feelings of being outside of an institution, rather than part of it, may enhance feelings of inadequacy, withdrawal or depression.

As Zoya continues to reflect, she shrugs her shoulders, shakes her head and for a moment says nothing. She then continues, describing her feelings with a sense of familiarity.

"And then I just kind of ended up on a downward spiral. Almost. I became very withdrawn. And I just got thinking, what's the point in trying, because you'd ask for help, I'm not dissing like the university. You'd ask for help, and I didn't feel like I was getting it 'cause no one seems to understand what I was struggling with." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya provides an understanding of the complex relationship between her academic performance and her mental health, which illuminates a perceived inadequacy of support, triggering existing vulnerabilities. The rigorous demands of nurse education, particularly the extensive professional practice placement hours required in the UK by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, 2018), significantly contribute to student stress, fatigue and assumed limited time for self-care. Chevalier's (2017) study recognised the need for support with purposeful intervention; however, Pirttimaa's (2015) research suggested that rather than seeking support, students often chose to hide their academic difficulties as a way of coping. Consequently, the study emphasises a distinct relationship between mental well-being and self-compassion, signifying that social support from peers and a caring culture within an academic environment boost self-compassion. Notably, although the university in

this study offered support for students experiencing mental health challenges, the literature suggests justifications for why such support may not be considered by mature, quasi-dyslexic nursing students.

The participant's reflections highlight the need for critical pedagogical approaches as discussed in Section 2.8, such as those recognised by Freire's (1995) concept of critical pedagogy. Approaches like these reinforce how educational systems often benefit some students while disempowering others, particularly learners from marginalised backgrounds. This marginalisation is greatly appreciated through Harding's (1992) concept of strong objectivity, which reveals the importance of examining the subjective experiences of marginalised students to show educational inequalities. Harding (1992) acknowledges that those, like Zoya, from marginalised educational backgrounds labelled by universities as mature students, have a clearer perception of the inequalities due to their lived experiences. Drawing on Freire's (1995) concept of critical pedagogy, which advocates for a fairer and student-centred education and Harding's (1992) consideration for respecting the views of marginalised perspectives, it becomes noticeable that Zoya's reflections are not the consequence of personal failure, but insight into how educational systems benefit some and disempower others. The association between mental health and academic achievement was a repeated theme among participants' reflections.

Wendy reflects on her ongoing exam anxiety.

"I used to go to CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and counselling over exam anxiety because it was just too much, and it did help ... but it hasn't really solved it." **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.**

Verity describes her personality based on her more recent experiences.

"I think to start with, I'm feeling anxious, cause I'm an emotional person ... cause I think it's been a whirlwind the past few months. I think it plays a

part in your academic work, cause you can't escape it." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity presents herself as an *"emotional person,"* which she considers a key aspect of the inability to *"escape it,"* implying that her academic work affects her on a psychological level. Wendy and Verity's reflections further portray that the immersive nature of evaluating their student learning negatively exacerbates their mental health and well-being.

As Zoya reflects on her lived experience, she reveals her disturbing truth.

"When all your friends. I mean, I've had quite a bad time at uni, I've been bullied ... When they're (her friends) are coming out with (saying), I've got 77% on that module, and I scraped 40%." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

The disclosure that Zoya has endured bullying can be analysed through hooks' (1994) framework of critical pedagogy (see Section 3.6), through which the voices of everyone are heard to ensure the psychological and social influence of exclusion in universities is acknowledged. Zoya's experience of bullying is the consequence of a real or perceived power imbalance by another(s). hooks (1994) conveys that educational spaces frequently form hierarchies and exclusions for students like Zoya, based on her perceived difference. In this instance, institutional standards prioritise a student's performance over relevant engagement. Subsequently, Zoya's attempt, which *"scraped 40%"*, illustrates the psychological bearing of an ability-based system. Specifically, one that is based on ability, which, for Zoya, is judged by 'traditional' assessments, often fails to reflect her ability to apply knowledge and understanding in real-world circumstances.

hooks (1994) recommends the creation of learning environments that stimulate and support intellectual growth, rather than purely benefiting performance.

Acknowledging that psychological distress, bullying and perceived academic failure

are not purely personal circumstances that ultimately influence motivation and attitude, but a consequence of how systems of oppression, inequality and exploitation are wider institutional issues that must be addressed (Freire, 1970; 1993). The need for critical pedagogical change, opposed to one which fails to recognise diverse student identities, belonging and interconnectedness, confidence, and self-worth, all of which will be discussed in theme 3, titled A Sense of Inadequacy.

5.6 Theme 3. A Sense of Inadequacy – Psychological and Sociological Perspective

"Community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation."

(hooks, 2003: 119)

According to feminist literature, Seu (2006) defines inadequacy reported by women as a "constant, underlying anxiety of being exposed, of people seeing 'who they really are', which is presented as shameful and hidden" (Seu, 2006: 293). This interpretation reflects similarities with the participants of the study, who frequently described the psychological and sociological impact of their learning environment. For mature quasi-dyslexic students, feelings of loneliness and a lack of belonging are contributory factors towards student attrition, highlighting the importance of peer support, towards creating a sense of community and the development of collaborative skills (Sotardi, 2022; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1994; Van De Bogart et al., 2017; Won et al., 2021) improving overall resilience. With the emergence of subsequent work, Tinto (1997) creates a more comprehensive understanding of student persistence by focusing on the classroom as the main position of student engagement. The importance of academic support mechanisms, such as active learning environments, learning communities, tutoring and clear learning expectations, towards improving student capability. This change in focus, from wider institutional integration towards activities within the classroom, emphasises the need to support individual students to promote persistence rather than relying on large-scale university structures.

Verity reflects on her experience of the academic support she received at college when she had a diagnosis of dyslexia and was offered *reasonable adjustments*.

"We'd sit down with the assignment brief and used to pick out the important parts of it. Then make notes about what I need to go and include, and what I need to find out. Because I really struggle with ... so reading is

something, I really struggle to make an image of it and then understand ... it's always been like that." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity's reflection indicates how, with the support of her dyslexia tutor, she was able to manage her expectations and cope with her academic challenges. Verity mentions it has "*always been like that,*" implying this is not a new problem but is a long-standing difficulty, further illustrating her reliance on external structures (dyslexia tutor) to facilitate her progression, student identity and feelings of self-worth.

5.6.1 Student Identity

Identity is pivotal for student nurses who maintain two disparate identities, which are based on the requirements of their course: a student nurse in a professional practice environment and a student in university. As their identity develops, it becomes shaped by the complex interaction between personal strength and evolving forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). To become a nurse, there is a requirement to return to education. For mature quasi-dyslexic students, the situation is often associated with the negative memories of past educational experiences, which influence their academic journey.

Verity reflects on gaining the required qualifications to begin her nursing course.

"So, I failed my GCSEs. So, I retook them at college with the support passed them. Apart from my English ... then obviously, because I wanted to be a nurse ... I was thinking I'm never going to be a nurse. I got a job, and alongside my apprenticeship, they did functional skills, and I got my English that way." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity's educational path is intertwined with perseverance, resilience, and the ongoing struggle to prove her academic capabilities as a student with a 'non-traditional' educational background. Her student identity is shaped by the repeated

challenges and barriers associated with navigating the university systems, rather than her aspirations to become a nurse. While intrinsic motivation is key to her persistence, Tinto (2012: 43) highlights that for students, like Verity, "occupational goal commitment", such as becoming a nurse, is a determinant of student retention and success. However, Reay (2021) maintains that challenges faced by learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds are multifactorial and more complex than aspirations and academic performance. Mukhalalati and Taylor (2019) agree with Reay (2021) by stressing how one's identity can be affected by social interaction with other individuals. The repeated challenges and barriers encountered by Verity include structural inequities, limited or fragmented cultural capital, and the psychological harm of negotiating an institution not designed for mature, quasi-dyslexic students like Verity. Consequently, the intrinsic motivation arising from Verity's goal to become a nurse can be undermined by her increasing lack of confidence and self-esteem, which can ultimately disempower her ongoing commitment (Burnell, 2015).

Verity recalls, *"I was thinking I'm never going to be a nurse,"* highlighting self-doubt and waning self-confidence. An evident barrier she faces is the diminished value of 'non-traditional' qualifications, as Verity's English qualification was gained as part of her apprenticeship, rather than 'traditional' A-levels. Established qualifications, such as A-levels, are highly valued within a university setting, illustrating how certain forms of capital are more valuable than others. Verity's reflection provides insight into her perceived internalised limitations, as she reflects that failing her GCSEs symbolises her inability to become a nurse, reinforcing her sense of inadequacy. Furthermore, the 'non-traditional' apprenticeship route reinforces Verity's belief that to become educated, the 'traditional' structure, which prefers theory-based knowledge over the acquisition of practical skills, is the approved route.

Verity reflects on the professional practice placement aspect of the course.

"I think my only highs are placement. I'm getting P (achieved beyond) in placement ... they make me feel part of the team ... which makes me feel valued, because they think I'm capable."* **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

A broader aspect of Verity's identity is revealed as a person who values experiential learning environments. Verity navigates the institutional structures by seeking an environment to meet her need for experiential learning, Kolb (1984; 2014).

Experiential learning is a cyclical process involving four stages, primarily for Verity, Concrete Experience (hands-on), which she excels in. The remaining three stages: Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experience, are equally considered achievable for Verity by the award of a P* in her professional practice placement, which demonstrates high-order thinking by use of reflection to formulate ideas/theories and subsequently transferring such thinking into new practice situations (Bjerkvik and Hilli, 2019; Teekman, 2000). The application of Kolb's (1984; 2014) theory confirms that Verity's student identity is equal to that of a self-directed and proactive problem-solving mature learner, yet this is not reflected by her academic work throughout her nursing course.

Verity's reflection highlights the disparity between academic university assessments, which disadvantage students like her and the experiential learning in a professional practice environment, which empowers her, as she states, *"makes me feel valued, because they think I'm capable."* As a mature quasi-dyslexic student with a 'non-traditional' educational background, the university aspect of her nursing curriculum supports 'traditional' assessment methods, primarily essays or exams, which are less inclusive. Consequently, such assessment methods are challenging for Verity as they limit opportunities for collaborative learning. Despite that, her professional practice placement experiences encourage peer-to-peer learning and teamwork to facilitate knowledge, understanding and application.

Feminist scholar Smith's (1987) interpretation of standpoint theory complements Kolb's (1984; 2014) Experiential Learning Theory by the rejection of disconnected learning in favour of situated experiential understanding. Smith (1987) accepts that one's everyday experiences are shaped by the institutional structures and processes, confirming for both Smith (1987) and Kolb (1984; 2014) acknowledge that learning is active, repetitious and formed by those who share common interests, values and behaviours, similar to the professional nurses and the roles of being a student nurse within a professional practice environment, which is illustrated by "P*", in recognition of Verity's ability to achieve above and beyond..

Wendy describes what happened when she did not obtain her predicted grades to begin her nursing course.

"I was predicted ABC in my A levels, and overall, I got DDE, but that's just the common thing with me. Like my classwork and my exams just don't match up ... And it's always been the case. So, the only reason I got into uni was my unconditional offer from my interview; otherwise, I would not have been able to get in." **Wendy - Student Nurse: Child.**

The impact on Wendy's student identity becomes apparent, when her inability to meet expectations perceived facilitates her language to revert to that of self-blame, *"but that's just the common thing with me"*, and she considers the only reason, she was *"able to get in"* was due to the unconditional offer made by the university. Utilising Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital demonstrates how Wendy's reflection can be further interpreted to establish how systemic norms and values shaped her experience. Wendy was not required to demonstrate her academic ability during her interview, as she received an unconditional offer. The acceptance of her predicted ability reveals the role of institutional acceptance towards influencing educational paths. Wendy's interview performance may be suggestive of how the university can

prioritise certain types of capital, such as Wendy's ability to study at A-level, which are recognised and rewarded by way of an unconditional offer.

Universities often assume all students who study at this higher level begin with an equal degree of academic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), by which skills are presumed, rather than taught. Wendy's perception that *"the only reason I got into uni was my unconditional offer from my interview, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to get in,"* conveys the divergence of capitals acquired by students with 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. Further suggesting institutional inequality, rather than a deficit in the abilities of mature quasi-dyslexic students. Wendy's successful interview outcome, before receiving her grades, also suggests her use of language and ability to communicate effectively in an interpersonal environment may have served as a form of symbolic capital, even if it was not formally acknowledged. Bourdieu (1991: 69) ascertains language as a form of symbolic power, where certain forms of language and/or linguistics are validated and others devalued and questioned. The discreet university's acknowledgement of less obvious forms of capital, such as interpersonal communication skills, may have also enriched the interview and justified the unconditional offer.

Verity describes the challenges associated with the demands of the nursing course (50% theory and 50% professional practice).

"I think the challenging part is when you've got an assignment and an exam to revise for, and you're also out in practice. So, you try to juggle three things ... and you just feel overloaded ... I feel stressed, anxious, sad, and nervous ... because I feel like I'm letting something slip." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity describes feelings of inadequacy when faced with academic and professional practice-based learning simultaneously. Ongoing studies by O'Byrne et al. (2019) and Welton (2023) indicate that dyslexia is often associated with low self-esteem and

confidence. For mature quasi-dyslexic students, like Verity, feeling “overloaded” worsens her feelings of inadequacy, reinforcing a negative student identity. Verity’s quasi-dyslexia and feelings of stress (Clouder et al., 2016; Jacobs et al., 2022); anxiety (Abbott-Jones, 2021); sadness and nervousness when faced with completing academic assessments are feelings recognised and acknowledged within the literature and often associated with adult dyslexia. The literature equally associates a relationship with removing time restrictions for those with dyslexia and self-reporting a history of reading difficulty, and an improvement in academic achievement (Mosberg and Johns, 1994; Olofsson et al., 2012; Parrila et al., 2007; Pedersen et al., 2016).

Verity continues to express her feelings and shares thoughts about her withdrawn dyslexia diagnosis.

“I was shocked when I read the report, it was like, Erm, I’m below in most things, and you must just think, how can I not be dyslexic? It has been dyslexic for all these years ... I’m not up to my age; I should be in my reading and my writing. Yeah, and then obviously, like I said, all my support got stripped because it’s the Equality Act. Which I thought, well, you’re not being very equal, because I’ve got a learning disability, just not the one that you want, but I won’t go into that.” **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity’s student identity is challenged by the withdrawal of academic support, especially as “it has been dyslexic for all these years.” Verity is questioning her abilities and self-worth. There is a need for recognition and fairness, suggesting that her student identity is closely associated with how she is perceived and treated by the institutional structural support system. Verity attempts to maintain a sense of agency and self-identity by stating, “How can I not be dyslexic? It has been dyslexic for all these years.” By asking the rhetorical question, Verity attempts to take control of the outcome by probing for answers, which is also addressed by Cameron (2021),

who debated similar circumstances. The situation faced by Verity is further acknowledged by Harding (1986) as epistemic privilege (see Section 3.6). This philosophical concept is viewed by Verity as unjust, as she questions the fairness and equality of the decisions made within the university regarding her *"learning disability."* As a marginalised individual, Verity's lived experience has enabled her to develop a unique perspective through which she recognises the injustices surrounding her situation and how power structures influence what is considered valid knowledge, such as the outcome of the dyslexia assessment.

Verity's concerns further bear similarities to Ryder and Norwich's (2018) study that highlighted concerns regarding the lack of consistency, reliability and interpretation and the subjective disposition of dyslexia diagnosis amongst UK assessors. Furthermore, there is an acknowledgement of the potential for inaccurate outcomes due to compensatory skills and secondary symptoms, e.g., anxiety and/or low self-esteem (Dobson, 2018; Rack, 1997; Roitsch and Watson, 2019; Snowling et al., 2020) which were all expressed by Verity, who, based on her dialogue, shows acute awareness of the limitations and biases of the dyslexia assessment outcome.

Interpreted through feminist methodologies, Verity and Wendy's epistemic privilege provides a unique insight which allows them to engage with the institutional practices that marginalise their learning needs (Hartsock, 1983b). Their knowledge is not accepted or valued by the university; consequently, they are treated as inferior rather than owners of situated knowledge. Wendy's reflections on her educational journey show a disconnect between 'traditional' assessment methods, academic support, and her capabilities. Highlighting the epistemic privilege of mature quasi-dyslexic students who, through their lived experiences, expose inadequacies and limitations of conventional academic standards (Hartsock, 1983a; Smith, 2004a). Verity's nuanced understanding of the removal of her dyslexia support exposes institutional power and the failure to accommodate mature quasi-dyslexic learners who do not fit precisely into predefined categories, therefore validating or

invalidating certain disabilities. Verity's epistemic privilege reflects how institutional power, based on the outcome of her dyslexia re-assessment and the arbitrary judgment of her learning needs, is perceived as being unfair.

For Verity, there is no affirming transition through university, as the support and facilitated strategies required for her learning needs were removed upon entry. Consequently, she feels undervalued as she describes the university's action towards her as "*not being very equal.*" Hartsock (1983a) and (Smith, 2004a) argue that epistemic privilege shows Verity's acknowledgement that she has a "*learning disability, just not the one that you want,*" illustrating her to be actively resisting this outcome, and as such reclaiming her student identity as she critiques the dominant knowledge systems from an insider perspective of a mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate student nurse.

5.6.2 Belonging and Interconnectedness

Belonging is an essential component to facilitate the smooth transition to university. Maslow's definition (1943: 380) of "the love needs" suggests there is a human need to belong and have meaningful relationships. In an educational context, belongingness could be described as the necessity to meet the psychological and safety needs of an individual towards seeking connections with others for the fulfilment of emotional well-being. If belonging and interconnectedness remain unmet, feelings of loneliness arise. Creating a sense of belonging and interconnectedness across all levels of the nursing profession, whether with peers or working colleagues, can favourably impact both personal and professional outcomes, such as confidence and job satisfaction. Consequently, undergraduate student nurses are supported throughout their course by a personal tutor who facilitates the development of a positive and meaningful student-tutor relationship but also acts as a role model.

Ursula describes the student-tutor relationship.

"My personal tutor. I'm really lucky in that I have a really good relationship with them. I can talk to them about anything." **Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.**

Ursula's sense of being "really lucky" signifies the importance of relatedness as a fundamental aspect of belonging and interconnectedness. This emphasises the creation of a strong and trusting relationship with her tutor, which is crucial to academic success and personal well-being. Ursula's reflections align with Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT, based on the principles of autonomy, competence and relatedness, in her experience as a self-determined and autonomous mature quasi-dyslexic student. Ursula shows a sense of personal agency and the confidence to express herself to her tutor, without fear of judgement, enhancing her ability to fully engage with her studies. Her positive and open interactions show a sense of competence as she feels supported and validated, reinforcing a sense of academic positivity.

While Ursula finds a sense of belonging through a supportive relationship with her tutor, Zoya's experience signifies contradiction.

"People don't know my grades ... No one knows, only my husband knows my grades. Embarrassment. Pure embarrassment ... I can't tell them I scraped 40%. Just can't, so they just know I've passed ... and then I had to tell them I failed the next module." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya's reflections convey feelings of isolation and loneliness, illustrating how the absence of support from her peers leads to disconnection and self-doubt. Zoya's perception that her academic performance does not meet the standard the university values, which, due to embarrassment, makes her reluctant to share her grades with her peers. Deacon et al.'s (2022) study showed similarities to this study, highlighting that marginalisation and judgement are more than academic obstacles, but also

create deep psychological and emotional harm. Furthermore, negative experiences of education led to anxiety and intensified the challenges associated with assessment and studying (Deacon et al., 2012; Olofsson et al., 2012).

Honneth's (2004) theory of recognition (Section 2.3.iii) acknowledges the social conditions necessary for adults to have an equal opportunity to achieve self-realisation of their abilities. This socialised approach considers the role of institutions established on three principles: love, equality, and merit, which together define the theory's understanding of social justice. The principle of love, in the form of care and emotional support, is experienced by Ursula as she expresses her thoughts on her tutor-student relationship: *"I can talk to them about anything"*. Honneth (2004) accepts institutions can structure or deny an individual recognition, whilst acknowledging that misrecognition is more than a personal harm, but an injustice, which can be resolved by bridging the gap between recognition and economic justice, i.e., the redistribution of resources and opportunities. However, for Zoya, her psychological needs, such as care and emotional support, are obtained from the only person she feels able to confide in, her husband, which reveals a disconnect between her and the academic community, creating a misrecognition of a principle of social justice. For Zoya, her reflection, informed by Honneth (1995), shows the psycho-emotional consequence of her perceived inadequacy, where the lack of social esteem and fear of judgment prevent open and honest communication, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy.

Recognition remains important for the development of a positive self-identity (Honneth, 2004). Zoya reflects on her educational journey so far.

"You just kind of feel, maybe I just don't, I'm just not suited for adult nursing. Maybe it's that. I just don't understand things, and it's a bit above me, and I've overestimated myself, and I'm just not suited for this. That's how I feel. Secretly, everyone wants to get better than that (40%). If anyone says it

doesn't matter if I get 40%. It does matter. We haven't worked this hard to get that, and it does matter ... that's proper, put a downer on me when I'm told it's not worth more than 40%. I've kind of gone, Zoya, you think you can do this, but you actually can't." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya's reflections suggest someone who feels inferior, isolated, and overcome with self-doubt. The lack of recognition from within her academic community challenges her sense of self-worth, negatively impacting her sense of belonging and interconnectedness. As discussed in Section 2.3.iii Honneth's (1995; 2004) three principles of recognition, although from a different perspective, share similar beliefs to Collins (1990a) *The Matrix of Domination* primarily regarding justice, identity and systemic power; both furthermore imply a need for belonging and interconnectedness. Utilising Honneth's (1995) principles and Collins' (1990a) interpretation of standpoint theory, this study acknowledges, through the exploration of structural inequality, lived experience and recognition of social categories and dimensions, that belonging and interconnectedness at university are fragmented. Students like Zoya from marginalised backgrounds are frequently misrecognised, which undermines their identity and hinders their ability for social inclusion due to low self-esteem. Identity is formed of social interactions and institutional contexts (Honneth, 1995; 2004). Similarly, individual experience is always socially and structurally embedded (Collins, 1990a). Both perspectives reinforce our understanding of interconnectedness. For social justice and inclusion to be achieved, an individual's academic journey must be acknowledged and valued (Honneth, 1995; 2004). As such, social justice for Zoya remains overlooked until the university's structure and culture are transformed (Collins, 1990a) to acknowledge the needs of students like Zoya.

Zoya outlines the extent of her feelings.

"I was sat in a lecture, and I burst into tears 'cause the tutor was coming round. He was like We'll go through it, and I was sat there, and I burst into

tears and went I just don't understand. I really don't understand what you mean. Here's what I mean, blah, blah, blah. I was like you, saying it like that, and I still don't understand you. I almost feel too stupid to be here because it's not in basic terms." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya's remark, that she "*feels too stupid to be here*", reflects her sense of misrecognition, which is consistent with the findings from Elftorp and Hearne (2020), who found that adult learners frequently used the term struggle to express the challenges they encountered with academic study. Similarities were found by Deacon et al. (2022), who studied how negative experiences of education were related to the psychological and social situation of being portrayed as slow or stupid. Zoya's experience is more than an individual struggle, but indicates wider systemic issues faced by mature learners and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, by which 'traditional' learning methods and competencies may not align with the diverse needs of mature learners like Zoya. However, Zoya's professional practice placement rewards her with "*excellent reports*," reflecting a field that rewards her experiential knowledge by recognising her skills with a positive report. This contrasts with her academic work, which is considered "*not worth more than 40%*", reflecting a field which privileges disembodied academic capital, with emphasis on the final result and the cognitive process of learning. This contrast between fields (professional practice versus academia) illustrates a form of cleft habitus (Bourdieu, 2000) by the conflicting expectations and values experienced by Zoya within the fields. The reflection of a performance-based pedagogy of the university nurse education, with an emphasis on measurable outcomes, creates a tension with the acquisition of skills in a professional practice placement environment (Cook, 1991; Landers, 2000; Tappen, 2022).

Collins' (2000) concept of the *outsider within* examines Black women academics as they navigate predominantly white male-dominated domains, while maintaining a

distinct viewpoint determined by their lived experiences. As an *outsider within*, Zoya has access to the nursing course, but does not feel she belongs or that her learning needs are recognised, reinforcing epistemic exclusion and her sense of inadequacy. Collins' (2000) concept recognises that individuals, like Zoya, occupy a unique and peripheral insight into the educational structures that frequently exclude them, and as such, this vantage point allows for a diverse opinion. Zoya's peripheral position creates a lens through which the inequalities of the educational system are revealed, and how such inequalities undermine her sense of belonging and interconnectedness, which are essential for successful engagement in university.

5.6.3 Confidence and Self-Worth

The experiences of the participants in the current study reveal that without academic and emotional support to meet their unique needs, their confidence can diminish, resulting in reduced academic engagement and low self-worth. By addressing such areas, the transition into university can be smoother for mature learners from widening participation (WP) and 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. The learning environment (Bligh, 2002) and the university's awareness of a student's perspective on persistence (Tinto, 2017) are crucial towards student motivation to persist based on the belief in their ability to succeed, feeling valued and accepted and the relevance of the curriculum towards meeting their goal. A lack of confidence and self-worth are not inherent characteristics of mature quasi-dyslexic students, but are strongly influenced by external structures, academic environments, and institutional support systems.

Verity reflects on her studies in further education when she was diagnosed with dyslexia.

"I had a Reader, I had one-to-one support, I had one hour a week and extra time for my assignments. It helped me actually get involved in the class,

because you can give me a question that can be so many ways you can interpretate one of the questions, so actually sitting down with someone who knows a lot, helped me actually understand what was being asked ... It was amazing, 10 out of 10." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity's experience offers a critical insight into the importance of tailored support to meet her diverse academic needs as a mature, quasi-dyslexic student. Her experience highlights how the support she received gave her confidence in her academic ability. Verity's experience aligns with the commonality-differentiation of pedagogy (Norwich, 2013). As an educational concept, it considers the need for education to balance both commonality and differentiated approaches to education. For Verity, this would ensure she was part of an inclusive learning environment where the lecturer considers all students' needs to learn (commonality). The differentiation is through adaptation to ensure that individual learning needs are met, such as one-to-one support. During Verity's studies in further education, her pedagogical needs were considered on an individual basis by a dyslexia tutor and at this point she recalls, *"It helped me actually get involved in the class."* Her experience emphasises how differentiated support meets individual learning needs and enhances self-worth.

Presently, without a diagnosis of dyslexia, the support Verity received in university is generic and designed to meet the "pedagogical needs common to all learners" (Lewis and Norwich, 2004: 3). Verity appears to carefully consider before describing her feelings.

"I just think I'm doing it on my own, that I haven't got the support ... From like, uni sense and what not, I'm doing it on my own ... It just made me feel like, when uni said that I can't have my extra time I can't have this kind of, all the stuff that I had for my first half of year one, let's say. It made me feel really like uh ... to come out with a third. Because I know that I did it. I did feel really confident and then all of a sudden, I've gone really like, I

don't even know, I've gone like I just feel really, I don't know the word."

Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.

Verity is challenged to find the words to express the impact on her confidence and self-worth upon the removal of her disability support. Her dependence on external academic support can be explained through Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus and cultural capital to reveal that the offer of tailored academic support enabled Verity to be more confident with the valued knowledge and behaviours of the educational environment. Studies by Deacon et al. (2022) found that a disabling education system and challenges around assessments and studying adversely affected students' psycho-emotional perspective, resulting in a lack of self-confidence, reduced self-esteem and feelings of being a failure. Without tailored support to meet Verity's academic challenges, her unsupported academic knowledge and behaviours are not valued by the educational academic system, and she is denied academic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) .

A lack of confidence and self-worth may subsequently hinder Verity's learning to surface learning with a focus on memorisation of facts, rather than developing a deeper understanding of content (Badger et al., 2001). As Verity reflects, her thoughts return to the outcome of her dyslexia assessment. She looks close to tears as she describes how she feels.

"So, I think the only way forward for that is to obviously get on top of my work and become more organised, which I'm trying. I'm trying so hard, and I think I need to start asking for help when I need it, rather than being like, I'll just plod on. I remember getting the (dyslexia) report. I was on a night shift, and I burst into tears. I cried. And I felt stupid. I felt like I wasn't worth it. Worth doing my degree." **Verity - Student Nurse: Mental Health.**

Verity's reflections express how the withdrawal of her support undermines her sense of confidence and self-worth. Subsequently, she questioned equity and social justice in education: *"I thought, well, you're not being very equal, because I've got a learning disability, just not the one that you want"* (Section 5.6.1). The erroneousness of dyslexia assessments in mature learners is challenged by the literature. Sadusky et al. (2021) found assessors lacked confidence in their ability to assess adults and relied upon their clinical judgement, rather than verifiable tools and guidelines. This aligns with the findings in Harrison and Nichols (2005), which questioned the discriminant validity of the Adult Screening Test (DAST), one of the best-known UK conventional dyslexia screening assessments for adults (Cameron, 2021; Harrison and Sparks, 2022; Nicolson and Fawcett, 1997; Pimentel Hellier, 2023). Their findings contested the ability of the DAST to accurately measure the intended construct without being misled by other variables, such as biases or social influences.

Ursula describes her frustration regarding her academic performance.

"Whether it's our society or our education system, it's all based on what you do in an exam, unfortunately. And everybody would be, you know, I got this per cent, I got this grade, and you'd be like, well, you won't admit it, but you know, sort of where you stand amongst your peers. And it'd be really frustrating when, you know, that you could perform just as well as someone else, but then it's not shown in an exam." **Ursula - Student Nurse: Child.**

Although Ursula understands the educational system, her frustration shows a disconnect between her academic ability and how it is valued by the university. Such judgements are further exacerbated by societal stereotypes, particularly for women in universities (Crenshaw, 1994), who are often characterised as lacking in confidence or assertiveness, negatively impacting self-worth and academic success. In several previous quotations, Ursula has shown how she uses cultural capital to her

advantage. Nonetheless, both Ursula and Verity's reflections describe certain indicators of success, confirming that some aspects of Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital are more highly regarded than others, consequently privileging those who can demonstrate their abilities in a standardised and measurable way, such as through exams and essays. These 'traditional' formats exclude and devalue other forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities, such as the experiential learning aspect of the nursing course. hooks' (2003) proposes an educational system that is established according to the principles of liberatory pedagogy, to empower mature learners to challenge oppressive structures. Empowering students like Ursula to reveal their lived experiences in a collaborative learning environment, to challenge the rigidity of measuring academic performance, is pivotal towards rebuilding student confidence and self-worth.

Zoya contemplates her existing situation.

"Maybe I'm in the wrong job. Maybe I should go and work in a supermarket, where I can't. I don't have to think ... it's horrific cause they (her peers) got 67 and 68% ... I tried so bloody hard. Erm, and I feel like I wish I hadn't bothered. Yeah, why didn't I just stay doing what I knew and carried on the way I was? And that sounds awful. Oh, I wish I'd just stuck to what I knew, and then I wouldn't be so disappointed with myself and frustrated with myself." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Zoya's experience reflects a deep struggle with confidence and self-worth, emerging from her perception of underperforming. The cultures and structures surrounding the participants of the study negatively impact their experience of university, and to cope, they hide their difficulties for fear of ridicule or labelling (Pirttimaa et al., 2015). Each participant within the study, based on their academic challenges, concluded that there may be something wrong with them, and to determine what, they requested an assessment for dyslexia. The assessment determined that none of them had dyslexia.

The outcome of the dyslexia assessment left each of them questioning their self-worth and believing that not having a diagnosis could only mean one thing.

"There's something what's making me slow in the head." **Yvonne.**

"In my head, it was either I've got a learning disorder or I'm thick." **Wendy.**

"Because I've always been slow." **Verity.**

"I almost feel too stupid to be here." **Zoya.**

The label of dyslexia, although not associated with a level of intelligence, still has perceived significance to the owner and may enhance self-concept and self-worth by improving confidence and increasing motivation. Deacon et al. (2022) draw on a social relational model of disability, which views disability as a product of social interplay and power structures which create barriers for such individuals. Use of narrative dialogues of adult life stories established feelings of "difference", which they perceived from a "deficit" perspective, with the use of predominant negative language such as "stupid", "thick" or "not academic" (Deacon et al., 2022: 9).

Zoya describes how she feels about not being diagnosed with dyslexia.

"There's a lot of questions. Um, when they said, probably not. Well, I must be stupid then. That's what I'm taking with me. I'm probably not, therefore I must be stupid. That's how I feel. That's the words I'd use, almost be just, a little slow. A little bit stupid on the uptake. And I can't not think that I must just be a little bit. Yes, stupid ... This is part of the reason why I wish I'd never done the course. I underestimated this course. I'm thinking I could do it. It's really sad when you say it out loud. Where my friends will be graduating with firsts and 2:1s, and I'll be there with my 3rd, and everyone's like it doesn't matter what grade you get. Yes, I spent hours doing it, and then they told me that. Maybe it's just their way of doing it. Oh, I don't know. Maybe I'm just a 40% person." **Zoya - Student Nurse: Adult.**

Excerpts from Verity, Ursula and Zoya expose the emotional and psychological consequences when individualised support fails to address their unique learning needs. The lack of differentiating content, processes, assessment, and the learning environment prolongs their sense of inadequacy, reducing confidence and reinforcing negative perceptions of self-worth. The disclosure of such poignant lived experiences highlights the need for critical and liberatory pedagogies which challenge traditional academic structures and advocate equity and inclusivity. A more inclusive and differentiated pedagogical approach towards supporting mature, quasi-dyslexic undergraduate student nurses will empower them to feel more confident and enhance their perceptions of self-worth.

5.7 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has explored, critically examined, and interpreted the lived experience of five mature, quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students. Quasi-dyslexia was the term used following a diagnostic assessment; none of the participants were considered to have dyslexia. Each participant experiences academic challenges, accompanied by familiar attributes and characteristics similar to a person with dyslexia. Semi-structured phenomenological interviews produced three superordinate themes: 1. A Sense of Uncertainty, 2. The Academically Struggling Student and 3. A Sense of Inadequacy. Each theme contains sub-themes to establish each participant's journey, whilst developing an understanding of the varied challenges associated with being a mature, quasi-dyslexic nursing student. The issues raised address the psychological and sociological determinants that influence their lived experience. I consider that the new knowledge can be seen to improve our understanding of the experiences of mature quasi-dyslexic students.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS - A Critical Overview of the Study

6.1 Overview of the Study and the Chapter

This chapter summarises how the thesis has responded to the research questions, aims and objectives of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain verbatim quotes of five mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students who navigated ongoing academic challenges while studying a BSc (Hons) nursing course at a post-1992 university. The phenomenological interviews offer a unique and rich insight into their lived experience. To explore the phenomenon, an interpretative phenomenological approach was used. To critically examine and interpret the nuanced and complex subjective lived experience, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to highlight both commonalities and unique differences among the participants. To better understand and interpret the participants' reflections comprehensively, this study is informed by Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice and feminist standpoint theorists, which, amongst other theories, is used to provide a framework for analysing phenomena that are sociologically, culturally and historically situated (Wigginton and Lafrance, 2019).

6.2 Research Question 1

What is the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students navigating ongoing academic challenges in a post-1992 university?

This study has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students. The study shows how multifactorial psychological and sociological factors contribute to a complex understanding of the apparent and perceived academic challenges faced by the participants. A significant finding was that traditionally used dyslexia frameworks do not always capture specific reading and comprehension issues (Harrison and

Nichols, 2005; Ryder and Norwich, 2018). For example, scrutiny of the Dyslexia Adult Screening Tool (DAST) exposed issues about validity and reliability, particularly when used with mature learners and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. The findings of this study suggest that the provision of academic support needs to be reconsidered by using a more multifaceted approach, one that considers not just literacy, but also comprehension and how to apply new learning to demonstrate the complexities of understanding.

These findings provide strong empirical confirmation that the learning environment was a reliable predictor of the vulnerability experienced by mature quasi-dyslexic students, as they are more inclined to internalise their academic challenges, subsequently heightening their self-perceived inadequacy. A closed (pure) cohort model is often prevalent in university nursing courses, and due to the large cohort size, this specific learning environment is particularly unsuitable for mature, quasi-dyslexic students or learners from a 'non-traditional' educational background. Such high-volume learning environments further contribute to anonymity, consequently affecting the ability to engage with the necessary social conditions of learning. These findings have significant implications for the importance of recognising the emotional and social intricacies faced during their university experience and how this is negatively impacted by the learning environment.

The reflective accounts contradicted the belief that independent learning is a prerequisite for university. The findings showed participants' limited ability to engage in independent learning, as this prior knowledge was lacking in mature quasi-dyslexic students who progressed to university. Theoretical perspectives of Deci and Ryan's (1985; 2000) self-determination theory (SDT) and Spady's (1971) and Tinto's (1975; 1994) model of integration highlight how emotional perception and responses, such as isolation and frustration are shaped by the interaction between students of a 'non-traditional' educational background and the established ways of the university. Their emotional responses became intensified by the barriers to

learning created by the academic language used in the university. Linguistic challenges exacerbated their academic self-doubt, reducing self-confidence and creating a wider academic disengagement. Participants found that the use of complex and unfamiliar scholarly discourse language disempowered their ability to become autonomous critical thinkers. Despite that, medical and health-oriented language encountered during professional practice placement experience appears not to have been problematic for participants.

6.2a Recommendations for Research Question 1

The findings of this study have highlighted the need for several targeted interventions designed to support and enhance the academic progression of mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. These recommendations focus on the: learning environment, social interactions and support, independent learning, and the language of universities.

- i. To enhance the critical thinking and metacognitive skills of mature quasi-dyslexic learners, universities should implement explicit metacognitive teaching strategies. Mature quasi-dyslexic learners already demonstrate an awareness of metacognitive knowledge when applied within a professional practice environment. Therefore, further development of these skills and strategies in the application of a university environment would prove to be of significant benefit.
- ii. Active learning should be implemented by educators to create a more inclusive and engaging environment for all learners, including mature quasi-dyslexic learners and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds. Active learning and group-based activities encourage collaboration and peer learning, further improving critical thinking skills, which can be deepened by way of questioning dominant narratives and theories.
- iii. Demystifying challenging concepts into manageable components enables learners to develop knowledge at their own pace whilst gaining a deeper

understanding of the subject matter. Incorporating scaffolding as a teaching method into active learning is fundamental towards creating a supportive environment that promotes confidence and independence. While conventional percentage-based grading can be subjective and disempowering for mature quasi-dyslexic learners, it further undermines their motivation and peer support. Whereas in professional practice placement experiences, students were able to excel under the pass/fail assessment structure, which acknowledged their strengths and advocated collaborative learning over competitiveness.

6.3 Research Question 2

What are the psychological and sociological impacts on self-perception among mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students whose diagnostic assessment does not indicate dyslexia?

The literature review contests the certainty of the assessment outcome and the accurate description of dyslexia (Elliott and Grigorenko, 2014a; Lyon et al., 2003). Furthermore, diagnosing dyslexia in mature quasi-dyslexic learners is problematic (Sadusky et al., 2022). This study shows that the removal of a dyslexia diagnosis highlights the long-term emotional and academic consequences of such inconsistencies in support for mature quasi-dyslexic learners. By interpreting emotional resilience and intelligence through Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, it emphasises how personal strength plays a consequential role in counteracting the university's shortcomings, further challenging traditional views of cultural capital by affirming emotional traits as essential assets in university settings.

This study also demonstrates and strengthens our understanding of harsh, dismissive, and negative feedback and its impact on mature quasi-dyslexic learners' motivation, autonomy, and self-worth. Consequently, this results in disengagement or thoughts of "*quitting the course*," further showing the emotional consequences of

negative feedback. The study uniquely situates Deci and Ryan's (1985; 2000) SDT within the context of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students to emphasise how their disregarded need for autonomy, competence and relatedness negatively impacts their psychological and sociological self-perception. This illustrates the distinct motivational dynamics of mature quasi-dyslexic students and how they significantly differ from 'traditional' learners. The findings further suggest that academic failure disproportionately impacts mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, as opposed to the younger 'traditional' learner. Through the lens of feminist theory, these findings highlight the role of institutional biases in perpetuating emotional vulnerabilities among mature quasi-dyslexic students, especially women whose self-worth is often shackled to external feedback rather than intrinsic academic achievement.

6.3a Recommendations for Research Question 2

These findings suggest the following institutional recommendations to better support the unique needs of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students, specifically relating to subheadings in Theme 2, The Academically Struggling Student: motivation and attitudes, emotional responses and encounters with mental health.

- i. Provide teaching staff with tailored support mechanisms and structures that enable them to address the gap in preparedness for mature quasi-dyslexic learners and learners from non-traditional educational backgrounds.
- ii. Introduce teaching staff to inclusive pedagogies that focus on creating a learning environment where all students feel valued, respected, and able to succeed, subsequently improving their motivation and academic success.
- iii. The emotional aftermath on mature quasi-dyslexic learners indicates the compelling need for the use of critical pedagogies to encourage open group discussions, debates and problem solving to challenge what it means to be a

mature quasi-dyslexic and/or 'non-traditional' educational background learner in university.

6.4 Research Question 3

How can feminist standpoint theory clarify the relationship between power and knowledge in a post-1992 university and challenge the barriers mature quasi-dyslexic learners encounter in their pedagogical experience?

The study offers a nuanced understanding of the complexities and diversity of two distinct yet interconnected identities: a student in university and a student nurse in the professional practice environment. The findings highlight how mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students navigate the emotional and cognitive divergence between academic challenges and practical proficiency. The integration of a feminist standpoint theory in nurse education reframes mature quasi-dyslexic learners' experiences by positioning them as legitimate authors of knowledge. This challenges the 'traditional' academic power structures that marginalise such learners by failing to recognise their diverse experiences and the emotional resilience they bring to the learning environment.

Whilst the literature acknowledges the role of personal tutors in offering support, the findings of this study show how these relationships create a sense of belonging and interconnectedness for mature quasi-dyslexic nursing students. As role models, personal tutors influence learners' resilience and motivation within a nursing context. Belonging and interconnectedness are shaped by individual relationships and institutional structures, highlighting how the variability of experiences and lack of a personal tutor relationship increase feelings of isolation.

Feminist standpoint theory and the concept of critical and liberatory pedagogies (Collins, 2002; Freire, 1970; 1993; hooks, 1994; Smith, 2005) offer innovative lenses to interpret mature quasi-dyslexic learners' feelings of marginalisation by showing how

they bring valuable and unique perspectives due to their outsider position. Their perspective suggests that 'traditional' approaches to fostering belonging may not fully consider their diverse needs, which further advocates for universities to critically rethink how they create inclusive educational environments.

The study has found that mature quasi-dyslexic students are marginalised; consequently, they become disadvantaged through pedagogical practices that fail to consider their prior experiences and diverse learning styles. The construction of feminist standpoint and critical pedagogy has shown this study to reveal how oppressive academic structures negatively affect mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners with 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, by revealing how systemic inequalities in university structure create power imbalances, which further hinder their confidence and self-worth.

6.4a Recommendations for Research Question 3

These findings represent an original contribution to understanding in the exploration of the relationship between power and knowledge between mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students and the university. Subsequently, the study improves our appreciation of the learning environment, social interactions and support, emotional responses, student identity, nurse education, belongingness and interconnectedness, and confidence and self-worth by the following recommendations.

- i. The implementation of critical and liberatory pedagogies to transform learning environments to empower mature quasi-dyslexic learners to become critical thinkers, fostering both confidence and self-worth.
- ii. The creation of educational spaces that actively facilitate structured support and peer collaboration, such as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).
- iii. Application of Self-Determination theory (SDT) principles to feedback mechanisms. Redesigning feedback to better support the mature quasi-dyslexic

learner and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds, the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is emphasised.

- iv. The design of nursing courses should prioritise the psychological needs of mature quasi-dyslexic students by extending the application of SDT into actionable tasks for educators and universities. Emphasising the importance of creating a supportive, competence-building and autonomy-respecting learning environment, specifically for mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds.

6.5 Limitations

Accepted limitations of the study are recognised, as follows: participant demographics, parent educational background and data collection period.

- i. Participant demographics. The Office for Students (OfS) is focused on the access and participation of underrepresented groups in universities. To identify under-represented groups, Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) data is gathered. If this study had requested such participant data, there may have been the opportunity to further explore the POLAR classification groups of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students at the university.
- i. Parent educational background. Including data on the parents' educational background may have given further insight into wider contextual determinants, such as the utilisation of Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice or the first in the family to attend university. The use of such data may have impacted the mature quasi-dyslexic learners' experience of the university.
- ii. Data collection period. The data collection period was in line with the requested ethical approval. On consideration, prolonged exposure to the participants may have highlighted a wider breadth of their lived experiences as they progressed from Year Two (level 5) to Year Three (level 6).

6.6 Future Research

The findings and limitations of the study have provided evidence for further research and the discovery of supporting knowledge.

- i. A longitudinal study of mature quasi-dyslexic students in university, such as from year one through to completion of their studies.
- ii. Follow mature quasi-dyslexic students from university as they transition into newly qualified nurses (NQN) to explore how they continue to learn and the application of their knowledge and understanding to a professional practice environment.
- iii. Investigate mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students' thoughts and/or lived experience of lifelong learning, for instance, Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) Revalidation or further studies at university as a post-graduate student.

6.7 Conclusion

The study aimed to explore and interpret the lived experience of mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students navigating ongoing academic challenges in a post-1992 university, by way of an empathetic and explanatory understanding of their unique viewpoint. To present an analytical understanding by using a qualitative method of interpretative phenomenology. The data were collected by phenomenological semi-structured interviews with five purposively selected mature quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in three themes: A Sense of Uncertainty, The Academically Struggling Student and A Sense of Inadequacy. To explore and discover the meaning of the data, plural analytical frameworks were used, such as IPA, the feminist standpoint theory and Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice.

Widening participation is considered a contributory factor to the enriched diversity of the students in universities. Their lived experience has provided an insight into their perception of the wider structural barriers that impede and negatively impact their learning experience. Their learning needs and academic challenges exposed feelings of exclusion and abandonment while hindering their sense of belonging and interconnectedness. They expressed uncertainty and vagueness about what it truly means to be an independent learner. As their self-confidence waned, they began to internalise their feelings through self-blame. Inevitably, feelings of inadequacy evolved and negatively impacted their mental health.

The discovery of such knowledge is based on the lived experience of five courageous, mature, quasi-dyslexic undergraduate nursing students who shared the experience of continuing to study amid academic challenge. In conjunction with my interpretation of their recollections, new knowledge has been created to improve the university experiences of mature quasi-dyslexic students and learners from 'non-traditional' educational backgrounds.

6.8 Epilogue: Where Are They Now?

This epilogue provides a brief outline of each participant's current situation following the completion of the study. The reflections are not part of the original data collection, nor do they form part of the discussions and analysis; nevertheless, they do offer insight into how each participant's journey concluded upon completion of the BSc (Hons) nursing course. Including this outline within my thesis acknowledges the impact of their lived experience and reinforces the importance of their voices within the research context.

Name	BSc (Hons) Nursing: Course Classification and NMC Registration
------	--

Zoya	Began the course as an adult student nurse, having completed an Access to Higher Education course. She completed her nursing course and graduated with a Lower Second-Class Honours (2:2). Zoya joined the NMC register as a Registered Nurse (Adult) in September 2020.
Yvonne	Began the course as an adult student nurse, having completed an Extended BTEC Diploma in Health and Social Care. She completed her nursing course and graduated with an Upper Second-Class Honours (2:1). Yvonne joined the NMC register as a Registered Nurse (Adult) in November 2020.
Wendy	Began the course as a Child student nurse, having received an unconditional offer based on the prediction of her A-level exams; however, she did not obtain those predictions. She completed her nursing course and graduated with an Upper Second-Class Honours (2:1). Wendy joined the NMC register as a Registered Nurse (Children) in December 2021.
Verity	Began the course as a Mental Health student nurse, having completed an Extended BTEC in Health and Social Care during which time she was diagnosed with dyslexia and offered reasonable adjustments and support to meet her needs. Upon beginning university, Verity no longer met the criteria for dyslexia and therefore such support was removed. She completed her nursing course and graduated with a Third-Class Honours (3rd). Verity joined the NMC register as a Registered Nurse (Mental Health) in September 2021.
Ursula	Began the course as a Child student nurse, having received an unconditional offer based on the prediction of her A-level exams. She completed her nursing course and graduated with a Lower Second-Class Honours (2:2). Ursula joined the NMC register as a Registered Nurse (Children) in October 2021

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Appendix A: The Elementary Education Section of the Modified Adult Reading History Questionnaire-Revised (ARHQ-R) Pg. 1

Compensation & Reading Difficulties

Appendix

The instructions and the ten questions of the Adult Reading History Questionnaire-Revised used to calculate self-reported reading acquisition problems score.

Instructions:

Please circle the number of the response that most nearly describes your attitude or experience for each of the following questions or statements. If you think your response would be between numbers, place an "X" where you think it should be.

Questions:

How much difficulty did you have learning to read in elementary school?

None **A great deal**
0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4

How much extra help did you need when learning to read in elementary school?

No help **Help from:** **Teachers/** **Tutors or** **Tutors or**
Friends **parents** **special** **special class 2**
class 1 year **or more years**
0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4

Did you ever reverse the order of letters or numbers when you were a child?

No **A great deal**
0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4

Did you have difficulty learning letter and/or colour names when you were a child?

No **A great deal**
0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4

Appendix A: The Elementary Education Section of the Modified Adult Reading
History Questionnaire-Revised (ARHQ-R) Pg. 2

Parrila, Georgiou & Corkett

How would you compare your reading skill to that of others in your elementary classes?

Above average	Average	Below Average
0 _____	1 _____	2 _____
3 _____	4 _____	

Which of the following most nearly describes *your* attitude toward reading as a child?

Very positive	Very negative
0 _____	1 _____
2 _____	3 _____
4 _____	

How would you compare your reading speed in elementary school with that of your classmates?

Above average	Average	Below average
0 _____	1 _____	2 _____
3 _____	4 _____	

How much difficulty did you have learning to spell in elementary school?

None	Some	A great deal
0 _____	1 _____	2 _____
3 _____	4 _____	

When you were in elementary school, how many books did you read for pleasure each *year*?

More than 10	6-10	2-5	1-2	None
0 _____	1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____

How many comic books did you read for pleasure each *year*?

More than 10	6-10	2-5	1-2	None
0 _____	1 _____	2 _____	3 _____	4 _____

Appendix B: Components of the Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST)

	Test	Description	Skills tapped
Test 1	Rapid Naming	Time taken to name all the simple pictures on a card	Speed of lexical access and articulation
Test 2	One minute reading test	The number of words on a card read in one minute	Reading fluency
Test 3	Postural Stability	The disturbance in balance caused by a calibrated push in the back	Balance
Test 4	Phonemic Segmentation	The ability to split a word up into its constituent phonemes	Phonological skill
Test 5	Two-minute Spelling Test	The number of words spelled correctly in two minutes (tester speaks them). A graded test, (e.g. age, Saturday, receipt)	Spelling fluency - for regular and irregular words
Test 6	Backwards Digit Span	The maximum number of digits that can be correctly repeated in the reverse order	Working memory
Test 7	Nonsense Passage Reading	The score on a jabberwock type passage	Grapheme/phoneme translation fluency
Test 8	Non-verbal Reasoning	A short nonverbal IQ test (Nicolson and Fawcett, 1996)	Nonverbal reasoning (expected to be OK for dyslexic adults)
Test 9	One-minute Writing Test	The number of words of a sentence that can be correctly copied in one minute	Transcription fluency (important for exam concessions)
Test 10	Verbal Fluency	The number of words beginning with S that can be thought of in one minute	Verbal fluency
Test 11	Semantic Fluency	The number of animals that can be thought of in one minute (Frith et al, 1995)	Semantic fluency (should be a relative strength for dyslexic adults)

Development of objective procedures for screening and assessment of dyslexic students in a university (Nicolson and Fawcett, 1997)

Guided in-Depth Phenomenological Interview

Introduction

After the introduction, the participant should know who I am, and the purpose of the research study and the reason for interviewing them.

This is where all formalities, such as consent forms and recording devices are attended to.

Question Areas

- How is your course going?
- What has been the most challenging experience on your course so far?
- How were you supported through this challenge?
- What has been the most rewarding experience on your course so far?
- Tell me about when you first thought you had problems and how you came to be tested for dyslexia?
- How did you feel about the outcome?
- How did family/friends/peers react to the outcome?
- How do you feel now about yourself with regards to the course you're studying?
- How will you deal with these feelings (emotional / practical / psychological)?

Question, if applicable

- How do you feel the outcome of the assessment has affected 'sense of self' and/or 'self-identity'?

General Prompts

- Can you describe what it was like?
- Can you describe what this means for you?
- Can you describe how it makes you feel?
- Can you give me an example of what you mean by that?
- You said what do you mean by I am not sure that I understand what you mean by that. I want to be sure that I understand what you're saying.
- I think it would help if you could say a little more about that

Recruiting Research Participants - Doctoral Research in Education

by [Jaye Ryan](#)

A Description

As a result of the outbreak of Covid-19 and Government guidance to Stay Alert and Safe (social distancing), Birmingham City University (BCU) have instructed all researchers to comply with these changes with immediate effect. Therefore, research designed to conduct face-to-face interviews has been modified accordingly. This means, that until further notice anyone agreeing to take part in my research will NOT be asked to attend BCU, but we will negotiate a suitable date/time, and utilise the video/audio recording capabilities of Microsoft Teams to conduct our interview.

Please Read Step 1 and 2 carefully, along with the other information provided.



As an undergraduate student at BCU, have you had a test for Dyslexia and the outcome stated that you 'did not have Dyslexia'?

Would you like the opportunity to describe your lived experience?

A About My Research Study

You are invited to take part in my doctoral research study, which aims to describe the lived experience of undergraduate students who following a dyslexia test/screen are found **not** to have dyslexia. Whether or not you take part in the research is your choice. If you choose not to take part, you don't have to give a reason, and it won't affect your studies in anyway. If you do want to take part and then change your mind later, that is also acceptable. You can change your mind at any time.

The **Participant Information Sheet** will help you to decide if you would like to be involved. It sets out why I am doing the research, what your participation will involve, any benefits and/or risks, and what will happen after the study completes. Before you decide, you may decide to talk about the research with your peers or friends. Feel free to do this.

If you agree to take part, you will be required to sign a consent form to confirm that you are in agreement with the conditions of the research and that you have

A About Me

Lead Person: Jaye Ryan

Title: 4th Year Post Graduate Research Student at BCU; Senior Lecturer within the Department of Children and Young People's Health



About Me: I have worked at the university within the HELS Faculty since 2003. I previously worked at Birmingham Children's Hospital within the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit for 12

A Step 1. Please Read

Participant Information Sheet

Research Title: Describe the lived experience of undergraduate students within Higher Education following a Dyslexia test/screen by a Dyslexia Teacher or an Educational Psychologist who are found not to have dyslexia.

You are invited to take part in my doctoral research study, which aims to describe the lived experience of undergraduate students who following dyslexia screening are found not to have dyslexia. Whether or not you take part in the research is your choice. If you don't want to take part, you don't have to give a reason, and it won't affect your studies in anyway. If you do want to take part and then change your mind later, that is also acceptable. You can change your mind at any time.

This Participant Information Sheet will help you to decide if you would like to take part. It sets out why I am doing the research, what your participation would involve, what the benefits and risks to you might be, and what would happen after the study ends. Before you decide, you may want to talk about the research with your peers or friends. Feel free to do this. If you agree to take part, you will be required to sign a consent form to confirm that you are in agreement with the conditions of the research and have received information to enable you to make an informed decision.

What is Dyslexia?

According to the British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia is

- A life-long, usually genetic, inherited condition and affects around 10% of the population.
- Dyslexia occurs in people of all races, backgrounds and abilities, and varies from person to person: no two people will have the same set of strengths and weaknesses.
- Dyslexia occurs independently of intelligence.
- Dyslexia is really about information processing: dyslexic people may have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear. This can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy skills.
- Dyslexia is one of a family of Specific Learning Difficulties. It often co-occurs with related conditions, such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia and attention deficit disorder.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of the research is to describe the lived experience of undergraduate students who have been tested/screened and found not to have dyslexia. Lived experiences are best described as the experiences and choices of a given person (you), and the knowledge you have gained from these experiences and choices. There are no right or wrong answers – just your experience.

What will my participation in the research involve?

If you choose to participate in the research you will be invited to attend a 40 to 50-minute recorded online interview using Microsoft Teams. This platform is free and available to all BCU students as part of their Microsoft 365 package. The interview will take place at a time and date to suit us both, no other participant will be present. You will be reminded that information shared will remain confidential and that 'real' names are not used within the analysed data. You will be asked to share your experiences by responding to some carefully predetermined open-ended questions. You will be allowed to answer freely and openly. The online recording will ensure that your experiences are accurately documented.

years. During my final 2 years within the practice setting I worked as a Student Pathway Facilitator working one to one with 3rd year student nurses. I supported them towards learning and developing new knowledge and skills pertaining to children, young people and their families within an intensive care setting. I enjoyed the close interaction with students and thrived off their ability to grow in confidence as they

A Additional Contact Information

Who do I contact for more information or if I have concerns?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research study at any stage, you can contact me, or my supervisor(s):

Name: Jaye Ryan (Lead Person). **Email:** jacinth.ryan@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Name: Dr. Rob Smith. **Title:** Professor in Education. **Email:** Rob.Smith@bcu.ac.uk

Name: Dr. Kate Carruthers-Thomas. **Title:** Senior Research Fellow/Athena Swan Project Manager. **Email:** Kate.Thomas@bcu.ac.uk

↓ Participant Information (Download a Copy)





Participant Information Sheet

Research Title: Describe the lived experience of undergraduate students within Higher Education following dyslexia screening by a Dyslexia Teacher or an Educational Psychologist who are found not to have dyslexia.

Lead Person: Jaye Ryan

Title: 4th Year Post Graduate Student; Senior Lecturer within the Department of Children and Young People's Health

Email: jacinth.ryan@mail.bcu.ac.uk

You are invited to take part in my doctoral research study, which aims to describe the lived experience of undergraduate students who following dyslexia screening are found not to have dyslexia. Whether or not you take part in the research is your choice. If you don't want to take part, you don't have to give a reason, and it won't affect your studies in anyway. If you do want to take part and then change your mind later, that is also acceptable. You can change your mind at any time.

This Participant Information Sheet will help you to decide if you would like to take part. It sets out why I am doing the research, what your participation would involve, what the benefits and risks to you might be, and what would happen after the study ends. Before you decide, you may want to talk about the research with your peers or friends. Feel free to do this.

If you agree to take part, you will be required to sign a consent form to confirm that you agree with the conditions of the research and have received information to enable you to make an informed decision.

This document is 3 pages long, please make sure you have read and understand all the pages.

What is Dyslexia?

According to the British Dyslexia Association, Dyslexia is

- A life-long, usually genetic, inherited condition and affects around 10% of the population.
- Dyslexia occurs in people of all races, backgrounds and abilities, and varies from person to person: no two people will have the same set of strengths and weaknesses.
- Dyslexia occurs independently of intelligence.

- Dyslexia is really about information processing: dyslexic people may have difficulty processing and remembering information they see and hear. This can affect learning and the acquisition of literacy skills.
- Dyslexia is one of a family of Specific Learning Difficulties. It often co-occurs with related conditions, such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia and attention deficit disorder.

What is the purpose of the research?

The purpose of the research is to describe the lived experience of undergraduate students who have been tested and found not to have dyslexia. Lived experiences are best described as the experiences and choices of a given person (you), and the knowledge you have gained from these experiences and choices. There are no right or wrong answers – just your experiences.

What will my participation in the research involve?

If you choose to participate in the research, you will be invited to attend a 40 to 50-minute recorded online interview using Microsoft Teams. This platform is free and available to all BCU students as part of their Microsoft 365 package. The interview will take place at a time and date to suit us both, no other participant will be present. You will be reminded that information shared will remain confidential and that 'real' names are not used within the analysed data.

You will be asked to share your experiences by responding to some carefully predetermined open-ended questions. You will be allowed to answer freely and openly. The online recording will ensure that your experiences are accurately documented.

What are the possible benefits and risks of this research?

Participants who choose to be involved in the research may benefit from talking about their lived experiences, the choices made, and the knowledge gained from these experiences and choices. There is a potential risk that you may become emotional as to reflect on some experiences can be emotive.

Will I be paid?

Unfortunately, there will not be any financial payment/reimbursement.

What are my rights?

You have the right to choose whether to participate in the research. You have the right to not be treated differently regardless of your choice to participate, or not. You will not be treated differently if you do choose to participate. You have the right to maintain your anonymity throughout the research. You have the right to change your mind at any point and to withdraw from the research, in this instance all data obtained will be destroyed in accordance with the university policy.

What happens after the research?

After the research all the data will be themed and analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The anonymized data findings will form part of my doctoral thesis. My aim is to publish the thesis and to publish aspects of it within a suitable and reputable journal. The findings may also be presented at educational conferences. Direct quotes from participants may be used within publication(s) and presentations, however anonymity will be maintained throughout.

Upon completion of the research, all participant data will remain password protected and stored electronically. It will be destroyed in accordance with the university policy.

Who do I contact for more information or if I have concerns?

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research study at any stage, you can contact:

Name: Jaye Ryan,
Email: <mailto:jacynth.ryan@mail.bcu.ac.uk>

You can also contact my supervisor(s) if you have questions, concerns or complaints, about the research. Alternatively, you can email the HELS Ethics Committee HELS_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk

Name: Dr. Rob Smith
Title: Professor in Education
Email: Rob.Smith@bcu.ac.uk

Name: Dr. Kate Thomas
Title: Senior Research Fellow/Athena Swan Project Manager
Email: Kate.Thomas@bcu.ac.uk



Eligibility and Research Consent Form

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:
Jaye Ryan

TITLE OF STUDY:
The lived experience of undergraduate students within Higher Education following Dyslexia Screening who are found not to have dyslexia.

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY
Questions 1-3 will check your eligibility to participate in the research. Completion of the remaining questions will take approx. 5 minutes, and will consist of name, age, name of course studying etc.

Questions 12 to 18 must be answered 'Yes' to ensure you have understood.

If you are eligible your details will remain confidential. The information you provide enables the researcher to identify patterns and trends within the research study. If you are willing to participate in this research, identify the appropriate responses and date the declaration at the end. Submission of the form will be accepted as consent.

If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please contact jacynth.ryan@bcu.ac.uk

* Required

* This form will record your name, please fill your name.

1. What is your current level of study? *

☐ Undergraduate Student

☐ Postgraduate Student

2. Have you undertaken Dyslexia Screening and/or Diagnostic Test/Assessment? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

3. Do you have a Post 16 (e.g. since beginning university) diagnosis of Dyslexia? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

4. Full Name *

5. Email Address: Only insert your BCU email address e.g. firstname.lastname@mail.bcu.ac.uk *

6. Gender *

- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to say

7. Age: What is your age? *

- ☐ 18-24 years old
- ☐ 25-34 years old
- ☐ 35-44 years old
- ☐ 45-54 years old
- ☐ 55 and above years old

8. Ethnicity: Identify your group *

- ☐ White - British
- ☐ White - Irish
- ☐ White - Scottish
- ☐ White - Welsh
- ☐ White - Other
- ☐ Black or Black British - Caribbean
- ☐ Black or Black British - African
- ☐ Black - Other
- ☐ Asian or Asian British - Indian
- ☐ Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- ☐ Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
- ☐ Asian or Asian British - Chinese
- ☐ Asian - Other
- ☐ White and Black Caribbean
- ☐ White and Black African
- ☐ White and Asian
- ☐ Mixed - Other
- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Other Ethnic Group

9. Within which Faculty are your undergraduate studies taking place? *

- ☐ School of Nursing and Midwifery
- ☐ School of Education and Social Work
- ☐ School of Health Sciences

10. Highest entry qualification to your course of study? *

- ☐ A Level and AS
- ☐ BTEC
- ☐ Access Course
- ☐ AQA
- ☐ City and Guilds
- ☐ Foundation Course/Degree
- ☐ Any other

11. What course are you studying? *

12. I have read and understand the Participant Information provided by the researcher? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. Any questions I have about the research have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time without having to give an explanation? This will not affect my studies at the university. *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

15. I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this research? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16. I understand that any video/written/audiotape material obtained from me will be securely stored and used solely for research purposes. All material will be destroyed on completion of the research? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

17. I understand that the researcher will be discussing the progress of the research with her supervisors Dr Rob Smith (rob.smith@bcu.ac.uk) and Dr Kate Thomas (kate.thomas@bcu.ac.uk) at Birmingham City University? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

18. I freely give my consent to participate in this research study? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

19. Signature: Type your full name to give your consent *

20. Date *

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

 Microsoft Forms

Appendix G: Permission to Conduct Research – Internal POA Letter



[REDACTED]
Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences
Birmingham City University
City South Campus
Westbourne Road
Birmingham
B15 3TN
[REDACTED]

12th May 2020

Jacinth Anne Ryan
Birmingham City University
226 Bevan House
Westbourne Road
Birmingham
B15 3TN

Dear Jacinth,

Re: Describe the lived experience of undergraduate students within Higher Education following Dyslexia Screening by a Dyslexia Teacher or Educational Psychologist who are found not to have dyslexia

Following receipt of your application to conduct research within the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences at Birmingham City University, I am pleased to inform you that you have satisfied all the necessary requirements in relation to ethical approval and indemnity cover.

I am therefore able to grant you my formal permission to begin your research project from 12/05/2020. Your access to the Faculty will expire on 12/09/2020. If an extension is required, you must contact me to apply at least one month before the expiry date.

[REDACTED] has been identified as your lead contact from within the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences.

Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Associate Dean (Research & Enterprise)
Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences

Appendix H: Research Ethics Approval Letter with Amendments Due to COVID-19



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

Faculty of Health, Education & Life Sciences Research Office
Seacole Building, 8 Westbourne Road
Birmingham
B15 3TN

HELS_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk

20/Mar/2020

Mrs. Jaye Ryan

Jaye.Ryan@bcu.ac.uk

Dear Jaye ,

Re: Ryan /3616 /Am /2020 /Mar /HELS FAEC - The lived experience of undergraduate students within one faculty of an HEI following Dyslexia Screening and non-diagnosis of dyslexia

Thank you for your application for approval of amendments regarding the above study. I am happy to take Chair's Action and approve these amendments.

Provided that you are granted Permission of Access by relevant parties (meeting requirements as laid out by them), you may continue your activity.

I can also confirm that any person participating in the project is covered under the University's insurance arrangements.

Please note that ethics approval only covers your activity as it has been detailed in your ethics application. If you wish to make any changes to the activity, then you must submit an Amendment application for approval of the proposed changes.

Examples of changes include (but are not limited to) adding a new study site, a new method of participant recruitment, adding a new method of data collection and/or change of Project Lead.

Please also note that the Committee should be notified of any serious adverse effects arising as a result of this activity.

If for any reason the Committee feels that the activity is no longer ethically sound, it reserves the right to withdraw its approval. In the unlikely event of issues arising which would lead to this, you will be consulted.

Keep a copy of this letter along with the corresponding application for your records as evidence of approval.

If you have any queries, please contact HELS_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk

I wish you every success with your activity.

Yours Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Research Ethics Officer

On behalf of the Health, Education and Life Sciences Faculty Academic Ethics Committee

Appendix I: Sample of Post-Its Illustrating Repetitions, Metaphors, Similarities and Differences

Participant I

Repetitions

P1 *	P2 *	P3 *
struggle	a bit slow	teach myself
Not words	more simple, left	question unclear (wrong)
... that is not	struggle with long words	not really understanding
don't understand	struggle myself	don't get through it
age 30 and	academically struggle	mental better
not helped much at	actually disoriented	mental better
works with less	not serious but great	
understanding		

IDIOM

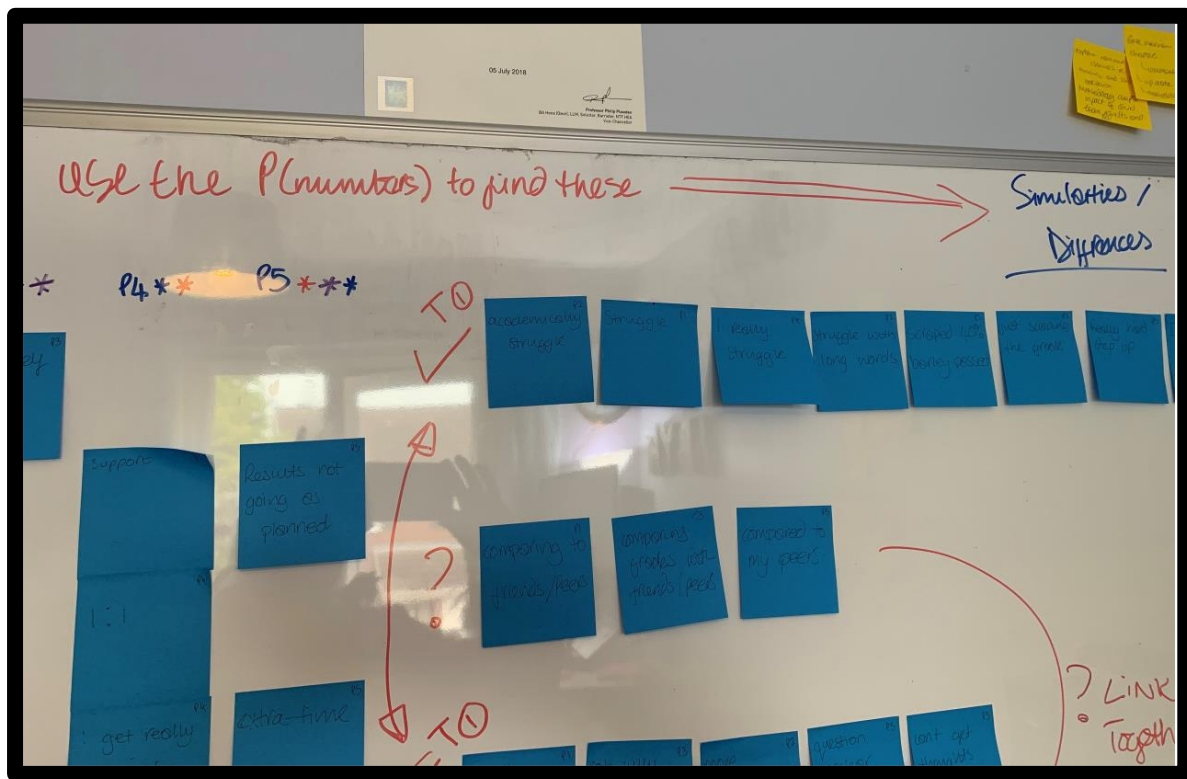
Idiomatic Typologies

P1	P2	P3
But slow	looking on top of everything	
'scraped' egg	a bit slow in the head	
	scraping the grate	

Metaphors / Analogies

Similes / Differences

Appendix I: Sample of Post-Its Illustrating Repetitions, Metaphors, Similarities and Differences



Appendix J: Sample of Participant's Interview (Verbatim)

need to write this, but I read it and I'm like, But it does make sense. And then it takes me a long time to process. And Oh yeah, I can completely see what he means now. It does make sense what he's saying, because, what am I talking about?	self doubt?	Emergent Theme Self doubt
Me: Yeah,		
Participant 1: and it's the same with if I'm in lectures, I'll write notes. I've come back and it's like, why have I written that? It's just words that just, are there. They're just words. There's no point to them. And I'll write the, but why have I wrote the? It was just a random word, I was like what was I meant to write there? So I have struggled that way, I really have.	stops trying to explain & gives an example instead. when trying to write what someone is saying sentences may stop as you get lost in what they are saying hence ... 'the' ...	Emergent Theme unclear note taking
Me: How does, can you describe how that makes you feel?		
Participant 1: Frustrated. I've never felt more, I get really frustrated at myself because I know you shouldn't compare yourself to other people on your course and they're doing a massively great and they're getting all these high Marks and you come away with your 40% and you think, I tried so hard on that like so hard. An example was the policy and politics I tried so hard yet I failed. And I've got my friends saying and I didn't find that that bad. And you know? I was sweating in the night before like working through, and I just get you get this 40 like 35% mark. And I've had it back this morning. I have rewritten the assignment, virtually to get a better grade?	Uses the word 'frustrated' angrily. Emphasised words 'so hard' several times. Comparing to peers. Feedback stating not worthy of more than 40% (Att2).	Friends doing massively great 'eyes roll'. Friends say 'I didn't find it so bad' uses a mocking tone and body language. Emergent Theme Effort applied to academic work not yielding reflective of grades.

Appendix J: Sample of Participant's Interview (Verbatim)

them know. I sent them over there for actual copy to interview. Yeah. Email, and then from there and they've all sorted stuff out at university for me which is good.		
Me: So when you got when you got your results such. How did you feel? Participant 4: 22:48 relieved in a way because it was in my head it was either I got learning disorder or I'm thick (laughing). I was kind of relieved to have a reason for why I struggle with some things. Like it was over summer me and my boyfriend, we both read the same book and we were gonna, like, read it at the same time. Like, we got two copies. We read it at the same time. And then we were gonna, like, compare it as we went through it. And he had finished the book and I was on chapter four. But it's just, I was more relief than anything, but then also kind of annoyed because I would have qualified, I would have been diagnosed with dyslexia. If I was like, I got three questions wrong in my phonics or something. So I was very on the cusp, she said, she can't diagnose me as dyslexic because technically, I've got more phonic knowledge than I should do for dyslexia, but if I hadn't got like, I think it was three or four questions more if I got more than if I did three or four questions wrong. Yes. Than I did, then I would have been diagnosed as dyslexic.	The security in a need for knowing (relieved) that this thing has a name and not just thick. However still annoyed that it isn't dyslexia as this is something that everyone has heard of – they may not understand but they know that it causes problems. Comparing reading time to BF Talks about the fact that she can't be diagnosed with dyslexia, rather than the fact that she isn't – again almost as though the person assessing has a choice and she can't. More phonic knowledge – could that be due to compensating as she has never had any help/support and stated that she had to teach herself how to ...	Emergent Theme The relief of a lot of worry Emergent Theme Comparing self to others.. Theme Privacy keeping it hidden
Me 24:14 Did she go into that any further or did she leave it there? Participant 4 24:18 Not really. It's kind of, she's given me a I've got a breakdown of everything that she did. So I've got like my percentiles, and my Where is that average low average. And then she sent me all the	I wonder why the possibility of retesting was mentioned by the participant almost as though the results were not believable or a mistake may have been made	

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