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A qualitative exploration of
postgraduate students' and
lecturers' perspectives on
whether their experiences of
higher education reflect an
*'Intellectually Humble Dialogic
Space'*

University of Oxford
Department of Education

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Abstract

My dissertation explores whether self-reported experiences of higher education from lecturers and postgraduate students reflect an '*intellectually humble dialogic space*'; this is a conceptual space representing a disposition to rigorously consider opposing ideas to beliefs held, where ideas are presented in a manner where they are rigorously considered to be true relative to alternatives; finally, it is a space where participants incorporate the most truthful ideas in developing their deeply held beliefs.

Utilising a pragmatic, qualitative approach, ten lecturers and ten postgraduate students in the social sciences participated in semi-structured interviews centred on whether their experiences of higher education reflected an intellectually humble dialogic space. Through a comparative thematic analysis inspired by Braun and Clarke (2007), results showed that lecturers are less certain of the positive epistemic status (or truth) of their beliefs compared to students. Students' beliefs were mainly confirmed resulting in an increased motivation to act on their beliefs because of their experiences of higher education. Lecturers were also more favourable to disagreement, with students being described as intolerant towards differing views. Experiences reflected that higher education encouraged a harsh treatment of lecturers' deeply held beliefs when they were students, but now (due to factors such as fear of complaint and precarity of employment) students deeply held beliefs are not challenged. Overall, the experiences of both lecturers and students did not reflect an intellectually humble dialogic space.

Suggestions for future research are made. The themes identified in this small scale, exploratory study could be used as a framework for investigating differing contexts of higher education in terms of their reflection of an intellectually humble dialogic space (or related concepts).

Introduction

According to a 2018 Ipsos MORI poll, sixty-six per cent of European nations feel their societies are *'very divided'*, with seventy-three per cent of British respondents feeling their society is more polarised than ten years ago (Duffy, Kaur Ballagan, Skinner & Gotfried 2018 para. 3). A societal state of divide is especially prominent politically; just half of the UK population are now willing to discuss politics with supporters of the other side of the Brexit vote, and only one in three say they would be happy with their child marrying someone supporting the other side (Hobolt, Tilley, and Leeper 2019).

The presence of deeply divisive issues has sparked discourse over whether higher education institutions should embody *'safe'* spaces (where certain views should not be shared for protection of students' wellbeing) or environments of freedom of speech (where all opinions and views can be presented). In response, a Joint Committee on Human Rights (2018) conducted an inquiry into the state of free speech in UK universities; it found that *'there were concerns around... potential self-censorship from students on campus'* as well as *'flagged intolerant attitudes and violence'* threatening diversity of opinion (Committee on Human Rights 2018 p. 3). Though the debate continues, the Commission explicitly stated that, on UK campuses, *'protecting freedom of expression is a legal requirement for most higher education providers'*; they further argued that *'everyone has the right to express and receive views and opinions, including those that may "offend, shock or disturb others"'*.

Yet this explicit support of freedom of speech does not address how students with differing, opposing views should be optimally exposed, and expose others, to differing, potentially distressing ideas; explicit support of freedom of speech will not make subsequent disagreements, and the conflicting emotions associated, disappear. The matter remains of how students, and members of society, can optimally engage each other to progress their disagreements when they have strong emotional connections to the issues, and the role higher education can play in facilitating this process effectively.

But what would make this process *'effective'*? What is the underlying purpose of being exposed to differing, controversial and potentially distressing ideas? Marginson's (2017) suggested purpose of higher education concerns *'self-formation and the expansion of freedom'* (2017 p. 3). Self-formation, *simpliciter*, is defined as students having the freedom to

determine their own deeply held beliefs (defined as those that have a profound influence on the students' life, influencing the social groups and moral choices they align with). I will argue that self-formation can only lead to '*freedom*' if higher education facilitates students to rigorously evaluate differing/alternative ideas to their deeply held beliefs and incorporate the most '*truthful*' ideas into forming/reforming those beliefs.

However, students are not empty vessels and will join University with various preconceptions and assumptions forming their current deeply held beliefs. As Kaplan and Harris (2016) argue, deeply held beliefs carry a robust emotional and identity component. When a person is faced with information that contradicts their strong beliefs, the natural tendency is to avoid or discredit that information due to the distress caused by the uncertainty of having one's sense of identity threatened (Epstein 2012). Even if students are exposed to conflicting evidence that contradicts their deeply held beliefs, human processing is heavily biased to reducing its significance; as such, there are hindrances to engaging with differing ideas to beliefs held (Porter and Schumann 2018).

I argue that the concepts of intellectual humility and dialogue are pertinent to addressing these hindrances; I define intellectual humility as a disposition to continuously and rigorously engage with differing ideas and arguments to ensure the positive epistemic status (or truth) assigned to a belief is accurate. '*Dialogue*' is not defined in a manner that reduces it to talk or texts but concerns the general idea that the inter-animation of different perspectives can lead to mutual illumination (Bakhtin 1984). I will attempt to synthesize these concepts into one, describing an '*intellectually humble dialogic space*'; this is a conceptual space where there is a disposition to rigorously engage with differing and opposing ideas to beliefs held, and to seek more truthful developments of deeply held beliefs; crucially, ideas are presented in any manner (or medium) in which they are most likely rigorously considered to be '*truthful*'. Ultimately, my dissertation will investigate whether Russell Group University experiences in the social sciences reflect the traits of an intellectually humble dialogic space and facilitate a process of self-formation that expands '*freedom*'.

In Chapter One, I will present Marginson's (2017) purpose of higher education concerning self-formation leading to freedom, where I will argue for a specific dimension centred around '*truthful*' developments of beliefs. In chapter two, I will examine various

conceptions of the term '*Intellectual Humility*', critically analysing how each definition aligns with my interpretation of Marginson's purpose for higher education. I will also discuss theoretical approaches to '*dialogue*' and present empirical studies concerning intellectual humility/dialogue; through evaluating the results of those studies, I will argue for the synthesis of an intellectually humble dialogic space as a conceptual framework for investigating whether higher education fulfils the purpose of self-formation leading to freedom.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss my methodology centred on pragmatism, and justify in detail the formulation of my research question, interview schedule, ethics, method of analysis and other methodological considerations. Chapter four will discuss the results of the semi-structured interviews conducted, and chapter five will connect these to the theoretical discussions and empirical studies referenced in the literature review, discussing the key concepts holistically through the perspective of the entire dissertation. In conclusion, I will present the limitations of my study, as well as considerations for future research. To begin, Chapter One will critically analyse Marginson's conception of higher education being self-formation leading to freedom.

Chapter One - Self-formation Leading to Freedom

The purpose of higher education has been deeply contested; arguments have ranged from preparing students for productivity in a knowledge-based economy to producing knowledge that is intrinsically valuable to the notion of ‘*education*’ (Goddard and Payne 2017, Allen and Goddard 2020, Erskine as cited by Webb 2013). In this chapter, I will explore one suggested purpose of higher education to be ‘*self-formation and the expansion of freedom*’, summarising Marginson’s explanation of this purpose, and critically analysing its contents (Marginson 2017 p. 3). I will argue that if self-formation is to lead to freedom, it vitally requires students to engage, consider, and evaluate differing ideas to ones’ deeply held beliefs rigorously. Only then can higher education be freeing where students can espouse beliefs in forming themselves that are judged to be the most truthful against alternatives through rigorous, reflexive processes (all terms will be defined in subsequent chapters, with ‘*rigorously*’ being defined in chapter two). To begin unpacking these sentiments, I will present Marginson’s (2017) conception of the purpose of higher education.

As Marginson articulates (2017), ‘*higher education rests on the irreducible fact that while learning is conditioned by external factors, by the learners’ background and resources, the institution, the curriculum, teaching, and other circumstances, only the learner does the actual learning*’ (p. 3). Here, a distinction is made between the external influences on the learner, and the ability to actually learn. Students are not presented as passive, ‘*empty vessels*’ but active, critical actors with the self-determination to ‘*pilot*’ the learning of their own lives (Marginson 2017 p. 2). For example, a student may not have control over the financial support that their parents can offer them or the literary texts exposed to them in childhood, however, can still succeed academically through determination and effort (or so it is argued) (Marginson 2017). In this sense, the learner is reasoned to not completely be at the mercy of external factors that they have little control over being exposed to; instead, students critically engage with their own experiences and exposure, drawing what is most useful for them to further their learning (Marginson 2017 p. 2).

But how does a student draw what is most useful from their experiences? What does/should most ‘*useful*’ mean? To begin answering, one must determine what it means to be formed or to self-form. While ‘*formation*’ can infer broad connotations, the pertinent

aspect I will consider concerns the choice of a student to hold a deeply held belief. A deeply held belief influences the framing with which students make moral decisions, the social groups one engages with, and the practices one espouses (Hogg and Terry 2000). A strong religious belief, for example, commonly influences the moral framework a student uses to make choices, as well as whether a student follows the practices associated with that belief; it can also influence the social groups a person is involved with through regular attendance at religious events (Harris 2009, 2012). A deeply held belief commonly *'forms'* a major part of a students' identity by influencing their actions and practices.

Conversely, the focus of a deeply held belief is appropriate to the concept of *'formation'* because if a belief is *'forming'* a student's practices, choices, and social groups, it is most likely a deeply held belief. For example, students hold beliefs that are arbitrary in daily life, such as *'if I open this door it will open'*; however, beliefs that are deeply held (e.g. as a Christian I believe God is watching me) have a profound influence on a person's actions, experiences, and decisions (Harris 2009, 2012). Therefore, the focus of formation concerning deeply held beliefs is mutually pertinent to the concept of formation/self-formation.

The relevance of deeply held beliefs to formation and self-formation is further reinforced with how Ball (2016), drawing from Foucault, describes the terms as a process where *'one can become something that one was not'* (p. 56,57). While Ball highlights that Foucault was referring to *'freedom from determination from the state'*, the phrasing signals a considerable change; a person becomes someone very different because of their process of formation/self-formation. Foucault elaborated that if *'life was truly a life of truth, must it not be another life, a life which is radically and paradoxically other?'* (Foucault 2011 p. 245). The use of the terms *'radical'* and *'paradoxically other'* illustrate the extensiveness to which formation and self-formation results in a considerable change. The focus of a considerable change again highlights the relevance of deeply held beliefs; if a student is to go through a process of radical change, becoming *'something that one was not'*, then their deeply held beliefs would also change for the person to form into someone radically different to who they were.

Yet what distinguishes '*self-formation*' from formation, and how does the difference relate to higher education resulting in '*freedom*' for students? Foucault's prior mention of the '*life of truth*' underpins the answer where Marginson (2017) explains:

Because higher education enhances the capacity for reflexivity, and thereby expands the scope for agency, it grows the space for freedom (p. 5).

It is argued that higher education encourages reflexivity by facilitating students to critically analyse their own beliefs, experiences and ideas. Students are given '*agency*' by being encouraged or facilitated to reflexively develop their beliefs, and the process is therefore '*freeing*' as students' beliefs become more developed and informed. Through reflexivity, students engage in a process of self-learning by drawing from their experiences what they desire to form their own beliefs, and have the control to develop those beliefs into more informed versions to apply to self-formation; the ability to evaluate and develop inferences drawn from their external experiences gives them '*control*' over how these experiences can shape/form them, which distinguishes '*self-formation*' from formation (Foucault as cited by Ball 2017 p. 245).

Yet what is the criteria for reflexive processes leading to more '*informed*' or developed beliefs, and how do these criteria relate to freedom? To answer these questions, it is useful to evaluate a pertinent criterion of '*reflexivity*'. While a thorough reflection of the various ways this term has been defined will be beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will present pertinent strands of a criterion provided by Bourdieu (2004), who illuminated the goal to be:

increasing the chances of attaining truth.... which makes it possible to keep closer watch over the factors capable of biasing research (p. 89).

For Bourdieu (2004), the underlying criteria of reflexivity must be the '*attainment*' or the identification of more informed truths. He argued, *simpliciter*, that a person (or more specifically a social scientist) is inherently laden with biases, and that only by engaging in an '*epistemological vigilance*' accounting for those biases can social scientists reach more informed truths (p. 89). For Bourdieu, reflexivity was a process of accounting for and striving against the biases that restrict the identification of more informed truths.

In relating Bourdieu's (2004) criterion to my overall argument, I believe students should be engaging in reflexive processes concerning their experiences by identifying the most truthful elements of them; through critical reflection, students should develop their beliefs into more informed, truthful beliefs, ultimately choosing the most truthful to be used in their self-formation. For example, a student may be surrounded by friends who hold a specific political belief e.g. through the accommodation he/she is placed in. The student, through no acts of his/her own, is exposed to this political belief. However, the student may or may not choose to espouse this belief; this is because higher education should, in theory, encourage reflexivity in helping the student understand they may be biased towards espousing that belief because of the comparatively larger exposure to it (the '*mere-exposure*' effect, see Zajonc 2001). Through the epistemological vigilance referenced by Bourdieu (2004), higher education should facilitate the student to critically evaluate whether the belief is truthful, continuously and rigorously considering whether there are more truthful alternatives or more developed versions of beliefs. In this sense, I argue that reflexivity must involve '*rigorous*' engagement with differing and opposing arguments to deeply held beliefs, or beliefs one has been exposed to; this is to ensure the truthfulness assigned to a deeply held belief is accurate relative to others.

It is pertinent for my overall argument that I do not define '*truth*' as a rigid state to be reached, or narrowly attained through a particular, superior form of inquiry or method of verification. Instead, I frame it as Bourdieu (2004) articulates a continuous, '*epistemological vigilance*' (p. 89). Through this framing, truth can be defined as an iterative, continuous commitment to seeking out and finding a more informed perspective through any multitude of methods of inquiry that could illuminate a more informed truth (this conception will be expanded upon in the next chapter). In terms of self-formation, students should seek a more informed interpretation or evaluation of their external experience and exposure to continually evaluate the truthfulness of beliefs that are contributing to their self-formation; only if higher education facilitates students to critically evaluate their experiences to reach more informed truths can it be freeing in self-formation.

However, students are not empty vessels and will join University with various preconceptions, assumptions, and even deeply held beliefs. The process of students reflexively considering alternative viewpoints can be difficult and defensive when those ideas

are central to the sense of self; this is because, as mentioned, our identity is formed by our deeply held beliefs, influencing our social circles, and moral choices (Kaplan and Harris 2012, Hogg and Terry 2000). Opposing viewpoints to deeply held beliefs can cause uncertainty, uncomfortableness, emotional distress, and subsequently, defensiveness as the worldview of a participant, as well as the practices forming one's identity, are potentially questioned. However, this difficulty is aligned with how Ball (2017) describes the process of self-formation; namely, as an '*arduous struggle*' where students should be placing themselves in '*doubt*'; in this lies new possibilities that lead us to become someone considerably more truthful (p. 69). I argue that the characterisation of an arduous struggle is appropriate to the resistance to opposing information concerning deeply held beliefs that must be overcome if one is to become someone radically more truthful (Ball 2017, Foucault 2015).

However, overcoming this resistance through placing our deeply held beliefs and preconceptions into doubt can be as deceiving as it is challenging because humans are notoriously incapable of spotting their own biases (Kahneman 2011, Church and Samuelson 2016). Instinctual processing can discourage us from viewpoints that contradict our deeply held beliefs, and instead to ideas that comfort us, or that encourage *prima facie* positive emotional reactions (Kahneman 2016). In this sense, humans are cognitively biased towards actions and thoughts that encourage positive feelings and motivated away from actions and thoughts that can cause perceived negative feelings (Epstein 1994). Even if students are exposed to conflicting evidence that contradicts their deeply held beliefs, human processing is heavily biased to reducing its significance (Porter and Schumann 2018).

I postulate, therefore, the danger that students engage in a process of self-fulfilling reflexivity, believing they are going through an arduous struggle, but in actuality are not rigorously considering opposing ideas to those they believe are true. This can be illustrated with the beginnings of how '*reflexivity*' was conceptualised, where Merton (1948,1949) described the phenomena of the self-fulfilling prophecy: once a prediction or prophecy is made, actors may accommodate their behaviours and actions so that a statement becomes true, or conversely, a statement that would have been true becomes false - as a consequence, the prophecy has a constitutive influence on the outcome. Students, therefore, could be constitutively influencing the reflexive processes they undertake in challenging their deeply held beliefs, creating self-fulfilling '*truths*' which are then potentially used to form arbitrarily

scrutinised deeply held beliefs in self-formation; this is antithetical to how I defined '*freedom*' as beliefs could be being determined through a process of comfort, and not an arduous struggle of beliefs being determined due to truthfulness. How, therefore, can reflexivity not become a cycle of confirmation bias and self-fulfilling prophecy in self-formation? I will attempt to answer this question in the next chapter through the lens of intellectual humility and dialogue, acknowledging that the answer is inherently complex.

In conclusion, this chapter summarised Marginson's (2017) proposed purpose of higher education to be self-formation leading to freedom. I defined these terms, explaining that integral to self-formation is the notion of a deeply held belief because both terms appropriately reflect a profound influence on a students' experience and identity. In defining reflexivity, I highlighted a crucial factor to be the pursuit of truth in line with Bourdieu (2004) and Foucault (2015, as cited by Ball 2017). Following this, I argued that Marginson's (2017) conception of higher education leading to freedom must involve students critically engaging with their external experiences and exposure, seeking out alternative viewpoints and rigorously considering them. If students are integrating beliefs into their self-formation that are the most '*truthful*' through rigorous reflexive processes, only then can higher education be '*freeing*'.

However, I discussed that considering viewpoints opposed to deeply held beliefs is challenging due to our instinctual processing primed defensively against information that alters our worldview, and our conception of the self. I argued that, in line with early conceptions of reflexivity, students can potentially be entering a process of self-fulfilling reflexivity where ideas are believed to be going through a rigorous, reflexive process, but instead are excessively based on preconceptions and *prima facie* positive emotional reactions. The next chapter will examine the concepts of '*intellectual humility*' and '*dialogue*', addressing how and why students should engage with differing, alternative, and opposing viewpoints in a manner in which they are most likely to be accurately judged to be truthful, and included in self-formation leading to freedom through higher education.

Chapter Two – An Intellectually Humble Dialogic Space

The virtue of humility lies at the heart of all major religions and spiritual teachings, yet despite its universal presence, humility is an uncertain and contested virtue (Damon and Colby 2016). Philosophers have long argued that once a person claims to be humble that they are, paradoxically, no longer being humble (Lewis 1958). This chapter will explore the prominent conceptions of the delineation of '*Intellectual Humility*' found in multidisciplinary literature. I will critically evaluate each conception through the framework of how they embody my interpretation of Marginson's (2016) purpose of higher education; namely, '*freedom*' through students utilising beliefs in self-formation that are '*rigorously*' judged to be the most truthful against alternatives (the term rigorously will be defined in this chapter). Ultimately, I will argue that if intellectual humility is to be considered '*freeing*' it must include a disposition to engage with an extensive variety of opposing viewpoints to accurately judge their relative epistemic strength (or truthfulness) in comparison to ones' own deeply held beliefs.

Following this, I will conceptually explore the conditions required for intellectual humility to be embodied or enacted; I chose to examine the concept of '*dialogue*' which broadly indicates principles that could apply to engaging with differing, opposing viewpoints through a variety of forms (i.e. not limited to discussion). I will synthesize the concept of dialogue with intellectual humility, and the purpose of higher education being '*self-formation*' leading to '*freedom*' to create the concept of an '*intellectually humble dialogic space*'; this conceptual space, *simpliciter*, is where ideas and views opposed to deeply held beliefs are '*rigorously*' considered to be used in self-formation. I will then compare this theoretical synthesis to current empirical studies on engagement with opposing ideas, where it will be shown that, commonly, the theory does not reflect reality. To begin, I will evaluate the current seminal account of '*intellectual humility*' in the literature by Roberts and Wood (2003, 2007).

Prima facie, intellectual humility is mapped as '*the virtuous mean between something like arrogance, on the one hand, and self-deprecation.... on the other*'; that is, one is not too arrogant regarding their beliefs or expertise, or too dismissive of their beliefs or expertise; instead they attribute truth and justification of their beliefs as they ought (Church and Samuelson 2018 p. 6). Yet by what standard does one attribute truth and justification to a

belief as they *'ought'*? The current seminal account of intellectual humility by Roberts and Wood (2003, 2007) highlights a fundamental trait being:

An unusually low dispositional concern for the kind of status accrues to persons who are viewed by their intellectual communities as intellectually talented, accomplished, and skilled (p. 271).

In other words, intellectual humility is centred on a *'striking or unusual unconcern for social importance, and thus a kind of emotional insensitivity to issues of status'* (Roberts and Wood 2007 p. 272). In this conception, the possessor of intellectual humility is not necessarily unaware of his or her status, or social importance, but status is of no concern (Church and Samuelson 2016).

Yet defining intellectual humility *fundamentally* by an unusual unconcern for social status can result in outcomes contradicting *'freedom'* where knowledgeable persons produce or allow untruthful representations of their knowledge; this can be illustrated with a thought experiment inspired by Church and Samuelson (2016):

BOMB SQUAD: Stephanie is a highly knowledgeable bomb defusal expert: however, she does not care about social status or praise. David, on the other hand, is a novice bomb squad member, but is obsessed with social status, and cares the most about what his peers think of him. Stephanie understands that David's knowledge is extremely low in comparison to hers. One day both are discussing bomb defusal with their mutual friends. As David cares so much about what others think, he exaggerates his ability. As Stephanie does not care about social status, she allows David to exaggerate. The friends are fooled into thinking that David has superior defusal knowledge to Stephanie. The next day, a bomb is planted beneath the friend's house; fooled into thinking David knows how to defuse it, they call him, and the bomb explodes.

According to the Roberts and Woods account (2003, 2007), a specialist in a particular topic may allow their expertise to be downplayed by being intellectually humble, even if their knowledge should be attributed that expertise, due to an *'unusual unconcern for social importance'*. Ultimately, in not caring for social status, Stephanie provided a dishonest self-representation, both to her friends in the restaurant and to David, of her relative ability to stop the bomb compared to David.

Therefore, intellectual humility cannot *fundamentally* be defined by a lack of caring of social status if it is to be '*freeing*' (social status can play a role, but it cannot be a fundamental trait of the conception) (Church and Samuelson 2016). Instead, what is required is a disposition to honestly self-appraise, and represent, the truthfulness of one's beliefs (Damon and Colby 2018). However, as Porter and Schumann (2018) argue, this is fundamentally an '*other*' oriented activity (para. 3). One can only honestly self-appraise and represent the strength of their beliefs relative to others; further, one can only achieve this if they are actively engaging with opposing viewpoints and ideas. This reflection, I argue, is fundamental to any conception of intellectual humility; namely, the active engagement with differing and opposing ideas to accurately identify, and represent, the truthfulness and justification of one's belief.

Subsequently, a crucial element of the definition that I will espouse in this dissertation is introduced by Church and Samuelson (2016):

Intellectual humility is the virtue of accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs (p. 24)

This definition overcomes the prior criticisms; it disregards social status as a fundamental factor of intellectual humility; it also more explicitly highlights the need to evaluate the truthfulness of beliefs relative to others, phrased as tracking the '*positive epistemic status*' of one's own beliefs. However, crucial for the usefulness of this definition is what tracking positive epistemic status practically means. Here, Church and Samuelson fail to provide a rigid criterion:

we don't intend to commit ourselves.... on this score. For now, let's let a thousand flowers blossom. Whether it's safety, sensitivity, evidence, reliability, character virtues, justification, defeasibility.... if it can give a belief positive epistemic status, - or at the very least, positive epistemic status that really matters, then our definition should track it (p. 27)

While this reasoning serves to hold for an abstract discussion of intellectual humility, I believe it represents a fundamental weakness of the definition. If positive epistemic status is an essential component, and it cannot translate to at least a somewhat rigid criterion, arguably the definition is vacuous (Hammersley & Traianou 2014). While Church and Samuelson do not

elaborate further on the meaning, I believe it crucial to further derive what '*tracking positive epistemic status*' should infer for it to have practical usefulness in the context of the expansion of freedom in higher education.

I derive the meaning of the phrase '*accurately tracking the positive epistemic status*' in line with the proposed use of '*truth*' in the previous chapter; the phrase is expressed in the present continuous tense, which indicates it is indicatively ongoing. This characterisation of an ongoing process can serve as a crucial foundation of derivation. To illustrate, a specialist brain surgeon may hold the belief that his/her chosen method of surgery is the most informed for saving people's lives. However, he/she must constantly keep track of the latest medical discoveries to ensure that his/her belief in this method is accurately reflecting the positive epistemic status that the doctor is attributing (that it can save lives). Crucially, the surgeon will, ideally, never stop tracking the positive epistemic status of his belief relative to others because there is always the possibility of a more informed treatment being discovered (Harris 2012).

My argument, therefore, is that '*tracking positive epistemic status*', or truth, can inherently be defined as an iterative process, constantly requiring the re-evaluation and revision of beliefs in comparison to other viewpoints (Damon and Colby 2018). Tracking positive epistemic status does not need to be rigidly defined as a particular form of verification (e.g. through the scientific method, or a certain epistemological commitment). Though persons may favour a specific form or method of verification (e.g. quantitative or qualitative), the term need not be restricted by being defined through a particular method. Instead, the term can refer to a disposition to evaluate conflicting and opposing evidence sourced from various lines of inquiry to ensure the positive epistemic status applied to a belief is accurate.

However, a pertinent objection concerns how much attention an expert on a topic should consider the opinion of a non-expert (Church and Samuelson 2016, Nichols 2018). Should an astrophysicist concern him/herself with every flat-earth theory that exists? Should an astrophysicist continue to see a palm reader checking if his/her non-belief in palm reading is still accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of that belief? And if so, how often? These objections fall under the bracket of '*epistemic disagreement*', and do not have answers

in the scope of this dissertation. For now, I will loosely state that tracking the positive epistemic status of a belief requires a commitment to engaging with opposing viewpoints as they ought; I acknowledge that '*oughtness*' concerning the duration (and amount) of evaluation of opposing beliefs cannot be answered within the scope of this dissertation, but is a crucial consideration (see literature on '*Epistemic disagreement*' such as Christensen 2011, Feldman 2006, Elga 2007, Foley 2001, Kelly 2005, Wedgewood 2007, and Matheson 2015).

Despite this limitation, a postulated definition that can be produced because of my prior reasoning is the following:

Intellectual Humility is the virtue of accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs, acknowledging that tracking positive epistemic status is an iterative and continuous process of engaging, listening/giving attention, and preparedness to enter into opposing viewpoints, with intellectual humility being a disposition to do so.

Throughout this dissertation, I have used the term '*rigorously*' engaging with opposing viewpoints; here I define rigorously as engaging, listening/giving attention, and preparedness to enter into the other belief, fully considering it prior to evaluation and comparison of that belief with what was previously known (or '*believed*'). In other words, the opposing belief must, conceptually, be evaluated in a manner insofar that it is completely possible for that belief to be utilised in self-formation.

Yet what are the conditions with which someone engages, listens/gives attention to, and prepares to enter into opposing viewpoints? How does one rigorously evaluate a belief to be utilised in self-formation? Is the process self-directed (i.e. a mindset), or encouraged by group conventions? To explore these questions, it is useful to draw from the concept of '*dialogue*'.

Dialogue and an Intellectually Humble Dialogic Space

The general use of the term '*dialogue*' is commonly associated with explicit talk; however, the concept is not limited to spoken or explicit language. Bakhtin instead referred to how the holding of different ideas or perspectives together in tension led to new insights; he was interested in the general idea that the inter-animation of different perspectives can

lead to mutual illumination (Bakhtin 1984). Crucially, this inter-animation is not restricted to the medium of discussion, but can take the form of reading another person's idea and creating a new interpretation as a result of the '*tension*' between the authors' and the original or other interpretations; this is why, as Wegerif (2018) reasons, there is a new interpretation of Socrates almost yearly; the inter-animation of one person's perspective with the writings of Socrates can lead to a new, mutually illuminating interpretation.

Dialogic is also less about reaching a singularly truthful conclusion but concerns a co-creation of new perspectives and interpretations. As Sennett (2012) postulates, dialogic is focused on problem-finding, as opposed to problem-solving, with problem finding referring to the identification of new questions to be asked that give rise to new perspectives. Jointly creating new questions is so vital to the concept of dialogic that Bakhtin states '*if an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue*'; therefore an '*answer*' in a dialogue must give rise to a new question, or it cannot be considered dialogic (Bakhtin 1986 p. 168, Sennett 2012).

Sennett exemplifies a dialogic trait by stating that it can, in some instances, only consist of listening. For example, when engaging in a discussion or exchange with someone else, or with another idea, the utterance (in whichever form) is not taken at face value, but instead, there is a consideration as to what was not said, or what could have been said. As Wegerif (2012) and Sennett (2012) reason, the discussion itself (if it takes place) is conceptualised as the outside form of the dialogue, but the inside can be limitless, through the new interpretations and considerations of what the idea was, could have been, and what it could be, that are occurring internally. Crucially, for Bakhtin (1986), the notion of dialogue is an unclosed system that has no resolution, or moment, where the implicit, or the hidden, cannot be completely surfaced and resolved with the other; it remains in a condition that is, as phrased by Sennett, '*unresolved*' as a process (Sennett 2012).

However, the '*unresolved*' conceptions of dialogue are open to certain fundamental criticisms in the context of the expansion of freedom. These criticisms concurrently align with the importance of a conceptual synthesis of intellectual humility and dialogue. The first criticism concerns the demand for new interpretations, and the limitless possibilities associated with the '*tension*' or '*inter-animation*' of two ideas always resulting in new

interpretations; there are multitudes of practical situations where this ideal would not be freeing. Drawing from an example in the previous section, BOMB SQUAD, there may be a clear goal required for a specific exchange of ideas e.g. defusing a bomb. If one knows more about defusing a bomb than others who are present (and there is limited time) the inter-animation of two differing ideas does need to result in a new interpretation; the more informed idea needs to be identified and utilised to fulfil a certain goal.

Using yet another example from the previous chapter, if an astrophysicist who believes the world is round is in discussion with a flat earther, will the combination of their ideas always lead to a new perspective? Even if a potentially new perspective is discovered, the inter-animation of perspectives may not always lead to a more informed truth (and not be freeing). As Kaplan notes, our collective existence can, at times, rely on reaching a shared understanding of the world, where certain '*understandings*' are more informed than others in relation to a practical goal (Kaplan 2012). Therefore, I argue that a '*dialogue*' is only practically useful if, as a result, more informed answers concerning certain practical goals are being produced for participants; yet, as demonstrated with the prior examples, this is not always the case.

Here, the concept of an intellectually humble dialogic space can address this criticism. Conceptually, the synthesis of an '*intellectually humble dialogic space*' could be defined as:

A dialogic space centred on facilitating the accurate tracking of the positive epistemic status of beliefs, acknowledging that tracking positive epistemic status is an iterative and continuous process of engaging, listening/giving attention, and preparedness to enter into opposing viewpoints, with intellectual humility being a disposition to do so.

To elucidate, an intellectually humble dialogic space holds many of the prior traits of a dialogue; it still is not restricted to discussion but concerns a variety of mediums of exchanges of ideas; it still concerns the tension of ideas leading to mutual illumination, but it is with the narrower focus of accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of beliefs. Therefore, engaging with new ideas does not always have to result in mutually illuminating perspectives; instead, there is an encouragement in this space to accurately track the positive epistemic status of a belief or argument. In this regard, the exchange must involve relevance to the positive epistemic status of the belief or argument under review. Overall, synthesizing

dialogue with intellectual humility narrows the criteria of dialogue, providing it with a more practical goal concerning the truthful developments of beliefs (or accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of beliefs).

To use BOMB SQUAD as a further example, in an intellectually humble dialogic space, if one bomb defusal expert was discussing defusal strategy with a bomb defusal novice, that discussion does not need to lead to new, mutually illuminating perspectives. The exchange need only encourage the accurate tracking of the positive epistemic status of a belief, where the expert can simply confirm the truthfulness attributed to his superior defusal knowledge. However, what about the novice?

If an intellectually humble dialogic space encourages tracking the positive epistemic status of beliefs, surely that must hold for all participants, and not just the participants with more expertise? In this sense, the expert should convince the novice that the positive epistemic status (or truthfulness) attributed to his/her beliefs should be readjusted. But what is the optimum way that the bomb defusal expert can convince the novice that he/she is incorrect in their reasoning? What if the bomb defusal novice strongly believes he/she is the best at what he/she does, and reacts defensively to being corrected? For an intellectually humble dialogic space to function, it must encourage exchanges where all members can revise the opinions of others and be open to having their own opinions revised (Conlin 2015). There is always the possibility that the bomb squad expert could be incorrect, and that permutation should be given the chance manifest in this dialogic space (within reason, though acknowledging the durational boundaries are not known). However, as was argued, and will be further practically demonstrated, the process of revising ideas related to deeply held beliefs contains fundamental hindrances concerning opposing ideas.

As already mentioned, Kaplan noted that there is a blockade in challenging, revising, and objectively evaluating personal opinions and beliefs, a blockade which is especially prominent when beliefs are central to a person's identity (Kaplan, Gimbel and Harris 2016). Sapolsky further elucidates this prominence by the tribalistic processing of primates, who are *'hard-wired for us/them dichotomies'* (Sapolsky 2018 p. 391). The aforementioned *'us/them'* hardwiring means opposing viewpoints can be interpreted as *'attacks'* on *'us'* from *'them'* (Kaplan et al. 2016). Kaplan states this perception of attack causes anxiety, and Epstein further

argues that our unconscious processes are defensive, '*motivating actions and thoughts anticipated to avoid negative feelings*' (Epstein 1994 p. 716). How does this manifest in both revising and encouraging the revision of opinions with others?

Gottmann (1995) practically illustrated these issues in the context of marital disagreement; in marriages, disagreements are often emotionally charged, and Gottman showed that when one's heartbeat rises to a certain threshold - about 82 beats per minute (BPM) for men (up from an average of 72) and 90 BPM for women (up from an average of 82) - a phenomenon called flooding occurs. Flooding is characterised by '*the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, which releases adrenaline and cortisol*' (Church and Samuelson 2018 p. 198). When one's heart rate increases to 100 BPM, the adrenaline rush leads to a '*fight or flight*' response; as Goleman (1996) highlights, this has evolutionary origins to prime our ancestors to defend an attack (e.g. by the adrenaline rush readying arms to strike, or through heightened alertness to spot an attacker). Crucially, however, these evolutionary purposes were mainly defensive, and in the context of disagreement of emotionally charged topics, flooding is a common occurrence, building barriers to '*focus on what the other person is saying*' due to increased '*defensiveness and hostility*' (Gottman 1995 p. 116). As has been extensively argued, when persons engage with opposing ideas to deeply held beliefs, being open to revising opinions is extremely difficult.

However, there is evidence that certain conditions of exchanges can encourage consideration of differing ideas more rigorously. Reddy and Wilson (2015) suggest engaging in a process of self-distancing reflected in the work of Ayduk and Kross (2010); in a study where participants were asked to reflect on an emotionally difficult time, those that could '*self-distance*' and see themselves from the perspective of an observer had less emotional reactivity to the memory in the short term. Crucially, those able to self-distance showed a greater capacity for problem-solving and less reciprocity of negativity (emotional reactivity, hostility) in situations of conflict with someone with whom they were in an ongoing relationship. These findings were further reinforced by Conlin (2015) who observed tutorial groups of physics classes; he found that students would distance themselves from an argument they were making to alleviate the affective risks of sharing ideas and having them corrected. This strategy allowed students to express a '*contrary position without escalating... conflict*', facilitating students to continue sensemaking (2015 p. 1). The strategy of distancing

was identified as a trait that reduced the affective consequence of having beliefs revised or changed, while still focusing on progressing the discussion to produce a more informed answer.

How does reflection on these empirical studies illuminate the synthesis of the key concepts of my dissertation? I argue that an intellectually humble dialogic space is both a mindset and a set of practices/conventions that encourage that mindset. Further, students must be exposed to differing and opposing viewpoints in a manner in which they '*rigorously*' consider them in self-formation. Though our instinctual processing is primed against attributing significance to opposing viewpoints, creating environments where students can be more receptive to revising their beliefs can encourage students to accurately track the positive epistemic status of a belief to only utilise the most truthful or scrutinised in self-formation. In this sense, these spaces can more effectively encourage reflexivity fulfilling the criteria from Bourdieu (2004) in opening students to more truthful, developed versions of their deeply held beliefs. Higher education, therefore, must embody this conceptual space if it is to result in '*freedom*' in facilitating students to critique their own beliefs by examining differing ideas, however, examining them in a manner with which they can be rigorously considered/utilised in self-formation. Only then can higher education be freeing, if students are choosing the ideas and beliefs that are most truthful, or informed, in their self-formation.

But how does higher education in the UK facilitate this process? Does the experience mirror the theoretical synthesis of an intellectually humble dialogic space? If higher education facilitates this process effectively, where, and how does this take place? Does this process reflect the empirical work cited (i.e. distancing or reducing the emotional conflict of the presentation of ideas)? If higher education does not reflect this conceptual space, what can be improved, and how? These are the themes my empirical work aimed to explore, ultimately examining how/if experiences of higher education reflect an intellectually humble dialogic space. In conclusion, I will summarise this chapter including the conceptual synthesis of intellectual humility and dialogue concerning its embodiment of self-formation leading to freedom.

In summary, this chapter critically evaluated prominent approaches to defining intellectual humility in current interdisciplinary literature concerning the purpose of higher

education being self-formation and the expansion of freedom. I opened with mapping intellectual humility as the virtuous mean between arrogance and diffidence, defined as appropriately being arrogant or confident in a belief as you ought. In defining what this oughtness entails, I started from a definition centred on social status, where I reasoned that this focus produces instances where those who are knowledgeable in actuality can be forced to reduce the strength of their knowledge, anti-thetical to '*freedom*' concerning the pursuit of truthful knowledge. Defining IH as accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of one's belief overcame these objections and focused on the iterative nature of tracking the strength of a belief (Church and Samuelson 2016 p. 20-25).

Crucially, for this dissertation project, I delved deeper into the use of the phrase '*positive epistemic status*' where Church and Samuelson fell short of providing a rigid definition. I argued that tracking the positive epistemic status of a belief must inherently be an iterative, continuous process, where an intellectually humble person has a disposition to constantly evaluate their beliefs against others, weighing up differing types of evidence (as truth is not defined by one superior line of inquiry) and reaffirming/revising the strength they assign to their beliefs. I acknowledged the limitation that this definition does not provide a criterion for whether all views should be taken seriously (and how many times they should be evaluated), especially those that are deemed vastly disproven (but cited literature where this broader issue could be examined).

I then presented the concept of dialogue as an exchange not limited to talk but concerning the inter-animation of two perspectives leading to new, mutually illuminating outcomes. I discussed the conceptual features of dialogue as '*unresolved*' in that a new answer, or question, must be produced. However, I disputed the practical usefulness of this trait in highlighting that certain exchanges have specific goals, and the combination of perspectives would not always lead to a more informed result concerning that goal. I argued the limitless, boundless, '*unresolved*' nature of dialogue made it practically limiting in situations where a more informed understanding of the world was paramount to solving a particular problem.

Further to this, I introduced the synthesis of an intellectually humble dialogic space, explaining how intellectual humility narrows the scope of exchanges to reaffirming the

positive epistemic status of beliefs of all participants, conceptually leading to the most truthfully developed beliefs being utilised in self-formation. However, a major limitation concerned the process of reaffirming or revising deeply held beliefs, where extensive research has shown humans have various barriers to engaging with opposing viewpoints, reducing their impact. The main theme regarding these barriers concerned instinctual hindrances because challenges to deeply held beliefs can be interpreted as personal attacks, motivating defensive processing.

I then examined empirical research indicating traits that encourage revision of beliefs centred around distancing oneself from the argument; this strategy encouraged less direct opposition of viewpoints, allowing sensemaking of a problem to continue while alleviating the emotional costs of having an idea being considered wrong or revised. Finally, I argued that an intellectually humble dialogic space is both a mindset and a set of practices/conventions that encourages this mindset; this mindset being a disposition to accurately track the positive epistemic status of a belief or argument by presenting and engaging with arguments in a manner in which they are most likely to be rigorously considered; this could, in line with the empirical literature cited, concern reducing the socio-emotional cost of having ideas revised or disputed by distancing ones' self from the conflict of ideas. However, this distancing cannot be at the expense of checking whether the positive epistemic status of a belief is accurately assigned in relation to alternatives.

In concluding this literature review, the main thematic line of inquiry for this dissertation concerned whether current experiences of higher education reflect an intellectually humble dialogic space, encouraging students, through any manner or medium, to rigorously consider differing/alternative/opposing beliefs, and evaluate the positive epistemic status assigned to their own deeply held beliefs (i.e. facilitating self-formation in a manner that is '*freeing*'). The next chapter will discuss my methodology and method regarding this overarching aim.

Methodology and Method

In this chapter, I will present the justification of my choices concerning my empirical exploration of whether/how intellectually humble dialogic spaces are reflected in contexts of higher education. I will discuss the methodological considerations associated (such as the formation of my research question, the formation of the interview schedule, data analysis, sampling, ethics, and others) where embedded are considerations of positionality. As a caveat, I acknowledge that my decisions carried various limitations and considerations for further study; these will be discussed in the conclusion. In this chapter I will solely present justifications, acknowledging that there were potentially more illuminating alternative approaches.

Methodology and Method

According to the incompatibility thesis, a limiting factor concerning choices of methods concerned the notion that ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions were all rigidly connected to a particular type or choice of method (either quantitative or qualitative), with these assumptions assumed to be rigid to the extent that they were '*antithetical*' (Guba and Lincoln 1989 p. 2). With the emergence of pragmatism, researchers began to dispute dichotomous philosophical representations of reality and the subsequent methodological restrictions that accompanied each, accepting that researchers could exist along the methodological continuum depending on the demands of their particular projects (Biesta 2010). Pragmatism instead emphasised the '*dictatorship of the research question*' where researchers could use quantitative, qualitative, multi or mixed methods if the research questions deemed those choices appropriate to producing informed knowledge (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2003 p. 619). Despite this pragmatic freedom, Creswell (2018) argues that certain types of research questions are more appropriately aligned to the use of particular methods. Research questions that indicate an exploration of perspectives may more appropriately suit a qualitative approach that conveys multiple perspectives and attempts to map the complexity of a phenomenon; whereas research questions that seek to understand the relationship amongst clearly defined variables may be more appropriate for quantitative analysis explicitly examining this relationship (p. 10).

In applying these sentiments to my study, I aimed to embody a pragmatic approach where the research question which was derived from, and a reflection of, the complexity of the concepts I wished to investigate dictated the choices of the method. The scope of my inquiry was formulated in the following:

RQ1: What are social science lecturers' and students' perspectives on whether higher education embodies an '*intellectually humble dialogic space*'? Do their perspectives reflect the facilitation of a rigorous consideration of differing/opposing beliefs to those held?

1) Why does the question focus on lecturer and student perspectives generally?

To reiterate, the concept of an intellectually humble dialogic space is not reduced solely to discussion. Though my study was focusing on higher education, there are broad, uniquely contextualised environments and mediums where engagement with differing ideas can occur; these could range from the internal dialogue occurring from reading ideas, classroom tutorials, student networks, informal discussions in student cafes, exchanges with flatmates, differing cultures of departments and different disciplines etc. Following from this, the experience of '*higher education*' is far from uniform, with considerable differences across Universities as well as departments within a single University. The evaluative scope of both the concept of an intellectually humble dialogic space and the varying potential experiences within higher education are both vastly too broad to be reflected through one pre-conceived medium. In line with Law (2004), I did not want to simplify a complex phenomenon if the phenomenon itself was not simple.

These considerations warranted a method that reflected higher education as a multi-faceted experience, allowing the possibility for a variety of relevant mediums of exchanges of ideas to be suggested (Law 2004). The previously mentioned mediums were based on my preconceptions; an entirely different medium may be more pertinent in facilitating an intellectually humble dialogic space depending on the context. The project, therefore, aimed to provide an exploratory basis for further study, yielding considerations that could be used as a framework to investigate whether the themes/mediums identified could be generalised/applied across other contexts in higher education (Agee 2009).

Following these considerations, it was deemed appropriate to interview students/lecturers examining their self-reported experiences of, and perspectives on, higher education. Firstly, this was because personal experiences and perspectives are flexible enough to reveal mediums that my preconceptions, and contextual biases, had hidden (Bourdieu 2004, Law 2004). Solely creating a Likert scale questionnaire, for example, would potentially have not allowed the flexibility of a variety of mediums to be suggested beyond those devised from my preconceptions. Self-reported experiences and perspectives could emphasize the need for further exploration of a particular medium if one were thematically emphasized as crucial to the key concepts across differing responses (Braun and Clarke 2006).

2) Why does the question narrow on both the experiences and perspectives of lecturers and students, as well as specifically in the social sciences?

As I was narrowing on experiences of, and perspectives on, higher education, it seemed relevant to interview populations that had extensive experience in higher education. At first instance, I reasoned that experienced lecturers may be most appropriate as they have engaged with higher education at a variety of levels ranging from Undergraduate to Postgraduate, to Postdoctoral to Lecturer/Senior Lecturer. Additionally, I deemed the social sciences lent themselves more to discussing and critiquing deeply held beliefs in their disciplines. However, only interviewing lecturers risked that the perspectives they presented (especially of student experiences) may be one step removed from the experience of being a student currently. It, therefore, felt reasonable to include postgraduate students who, despite having less experience to draw on than lecturers, may have more current insights pertinent to my line of inquiry (and provide a frame of comparison).

3) Why choose semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate way to pragmatically address the research question?

I conducted semi-structured interviews because they can be flexible enough to identify new information but provide a point with which to analyse if the researcher has a specific focus (May 2011). While my chosen concept is broad and complex, there is still a distinct conceptual focus; the concept of an '*intellectually humble dialogic space*' contains specific criteria to identify it as a distinct concept, though acknowledging the concepts' criteria can be

interpreted and explored in a multitude of ways. Semi-structured interviews seem to appropriately align to this attempted balancing act of having a specific focus open to a wide range of approaches and considerations.

Additionally, as the goal of this study was to provide a basis for investigation of themes that could be used as an evaluative framework for other contexts of higher education, it would be useful to have a basis to identify themes across interview responses. As May (2011) further articulates, semi-structured interviews '*provide a greater structure for comparability over that of the focused or unstructured interview*' (para 4). A semi-structured interview more appropriately facilitates the investigation of common themes while allowing exploration of the complexity of the concept through iterative probing and clarification questions.

As the synthesis of an intellectually humble dialogic space was unique to my project, the interview schedule was formulated by myself flexibly based on the key traits of the concepts I wished to be illuminated. The next section will present key considerations for the interview schedule that resulted from the piloting process.

The Interview Schedule and Piloting Process

The piloting process involved five interviews with students who were overly familiar with my topic deemed too knowledgeable of my preconceptions to be included in data analysis (Arthur 2018). Lecturer time was deemed too valuable for piloting and instead was reserved for recruitment in the primary stage of research.

The process revealed that participants were initially reserved about discussing their perspectives and experiences concerning their beliefs in detail, requiring an establishment of rapport (Spradley as cited by May 2011). I, therefore, included initial '*softball*', '*descriptive*' questions regarding the academic qualifications and interests of the participant which, in line with Spradley (as cited by May 2011), overcame initial apprehension of the interview process, and simultaneously allowed the identification of demographic information.

Additionally, the words '*intellectual*', '*humble*', '*dialogic*' and '*self-formation*' were all carrying a unique meaning to differing participants; the original interview schedule contained these terms in the questions. However, as I did not want participants to provide perspectives on differing conceptions of the terms I spent two chapters defining, I instead chose to form

my interview schedule around the main/crucial aspects of my definitions of the key concepts (De Vaus 2001). Questions narrowed on an intellectually humble dialogic space through their main attributes e.g. encouraging a rigorous consideration of alternate or opposing views. They also narrowed on the concept of self-formation leading to freedom through its main attributes, such as seeking/identifying the most truthful beliefs to be deeply held.

The appendix section entitled '*Interview Schedule*' contains the final questions that were formulated; I explain the purpose of each question in how it is attempting to explore the key concepts according to how I defined them concerning participants' experiences of, and perspectives on, higher education (probing/additional lines of questioning are also included) (De Vaus 2001).

Thematic Analysis, Rigour and Positionality

Following from the previous sections, I wanted to choose a method of data analysis that reflected the complexity of the phenomena I was investigating, and identify general patterns within experiences and perspectives to identify mediums that could be explored in future studies in differing contexts of higher education. Additionally, I wished to determine whether the perspectives and experiences of higher education from interviewed lecturers were comparatively relevant to current perspectives and experiences of students. Due to these prior considerations, I chose to conduct a comparative thematic analysis underpinned by a '*process of continuous meaning-making and progressive focusing*' (Srivastana and Hopwood 2018 para. 2). I will now elucidate these underpinnings, justifying this choice by presenting pertinent considerations of rigour and positionality when undertaking this method.

The topic of intellectual humility and dialogue have been of interest to me for various years; therefore, I am consistently biased towards identifying responses that confirm my preconceptions towards the usefulness of these concepts. This sentiment is in line with Braun and Clarke (2006) who argue that:

patterns, themes, and categories do not emerge on their own. They are driven by what the inquirer wants to know and how the inquirer interprets what the data are telling her or him according to subscribed theoretical frameworks (p. 77).

While Strauss and Corbin (1999) present qualitative research in its purest form being completely inductive, patterns and themes do not ‘*emerge*’ from the data as if the researcher is a passive actor; the researcher takes an active role in interpretation (Braun and Clarke 2006 p. 80, Taylor and Ussher 2001). However, Durkheim stated there is a failure ‘*to penetrate the “inmost essence” of phenomena if the social scientist’s preconceptions dominate the research*’ (Durkheim 1982 pg. 380). In response to the risk of ‘*domination*’ of preconceptions, I postulate that the relationship between data and researcher can be characterised and embodied dialogically.

To elucidate, Rommetveit (1992), Linell (2009), and Wegerif (2013) argue that the meaning of an idea is not given by that idea alone; instead it can only be understood through the role in which it is a response to previous utterances and is trying to elicit and have an impact upon future utterances. Wegerif exemplifies by explaining:

if a friend sends a text with a happy face emoji, the meaning of that text does not stand alone but depends on the previous message and also on how your friend might want you to respond (Wegerif 2017 para. 4).

Therefore, in dialogic framing, meaning is only attributed to an idea by its role in a continuous dialogue which fundamentally requires the inter-animation of multiple perspectives.

Applying this framing to the relationship between data and researcher, I argue that the perspectives of both researcher and data combine to form equally necessary parts of the same whole in creating meaning; this is because, dialogically, one without the other cannot produce ‘*meaning*’ (Bakhtin 1986). Here, the dialogic is both an ontological and an epistemological postulation; that reality is only created by two perspectives in combination, and meaning is only produced in that reality as a result of two perspectives in combination, mutually illuminating knowledge (Wegerif 2018). Crucially, however, if two perspectives form equal parts of the same whole in creating meaning, then the notion of one being dominant over the other in interpretation is contradictory to a dialogic relationship.

Subsequently, I was heavily inspired by the framework of thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006) who propose a symbiotic relationship with the data; the researcher takes an active but not overly dominant role in interpretation through multiple, loop-like rounds of iteratively and rigorously questioning the inferences and comparisons drawn. While a thorough reflection of the entire framework is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Figure One contains a summary of this approach, and I will explain how, drawing from it, I formulated my process of coding attempting to embody a dialogic relationship between data and researcher.

Figure 1

Table 1 Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

From '*Using Thematic Analysis*' (p. 4), by V.Braun and V.Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. Copyright 2005. Adapted with Permission

Coding Process

Interviews were conducted via video call lasting forty minutes to two hours and were recorded and translated to text with auto-transcribing software. Embodying step one and two in Figure One, my initial aim was to familiarise myself with the data through correcting the auto-generated transcripts by relistening to each recording of the interviews. At this stage, I chose not to make thematic connections across interviews because I did not want themes generated excessively early in the process potentially dictating what I looked for in others (Braun and Clarke 2009). Upon familiarising myself with the data, I attempted to code

each interview individually in the order that they were recorded, which mostly consisted of one lecturer followed by one student.

In terms of step three, interviews were then re-analysed where I drew parallels between codes of interviews in the lecturer group, and interviews in the student group separately, which I then defined as themes. Themes were the broader parallels of codes that I had attributed when drawing ideas across interviews, in line with Creswell describing them as *'broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea'* (Creswell 2013 p. 186, Elliot 2018). Initially drawing themes across interviews of lecturers and students separately was to aid in identifying themes exclusive to each group as a more explicit frame of comparison between groups. Following this, I analysed themes across groups (lecturers and students), identifying thematic similarities and differences *within* themes *between* the groups for narrower, focused comparisons.

Finally, step four and five concerned an iterative process of refining the themes and the codes forming the themes. This translated in practice to a constant cycle of relistening to recordings (to ensure I had not misread interpretations in my eagerness to formulate themes), reviewing codes assigned, and revising the interpretation of the raw data to the codes, and subsequent themes. In attempting a dialogic relationship with the data, I guarded against having an overly dominant relationship of interpretation. One way this practically translated was a constant guarding against merely putting quotes together to form a theme that reflected the usefulness of my chosen concepts, but that was not thematically represented by the sample (Braun and Clarke 2006). There were two key ways this manifested practically.

Firstly, as is recommended by Kerr 2010, I created an Annotated Codebook detailing the full structure and formulation of the themes organised by *'a full definition; an explanation of when to use and when not to use the theme (in further research); and illustrated with a quotation from the data'*; this was motivated by the desire *'to provide greater structure, transparency and, most importantly, evidence of depth in the analysis'* (para. 12). Creating the codebook was additionally motivated by the framing of saturation as *'conceptual rigour'* postulated by Nelson (2016) and Kerr (2010). Therefore, a theme was not included unless it

could reflect the conceptual depth and appropriate representativeness of the sample from which it was formulated, where transparency through the codebook would equal accountability of depth (and can be viewed in the Appendix entitled '*Annotated Codebook*', further, detailed saturation considerations will be discussed in the conclusion). Secondly, in line with Braun and Clarke (2013), a theme was not formulated unless the codes forming it represented the views of around two-thirds of the total sample (calculated as twelve participants for themes across groups, and six participants for themes exclusive to either lecturers or students); in the results section, I number how many participants from each group (and from each discipline) commented to form the theme.

The analytic approach to the experiential '*objectivity*' of the data drew partially from a critical realist framework; in this sense, I acknowledge (as did many participants) that they were portraying '*stories*' regarding their experiences (Sims -Schouten, Riley and Willig, 2007). I evaluated socially produced meanings with the underpinning that these have a certain relationship to material or experiential reality for participants (Braun and Clarke 2013). Therefore, participants' responses and sentiments were real for them but theorised as stemming from socially available meanings, rather than embodying a self-evident or inherently '*objective*', verifiable reality.

As a result, I examined data from the semantic as opposed to the latent level; this meant I interpreted language as having a significant relationship to cause, effect, and meaning (Braun and Clarke 2009). The latent level, which I did not pursue, '*starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions.... and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data*' (Braun and Clarke 2006 p. 83). I deemed myself too biased towards '*proving*' the usefulness of the concepts to examine underlying ideas at the latent level and predicted I would contradict the dialogic relationship to the data undertaking this, thus committing solely to semantic analysis.

While this was not a fully representative reflection, I attempted to relay certain considerations of my coding approach, trying to embody the sentiments of Trainor and Graue (2014) highlighting how honest, clear presentation of the research process provides an accurate reflection of its rigour, referred to as '*interpretive transparency*' (para. 19).

Sampling Method

As this was a master's study on a limited timescale, alongside hindrances due to the COVID 19 pandemic, choices of sampling were determined by availability, and snowball sampling, where one lecturer/student would recommend another who was available for the interview. The two fundamental requirements were for lecturers to have achieved a lectureship position and to have at least three years of experience as a lecturer and as a published researcher. For students, the requirement was to be studying at Postgraduate level to have experiences of higher education to draw from at the level of undergraduate or previous postgraduate qualifications. Ten students and ten lecturers studying/teaching social science topics were interviewed to attempt an even balance of potential comparisons of differences. In terms of demographics, six of the lecturers taught/lectured on Philosophy, two in Education, one in Anthropology and one in Critical Literacy. Of the students, five studied Education related degrees, three Political Science, and two in Economics.

Of the lecturers, six were women and four men; of the students, six were men and four women. All lecturers taught at a Russell Group institution in the UK, and all students had studied and were currently studying at a Russell Group institution. Through evaluation of publication dates and descriptions of experience on institution websites, all lecturers had over three years' experience as a researcher/lecturer, and all students were known to be Postgraduates in the UK for them to receive the email invitation to conduct the interview (which was confirmed at the start of the interview).

Ethical Considerations

My research received ethical approval from the appropriate ethics committee of the Department of Education, Oxford University. The steps of technical and legal protection of the data that I took (such as handling, privacy etc.) can be viewed in the Appendix (section '*CUREC approved application*') contains a detailed description of undertaken technical ethics procedures, an example consent form, the information sheet and confirmation of CUREC approval).

However, Connor, Copland and Owen (2017) argue ethical considerations should not be restricted to the compulsory, '*preventative, risk-averse guidelines*' that self-evidently must

be followed (para. 5). In agreeance with Hammersley and Traianou (2014), I deem it crucial to consider ethical considerations outside the required procedures; in terms of these considerations, I strove to view the participants' feedback as fundamental to the notion of knowledge itself, inspired by the dialogic notion of participant and researcher being equal, co-creators of knowledge (Bakhtin 1986, Wegerif 2018). I therefore constantly invited participants throughout the interview to inspect my interpretation of their account, asking them to expand or revise my interpretations where appropriate (Reason and Bradbury 2012). I sought to constantly reassure participants that any interpretation of their data could be viewed by them throughout the *entire* research process to ensure it was accurate from their perspective (Denzel and Giardina 2007). As participants were discussing deeply held beliefs, there was the potential for strong emotions to be expressed. I, as the interviewer, did not seek to challenge beliefs; instead, I probed for further reflections from their perspective (May 2011). I also constantly reassured participants that any personal experiences they shared could be removed upon asking and that accounts would be generalised to remove any unique identifying factors, and securely encrypted. Two participants noted which comments they did not want to be included.

The next chapter will discuss the results and discussion of the study. I will introduce and justify the codes that formed the '*themes*', while analysis for their broader importance within the scope of the literature review will be reserved for the discussion section following.

Results

Theme one: The changing of Beliefs

Beliefs changing due to the experience of higher education was interpreted in both lecturers (9) and students (8) with notable differences between the groups concerning the nature of this change. Lecturers generally (7) reflected a gradual changing of belief from more extreme to less extreme, and gradual but complete changes in beliefs. For example, three philosophy lecturers believed in God but gradually became atheists; another philosophy lecturer slowly became open to the idea of believing in God originally being an atheist. Other lecturers (Philosophy and Education) identified with the *'hard-left'* or were *'strictly conservative'* but softened their views through years of reading *'how a society was structured'* and becoming *'more pluralistic'*.

With students, however, just over half (6) portrayed a confirmatory nature to their changes in beliefs. For example, one Education postgraduate is a Christian and joined a religious society, which motivated her to act on her faith; another Political Science student joined a society representing a political party she supported which strengthened her resolve to engage in activism. The comments from students concerning confirmations of beliefs were also generally (5) linked to an action in that beliefs becoming stronger motivated students to act, mainly through political activism (4). A social group holding the same beliefs also was mentioned almost always (5) alongside the discussion of how beliefs became confirmed for students, and subsequently stronger.

As a caveat, there were a small number of lecturers (2) who also reported that their experience of higher education confirmed or made stronger their beliefs, where one philosophy lecturer pointed out she was *'raised by extremely left-wing academics and I turned out to be an extremely left-wing academic'* emphasizing that higher education had given her *'facts and reasons'* to confirm the beliefs fostered by her parents.

There was also a difference of approach to the absolute truth (or positive epistemic status) assigned to beliefs. The vast majority (8) of lecturers described a realisation that there was much more that needed to be learnt, and that resulted in them approaching their beliefs with less certainty. One Anthropology lecturer articulated this through experience:

I was stunned right to the end of my undergraduate degree by going into Blackwell's (a book shop) and discovering this book entitled Cultural Studies. I thought I'd done a degree in Anthropology, which is about culture but it hadn't mentioned Cultural studies, so it just blew me away that my own beliefs were so undercut by that point by thinking I'd study something I'd missed out hugely on other disciplines of knowledge. There was so much more to learn and acquire.

One philosophy lecturer said the goal of education was to *'develop a sense of joy and satisfaction at intellectual expansion, and the feeling of "wow I didn't realise I didn't know so much" as the most wonderful feeling'*. The same lecturer commented that not knowing is part of being human, and that *'it's always uncomfortable but we can become more acquainted with it, that's the power for me.'*

However, half of the lecturers (5) described students they had taught as commonly being too strongly committed to their beliefs. For example, the Anthropology lecturer stated he had students who were too attached to particular models, one example being a student who felt his model of critical thinking was *"the" model'*. He tried to get him to consider alternatives but the student persisted in the model being the most superior; eventually, he did not stay for a doctorate at the institution with the lecturer commenting: *'I also couldn't write him a good reference because he wasn't open to a broader discussion. He had the one guru of critical thinking who he thought was the be-all and end-all'*.

Theme two – Beliefs Changing as a Result of reading

Most lecturers (8) and almost half the students (4) reported that reading texts from authors who had differing ideas/beliefs was most influential in their beliefs changing. Crucially, this process was not described as instant, and lecturers (5) especially emphasized that there was no *'sudden'* or *'extreme'* change. Instead, reading caused doubt, and that doubt led to delving further. As one previously religious Philosophy lecturer articulated:

I suppose it was reading things from the other. From the opposite point of view reading Freud and Nietzsche, for example, whose ideas were profoundly inconsistent I thought with religious believers. It's not so much that I thought they were right, or even that I thought they were wrong. It was rather than I wasn't sure whether to think they were right or wrong and that

got me thinking. That showed me that things were not as clear as they initially seemed to be, that there was room for doubt. And I suppose that just grew and grew very gradually.

This process of *'doubt'* was prominent amongst lecturers discussing reading (5); readings of differing beliefs to those held caused a process of reflection that their absolute beliefs were not so absolute.

A large degree of lecturers (7) and students (6) stated reading as preferable to a discussion when engaging differing beliefs; this was mainly because discussion was *'a bit more threatening and uncomfortable'*. Reading was preferable because an Education student stated, *'you can take as much time as you want to think'* and *'you don't have to worry about looking foolish or losing face'*. A Philosophy lecturer commented that *'in a conversation, you can take a few seconds to think about what to say but you can't take an hour or a day or a week; with reading, I can go away, let that stew and then something might occur to me'*.

Another code under reading concerned the majority of lecturers (7) and students (8) highlighting more culturally diverse reading lists as a key method to engage with differing ideas, with one Political science student criticising the *'overly white, western dominated'* lists, and a Philosophy lecturer expressing the desire to include *'more BAME representatives'*.

Theme three – differing approaches to disagreement

I interpreted differing approaches to disagreement by both lecturers and students. In terms of the lecturers, they seemed to embrace disagreement (8) as being productive to identifying more informed truths; one Philosophy lecturer described the seamless transition of opposing information being incorporated into her views, where she rejected the framing of conflicting information as *'disagreement'*; instead *'it just feels like "oh I learned something". I integrated it and moved on'*. Another Philosophy lecturer stated that the explicit goal of their teaching was to *'curate a sense that there's real pleasure in being questioned and receiving large objections'*.

Other lecturers not only embraced disagreement but revelled in the process (4), with another Philosophy lecturer describing receiving a *'devastating objection'* as *'incredibly*

enjoyable'. Further to this, lecturers overwhelmingly (7) stated that fundamental to the notion of an idea is for it to be challenged, with one Philosophy lecturer articulating:

I get students to see if their ideas can stand up to questioning, you know, like John Stuart Mill's principle that even a true opinion, if you just keep repeating it and don't challenge or question it, then it becomes and turns into dogma. True opinions to remain true opinions need to be exposed to the oxygen of query and questioning.

Another Philosophy lecturer stated that teaching without friction and challenge is *'impossible'* because the *'the history of thoughts is such that you know there really is a diversity of opinions on almost any topic'*.

Five of the six philosophy lecturers all mentioned the principle of charity, where the goal is to *'disagree with you as meaningfully as possible but to do so without impugning your character... with the best possible effort to disagree with the best possible version of your argument'*. Another in relation to the principle said, *'shutting down the weakest version of arguments is boring and does not advance knowledge'*. Three of the philosophy professors believed that first and second-year philosophy students are not capable of applying the principle of charity.

However, I interpreted resistance and disliking to disagreement from students based on descriptions of students that had been taught by lecturers (5) and general descriptions from students of other classmates (5) alongside accounts from the interviewed students themselves (4). One representative example from an Education student, in describing her postgraduate class, was the following:

Steven (pseudonym) invited this guy Benjamin to our lectures every week, and he had very different opposed views to everyone. I strongly disagreed with him but people were so fierce, they were about to cry. This person was just someone who supported the opposite party to everyone else and supported Boris (the conservatives). It's like his little comments made the whole class furious and that's what made me stand backwards, I was annoyed at my class. I'm just like s**t we need to pull ourselves together because if this one little comment triggers you that means you all live in this big fat bubble and like when you get to the real world you hear people who disagree with you like what are you going to do cry? Like letting your whole self-get so triggered and like not being able to stand up in conversation is not gonna work.

Another Education student postulated that it was not that Universities did not want to provide opportunities to engage with differing ideas, but that they felt students could not handle the disagreement:

If a strong Trump supporter went into our class, I think people wouldn't even sit to listen to him, they would throw things on his head, and then they would walk out because that is the way things are going these days. Maybe the lecturers didn't want to give us the opportunity because students don't work well with opposite opinions in the classroom.

Theme four: Shift of approach to student beliefs in higher education

The vast majority (8) of lecturers reported that their undergraduate and postgraduate experience of academic culture in the UK was excessively harsh concerning personal beliefs, so much so to the point where it was described as '*bullying*' and '*sexist*'. The Anthropology lecturer discussed how when he was a junior academic trying innovative teaching methods, a senior academic told him '*it's all rubbish*' and '*you can't be serious*'. He described this certain academic as being a '*tyrant*', and others generally as bullies, where they would seek to strike fear in their students, stating that '*belief is one of those words that could cover all sorts of sins*'.

Another academic in Critical Literacy said the Russell Group institution she attended prided itself on being very '*blokey*' and no-nonsense to the point that mocking was common:

Academics would often mock things, none of this kind of philosophizing differing beliefs. For example, immediately you would read the name Foucault and there would be jokes about what it rhymes with.

Another Philosophy academic mentioned how her supervisor told her all feminist scholarship was '*game-playing*'. When she asked him for evidence concerning this view, he reacted harshly. Another Philosophy lecturer described her supervisor as being '*extremely sexist, racist and horrible*' with the goal of offending others, and not much care for convincing others of his point of view, only '*imposing*' it. Others commented on a discussion dynamic that centred on '*tearing down the speaker*', with one supervisor having the goal in each seminar to '*reduce the speaker to tears if possible*'.

Conversely, there seemed to be an apparent shift in the harshness with which the beliefs of students now, generally, are seemingly not challenged at all; I interpreted this code as prominent from both students (7) and academics (8). One Education student described academics as being *'timid and scared'*; another Education student stated academics were afraid to *'offer their own position through fear of offending other students'*. Three Education students stated that relativism was excessively espoused concerning beliefs and ideas generally: as one articulated:

It was repeated in your head that everything is relative to the point where you feel like if you don't believe it's relative, you're this crazy madman person or really uneducated. I didn't come to learn everything depends on everything depends on everything. It was so relative to the point where you're not even able to critically analyse something.

There was also a common description (7) of lecturers saying colleagues were afraid to discuss certain topics or provide their own position, with two examples from a lecturer in Philosophy and in Education being:

In the last few years, people have become more worried about subjects, people say *'look there are certain topics that I don't even discuss'* because they say they might get fired, you know, so it's better to avoid it completely.

Look, my class 10 years ago would have touched upon this issue. Now I say let's avoid it completely because you know, it's too controversial and everything you say can be used from one side or another against you. When academia becomes replaced by ideology things become more complicated.

Half of the academics (5), four in philosophy and one in Critical Literacy, particularly singled out the issue of trans-rights as one they would completely stay away from, describing it as *'worse than Brexit'* and a *'hornet's nest'* for academics. One Philosophy lecturer articulated she had never seen *'so much s**tloads of abuse poured on people from one side or the other'* and described it as *'the most intolerant debate I've ever come across'* with lecturers refusing to moderate debates, answer questions, or involve themselves in the area entirely.

There was also recognition from lecturers (6) and one Education student (1) that the precarious nature of academic employment means that including controversial issues in

taught content is excessively risky. The education student described a situation where she wanted a lecturer to challenge someone who had made a remark that she knew the lecturer felt was incorrect, however, according to her perspective:

I also know if a student goes and has a complaint then its terrible, sometimes life-changing, for the academic. They were in a more precarious situation than the students would have been so it's very difficult.

Another Education lecturer commented that bringing content into the learning environment *'that's not mainstream or makes people uncomfortable'* runs *'the risk of being reported... or you being perceived as something you're not because... people don't like to be criticised or not seen as perfect'*. Finally, the Anthropologist articulated that academics are often *'teased for being radical only when they are tenured'*, jokingly referring to the precarity of discussing topics that could threaten their employment unless they have tenured security.

Theme five: the constant struggle between a safe space and a comfortable space

Most lecturers (7) mentioned the constant struggle between a space that is safe, and one that allows all views and opinions to be discussed, critiqued and evaluated in higher education. Most mentioning this struggle (6) were against the notion of a *'blanket'* safe space in seminars where certain ideas should not be discussed (but others (2) disagreed about student unions), yet they acknowledged that it is vital students are *'prepared'* to hear certain views considered controversial. There was agreement (6) amongst lecturers that certain students are not ready to engage with certain content, and that background knowledge of students should always be considered in determining which content could potentially be delayed or removed. One explicit example was that of a suicidal student and teaching Nietzsche:

A student came up to me in a seminar and said, *'I want to come and tell you that I'm going to commit suicide this evening'*. And I, I sort of went *"God, well, what, what, what has brought you to?"*, you know, of course, I put him on suicide watch immediately but I said, *"Why are you feeling like this?"* and he said *"well I've just read this essay from Heidegger, you know you've got to commit suicide before you're 30, otherwise you have no artistic integrity"*. I said *"Do you know how ironic it was when he wrote that he was nearly 80"?* (laughter). It was all

fine in the end, but he was exactly the kind of person I don't want reading Nietzsche you know, opening up ideas that can be really dangerous for people. And so that's why though my general principle is no platforms, open up the world to everything let it all, you know, discuss everything, read everything, there have to be certain exceptions and you have to be a bit sensitive to the dynamic of your group, or what some particular person in your group you sort of feel they can manage. I have certainly, on occasions, edited bits and cut, you know literally quite deliberately steered the conversation away from things like suicide if I thought it was going to be too difficult for somebody.

Another Philosophy lecturer made a '*distinction between critiquing views and simply knowing that differing views exist*', mentioning students who grew up in Jehovah's witness households, stating that '*one has to be incredibly mindful... that they... are having everything they thought they knew and believed all their lives questioned*' and in some cases '*it's simply knowing the stuff is out there*'.

However, lecturers generally (6) supported the discussion of all ideas (conditional on students being ready to hear them), even those deemed extreme (Neo-Nazis, Radicalism were two examples) as crucial in seminars; this was because, as one Philosophy lecturer articulated, '*if you don't allow these views they go underground as Plato stated; you then get underground Nazi rallies and the underground Ku Klux Klan*'. The same lecturer stated you have to '*challenge and provide the toughest philosophy and scrutinization of these ideas*', not just '*provide them with a free platform*'.

There was moderate consensus between students (6) and strong consensus between lecturers (8) that the experience of higher education does not afford opportunities to have alternative ideas to deeply held beliefs considered rigorously, with the following themes explaining why.

Theme six – Higher education generally does not afford the chance for everyone to engage with differing ideas, and challenge their deeply held beliefs because of the excessive influence of neoliberalism and marketisation

Many lecturers (7) and half of the students (5) were extremely critical of the excessively neoliberal and market forces influencing higher education. The students (3) articulated that they always felt in competition with one another during exchanges because

you're *'applying for a PHD grant and you're essentially competing with other amazing students'*. Two lecturers in Anthropology and Philosophy also criticised student unions for excessively competitive practices by inviting controversial speakers to *'prop up their own student careers'*. I interpreted these sentiments as expressing a dynamic making it burdensome for people to acknowledge gaps in their reasoning and engage in progressing knowledge together, instead looking to best the other. In terms of the lecturers, one Education lecturer commented that they are *'forced to give this image that they know everything because of precarious employment, where you might not get tenure if you aren't valuable enough'*. Another in Education commented that lecturers are forced to constantly *'resell'* themselves and must be *'better than everyone else to survive'*.

A point directly on humility was linked to tenure and status, where it was argued that only those who can afford to be humble in secure academic employment can be; as one Philosophy academic articulated:

The more open-minded people that I met were superstars in academia because they know they are the best Nobel Prize lab and so they know they're fantastic. And they say, oh, maybe I'm wrong, and they're happy because they have nothing to lose. If your status is a bit precarious then you can't. So, paradoxically, you have to be very confident to be humble, that is my impression.

Additionally, the marketisation of higher education was interpreted as a major hindrance for lecturers (6) to engaging with differing beliefs. One Philosophy lecturer stated that *'marketisation leads to a type of interaction between teacher and student that makes it incredibly difficult to have relatively egalitarian horizontal relations where the object is the inquiry itself... the model erodes the possibility of meaningful communities of inquiries emerging in higher education'*.

Another Education lecturer was openly critical of her department prioritising *'bums on seats'* at the expense of being able to provide more student-centred content; the process was described as *'making the student the consumer'*. She also commented that, in her department, *'teaching assistants are overwhelmed'* and she'd been told that *'nobody reads the personal statements of the 300 people joining a course'* because *'you'll get in anyway because you are bringing in £16,000'*; in her department, there was *'no room for the personal'*.

Theme seven: Higher education generally does not afford the chance for everyone to engage with differing ideas, and challenge their deeply held beliefs because class sizes are too large

Both lecturers (8) and students (6) attributed excessively large class sizes as a crucial hindrance. One Education lecturer articulated:

Universities don't do well in getting students to engage with differing beliefs. They're very rigid and everything is very set out in advance, partly because of numbers. When they have 300 students it's almost sort of a mechanical practice, you have to cover certain things, you have to do certain things in this set time. You have very little time to spend with people.

Another Critical Literacy lecturer pointed out that in larger class sizes, *'you wouldn't know'* the deeply held beliefs of people unless they were the *'kind of person who asserted them constantly'* because there was not enough time for everyone to share, and thus no opportunity to engage with *'differing beliefs, let alone share them'*.

Students generally (6) wanted smaller classes sizes and opportunity for small group discussion which was justified by explaining the benefits; *'a class of 15'* allowed students to *'open up and share'* but *'a lecture hall of 150 did not'*. Another Education student stated her cohort felt so starved of meaningful discussions that they arranged weekly meetings as they *'were still craving more.... because the course couldn't afford us the opportunity to hash things out'*.

Theme eight - Higher education generally does not afford the chance for everyone to engage with differing ideas, and challenge their deeply held beliefs: there is not enough time to properly address or consider differing ideas

Time was consistently (8 lecturers, 8 students) mentioned as a limitation; discussions were too short, the duration of courses too short to engage everyone, and class sizes did not allow students the time to engage with their own and differing beliefs. One lecturer described the *'network of beliefs'* that students hold, where social groups and backgrounds have a profound influence on a student espousing a belief, and their ability to consider alternatives. He argues that the *'entire network'* must be addressed but there is generally no time, and higher education only does this in an *'ad-hoc'* manner where *'addressing deeply held beliefs is often not on the agenda at all'*. Referring generally to discussion in higher education, he said it only leads to the point where:

you can silence people with your points such they accept them, but they're not convinced. You've said enough that they're not going to continue the argument, but they're not convinced. I think that happened a lot because the people I've spoken to and after the degree haven't really changed their mind all that much.

Another Education lecturer articulated that in designing a program, there are a myriad factors to include that it is difficult to know *'what to prioritise'*, and specifically concerning engaging with differing beliefs, *'how often do you make everything explicit'*.

From the student perspective, one in Education articulated the importance of hearing ideas *'five times'* and *'maybe the sixth time you think oh I've heard it before and maybe there is some truth to it'* but higher education does not afford this opportunity because *'we mostly just skim through content, with a new speaker every week, and there's no time to reflect on one person's ideas'*.

Theme nine: Higher Education can be a place where people rigorously consider differing and opposing ideas, using them to revise and develop their own worldview, but it is conditional: Perspective-taking ability of students and immersion

Many academics (6) and students (6) highlighted the importance of exchange programs in understanding different cultures and opening students to the ability to take the perspective of those that are from considerably different contexts. One Education student said she participated in three exchange programs to Morocco, Paris and Xinjiang to *'make the familiar strange and the strange familiar'* which inspired her inclusiveness to differing cultures. A Philosophy lecturer pointed out the importance of being immersed in different cultures through exchanges such as Erasmus facilitating *'perspective-taking'*. She described an experience which empowered her to perspective take when she spent a year in Naples; she had been brought up in a Conservative household that believed anyone could achieve anything with individual effort; however, she saw that:

these extremely gifted often brilliant and incredibly hard-working people, you know maybe with PhDs or whatever but working as, you know, postmen or whatever job they could to survive because there was really no safety net, there was really no social security net. They were doing 2, 3, 4 jobs, and just exhausted by 30 or 40. And I just saw that individual effort and responsibility were important but could only get you so far and that you needed much

more in the way of social structure and support that my parents in their political views could not identify with.

She stated that immersion programs are vital to producing '*imaginative empathy*' for differing cultures who hold potentially different views. The next chapter will discuss these results, relating them to the broader conceptual discussions that occurred in my literature review and critically evaluating them holistically.

Discussion

I conceptualised an intellectually humble dialogic space as:

A dialogic space centred on facilitating the accurate tracking of the positive epistemic status of beliefs, acknowledging that tracking positive epistemic status is an iterative and continuous process of engaging, listening/giving attention, and preparedness to enter into opposing viewpoints, with intellectual humility being a disposition to do so.

Is higher education facilitating a rigorous disposition (the collated term for engaging, listening/giving attention and preparedness to enter) that other beliefs than the one's students hold are potentially truthful? Is higher education encouraging navigation of the instinctual resistance and uncomfortableness of engaging with opposing ideas to ultimately contribute to self-formation leading to freedom? (Kahneman 2016, Marginson 2017). Arguably, based on my sample, it would seem experiences of higher education are navigating a degree of students towards comfort, safety, and complacency in that ones' own beliefs are somehow confirmed to the point that the only missing element of consideration is how to act on a belief.

One lecturer stated that *'the history of thoughts is such that... there really is a diversity of opinions on almost any topic'*. If one were to, in a narrow-minded and conservative historical fashion, trace the history of thought to the Ancient Greeks, that would account for 2500 years' worth of *'thoughts'*, of *'diversity'*, and of opinion. The scale of a thought being placed within the broader existence of inquiry was reflected in the sentiment of a lecturer who entered a book shop and realised various disciplines were stemming from his degree he had not even encountered; despite specialising in a particular subject, his beliefs were *'undercut'* by the realisation that there is so much more to learn. Is it *'freedom'* for a degree of students that the only gap they feel exists concerning their beliefs, placed within the extraordinarily large history of thought, is the knowledge of how to most appropriately act on ones' belief?

Lecturers highlighted the fundamental role of disagreement to the notion of an idea, with one commenting that *'true opinions to remain true need to be exposed to the oxygen of*

query and questioning'. The precise choice of the word '*oxygen*' reflected the general attitude of lecturers that ideas demand scrutiny to live and breathe. Like surgery or exercise, the process may not be comfortable, and in some cases extremely disconcerting, but necessary to the very life of an '*idea*' or a '*belief*' that it must withstand scrutiny for it not to become '*dogma*'. If dogma was defined as beliefs that were not rigorously scrutinised in relation to alternatives, would it be too extreme a postulation that higher education, in not facilitating a rigorous consideration of alternative beliefs, is complicit in the facilitation of dogma?

Yet the term complicit implies that someone is to blame; that there is a narrow manner with which to identify or diagnose the culprit and adjust through some precisely produced solution. Conversely to this characterisation, there was a description of lecturers battling forces they could not control; they argued that the forces of neoliberalism and the narrow scope of market '*value*' had permeated the experience of higher education; excessive marketisation had consumed the possibility of a '*relatively egalitarian horizontal relation where the object is the inquiry itself*' eroding 'the possibility of meaningful communities of inquiries emerging in higher education'. Exchanges in contexts of higher education were generally described as closet, proxy contests of furthering one's own or institutions agenda. Excessive competitiveness spread to student interactions, such as those working in unions who were described as inviting controversial speakers to prop up their union careers, and students claiming their peers could not admit fault or error because they were competing for grants and places. The excessively competitive nature of higher education contradicts an intellectually humble dialogic space as the disposition to seek more truthful ideas is placed underneath the desire for personal and institutional gain; this prioritisation can lead to a lack of scrutiny of deeply held beliefs, as one lecturer stated '*addressing deeply held beliefs is not often on the agenda at all*'.

Marketisation also linked with the characterisation of higher education as a '*mechanical practice*' with the product of the mechanism being prestige and revenue for the department or institution. One lecturer criticised her department for prioritising '*bums on seats*'; class sizes were mentioned as so excessively large that students would not have the chance to share their own beliefs, let alone consider alternatives. Considering lecturers stated that certain students are from households where they do not know the existence of alternative beliefs, how is the possibility that they will be unable to share their belief (due to

excessively large class sizes) going to facilitate a rigorous consideration of alternatives? Could it be that the notion of '*value*' moving the compass of institutional and departmental action is excessively dominated by neoliberalism, and the facilitation of rigorously considering alternative beliefs is incompatible with this dominance?

There was an apparent, overarching atmosphere of fear, though it was characterised less as an enforcing Gestapo but more as an unwritten law which, if broken, resulted in potentially life-changing employment termination and reputational damage. Students described lecturers as '*timid*' and '*scared*'; lecturers described topics that they would not touch through fear of having their employment and lives significantly changed through complaint; they described the fear of being labelled something that they were not if they introduced content '*that wasn't mainstream*'. One topic, in particular, was avoided completely because it was a '*hornet's nest*', where you would receive '*s***tloads of abuse*', described as '*the most intolerant debate I've ever seen*'. How can a student hope to rigorously consider alternative viewpoints if those who should be facilitating this process do not even feel close to the safety required to merely bring up a topic, let alone facilitate rigorous critique? Perhaps the comparison to an intellectually humble dialogic space falls before it can begin to limp; if participants are afraid, how can such a space ever be embodied? Throughout history, truthful development of beliefs and fear of the social consequences have been mutually incompatible; Galileo was threatened with the instruments of torture and put under house arrest by people who refused to look through his telescope as merely one example of fear inhibiting intellectual progress (Harris 2012). The presence of fear both explicitly enforced and implicitly known through the underlying threat of employment or reputation will be hindrances to the truthful development of deeply held beliefs, contradicting an intellectually humble dialogic space resulting in '*freedom*'.

Yet it was noted that the danger of ideas in the wrong hands (or heads) is a reasonable consideration in higher education; lecturers stated certain students come from households where their entire worldview was never questioned, where the mere existence of another view was not known; the oxygen of inquiry for ideas and beliefs was non-existent because ideas did not breathe in this sense; they quite simply had never been challenged. It was noted that a degree of students, especially with mental health struggles, required extra care in the '*arduous struggle*' of self-formation leading to a life of truth (Ball 2017). Lecturers described

walking a tightrope requiring a delicate, precise balance between a safe space (one where ideas are removed for the wellbeing of students) and a comfortable space (one where ideas that challenge students' beliefs are presented when they are deemed ready). Yet how can lecturers expect to walk this challenging, ever-changing tightrope while having potential reputational damage and employment threat lurking? Is it more likely, as the lecturers reported, that they would simply leave deeply disputed topics alone? (Lukianoff and Haidt 2015, 2019)

Despite these hindrances, *'discussion'* (if defined as the act of actually conversing) was described as less effective at facilitating an intellectually humble dialogic space, with reading being mentioned as preferable and effective in the rigorous consideration of alternative ideas. Reading academic papers and books was described as initiating a gradual reduction in the absolutist assignment of truth to beliefs. This theme reinforced Bakhtin's (1984) view that *'dialogue'* is not reduced to talk, but is any process with which differing ideas combine leading to *'mutual illumination'*; in this case, the mutual illumination through reading differing ideas contributed to the gradual readjustment of the positive epistemic status of one's own beliefs. Several students also reflected that reading was influential and preferable to engaging with differing beliefs because it was less confrontational than discussion, minimising the social cost of ideas contradicting deeply held beliefs.

The justification of reading as the most effective medium to engage with differing beliefs reinforced the findings of Conlin (2018), Reddy and Wilson (2015) as well as Ayduk and Kross (2010); distancing through reading reduced the potential emotional conflict of engaging with differing ideas, instead encouraging an internal dialogue which, as one professor noted, *'showed me that things were not as clear as they initially seemed to be, that there was room for doubt'*. The distancing mentioned by respondents also potentially contributed to the separation of an idea from the self; the less conflicting the medium, the less chance of associating an idea as an attack (and subsequently signalling instinctual defences against it) (Kahneman 2016, Sapolsky 2018). Arguably, self-formation requires that the self manages a separation between idea and self – so ideas become more like clothes that can be changed, than like a part of the body that cannot be dismembered. Therefore, distancing from conflict through suggesting readings to those that disagree, or lecturers setting readings presenting differing perspectives to the deeply held beliefs of students, could be the most effective

facilitation of an intellectually humble dialogic space; this is as opposed to discussion which could encourage students to '*dig in*' their trenches of beliefs (Porter and Schumann 2018).

Yet despite the various hindrances mentioned, there were elements of experiences reflecting an intellectually humble dialogic space; immersion in a new culture through exchange programs was described by a student as crucial to making the '*strange familiar, and the familiar strange*'. Lecturers also presented exchange programs as pivotal to the ability to '*perspective take*', with one describing how her conservative parents had instilled a belief in her that through determination and hard work, anything was possible; however, her experience in Naples embodied that '*extremely talented people with PHD's who were forced to work 2-4 jobs*' could not flourish with hard work alone, and that individual talent could only get them so far. Her experience assisted in a vivid representation and consideration of the perspective of others which she immediately utilised in self-formation, adjusting her deeply held beliefs to espouse that people required additional, state assistance. It could be argued that students, before engaging with differing and opposing ideas, need to be made aware that the formulation of opposing ideas is *possible* through immersion in a new culture. Much like the students who were mentioned as never having known the existence of differing beliefs, perhaps it cannot truly be known that other beliefs *exist* in the sense that they are formed by others in contexts that cannot be truly understood without experience. Conceivably, before facilitation of a rigorous consideration of alternative ideas can occur, the experience of a new culture must occur.

In drawing holistic, concluding remarks, I refer to my research question which was:

RQ1: What are social science lecturers' and students' perspectives on whether higher education embodies an '*intellectually humble dialogic space*'? Do they reflect a rigorous consideration of differing/opposing beliefs to those held?

While it was argued that certain experiences of higher education can encourage a rigorous consideration of alternatives (such as immersion into new cultures through exchange programs), this realisation was reflected as '*ad-hoc*' and not '*general*'. Overall, the perspectives of lecturers and students (concerning their contexts of higher education)

reflected a lack of embodiment of an intellectually humble dialogic space; most responses overwhelmingly described hindrances. It seemed that higher education could be an embodiment of this space, but it was conditional on the hindrances (such as excessively larger class sizes) being removed. However, the description of forces beyond the control of the lecturer and student (such as the marketisation of higher education) indicated that the embodiment of this space would require a largescale, cultural disinclination to the excessive competitiveness and neoliberal '*marketisation*' perceived to be permeating the experience of higher education (Goddard and Payne 2012).

In terms of self-formation leading to '*freedom*', it could be the case that lecturers have rigorously considered alternatives to their beliefs in becoming something '*radically and paradoxically different*' and more truthful, yet a certain degree of students are engaging in self-formation leading to comfort, and confirmation bias, instead of '*freedom*'. The resistance and disliking of disagreement reported contradict the arduous struggle caused by our instinctual resistance to opposing beliefs, hindering the ability to rigorously consider alternatives to beliefs held, and utilise the most truthful in self-formation (Ball 2016, Marginson 2017). However, as was touched upon in the Methodology chapter, the study contained various limitations preventing grand claims, and this study was in no way conclusively reflective of wider populations. The next section will offer suggestions for future research considering the limitations, concluding this dissertation.

Conclusion

In concluding this dissertation, I will first present the limitations of my study, followed by making holistic reflections to the importance of continued research into the concepts deliberated on in contexts of higher education. As this study was limited to the timescale of a master's dissertation, there were restraints to the strengths of inferences possible. The first of these concerns the sole reliance upon the self-reported experiences of participants. While Law (2004) and Tudge (1994) emphasize the importance of personal experience to the notion of knowledge (as I argued), Arthur explains that it is:

widely known that, in addition to well-known social desirability and self-confirmation biases, self-reports often involve hefty doses of self-serving spin. Unknown self-deceptions, and wilful known deceptions pose a threat.... to self-reporting instruments (Arthur 2018 p. 111).

Kristanjsson notes that self-reporting data *'ground their rationale in anti-realism, where the self is the same as self-concept'* (Kristanjsson 2010). In other words, the way a respondent imagines/reports themselves to be is not necessarily how they are; subsequently how they respond to questions for an academic study may bear no causal accuracy in real life (ibid). While no instrument of data collection is objectively perfect in attaining causal knowledge in social science, it could have been illuminating to utilise different types of 'q' methods alongside the self-reported accounts to have a more rounded perspective of the phenomena I was investigating, triangulating the results of the semi-structured interviews to create stronger, meta-inferences (Fetters 2018).

For example, I earlier quoted a study by Gottman (1995) which showed that when one's heartbeat rises to a certain threshold (about 82 beats per minute for men and 90 for women), the flooding of hormones occurs which significantly hinders the ability to listen to an opposing argument. Observing dialogues (with participants reading opposing arguments, thinking about opposing arguments, or discussing them with peers) in contexts of higher education and measuring the heart rate changes according to this threshold could have illuminated another perspective of the resistance to considering alternative beliefs. I acknowledge that I did not want to restrict the concept of an intellectually humble dialogic space to a specific medium of exchange of ideas, yet it still could have been useful to examine certain mediums with this differing lens alongside interview data.

As was reiterated, this study was exploratory, capturing indications of themes/contexts/mediums that could be further researched in relation to an intellectually humble dialogic space (and related topics) in higher education. The study could have utilized a Sequential Exploratory Analysis design where the qualitative results are further confirmed with a quantitative approach using a more generalisable instrument (Creswell & Plano Clark 2018, Eckert 2013). The key themes of the thematic analysis could have been translated into a quantitative instrument (such as a Likert Scale style questionnaire) then distributed to a larger sample; if the identified themes were reinforced as apparent with a larger sample, there is a higher probability that the effect (or theme) is generalisable to a wider population (Field 2009). It is possible that the complexity of responses from respondents would not translate appropriately into a Likert Scale instrument, however, it is a consideration if further researchers wished to investigate the generalisability of results.

Additionally, a significant concept concerning rigour and limitations in qualitative research concerns '*saturation*'. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that saturation should not be represented as a point of '*entirely full conceptual understanding*'. Nelson (2016) further argues that saturation is not '*a point beyond which it is not possible to add anything further*' (para. 3). Instead, Nelson (2016) defines saturation by '*conceptual density/depth*', where themes and codes are '*sufficiently*' supported by interview data to allow the researcher to theorise and draw inferences (para. 5). In terms of this criteria, I believe the Annotated Codebook in the Appendix (structured and inspired from the recommendations of Kerr (2010)), alongside the attempted detailed representation of the themes in the results section potentially fulfilled '*conceptual density*', providing a reasonable basis to theorise, and thus achieving this framing of '*saturation*'. However, the term has also been defined as the assurance that further data collection would yield '*similar results and serve to confirm emerging themes and conclusions*' (Faulkner and Trotter 2017). I mentioned that higher education is a multi-faceted, complex context, with numerous disciplinary differences and approaches within universities. Despite my study achieving conceptual density in terms of saturation, I could not be certain that further data collection would yield differing themes/codes that contradicted or made thematic additions pertinent to an intellectually humble dialogic space. Although I used a systematic Annotated Codebook, I did not use an additional method of saturation tables suggested by Kerr (2010), which would have further

confirmed that saturation (in the prior framing) had been achieved. In increasing sample sizes and making comparisons between disciplines (and other characteristics), more pertinent, generalisable themes could have been revealed that nuanced (or perhaps contradicted) the findings from my sample. Future projects could continue interviewing social science Russell Group lecturers/students with larger, more diverse samples to provide a more informed account of the general themes emerging and the applicability of these themes between and within disciplines.

The study also showed that most influential to students/lecturer's beliefs changing was reading texts that brought deeply held beliefs into '*doubt*', however, it would be been useful to ask for specific suggestions of texts that were deemed influential in this process. Though authors were mentioned (Nietzsche for the religious believing lecturer), more specific reading lists and book names could have opened a window into examining the styles of prose, methods of presenting ideas, structures, and other forms that could have identified why certain books are more influential than others in achieving a rigorous consideration of alternative beliefs; this was, in my opinion, a crucial opportunity missed to my line of inquiry, but one that can be explored in future studies.

Additionally, the scope of the literature review was conceptual, focusing on a synthesis of concepts that, while attempting to be more practical, was still potentially abstract in relation to higher education. The literature could have been more empirically based in terms of drawing on data specifically on free speech and controversial ideas on campuses (Jolley 2020, Mateer 2020, Wasserstrom 2020 and others from the Index on Censorship Journal, or Times Higher Education data on attitudes towards free speech in Universities in the UK). However, this approach could have limited the scope of enquiry to considerations of '*freedom of speech*' as opposed to the broader, conceptual lines of inquiry concerning intellectual humility, dialogue and self-formation leading to freedom which still arguably offered a pertinent, unique lens of analysis.

Further, the demographic information of participants collected was not fully utilised in analysis which meant drawing detailed inferences and comparisons within groups was limited; having and analysing more detailed demographics (such as the number of years in exchange, number of Universities experienced/studied/taught) could have been useful to

draw detailed comparisons of how certain characteristics inspire certain behaviours or experiences.

Finally, the University is not only made up of lecturers and students; in fact, the results showed that many of the factors that determine whether intellectually humble dialogic spaces are reflected in higher education were potentially out of the control of both lecturer and student. Interviewing Department heads, University Chancellors, Administrators, Diversity officers and the multitude of other participants in the formation of the University could have revealed considerations vital to the conception of intellectually humble dialogic spaces. As one example, motivations behind having '*bums on seats*' and the process with which class sizes are determined could have been revealed by interviews specifically with those responsible for admissions.

Despite these constraints, the project potentially successfully provided an exploratory basis for further study: it yielded considerations that could be used as a basis to investigate whether the themes/mediums identified could be generalised/applied across various institutions in higher education regarding their reflection of an intellectually humble dialogic space (Agee 2009). In drawing this dissertation to a close, I will offer brief sentiments for the importance of the continued exploration of topics such as intellectual humility, dialogue, and self-formation leading to '*freedom*' in higher education being pertinent to addressing societies' current, polarised climate.

Closing Remarks

Orwell (1979) stated that there are some ideas so wrong that only very intelligent people can believe them; even those society has deemed '*intelligent*' can snowball themselves into an avalanche of reasoning not realising that their justifications of beliefs are not warranted. In the introduction, I cited a 2018 Ipsos MORI poll that reflected sixty-six per cent of European nations feel their societies are '*very divided*', with seventy-three per cent of British respondents feeling their society is '*more polarised than ten years ago*' (Duffy, Kaur Ballagan, Skinner & Gotfried, 2018). I also cited a study from Hobolt, Tilley, and Leeper (2019) which found that just '*half of the population*' are now willing to discuss politics with supporters of the other side of the Brexit vote, and only one in three say they would be happy with their child marrying someone supporting the other side (ibid). How is society to progress

disagreement on consequential, life-defining issues if we do not considerably and effectively consider ourselves to be wrong, and consider others to be right? Raising above the dichotomous paradigm of wrong and right, how can society progress disagreement on consequential, life-defining issues if we do not view the rigorous consideration of varying and opposing viewpoints as vital to the oxygen of ones' point of view?

Smith (2020) stated that *'there is a raging historical river that is red with the blood of truth-tellers. So, it's not uncommon to kill the messenger'*. While truth-tellers may not be physically killed in British society, the fear of lecturers facilitating a diversity of opinion is potentially silencing the vital need for knowledge exchange; truth is not a rigid state that can be reached, but a fluid, ever-changing benchmark that requires the *'oxygen'* of scrutiny; the disposition to engage in that scrutiny must be facilitated by higher education, and not surrendered to overly excessive conceptions of neoliberal and market value; it cannot also be surrendered to the fear of reputational cost. Lecturers cannot facilitate an intellectually humble dialogic space if they fear they will be treated as sacrificial lambs to the slaughter if they bring up anything deemed controversial or not mainstream.

The truthful development of our beliefs in relation to alternatives, as Kaplan (2016) argues, can be vital to the wellbeing of society; progressing on deeply divisive issues with truth (defined loosely as any information forwarding or illuminating an inquiry) can contribute to more informed, beneficial ideas being espoused. I argue that an intellectually humble dialogic space can both be a social and cognitive disposition, helping individuals to establish truth, and also groups via dialogical conventions, helping people to live together knowing that specific disagreements and indeed, conflicting foundational assumptions, will not necessarily evaporate sociability. It is my hope that the themes in this project can be expanded upon to create a more rounded, authentic account of how Universities can build bridges across opposing positions by facilitating a rigorous consideration of differing, alternative beliefs, and thus to include more developed, truthful deeply held beliefs in self-formation, expanding freedom.

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Appendix

Purpose of Interview Schedule

- 1) Can you summarise your academic qualifications, PHD subject etc?
- 2) If you had a specialist topic, what would it be?
- 3) Would you say that you have any strong beliefs on your specialist topic?
- 4) Would you say you have any other strong beliefs generally? E.g. in politics, religion or moral issues.

Explanation: The above questions were the ‘softball’, ‘descriptive’ questions that were deemed necessary from the piloting process; they were designed to get participants comfortable with sharing and discussing experiences related to their deeply held beliefs.

- 6) How do you think your strong beliefs have changed in University, from Undergraduate to Postgraduate on these beliefs? To a lecturer or senior lecturer (only asked for lecturers)? Are there any key beliefs that were changed, or that were confirmed? And if yes or no, could you explain how these beliefs changed or confirmed?

Explanation: Beliefs changing and/or being confirmed indirectly tapped into the notion of readjusting positive epistemic status attributed to a belief based on higher education, and the focus of deeply held beliefs related the experiences to self-formation in narrowing on changes of beliefs that were central to the participants identity.

Example probing questions:

- ‘You mentioned social groups, how would you describe them in relation to the development of your beliefs?’
- ‘Do you believe your account is a general reflection of experiences in higher education?’

7) Was there a time when someone you knew at University had a deeply held belief that they were emotionally attached to, and you had to convince them they were incorrect? If yes, how did you feel about the way you convinced them? What was effective and what could have been improved?

8) Was there ever a time that you had a deeply held belief you were emotionally attached to that you learnt to be incorrect in your experience of higher education? If yes, how did you feel about the way that happened? Do you think there was a more effective way for you to receive that idea?

Asking both whether a person encouraged revision of someone else's as well as their own deeply held belief highlighted the notion of an intellectually humble dialogic space being both a space where a person can both correct others and be corrected. Asking whether it was '*effective*' was open to interpretation of the participant, allowing the scope and criteria of an effective medium to be flexible.

Probing questions were:

- 'How do you reflect on the way you engaged with the other person's view? Do you feel that encounter could have been improved?'
- 'How did the way the person engaged with your belief make you feel? Did it make you more open to their way of thinking or perhaps close you off, or neither?'

9) In your experience of higher education, how do you engage with opposing viewpoints generally regarding deeply held beliefs? Are there particular platforms, persons or people?

10) Are there ways in higher education that you prefer to engage with opposing ideas? i.e. certain platforms, or certain kinds of people, or certain kinds of ways that opposing ideas are presented?

These questions asked participants to reflect on other mediums across higher education, drawing from one's own experience of engaging with opposing viewpoints to get a general sense of whether the sentiments offered reflected the general experience of higher education for themselves and others.

They also aimed to identify mediums and traits that were preferable in engaging with differing ideas, and to explain why.

11) What do you think higher education does well in engaging students with opposing arguments to their deeply held beliefs, and what do you think could be improved?

This penultimate general question was to examine participants' thoughts on the general state of higher education, relating their own experiences to how generally higher education facilitates engaging with opposing viewpoints. The notion of higher education doing '*well*' in engaging students with opposing viewpoints was to avoid rigidly defining the criteria of exchanges in a particular way, but to allow the focus of exchanges to have a conclusion that was deemed productive or resulting in a more useful conclusion (as defined by the participant). Though the focus of my literature review was on truthful ideas becoming more prominent, I did not want to enforce that criteria, but instead determine whether it was implied by participants in their experiences.

Section Two

1. Finally, referring to whichever medium you feel, are there any particular phrases that you think are better for discussing deeply held beliefs?
2. Do you think there are particular phrases that you think are worse for discussing deeply held beliefs?

The responses to these questions were omitted from the study due to word count restrictions. They sought to identify specific '*dialogic*' traits that could be identified and thus utilised in engaging with differing and opposing ideas to facilitate a rigorous consideration of them.

Annotated Codebook (Kerr 2010)

Theme one: The changing of Beliefs

Codes: Gradual changes in beliefs, Confirmation of beliefs, Certainty of beliefs

Full definition: The theme represents the changing of the self-reported beliefs of Professors and students. Both groups described how their experience of higher education had caused changes in their beliefs, yet what was also included in this theme was the actions because of beliefs becoming stronger or more confirmed

When to use: When participants are expressing a belief that was in a prior state, but has now developed into a different state e.g. I was an atheist but now I believe in God. The theme also can include a general approach to beliefs changing e.g. my beliefs are fluid because there is joy in not knowing

When not to use: This theme does not represent approaches to other beliefs; it is solely focused on the participants own beliefs, and how they have changed.

Theme example: 'it just blew me away that my own beliefs were so undercut by that point by thinking I'd study something I'd actually missed out hugely on other disciplines of knowledge. There was so much more to learn and acquire.

Theme two – Beliefs Changing as a Result of reading

Codes: Reading led to doubt, Reading preferable to discussion

Full definition – The act of reading causing a participant to change the positive epistemic status (or truth) they assign to a belief, influencing their actions and epistemological position in association with their belief.

When to use – when a participant specifically mentions reading as causing a change in beliefs, or the epistemological approach to beliefs

When not to use – this theme should be mistaken for reading texts that confirm one's existing views. This theme is specifically for reading that causes a shift or change in one's beliefs.

Theme example – 'I suppose it was reading things from the other. From the opposite point of view reading Freud and Nietzsche, for example, whose ideas were profoundly inconsistent I thought with religious believers. It's not so much that I thought they were right, or even that I thought they were wrong. It was rather than I wasn't sure whether to think they were right or wrong and that got me thinking. That showed me that things were not as clear as they initially seemed to be, that there was room for doubt.'

Theme three – differing approaches to disagreement

Codes – Embracing disagreement in identifying further truths, Enjoying disagreement

Full definition – this theme represents how participants approach disagreement in a variety of forms ranging from reading differing ideas, to discussion, to the general existence and workings of disagreement to sociability and epistemological development

When to use – When participants describe how they view disagreement e.g. he/she disagreed with me and that made me feel that he/she was a bad person. Here the disagreement has caused a judgement of a person's moral character.

When not to use – if the participant is describing a specific act of disagreement, then this theme does not apply. This is participants thoughts generally on disagreement.

Theme example: 'like John Stuart Mill's principle that even a true opinion, if you just keep repeating it and don't challenge or question it, then it becomes and turns into dogma. True opinions to remain true opinions need to be exposed to the oxygen of query and questioning.'

Theme four: Shift of approach to students and their beliefs in higher education

Codes: Excessively harsh culture concerning student's beliefs, Excessively soft concerning students' beliefs, Precarity of employment leading to fear of academics to discuss topics that would upset students

Full description: This theme represents how higher education (broadly representing the general experience of higher education) treated the deeply held beliefs of students in the past/present. This is not to characterise higher education as a person, but how the experience either seemingly respected views or treated them harshly.

When to use: If a participant is describing how their beliefs were treated in higher education, through lecturers respecting students deeply held beliefs or encouraging diversity of opinion if ones deeply held beliefs were not common in contexts of higher education

When not to use: Again, there is a crucial distinction between a general sense of how higher education treated beliefs, and the opinion on one singular account of a lecturer treating a belief harshly or terribly. It must reflect a general treatment of beliefs.

Theme example: ‘Academics would often mock things, none of this kind of philosophizing differing beliefs. For example, immediately you would read the name Foucault and there would be jokes about what it rhymes with.’

Theme five: constant struggle between a safe space and a comfortable space

Codes: Against safe spaces, content must be removed or addressed indirectly if students are not ready

Full description: The balance of lecturers in their teaching practice to facilitate a safe space (where students are not negatively influenced to harm themselves) and a comfortable space (one where all ideas are shared in a manner where students are ready to hear them). This balancing act involves the decisions lecturers make in their teaching in terms of content, individual and group discussion etc.

When to use: When a participant describes difficulties in creating an environment in higher education that is emotionally and physically safe, yet still fulfils the function of challenging deeply held beliefs and the flow of differing/alternative ideas.

When not to use: This theme is not a representation of either a safe or comfortable space singularly. It must be the balancing act of trying to fulfil both. If responses prioritise one goal over the other then this theme is not appropriate

Theme Example: ‘why though my general principle is no platforms, open up the world to everything let it all, you know, discuss everything, read everything, there have to be certain exceptions and you have to be a bit sensitive to the dynamic of your group, or what some particular person in your group you sort of feel they can manage. I have certainly, on occasions, edited bits and cut, you know literally quite deliberately steered the conversation away from things like suicide if I thought it was going to be too difficult for somebody.’

Theme six – Higher education generally does not afford the chance for everyone to engage with differing ideas, and challenge their deeply held beliefs because of the excessive influence of Neoliberal and competitive forces

Codes: Competitiveness in precarious employment and funding between students, Humility only for those who have protected status, Marketisation of Higher Education

Full Definition: The influence of neoliberal forces, and over prioritisation on market dominated competition, is a major hindrance to the engagement of ideas differing to those held, and to challenge deeply held beliefs.

When to use: When activities involving competition are seen to supersede or hinder the engagement with differing or opposing ideas to those deeply held in higher education

When not to use: Neoliberalism, competition and marketisation being mentioned is not enough; they must be mentioned as hindrances to the engagement with differing and opposing beliefs.

Theme example: ‘lecturers are forced to give this image that they know everything because of precarious employment, where you might not get tenure if you aren’t valuable enough’.

Theme seven: Higher education generally does not afford the chance for everyone to engage with differing ideas, and challenge their deeply held beliefs because class sizes are too large

Codes: Inability to share ideas due to large class sizes, Revenue over human learning experience

Full definition: When class sizes are described as a hindrance to the engagement of differing and opposing beliefs in higher education, specifically referring to the activity.

When to use: When class sizes have specifically been mentioned as a hindrance in higher education to engage with differing ideas

When not to use: When factors are explained that are coinciding with class sizes i.e. a negative teaching experience. The factor of class sizes must be the explicit and main cause of the hindrance.

Theme example: Universities don't do well in getting students to engage with differing beliefs. They're very rigid and everything is very set out in advance, partly because of numbers. When they have 300 students it's almost sort of a mechanical practice, you have to cover certain things, you have to do certain things in this set time. You have very little time to spend with people.

Theme eight: Higher education generally, does not afford the chance for everyone to engage with differing ideas, and challenge their deeply held beliefs: there is not enough time to properly address or consider differing ideas

Codes: Mechanical activities to prioritise, students craving more time to engage with ideas

Full definition – The general attitude that, through whichever medium, there is not enough time in higher education to engage students, or students themselves to engage, with differing and opposing views to their deeply held beliefs.

When to use – If time is explicitly mentioned as a hindrance in any form

When not to use – if time is secondary, and not the main hindrance. Time must be explicitly highlighted as the hindrance.

Theme Example: 'we mostly just skim through content, with a new speaker every week, and there's no time to really reflect on one person's ideas'.

Theme nine: Higher Education can be a place where people rigorously consider differing and opposing ideas and use them to revise and develop their own worldview, but it is conditional: Perspective taking ability of students and immersion

Codes: Immersion leading to self-formation

Full Description: The impact of exchange programs to immerse another into a perspective, granting them the ability to perspective take other points of view with depth

When to use: When exchange programs are explicitly mentioned as assisting in taking the perspective of others, and being open minded

When not to use: When exchange programs are listed as beneficial, but these benefits are not explicitly linked to taking the perspective of others

Theme Example: I just saw that individual effort and responsibility were important but could only get you so far, and that you needed much more in the way of social structure and support that my parents in their political views could not identify with.

CUREC Approved Form

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)
Form CUREC 1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities



The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution. They start from the presumption that all members of the University take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research involving human participants is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate.

- Please check **"Where and how to apply for ethical review"** and the **CUREC flowchart** first to see if you need ethics approval.
- Please complete this form using a word processor and email it, together with your **supporting documents**, to your **Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC)** (if applicable). If you don't have a DREC please email this form to **ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk** using your official **ox.ac.uk** email address. **Only type-written, emailed applications will be accepted.**

SECTION A: Filter for CUREC 2 application

This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues requiring the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application. **(Please mark 'X' in the Yes/No column.)**

1. Are research participants classed as people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question ? (This may include under 18s (although see " competent youths "), prisoners, or adults "at risk".) Your attention is drawn to the University's Safeguarding Code of Practice and its implications for researchers involving children or adults at risk. This includes the need for the work to be risk assessed and for researchers to undertake related training. (Note: If any of your participants are aged 16 or under, answer 'Yes' here and also answer question 5 below.)	Yes ☐	No ☒
2. By taking part in the research, will participants be at risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	Yes ☐	No ☒
3. Does the research involve the deception of participants?	Yes ☐	No ☒
4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (the Prevent duty) , which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? Please see advice on this on our Best Practice Guidance web page .	Yes ☐	No ☒

If you answered 'No' to **all** the questions above, go to **Section B**. If you answered 'Yes' to **any** question above, continue to question 5 below.

5. Is your project covered by a CUREC Approved Procedure (formerly known as "CUREC Protocols")?	Yes ☐	No ☒
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If yes, give the specific Approved Procedure number(s):

If you answered 'Yes' to **ANY** of questions 1-4, and answered 'No' to question 5, **stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review**. Instead, complete the **CUREC 2 application form** from the CUREC website, then submit that for ethical review.
 If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-3, and answered 'Yes' to question 5, go on to **Section B**.

	process. Retrospective ethics approval cannot be granted.
12. b) In the case of international or collaborative research, will you submit or have you submitted this project for ethical review or consideration elsewhere (e.g. collaborator's/local ethics committee, or other local approval)?	Yes ☐ N/A No ☐ If 'Yes', please attach ethics or other approvals and give more details below. If 'No', please explain your reasons below. Please also refer to the Best Practice Guidance on Ethical Review of social-sciences based research conducted outside the UK (BPG 16), which includes an Ethics Issues Checklist for International Research (Appendix A)
Please supply further details in response to question 12b here Not required	
13. External organisation funding the research (if applicable)	N/A
14. a) Title and brief description of research (about 150 words) in lay language. When describing the research, include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/data will be put. Please also declare any conflicts of interest here.	
What are lecturers and students' perspectives on the role of intellectual humility in their 'self-formation'? What traits or phrases do they feel encourage intellectual humility in their self-formation, and what traits discourage intellectual humility in their self-formation? I'm interviewing students and professors, identifying how their experiences of university have shaped or changed their beliefs through self formation. I define Intellectual Humility as the ability to not overestimate or underestimate the strength of an argument or belief. I'm exploring how lecturers and students ensure their beliefs and arguments are not overestimated or underestimated through engaging with opposing arguments; and whether certain qualities, platforms, or ways of discussing ideas are preferable for developing, confirming or disconfirming beliefs.	
14.b) Description of participants and how you will obtain informed consent to take part in the research (about 200 words in total)	
1. Description of participants and your criteria for inclusion/exclusion Russell Group university students and lecturers: minimum 10 (5 each), maximum 20 (10 each)	
2. Your method(s) of recruitment Email invitation	
3. Your processes for obtaining consent from participants Written consent form filled out online, plus verbal consent. Provision of information on purpose of research, the process of interviews, and how data will be stored, used and deleted upon use.	

Please **attach separate supporting documents (in Word)** if appropriate for your research (English language versions only). Tick those you are submitting below. If appropriate supporting documents are not submitted, you will be asked to provide these separately, which may delay the ethical review process.

- ☒ [Recruitment and advertisement material](#) (e.g. a poster, social media recruitment text, or brief invitation letter/ email)
- ☐ Information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part (e.g. [written information](#) or, if applicable, an outline [oral information script](#)).
- ☒ A document to record informed consent. Templates for [written consent forms](#) and/or [oral information scripts](#) (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website
- ☒ Questions to be asked of participants (e.g. interview questions, or a preliminary scope of questions, or a sample questionnaire)
- ☐ (If relevant) debriefing document after participants have taken part
- ☐ If you feel the above approaches are not appropriate for your study, provide details on how you will obtain consent from participants
- ☐ Please complete section 15 if you cannot obtain informed consent

Please add any further details here.

As interviews will be conducted online, verbal consent will be given after going through the consent form. This will be recorded alongside written consent.

Lecturers and students will be from social science departments. I will aim for diversity within the populations, e.g. lecturers and students from different disciplines where discussion is involved of deeply held beliefs.

Population is based on availability.

15. If you cannot obtain informed consent from participants according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline, please give a brief explanation and justification of this decision below.

N/A

16. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? **Please do not answer 'none'.** We need to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. If applicable, please address:

- Participant burdens and/or risks

The main risk is that participants are discussing strong beliefs and how they have changed. It is marginally possible that it could be upsetting for students, however all are adults, and I have no intention of challenging beliefs in the interview. I am merely exploring how university changes and shapes beliefs.

- Your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher or of fieldworkers you may employ (see the [University's](#) and [Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork guidance](#))

None

- Data protection/ confidentiality (also see Section 18).

Interview transcripts or notes will be securely encrypted. All participants will be identified only by unique identifier number. I will also invite each participant to view or access their own respective data. Also, participants will be reminded that their data can be removed from the study if they wish at any point, and I will provide clear contact details to them. Only my supervisor and I will be able to view the data, and upon analysis the data will be destroyed.

For more guidance on ethical issues, please see
<http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources>

Discuss other ethical issues here

No further issues to discuss.

17. Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues?

This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities.

Yes ☒

No ☐

If you answered 'Yes', make sure you include some supporting information (as directed in Section 14 b.) above, showing the range of questions covering these issues.

The information sheet specifies that the project focuses on beliefs, and deeply held beliefs can be sensitive issues. However, as discussed, the interviews do not challenge beliefs.

18. Management and handling of personal and other research data

For the purpose of completing this section, all information provided by participants is considered **research data**. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as *personal data*; any personal data which is sensitive is considered *special category data*.

Management of **personal data** and **special category data** of human participants, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the [University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research](#). In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the [Data Protection Checklist](#). For advice on research data management and security, please consult with the University's Research Data Team (researchdata@ox.ac.uk) and/or your local IT department, and the University's [web pages on research data management](#).

a.) Please mark 'X' against the data you will collect for your research

Consent records (written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms (for research involving minors) including participant name

☒

INTELLECTUALLY HUMBLE DIALOGIC SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Online consent (may be anonymous)	☐
<i>N/A as not an online survey, but consent recorded in online interview, as specified above</i>	
Opt-out forms	☐
Contact details for research purposes only (destroyed when no longer needed for this research)	☒
Contact details kept for future studies	☐
Audio recordings (preferably using PIN-protected audio recorder and stored on device's hard drive)	☒
Video recordings	☐
Transcript of audio/video recordings	☒
Photographs	☐
Task results (e.g. paper/online tasks, diary completion)	☐
Questionnaire answers	☐
Field notes	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐
b.) For each of the types of data selected above, state how this will be physically transferred from where it is collected to a local secure storage site (and backed up as necessary). This includes paper records and data captured electronically.	
Data will be saved directly to an encrypted folder. It will be stored there for transcription and analysis in the dissertation project and papers arising for three years. It will then be deleted. Recordings will be recorded on my device only and not sent to cloud storage to ensure privacy and compliance with data protection.	
c.) How and where will each type of data be stored during the research (until the end of all participant involvement)? Describe the arrangements for ensuring confidentiality, i.e. location of storage (e.g. Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business , SharePoint), security arrangements and de-identification of such data. Do not store unencrypted data in freely available cloud services or unprotected USB drives.	
All data will be stored on an encrypted file, either through Google Drive or another platform.	
d.) Will you use a unique participant number on research data instead of a participant name? If yes , state whether or not you will retain a list of participant names against numbers (i.e. pseudonymisation via a linkage list). Where will the list be stored, and when will it be destroyed?	
Yes, each participant will only be identified as a lecturer or student with a unique identifier, the list will be stored in an encrypted file and destroyed on completion of analysis.	
e.) Who will have access to the research data?	
Only the supervisor and student researcher	

f.) If research data is to be shared with another organisation, how will it be transferred / disclosed securely?		
The data itself will not be shared, except to the extent it is used in anonymised form in the thesis, or academic papers arising from the research. All participants will be referred to anonymously in all uses of the data.		
g.) When and how will identifiable data (including audio/video recordings & photos) be destroyed or deleted?		
Note: Records of consent should be retained for a minimum of three years after publication or public release . Some funders may require longer periods (see http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/policy-and-legal/overview-funders-data-policies). If you wish to retain contact details in order to re-approach participants about future studies, you must detail this in information provided to them and obtain specific consent for this.		
About three years for analysis and potential use in other papers.		
h.) Please confirm that you will store other research data safely for at least 3 years after final publication or public release and adhere to any additional research funder policies . For more information about the University policies, please see the University's web pages on research data management .	Yes ☒	No ☐
If 'Yes', please give details of who will store the data and on storage format, location and security. Note that open science is encouraged.		
If 'No', please provide further details below.		
see sections b) and c)		
i.) Does your research involve the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) data? Common sources of secondary data include censuses, information collected by government departments, organisational records and data that was originally collected for other research purposes (If "No", please go to section 19.)	Yes ☐	No ☒
j.) Do you have data access agreements for the use of this secondary data? (If so, please attach these.)	Yes ☐	No ☐
k.) Is your use of this secondary data compatible with what data subjects/participants agreed that their data should be used for?	Yes ☐	No ☐
l.) Could this data be linked back to an individual or individuals? If yes, address how securely any personally identifiable data will be transferred to you, and where and for how long it will be stored during or after the research. Who will have access to it?	Yes ☐	No ☐
19. Publication and dissemination of research data		
How will you disseminate and feedback project outcomes at the end of the research?	Through my dissertation project in the results section, as well as partial anonymised transcripts in appendix. The same may be available if other papers arise from the study e.g journal articles.	

SECTION C: Methods and procedures to be used	
Method used: Please ensure you have addressed any potential ethical issues related to these methods in Section 14 and in your Participant Information Sheet	Please mark 'X'
1. Analysis of existing records	☐
2. Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	☒
3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	☐
4. Participant observation	☐
5. Covert observation	☐
6. Observation of specific organisational practices	☐
7. Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	☐
8. Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	☐
9. Using social media	☐
10. Participant performs paper and pencil task	☐
11. Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	☐
12. Focus group	☐
13. Interview	☒
14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☒
15. Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☐
16. Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☐
17. Others (please specify below)	☐

SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training		
1. In this section, please mark 'X' against at least one of the following professional guidelines you aim to adhere to. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. Note: this is not an exhaustive list.		Please mark 'X'
Research specialism/ methodology	Association and guidance document	
Anthropology	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth	☐
Computer Sciences	ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct	☐
Criminology	http://www.britisoccrim.org/ethics/	☐
Education	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	☒
Geography	Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics	☐
History	Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines	☐
Internet-based Research	British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Also see our Best Practice Guidance on internet-based research	☐
Law (Socio-Legal)	Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research	☐
Management	Academy of Management's Professional Code of Ethics	☐
Political Science	American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science	☐
Politics	Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct	☐
Psychology	British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct	☐
Social Research	Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines	☐
Sociology	The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice	☐
Visual Research	ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research	☐
Other professional guidelines. Please specify the other guidelines used here:		☐
2. Please indicate what training in research ethics (or research methodology) the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at		

CUREC Approval Email

[REDACTED]
Dear X

What are lecturers' and students perspectives of the role of intellectual humility in their 'self-formation'

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Sincerely,

With kind regards,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Chair DREC
Department of Education
University of Oxford

Participant Consent Form**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) Approval Reference: ED-CIA-20-188

How does the experience of higher education shape deeply held beliefs of lecturers and students?

Purpose of Study: Higher education is an opportunity for students and lecturers to engage with a variety of ideas, beliefs, and opinions, and the experience is one that can have a hand in shaping a person's deeply held beliefs. However, there is common disagreement on many deeply held beliefs. I am interested in the ways higher education can shape a person's beliefs, and in your view about how effective (however you define that) the different ways higher education affects beliefs are. I'm also interested in whether and how the experience of higher education encourages students to critically evaluate their deeply held beliefs, potentially leading to confirmation, revision or change of those beliefs, especially considering engaging with opposing views to deeply held beliefs can be an emotional process.

*Please initial each
box*

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| 2 | I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty. | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| 3 | I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by authorised people outside the research team. I give permission for these individuals to access my data. | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| 4 | I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| 5 | I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project. | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| 6 | I understand how this research will be written up and published. | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| 7 | I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint. | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |
| 8 | I agree to the use of anonymised quotes from the interview in the thesis or other academic papers arising from the research | <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 30px; margin: 0 auto;"></div> |

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of person taking consent Date Signature

Participant Information Sheet



Department of Education +44(0)1865274024 / xxx

Student researcher xx

Academic supervisor: xx

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (ACADEMICS)

How does the experience of higher education shape deeply held beliefs of lecturers and students?

What is the purpose of the study?

Higher education is an opportunity for students and lecturers to engage with a variety of ideas, beliefs, and opinions. The experience of higher education is one that can have a hand in shaping a person's deeply held beliefs. However, given that there is common disagreement on many deeply held beliefs, I'm interested in what ways higher education can shape a person's beliefs in different ways, and whether you feel there are more effective ways (however you define that) than others.

I'm also interested in how higher education encourages students to critically evaluate their deeply held beliefs, potentially leading to confirmation, revision or change of those beliefs, especially considering engaging with opposing views to deeply held beliefs can be an emotional process.

Why have I been invited?

You are a successful academic and far along in the progression of an academic career. I'm interested therefore in how the different stages of your experience with higher education have shaped your deeply held beliefs, and beliefs in general. I'm also interested in instances where you may have shaped a persons' deeply held beliefs or had your deeply held beliefs shaped by others.

Do I have to take part?

No. You can withdraw at any moment. Your data will not be used in the study if you wish.

What are the possible benefits/drawbacks of taking part?

Highlighting how the university experience can shape people's deeply held beliefs helps us all to better understand what happens when people change their beliefs and highlights the value of students being able to choose beliefs most suitable or useful to them. At university students can access a wide range of beliefs which they can use in their own development.

The drawbacks are you, or others, may not be comfortable discussing deeply held beliefs. However, you do not need to share any information that you do not wish to share.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Responsible members of the University of Oxford may be given access to data for monitoring and/or audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations.

What will happen to my data?

All data will be anonymised, and transcripts of recordings will be removed upon use of them in the study. Participants, such as yourself, are invited to read transcripts and analysis, and suggest changes or request removal or changing of any information. Data will be kept in an encrypted file.

What will happen to the results of this study?

This study is part of an MSc Education and will be used for a dissertation and possibly papers arising from the study. I will take special care that when quotes are presented in the study, to ensure that they are not obviously identifiable to a particular person i.e. obviously connected to a person's research project for which they are known.

What if there is a problem?

The University of Oxford, as Sponsor, has appropriate insurance in place in the unlikely event that you suffer any harm as a direct consequence of your participation in this study. If you wish to complain about any aspect of the way in which you have been approached or treated, or how your information is handled during the course of this study, contact:

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by CUREC (the research ethics body for social science research in the Department of Education), approval number:

Further information and contact details: xxxx

Thank you for reading this information