

Exploring Doctoral Students' Theory Choices in Education

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DECLARATION

I, S.M. Ramson, declare that the research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

S.M. Ramson

Date

Promoter

Date

Promoter

Date

DEDICATION

*To all great thinkers who have been excluded or persecuted for dissonance
against epistemological fundamentalism, wherever it located itself –
East, West, North or South.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Beyond the emotional aloofness of positivism, and the postmodern analysis of all experiences as semantic and relative, certain crucial values still define our humanity. For one who submits to this reflection, a sense of deep gratitude and obligation to numerous well-wishers is a tangible experience. I am overwhelmed by a sense of appreciation for the kindness and care of several benefactors. How can I even begin to express my indebtedness, as the benefaction I received is immense, and my efforts to express my gratitude, so meagre and disproportionate?

My deep gratitude to my mother, Palmwathie Ramson, frail now, for having given off herself unreservedly to four children, and her dedication to my late father and our unquantifiable extended family; for her encouragement and untiring effort to enable our education and the lesson that “the more one is educated, the more one should become humble”. I do remember all her sacrifices to ensure we were not deprived of anything, and it is to her credit that I have developed my academic inclinations. Although she was limited by the conservative nature of her social context as a young person, which excluded her from a pursuance of academics, she dedicated her life to a family, kept a sharp intellect, and gave incalculable support to us, something that we have often failed to recognize and express our indebtedness. She epitomises a significant facet of my thesis that her knowledge, from intuition, experience and her interminable reading, provides a wisdom that needs no academic accreditation.

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experience, to perceive instantaneously the personal and academic dilemmas of her students, but I venture that it is due to something more profound, that is, a deep spiritual sensitivity that is evident also in her balanced view of life. Her seniority is matched only by her humility. I felt a great sense of trust in her, and her reciprocal belief in my abilities encouraged me to pursue my studies within my own epistemic spaces. My list of her endearing qualities could take several pages and I am honoured and privileged to have her association. At the time of this writing, she had submitted her resignation from the university after a very long career in academia, and I know the university will be the worse for it. I express my deepest wishes for her successful transition to more wonderful events, and all prosperity and peace. I thank her also, for keeping her promise to hold on until I submit my dissertation.

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portfolios in ISKCON, for his understanding of the significance of my studies. He is a brilliant writer and scholar of ancient Vedic wisdom and philosophical systems, and I can only try to emulate his astuteness and depth, as much as a firefly can imitate the sun.

For those of us who choose this discourse, no endeavour is complete without thanks to the Supreme Benefactor. I therefore give my greatest thanks to the Supreme Person whose presence is a tangible reality in my daily activities. Perhaps He may also be amused when I say, "Thank God, it's finally finished".

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Chapter 1: Theory and Knowledge production 1.1 Introduction The use of theory appears as a pivotal aspect in doctoral research in education. The idea of theory as a set structured lenses through which "aspects or parts of the world can be observed, studied or analysed" (Klette, 2011: 4) or as a framework used to systematically analyse and explain "how" and "why" events unfold as they do (Johnson & Christensen, 2007:7), predominates. Theory is so pervasive to the entire research process, from research design, methodology and to extending knowledge, (Kelly, 2010) that some researchers propose that theory is indispensable to research (Moore, 2007:431). Whether theories are used apriori or allowed to emerge from the data as recommended by grounded theorists, theory is characterized by a systematic formulation and organization of ideas to make sense of specific phenomena (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993: 20). Others, like Thomas (1997:76) and Carr (2006) suggest that the emphasis on theory in educational and social science inquiry emanates from an allure with theory from natural sciences that saw a borrowing simply for "academic legitimacy", and that this "romance" with theory promotes a particular kind of research endeavour that belittles any atheoretical stance, distorts educational enquiry and produces a "hegemony of theory", which, instead of being emancipatory actually entrenches the status quo (Thomas, 2007; 1997). These contentions lend credibility to the assertions by Hammersley (2012) and Klette (2011) that theory in the social sciences occupies a nebulous position. Given the following considerations that academic research produces knowledge; that a major component of the research process is to underpin one's research with appropriate theoretical lenses to analyse the data; and that contentions exist about the validity and role of theory, I sought to explore and understand the process by which doctoral students choose their theories for their doctoral research. A major part of a doctoral student's deliberation is to find an appropriate theoretical framework to underpin her studies; and students of the social sciences have a diverse array of theories to choose from. However the literature did not specifically reveal how doctoral students choose theories. To understand this phenomenon, this study initially used an interpretivist approach by drawing on the salient features of several psychological and cognitive models, viz., the Information Processing Approach and Prospect Theory (Bereford and Sloper, 2008; Payne and Bettman, 2004) to explore how doctoral students made particular theoretical choices for their studies. The study necessitated a shift however, to a more critical approach, as certain patterns emerged from the data that suggested deeper underlying reasons why the participants made particular choices of theory, for which an interpretivist lens lacked sufficient criticality. Given the assertions of several researchers (Le Grange, 2012; Pascale, 2011; Mignolo, 2011;

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ABSTRACT

The use of *theory*, regarded as a set of structured lenses or frameworks through which phenomena can be systematically analysed or explained (Klette, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2007), and deemed central to the entire research process, is not without contention. Contentious issues relate to theory as occupying a nebulous position due to its borrowing from the natural sciences for academic legitimacy, and an inherent hegemony that entrenches the status quo (Thomas, 1997; Carr, 2006). Given the link between knowledge production and theory, and that locating a theoretical framework forms a major part of doctoral students' deliberations, the study sought to explore and understand the process by which doctoral students *chose* their theories for their doctoral research.

A review of the academic literature provided the historical and definitional aspects of theory, some of the contestations about the meanings and uses of theory, and an evaluation of issues as they pertained to particular developments within tertiary education and postgraduate knowledge generation. Although the social sciences have a diverse array of theories to choose from, the literature did not specifically reveal how doctoral students choose theories. Against this background, this qualitative study, which initially adopted an interpretivist case study approach incorporating purposive sampling, was located at the Faculty of Education at a university in South Africa and focused on five doctoral students who completed their doctoral theses in Education, in the period 2006 to 2011. The study asked the key questions, *how do doctoral students choose their focal theories for their study*, and *why do they do so?*

To explore doctoral students' theory choices, the study drew on the salient features of two dominant psychological and cognitive theories, viz., the Information Processing Approach and Prospect Theory (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Payne & Bettman, 2004). The emergent data suggested that for the students in this study, factors like academic context, sociocultural background, intuition, worldviews and knowledge influenced their theory choices. However, several deeper issues emerged which the psychological and

cognitive theories of decision-making were inadequate in addressing, particularly issues of power, and the dichotomies of east/west, north/south influences on knowledge generation. Due to the lack of criticality, and the inability of these models to provide a deeper analysis for the *why* question, the study motivated for the shift to a critical stance, underpinned by the *Decolonial Turn*, which included an array of positions that viewed *coloniality* as the problem confronting the modern world (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). The literature on Said's Postcolonial theoretical views on *Orientalism*, Gayatri Spivak on the *subaltern*, Southern Theory by Connell, and Decolonial Theory by Quijano, Mignolo and Grosfoguel was reviewed, and decolonial theory was used to analyse the data from a critical stance. It is suggested that while insertions from the North and West may continue to determine particular theoretical inclinations and choices of theory on the part of doctoral students in the periphery, an epistemic shift is occurring in the South. This is supported by the observations from the data that, participants tended toward critical, feminist, gender, postcolonial and postmodern theoretical underpinnings, were conscious of the impingement of West/Eurocentricism on their choices and knowledge production, and open to alternate knowledge frameworks. Finally, the concept of *epistemic dissonance* is proposed as necessary to delink from the status quo, suggesting it as a means to confront our assumptions about culture and history, and re-conceptualize our research in the context of sensitivity to difference, and facilitate a change in consciousness of students towards disrupting particular epistemic gridlocks on theory choices.

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Prologue

"When men wish to construct or support a theory, how they torture facts into their service!"

(Mackay, 1974 [1841], p.

459)

In this Prologue, I inscribe myself in describing particular moments that underpinned my own trajectory towards being a doctoral student and especially my own dilemma of choice. According to Brown (2009) it has become a familiar practice in qualitative research to encounter writers who disclose their own biographies (or parts of it) to the degree it assists the reader to understand the author's perspectives and background that impinge upon the study. I therefore describe what I feel to be salient aspects of my own thoughts and experiences about academic discourse and engagement with knowledge, both contemporary and ancient, which informs a personal rationale for my doctoral study.

I submit that intuitively perhaps, I have always approached knowledge, whatever its location, with keen interest, even as a child. As a young adult, I became fascinated by the rhetoric of academic discourse and intellectual endeavour, especially admiring how researchers proficiently distilled their thoughts in writing, often captivating my interest with thought provoking explanations, and sometimes witty remarks and metaphors. My own cultural upbringing exposed me to ancient tales of valour and morals, and I was awe-struck by the stories of Indian, Egyptian, Celtic, Greek and Roman heroes, and fireside tales of indigenous cultures whose lessons about life seemed to reach out to me from a more metaphysical age.

I reflect upon, with a sense of pride and sadness, the dedicated struggle of my mom who took us by our racially separated buses to the racially separated municipal library in the city, a weekly ritual on a Saturday morning, from where I returned with a stack of books on a variety of subjects. I gasped in awe at the books detailing science, astronomy, voyages of discovery, inventions, wildlife, natural catastrophes, and intriguing cultures. I read all the classic tales that were written by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen that children of my age were attracted to then (and still are nowadays) – from *Snow White* to *Sleeping Beauty*. At university, I realized just how much this literature had impinged upon my perceptions and

consciousness. The Eurocentric female archetype – skin as white as snow and soft as down, rosy red lips and cheeks, and flowing golden tresses of beautiful hair; and the male archetype –tall, handsome and blonde, with a sculptured, Celtic-god body – physical characteristics of both male and female that were made to seem automatically synonymous with compassion, intelligence, charm and courage, were to dominate our reading and perceptions for a long time.

The same mentality of racial superiority had become transplanted on South African soil, first by the Dutch, then the British, and then by the Afrikaner whose social Darwinist perspective of humankind elevated them to being God’s chosen race (Du Preez, 1983)¹ and made them supremely arrogant, racist and violent. The same ideology of racial superiority, perpetuated in our school texts and media during apartheid, that created the inferiority complex of every non-white person, simultaneously fed every non-white boy’s fantasies of what it might be to have a white girlfriend, and turned vernacular accents of fellow Indians who wished to impress whites, into anglicized twangs *ad nauseam*.

I was a high school student in Durban in 1976 when children my age were killed in Soweto. The country was tense and talks amongst our adults around the dining table, serious. As children, we sat respectfully away, but close enough to hear. Some adults were angry with the police, some were neutral and a fair share of bigots was present too. I listened to the anti-racist arguments carefully, and became convinced that they were correct. In school, my teachers scrambled and shuddered when the Afrikaner officials (or their agents) from the Department of Education visited us (the same authority I refused to be subservient to, when I became an educator, prompting several heated exchanges and threats). In grade 11 and 12, I came across several books describing the black social condition² by authors like Griffins, Haley and Biko. These were smuggled, “illegal” books and writings, because the apartheid government had banned them. The colonial and apartheid propaganda machine in South

¹ An Afrikaans text cited in English, in Engelbrecht, A. (2004). *Who moved the textbook...?* Unpublished Masters dissertation. See Bibliography for the complete reference.

² In high school, I came across a book called *Black like Me*, by J.H. Griffins, albeit set in the deep South of USA, sensitized me further to racism. I then read Haley’s *Roots* in 1978, which tells the story of Kunta Kinte, an African captured in the eighteenth century and sold into slavery in the USA. Some friends handed me excerpts of Steve Biko’s writings, which I later discovered at university, was from Biko’s book *I Write what I like*.

Africa continued unabated. Stuck in my mind, is a cartoon, in which the white *sahib* in a pith helmet leads his pack of African slaves through the jungle with his supplies upon their heads, caricatured with thick red lips and bones through their nostrils. Abhorrence to the racial classifications and humiliation of colonized cultures arose within me. Encountering the biography of Gandhi in my early years at university, I was aghast at the two hundred year British subjugation of India that usurped the resources, the wealth, the arts, the literature, the architecture, and the lives of its inhabitants, familiar scenario in my own country and continent of Africa. Reading that Latin America, East and West Indies, the Pacific islands and Australia were not spared the same violent exploitation by European colonialists, I felt dismay about the ravaging of the Incas and Aztecs by European colonialists, the African slave experiences in the USA, and the massacre of North American indigenous populations by British rebels (who ironically were running away from their own exploitative government). In the course of those readings (I cannot pinpoint exactly where or when) I recall the first thing a powerful nation does to subjugate those they wish to dominate, is to introduce their own language as the official one, and change the education system to promote their own values and knowledge. Power, I learnt then, resides in controlling the minds of the oppressed.

I admit that my own outlook on life was informed by a Western civilization, and I certainly benefited from all its spinoffs. Yet I always felt something amiss in its condescension of other cultures, the scant regard for the environment and its carefully marketed superiority of its values and activities. My scepticism compelled me to look for a hidden agenda in the utopian claims of Western knowledge. It became apparent to me that, depending on what one was exposed to, one's perceptions, thoughts, experience, choices and ways of relating to the world were shaped accordingly, a dawning that I experienced when I read Gramsci's texts on *hegemony* in my undergraduate years. As part of the student anti-apartheid movements participating in different community structures, we were monitored by special police, arrested on occasion, and subject to riot police action. Therefore as a mark of attending education under protest, I did not attend a single graduation (BA, UHDE or Honours). As a teacher, my cynicism often impelled my divergence with authority, and my caustic analyses often raised the ire of those who assumed control. Simultaneously my exposure to eastern philosophies on

the nature of existence and reality³, and later, as a reflective educator, my readings and musings led me to perceive that a considerable dissemination of knowledge in society had an insidious agenda; a feeling that crystallized when I was exposed to the works of several educational and social reformers at postgraduate level.⁴ I continued to read widely about knowledge generation in academia, and soon the debates about academic gatekeeping, the lack of epistemological access for peripheral and indigenous societies, Eastern vs Western and Northern vs Southern theoretical posturing, the subaltern, post colonialism and de-colonialism became part of my repertoire. I sought to examine the extent to which knowledge generation in higher education was subservient to particular agendas, and the question, “Whose knowledge is most worth?” became an integral part of my psyche. I began to feel that knowledge generation at higher education, which cascades to what students learn at schools, is influenced by a political and economic hegemony, and propelled in specific ways, due to the influence of globalization and the rise of neoliberalism where consumerism becomes valued as an ethic in itself, and acts as a guide for behaviour and replaces previously held ethical beliefs (Fitzsimons, 2002). As I was involved in youth outreach projects in the community, a reading of Giroux’s (2003) assertion that the crisis of youth results from their disenfranchisement brought on by neoliberalism, impelled my contemplation about the increasingly weakened social ethic, loss of values and resultant self-indulgence and narcissism apparent amongst the youth, giving me the basis for my initial doctoral proposal.

My first proposal to the initial academic committee, exploring the neoliberal influence on the structure of academic curricula and academic capitalism, was received with enthusiasm and commended as an innovative study. As I attended the doctoral cohort, I felt my proposal was not being understood and, coupled with some ill health, I decided to temporarily withdraw from the programme and revitalize myself physically and mentally. I continued to lecture and stay in contact with the trends in research via the literature and presentations at conferences. Soon *neoliberalism* became the buzzword, and the synopses on conference invitations describing their themes looked strangely familiar. I took up my studies again a few years with

³ *Origins* by Michael Cremo and Richard Thompson; *Dialectic Spiritualism: Vedic Philosophy vs Western Philosophy; The Science of Self Realization; Coming Back; and Bhagavad-gita As It Is* by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami; *Leadership for an Age of Higher Consciousness* by Bhakti Tirtha Swami.

⁴ Gramsci, Freire, Bourdieu, Giroux, Giddens, Castells, Beck, Apple, Dussel, Quijano, Houtoundji, Mignolo

my original proposal and was again informed at the cohort that the topic was too wide. I continued to struggle with it for a year to meet the expectations of the committee. Given what I was told about the pre-emptive nature of the assumptions of my original proposal and the capacious scope of my musings, I came under sway of a pragmatic need to narrow the phenomenon under scrutiny for my doctoral study, thus my enquiry eventually formalized into *An exploration of doctoral students' theory choices* over the last five years in a faculty of education at a specific university in South Africa. In the meantime my thoughts were continuously troubled with the idea that historical influences like colonialism and apartheid and ideologies like neoliberalism, continued to assail the knowledge produced in tertiary institutions and that which is cascaded to schools and society in general.

These thoughts extended themselves into the use of theoretical frameworks that is expected in doctoral studies. Urged by the literature and my academic supervisors, my own search for an appropriate theoretical framework to underpin my deliberations continuously eluded me and caused me endless frustration. Given the legacy of a patriarchal, white, colonial dominance on knowledge production and theorizing (in South Africa's history) and my dissatisfaction with how Western scholars relegated alternate and indigenous knowledge systems to obscurity or incredulity, I questioned the need to find a theoretical framework that would "guide" one's thinking and provide a "lens" through which to view the data. I also found it extremely difficult to locate a theoretical framework to underpin my proposal due to a lack of suitable theories, as well as my resistance to the idea, feeling that such ascription would shape my own thinking in a particular way. My variance with the need for a theoretical framework was met with responses that ranged from, "everything you can think about has already been theorized" to "perhaps your thinking is better suited to a qualified professor with more experience". This ambivalence caused me discomfort and much anxiety. On one hand, I recognized the scholarship of great researchers and marvelled at their insightful presentations, explanations, and brilliant abilities to encapsulate those ideas in text, wishing that one day I will be able to write with such ease. On the other hand, as a fledgling researcher, I was quite aware that my repertoire of skills and experiential access to a wide range of theoretical viewpoints and methodologies was limited. I was simultaneously unsettled that my divergence from

particular academic strictures may subject me then to the same kind of gatekeeping that I was questioning.

Thus began my attempt to read as widely as possible ideas of theory, which took me two years of sleepless days and nights glued to Google and library internet searches tagging “ideas of theory”, “theory in the social sciences”, “history of theory”, “role of theory” and “debates about theory”. My searches provided me with vast amounts of information from the Greco-Roman origins of theory, famous theoreticians, contemporary theoreticians of the 20th century, and information on feminist, critical, postcolonial, postmodern and anti-theoretical positions amongst others. My daughter, understanding my search, bought me a book, *The Philosophy Book*, which provides a useful description of prominent theorists from the ancient world (about 700 BCE) to the present in the final section called *Contemporary Philosophy* (1950’s onwards). It is a particularly useful book, as, for each theorist discussed it summarizes the academic lineage before and after, thus showing the reader the paradigmatic context in which the theorist is located. What the book also reveals in the introduction however, is that the writers feel that “the first true philosophers” appeared in ancient Greece 2500 years ago (Buckingham et al., 2011, p. 13), and besides a brief mention of Edward Said (Palestine) and Henry Odera Oruka (Kenya) towards the latter section, it focuses mostly on theorists that are located in a Northern Euro-Americo context. This indicates (intentionally or unintentionally) how the authors’ understandings have been shaped about who theorists are and what they regard as valuable epistemological contributions, a discussion I pursue in my dissertation. While I pondered on this, I came across Thomas’ (1997, p. 76) declaration that “theory’s acquired potency for bestowing academic legitimacy is troublesome, for it means that specific kinds of endeavour in educational research are emphasized and promulgated, while the legitimacy of atheoretical kinds is questioned or belittled”. From his perspective, theory does not emancipate, but reinforces the status quo, an assertion I consider in greater detail in my dissertation.

In this Prologue I attempted to present some thoughts that I feel impinged strongly upon my doctoral study, an important background to clarify the ontological perspective of my engagement. These thoughts and intuitions that have arisen in the course of my personal

reflections, I call *realizations*.⁵ I do wish to inform the reader that my presentation is neither an antagonistic Western evaluation arising out of a fundamentalist attitude, nor am I questioning the pedigree of well-established researchers whose names may be mentioned in my study. With regard to my suppositions, I also request that the reader not consider my deliberations to be presumptuous, pedantic or supercilious in the least. I am aware of the need to demonstrate scholarship that is meritorious, as well as the need to demonstrate that as a student I have the sufficient literary repertoire to be able to make certain assertions that I do in my presentation. Having said that, I also submit that it is not necessary that every detail of the disseminations of every theorist mentioned in my dissertation be interrogated and understood; that is not my purpose. Also within this dissertation, I suggest that the demand for established strictures that doctoral theses regard as *normal rigour* – is also a type of “torturing” that Mackay (quoted in the header of this prologue) alleges. Thus I seek the latitude to explicate my presentation in concordance with a more flexible approach, without sacrificing scholarship, fully aware that innovative theses do not necessarily sacrifice form and structure.

In this study I want to understand how and why doctoral students make theory choices. Given my reflections in this Prologue and the assertions made by several scholars about the influences on how knowledge is shaped, I wish to explore what personal and contextual constraints and/or facilitative factors influence doctoral students’ theory choices.

⁵ *Realization* is defined as a more “intuitive and self-reflective state of consciousness, where one becomes aware that lessons learnt in theory, especially those of life choices and values, are indeed tangible realities” (Ramson, 2006, p. 28).

Chapter 1

Theory and Knowledge production

1.1 Introduction

The use of theory appears as a pivotal aspect in doctoral research in education. The idea of theory as a set of structured lenses through which “aspects or parts of the world can be observed, studied or analysed” (Klette, 2012, p. 4) or as a framework used to systematically analyse and explain “how” and “why” events unfold as they do (Johnson & Christensen, 2007, p. 7), predominates. Theory is so pervasive to the entire research process, from research design, methodology and to extending knowledge, (Kelly, 2010) that some researchers propose that theory is indispensable to research (Moore, 2007, p. 431). Whether theories are used *apriori* or allowed to emerge from the data as recommended by grounded theorists, theory is characterized by a systematic formulation and organization of ideas to make sense of specific phenomena (Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993, p. 20). Others, like Thomas (1997, p. 76) and Carr (2006) suggest that the emphasis on theory in educational and social science inquiry emanates from an allure with theory from natural sciences that saw a borrowing simply for “academic legitimacy”, and that this “romance” with theory promotes a particular kind of research endeavour that belittles any atheoretical stance, distorts educational enquiry and produces a “hegemony of theory”, which, instead of being emancipatory actually entrenches the status quo (Thomas, 2007, p. 1997). These contentions lend credibility to the assertions by Hammersley (2012) and Klette (2012) that theory in the social sciences occupies a nebulous position. Given the following considerations that academic research produces knowledge, that a major component of the research process is to underpin one’s research with appropriate theoretical lenses to analyse the data, and that contentions exist about the validity and role of theory, I sought to explore and understand the process by which doctoral students *choose* their theories for their doctoral research. A major part of a doctoral student’s deliberation is to find an appropriate theoretical framework to underpin her studies; and students of the social sciences have a diverse array of theories to choose from. However, the literature did not specifically reveal how doctoral students choose theories. To understand this phenomenon, this study initially used an interpretivist approach by drawing on the salient features of several psychological and cognitive models, viz., the Information Processing Approach and Prospect

Theory (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Payne & Bettman, 2004) to explore how doctoral students made particular theoretical choices for their studies. The study necessitated a shift, however, to a more critical approach, as certain patterns emerged from the data that suggested deeper underlying reasons why the participants made particular choices of theory, for which an interpretivist lens lacked sufficient criticality.

Given the assertions of several researchers (Le Grange, 2012; Grosfoguel, 2012; Pascale, 2011; Mignolo, 2011; Daniels, 2011; Connell, 2007; Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2003; Bendle, 2002; Monkman & Baird; 2002; Giddens; 2002; Beck, 2000) that knowledge generation in the Social Sciences is shaped in particular ways by cultural ideologies, notions, conceptualizations, circumstances and processes, one may extend the idea to understand that theories also do not arise from vacuity; they arise within specific ideological, cultural and economic contexts, and therefore pervade research and resultant knowledge production in specific ways. The link between theory and knowledge may thus become clearer with Gehl's (2010) assertion, that "all knowledge, and the methodological practices and constructs that birth them, are inextricably connected to the worldview assumptions, histories, and discourse vocabularies of those who create the knowledge".

This raises epistemological concerns and emphasizes the question – how do we really know what we know? My own thoughts resonated with that of the above researchers that particular ideological agendas imperceptibly shape our thoughts and perceptions, especially through education which is the key protagonist in making us subservient to particular societal agendas. If this is the case, to what extent then, do conceptual strictures offered by the ontological and epistemic frameworks of social sciences influence the extent to which doctoral students can engage critically with knowledge generation, and in particular, what are the specific influences on their choices on theory? Therefore I found the particular theoretical choices made by doctoral students an intriguing phenomenon to explore. This study, called *Exploring Doctoral Students Theory Choices in Education*, explores the choice of focal theories by doctoral students for their doctoral theses, and is located at the Faculty of Education at a university in South Africa and focuses on five doctoral students who completed their theses in Education in the period 2006 to 2011.

In this chapter I discuss the rationale for my study and the key questions, and interrogate the literature to provide an annotated history of the development of theory in education.

Thereafter I review the meanings of theory as proposed by researchers in the field; examine some of the contestations about the meanings and use of theory; review issues in the literature as they pertain to particular developments within tertiary education and postgraduate knowledge generation, which further augments the research and contextual imperatives of my study, and conclude the chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

1.2 Rationale

In the Prologue of this dissertation I have described my personal rationale in detail, and therefore focus on the contextual and research imperatives of my study hereunder.

The **contextual** imperative of this study was informed by particular developments in doctoral education globally, and in South Africa. The call by the Academy of Science for South Africa (ASSAf)⁶ (2010) for more doctoral studies, provided the space for my study, which I believe will contribute to the growing body of knowledge needed to understand the doctoral process more clearly. On average, South Africa produces 25 doctorates per million of the population annually (ASSAf, 2010), regarded as low when compared to international figures. These doctorates are produced mostly in the social sciences (five times higher than the engineering and technological sciences), with the largest share of doctoral graduates coming from *Education*, Economic and Management Sciences and Religion. This corresponded with a data report from Pearson & Ford (1997) which indicated that of the professional doctorates in Australia, the largest single group was the EdD degrees. Since a substantial number of doctoral theses in South Africa are completed in the field of education, and the government advocates higher doctoral output, the location of my study within a faculty of education is especially relevant.

The **research** imperative emanated from an analysis of the literature which suggested that although several researchers, (Pascale, 2011; ASSAf, 2010; Backhouse, 2009; O'Brien, 2008; Holbrook, Bourke, Fairbairn & Lovat, 2007; King, 2004; Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2003; Gibbons et

⁶ ASSAf is as an independent organization of prominent scientists in SA and has been mandated by the government to research and advise the government on vital scientific issues (ASSAf, 2010)

al, 1994) have examined developments within postgraduate education as a response to global, governmental and other influences, there was a paucity of studies that specifically interrogated doctoral students' choices of focal theories emerging from doctoral theses in South Africa. ASSAf (2010, p. 22) described the South African government's emphasis on "the importance of the PhD in securing a competitive advantage for a national government that is seeking to compete in a global economy". Therefore governmental expectations in response to global economic influences, need for innovation, and increased research productivity, influence universities to position themselves in particular ways in terms of policies, structure, curricula, and programmes (Chetty, 2012; Blackmore, 2007; Elliot, 2007). This gave impetus to my query as to whether such posturing, and other research agendas have an influence on doctoral students' theory choices.

In an attempt to explore *how* doctoral students choose their focal theories, and *why* those theories were chosen, the study focuses specifically on five doctoral students who completed their theses in Education over the last five years (2006 to 2011), in the Faculty of Education at a university in South Africa.

1.3 Key Questions

The assertions made by several scholars (Grosfoguel, 2012; Hammersley, 2012; Klette, 2012; Pascale, 2011; Mignolo, 2011; Daniels, 2011; Thomas, 2007; Connell, 2007; Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2003) about the various influences on the generation of knowledge, impelled the following critical questions to be asked in my study:

- 1) How do doctoral students choose their focal theories for their doctoral studies in Education?
- 2) Why were these theories chosen?

These critical questions were extended in my semi-structured interviews with study participants to understand the doctoral students' personal and contextual conditions affecting their theoretical choices. To understand doctoral students' theory choices the following contemplations formed the backdrop to formalizing my interview questions: are there intellectual, psychological, and

emotional decision-making processes that students undergo in choosing their theories? Does management, promotion or negotiation of the doctoral process have an influence on how students choose? Are students' choices of focal theories operationalised, supported, or perhaps subverted by contextual, ideological or personal factors? Are there any subtle or direct, advertent or inadvertent influences brought to bear upon theoretical choices? These deliberations informed the development of my interview questions to gain an understanding of the personal, individual, institutional, and informational contexts that influenced doctoral students' theory choices.

In the following literature review, I initially discuss the meanings and importance of theory in the social sciences. Given the emphasis on the role of theory in the Social sciences, it is suggested that the students' understanding of the meaning and role of theory may inform their theoretical choices in particular ways, and therefore, it is argued, that this forms an important component to be included in the literature review. As described earlier, a literature review did not reveal studies that specifically interrogate doctoral students' choices of theories; the literature presents several cognitive and psychological theories of how decisions or choices are made in other circumstances. I interrogate these in Chapter 2 in an attempt to provide a theoretical framework to explore how the participants in my study made their choices of theory for their doctoral studies. I also discuss the position of theory in the natural and social sciences to clarify the meaning and utility across these two disciplines. Thereafter I present an annotated history of the development of theory in education (Carr, 2006; Thomas, 2007) and discuss the contestation about the use of theory in the social sciences. I alert the reader here that it is necessary for me to discuss the historical and definitional aspects of theory as this informs the theoretical component of my study. In the next subsection, I review issues in the literature as they pertain to particular developments within tertiary education and postgraduate knowledge generation, which further augments the research imperative of my study.

1.4 Interrogating the Meaning and Role of Theory in PhD

An etymological analysis of the word "theory" (Peters, 2007, p. 430) reverts to the original Greek word *theorein*, which means "to look upon, to observe, to consider, to contemplate," and *theoria*, which means "looking at, looking more closely, observation, consideration, insight and scientific contemplation". Klette (2012) states that for a system to be considered a theory, it

must satisfy the following set of criteria, viz.: 1) *stability*, i.e., remaining the same over a long period of time; 2) *coherence*, i.e., the components are linked completely in ways that do not contradict one another and 3) *consistency*, i.e., will not produce contradictory claims. The following definitions of theory indicate a subscription to these norms. Klette (2012, p. 4) describes theory as “a structured set of lenses through which aspects or parts of the world can be observed, studied or analysed”. Johnson & Christensen (2007, p. 7) state that theory is a framework for explaining “how” and “why” events and phenomena unfold as they do. Boss, Doherty, LaRossa, Schumm, & Steinmetz (1993, p. 20) assert that theory is characterized by a systematic formulation and organization of ideas to make sense of specific phenomena. Garrison (2000, np) describes a theory as “a coherent and systematic ordering of ideas, concepts and models, with a purpose of constructing meaning to explain, to interpret, to shape practice”. Leedy and Ormrod (2005, p. 4) state, “a theory is an organized body of concepts and principles intended to explain a particular phenomenon”. Moore (2007) regards theory as a map, a summary of that which is known and unknown, which motivates researchers to inquire further about the unknown. Moore strongly suggests that, “without theory there cannot be research; there can be number counting, data gathering, but there cannot be research without theory” (2007, p. 431). Klette (2012) describes several important functions of theory in the educational and social sciences; viz., its predictive, analytical and explanatory role for observed phenomena; providing a structured scientific approach to a problem; making one’s research more credible by underpinning it with a theoretical orientation, and avoiding the singular perspective of empiricism.

Kelly (2010) asserts that although the role of theory in qualitative research is underemphasized, it pervades research quality in three ways, viz.: 1) research design - decisions about the phenomenon of research and the types of research questions depend on theory; 2) methodology - data analyses and interpretation are influenced by theory, and 3) theories about a specific issue may be developed extending the knowledge about the phenomenon being researched. From these definitions, theory emerges as useful in providing an established, consistent, organized, abstract set of ideas and concepts, whose application to observed phenomena provides explanatory, analytical and interpretative value, and whose purpose is to provide a conceptual tool to assist understanding our complex social reality, as well as to contribute to knowledge

development, or extend existing knowledge. While the literature describes the usefulness of theory to research in the social sciences, the diverse opinions about its role and where to locate it in the research framework poses difficulties for researchers (Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010), contentions which will be discussed later in this section.

1.4.1 Theory in the Natural and Social Sciences

Theory is conceptualized differently in the natural sciences and the social sciences. Reeves (2008), explains that in the natural sciences, theories are generally used to make predictions about the relation between two or more different variables. By establishing causal relationships in this manner, universal laws are generated. The social sciences, however, posit that the complexity of our social reality makes it almost impossible to demonstrate causal relationships. Universal laws and predictability also cannot apply to the permutations of factors and complex interconnections in societies. Educational and social sciences research itself is quite diverse and broad in nature. Anfara & Mertz (2006) states that the main difference between the natural and social sciences is the rigid system or explanatory structure of the former, while the latter attempts explanations of phenomena through multiple perspectives. As the nature of the phenomena researched in the social sciences is diverse, multiple theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain different aspects of the phenomenon being studied. Kelly (2010) explains that since the social sciences tries to make sense of human activity, it draws on diverse theoretical perspectives from disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, amongst others. Kelly (2010) suggests that the social sciences are similar to the natural sciences in the following way: both attempt to extend existing knowledge about a phenomenon using established theories to assess data. In this way, theory allows the researcher to engage with deeper description, interpretation and explanation of phenomena. A brief review of the history of theory in the educational sciences clarifies how theory has come to occupy a significant position in education.

1.4.2 A Brief Historical Outline of Theory in the Educational and Social Sciences

The following historical trajectory of theory in education is not meant to be an exhaustive, comprehensive discussion; its purpose is to gain an annotated idea of how theory gained prominence in the field of education and social sciences according to Carr (2006). Focusing on the pervasiveness of theory in education, Carr (2006, p. 1) provides a narrative that traces a

“historical evolution of the educational theory debate”. He strongly asserts that the presence of theory in education arises from a post-Enlightenment preoccupation of education to appear credible, and not as “some timeless philosophical argument about how educational theory is to be conducted” (2006, p. 1). The idea of “educational theory” did not exist prior to the end of the nineteenth century, although the classic texts of Plato’s *Republic* and Rousseau’s *Emile* were written. Carr (2006) feels that post-nineteenth century rationalists have irrelevantly quoted and misrepresented these texts to bolster the idea of “educational theory”. Furthermore, the concern of modernity in making our social practices more objective and rational, rather than relying on traditional customs, gave impetus to classifying knowledge obtained by these rigorous standards, as “theory”.

Given such an impetus, educational reformers began to examine the absence of “theory” in Education and began campaigning to fill this void. Exhorted by comments of reformers such as Quick in 1884⁷, who declared, “I say boldly that what English Schoolmasters now stand in need of is *theory*; and further that the universities have special advantages for meeting this need”, training of educators began to move into universities and a proliferation of courses in “educational theory” underpinned by a philosophical stance, promulgated the teachings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Carr suggests that such curricula were sustained by the writings of Sir John Adams in his original writings called *The Evolution of Educational Theory* in 1928. However, by the mid twentieth century, logical positivism had sway, and an educational reformer O’Connor published *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* in 1959, in which he argued for “the standards and criteria used to determine what is to count as a genuine theory in science can and should be used to judge the value of the various (and often conflicting) theories that are put forward by writers of education” (O’Connor, 1959⁸). O’Connor argues that educational theory deemed itself credible by aborting its heavy philosophical leanings and claiming the status of an applied science. According to Carr (2006), other reformers, like Hirst, found this too restrictive and argued that educational theory was a practical theory that was informed by diverse fields that underpinned education. Thus, teacher education curricula in the 1960s to 1980s came to be dominated by a foundation discipline view – philosophy, psychology,

⁷ cited in Carr (2006, p. 2)

⁸ cited in Carr (2006, p. 3)

sociology and history of education – were established as academic disciplines. However, by the 1980s, the relevance of such foundational disciplines was questioned, and simultaneously with the development of post-positivism, greater critique of the weaknesses of the foundational disciplines flourished. Interest in practice rather than theory began to dominate from the 1980s, influenced by several educational reformers like Ryle, Gadamer, Polanyi, and Habermas. Although their ideas were diverse, what developed was “a philosophical rationale for the interpretation of educational theory as a species of ‘practical’ or ‘personal’ theory which emerged through a process of ‘self-reflective inquiry’ in which educational practitioners reflectively exposed and critically examined the theories implicit in their own everyday practice”(Carr, 2006, p. 4). Thus, the idea of the reflective practitioner developing her own personal theories, tacit theories or theories in use (Thomas, 2007) emerged, influenced by the research of Lawrence Stenhouse and Donald Schön.

Concluding this annotated historical tracing of the development of theory in education, Carr (2006) acknowledges that others have preceded his debate on the relevance of theory. He also suggests that although the theoretical trajectory he describes is brief, that is, a shifting from philosophy to science, to a grouping of foundational disciplines, and eventually to researchers’ personal theories, there has not been any serious opposition to the notion that the practice of education *must* be based on theory. Although the derivation and the emergence of particular forms of theory have emerged within specific intellectual and cultural contexts, which make educational theory seem compelling, it is all too often taken as granted that theory is necessary. In the following subsection, I discuss the contestations around the position of theory in the social sciences.

1.4.3 Contestations about theory in the Social Sciences

Klette (2012) avers that although theory has positioned itself centrally in the social sciences, its origins, the bases, utility and the meanings in educational research are vague and the roles they contribute to in the field are uncertain. Since the status quo dictates that theory is central to the progress of research, the nebulous position and function of theory in the social sciences becomes problematic, and as Thomas (1997, p. 75) declares, this very position relegates “theory” to a

mere “intellectual endeavor”. In the discussion that follows, I draw on both Thomas (1997) and Hammersley (2012) to understand the meanings and use of theory.

Hammersley (2012) also declares that researchers have challenged the diverse meanings of theory, its speculative nature and its insubstantial development. Therefore, to understand how the term *theory* is commonly used and some of the contestations around those meanings, Hammersley proposes seven “senses” of theory, viz.: theory and practice; theory versus fact; theory as abstract versus the concrete; theory related to the macro versus versions of the local; theory as contrasted with description; theory as a language of explanation; and theory as an approach or ‘paradigm’. I elaborate further on each of these seven ideas of theory:

1.4.3.1 Theory and practice

Theory here, regarded as normative, includes a set of *apriori* ideas about what is expected about an activity, its value and reasons for its use – ideas that are strongly influenced by the natural sciences. The views on the use of theory in relation to practice are diverse; theory may be seen as a set of maxims to transform practice, or destabilize existing ideas, or a simple guide that can be moderated in the light of emerging data, or not relevant at all due to its idealized nature.

1.4.3.2 Theory versus fact

Whether knowledge produced, can be considered factual or is simply conjecture, is another contestation. The disputes around the meaning of theory include uncertain validity of theoretical claims; the amount of evidence required before a theory can be considered a fact; whether ontological claims really represent the world or are they convenient claims to view phenomena in certain ways; and the degree to which knowledge can be considered fact. These questions are especially relevant to social science as to whether there can be an independent reality at all, due to its diverse and fluid nature, and whether research can produce theories to capture the nature of the phenomena that is studied.

1.4.3.3 Theory as abstract versus the concrete

Here ‘theory’ functions at a level of abstraction that is more complex than direct experience or rational knowledge. This view, which often emanates from a positivist and realist type of

science, regards theory as the means to classify or understand the fundamental attributes of different kinds of phenomena, or the causal processes that produce them. Social scientists also argue for abstractions that may be able to explain broad human social processes. However, the merit of this has been contested, for example, the sociological theory of Parsons is regarded as extremely abstract (Merton, 1968). More recent theorists like Bernstein, Giddens and others are targeted by Sharrock (2010, p. 106-9) for also being overly abstract.

1.4.3.4 Theory related to the macro versus versions of the local

The idea of *macro* may be understood as a “whole community or national society; as the structure of a specific type of social formation, such as capitalism or patriarchy or racism, that transcends national societies; as the ‘world system’; or even as the whole process of socio-historical development that, for instance, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Elias, Giddens, or Castells, has identified as characteristic of the West or the world more generally” (Hammersley, 2012, p. 5). The idea that local experiences and events must be evaluated against the backdrop of wider social system or its history, has emanated from anthropology and earlier sociology, as well as grand theories like Marxism, Critical Theory and other grand theories (meta-narratives). The arguments in support have claimed that one needs to understand the whole before understanding the particular. The feasibility of this claim has been criticized by researchers like Martin and Dennis (2010), who argue for the advantages of *micro* theories as opposed to *macro* theories, as well as by postmodern and post-structural critique that challenge the “claims to knowledge of totalities, and all meta-narratives” (Hammersley, 2012, p. 5).

1.4.3.5 Theory as contrasted with description

Explanatory theory is often considered the primary result of science. The role of theory as explanatory is assumed to offer some type of global pattern or process that can explain cause and outcome or result – if we say, “event A caused event B, we are implying that if A had not occurred then B would not have happened, other things being equal. This assumes that events of type A generally produce events of type B, when certain conditions are met” (Hammersley, 2012, p. 5). In this regard, Warshay & Warshay (2005) differentiate between perceptions of causation as mechanical determinism (which is the stimulus and response described by Hammersley above) and interpretive causation. Warshay & Warshay (2005) further assert that

cause and effect principles on a macro scale are embodied in Marxism as an economic deterministic model and Durkheim's explanation of social structure as a social deterministic model.

Descriptions, on the other hand, articulates what exists, or existed, in specific spatio-temporal localities, the characteristics of objects and events, and the sequence in which such phenomena have unfolded. The main contestation has been about whether theory can claim that causality actuality exists in the societal domain.

1.4.3.6 Theory as a language of explanation

This is similar to the idea discussed under 1.2.1.5 above. The assumption is that for any theory to be authentic it must encapsulate a set of rules that explain the entire range of behaviours of particular social phenomena, an idea that owes its origin to natural science. Social Science has also leaned on this idea by trying to provide global concepts to explain human social behaviour, e.g. Marxist theory. The question that remains is whether causal structures function in the social world and, whether obtaining knowledge of them is viable or practical.

1.4.3.7 Theory as an approach or 'paradigm'

The idea of paradigm owes its existence to Thomas Kuhn's original explanation of the natural sciences. A paradigm is a "well-defined framework of assumptions, incommensurable with other such frameworks, embodied in what are treated as exemplary studies within a 'mature science'" (Hammersley, 2012, p. 6). If we use Kuhn's original concept of a paradigm as a "disciplinary matrix" the idea becomes clearer (Bird, 2011). A disciplinary matrix is that which comprises the main theories, instruments, values and philosophical assumptions of a particular worldview. To understand this, a distinction is drawn between normal science and revolutions. A mature science is characterized by stages of normal science followed by revolutions. In normal science the main theories, instruments, values and philosophical assumptions of a disciplinary matrix remain fixed. As anomalies accumulate, they undermine the ability of the normal science to provide solutions and a revision of the disciplinary matrix occurs, which is deemed a scientific revolution. In an immature science, consensus is absent. Kuhn often referred to this as a 'pre-paradigm' period (Bird, 2011). Kuhn regarded social science as *pre-*

paradigmatic, and was doubtful whether it would ever progress beyond this situation.

Hammersley (2012) feels that Kuhn is “often misrepresented as arguing that paradigms are impositions on our experience of the world that reconstitute it in ways that are essentially arbitrary”. Kuhn, however, did not feel this way, since he maintained the notion of scientific progress. Hammersley (1984) contends that this misinterpretation has influenced social science to develop a narrow view, with the “task of research becoming simply to ‘demonstrate’ the validity of founding assumptions or to validate particular political or practical conclusions”. Furthermore, he declares, the definitions of social science paradigms are often imprecise and blurred, as well as makes important differences between theories indistinct, ideas that concord with Klette’s (2012) and Reeves’ (2008) views.

Hammersley (2012, p. 6) further avers that the conspicuous aspect about interpreting theory as an approach or paradigm is that it includes entire philosophies “in the sense of distinctive sets of ontological, epistemological, and perhaps also praxiological assumptions” and often integrates elements from various types of theories. Several paradigms have emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, many originating from philosophical sources, often extensive and covering numerous disciplinary fields, e.g., critical research, interpretivism, phenomenology, critical feminism, constructionism or constructivism, and postmodernism, each of which questions the basic assumptions of what it means to engage in science (Lather, 1992). This “explosion” of approaches has migrated to “post-conditions” leading even to a *post-paradigmatic* condition which undermines the “very concept of paradigms itself” (Lather, 1992, p. 89).

The idea of theory as paradigmatic dominates the social sciences as seen in the meanings given by researchers earlier in this section. According to Hammersley (2012) and Thomas (2011) theory is automatically utilized in research in higher education, and generally also, in educational and social scientific enquiry. Thomas (2011, p. 20) asserts that theory is used to bestow academic legitimacy, and alternative ideas that may be seen as atheoretical are ridiculed. Although social scientists are at pains to distinguish between theory in the natural sciences and social sciences (Reeves, 2008; Anfara et al., 2006), the meanings of theory above still appear to have a strong positivistic inclination that claims need to be testable. Therefore, it appears almost mandatory that for any discipline to claim itself as scientific, it must subscribe to a notion of

theory. This resonates with Carr's (2006) historical outline of theory (1.4.1. above) where he declares that particular forms of theory have emerged within specific intellectual and cultural contexts that make educational theory seem compelling. Given the social scientists historical dalliance with the natural science model to draw credibility about theory, one can take cognizance of Feyerabend's (1975, np)⁹ scathing critique of ideas of scientific theory itself, asserting that science, on the contrary, is *anarchistic*, and in particular opposes the consistency condition that new knowledge fits in with established theories of knowledge (as described by McMillan & Schumaker, 2000 and Klette, 2012, above).

The idea that science can, and should, be run according to fixed and universal rules, is both unrealistic and pernicious. It is unrealistic, for it takes too simple a view of the talents of man and of the circumstances which encourage, or cause, their development. And it is pernicious, for the attempt to enforce the rules is bound to increase our professional qualifications at the expense of our humanity. In addition, the idea is detrimental to science, for it neglects the complex physical and historical conditions which influence scientific change. It makes our science less adaptable and more dogmatic: every methodological rule is associated with cosmological assumptions, so that using the rule we take it for granted that the assumptions are correct.

Feyerabend is reacting to the limiting laws that govern research and proposing the freedom of thought in research, suggesting that there is a need to be open to new ways of perceiving reality. While the critique by Feyerabend focuses on the natural sciences, the conception of research described in the extract above has permeated educational and social sciences since the nineteenth century, reasons for which are made clearer by Carr (2006) and Thomas (2007) in their intriguing historical description (1.4.2. above) of how the idea of theory seems to have inconspicuously usurped a position in the educational and social sciences.

As stated earlier, the nebulous nature of theory in the social sciences is problematic, which Klette (2012) elaborates as follows: in education and social sciences there are several schools of thought, which are sometimes discordant or incompatible, and which makes it difficult to

⁹ cited in <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/feyerabe.htm>

develop a well-grounded, unified theory of education. Further, theories are also borrowed from researchers in other fields and often used in diverse and vague ways in the social and educational sciences. There is often an incongruity between the theories some educational researchers choose and the subsequent application to data and interpretations of the data; theoretical frameworks are introduced at the “beginning or in the end of a paper without having any presence or bearing on what happens between the beginning and the end” (Klette, 2012, p. 6).

A further critique refers to researchers using the understandings of specific theorists, and then applying these uncritically. This is sometimes due to reverence or “adulation” researchers have for the ideas of great thinkers, and may prevent them from a critical engagement with the theory or the evidence itself (Klette 2012, p. 5-6). This resonates with Niss’s (2006) concern about the lack of innovation and unique theoretical contributions in the educational sciences. Backhouse (2009) who comments on the paradox of the doctoral study as a creative engagement yet bounded by examination criteria further addresses the idea of innovativeness. In a study of creativity in doctoral theses, Backhouse (2009) proposes the *paradox of constrained creativity*. The paradox is that PhD students are expected to extend the boundaries of knowledge on one hand, but because it is actually an accreditation process in which disciplined research is recognized, it “serves a gate keeping role, controlling who may claim to make knowledge” (2009, p. 274). She suggests that supervisors of doctoral students often exert great control over students’ choices, and the form and structure of their research. Analysing knowledge classification into disciplines as sources of power and control, Backhouse (2009), describes a strong opposition to professional doctorates by some South African academic staff in her study, who felt that practitioner knowledge was inferior to theoretical academic knowledge. Further, given the legacy of colonial and apartheid education in South Africa, ambivalence exists about the form and structure of the PhD, as well as the type of knowledge that should be valued. If academic gatekeeping exists, and supervisors have inclinations to particular type of doctoral studies as asserted by these researchers, then these scenarios may impinge either directly or subtly on how doctoral students make theory choices.

Thomas (1997) describes quite powerfully the nature of theory as hegemonic in that it is

“a force for conservatism, for stabilizing the status quo through the circumscription of thought within a hermetic set of rules, procedures, and methods. Seen in this way, theory – far from being emancipatory – is in fact an instrument for reinforcing an existing set of practices and methods in education” (1997, p. 76).

Thomas (2011), whose long background as educational psychologist has qualified him to observe particular changes in theorizing over time, asserts that education initially borrowed from psychology to inform its practice. Piagetian theory and the Learning theory of B.F. Skinner formed the backbone of education (as we all know) and continues to be presented as theorists in education curricula at university. Thomas (2011, p. 2) declares that such theories whose “practical spinoffs” led to claims of ideas such as *stages of reading readiness* (for example) did more damage than good, and the decline and obsolescence of such practical results have become obvious. The consorting of education with theorizing from so-called “credible” sources is highlighted in Thomas’ (2011, p. 2) comment that the use of such theories as behavioural theory “forms a clear example of one of the dangers of theory in education: the danger of its epistemological allure.....” Later he also asserts that, “theory is *still* seen in some quarters, many quarters, as ‘scientific theory’ or a diluted version of such” (2011, p. 6), and that theory’s

pull is psychological as well as (or perhaps rather than) rational. In a field that has always had something of an inferiority complex about its academic status, theory has enormous cachet – as the cream of intellectual endeavor, the distillation of very clever people’s thoughts. Its presence acts as a magnet.

Thomas (2011) avers that the allurements of theory is so great that researchers even construct their identities around it. Education researchers have claimed themselves to be Piagetian and behaviourists in the past and now the proliferation of constructionists, critical theorists, poststructuralists, chaos theorists and all their permutations and offshoots provide a dizzying array of theoretical identities.

In the following section, I discuss the current state of research concerning knowledge production in the social sciences and its ramifications on theory. Kelly (2010) avers that theory contributes to extending knowledge. Since tertiary institutions are involved in the generation of knowledge through research, theory is bound to knowledge generation. Scardamalia & Bereiter (2006) assert that one component of knowledge generation is the development of particular tools, such as theories and models, that support the further progress of knowledge. Research, which is the formalized process by which new knowledge is sought, appears to have an inherent expectation that students will choose or subscribe to particular theoretical frameworks to support their research (Thomas, 2007). It has already been suggested that theories do not arise in a vacuum but develop within specific ideological or historical contexts. Therefore, given that the connection between knowledge production and theory, and that, theoretical choices of doctoral students may be influenced by several factors, I attempted to explore and understand the process by which doctoral students *choose* their theories for their doctoral research.

1.4.4 Knowledge production (generation)

Many international studies have interrogated the plethora of imperatives that are currently influencing knowledge generation in the Social Sciences, and in particular postgraduate education (Gibbons et al, 1994; Gough, 2000; Beck, 2000; Fitzsimons, 2002; Monkman, & Baird, 2002; Giroux, 2003; King, 2004; Apple, 2004; Grevholm, Perssson, & Wall, 2005; Holbrook, Bourke, Fairbairn & Lovat, 2007; ASSAf, 2010; Pascale, 2011; Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2011). My purpose is not to catalogue types of knowledge but to conceptualize knowledge production, particularly in doctoral research. As a conceptual underpinning I prefer to use the term knowledge generation, being convinced by the arguments of Balfour, Moletsane and Karlsson (2011) that the association of the word “production” with “knowledge” delimits the worth of knowledge, ignores the generative nature of knowledge, and implies a type of commodification associated with industry and the corporate sector. The development of new modes of “knowledge production” were made prominent by the deliberations of Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott, & Trow (1994) and Gibbons (2001) who mooted the concepts of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production. Mode 1 knowledge production arises from the influence of the traditional, scientific model. Gibbons (2001) asserts that the rigid cognitive and social strictures of this model legitimizes or excludes what can be argued as

credible research, as well as who is qualified to engage in such research. The interest of a specific academic community takes precedence and knowledge production is therefore restricted to a particular discipline and context. Mode 1 is therefore characterized by disciplinarity, homogeneity, hierarchy and opacity.

The earlier discussion by Backhouse (2009) that the ontological and epistemic frameworks of social sciences exert a gatekeeping force on types of research is supported by Gibbon's (2001, p. 8) assertion that Mode 1 knowledge production has been efficacious because it was achieved through

a process of specialisation in the cognitive realm, of professionalisation in the social realm and institutionalisation of the political realm. This pattern has governed the diffusion of science from one area of activity to another and it has tended to treat harshly those who tried to circumvent its controls. The disciplinary structure of knowledge reflects the successful operation of this pattern of cognitive and social control.

Flyvbjerg (2001) describes how these parameters are more obvious within the bounds of traditional empirical sciences, and traditional social sciences which sought to mirror the research methods of empiric sciences are therefore questionable.

Mode 2 diverges from Mode 1 in that the focus is on *applicability*. Gibbons (2001) states that the utility of knowledge is given precedence, i.e., how useful is it to governmental, industrial or societal imperatives. Mode 2 knowledge production involves transdisciplinary collaboration, which, due to its decreased institutionalization, creates the dynamic to consensually foster creative and theoretical output. Due to the problem solving nature of the process, practitioners are sensitive to the value implications of their research and become more self-reflexive and aware of the social accountability of knowledge production. Mode 2 is therefore characterized by transdisciplinarity, homogeneity, heterarchicality, transience, reflexiveness, and social and market accountability. The academic dominance of universities is being eroded as the sites of knowledge production have become diverse (industry, government, consultancies, private

tertiary institutes, etc.), and together with the internet, an acceleration of knowledge networks has occurred, which fosters a “socially distributed knowledge production system” (Gibbons, 2001, p. 8). Gibbons asserts that telecommunication, internet and other computer technologies are crucial for Mode 2 knowledge production, and is actually advantageous for those who can afford these. I argue that while decreased institutionalization may increase creativity and theorizing, if knowledge generation in Mode 2 is dependent on technology and facilitates those who can afford it, then access and affordability will influence knowledge production. Will the dominant economies which are themselves capitalistic, and who have made electronic communication their mainstay, continue to dictate the type of knowledge generation that occurs? This alludes to the critique by Connell who proposes that modern social science “embeds the viewpoints, perspectives and problems of metropolitan society while presenting itself as universal knowledge” (2007, p vii-viii).

The changing roles of universities and the production of knowledge have also been interrogated by Pearson & Ford (1997). They describe the tension that exists between the traditional conception of inducting students into a closed academic community of scholarship, and the demand from industry that students engage more with the “Mode 2” knowledge production as described above. This idea is extended in King’s (2004) assertion that, in this age of principally knowledge-based economies, governments are emulating industrial nations by investing in and emphasising university education, because they are motivated by increasing global competition, and that it is the means for securing greater economic development and prosperity. King feels that the utilitarian value of university education may not be accepted by everyone, especially the academics working within these institutions, and that it also ignores a “wider social, individual and political well-being” (2004, p. xiv). Delanty (2001) who shares a similar view, regards universities as having a role of promoting open discussion and debate about democracy and governance, but have become shaped by the global economic agenda. Other researchers like Shinn (2002) and Godin (1998) maintain that talks of Mode 2 are politically motivated than actually contributing to theory.

Pascale (2011, p. 4) describes epistemology as a branch of philosophy that questions how the world can be known. It “concerns the nature, sources and limits of knowledge” and includes

“issues of belief, assertions and propositions “of how the world can be understood. Inherent in the definition is the assumption that the understanding of the world will depend on the particular ideology or ontological stance taken by the viewer. Therefore if academic knowledge is dominated by a Western capitalistic agenda, knowledge production will serve the agenda of the dominator. In this it is suggested that neoliberalism, which is an extension of this Western consumerism, is influential in knowledge generation in academia. Driven by powerful economic forces, it is possible that these particular values permeate education systems through politics, policy, the curriculum, and public perceptions through media and other institutions, and has ramifications for epistemology. Flyvbjerg (2001) asserts that values, ethics, power, politics are inherent in epistemology. This has direct bearing on my study as I wish to understand whether particular values, ethics, power, politics are influential in doctoral students choice of theories for their doctoral studies. The following studies demonstrate how doctoral students’ theory choices may be influenced in particular ways.

An example of how student perceptions are shaped, often persuasively, is described by O’ Brien (2008). In her study of indigenous students, she asserts that universities fundamentally subscribe to a western mode of knowledge production, especially using academic language that favours influential groups to perpetuate “unequal power relationships” (O’ Brien, 2008, p. 56). She borrows from Laurillard’s (1993) and Corson (1993) to support her assertion. Laurillard’s study provides a cognitive analysis of the process of teaching and learning at higher education. According to Laurillard (1993), teaching at university is a *rhetorical activity*. It is the language of the discipline within the university system that exercises rigid control and “faithfully reproduces its own meaning which students are required to understand”. Learning at university then becomes learning of other’s worldviews, which is articulated by a lecturer to passive students. To grasp the deeper meanings, O’Brien states (2008, p. 57), a student has to penetrate the “complex linguistic barriers” and its “exclusive and distancing” nature, which is the very heart of the contention that academic language is elitist. Corson’s study (1993) which focused on language, minority education and gender, examined the concepts of power, institutional violence and academic language. Corson contends that the complex vocabulary and high lexical language of academia is status awarding to those who can imbibe the status quo, and excludes indigenous students or those who are unable to speak the dominant language. Thus, one can

extrapolate the above ideas to theorizing. For a student to be deemed successful, he or she must be able to subscribe to the rhetoric and conventions of a particular mode of knowledge production.

Gehl (2011), an indigenous American scholar, explains that creating knowledge is expected of PhD students, and that adding to the “lineage of knowledge” together with comprehensive examinations, is a criterion for obtaining a Ph.D. This entails that doctoral students have to clearly choose and decisively articulate their methodological and theoretical frameworks, which then establishes the strictures within which knowledge is generated. Using an indigenous scholar stance, she asserts that most Indigenous scholars continue to use approaches “rooted in western knowledge philosophy”. In the previous subsection, I also discussed the paradox of *constrained creativity* suggested by Backhouse (2009) that although academia may claim to allow doctoral students to produce original, creative, research it exercises great control over students’ choices.

The review of international research above, introduces several concepts that have implications for my study of how doctoral students in education make theory choices; viz., modes of knowledge production, different ideological and ontological perceptions, and sources of external control. How such influences manifest in the choices of theory made by doctoral students will be examined in the interview responses of the participants of my study.

In the next section, I interrogate doctoral research in South Africa to ascertain whether similar contentions exist. I address knowledge issues here since several important developments have occurred in South African Higher Education since the demise of apartheid in 1994, which have had a concomitant influence on knowledge production. A strong influence has been government expectations for increased research productivity and innovation, driven by a need to ensure its place in an increasingly competitive global economy (ASSAF, 2010). Research, such as the review of South African studies on postgraduate studies from 1994 to 2004 done by Balfour, Moletsane and Karlsson (2011) as part of the Project for Postgraduate Research (PPER), which is by no means an exhaustive list, gives us an idea of developments in doctoral education in South Africa, which I describe in the next subsection.

1.4.4.1 Doctoral research in South Africa

1.4.4.1.1 Some examples of Postgraduate Research generation from 1994

Since my study is located in Higher Education (HE), the following review interrogates research that specifically focused on doctoral students, including other postgraduate studies that interrogated issues of epistemology and theory in doctoral studies.

In South Africa, Balfour, Moletsane and Karlsson (2011) examined postgraduate research generation in the period 1995-2004 at higher education institutions in South Africa, a significant period as the first decade after apartheid. Using the Project for Postgraduate Research (PPER) Balfour et al. (2011) explored the role of large-scale research projects and their relation to government concerns, and other issues identified by society and the academy. Researchers like Madiya, Bengesai and Karlsson (2011) undertook a comparative analysis of postgraduate research performance of three South African higher education institutions in the period 1995 to 2004, as influenced by their geographical and social contexts. Karlsson & Pillay (2011) focus on the doctoral theses of the former UDW and Natal¹⁰ campuses in relation to the African scholarship vision that emerged in 2004 at UKZN. Goba, Balfour and Nkambule (2011) researched the scarcity of quantitative research and the predominance of qualitative research in South African postgraduate education research during the first decade of democracy. Moletsane and Madiya (2011) explored other trends in social issues like gender, violence, and HIV/AIDS within the same period. Rule, Davey and Balfour (2011) unpacked the predominance of the case study methodology in South African postgraduate research in the period 1995-2004. However, none of these studies described above interrogate issues of theory in doctoral work.

Schulze (2011) surveyed Masters and doctorate students' views on supervision at University of South Africa (UNISA) to understand the main issues that institutions and supervisors need to address. They found that postgraduate supervision at distance-education institutions have particular challenges that need to be enhanced to improve the self-efficacy and success of

¹⁰ Durban, South Africa. University of Durban-Westville (UDW) and the University of Natal were separate universities in the apartheid era. UDW, regarded as an "ethnic college" by liberals, was created to cater to the needs of the Indian population. In 2005, these campuses merged under the banner of UKZN – University of KwaZulu Natal.

students, particularly language and feedback issues, which alludes to access described earlier by O' Brien (2008) in her study of indigenous students, where she asserts that language perpetuates unequal power relationships. In another study about supervision, Bak (2011) responded to the assertions about the nature of supervisory relationships by Fataar (2005), Waghid (2007) and Hugo (2009), where Hugo suggests that students should “choose their supervisors on the authority of their academic lineage”. Bak (2011, p. 1047) concedes there are accepted strictures, conventions, and tools of academic engagement, but subscription to a particular “-ism” is risky for the new student who still has to decide on her own particular academic trajectory, and may be unable to judge the merit of the lineage. According to Bak, most academic communities function in this manner by conferring upon the recruits several opportunities and benefits if they subscribe to the academic lineage of the supervisor, which is risky in two ways. Firstly, students become “captive” to a particular set of epistemic beliefs – the “right” choice will allow one to access immense advantages, and the wrong choice will exclude one from such opportunities. Secondly, if the academic later discovers she has chosen the wrong path after all those years, emotional turmoil is bound to occur; she will also have to relinquish access to the network of opportunities like publishing and presenting, tantamount to what Bak earlier refers to as “academic excommunication” (2011, p. 1058).

Ondari-Okemwa (2011) examined knowledge production and distribution by HE institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. Existing studies reviewed by him revealed that sub-Saharan HE institutions are beset with the challenges of poor infrastructure, poor funding and budgetary allocations, the loss of qualified academics (“brain drain”) and competition in the production of knowledge. His study explored ways in which Mode 2 knowledge could be introduced to; enhance the existing Mode 1 in HE institutions in sub-Saharan Africa; identify the challenges in knowledge production; understand the impact of the HE environment on knowledge production, and explore the utility of information technology in enhancing HE knowledge production and distribution. In his study of such influences on epistemology, Ondari-Okemwa (2011, p. 1448) grants that similar factors operate in HE institutes globally, but claims that there are “unique environmental factors” of the local region that affect knowledge production. This idea is also evident in Ebersöhn's (2012) study of career resilience research and training using an indigenous knowledge perspective in educational psychology. He maintains that this perspective will

increase researchers' understandings of daily events and the more enduring habits and behavioural patterns. Ebersöhn (2012, p. 800-801) advocates the establishment of indigenized psychology as "research schemas to develop ecologically-just curricula for higher education training". Ebersöhn's questions, particular to his field of specialization (i.e. educational psychology), resonate with my own questionings about our curricula being informed by "Western understandings". He asserts that career counselling uses instruments premised on American and British understandings of career paths. He presents several thought provoking questions:

How can formal curricula and career counselling enable clients to thrive if the techniques used and the ideals aspired to, are post-colonial surplus in a transforming society? Why do we continue to train psychologists in Western-oriented notions of careers, wellness, health and illness? Why do we persist in labelling clients post-assessment in terms of categories of health and illness worded by scholars unfamiliar with a local habitus? (Ebersöhn, 2012, p. 801-802).

He continues to assert that as scholars we have become habituated to using "imported" knowledge and neglecting local knowledge. This alludes to a possibility of how local knowledge is produced in South Africa. Ebersöhn commends the attempts of several researchers in South Africa (Duncan; Stead and Watson; Ally; Eskill-Blokland; Petersen; Moletsane) who have culturally adapted Western measurement techniques or intervention strategies, but regards the efforts to develop a South African indigenous psychology still wanting.

Similarly, Maila (2012) analyzes the dominant linear knowledge creation approaches in academia and suggests a non-linear, multidisciplinary approach that admits plural knowledges, and is more open, flexible and fluid. This will also include a more reflexive teaching and learning. In presenting the idea of reflexivity, Maila makes a fleeting reference to the opportunity this will allow to "decolonize Western research methodologies" (2012, p. 1164) and a critical reflection of *North* versus *South* perspectives, but does not explain these ideas further at this point. However, it does allude to the ideas relevant to my study I

discussed earlier in this chapter, which supports the idea of rethinking education in “diverse ways of knowledge creation and ways of knowing” (Maila, 2012, p. 1163).

In the next section, I describe particular trends in HE governance and curriculum development, especially an inclination towards neo-liberal models in university governance, which may influence knowledge generation and value development in university curricula, and have possible implications for the choices doctoral studies students may make.

1.4.4.1.2 Governance, Leadership and Knowledge production

Yu & Pillay (2011, p. 1218) respond to the “perceived crisis in humanities education” by tracking enrolments and graduations in this cluster in South Africa. They suggest that the small numerical decline in the humanities observed in their study is not a crisis, but what is of particular concern is that the growth in the humanities does not concord with overall growth trends evident in higher education. According to Pillay, Yu & Esakov, (2009) three issues which concern South African academics seem to underpin this trend, viz.: a great emphasis on vocational training; the government’s accentuation of Science and Technology education at all stages; and extensive consumerism in the country. Waghid (2008, p. 23) suggests that neoliberalism’s incursion on universities perpetuates the idea that only knowledge with significant commercial value is important and those with little commercial value are de-emphasized, a situation which will eventually lead to the redundancy of such subjects in the “hierarchy of academic knowledge”. Yu & Pillay’s (2011) study emphasizes particular types of influences upon knowledge generation and value development in university curricula and has implications for the choices doctoral studies students will make.

Following Waghid’s assertion of the assail of neoliberalism in HE, I was struck by the incisiveness of Maistry’s (2012) self-reflection as middle-level manager (Head of School) at a higher education institute in his interrogation of HE management policies and practice. Maistry explains that universities have a social responsibility towards the community, and a simultaneous desire to compete globally. While suggesting that these may not necessarily be conflictual with each other, he strongly asserts that (2012, p. 515) the heedless arrogation of neo-liberal, western-performance driven models based only on economic reasoning “translates into a form of subtle

and sometimes overt ‘violence’ against and humiliation of marginalized individuals and groups within the university community”. Maistry avers that university management and administrative structures have succumbed to the neo-liberal agenda in the following ways: 1) an increasingly submissive set of managers who are influenced, and promote the neo-liberal discourse in such a way that it seems quite normal; 2) participation in global ranking systems; cumulative rationalization procedures that quantify human output visibly manifested in an escalation of staff contract positions, which are easily abused by “mercenary-like interventions especially at leadership level”; 3) performativity targets and performance management models which are usurped from a corporate environment and imposed upon the university structures as a single fit; 4) increasingly unrealistic demands of teaching, contact time with students, marking and feedback, community service and research production and publishing – the cumulative effect of all of these which dehumanizes and alienates individuals in the system (Maistry, 2012, p. 522). Another study, which resonated with Maistry’s assertions, conducted by Mashabela (2011), examined the degree to which collective decision-making in governance (called *deliberative democracy*) occurred as part of the democratic transformation agenda at University of Limpopo. Motivated by an interest in the academic freedom and autonomy granted by the Bill of Rights to higher education institutions, Mashabela asserts that globalization and marketization dictates to university governance policies, and such alignment undermines institutional autonomy and academic freedom. According to Mashabela (2011, p. 1590-1591) respondents in his study indicate that deliberative democracy is obstructed by those in university governance, and the epistemological values of “inclusion, equality, reasonableness, public process and compassion” are absent. Although both Maistry’s (2012) and Mashabela’s (2011) assertions encapsulate particular tensions of administration and management of higher education institutes, it is possible that the particular power dynamics of such a neo-liberal agenda will manifest itself in the type of knowledge that is generated at universities, since research priorities will be dictated to by university policies that come under the sway of funding agencies, donors, governments and corporates. This could have an influence on the type of research that researchers may undertake, and (to revert to the purpose of my study) may impinge on how and why doctoral students make particular theory choices and the type of knowledge they generate.

The research indicates there is a growing awareness of the importance of incorporating indigenous/alternate knowledge in research frameworks and curricula. This reverts to the point made in the introduction of the chapter, that theory and knowledge generation in Higher Education are reciprocal, and inform each other. Thus, depending on the knowledge that one is exposed to, precedents are established from which researchers make particular theory choices. Oliveira (2007, p. 16) states that every activity of a human being is governed by choices and decision-making, and the behaviour that results from that are responses to particular circumstances and contexts. The discussion of the studies hitherto presents the contexts that possibly impinge upon doctoral students' theory choices in diverse ways. In this study I wish to understand whether such contexts lead to doctoral students choosing particular theories for their studies, and whether any of the scenarios influencing choice discussed in this chapter emerge in the data.

1.4.5 Chapter Outlines

In this chapter, I introduced the idea of theory, described the focus and rationale of my study, and presented the key research questions motivating the study. I reviewed the literature to provide an annotated history of the development of theory in education, the meanings of theory as proposed by researchers in the field, the contestations about the meanings and role of theory and interrogated issues in the literature as they related to particular developments within tertiary education and post graduate knowledge generation.

The research methodology used in this study is described in *Chapter 3*. Underpinned by a qualitative framework to understand “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13) the critical questions are initially explored through interpretivist epistemological and methodological perspective, by an analysis of the participants words to obtain an understanding of the subjective world of the participant's point of view (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Coleman & Lumby, 1999). Data collection for this study was done in two ways; viz., 1) an electronic data set; and 2) a case study of five postdoctoral students from School of Education using purposive sampling. In the first level data collection I identified 98 theses in education from the library services electronic database. Out of these, 25 PhD dissertations in education from 2006 to 2012 were randomly drawn and data

assigned to specific categories. The abstracts and chapters explaining the theoretical framing of each of the 25 theses were read to produce a summary of data. The second level of data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with five participants who were drawn using the technique of *feasibility*.

Chapter Four consists of two parts. In Part One, I respond to the data derived from interviews held with five postdoctoral students whose studies were taken from a period of seven years (2006-2012) at a School of Education at a university in South Africa. Throughout the analysis of the data, an attempt is made to use the theoretical lenses provided by the psychological and cognitive models described in Chapter 2, as well as juxtapose the responses with assertions and findings made by other researchers discussed in the literature. In Part Two of this chapter, using the understandings that emerged from the data analysis, I critique the applicability of these models to the process of how doctoral students make theory choices, particularly using the *Framing Model* as the dominant framework to underpin the analysis of the data. *Framing*, which consists of how the decision-maker mentally represents the problem she faces, involves making choices or decisions that are influenced by the individual's background, context, and access to information. The data in my study, which I analyse into themes in this chapter, suggests several factors that amalgamate to possibly influence either directly or indirectly how and why doctoral students make theory choices.

In *Chapter 5*, I discuss my reasons for shifting from an interpretivist lens to a more critical view and discuss some of its salient assumptions. My initial choice of an interpretivist lens underpinned by the framing of psychological and cognitive theories was insufficient to respond to the *why* question of my study, as I observed ideas emerging from participants' responses that needed a deeper interpretation and more critical insight. I underpin my critical stance by referring to what is called the *Decolonial Turn* which includes a diverse array of positions that view *coloniality* as the problem confronting the modern world (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). To do this I briefly review the literature on Postcolonial theoretical views of Said on *Orientalism*, Gayatri Spivak on the *subaltern*, and *Southern Theory* by Connell, and *Decolonial Theory* by Quijano, Mignolo and Grosfoguel.

In *Chapter 6* I revisit selected data with a more critical gaze, allowing me to interrogate the framing of doctoral students' theory choices particularly from the standpoint of a decolonial option. The responses of participants in my study indicate an awareness of issues of Western/Eurocentric influences upon their theory choices and attempt to engage with theories to disrupt the status quo. While the participants adopt critical, feminist and postmodern perspectives, the data does suggest that for the doctoral students in my study, theoretical choices are influenced by particular background ideologies and contexts bound to the allurements of theory, particular norms and structures and a locus of enunciation cascading from the historical epistemic Northern and Western epicentre.

In my concluding *Chapter 7*, I use the metaphor of the *Geography of Reasoning* to describe the historically conceived epistemological influence originating from the core, its translocation, and a re-shifting in and from the periphery, an idea I elaborate in three features. To produce shifts in the status quo, as well as produce new understandings of phenomena that researchers are interested in, I suggest that researchers develop *epistemic dissonance*. For this to occur, universities must ask how to implement epistemic diversity and what academics can do to identify and decolonize the coloniality of power that may be present within particular disciplines. It is suggested that the *Geography of Reasoning* is shifting and that the *decolonial turn* which is making its mark in academic thought is expected to further displace the coloniality of power and dismantle the status quo through a change in consciousness.

1.5 Conclusion

The use of theory, which is regarded as a set of structured lenses or frameworks through which phenomena can be systematically analysed or explained, and deemed central to the entire research process, is not without contention. Issues relate to theory as occupying a nebulous position due to its borrowing from the natural sciences for academic legitimacy, and an inherent hegemony that entrenches the status quo. Given the position of theory in academic research in relation to knowledge production, and the contentions about the role of theory, I sought to explore and understand how doctoral students choose their focal theories for their research, and why they do so. In this chapter I discussed the rationale for my study, explained the key questions, and reviewed the literature to obtain the historical and

definitional aspects of theory and meanings of theory as proposed by researchers in the field; I also examined some of the contestations about these meanings and uses of theory; and evaluated issues in the literature as they pertained to particular developments within tertiary education and postgraduate knowledge generation, and concluded the chapter with an overview of the dissertation.

As a means to understand how and why doctoral students engage in their choice of theories, in the next chapter (Chapter 2), I examine several cognitive and psychological models of decision-making and the contentions around the use of these theories. I draw on both Beresford & Sloper (2008) and Payne & Bettman (2004) to elucidate salient features of the Information Processing Approach (the Adaptive Decision Maker Framework) and Prospect Theory (Framing theory) about how people make choices.

Chapter 2

Theories of Choice

2.1 Introduction

A review of the literature has not revealed any specific scenarios or models that illustrate *how* and *why doctoral* students in education choose particular theories for their doctoral studies. However, attempts at explaining decision-making and choice behaviour derive from a variety of theories and models. *Medical and neurophysiological* models explain particular neurological pathways and brain functions involved in decision-making (Deco & Rolls, 2006; Branco, 2005); *normative models* stipulate specific rational pathways to arrive at ideal decisions (Baron, 2004) and, *descriptive models* or psychological models explain how people's perceptions, attitudes, differences and contexts influence their choices (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Oliveira, 2007; Payne & Bettman, 2004). People make decisions all the time, knowingly or not (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). Thus every activity of a human being is governed by choice – from deciding to ignore the morning clock alarm, the clothes to wear, financial and career decisions, research decisions, and even, in some cases, whether to live or die.

Beresford & Sloper (2008) rely on the earlier work of Payne & Bettman (2004) to interrogate various psychological, behavioural and economic models and ideas of how people choose and make decisions. I draw on both Beresford & Sloper (2008) and Payne & Bettman (2004) to elucidate salient features of the Information Processing Approach and Prospect Theory in decision research. The Information-Processing Approach includes a description of the *Adaptive Decision Maker Framework*. It highlights how people choose among various alternatives when the 'best option' is not obvious, and how people use particular strategies or heuristics to make decisions. Prospect Theory explains how decisions that have risk or uncertainty are made, and features a prominent theoretical component called the *Framing Model*. A frame is a mental model that integrates information about a decision that an individual needs to make and the context that influences it. I elaborate the salient features of these models in this chapter. Although these models do not explain how doctoral students in education make theory choices *per se*, the models are used as generic explanations for doctoral students' theory choices – in

other words, how best these descriptive models can be used to understand how doctoral students choose their theories.

2.2 The Theoretical Perspectives of Choice and Decision-Making

Beresford and Sloper (2008, p. 2) regard choice as the end result of a cognitive process that entails “assessment and judgement”. Choosing can only occur when there are two or more options from which to choose. Further, the choice must have “positive value” for the chooser. In other words, each option must have something that the chooser regards as positive, which makes the evaluation of the options necessary. To have one option that is positive and the other that is obviously negative does not constitute a true choice and depends on who decides what is negative or positive, e.g., sometimes a negative is a positive over time and vice versa.

Since choice is considered a cognitive process, it explains why there is such a preponderance of psychological and cognitive theories expounding choice and decision-making. Several empirical studies in the psychological, cognitive and behavioural sciences indicate that individuals reflect similar patterns in making choices and decisions, suggesting perhaps similar cognitive skills and processes (Beresford & Sloper, 2008).

According to Oliveira (2007, p. 16), a decision which requires “judgment, expectations, and evaluation” is a response to particular circumstances or contexts, and choice and particular types of behaviour arise from that. I have used the terms *choice* and *decision-making* interchangeably. However, one could argue that *choice* is the actual execution of a decision – in other words the actual action after a decision has been made, while a *decision* means the cognitive/psychological activity before the action is executed (thinking about the choice). Nonetheless, when I use the word *decision-making*, I am referring to the individual who is actively *choosing*, in other words, *making a choice*.

2.3 Normative and Descriptive Theories of Decision-making

Decision-making theories, fall into two broad categories: normative and descriptive theories (Hansson, 1994; Oliveira, 2007). *Normative decision theories*, also called *rational theories*, are axiomatic models based on rules of how decisions *ought* to be made, how we should reason and make judgements (Over, 2004). They have pre-emptive rules that specify how decisions *should*

be made (Oliveira, 2007) so that decisions will be considered rational, in other words, what is the logic of the decision-making. According to Hoch, Kunreuther, & Gunther (2001), in a normative model several outcomes are possible, and the decision makers examine the probability of each outcome, and the decision with the highest probability of success is chosen. To arrive at the best possible utility, these are normally statistically or mathematically calculated (Over, 2004).

Normative theories are appropriate in economic, managerial and medical contexts.

Descriptive, or psychological theories, on the other hand are “concerned with people's beliefs and preferences as they are, not as they should be” (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984, p. 341). They explain how decisions *are* actually made. Psychological theories posit that there are basic principles that people utilize when facing problems in reality (Oliveira, 2007). However, in reality, people do not follow rational models when making choices – they are often faced with novel and unexpected situations, and therefore make decisions in ways that do not obey rational models of choice. Stein and Welch (1997) observe that people utilize particular types of simplifications, or filters, by which they comprehend their environments, and analyse information. This results in diverse and unique individual responses that deviate from rational models of choice. They propose that such variance is often due to the difference in people's culture, or ideology (called schemata). This suggests that rationality may not be a shared construct.

Thus, descriptive theories are more suited to understanding decision-making in social contexts. Many theories and models attempt to explain decision-making in these contexts. In the next section, I explain the main features of two prominent models, viz.: The Information-Processing Approach and Prospect Theory.

- The Information-Processing Approach includes a description of the Adaptive Decision Maker Framework. It highlights how people choose among various alternatives when the ‘best option’ is not obvious. A description of how people use particular strategies or heuristics to make decisions is discussed.
- Prospect Theory explains how decisions that have risk or uncertainty are made.

2.3.1 The Information-Processing Approach

Payne and Bettman (2004) refer to the seminal concept of the *notion of bounded rationality* underpinning this approach. This notion, which originates from Simon in 1955, initially centred on the role of cognition in decision-making, and proposes that human beings are constrained or “bounded” by particular circumstances or contexts in the environment as well as in their minds (capacity for thought, memory span, etc.), which impels their behaviour in particular ways. The approach has become broader and has included emotional and other social mechanisms in decision-making.

Beresford & Sloper (2008, p. 3) summarize the main assumptions of The Information-Processing Approach as follows: obtaining and processing information has cognitive and/or emotional implications; individuals do not bring predetermined solutions to a decision-making situation, but most often construct beliefs and preferences through the process of decision-making almost immediately; to process information we rely on many different types of simplification mechanisms called *heuristics* and the type of problem determines which heuristics are chosen; and people are largely attentive to particular information and how they use it. A model, called the Adaptive Decision-Maker Framework, introduced by Payne & Bettman (2004) can be used to understand this.

2.3.1.1 The Adaptive Decision-Maker Framework (ADMF)

The Adaptive Decision-Maker Framework is an example of the Information Processing Approach to decision-making (Payne & Bettman, 2004). This framework assumes that an individual’s decision-making involves the minimizing of cognitive effort and the use of various information-processing strategies. In the context of multiple outcomes of a decision, people do make decisions that are “adaptive and intelligent” although these decisions may not always be optimal (Payne & Bettman, 2004, p. 116). The Adaptive Decision-Maker model explains how persons decide between various conflicting choices, especially when no single choice has prominent qualities that would make choosing easy. Decisions in this category, known as preferential choice problems, are made after seeking a solution through acquiring information about the alternatives, and then evaluating them. The decisions made are based on how desirable the features of the option are to the individual, the certainty of actually achieving the attribute

value, and how willing the individual is to lose or gain one feature of the choice for another (Payne & Bettman, 2004).

Beresford & Sloper (2008) state that a person may use various *heuristics* in deciding on which option to choose from a choice problem that may have many attributes. Heuristics refer to simplification mechanisms that we use to select and process information. Different individuals will use different strategies based on how important that choice-making situation is to that person. The following heuristics have been identified:

- **Lexographic strategy (LEX):** Individuals locate the option with the greatest value on the most significant characteristic (Payne & Bettman, 2004). People who choose in this way are highly selective in the information used to make their choice. LEX is often used within bounded or constrained contexts, e.g. restrictions in the environment, costs, and cognition, like limited memory (Gigerenzer, 2004). Thus the LEX heuristic strategy may be an adaptive response used by an individual who wants to save cognitive effort while simultaneously choosing the best option, which Gigerenzer (2004) calls the “fast and frugal heuristic”, because the problem may be solved in a relatively short time and frugal because it needs little information. In terms of accuracy, using heuristics may not produce the optimal decision but they are quick and reasonable. However, if there many important attributes associated with multiple choices, the LEX strategy is less likely to lead to a high quality decision and could lead to errors of judgment (Payne & Bettman, 2004).

- **Satisficing Strategy for Decisions (SAT):** The characteristics of the choices are considered in relation to a fixed cutoff limit. If the feature or attribute does not meet the required cutoff limit, the choice is excluded and the next choice is deliberated. Deliberation upon each option occurs in this way, until a suitable alternative is identified. The maximal alternative is not usually chosen because the individual often stops at the first option that passes the cut-off level. This saves a large amount of time and information processing. However if the options do not pass the cut-off points, then the levels are decreased and the process repeated (Payne & Bettman, 2004).

- **Elimination by Aspects (EBA):** This heuristic uses both the elements of LEX and SAT. EBA excludes the choices that fail to achieve the lowest requirements, or preferred characteristic. This process of elimination is repeated for the next most important characteristic and proceeds

until only one choice remains. EBA, though, does not utilize all pertinent information, and if the sequence of the characteristics concur with the chooser's key values, then this heuristic becomes pertinent. However, the accuracy of the decision may be negatively affected by selectively attending to irrelevant attributes (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Payne & Bettman, 2004).

According to Beresford & Sloper (2008), decision-makers may also combine various strategies of choice. This may involve a preliminary broad viewing of the options, where some are excluded, and subsequently a second stage, where a detailed analysis of the remaining choices is done. Using heuristics does result in accurate choices with significant reduction in cognition. However, the same heuristic will not apply to all contexts and circumstances, consequently people use many types of heuristics. In the case of time constraints, the simple LEX rule is frequently the most efficient for accuracy of choice. In other words, it is most efficient to study some, although partial information about each choice, if one is compelled by time constraints, than to examine only a few choices in detail and neglect the rest (Beresford & Sloper, 2008).

Where decisions have to be made quickly without much information, people often rely on many types of heuristics to choose (Goldstein, 2004), some of which are described in the following paragraphs.

- **The recognition heuristic:** When people are deciding between options, where one option is recognized and the other is not, it is more likely that people will choose the option they recognized. For example, Gigerenzer (2004) demonstrates in an experiment where American and German students were asked to choose whether San Diego or San Antonio, had a higher population. One hundred percent of the German students, who were less knowledgeable about American cities, chose San Diego (the correct answer) while only 66% of the American students had the correct answer. This is because the German students were more likely to have heard of San Diego than San Antonio and therefore recognized it; the Americans knew of both cities and therefore had actually too much information. According to Gigerenzer (2004), the recognition heuristic is expedient in situations where recognition and criterion correlate strongly with each other. The recognition heuristic rule may be stated as follows:

“If one of two objects is recognized and the other is not, then infer that the recognized object has the higher value with respect to the criterion” (Gigerenzer, 2004, p. 68).

The recognition heuristic relies on the human ability for recognizing characteristics like faces, voices, names and even fragrances. For example, a child is able to recognize the face of familiar adults. Note that the capacity for recognition in such contexts the principle of “less is more” operates – in other words, it emerges that groups with more knowledge “make worse inferences than less knowledgeable groups in a given domain” (Gigerenzer, 2004, p. 71).

• **The social heuristic:** The human ability for social learning and imitation underpins the use of the social heuristic. Doing what the majority of one’s peer group does is an example of social heuristics (Gigerenzer, 2004; Beresford & Sloper, 2008). This is visible in decisions where high school graduates may decide to further their studies at university because the majority of the peer group is doing so, or teenagers choose to embrace particular fashion trends¹¹, or individuals think about getting married at a certain age because many others in one’s social group are doing so. Gigerenzer (2004, p. 73) suggests that following the majority in one’s social group is a “most frugal” heuristic, because one does not have to deliberate about its advantages and disadvantages. Following the majority seems “ecologically rational” when the environment of the observer and the peers are similar and stable, as well as where the immediate consequences of one’s decisions are unclear (Gigerenzer, 2004, p. 73).

• **Heuristics based on reasons:** When a decision cannot be made on recognition alone, or when individuals have too much information to make a quick decision, then another array of heuristics operates – individuals look for reasons to act (Beresford & Sloper, 2008). In this regard, Gigerenzer (2004) identifies two strategies, viz., “Take the Best” (TTB), and “Tallying” heuristics. With the first strategy, people will not methodically add all the cues, but instead use a simple weighting based “one-reason decision-making” to search cues in order (the “take the best” heuristic). In the second strategy, people do not use weighting but add the cues until they reach a limit (the “tallying” heuristic). Three building blocks characterize the use of each of these strategies: searching, stopping, and making the choice.

In the *Take the Best (TTB)* scenario, using the one-reason stopping rule, the individual will begin to use a series of steps, which Gigerenzer (2004) describes as follows: 1) Search first for the cues with the highest validity; 2) Once an object with the positive value is identified, the search is stopped and proceeds to Step 3. If not, the cue is excluded, and the search for the next most

¹¹ My examples

valid cue continues. If cues are not found, then one can guess; 3) Decision-making based on One-reason, then takes place. The most suitable option is the one with the “positive cue value” and therefore chosen.

Using the information given in the text by Gigerenzer (2004), I created a diagram to represent this TTB process as shown in the following:

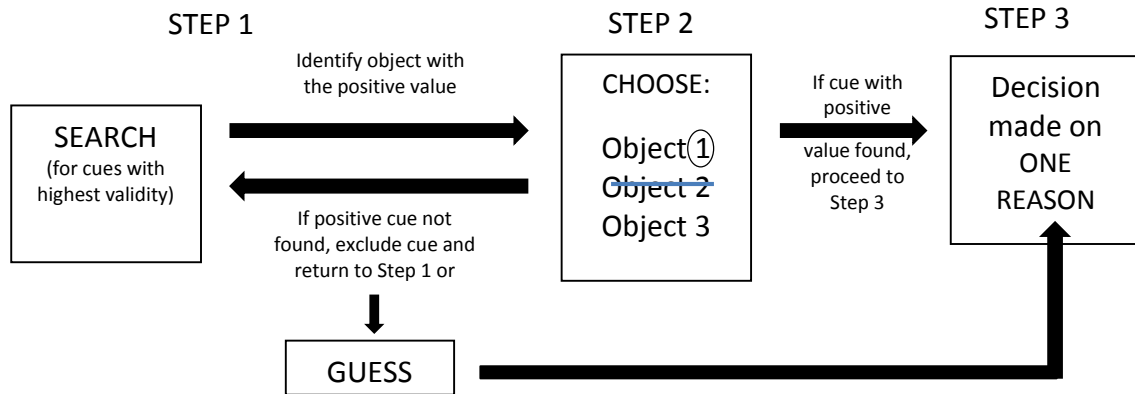


Figure 2.1. “Take the Best” (TTB) heuristic of decision-making using reasons. Based on Gigerenzer (2004, p. 74)

The word “object” in the above diagram refers to the range of targets amongst which the individual has to make a choice; it could be a physical product or a decision that may be more intangible, e.g., decision about committing to a particular lifestyle path, or amongst values, and so forth. In the *Tallying* heuristic scenario, the steps are as follows: 1) Conduct a random search through cues, and identify the object with the “most positive cue values”; 2) Once this is identified, the search is stopped and proceeds to Step 3. If the number of cue values is similar, then one returns to Step 1 and looks for another cue. If these are not obtained, then one can guess; 3) Exercise the “tallying rule” - choose the object most “positive cue values”.

Using the above description given by Gigerenzer’s (2004, p. 74), I also attempted to create a diagram of the “Tallying” heuristic.

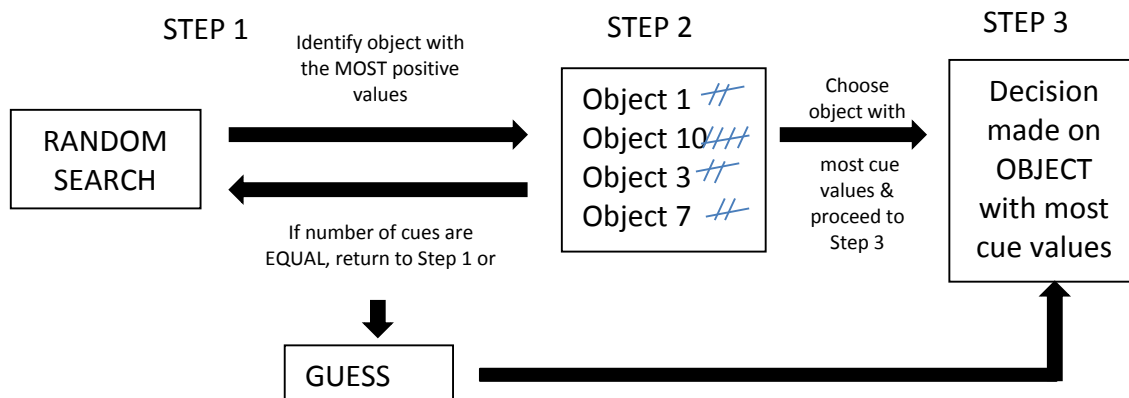


Figure 2.2. “Tallying” heuristic of decision-making using reasons. Based on Gigerenzer (2004, p. 74)

Heuristic studies thus suggest that it is not in all cases where access to more information and more choices will always make for better decisions or choices. Shanteau (cited in Gigerenzer, 2004) states that experts are able to use very little information to make judgements. This also relates to the assertion by Flyvbjerg (2001) that intuition and experience are highly significant factors in making choices. An important consideration is that most people do not consciously choose which heuristic they will use – they automatically and unconsciously use heuristics according to the context or circumstances they find themselves in (Gigerenzer, 2004).

Phillips, Klein & Sieck (2004) suggest that people choose the most workable course of action rather than the best or optimal decision. Referring to the original concept of “satisficing” presented by Simon in 1957, they explain that in contexts where time constraints require quick decisions, the individual does not engage in maximizing her choice. In other words, the choice does not have to be the best one – it needs only to be satisfying.

Beresford & Sloper (2008) summarize their observations about decision-making as follows: the more alternatives people are faced with the more varied will their information processing be. Individuals have a wide selection of heuristics, and sometimes strategize beforehand how to solve a problem, and other times have no real conscious decision about any strategy. As people learn more about the decision during the course of solving a problem, they may adjust their thinking opportunistically. If decision accuracy is more important than time constraints, then cognitive effort is prioritized. By adjusting strategies in response to time constraints, better decision-making is produced, however, errors in judgement can result from making decisions too soon or too late. The difference in values will determine whether the individual is satisfied with

the decision that was made. Sometimes due to time constraints and cognitive demands of the decision, individuals may compromise their original decision quality. However, I suggest that the models proposed above still point to a positivist explanation of how decisions are made. My observation from the data (as I will discuss later in more detail) is that there are diverse sets of decision scenarios that confront humans and certain life-changing decisions are not executed quickly. It could take years to make a decision and could present deep conflict for the individual who is making choices.

What can be conceded is that a Heuristics model provides a practical way to implement decisions one may encounter in one's daily living – decisions that are not exceptionally complex and needing quick responses. Heuristics are also useful for decisions made in clinical or managerial contexts. For example, Gigerenzer (2004) describes how the University of Michigan Hospital uses a heuristic decision tree in clinical care.

Fast and frugal tree: coronary care unit decisions

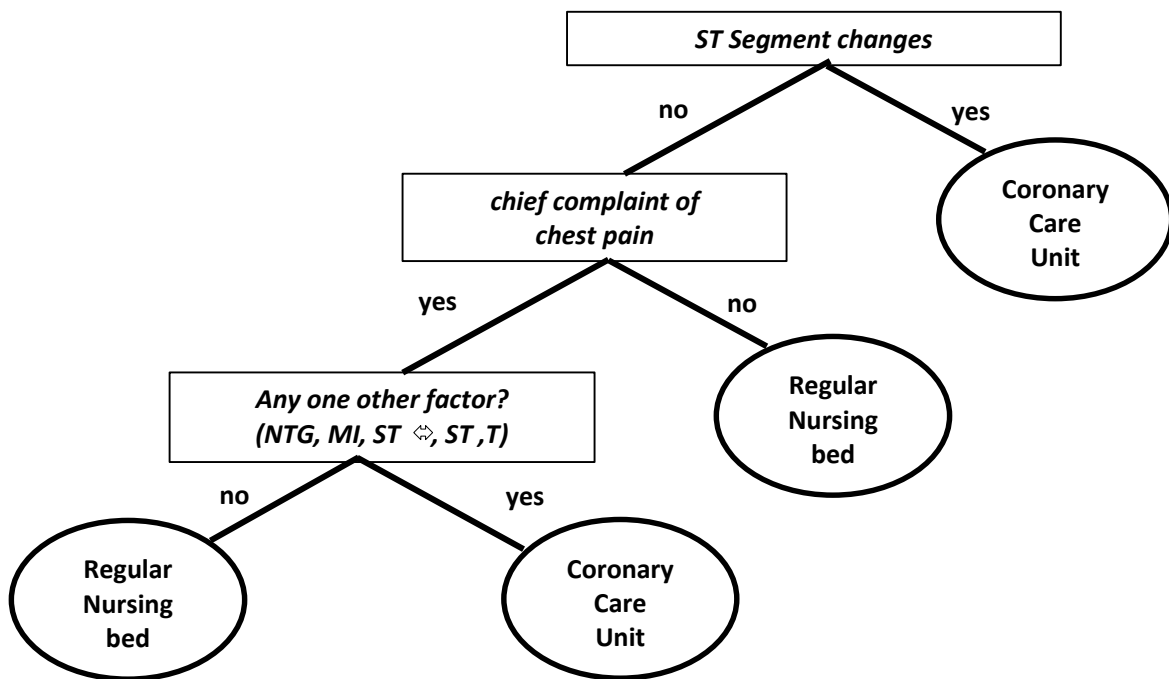


Figure 2.3. A heuristic for coronary care unit allocation. Gigerenzer (2004). Based on Green & Mehr (1997)

This is especially suitable in organizations and institutes that delineate specific processes to facilitate their administration and management or when quick decisions have to be made in an emergency; in such decisions, time is of the essence as long deliberations may have detrimental consequences. The decision tree above represents the process when detecting an anomaly in a patient's electrocardiogram. The decision tree indicates the process to be followed, and facilitates quick decisions, addresses the correct procedures without wasting time and money, and most importantly focuses on saving a person's life. In the above decision tree, the pathways for patient care are clearly marked depending on what symptoms the patient presents. If the patient presents symptoms that indicate a possible risk of heart attack (or already had a heart attack) the patient is directed to high end treatment immediately, or if the symptoms do not indicate heart attack risk the patient is directed to regular care for observation and tests.

The idea of a decision tree like the one presented above, could be used to analyse the processes by which doctoral students make their theory choices for their doctoral studies. In relation to the coronary care model above, Beresford & Sloper, (2008) ask a few questions, which I adapt here in relation to doctoral students theory choices: What were the prompts that they used? How much information did they have? To what extent did they really use this information in making their theory choices? What information was of most significance? Given the permutation of factors that emerge from the data about the how doctoral students make decisions about theory choices, it is difficult to suggest a model that could signal a pathway that students should follow to make choices. What could be developed is a schematic representation of a possible pathway that doctoral students can follow as a guide once they register, a possibility I examine in my discussion chapter.

The Adaptive Decision Maker Framework, as an example of the Information-Processing Theory, postulated by Payne & Bettman (2004), has been developed to understand how people make decisions in the context of multiple outcomes. Another theory, called Prospect Theory, describes how people make decisions based on their perception of loss or gain, claiming that not all decisions are made on risk aversion; people perceive loss or gain according to contexts or points of reference. These theories introduce the idea that decision-making is dichotomized into different levels where decisions are often quickly executed on a more automatic, intuitive level

and other decisions that are subjected to more deliberative process that appears rational, and may take longer to conclude, which introduces the idea of a dual process thinking framework.

2.3.1.2 Dual Process thinking

The descriptions of the preceding models illustrates that decision-making is often dichotomized into a *two-systems* framework with heuristic, intuitive and affective processes on one hand, and more deliberative, cognitive processes and rational processes on the other. Beresford & Sloper (2008, p. 3) introduce the idea of System 1 and System 2 thinking that “can be conceived as being on a continuum – intuitive, relatively unconscious (System 1) through to analytic, controllable, conscious (System 2)”. This dual process describes System 1 thinking as *intuitive* and System 2 thinking as *analytical*.

Payne & Bettman (2008) describe System 1 thinking as that which occurs automatically, operates on an unconscious level and is intuitive. Related to the *affect* heuristic, it is influenced by context (like time pressure), rapidly deployed, executed quite effortlessly with a feeling of conviction or certainty, and not dependent on language. System 2 thinking, on the other hand, is deliberate and rule-based, consciously executed, and regulated. Limited by working memory, System 2 thinking is language and age dependent, and has less of an emotional content associated with it. This analytic thinking, which is related to higher-level cognitive decision-making, is the focus for most decision research. Hogarth (2001) states that there is an increasing awareness, however, that System 1 thinking is more influential on choices than previously acknowledged. Most people rely on System 1 thinking to make decisions, which is often executed immediately. However, in the case of unique scenarios or those needing greater deliberation, System 2 becomes deployed to confirm or disconfirm the correctness or incorrectness of System 1 thinking and adjust it if necessary (Cobos, Almaraz, & García-Madruga, 2003), a discerning ability which Hogarth (2001) feels is a symptom of intelligence. Although a tendency exists to dichotomize thinking into these two systems, Price & Norman (2008, p. 2) suggest that a large amount of ambiguity exists about how to “map the System 1/System 2 axis and the notion of intuitive processing onto the distinction between conscious and non-conscious processes”. They also suggest that there are moves to find a compromise between the two extremes. This has implications for how people choose as this suggests that decision-

making will interplay between processes that are both conscious and unconscious. In this regard, Strle (2012) introduce the concept of *metacognition*.

Metacognition may be described as an individual's ability to be self-reflective about her own thinking, that is, "cognition about cognition or thinking about thinking" (Strle, 2012, p. 285). Strle asserts that individuals have conscious awareness about their own cognition and behaviours that arises from their *metacognitive feelings* and their common understanding about their own minds. According to Fletcher & Carruthers (2012), individuals have some capacity to evaluate and manage a few of the cognitive systems contained in making decisions and logical thought. An individual may therefore reflect upon her own reasoning, whether the reasoning is logical or appropriate, or one can evaluate whether one's own thinking is being influenced by some external factors – in other words – thinking about how one is thinking. Individuals then use this information for making judgments and directing behaviour and decision-making processes. It involves a type of monitoring and assessment of one's own thoughts which mediate putting them into action or not, in other words, exerting a form of *metacognitive* control. According to Kahneman (2003) people mostly accede to their intuitive choices, but modify them inaccurately and inadequately, due to what he calls "natural assessments". These are impressions that are formed unconsciously about the phenomena and thoughts we identify (Strle, 2012). This gives rise to the question as to why individuals generally accept their intuitive choice, which are already framed or induced by these impressions, and not adjust them by "a more deliberate analysis of the problem, situation, choice options" (Strle, 2012, p. 289). The dominant view of metacognitive researchers is that an individual's metacognition pervades the intuitive process, and therefore this awareness, this consciousness, that is part of the intuitive processes, are vital determinants of how choices are made. To the claim that System 2 thinking is always rational, Fletcher & Caruthers (2012, p.1367) propose that System 2 reasoning is also dependent "in part on one's beliefs about norms of reasoning, and so will only be as rational as one's beliefs are". Given the claim by dual-system theorists that System 2 is deployed for intentional control and to override ineffective reasoning of System 1 thinking, it would be expected that one should be able to predict with certainty that people will engage in meta-reasoning to produce competent decision-making since they will be able to access normative standards provided by System 2 thinking. According to Fletcher et al. (2012) however, this is not the case.

In their study, Fletcher et al. (2012) examined psychological evidence pertaining to people's capability to meta-represent and govern their own abilities to reasoning, and make decisions. They found that the tendency for self-reflection is highly reliant on features of one's personality, as some individuals are more 'reflective'— that is, are more inclined to be more measured and thoughtful about the appropriateness of their initial responses before a conclusive decision. They also found that reflective reasoning is highly reliant on learning, particularly on how much exposure and training the individual has had in systematic or normative methods of decision-making. In other words, for people to be successful at monitoring their own reasoning they must learn the appropriate reasoning norms, only then can they assess the deficiencies in their reasoning. This systematic scrutiny of one's personal reasoning, "may be, to a large extent, a learned skill, acquired from one's culture through explicit instruction, rather than anything resembling an innate endowment" (Fletcher et al., 2012, p. 1369). According to Fletcher et al. (2012) people use a wide variety of idiosyncratic techniques to make decisions, and that an individuals' meta-reasoning is informed by a miscellaneous potpourri of "self-management strategies" attained from their own cultural backgrounds or through personal experience. In this regard, I found the model of Framing as included in Prospect Theory a more suitable theoretical lens from which to interpret my data. In the following section, I will describe Prospect Theory as the background and thereafter describe the model of Framing.

2.3.2 Prospect theory

Beresford & Sloper (2008) regard Prospect Theory as one of best descriptive models of risky decision-making. The theory, which owes its origin in 1979, to two economists, Kahneman and Tversky, received the Nobel Prize in Economics due to its major impact on economics and the social sciences. Prospect Theory challenged the existing idea that decision makers are always rational and seek maximum utility. This theory has been widely used in diverse fields and disciplines to understand decision-making. In terms of the model's applicability, while the economists have been attempting to improve its mathematical aspects, the psychologists have tried to improve its utility as a tool to understand factors of cognition, personality and motivation in decision-making (Beresford & Sloper, 2008). Prospect Theory also relies on mathematical principles to explain risky decision-making or gamble outcomes as evaluated by its value function, i.e., loss aversion and gains. In my study, I will not be using mathematical and

statistical models to analyse the doctoral students' theory choices as these models are beyond the scope of this study. I will use the descriptive principles of Prospect theory that explain how people make choices that involve risk.

Earlier ideas about decisions posited that people were only risk averse, that is, they will only make decisions by choosing the least risky option. Prospect Theory asserts that individuals are both "risk seeking and risk averse" (Beresford & Sloper, 2008, p. 15), and choices of options are made by how people perceive the outcome in terms of loss or gain, or whether in a specific context, they seek risk or be averse to risk. In other words, the psychological valuation of outcomes is dependent on whether the individual regards the outcomes as gains relative to some benchmark.

Beresford & Sloper (2008, p. 16) summarize some of the main research findings in this regard:

Degree of Loss: people will consider the degree of loss more when choosing. The perception of the degree of gains and losses are context dependent, e.g., for someone who has very little money, losing one thousand rands¹² is a large loss, but for someone who has millions, even losing one hundred thousand rands is not serious. People would rather choose a safe bet (definite outcome) than an uncertainty even if it could provide them with a higher return. To avoid loss, people prefer reverting to the status quo.

Point of reference: people use a point of reference from which to evaluate their losses or gains of a particular choice of action, e.g., when choosing a car, someone with a low income may use cost of the vehicle and fuel economy as a point of reference. Points of reference are also influenced by the person's beliefs and values; e.g., someone who supports animal anti-cruelty will not buy a particular perfume if she knows it was tested on animals.

Manipulation of Information: People's perception, and hence decisions can be influenced by manipulating related information, e.g., telling people they have an 80% chance of success instead of saying they have a 20% chance of loss.

Using the concept of risky decision-making, I attempted to understand whether doctoral students perceived inherent factors of risk in the process of choosing their theories, and if so, what was

¹² South African currency

viewed as risk; and how the idea of risk impinged upon their choice of theory. In other words, did the above factors of degree of loss, points of reference or even manipulation of information, feature in their choices of particular theories in their doctoral studies?

One of the significant ideas to emerge from Prospect Theory is that when people are confronted with a decision problem, they mentally configure or represent it in particular ways, which is explained by the concept of *framing*.

2.3.2.1. Framing

The concept of a “frame” originated in the cognitive sciences and artificial intelligence studies (Soman, 2004). Soman describes a *frame* as a mental model of a decision problem, which incorporates information about the decision problem and its context. Information from a specific problem may be the identical, but perception, organization, and interpretation by different individuals will vary and solutions may be reached differently in diverse contexts. Soman (2004) suggests that people with the identical personal or context specific mental model may be cognitively processing the same stimulus differently. The most important aspect of the decision-making is how it is mentally represented — “importantly, the true objects of evaluation and choice are not real objects, nor their verbal descriptions; but rather their mental representations” (Soman, 2004, p. 380).

Beresford & Sloper (2008) also assert that the manner in which relevant information is perceived and processed, is crucial to how individuals make decisions. Beresford & Sloper (2008, p. 17) adapts Soman’s model (2004)¹³ as shown in the following diagram:

¹³ The white blocks are Soman’s (2004) original model, and the grey blocks indicate Beresford & Sloper (2008) adaptation of the model

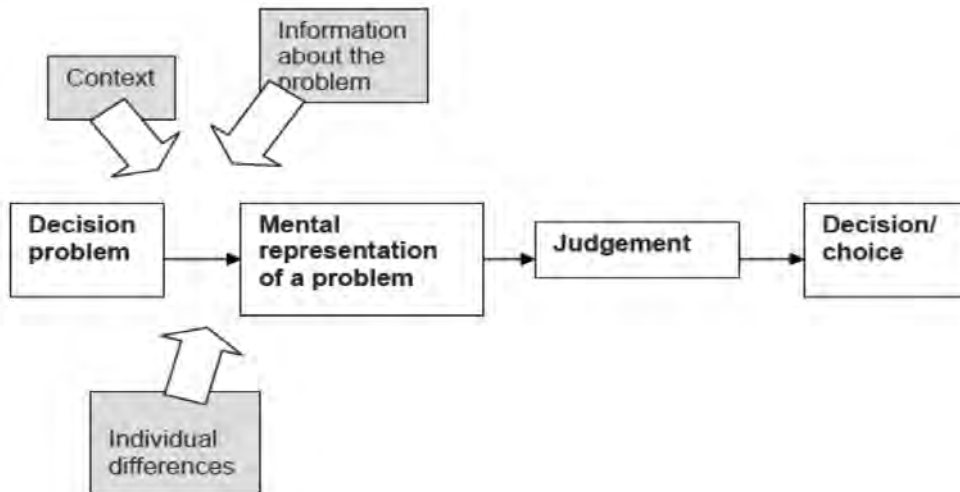


Figure 2.4. The role of mental representation in decision-making (Beresford & Sloper, 2008, p. 17)

The model shows the mental representation (framing) of a decision problem by an individual. The decision is influenced by the amount of *information* available, the *context* and the *individual differences*. The amount of *information* the individual has, sheds light upon the decision to be made, however, the earlier discussion on too much or too little information bears relevance here. The *context* of the decision problem includes factors like urgency of the decision and emotional factors. *Individual differences* refer to the diverse qualities that people have, cognitive capacity, and how they perceive, organize and interpret information, which means that the decision outcomes (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Soman, 2004) will also differ. According to Schoemaker & Russo (2001), an individual's previous experience, habits, or patterns, and the tendency to simplify the decision process, impinges upon one's actual mental representation or framing. Framing occurs spontaneously and subconsciously, but can be manipulated by both the individual herself or others. This could happen due to the power implications of the context in which the choice occurs. For example, if the person who is presenting the options is viewed as the authority, holds more information or is a professional person, her word can influence the decision outcome; thus depending on how one presents the decision outcomes, especially in relation to loss or gain, individuals will choose differently (Beresford & Sloper, 2008). This has implications for the theoretical choices made by doctoral students, as students find themselves in relationships under institutional or supervisor power.

Beresford & Sloper (2008) point out that the decision-making process as explained by Prospect theorists, seems to be similar to the use of heuristics as explained by the Information processing approach, in that people may consider the options simultaneously, or compare them, or weigh them up in sequence. However, the use of heuristics is often employed when quick decisions have to be made, and given the intense and long duration of a doctoral study, heuristics may not have the same applicability to doctoral students' theory choices. To conclude this chapter, I discuss some of the limitations of the theories mentioned in this section and summarize the main ideas presented.

2.4 Conclusion

Although the ADMF provides useful insights into individual decision-making behaviour, the focus is more on the components of cognitive effort. One must recognize that, besides cognitive effort and maximizing the quality of decisions, the role of emotion in decision-making is also an important component – decisions also involve reducing the experience of negative emotion during decision-making, as well as justifying the choice to oneself, and to others, after the choice has been made. According to Beresford & Sloper (2008), both cognition and emotions are components of information processing, but have different functions. Emotions signal the types of choices that may be made. When people are faced with choices, they have feelings about those choices, as well as an expectation of what feelings their choices may bring. Anticipation of positive or negative results or feelings from the impending choices affects the decision in particular ways, and are especially prominent in situations where information is lacking, and uncertainty. Emotions help the decision maker to prioritize amongst the many options available and in this way decrease the large volumes of information that would otherwise have to be processed. Additionally, the role of social and other background factors like race, gender, personality and other factors are not prominent in the ADMF model. Further, the use of heuristics seem to be applicable when the individual is faced with making quick decisions from multi-options; however given the protracted nature of the doctoral process, at least the minimum of a year before a student has developed her proposal, it will be interesting to see whether doctoral students apply a heuristic method to choosing their theories.

A further critique is that the studies and research into choice and decision-making are often contrived situations – they consist of tasks and experiments developed by the researcher to assess how people make choices; thus, they do not represent real life scenarios in which people make decisions. The making of decisions in real life is dissimilar to the kinds of choice tasks set up in experiments. According to Strle (2012), the experimental choice scenarios are simple, and participants are normally presented with alternatives, from which they have to make a choice. The experiment is an artificial condition that is empty of social, emotional, and actual physical contexts. Thus, the participant is not reliant on making choices *in situ* as real life situations would demand. Strle (2012) advocates long-term studies of decision-making, which he feels would be more revealing of how decisions are made.

In this chapter I drew on the theoretical perspectives of choice and decision-making as described by both Beresford & Sloper (2008) and Payne & Bettman (2004) to elucidate salient features of two prominent decision theories, viz.: the Information-Processing Approach and Prospect Theory. In particular, the Adaptive Decision-maker framework and Framing were described as respective models of these theories. I indicated that I found the *Framing Model* more useful as a tool to understand how doctoral students make decisions about their theory choices. In Chapter Four, I use the information provided by the above models, specifically the *Framing Model*, to analyse the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the doctoral students in an attempt to understand how and why doctoral students make particular theory choices. In the next chapter, Chapter 3 the research methodology employed in the study is described.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the questions of research methodology and method, the research design, data collection and the data analysis used in this study, are addressed. In my study *Exploring Doctoral Students' Theory Choices*, I attempted to answer the following critical questions: 1) how do doctoral students choose their focal theories for their doctoral studies in Education, and 2) why were these theories chosen. To do this I adopted a qualitative framework to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). The qualitative framework allowed me to understand “the meaning people have constructed”, and “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). To investigate the critical questions of my study, I initially adopted the interpretivist epistemological and methodological perspective. Terre Blanche & Durrheim (2006, p. 7) assert that reality, for a person is comprised of one’s individual experiences, and the researcher may adopt an “interactional epistemological stance toward that reality”. Interpretivism encompasses discovering meaning of participants by an analysis of their words, providing “relativist or phenomenological” meanings (Coleman & Lumby, 1999) and therefore provided me with a perspective to understand the subjective world of the participant’s point of view (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Data collection for this study was done in two ways; viz., 1) an electronic data set; and 2) a case study of five postdoctoral students from School of Education using purposive sampling. In the first level data collection I identified 98 theses in education from the library services electronic database. Out of these, 25 PHD dissertations in education from 2006 to 2012 were randomly drawn and data assigned to specific categories. The categories listed were determined by reading the title pages of the theses, the abstracts and foci of the studies. The abstracts and chapters explaining the theoretical framing (usually chapter 2 or 3) of the 25 theses were read to produce a summary of data (see Appendix A). The second level of data collection involved conducting

semi-structured interviews with five participants who were drawn using the technique of *feasibility*.

3.2 The Qualitative study

Several definitions of qualitative research abound in the literature. Denzin & Lincoln (2005, p. 3) state that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.” Merriam (2009, p. 13) regards the purpose of qualitative research as “understanding the meaning people have constructed”, in other words “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world”. Parkinson & Drislane (2011) consider qualitative research that uses methods that produce narrative, descriptive accounts of different contexts and phenomena. Qualitative researchers typically reject positivism. Strauss & Corbin (1990, p.17) define qualitative research, as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification”. A variety of data collection and analysis methods and a range of theoretical and epistemological positions characterize qualitative research.

In contrast to quantitative researchers whose goals of research are to determine cause and effect, to predict and to generalize results, qualitative researchers seek to understand particular phenomena as they occur in specific social contexts. Schwandt (2001) states that quantitative research analyzes data in numerical and statistical form, whereas qualitative research is concerned with analyzing data as it appears in text (from interviews, documents, audio, video, etc.) characterized mostly by narrative descriptions which inform the researcher’s understanding of social or cultural phenomena being studied. Qualitative research is not bound to an analysis of numerical data, and allows a researcher to include a wider ambit of research techniques and theoretical and epistemological perspectives. Qualitative research allows an understanding of the life experiences of individuals, and the world from the individual’s perspective – in this study, an attempt was made to understand how and why postdoctoral students have made particular choices in the focal theories of their doctoral studies.

Pascale (2011, p. 4) describes *epistemology* as a branch of philosophy that questions how the world can be known. It “concerns the nature, sources and limits of knowledge” and includes “issues of belief, assertions and propositions “of how the world can be understood. Flyvbjerg (2001) asserts that values, ethics, power, politics are inherent in epistemology and indivisible from knowledge generation. *Methodology* is defined by Schwandt (2001, p. 161) as the “analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry”. Methodology articulates how the research will follow; it does not refer to the actual method itself, but offers an explanation for the use of specific methods to collect data (Carter & Miles, 2007). *Method*, according to Carter & Miles (2007, p. 1317) can be thought of as “research in action” – that is the actual tools, procedures and strategies used to elicit data. Method is therefore, the application or the operational aspects of research, viz., sampling, collection of data, management of data, analysis, and writing. The research design could also refer to the overall, logical framework of the enquiry and is also linked to paradigmatic orientation.

In this study, the data collection occurred from the following angles: 1) first level analysis of Doctoral theses (accessed from an electronic database) over the last five years submitted in the School of education at a South African university where my study is located; 2) semi-structured interviews with five graduate doctoral students.

3.3 Key questions of the study

The study asks the following questions:

- *How* do doctoral students choose their focal theories for their doctoral studies in Education?
- *Why* were these theories chosen?

3.4 Research design and methodology

Research design refers to the overall systematic plan of how the research is to be executed and how the data will be collected and analyzed. Research design refers to the “logical structure of the inquiry. It articulates what data is required, from whom, and how it is going to answer the research question” (Jalil, 2013). The research design includes explaining the purpose of the

research, stating the research questions, and describing how information will be obtained (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

To investigate the critical questions of my study, I initially adopted the interpretivist epistemological and methodological perspective. Interpretivism encompasses discovering meaning of participants by an analysis of their words, providing “relativist or phenomenological” meanings (Coleman & Lumby, 1999), and allows hermeneutic discovery of meaning from texts (Neuman, 1997). The interpretivist perspective would allow me to understand the subjective world of the participant’s point of view that Terre Blanche & Durrheim (2006), and Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2001, 2011) describe. Lichtman (2006, p. 12) states that it is through the “eyes and ears” of the researcher “that data are collected, information is gathered, settings are viewed, and realities are constructed”. Therefore as a qualitative researcher using an interpretivist stance, I have attempted to include an understanding of the world from the participant’s perspective.

3.5 Establishing Trustworthiness in the study

Researchers engaged in quantitative research or those of a positivist stance often question the rigour of qualitative studies (Shenton, 2004). The models used to appraise quantitative research, however, rarely apply to qualitative research (Krefting, 1991). Since quantitative and qualitative research differ in terms of their nature and purpose, it would be untenable to use the identical criteria to evaluate the value both types of research. Terms like *reliability* and *validity* are more frequently applicable to quantitative or positivist research than qualitative research (Shenton, 2004; Krefting, 1991). The term *trustworthiness* of qualitative research is therefore used, which is composed of the following aspects: credibility (instead of internal validity), transferability (instead of external validity/generalisability), dependability (instead of reliability), and confirmability (instead of objectivity). These concepts are derived from Shenton (2004) and I describe how they have been used in my study to implement trustworthiness, in the following paragraphs.

Credibility deals with the question of how congruent the findings of the research are with reality (Shenton, 2004). Credibility is also determined by the use of well-established research methods.

In my study, I engaged in a two level data collection, viz., an electronic data set, and the case study of five participants, in which semi-structured interviews were used to elicit data. Another aspect of credibility, ethics notwithstanding, is the proviso that participation of those approached is voluntary, and the participant has a right to withdraw from the research. Shenton (2004) further suggests that types of questioning and data gathering methods can be modelled on other successful research to increase its effectiveness and hence credibility. Credibility is also established by iterative questioning in the interview itself (probing, prompting, seeking clarification) not only to allow the researcher to elicit deeper information but also to locate discrepancies in participants' responses, a process that I conducted in my interview. Since my study concerning doctoral students' theory choices had no exemplar, I relied on reviewing the literature to construct a set of interview questions. The merit of these questions were discussed with my supervisors and restructured according to their suggestions for improvement. Once the interview schedule was satisfactorily completed, I conducted the pilot interview to determine its efficacy. In my study, I attempted to establish credibility by piloting the questionnaire and requesting feedback from the participant in the pilot study to determine the appropriateness of the interview questions and other aspects of the interview situation (see Section 3.6.4.4 below).

There are further ways in which *validity*, i.e. trustworthiness was established. In trying to establish just how factual the accounts of the participants were, I had no cause to doubt the responses of the participants. The participants themselves are engaged in post-doctoral research as academics, and are teaching at university, and therefore what they had related to, is bound to be credible. Just as the interviewee places trust in the interviewer, I placed trust in the participants that their professionalism as academics ensured credible responses; their engagement with research as part of their occupation and interest ensured they understood the importance of my inquiry as researcher and responded honestly and proficiently as possible. In other words as expert informers and established researchers and academics they were certainly credible participants. Interpretive validity refers to the ability of the research to capture meanings, interpretations, terms, intentions that data have for the subjects themselves. The interpretivist stance adopted by this researcher ensured that the meanings the participants gave to the data were given prominence. Further, the participants' responses were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. These transcripts were also checked for accuracy, and where clarity was required after

I transcribed the interviews, I reverted to the participants either telephonically or in person. Theoretical validity refers to the degree that the researcher explains phenomena. In my study, I reviewed the ideas of previous thinkers as well as current research to provide plausible explanations about the phenomenon I was exploring, and provided the basis from which to support, negate, or discuss the contentions of the meanings that participants presented.

Bush (2007) discussed the *generalizability* of findings, that is, the external validity of the findings, which refers to the extent to which findings may be generalized to a broader population or to other similar contexts. In positivist studies, the emphasis is on *generalizability*, but qualitative studies often explore small and local contexts and therefore cannot claim to be generalizable to other contexts. However, if the researcher believes the other context to be similar enough, she may examine the data in relation on to that. Therefore, the term *transferability* is used in the social sciences to refer to the degree to which the research can be applied to other situations. Given that my study was a small-scale study conducted with five doctoral students at one school of education at a university in South Africa, I cannot claim that similar data would be elicited at other faculties. The participants in my study, though teaching at the same school of education, belonged to different specialties ranging from curriculum studies, literacy to science and gender education (See Table 3.1 below) which introduces a small range of diversification. Several responses elicited from the participants in my study (see Chapters 4 and 6) concurred with Grosfoguel's (2011) assertion that the globalized Western university is characterized by a similar epistemic posturing, methods, canon of thought and theorists. Therefore, it would be interesting to extend this study to a larger scale study at more faculties and universities in South Africa and other peripheral locations.

Another expectation by positivists is *reliability*, i.e. repeatability of results in the same context using the same methods and types of participants. This is not applicable to the qualitative study, as social researchers declare that social phenomena are subject to change. Thus, the concept of *dependability* is more applicable to qualitative studies. Shenton (2004) suggests that the researcher, by reporting in detail the processes employed in her study, could address the dependability issue, as this would make it more accessible to other researchers who wished to repeat the study. This would allow the reader to determine the appropriateness of the methods

employed. In my study, I can argue, that this is the very purpose of this chapter. All the aspects of the methodology are being described so that the reader can understand what the methodological aspects were employed.

Another feature, *confirmability*, refers to the concern of the qualitative researcher that the findings of the study emanate from the participants' experiences and notions, and not from the researcher's biases. This idea mirrors the expectations of objectivity in the positivist sciences. However, since humans design questionnaires and other methods of exploration, researcher bias is inevitable. According to Mouton (1990), objectivity is essentially a methodological concern, and is gained through maximizing validity. However, in qualitative research, the term "understanding" is more appropriate than "validity". Researchers are an important part of the research context and thus cannot claim complete objectivity. The participants' perspectives are regarded as equally valid as the researcher's, and it is the researcher's role to understand and discover these rather than assume it (Ezzy, 2002, p. 45). Such a study aims for acuity rather than quantity of understanding (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004, p. 8). Thus validity can be established through the "honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). Therefore the meaning subjects give to data as well as the inferences drawn from the data are important, and honesty of the researcher becomes a factor of prime importance. The researcher needs to state upfront his own perspective and type of approach to the study. In my study, I have described my own background, ontology and influences on my research in the Prologue to the study. This allows the reader to understand the particular perspective from which I engaged in this research. Embedded in the following subsections, are further explanations on how the trustworthiness of the research was established.

3.6 Data collection methods

Data collection for this study was done in two ways; viz., 1) an electronic data set; and 2) a case study of five postdoctoral students from School of Education.

3.6.1 Electronic data set

A search of the electronic database of the university at which my study was located, identified 98 doctoral theses in the School Education that were completed during the seven year period of

2006 to 2012. Twenty five theses from this list of 98 were randomly selected for analysis. The table of 25 random numbers was produced according to the following specifications: numbers were randomly selected from within the range of 1 to 98 using a web-based software called *Random Number Generator*¹⁴. The selected theses were then enumerated from 1 to 25. Although the theses are in the public domain, and the PhD candidates' names and their doctoral theses are available for scrutiny, it was decided not to use the names of any candidates, or to refer to the titles and year of examination of the studies, as a measure of anonymity and to increase confidentiality. For the first level data collection, the theses of the doctoral candidates were read and salient categories were elicited from the title pages of the theses, the abstracts and foci of the studies, and chapters explaining the theoretical framing. From this a descriptive table was developed with two columns headed, *Subject Focus* and *Theorists use* (see Appendix A).¹⁵ The second level data was derived from the responses of the five cases (postdoctoral students) who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

3.6.2 The Case Study

To explore how doctoral students chose their focal theories for their doctoral studies and why they did so, five doctoral students were approached to participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviewees were currently academics, and were also academics at the time of undertaking their doctorates. These five interviews constituted the five cases used in my study. Gerring (2004, p. 342) defines the case study as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units”. A unit, according to Gerring is “a spatially bounded phenomenon — e.g., a nation-state, revolution, political party, election, or person — observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time.” Both Thomas (2011) and Yin (2009) describe the case study as a “research approach that increases our understanding of an individual, group, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, organizations, institutions, or other systems”. When rich descriptions of phenomena are needed, the value of the case study is most effective in answering the “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 2009). The case study employed is not used in the ethnographic sense as an immersion in a real life setting in which I make observations; in choosing the particular cases (five participants), I

¹⁴ Stat Trek Teach Yourself Statistics. <http://stattrek.com/statistics/random-number-generator.aspx>.

¹⁵ The table in Appendix A actually lists 24 studies. In the course of trying to locate the students, it was discovered that one of the doctorates had been awarded posthumously and therefore that was excluded from the list

gave voice to the participants to report and reflect on the real life settings as they perceived and understood it. In my study, I used the case study approach as I wished to explore *how* and *why*, five doctoral students at a selected university's school of education chose particular focal theories for their studies. Oliveira (2007, p. 16) affirms that every activity of a human being is governed by choices and decision-making, and the behaviour that results from that are responses to particular circumstances and contexts. Thus the critical questions in this study were asked to understand the processes by which individuals made choices, and what personal and contextual constraints and/or facilitative factors influenced choices of their theoretical frameworks; how did the doctoral students in the study choose their focal theories for their doctoral studies in Education, and why were these theories chosen?

The use of the case study for my exploration of doctoral students' theory choices was useful in the following ways: 1) it made the social behaviour of my participants more comprehensible by providing access to their insider view of reality and their personal perspectives and interpretations; 2) it prompted richer responses by enabling a periodized understanding of the possible changes of participants, and allowed my participants to describe their intentions, meanings and actions. According to Johnson & Christensen (2012, p. 202), *thick descriptions* refers to obtaining "in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations and feelings about a topic" by entering into their inner worlds. The participants were requested to provide a reflective and retrospective look at how they made particular choices of theory in their studies and to describe their experiences and thoughts first-hand. Semi-structured interviews were used as questions were open-ended, and thus allowed the participants to elaborate; it also allowed me as the interviewer to probe and prompt for clarification. In this way, it evoked multi-layered responses by the participants and helped me gain a deeper insight into their understanding. As mentioned at the beginning of this subsection, the interviewees were academics and also were also working as academics when doing their doctorates. This may have influenced the particular perspectives and proficiency in the manner in which they answered the questions contributing to the rich data elicited.

Flyvbjerg (2001) cites several researchers (Bacon, Diamond, Dogan, Pelassy) who critique the case study as being limited in use to *theorization* and *generalization*, and biased towards

verification, that is, a predilection towards the researcher's hypothesis. Flyvbjerg contends however, that the case study is not so disparate from other studies where researcher bias towards verification is a concern. *Context independent methods*, which by nature are aloof from the subject under study, do not do justice to an understanding of social phenomena. Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 73) asserts, "predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs" and acceptance of such methods as the only source of knowledge production is a misunderstanding. Therefore, by using the participants as *cases*, I was able to ascertain *context-dependent* knowledge, since I gleaned a more informed view of the participants' reality. Flyvbjerg (2001) maintains that *generalization*, which has its origins in the natural sciences, is overrated and the utility of a good case study is undervalued. While a case study may be used for generating and testing hypotheses, it has greater applicability than only that. Gerring (2004, p. 341) declares that the case study method must be perceived as a "particular way of defining cases, not a way of analyzing cases, or a way of modelling causal relations". Simons (2009) reports that there are myths that case studies are too subjective, or that theory cannot be generated from case study research amongst others. Simons (2009) suggests that the use of the word "subjective" is also value laden since, for the most part of qualitative research one is studying phenomena subjectively. Therefore, the criticism that the case study permits greater researcher subjectivity than other methods (see Flyvbjerg, 2001) is negated by the tradeoff that such studies have their own rigour and advantages: they allow phenomena to be studied *in situ* and on the contrary, certain preconceived notions and assumptions may be refuted. According to Simons (2009, p. 162), case studies "are what they are, studies documenting and analyzing phenomena appealing to subjective ways of knowing to gain insight and understanding".

3.6.3 Research population and sampling

A research population is a group of individuals that display similar characteristics that the researcher is interested in (Best & Kahn, 2003). In my study, the research population refers to the group of postdoctoral students who have graduated through the school of education at a selected university. It is obvious that to study the entire population of students would be too large, impractical, and unwieldy to manage. Flick (2008, p. 33) declares that sampling assists the researcher to reduce the enormous number of cases "to a manageable" selection and simultaneously ensures "justifiable selection of cases and materials". It was initially planned

that, the students identified in the first level data collection (described in 3.6.1 above) would be contacted and the sample drawn from them. In other words, the use of a *purposive* sampling technique to find participants for the study was planned. Purposive sampling is defined by Oliver (2013, np) as “a form of non-probability sampling” where the researcher decides about the individuals to be included in the sample “based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research.” Oliver (2013) states that it is a necessary part of certain types of research design for the researcher to choose the appropriate participants that would be the most relevant as well as provide the greatest depth. In purposive sampling, Palys (2008, p. 3) states that the general principle in choosing participants could be to “think of the person or place or situation that has the largest potential for advancing your understanding and look there”. Palys asserts that just by having “one well-placed, articulate informant” that will be more beneficial to the study than having 50 randomly sampled participants. Marshall (1996) also suggests that small samples are useful in qualitative studies and often, sampling errors in qualitative research stems from a misconception that for the study to be regarded as good, the goal should be *generalizability*. My study involves five postdoctoral students, who have varying amounts of experience in academia. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2001) explain that there are various methods of sampling for different types of investigation. The suggested types of purposive sampling strategies are quite diverse and simply reflect the gamut of possibilities thought of by the different authors (Palys, 2008). In purposive sampling, selection of the participants is intentional based on their *typicality*. The typicality in this case was specific – doctoral students who had completed their doctorates in the School of Education over the last five years formed the basis from which the sample, were chosen. However, certain difficulties were experienced – in the purposive sampling strategy, viz.; several postdoctoral students were approached telephonically, but were either not available, or geographically inaccessible due to long distances; I was also unable to locate some respondents as they had returned to their respective countries and others had no forwarding contact details. Therefore, I had to sample doctoral students according to the participants’ availability and ease of access (see Table 3.1. below), in other words, according to the *feasibility*. Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn (2000) maintain that *feasibility* is a determinant of how sampling can be done, and declare that issues of money costs and being

practical as far as access to participants goes, are logistical considerations that impinge on sampling.

Name ¹⁶	Occupation ¹⁷	Specialization
Joey	Lecturer/Supervisor	Gender & Education
Kai	Lecturer/researcher	Curriculum/ Diverse
Rene	Lecturer, Supervisor, Writer	Science and Gender Education
Asher	Lecturer /Head of Discipline	Education studies, Curriculum, Values education
Dusty	Lecturer/Supervisor/Head of School	English Literary Specialist / Higher education scholar

Table 3.1. Biographical Data of Participants

The participants in my study were engaged at the School of Education in various clusters as lecturers and/or researchers. It is important to reiterate that these interviewees were currently academics, and were also academics at the time of undertaking their doctorates as this is an important influence on how they articulated their responses. I contacted several of the academics telephonically to obtain their permission to participate in my study. Five of the academics agreed and I proceeded with the ethical protocols, which I will describe in more detail later (in section 3.6.4.5. below).

3.6.3.1. Background of Participants

In this section I provide an annotated biography of each of the participants. The background of each participant is summarized from the biodata and descriptions they have given as part of the interview conducted with them. In the descriptions given here, no attempt is being made at analysis of such data, but simply to present an annotated report of the background leading to their respective engagements with their doctoral studies. This is done for three reasons: *firstly*, the description of the participants' background will help the reader understand the participants as persons and not objects to be studied impersonally; *secondly*, the background provides a brief trajectory to the point of the participants becoming doctoral students, and *thirdly*, information

¹⁶ Gender neutral names have been substituted for the original names to maintain anonymity and confidentiality

¹⁷ The general occupation of the participant is described. The specific schools or disciplines are not mentioned to prevent the participants from being identified

about their background contribute to understanding their motivations and reasons that may have influenced their choice of theory.

For the purposes of confidentiality, the names of the participants were changed. Gender neutral names were chosen using an internet search. The names so chosen are not intended to have any cultural or racial ascription, although interview responses from the participants may allude to such characteristics, and may also refer to their own gender categories or others. Any such data has been given voluntarily by the participants. Except for requesting information about nationality (as part of the Biodata) and asking participants to volunteer information about their respective background, none of the questions in my interview asked candidates to indicate their race or culture (See Appendix D). The name of Participant 1 is Joey; Participant 2 - Kai; Participant 3- Rene; Participant 4- Asher and Participant 5 - Dusty.

Joey: Joey, a South African, is engaged as a lecturer, post graduate supervisor and writer at the tertiary institute where this study is located. In her doctorate, Joey conducted an ethnographic study of the construction of ...¹⁸ working class masculinities in the neighbourhood where she lived, and was particularly interested in understanding the violence, rampant sexual behaviour and how masculinity is constructed amongst the boys in her community. She completed her secondary schooling (grade 10 to twelve) in a low income suburb of Durban. She described her school teachers to have been dedicated, but suggested that it was the home environment that was lacking in motivation. She felt that the community in which she grew up placed little value on education. Due to the poor socio-economic climate, the emphasis was to begin working as soon as possible to earn and provide. Her mother, who was a single parent, typified this, and due to her work schedule and efforts to provide, she was not really supportive in the participant's education. Thus the participant asserted that she relied on her own devices.

Although the participant had a serious orientation to school work, her peers did not, and she was thus influenced in several ways. Nonetheless, her exposure to positive teacher role models in primary school, whom she considered caring and nurturing, motivated her to emulate them, and gave her direction to eventually train as a teacher. She believed that although she was in school during the apartheid era, which impacted on people's career choices by channelling

¹⁸ Reference to racial group deleted

disadvantaged race groups in particular ways due to limited choices, she always had a personal ambition to be a teacher. Her mother strongly supported this as she saw it as a means of her daughter becoming qualified and escaping the financial struggles of her own life. After completing high school, the participant enrolled at a local teachers' training college and completed a three year teaching diploma. Her personal qualities, like her passion for working with children, her enjoyment of the rapport, interaction and sharing of knowledge, enabled her positive engagement as a teacher. As a teacher she taught at several schools in various cities in South Africa, and when finally returning to Durban, she and some colleagues decided to complete the Higher Diploma in Education. After completion she enrolled for the Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree. Being inspired by particular lecturers in social justice and gender department, she enrolled for the BEd Honours degree attaining that *cum laude*. She was encouraged by her lecturers to enrol for her Masters, which she did, and extended her specialization in masculinity and gender to her doctorate.

Kai: Kai is a South African lecturer, postgraduate supervisor and researcher at university. In her doctoral study, Kai explored teacher identity - how teachers were able to change, adapt, or adopt in the context of changes within the assessment policy. Kai experienced growing discontent with her job as a teacher and applied for a scholarship with X Foundation to pursue her doctorate. As a school going pupil, she attended secondary school in a working class area. Although she was a top achiever in school, she did not consider her schooling as a fulfilling experience. She asserted that her working class background limited her access to opportunities as compared to children whose parents were professionals. A significant event in her schooling was her expulsion in grade 11 for participating in school boycotts as a protest against poor working conditions for teachers and inequalities in education. Subsequently, due to legal representation by the community, they were allowed to write the school exams at the end of the year. She passed with average results and entered matric feeling insufficiently prepared due to her absence from school, which she feels debilitated against a career in the medical sciences. She considered her enrolment at a tertiary institute to pursue her studies an expected social and cultural norm in her community to escape a working class background. After completing her Bachelor of Pedagogics degree in English and Psychology, she completed her B.Ed Honours. Upon completion of her Masters, she conducted workshops for her teacher peers, presented training

workshops for principals on developing HIV/AIDS policies for their schools, and was a member of different anti-discrimination teams. Applying for, and receiving a research grant from a certain research foundation¹⁹, she joined the university doctoral programme. She is currently engaged in post-doctoral research, writing and lecturing.

Rene: My third participant is also a South African lecturer at university specializing in Science and Gender education. In her study, Rene used the framework of feminist theory to empower secondary school learners to explore issues of power, risky behaviour and engendered roles in the spread of HIV/AIDS.

As a pupil she wished to pursue a course in science and therefore had to move away from her rural town to pursue a course in science. Rene felt that the difficulty of the move impinged upon her scholastic performance. She enrolled for the Bachelor of Science degree and chose the *big four* – Zoology, Botany, Physical Science and Mathematics. Her results at the end of the first year made her eligible for medical school, but she lost the opportunity because she had not applied. Subsequently she switched her degree into a BPaed Science teaching degree. Completing her undergraduate degree, she began teaching and soon enrolled through a distance university for her BPaed Honours in science education, which she did over two years part-time. After achieving her Honours, a three year interval lapsed before she enrolled at a local university for her MEd in the School of Education, in the discipline of multicultural science education, where her doctorate subject focus was HIV/AIDS. Observing the rampant social effects of HIV/AIDS upon people in her environment, she felt that the scientific view, which only clinically studied the virus, was lacking in this regard. Motivated to understand this phenomenon from a more social perspective, she enrolled as a doctoral student. She is currently a lecturer at the university, and has been appointed on several advisory, research and editorial boards.

Asher: Asher is a South African lecturer at university. He is in charge of a particular discipline and his duties entail administration, overseeing staff, curriculum development and lecturing to students. In his doctorate, Asher chose to explore the possibilities of using the Bhagavad Gita to

¹⁹ Name of foundation withheld

teach values education in schools, especially within Life Orientation, using pluriversality as a theory within a postmodern perspective.

He traced his cultural lineage back to his grandfather who initially came to South Africa as an indentured labourer and, who, upon completing his indentureship, began practicing as a community priest having brought such knowledge from India. Asher explained that as a child he was greatly exposed to the study of Hindi, Sanskrit and religion. In school he chose a Science course with Physical Science, Mathematics and Biology, based on the advice of the school counsellor. However at university he enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts degree and majored in Hindi and Sanskrit, something he claimed was natural for him, since his interests and abilities were more in the social sciences, religion, Hindi and Sanskrit. Subsequently he completed his Honours in Hindi, a University Higher Education Diploma (a teaching diploma) and then his Master's in Education, and eventually his doctorate. He is quite involved in the community as a priest.

Dusty: Dusty is a lecturer of South African nationality. He holds a senior administrative and academic position. In his doctoral studies, he used Systemic Functional Linguistics and Genre theory underpinned by a postcolonial perspective, to examine the purposes for which language is used in different social contexts and the epistemological access to such language registers for students.

Dusty describes the destructive effect of Bantu Education on his own life and that which produced the poorly trained teachers and the poor level of achievement of students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, and especially deprived them of literacy skills in English. He was inspired to become a teacher by his neighbour, a teacher who assisted him in her private capacity in English and Afrikaans. His scholastic trajectory, particularly in learning English, and then eventually teaching it, demonstrates a determined will and resoluteness especially that his schooling background was under-resourced and had poor exposure to English. He attributed what he called his "Afrocentric perspective" to the reading many of Steve Biko's works, and listening to the lyrics of reggae artists like Bob Marley, which informed his thoughts about Black Consciousness and anti-apartheid discourse. He was the chairperson of the Reggae

society at his university, and influenced by liberation ideology, he developed a conviction that his education must contribute to alleviating his people's poverty and illiteracy, and that teachers must have a critical perspective. His views were simultaneously underpinned by strong religious philosophy. He was nominated as a LEAP candidate and offered a lectureship by the English Department. In his personal life he is quite involved in the community, and has engagements at his church as a minister.

3.6.4 Research Instruments: The Semi-structured Interview

A qualitative interview consists of open-ended questions that a researcher will personally pose to participants in a study (Johnson & Christensen, 2006). Generally these are face-to-face situations, but interviews may also be conducted telephonically or by e-mail or skype.

3.6.4.1 Types of Interviews

Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick (2008) identify three types of research interviews, viz., the structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Structured interviews normally have a list of pre-written questions. These are much quicker and easier to administer and have great utility in literacy or numeracy type problems but do not have room for follow-up questions, or for probing or prompting for deeper insights or elaboration. Unstructured interviews on the other hand do not have real organization or schema. They generally proceed from asking an initial question and then following the cues from the participant's initial response, much like how an informal conversation would proceed. They are not underpinned by any preconceived theories.

Unstructured interviews are often time-consuming. The lack of structure could make it confusing or difficult for the participant, and the lack of guidance as to what is important.

Unstructured interviews are best suited to experienced researchers, and especially, when pursuing a different inquiry path with each participant. These types of interviews are often used in an exploratory role where no previous information is available in the research area (Gill et al., 2008; Harrel & Bradley, 2009).

3.6.4.2. Advantages and limitations of the semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews are situated in-between the rigidity of structured interviews and the looseness of unstructured interviews. The key questions help focus on the themes to be

explored, and simultaneously gives the interviewer the leeway to probe or prompt the participant for deeper insights, enabling a richer description of the participants' understandings and meanings. Although the interviewer decides the interview focus, a semi-structured interview has the advantage of allowing the respondent the time and flexibility to respond to specific subjects, and assists the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants' views. This prevents generalizing and making universal statements about phenomena, ideas and experiences and behaviour.

The limitations of the semi-structured interview are described before I elaborate the advantages. The limitations will obviously impinge negatively on the type of data elicited in the interview. Therefore, these limitations are presented first so that I can describe how I attempted to minimize the influence of these and increase the *trustworthiness* of the data.

The interviewer should be mindful of the following limitations of the semi-structured interview. Cohen et al. (2001, 2011) asserted that that with semi-structured interviews there is an increased possibility of interviewer subjectivity and bias. Nuances like tone of voice, how the questions are structured, the presence of the interviewer, will influence how participants respond. Cooperation is needed, and if participants feel uncomfortable, they will not share information that will contribute to a rich exchange. Participants may not always be truthful, and they may have reasons for not sharing all information about their lives. Neuman (1997) suggests that interviewers themselves may be dishonest by altering responses, or omitting questions and responses, what he refers to as the interviewer's "intentional subversion". Cohen et al. (2007) suggests that the skill of the interviewer in eliciting information as well as listening and understanding what participants mean will also determine how successful the interview process was. An attempt was made to address these limitations in the following ways: I employed the semi-structured interview to understand how the participants in my study chose their theories and their reasons for doing so. To address subjectivity and bias, I prepared an interview schedule (Appendix D) based on readings from the literature and discussions with my supervisors. The pilot study also helped to refine the instrument. I discuss this in more detail under section 3.6.4.4 below. Using this method, I also elicited a narrative of the participants' backgrounds about their

education trajectory. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore the participants' ideas of theory, and provided an opportunity to them for reflective and retrospective responses.

Gill et al. (2008) maintains that “good” questions in a qualitative interview are open-ended, clear, easily understood by the participants, and considerate. The questions should also progress from ones that are easy to answer to those that are more difficult or sensitive to answer. By doing this, the interviewer puts the participants at ease, and helps them gain confidence. To ensure greater understanding of the questions, and allow participants to reflect on them, and confidence to respond, the questionnaire was forwarded to them via email before our scheduled interview, so they could be familiar with it. Curtis et al. (2002) discusses how researcher competencies facilitate the interview process – that the researcher must have proficient linguistics and communication skills. This study was conducted in English, a language in which I felt I have sufficient proficiency, and all the participants were proficient in this language as well. When answers were unclear, or needed elaboration, I sought clarification from participants to understand what they meant. Furthermore, I was aware of the issues of power of the position of the researcher in such interviews and attempted not to be supercilious or threatening in my approach. Marshall & Rossman (2006, p. 97) states that the interviewer should make the participants feel that their views are “valuable and useful”. Participants were requested to inform me of any discrepancies and were reminded that they could withdraw without any explanation if they felt uncomfortable with the interview. At the end of the interview, I expressed my appreciation and asked the participants if they wished to add any concluding thoughts. This gave them the opportunity to reflect upon issues that they felt the interviewer might not have covered. I discovered in some cases that this led to “new, unanticipated information”, as suggested by Gill et al. (2008, p. 293) that could happen.

3.6.4.3. Developing the semi-structured interview questionnaire

The questions were initially from the broad readings of the literature. In constructing the interview instrument, I engaged in personal discussions and email correspondence with my supervisors as to the nature of the questions I wanted to include in my instrument. My supervisors interrogated the initial questions and together we refined the instrument to remove ambiguities and leading questions, and succinctly focus on the phenomenon of *choice* of theory,

and suggested that the questions needed to reflect some theoretical underpinnings. In this regard, I read more on the phenomenon of *choice*. While psychological and cognitive models of choice predominate, the dearth of information of *how* and *why* doctoral students make theory choices as a phenomenon was glaring. Inherent to the interpretivistic, qualitative design of my study was the recognition that respondents *would differ* in their experiences, and how they framed their choices. My semi-structured interview questions were developed with this in mind.

The advantages and disadvantages of the interview process notwithstanding, a pilot study was conducted to examine the efficacy of the interview instrument, and my own skills in the interview process.

3.6.4.4. The Pilot Study

Gill et al. (2008, p. 292) declares that it is important initially to pilot the interview schedule with some respondents before the actual data collection is done. This will allow the researcher “to establish if the schedule is clear, understandable, and capable of answering the research questions and if, therefore, any changes to the interview schedule are required”. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) also indicate that pilot studies provide the researcher with opportunities to resolve ambiguous or irrelevant questions, work out the timing, and perhaps establish other participant and researcher issues might have not thought of, which arise in the interview.

The pilot study was conducted to determine the efficacy of the semi-structured interview instrument (see Appendix D) and the interview process. All the ethical considerations were met for this interview. The respondent was contacted telephonically to set up the appointment, and with her permission, all documents describing the nature of my research was emailed to her. The Letter of Confidentiality (Appendix C) outlining the study and the interview schedule, was forwarded to the respondent for perusal. The respondent agreed and allocated a convenient time and our interview took place in her office at the university. The semi-structured interview, which lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes, was the only method of data collection used during the pilot programme. The respondent was already familiar with the reason for our interview, being aware through email, and my introduction was therefore, easily done by reading through the salient aspects. The respondent then signed the acknowledgment of voluntary participation.

According to Gill et al. (2008, p. 293), audio recording of interviews and their verbatim transcriptions “protects against bias and provides a permanent record of what was and was not said”. During the interview, some notes were taken, and the data was captured by digital audio recorder, and later transcribed. Permission for the use of the audio recording, which was stated in the request letter, was verbally restated at the beginning of the interview. The preliminary data of the pilot study, as well as the interview process was an important confirmation of the relevance of the questions, as well as this researcher’s interview technique, especially probing for more information.

The participant I approached for the pilot study was an academic at the university who had completed her postgraduate studies elsewhere. The respondent was also an academic who had experience in curriculum development and implementation, and in teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students. For these reasons, I felt that the respondent was an expert informer who would provide rich data, as well as insightful commentary and suggestions about the instrument and process, especially for the piloting phase. The question may arise that since I am exploring doctoral students theory choices in education located at a particular South African university school of education, why would I use a respondent whose doctoral study was located elsewhere. There are two reasons: one was the practical reason – the participant was available. Secondly, she was an astute academic and I felt that she would be a proficient respondent and be able to give me honest, incisive feedback about my interview questions, skills and manner. I feel that rather than this limiting my study, it actually impacted positively by giving a more expanded and enriched notion about how theorizing happens, and how it is experienced, enabled or dis-enabled elsewhere.

During the course of our interview, the discussion, the respondent’s thoughts about choices of theory, and how and why such choices were made intrigued me. The respondent proficiently and eloquently answered the questions, and I was able to also probe with ease. As the interview progressed, I found that some questions that were listed in the latter part of the interview schedule were answered in earlier discussions, and I therefore chose not to repeat them, as this was unnecessary, and laborious. When requested to provide feedback at the end of our interview

about the interview questions, sequencing, and the relevance of questions, the participant responded that it was an interesting and exciting interview, expressed pleasure at being a participant, and commented that the questions were precise and relevant. She felt that the interview was well conducted, and addressed the phenomenon that was being researched. I enquired, in the light of some matters emerging earlier in the interview, whether the questions covering those aspects later in the interview schedule be removed. The respondent felt that the interview schedule should not be changed since other students may not necessarily answer in the same way, and since it is a semi-structured interview, I could be flexible.

3.6.4.5. Ethics

Ethics in research refer to a set of standards that govern the authenticity of research, as well as establishes the ethical (moral code), legal and professional ambit of researchers.²⁰ The university, at which my research was located, has a research ethics policy which governs the conduct of its researchers, a policy that is similar at other universities. This policy provides a framework for all research activities at the institution that safeguards the authenticity of the research endeavour and researchers, and prevents harm to participants. The policy, based on the values enshrined in the South African Constitution, stipulates the ethical obligations for researchers and commits the university to specific ethical obligations, while simultaneously valuing academic freedom.²¹

A code of ethics for research therefore is meant to maintain the dignity of participants, protect them from physical and psychological harm, determine the rightful or erroneous conduct in research, and ensure legal and professional integrity.

3.6.4.5.1. The Legal Requirements

The first step was to apply to the research office for permission to conduct my study. Having followed the correct protocols and completed the relevant written applications, explained the nature and purposes of my study, declared that I had read and understood the *Code of Conduct*

²⁰ My definition, emanating out my own experience and understanding

²¹ The dilemma of referencing the document here means that the reader will know at which university this study was conducted. I therefore purposefully omitted the reference here but acknowledge that I have summarized the information from the university ethics policy in these sentences.

for Research and the *Informed Consent for participants* guidelines issued by the research office, and agreed to abide by the Ethics framework as required by the university, permission was granted by the research office to proceed with my study (Appendix B)²².

Once that was granted, I contacted the respective participants for my study. The participants were approached either personally or via telephonic contact, and a preliminary idea of what I attempted to do was explained to them with a promise of sending an email with further elaboration. To those who agreed to participate, I forwarded the following documents via email:

1. Informed Consent to Participate in Study and Confidentiality declaration (Appendix C)
2. Interview Questionnaire (Appendix D)

To ensure the protection of the participants, I declared in a letter to them that the interview data would be used for research purposes only, and that their names would not be mentioned in the study. Further, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without providing an explanation.

Having received email confirmation from five participants, I requested a personal interview at a time and venue that suited them. Four of the five respondents granted me appointments at their offices at the university, and I met one at an outside location. At the start of our interview, I again summarized the purpose of the interview verbally, and read out the *Consent to Participate in Study and Confidentiality declaration*. I also repeated that I would be using the audio-recorder and that it will be for the purposes of transcription only. The respondents were already familiar with the reason for our interview through my email, and my introduction was therefore, easily done by reading through the salient aspects. The respondents then signed the acknowledgment of voluntary participation at the end of the interview. Most interviews lasted between 1 to 1½ hours.

²² Once again, this presented a dilemma. The permission granted to me appeared on a letterhead of the university clearly identifying the university at which my research was conducted.

The research policy document also specified other infringements to the code of ethics; that is, researchers are expected to have integrity and honesty, which includes not fabricating or falsifying data. According to the Office of Research Integrity (2011), *fabrication* refers to making up of data and subsequently recording and reporting these as true; *falsification* refers to “manipulating” the resources of research, apparatus, and procedures, or altering or excluding data to purposefully skew results. To ensure that I did not infringe these codes, I had the audio recordings transcribed. Subsequently I checked the transcripts by listening to the audio, while simultaneously reading the script and correcting where necessary. I also set up another appointment with a participant to clarify some ambiguity, and telephonically clarified certain issues with another participant. The research policy also stipulates rules for data storage and maintenance. As required by the university policy, this researcher will ensure safe storage of the data and electronic records (in this case, audio) by retaining these for a period of five years at the School responsible for the study, and thereafter destroy these. The audio recording of the data provided another layer of protection against falsification and fabrication as the audio records will be available to cross check the transcripts (written data).

3.6.4.5.2. My Personal Orientation as a Critical Researcher

Irrespective of what paradigm a researcher locates himself, there are general ethical codes and principles that he is bound by to protect the participants from physical, psychological and emotional harm. Besides the legal requirements stipulated by an ethics policy, there are expectations of a researcher to conduct himself in an ethical manner. This translates to an expectation of honesty and integrity on my part as researcher in the interaction with the participants and as well as in the manner in which the data is treated. My personal orientation dictates to me not to fabricate or falsify data in the course of my research. While contentious issues may arise in the responses of the participants, I am bound by the ethics of confidentiality while remaining true to the data. I am aware of reporting the data in such a manner that the participants and those that are mentioned by them are protected from public scrutiny, a discussion I pursue in the next subsection. As far as interacting with those who volunteered to participate in my study, they were regarded as participants, and therefore I approached them respectfully as partners in the interview process, fully aware that they had participated

voluntarily, and that they had no obligation to continue the interview if they wished to withdraw at any stage.

My shift to a critical stance as a researcher later in the study meant that I began to analyse the data with a more critical view; a position that demanded my greater attentiveness, as an interest in power and emancipation can easily seem to be undermining particular strictures and perceptions. Critical research does address issues of power, and as a researcher I am mindful of the ethics in my manner and intent. My focus on particular issues from the data does not arise from a vindictive or antagonistic stance, nor do I claim that I can represent the emancipation of the participants in my study who are academics in their own right. Nonetheless as a critical researcher, my task is not simply to create an awareness of issues of power and other nuances of authority that arise from the data; it is expected that my intent will inevitably shift to excavating the influences that entrench power, and challenging what appears to have become axiomatic truths that do not serve the interest of particular dominated or marginalized groups. Besides this, the critical researcher also intends to empower the self-consciousness of researchers. Thus, my view concurs with the ideas of Brooke (2002), who suggests that critical research *is* ethical research itself; this is because critical research aims at empowering its human subjects.

A review of the participants' responses to the interview questions alerted me to the fact that some information provided by them may have ethical implications, the context which I describe in the next section.

3.6.4.5.3. The Fourth Party: An Ethical dilemma

The careful subscription to the procedures outlined in the ethics documents safeguards three important components: viz., the research undertaking, the researcher, and most importantly protects the well-being of the participants, three important parties in the research enterprise. The document, however, does not specify the concept of *relational ethics*. According to Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011), researchers do not work in isolation and are part of an interconnected network that includes the institution, colleagues, participants, students, family and friends. It is almost automatic that as researchers we implicate some of them in the research. The interpretative approach requires the researcher to remain true to the data, and not falsify

anything. In my study, all official ethical requirements were met, and in the course of our interviews, the participants presented information voluntarily and were not coerced or led in any way to present such descriptions. They presented the reality of their experiences as they perceived it. In reflecting on influences on their theory choices, some participants in my study discussed both the negative and positive interactions with their supervisors or other powerful individuals in the institution. A dilemma thus arose from the detail in which participants' statements described others or scenarios that could make persons identifiable in the following ways: 1) the participants' descriptions of certain events may make *themselves* identifiable to readers who are aware of the issues that occurred; 2) although participants do not reveal names of who they describe, the mentioning of certain characteristics may enable readers, who are familiar with those being described to actually identify them; and 3) the persons being described by the research participants may also be able to identify themselves from these descriptions. This alludes to the concept of relational ethics stated by Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) in which these individuals mentioned by the participants form what I suggest is the *fourth party* that needs protection. To ensure confidentiality in all the aspects alluded to in the list of 1, 2 and 3 above, the ethical dilemma was managed in the following way. The names of all participants were changed. Gender references were also changed. Details that may identify participants were removed. The names of projects or scholarships and events mentioned by participants were removed. Certain incidents that occurred that were mentioned by participants were paraphrased to remain being true to the data, but direct references to those being described were removed to protect their identities. Where participants mentioned their specific theoretical schools or disciplines, these were changed to be more neutral terms, to prevent specific supervisors being identified.

Further ethical dilemmas include:

- a. The permission granted to me by the university to conduct the study appears on a letterhead of the university clearly identifying the university at which my research was conducted.

To prevent the university being identified, I have cropped the letterhead to leave only the correspondence confirming ethical clearance was granted.

- b. In my letters of informed consent from participants, I mention that I am a doctoral student at a particular university.

Although this may not concern the students themselves so much, a reader could assume that the study was conducted at the university mentioned. I therefore edited the information by blanking out the name of the university on my sample letter included in the Appendices.

I suggest that I have done everything reasonably within my power to manage the confidentiality of the respondents and the fourth party as described.

3.7 Data Analysis

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007, p. 461), the analysis of qualitative data “involves organizing, accounting for and explaining the data”. In other words, analysis of data means, “making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities.” Therefore, data analysis may be understood as trying to make sense of the acquired data.

Different researchers (Cresswell, 2007; Marshall & Rosman, 1996) suggest specific steps to analyse data, but Cohen et al. (2007, 2011) feel that there is no prescribed technique of analyzing qualitative data, and ways of interpretation could be diverse. The main way will be influenced by what they suggest is the “*fitness for purpose*” (2007, p. 461). The researcher must know beforehand what the purpose of the data analysis is going to be, which will govern the type of analysis to be executed. Cohen et al. (2007, p. 461) suggested several objectives, viz., does the researcher wish to “describe, portray, summarize, interpret, discover patterns, generate themes, understand individuals and idiographic features, understand groups and nomothetic features, raise issues, prove or demonstrate, explain and seek causality, to explore, test, discover commonalities, differences and similarities, examine the application and operation of the same issues in different contexts”. Depending on the objective therefore, the researcher will analyse the data accordingly. In my study I wished to *explore* doctoral students’ theory choices, therefore I examined the data to find reasons for *how* and *why* they made those choices. Cohen et al. (2007, p. 467-468) suggests five different ways in which the data may be organized and

presented, which they categorize as *by people*, *by issue* and *by instrument*, which I enumerate here below:

1. Respondents are *grouped* according to similar responses and statements or by their membership, e.g., in a study of schools a group may be all the principals in a particular district, then another group will be all the teachers, and another group could be all the pupils in matric. While this is helpful in summarizing collective responses, the nuances of the individual responses may become subsumed into a collective and therefore lost.
2. The second way is by *individuals*. In this case the entire response of one individual is presented, and then the next participant's responses are analysed. In this way each individual's responses are analysed separately. The advantage is that it presents a lucid, deeper understanding of the individual and the meanings she presents. However, the disadvantage is, for the researcher to determine patterns and themes across individuals, s/he has to engage in a second level of analysis which is a tremendous investment of time and energy.
3. Organizing data according to specific *issues*. Often in this method, the issues or themes are determined *pre-ordinately*, that is, it precedes the collection of data. The disadvantage of this is that the richness of the individual response is sacrificed, the data becomes disjointed, and the pre-ordinate selection of issues may reduce sensitivity to new issues that may be present in the data.
4. Cohen et al. (2007) suggests that a very useful way to analyse data is according to the *research questions* asked in the interview instrument. This method focuses directly on what is "driving" the research, that is, the questions, and allows the researcher to gather together all data that relates to her particular issues of concern. If the researcher is using more than one method of data collection, it enables her to collate and cross compare the data from all of these to provide a more comprehensive understanding of patterns and connections.
5. Another method where data is analysed is by *instrument*. The researcher may have used more than one method to collect the data, e.g. interview, observation and field notes, documentary analysis, etc. The researcher then organizes and presents the data according to each type of instrument. Although the reader may be able to determine from which

instrument the data has originated, the disadvantage is that further analysis of the content will still be required, and therefore, extra investment of time and energy. Also if the data is not analysed across instruments the interconnectedness of the data may be lost and the richer understanding reduced.

I found that the fourth suggestion by Cohen et al. (2007), viz., to analyse the data according to the research questions was the most appropriate for the study. This assisted me to mine through the data sequentially, viz., to focus systematically on the background of the respondent, and understand their academic trajectory, and how they understood the meaning of theory, and how and why they chose particular theories for their doctoral studies. The overarching framework that I used for the analysis is the *Framing model* given by Beresford & Sloper (2008).

3.7.1 First Level Data Analysis

The first level data analysis (see 3.6.1) was conceptualized to identify doctoral students who could be approached as part of the purposive sample, as well to identify focal theorists used by the doctoral students. The abstracts, synopses of theoretical frameworks (which occurred mostly in Chapter One of their theses) and the theoretical/conceptual framework chapters were read and the table populated with the essential information as indicated (See Appendix A). Once the table had been populated with the data as shown, it was planned that at least ten of the doctoral students listed would be approached on the selection basis of *typicality*. However, that did not unfold due to reasons discussed (see section 3.6.3. above), and the sample was chosen on the basis of *feasibility*. The interviews with this sample formed the second level data collection, which was then subjected to the second level data analysis.

3.7.2 Second Level Data Analyses

At this level, I explored the participants' understandings of theory and their choices of theory as elicited from the interviews with them. As discussed above, I analysed the data according to the sequence of the research questions asked in the interview instrument, which helped to focus on the pertinent issues (Cohen et al., 2007). Using the questionnaire sequence, I responded to the data under specific themes related to choice, namely, in relation to the critical questions of the study, viz., *how* do doctoral students choose their focal theories for

their doctoral studies in Education, and *why* were these theories chosen? The *how* question focuses on the processes by which they choose, and the *why* question focuses on the reasons for their choices.

3.8 Conclusion

Given the claims by Fletcher et al. (2012), that people use a wide variety of idiosyncratic techniques to make decisions, that an individual's meta-reasoning is informed by a diverse miscellany of "self-management strategies" attained from one's personal and cultural learning, and that context has a great influence, I found the *Framing Model* to be the most suitable lens through which to examine the data obtained in my study. The categories considered by the *Framing Model*, viz., individual differences, information about the problem, and the context, which includes the physical, intellectual and emotional factors that influence how people make decisions, suggested that it was a comprehensive analytical tool to view the data elicited in this study as it had a wide ambit and a great amount of flexibility. Using the *Framing Model* also allowed the researcher to explore decision-making processes where different values, attitudes and contexts influenced choices, as well as how people changed their decisions. In the next chapter, this model of *Framing* is used as the main theoretical lens to explore how and why doctoral students in my study made particular theoretical choices.

Chapter 4

Framing the data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two parts. In Part One, I respond to the data derived from interviews held with five postdoctoral students whose studies were taken from a period of seven years (2006-2012) at a School of Education at a university in South Africa. Throughout the analysis of the data, I attempt to use the theoretical lenses provided by the psychological and cognitive models described in Chapter 2, as well as juxtapose the responses with assertions and findings made by other researchers. In Part Two of this chapter, using the understandings that emerged from the data analysis, I critique the applicability of these models to the process of how doctoral students make theory choices.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the Framing Model as the dominant framework that would underpin the analysis of the data. *Framing*, which consists of how the decision-maker mentally represents the problem she faces, involves making choices or decisions that are influenced by the individual's background, context, and access to information. The data in my study, which is analysed into themes in this chapter, suggests several factors that amalgamate to possibly influence, either directly or indirectly, how and why doctoral students make theory choices.

Part 4.1: Analysing the data

4.1.1 Sociocultural Background and Choice

In Chapter 3, I presented a tabular summary and an annotated description of the background of the participants. In the course of the following analysis, specific details, (e.g., names of schools or university where they studied) are not mentioned to avoid identifying the participants.

The data reveals the social and cultural context of the participants' early lives that have shaped their thoughts in particular ways about their study choices and choices made about theory in their postgraduate studies. Joey describes the influence of her childhood on her choice:

My earlier childhood is also linked to my study because I grew up in a household of boys. I had four brothers and so the way they did things and that male power and male dominance, the gender stereotypes that existed in my home didn't occur to me then.

Joey states that it was during a social justice module in her Masters study, when her lecturer asked the students “to think back into the past” and about their childhoods, to when they first realized that they were different “whether it was race, gender, class or whatever” that the circumstances of “the bullying and the roles and the sexual division of labour within the household” and how she was “treated differently to the boys no matter what they did”, became clearer. Her introspection made her realize how the violence perpetrated by males and the gender inequality in terms of the expected roles at home had been taken for granted. In her doctoral studies Joey conducted an ethnographic study of the construction of ...²³ working class masculinities in the neighbourhood where she lived, and was particularly interested in understanding the violence, rampant sexual behaviour and how masculinity was constructed amongst the boys in her community.

My second participant, Kai, felt that her working class background as a young person, with its limited access to opportunities had debilitated against her achievement, and that her schooling was not a really fulfilling experience. She presented a curious revelation that she felt uncomfortable that her name, which being a traditional one, sounded incongruous in the school setting, and that she also felt misplaced or a misfit in the school system, a feeling that seemed to endure throughout her life and choices. In school she participated in political protests and was suspended for a while. Kai believes her absence from school negatively affected her examination results which debilitated against a career in the medical sciences, and expressed her regret at such underachievement. However, she explained that in her community there were particular social and cultural expectations to enrol at a tertiary institute as a way to escape a “working class background”, a point she reiterated on several occasions. In her career as a teacher, she felt upset and marginalized when her application for a principal’s post was not successful. Kai retrospectively expressed gratitude, however, that she did not get that position

²³ Reference to racial group deleted

tending to a more philosophical view that it was not her “destiny” and would have limited the fulfilment of her potential which depended on doing something “more”:

I felt in so many aspects in my life, I was like almost like a kind of trapped, you know, living in a box. I was living in a box for most of my life. I lived like a coward for most of my life... then I felt that with my PHD I wanted to do exactly what I wanted to do. So I just wanted to have fun, bring in whoever I wanted to bring in because it had meaning for me.

She reflected upon her life as being restrictive up to this point and engaged in a type of self-deprecation over her inability to act, but acknowledged her enrolment in the PhD as an empowering act that gave her freedom of choice and control. She felt that the PhD finally gave her the empowerment that she was searching for, and thus she engaged with a variety of theorists like Foucault, Giddens, Bourdieu, Viktor Frankl, and Plato’s whose works, she felt resonated with her search for personal growth.

A pattern emerged where Kai referred to the emancipatory nature of her studies at different levels, that it “opened up another world”, an important background to understand her choice of particular theoretical choices for her doctorate. In her responses there appeared to be a particular cogitation, a reflection upon a void in her life, which drove what she refers to as her “personal journey” – a need to feel validated by her academic engagement. Kai expressed this mood numerous times in her responses and I focused on this as it bore relevance to her doctoral choice of theories. Her choice of theories for her doctorate is quite eclectic, resonating perhaps, with her need to feel validated, her need to be empowered and her need to experience the sense of freedom that she pursued. Her choice of using several theorists, some of which are listed in her response above, emanates from a personal philosophical resonance with their disseminations. Thus Kai’s choice of theory for her doctorate seems to be informed by a background which comprised of a personal search, a journey to achieve empowerment and fulfilment, and a desire to actualize her potential.

Asher, another participant, described the influence of his culture upon his perception:

We grew up in an environment of religious education and studying of scriptures and discussion of scriptures.

Asher directly attributed his choice of theory for his doctoral study to his cultural and linguistic background. He explained that since he grew up in a home where his grandfather and father were priests, he was exposed to several scriptural readings like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Bhagavad-Gita,²⁴ languages like Sanskrit and Hindi, and several, what he called, “literary luminaries” like Kalidas, Surdas, Tulsidas and Premchand. Being thus informed, for his doctorate he chose to explore the possibilities and perceptions of using the Bhagavad Gita to teach values education in schools, specifically in Life Orientation. The influence of his background upon his theoretical choices was very apparent in his responses and the participant clearly stated that his choice of studying the Bhagavad-gita was strongly influenced by his exposure to it in his life. When I enquired about his initial choice of theory for his doctoral studies, Asher responded:

All I knew is that I wanted to work in a kind of postmodern, use some kind of postmodern theory.

Asher felt that if he used “some kind of modernist theory then trying to get to convince people of the use of the Bhagavad-Gita”, would be “more difficult”. This may be understood in the context of modernism’s position in favour of rationality and natural science. The claims of modernism, viz., the assumption of an autonomous researcher as the source of truth, and a positivist, objective view of reality, falls foul of the claims of postmodernism which favours diverse meanings and an anarchist negation of all attempts to impose external meanings on reality. Asher believed that “postmodernism is also saying that there are many ways of knowing...that there isn’t one particular way of coming to know things”. He was convinced that there were several ways of knowing and that his choice of theory resonated with that. Asher’s assumption may be based on the idea that since the Bhagavad-Gita was a traditional text, academics could regard it as authoritative and essentialist in its propositions, similar to a modernist position. I suggest that his adoption of a postmodernist stance enabled his engagement with pluralist theory; by establishing that knowledge emanates from diverse sources

²⁴ Classical works that emanated from the Indian subcontinent

as parts contributing to a more complete view of reality, he was able to strategically locate his study in a way that would be acceptable to academics. Asher declared that he had “used the advocacy role here”, which he claims was influenced by his “background”. He reasoned that since advocacy studies were used to influence policy makers, it was not unacceptable in his research. Asher’s arguing for the idea of a pluralist theory which regards knowledge as emanating from diverse sources, was a conscious and intentional choice that enabled him to admit the Bhagavad-Gita as one such source of knowledge.

Another participant, Dusty, described his disadvantaged background as influential on his eventual choice of theory:

English was not my mother tongue and I was really struggling. It was never taught well at all in school. But what I was fortunate to have is the ability to think conceptually and I guess it's because of reading Biko, as a young grade 12 young boy Rastafarian and listening to reggae music.

Although Dusty struggled with the English language, he attributed what he called his “Afrocentric perspective” to the reading of many of Steve Biko’s works as a young matriculant, and listening to the lyrics of Reggae music, which informed his thoughts about Black Consciousness and anti-apartheid discourse, and gave him a “meta-language” to understand the experience of Black people. This helped him develop a conviction that his education must contribute to alleviating his people’s poverty and illiteracy, and this strong influence can be ascertained in his eventual choice of theories for his doctoral studies, where he adopted a postcolonial outlook and used the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Genre Theory (GT) as his main theories. These theories examine the purposes for which language is used in different social contexts, and the choices it makes available to those who use it. Dusty described the destructive effect of Bantu Education that produced the poor level of achievement of students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, and deprived them of literacy skills in English, a condition that he himself was subjected to. In his study he wanted to understand the extent to which students at university had epistemological access or the lack of it, since they were unable to choose the correct grammatical structures for the appropriate purposes in written

or spoken text. His choices were simultaneously underpinned by strong religious philosophy and practice:

Dusty: The theory I never liked was post modernism...and deconstruction. I didn't like those things because then there is no finality and everything is relative.

Dusty's strong religious beliefs did not allow him to subscribe to the fluidity of meaning that postmodernists propose. He considered the idea of God a certainty, an absolute that could not be deconstructed. He acknowledged that this perspective may be "problematic". This may be understood to refer to his assumption that his views may not be positively accepted by others in academia.

I use the Framing model of Beresford & Sloper (2008) to analyse the responses above. The Framing model asserts that the manner in which relevant information is perceived and processed is vital to how persons make decisions. In their responses above, participants provided a retrospective reflection of how their social, economic and cultural circumstances shaped their worldviews and eventually impinged upon the choices of theory they made for their doctoral studies. Joey's particular interest in issues of gender and social justice seems to have been influenced by the social context in which she grew up. Her immersion in a disadvantaged home environment and community, a general lack of emphasis on education in the community and peer group, bullying and gender stereotyping in her home, and the injustices of apartheid particularly in terms of career opportunities, inclined her towards a gender and social justice stance in her tertiary studies. Kai's eclectic choice of theorists seemed to resonate with her own personal philosophy of life that emanated from a need to find emotional and personal fulfilment in all her activities. Asher's exposure to strong cultural influences directed his research towards attempting an understanding the utility of a central religious literature for values education as part of a pluralist worldview of knowledge. Dusty's responses indicate how his impoverished background channelled his predilection towards a critical perspective, specifically his personal experience of a lack of epistemological access in his struggle with English, and the simultaneous influence of his religious beliefs on his worldviews.

Decision-making also appears to be influenced by the cognitive ability of the decision maker (Beresford & Sloper, 2008) and in this regard the Framing model introduces the idea of *cognitive capacity*. According to Boy (2005, p. 6-7), an event usually prompts decision-making. The event could be *internal*, that is, arising in one's mind; or could be *external*, occurring in the environment. The important consideration is that people need to be aware of the event. Internal events may give rise to *intentional* cognitive processing, and external events may give rise to *reactive* cognitive processing. The complexity of cognitive processing is dependent on the knowledge or training that the person has. In the case of the above participants, it appears that both intentional and reactive cognitive processing occurs. In my study, all the participants present introspection and reflections about events and growing up experiences especially in terms of gender, family, apartheid, social justice, culture, education, and degree of access to knowledge, which seems to have made indelible impressions upon their minds. When they were exposed to particular academic discussions, these appeared to have provided external stimuli to cause students to think deeply about their own phenomena of study. This alludes to the suggestion by Fletcher & Carruthers (2012) that some individuals are more inclined to self-reflect, to pause and deliberate about the adequacy of their preliminary responses before making final decisions. For example, in Joey's case, the lecturer's request to students to introspect was a catalyst for her deep thoughts about her own oppressive social context; in other words, the lecturer's question became an external stimulus, which produced a reactive cognitive process, which made her to think more deeply about her experience that was already an internal cognitive process.

While the Framing Model may be used to understand that participants "framed" their choices according to their sociocultural background, knowledge, and personal drives, to make sense of their experiences, it is not as simple as the model suggests. The Framing Model does not capture the influence of time on decision-making, since the application of the model as is suggests that decisions are made on the spot. The doctoral process may take several years for a student to choose a theory; thus the model does not factor in the time duration. The model does not explain that the doctoral students' choice of theory is also iterative, and oscillates amongst intentional, reactive, intuitive and analytical processes. In this study, it emerged that participants have adopted critical /postmodern/ post structural ontologies. It is suggested that the background of

the participants was an important influence upon their respective theory choices in their doctoral studies.

4.1.2 Intuition and Choice

In section 4.2, I referred to a study that examined psychological evidence pertaining to people's capability to monitor and govern their own decision-making (Fletcher & Carruthers, 2012). It suggested that some individuals are more disposed to self-reflection and deliberation about the adequacy of their preliminary responses before making a final decision, while others do not self-reflect in this way, this aspect of one's reasoning being largely dependent on one's personality. It also suggested that such reflective reasoning was reliant on learning, especially how much exposure to training in norms and procedures for reasoning the individual has had. In other words, for one to execute decisions in a rational, methodical way, one must be exposed to such techniques or decision-making models. This exposure may originate from individual or cultural learning. The data in this study did not reveal that the participants have had any systematic training in rational, decision-making processes as given in behavioural, psychological, managerial or economic models, which therefore suggests that other factors were at play. The participants' responses indicated a tendency to self-reflect or introspect about their decisions, which appeared as an intuitive process in decision-making, evident in the following responses by the participants:

Joey suggested that a doctoral student does not really know if the right choice is made at the beginning of the study. In her case she had a feeling that she "made the right choice" and she "went with it". She stated that the choice is something that the student must feel comfortable with, and believe in. Kai's response also indicated that choice may be influenced by an intuitive element:

I found that in my own experience, when memory was then activated I looked inward, to find the forms. And true reality cannot be known by logic or reason. It can only be known through a mystical experience that is intuition and revelation.

Kai's response is a direct indication that she believed choices were intuitive and that it did not arise from applying specific rational or analytical models to assist making correct choices. The "memory" she referred to suggests that she considered her decision-making to be influenced by some existing disposition, a kind of imprint, evoked by an "inward" gaze or deep introspection which was stimulated by encountering certain theorists whose views resonated with hers. The response she gave above is exactly a description made by Younkins (2002, p. 163) who paraphrases Plato's statement on the soul, memory and experience. This demonstrates that Kai, through her doctoral study, had imbibed Plato's disseminations to the point that it had part of her own thinking, which also demonstrates the extent to which her own understanding of identity connected with those of thinkers like Plato. Kai considered that her own search for a choice of theory was a "vibrant, evolving" process and she chose a theorist with whom she "found resonance with what he was saying". Rene presented similar thoughts:

I didn't realize that I was working within a post structural paradigm.

Rene had previously mentioned her positivist background as a Science teacher. This was relevant to her verbalization above. Rene explained that that she was motivated by a particular consciousness, a feeling that something was lacking in her understanding as a Science teacher about the phenomenon of HIV/AIDS. It was this feeling that she attributed to a "personal consciousness" that drove her eventual choice of critical feminist theory to empower secondary school learners. This also emerged strongly in her response when asked how students should choose theories for their doctoral research:

Rene: It's something that they must feel a passion for. They must feel it in their hearts, that this is the right thing.

The "passion" referred to here seems to indicate a strong conviction in both the ability of the chosen theory to explain a particular phenomenon and as well as the worthiness of the phenomenon under scrutiny. It suggested that the choice of the appropriate theory must be consistent with one's own personality, that is, "who they are". Rene felt that this choice of theory was more than an "academic" endeavour, in the sense that it was not undergirded by some

type of rational decision-making model but had a strong personal component. Dusty also felt that he had been theorizing about his phenomenon of study all along without realizing it, something he had “already believed in for a long time”. The theory became apparent only when he actually read about it, suggesting that it had resonated with his thoughts or his “personal passion for epistemological access and for explicit pedagogic practice” without knowing that he was in fact “busily passionate” about Genre theory.

Dusty: *...And so I was looking for a theory that will justify my persuasions and will justify my arguments. And Genre theory for me was: ‘Wow, I’m comfortable with this...’*

Dusty’s response also indicated a particular type of intuitive thought process that allowed him to engage with research and theorizing without having to initially formalize it by referring to a theory. When he encountered Genre Theory it almost seems to be epiphanic that this theory mirrored his thinking that was happening all along.

The responses of the participants above suggested that an intuitive feeling or belief was an important component in their choice of theory. This alludes to the *two-systems* approach to decision-making described by Beresford and Sloper (2008, p. 3) and Payne & Bettman (2008), viz., System 1 and System 2, represented on a continuum from System 1 being “intuitive, relatively unconscious” through to System 2 which is more “analytic, controllable, conscious”. Payne & Bettman (2008) described System 1 thinking as automatic, unconscious and intuitive, and associated with a feeling of conviction or certainty. System 2 thinking is deliberate, rule-based, consciously executed, regulated, and has less of an emotional content associated with it. According to Cobos, Almaraz, & García-Madruga (2003) System 1 thinking is often used to make immediate decisions, but in novel situations and where greater deliberation is needed, System 2 is used to determine the accuracy of System 1 thinking and adjust it if necessary. Price & Norman (2008, p. 2) asserted that the dichotomy between System 1 and System 2 thinking is not so clear and that decision researchers actually are uncertain about the following: how to chart the relationship between System 1 and 2, what is actually intuitive processing, and what is conscious and unconscious decision-making. Price et al. (2008) and Hogarth (2001) state that decision researchers are increasingly acknowledging the influence of System 1 thinking on

choices and there are attempts to find some conciliation between the two extremes. I propose that in the choices of theory by the participants in my study, they may be making their decisions by using both systems iteratively or collaboratively. When making theory choices, participants seem to go through the following process: first there is an intuitive aspect about their phenomenon of study and a particular ontological stance (System 1); secondly they engage in a vast amount of information searching (System 2) to confirm their intuition; but then a third aspect appears – that is, in the course of their systematic search, they suddenly have an epiphanic discovery – that a particular theory seems to fit with their thinking and *not that their thinking fits with a theory*. In other words, they rely on their intuition (System 1) to confirm what they discovered in their reading (System 2). This observation concurred with Hogarth's (2001) suggestion that there was an increasing awareness that System 1 thinking was more influential on choices than previously acknowledged. Thus the assertions of normative models which specify pre-emptive rules about how decisions should be made (Hoch, Kunreuther, & Gunther, 2001) or the heuristic models where individuals engage in tallying or take the best type of scenarios in making choices (Payne & Bettman, 2004; Beresford & Sloper, 2008) seems unlikely to operate in the doctoral students' choice of theories for their studies. There appears to be a more intuitive process, a feeling that crystallizes when the "correct" theory is encountered, referring perhaps to a more metacognitive process (Strle, 2012; Fletcher & Carruthers, 2012).

4.1.3 Participants' Worldview and Choice

The concept "worldview" refers to a cognitive frame that individuals may use to understand ideas of reality, the nature and purpose of life, and principles that direct relationships and interactions amongst humans (EFP Curriculum Manual, 2007). An individual's worldview shapes her perceptions, understanding and responses to the contexts they find themselves in. In the case of my participants their worldviews became visible in particular recurrent patterns of thoughts and verbalizations, which appears to have informed their choice of theories in specific ways.

Joey had earlier described the patriarchal and gender biased environment in which she was raised. Her awareness of gender inequity was a dominant feature of her outlook on life which informed her choices of theory for her doctoral studies.

Joey: I just believe I am a champion of some type of social justice and those theories differently do help me to understand better and the acute awareness is the thing.

Joey suggested that her striving for gender equality and speaking out against female subordination “sexual harassment”, “violence against women” and “any type of injustice” was “linked to” what she did as an academic. Joey’s choice of theory thus represented a refusal to be constrained by particular types of male power that was inherent in the research process. Kai on the other hand regarded her engagements in academia as one of many aspects for self-growth.

Kai: I started off the PHD to obtain a PHD, but when I completed it, at the end of it, it wasn’t about obtaining a PHD, it was me just doing what I felt was true to myself, true to my inner being, true to who I was.

Kai entered the doctoral programme after a successful application for a scholarship. One of the particular challenges was that she found the objectives of the scholarship programme discordant with her own personality, something she regarded as so important that she felt if the project agenda could not accommodate her interest it would be against her “very soul”. The depth of this feeling was conveyed as being “one of the most painful periods” of her life. However, driven by her strong-mindedness and self-reflection, she made a choice based on her real interest. She eventually settled on researching the phenomenon of assessment at her school, an area where she felt she could make a difference as she was working with that. Kai described her pursuance of a doctorate as an activity of self-actualization. Upon encountering the philosophical works of Foucault, she was immediately drawn to his disseminations as she felt that this had concordance with her own thoughts about life. She regarded her choice of theories as emanating from a personal search for meaning in her life suggesting that the theories were able to provide answers to questions she had been asking. Her choice of theories crystallized from her opinion of Foucault’s thoughts as bold, and insightful, and others like Giddens and Maslow whose views she felt were useful in the “dilemmas and understanding” of life. The recurrent emphasis on the importance of her choices to her life and personal growth is visible in her view that the theories she encountered were “life philosophies” which were “more important than academia”. The

value of such choice of theories, Kai suggested, lay in the actual utility of their contribution to one's "actual living". What emerged in Kai's responses was a recurring emphasis on personal growth, the desire for self-empowerment, and a personal consciousness of the self as researcher which informed her choice of theory for her doctorate. The importance of the participants' personal consciousness as a researcher, and the idea of independent thinking was a recurring theme amongst the participants.

For Rene, an important deliberation was the issue of power inherent in the positionality of the researcher. Underpinned by a feminist outlook she questioned the power dynamics that existed in the relationships between the researcher and the researched.

Rene: So I like the fact that feminism questions the notion of empowerment and does not just take for granted what many Social Scientists believe to be empowerment. I like the fact that it questions the position of the researcher and researched which in my view for too long has, not being neglected, just been conveniently overlooked in the Social Sciences.

Two strong views dominated Rene's outlook on research: she felt strongly that power should be shifted from researcher to participants; and that "school Science teaching and Science teaching in general should incorporate elements and useful knowledge from other knowledge systems". The use of the words "conveniently overlooked" suggests her view that researchers may be aware of the power dynamics inherent in research but intentionally neglected to acknowledge that participants were often subservient to research agendas, or did not engage with methodologies that balanced or shifted the power relations. Rene's choice of a feminist framework enabled her critical stance and allowed her divergence from the status quo she described in the response above. This is evident in her choice of participatory action research, and use of Empowerment Theory, where her innovative methods of engaging her youth participants as peer researchers, concurred with her strong feelings of shifting power from herself to the participants. Rene also emphasized that she used several "local people", that is, theories developed by South African gender/feminist specialists. She motivates her choice by explaining that:

Rene: ...*the local people do have an insider take on social scientific issue like HIV and Aids. And I think that their work is equally valuable, if not more.*

Her responses indicated that her choice of theories for her doctoral study on HIV/AIDS was informed by her knowledge about the current debates on the need to contextualize her research to a local context, in this case, South Africa. Thus her inclination to use feminist theory and to privilege local theorists was an important foundation in enabling her choice of theory. Her positive incorporation of alternative knowledge systems is seen in her creative strategy of using a local *isangoma* (African traditional healer/naturalist) to teach her students about nutritional botany, which she felt had great impact upon her students, even citing a student's response to me as evidence of this. She felt strongly that "other knowledge systems should also be privileged". In her response she introduced the idea that the Social Sciences were dominated by a particular type of perspective about knowledge –which she referred to as "Western" thought. Other participants like Kai, Asher and Dusty also described the dominance of Western/colonial influences upon how knowledge is constructed at university, a discussion I will revert to later in the thesis. Thus Rene's incisive assessment of power and the status quo of knowledge was an important facet of her worldview which informed her choice of theory. It was important for Rene that her personal worldview concurred with how she engaged with her research and teaching. Given her acceptance of others as knowledge generators, it can be understood why she was drawn to a critical feminist framework for her doctoral studies, and especially participatory research theory which was the key aspect of her methodology.

Asher described a shifting of his worldview from a very rigid view of life to a more flexible outlook, which he acknowledged was due to the influence of his academic engagements, particularly his "exposure over the years to theory", and his doctoral research. This suggested that his worldview was impacted upon by access to knowledge and indicated a cognitive influence on the choice of theory he made for his doctoral study. He suggested that it was this shift that allowed him to use pluralist theory in the study of the Bhagavad-Gita as a tool for the development of values. It seemed that the use of pluralist theory became a reciprocal exercise – in other words – being more open allowed him the use of pluralist theory, and using the pluralist theory made him more open to other ideas. This appeared to contradict the idea that subscription

to theory to underpin one's research restricts the researcher's viewpoint rather than expand it. Asher's shifting of positions also indicated that worldviews are fluid, and can adapt or change depending on the type of knowledge one is exposed to.

Dusty's outlook on life had been shaped much by his life experiences, especially growing up as a disenfranchised youth in the apartheid era, his exposure to particular readings and liberation philosophies, and many moments of deep self-reflection, aspects which have dominated his personal outlook and led him to make particular theoretical choices for his doctoral study. He declared that his vision was significantly driven by:

...persuasions about my studies and my identity and my persuasions about liberation and education all those things were driving my vision as such. That was on one hand. On the other hand, there were more of religious persuasions as well.

Being concerned with empowering students, he began searching for a theory that he could use to address the issue of students' lack of epistemological access due to language, and also simultaneously empower himself. His postcolonial reading, analysis of issues and sense of identity and personal consciousness about his independence as a researcher was strongly expressed in the following:

Well you see, SFL and postcolonial theory for me kind of liberated me, that is to say, as a South African in the African continent, a Black person who lives in Durban, I do not have to buy into the grand narratives that have attempted to define the world in ways that universalize what experience means and what phenomena actually mean.

It is significant that Dusty chose to specifically describe himself as geographically situated in Africa as well as mentioned his race, which indicated that he deliberately refused to be influenced by colonial discourses that continue to pervade postcolonial Africa. Inherent in his response was an analysis that the grand narratives were not adequate to explain experience and phenomena at the micro-level, and such universalizing explanations actually do not do justice to explaining local realities or define him as a researcher, especially intimating that the nature of

grand narratives are dominantly from a White, Eurocentric perspective which are incapable of understanding the reality of “Black”, “African” experience. He opposed the idea that local phenomena could be understood in terms of meta-narratives, which concurred with the critique of Martin & Dennis (2010) who argued for the advantage of micro theories rather than macro theories. This idea also resonated with postmodern and post-structural critique that challenged the “claims to knowledge of totalities, and all meta-narratives” (Hammersley, 2012, p. 5). Dusty’s choice of theory was driven by a resistance to being defined by the grand narratives which universalize phenomena and the human experience, preferring his outlook in which he could choose research that allowed him the freedom to define himself, and establish himself as an independent, critical thinking researcher.

Thus for the participants in my study, it appears that the choices made by the doctoral students are also influenced by their worldviews which manifested in certain features of personality, identity and emotions, and a drive to change circumstances which included a sense of empowerment of self as well as for others, and a personal awareness and conscientization of self as a researcher.

4.1.4 The Power to Influence or to Resist? Academic Context and Choice of Theory

In this section I refer specifically to following aspects of the academic context that may influence doctoral students’ choices of theory, viz., Projects and peer group influence on choices of theory, institutional influence, supervisor influence and influence of the cohort system. To understand the extent to which the academic context impinges upon doctoral student theory choices, it may be useful to conceptualize universities as social systems — everything from their buildings, design, administrative structures, policies, curricula, staff and institutional culture impacts upon the thought and behaviours of those who are participants within its formal and informal structures. This could also include the dominant theoretical perspectives of particular disciplines, and the expectations students working within particular disciplines may encounter from the guardians of those theoretical traditions.

4.1.4.1 Projects, Peer groups and Choice

Occasionally, when doctoral students register for their study they may be offered participation in a research project that their supervisor is working on. The supervisor normally would have been awarded a research grant from some prominent research foundation which has an interest in a specific phenomenon or research area, and this drives the supervisor's research project. This could be mutually advantageous to the student and supervisor; funding becomes available to the student, who may also receive several opportunities for travel and to present research papers at various conferences, and the supervisor has the benefit of a research team to compete the research agendas. However, doctoral students who enrol as part of an existing project are expected to dovetail their research to the objectives of the project. This often dictates in particular ways the topic of research, or the particular theorists that the student should consider. In my heading above, I group projects and peer groups together as a research project often involves several other academics who form part of the group.

Kai enrolled for her doctorate by applying for a scholarship granted by an education Foundation which was promoting a specific education project.²⁵ She admits, however, that she applied for the scholarship in that particular area of research by “going with the feeling in the university, at that time the buzzword was the X programmes”. She deliberately sought to join a project which she considered was in the vogue of research to facilitate her doctoral study. The project presented several challenges as she initially found it difficult to conceptualize what was being researched, as well as meet deadlines since she joined late. Since the project was well underway, certain roles and expectations were in place, and it appeared that Kai was immediately thrown in the deep end as far as expecting her to contribute to the project research, and she found herself travelling to different universities in the country as part of a select group of students, “the cream of the crop”. The project initially influenced the types of choices she had to make and she had to quickly develop a quality proposal to present at a forum of top researchers in the country. Kai describes the high calibre of the presenters and conference attendees several times, which suggests that the pedigree of those in that forum (“the who's who in the country in terms of the education”) was an important influence on what Kai included in her presentation, as well as how she responded when asked for her critique of other speakers. It was important for Kai to come

²⁵ Name of Foundation and type of project withheld for reasons of confidentiality

across to that forum as an expert, and appear credible as a researcher, stating that she had “to look good” and that “it was about projecting that kind of image”. Kai’s concern about appearing credible amongst the seasoned researchers continued into her choice of theories for her doctoral study. She described the influence of her peer group upon the choice of her theory for her doctorate and her initial encounter with the works of the theorist, Bernstein. Kai conceded that she did not have any information on Bernstein, and found his language complex and unfamiliar in terms of her own articulation and texts that she was normally used to reading. She admitted Bernstein’s work needed someone with a particular level of academic sophistication to understand it and thus she really did not have a full understanding of Bernstein, and considered him to be a starting point in her research. In this regard, Klette (2012, p. 5-6) suggests that researchers sometimes use theorists due to reverence or “adulation” they have for the great thinkers and engage uncritically with the theory. Initially, in the case of Kai, Bernstein appeared to be an influential theorist and she chose him due to the influence of her peer group. She described finding herself in an environment where the academics were all proponents of Bernstein, and her choice of theorist at that point was due to a need “to survive” which alluded to the acceptance of herself as a researcher, the acceptance of her research as credible and the benefit of other academic privileges. Subsequent to her exposure to Bernstein, she came across the work of Foucault, which she considered to be the “key theorist in completion” of her doctoral work. A recurrent idea of credibility appears to dominate Kai’s choices of theory. Again the decision to choose Foucault stemmed from a personal need to appear credible - “with Foucault, it started of like as a name that would add credibility to my study”. I suggest that she decided to choose Foucault to underpin her doctoral study since such theorists, at the time of her study, were considered important and acceptable to the forum of renowned academics in which she found herself; therefore such choices would ensure they were favourably disposed towards her. Kai also observed that academics were so partial to certain theorists that they developed a disciplinary or personal identity by subscribing to a particular theoretical tradition, which meant they were often quite vociferous about their differences (“warring-camps”). It appears that it was in these engagements that she was exposed to Foucault and began to pursue his ideas.

Dusty, also suggested that participation in a research project may influence a student's theoretical choices. Dusty felt that participation in a research project produces certain power issues in supervision, and that some supervisors may force students in particular ways,

...perhaps because they have a research project and these are the terms of the research project and then they impose those things on students.

Dusty suggested that the influence of a project can be very specific on students and can dictate which paradigm, theory and instruments to use and although the student may have wished to demonstrate original research, this may not occur as they “end up being a doctor which is supposed to be an individual thing and personal thing but in fact it's not”. This introduces the argument as to how, and at which point the student can claim ownership of her research if the hallmark of a doctoral thesis is original and creative research.

According to the Framing theory by Beresford & Sloper (2008), decisions are influenced by the power dynamics of the context in which the choice is being made, which include the decision maker's evaluation of loss or gain. If the persons presenting the options are viewed as the authority and has more information, it is likely that their words will influence the decision or outcome. In the case of Kai, it has been described how her initial choice of Bernstein and Foucault was certainly influenced by the peer group and senior academic context. The evaluation of loss or gain in her case concerned her credibility issue – her choice was certainly influenced by potential gains – namely, the acceptance of her research as credible, as well as being regarded as a credible researcher herself. In terms of the Adaptive Decision-Maker Framework of decision-making (Payne & Bettman, 2004) Kai's choices of theory may also be analysed using the concept of the *social heuristic* (Gigerenzer, 2004; Beresford & Sloper, 2008). This asserts that one does what the majority of one's peer group is doing, what Gigerenzer (2004, p. 73)) calls the “fast and frugal” heuristic. It was fast because, by following the majority in the peer group, Kai did not have to deliberate about its advantages and disadvantages, as she found herself constrained by time; it was frugal because the decision was made without really considering vast amounts of information.

4.1.4.2 Institutional Influence on Choice of Theory

To understand the influence of the Institution on doctoral students' choices of theory, I wish to describe the process for acceptance of a doctoral proposal at the university where my study is located, which is annotated as follows: the student registers for her doctoral degree, is allocated a supervisor, submits a proposal to the supervisor who gives feedback, then submits the edited proposal to the Higher Degrees Committee, and is then granted an interview where she has to engage in the defence of the proposal before a committee of four or five academics. It can be quite a daunting exercise as the academics ask questions of the candidate who is required to provide substantial arguments to defend why her study is worth undertaking. The Higher Degrees Committee then decides whether the student can proceed, or should re-submit a new proposal, or proceed but with amendments to the existing proposal.

Rene was trained in the natural sciences and thus adopted positivist ontology to underpin her doctoral proposal. She explained that due to her science training she was “very partial to psychological theories”. This is perhaps due to the semblance of psychological theories to the characteristics of positivist science which she felt was a safe launching point. Rene explained that she found out in “a very unpleasant way how this faculty of education, how anti-positivist they were.” She suggested that the public exercise “was not pleasant” and while she managed to cope, it could be humiliating to other students. The inclination of the Institution towards a particular paradigmatic position is evident in her response above, a fact that made her reconsider her own paradigmatic stance for her doctoral study. She appeared disturbed by the manner in which she was treated by the committee. She acknowledged that although she made her choice of theory based on the suggestion of the committee, the manner of their suggestions was unprofessional and unethical to have been “scoffing” at her presentation. She regarded this as a negative display of power by those in authority, and suggested that such attitudes and control still prevail since these academics continued “to be in positions of greater power today, at the same institution”. She accepted that it was necessary for her to change her theoretical stance, but preferred that it be done in a constructive manner, rather than the coercive manner that she was subjected to. Lending credence to Rene’s claim is a study by Govender & Dhunpath (2011, p. 7) who explored student experiences of a cohort model. They found that several participants in a focus group discussion actually raised the issue of the “anti-quantitative stance of the Faculty and

negative attitude shown by some supervisors to students using quantitative research methods”. Rene further proposed that: “I do think that people in power can and sometimes do influence one’s choice of theory” which introduced the debates of institutional identity, gatekeeping on the type of research, and the issues of power on student choices of theoretical framing. The responses by Rene and the information from Govender & Dhupath’s (2011) study clearly support the possibility that doctoral students’ theory choices are channelled in particular ways due to the position of the Faculty.

How the Institution continued to exert influence on students’ choices of theories is evident in the responses of Asher who was in charge of overseeing the development of postgraduate modules. Given his occupational portfolio, and his experience of the lack of courses on theory in his own academic study trajectory, I enquired whether there existed any structured courses and modules that are being developed for students. Asher responded that in the Masters programme, students have been introduced to various theorists. This initiative, which was a recent introduction at this Institute, appeared to be an important improvement in assisting students, and according to Asher, would serve to better inform students about theory and how to choose theories for their own studies. When I enquired further on what basis were those theorists chosen, Asher stated that quite often it was done on the personal preference of the lecturer but that “there is a bias towards the continental philosophers to poststructuralists”. Asher elaborated further that the theorists chosen were based on the lecturers’ own location within particular kinds of theory; students are not given “a whole spectrum from one end to another” and allowed to decide for themselves. Asher made an important observation that the course was structured in a manner that privileged continental philosophers and poststructuralists. Thus the students’ choices of theories may be influenced by the theorists that they are exposed to in such structured courses, and depending on the institutional or disciplinary inclination, only particular theorists may be privileged.

What emerges from the data is that the institution may exerts particular influences upon the choice of theory by students, viz., there may exist a subtle as well as direct expectation in some cases for those students entering a particular discipline to consider the use of theorists established by the guardians within the disciplinary tradition; and that academics may be so partial to certain theorists that they exert a peer control on entering doctoral students’ theory choices. The

institution in which this study is based emerges as anti-positivistic and inclined towards interpretivist/ critical/social constructionist/ postmodern and poststructural theorizing, which may direct students to the same. One aspect of power that appeared quite prominently about the guardians of the institutional tradition is the demeaning manner of questioning or comments Rene experienced. This is perhaps not the case for all students, but a risk occurs that such interaction may appear condescending or brusque to entry level doctoral students who are defending their proposals, and as a measure of avoidance of fear of loss, time, energy, failure and status may direct their own research in keeping with more favourable views of the doctoral defence Committee.

In the next subsection, I explore the role of the supervisor in the doctoral students' theory choices.

4.1.4.3 The Influence of Individual supervision on choice of theory

Backhouse (2009) states that obtaining a doctorate is actually an accreditation process in which disciplined research is recognized. Therefore it “serves a gate keeping role, controlling who may claim to make knowledge” (2009, p. 274). Although PhD students are expected to extend the boundaries of knowledge, Backhouse suggests that supervisors of doctoral students often exert great control over students' choices, and the form and structure of their research. Joey concurred with this point:

Now, we must also be realistic and honest in that often who is supervising you has a great influence on where your study goes and what you do although you have an idea of the study and what you want to do.

Joey suggested that the orientation of the supervisor and their theoretical perspectives often influenced the student to think in specific ways. This might occur because the supervisor had mastered a particular theoretical stance in terms of their own training. She stated that when one hears that a particular student was “so and so's student, then you know how that person is going to be thinking,” suggesting the theoretical choices become obvious due to the influence of the supervisor. She explained that it was both Masters and doctoral students who experienced supervisor influence on their choice of theories. Joey stated that this happened in her case, and

she was aware of the cases of other students as well. According to Joey, if a supervisor realized that a student's understanding of theories differed from theirs, they might indicate to the student that they would not be able to supervise, unless the student aligned her thinking with that of the supervisor's. She conceded that supervisors were experts in particular fields and were thus able to direct students in a certain way, but suggested that students who may have different views could create a situation of discomfort or conflict, in which case it might become necessary to "appoint a co-supervisor", someone who would be able to deal with the different thinking. Referring to the case of another student whose location in the critical feminist paradigm was different from her supervisors, Joey discussed the "struggle" that occurred to decide which path to take, stating that the supervisor's influence is often stronger, and the student might have to compromise. Joey cited her own case in her Master's study:

I had a very dominant, powerful, supervisor, who was white, and then the class issue was there, and of course the position in academia, so you feel like this relatively stupid, powerless, person and you have to go in line with what your supervisor's saying, although you have an understanding of what you want to do.

Joey expressed that her supervisor had a strong and dominating influence upon her Master's study. She inferred the lecturer's position of power from the following: the lecturer's personality ("dominant, powerful"); the lecturer's race ("white) and its concomitant class distinction; and the respective positions of the lecturer and student in academia. She suggested that the position of the lecturer was inherently a position of power, and it appeared she felt quite inadequate in the interaction with her supervisor. That she focused on the race of her lecturer presents an interesting phenomenon. Given that Joey had registered and completed her Masters several years after the demise of apartheid, her comment on race could suggest that the idea of vestiges of racial power and superiority continued to exist from the days of apartheid, or it could simply be her interpretation, an ascription to the lecturer of historical power and authority which she experienced as a student during her apartheid years. Joey felt that the experience under that supervisor forced her study in a specific direction which is why her doctorate is almost similar, "almost like an extension" but located in another context. Working under a new supervisor for her doctorate provided a positive and enlivening experience for Joey as she was given the "space

to think independently” and was constantly informed that it was her study. In this case the supervisor was aware of not suggesting any particular theoretical position or research strategy to Joey. Joey felt that her supervisor’s encouraging responses to her queries allowed her to take ownership of the study and contributed to her personal growth. Thus Joey’s responses suggests that supervisors could exert both positive or negative influences upon doctoral students’ theory choices; by encouragement and being open to student ownership of the study, or coercion of students into accepting their particular theoretical traditions due to the influence of their power and authority.

Kai stated that she did not rely much on her supervisor in terms of her study. For Kai, it was important for her to be able to make a choice free of restrictions – reflecting what seemed to be a *metachoice* – choosing to choose without restriction. She stated that she did not depend much on her supervisor, and worked with the entire thesis and handed over to her supervisor a full draft. His positive comment on her work validated her efforts and inspired her further. She acknowledged that he did not tell her how to go about the study and left her “to my own devices”, but gave her “crucial links in terms of the books” and was very knowledgeable about various theorists, qualities she found admirable in her supervisor. Her appreciation of her supervisor extended to what she perceived as non-interference in her work. Kai claimed that she “definitely had agency in terms of the choice of theory” although at strategic points she would inform her supervisor of her intentions, particularly pointing out an attempt to discuss what appeared to be a novel and unusual inclusion – she chose theories of the *soul* as frameworks for understanding her phenomenon of teacher identity, an aspect which concurred with her own spiritual ontology. The supervisor’s responded that “if I were you I would not do that, it’s very risky”. Kai acknowledged her decision to “delve” into the ideas of the soul was “risky”. According to Beresford & Sloper (2008) earlier theories of choice and decisions proposed that people will only choose the least risky option. Prospect Theory (Beresford & Sloper, 2008) however, states that people are both risk-seeking and risk-averse and their psychological valuation of outcomes is dependent on whether they regard the outcomes as gains or loss relative to some benchmark; people can choose to be risk seeking or risk averse. In the case of Kai, it can be assumed that the risk being mentioned may refer to the idea of the soul, which is intangible, not boding well with examiners and the possibility of rejection or failure based on

such a submission. This also suggests a fear of failure on the part of the examiner, who obviously has a vested interest in his doctoral student's success, which alludes to ideas of gatekeeping and issues of power (Backhouse, 2009) vested in examiners whose approval or disapproval can influence the choice of theories that students could make. What emerged in the responses of Kai in terms of her choice of theory is that she began her search from a point of confusion and doubt, and she sought to choose those theorists that would increase her acceptance as a credible researcher, a situation derived from contextual influences. However, once she came upon Foucault, she discovered that her personal worldview found theoretical resonance with the disseminations of Foucault and she immediately felt this was the theorization she could use to explain her selected phenomenon, a choice that seemed to arise from an epiphanic experience.

Rene gave credit to her supervisor as being supportive and innovative too, stating that there were "very interesting ideas from my supervisor about ways in which to generate data". The interaction with her supervisor appeared to be a collective exercise in which options were discussed and changes in theoretical frameworks were encouraged on the merit of its usefulness. Rene indicated that her experience with her supervisor with regard to the choice of theory was a collaborative effort. However, she suggested that supervisors could influence doctoral students' choices of theories. Rene's view that doctoral students' theory choices may be influenced by their supervisors is extrapolated from her experience as a teacher on the Masters programme. She proposed that this is perhaps "quite a natural thing, perhaps there is nothing wrong with it" meaning that it was expected that a supervisor would encourage a student to work with their theoretical constructs due to their familiarity and expertise in that field, a point that was also made by Joey that she would want to "supervise somebody that I have knowledge about, which is a natural, normal thing". In the responses of Rene, Kai and Joey above it emerged that a supervisor's influence on the doctoral students' choice of theory may be for practical reasons, that as an expert in a particular discipline, the supervisor was best able to direct the student to particular theories; this still means, however, that the supervisor will direct students to what was most familiar.

Dusty was ambivalent about the supervisor influence but ventured an explanation that although supervisors might not directly influence their students, some could have subtle expectations that

their students perpetuate their theoretical standpoints, something that he believed was not appropriate. He also felt it could be argued that supervisors should direct their students to theories in their particular fields of expertise. These contentions are described in the literature by Bak (2011, p. 1047) who states that to subscribe to a particular “-ism” or academic lineage of the supervisor is risky for a new student since she is unable to judge the merit of that lineage and can become “captive” to a particular set of academic beliefs. The student still has to decide on her own particular academic trajectory over time and may realize later, to her emotional and physical detriment (like career path), that the academic path she chose was limiting and incorrect.

Most participants in my study described positive and supportive influences from their supervisors in terms of how they have been directed to particular theorists, and claimed that they had agency in the choice of their theories. However, it does appear that supervisors *do* direct students to theories that they themselves are familiar with or in their respective fields of expertise. Further, it seems that the emphasis on students’ theoretical choices are stronger in the Masters’ study programme rather than the doctorate, although participants suggest that both study programmes are influenced by supervisors. It may be assumed that since the Masters’ programme is the entry point of a student into scholarship, and the student may display greater uncertainty and lack of know-how at this level, supervisors are involved in a more direct intervention to assist students here. In this relationship between the supervisor and student, power appears to exist inherently in the position of the supervisor. This may be understood by Butler’s concept of *subjectification*, about how power forms the subject. Butler (1995, p. 45) presents an interesting paradox that the “more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved”. Butler avers that one may suppose that submission usually results in a loss of mastery to an external source of domination, but mastery and submission are simultaneous. In this case the student (the subject) cannot exist without simultaneous submission and mastery – the participants in my study may claim agency to choose their own theories, and they may also contest and challenge the power inherent in the supervisor’s position, yet they are still dependent upon the supervisor for direction and critique.

In the next section, I examine the influence of the cohort system on doctoral students’ theory choices.

4.1.4.4 Cohort influences on Choice of Theory

In an attempt to increase doctoral throughput rate and reduce doctoral dropout rates internationally, several universities have developed a cohort model of supervision as opposed to the traditional mentorship model of the one-to-one relationship of supervisor-student. The cohort model adopted at the local university where my study is based, has already been lauded for its efficacy and providing opportunities for enhancing doctoral student understanding, quality of research and increasing retention rates (Govender & Dhunpath, 2011) as well as increasing the principles of “collaboration and collegiality” amongst students and staff (Govender & Dhunpath, 2013, p. 221). Govender & Dhunpath also describe several shortcomings of the cohort model, and I will analyse the data from my study that alludes to the same. The cohort system consists of a group of lecturers from different specialties in education who collectively supervise doctoral students using an organized system of taking students through the various aspects of the doctorate in stages, e.g. the proposal stage, the literature review, the theory chapter, methodology, data analysis, discussion, write up and so on. Participants in my study have had varying degrees of involvement and experiences with the cohort system. Therefore in my interview with doctoral students, I tried to understand whether the cohort had any influence on their theory choices. Several participants commented on the dynamics that emerged in the cohort system, much of which concurred with the findings of the studies by Govender & Dhunpath (2011; 2013). In the following description I present some of the tensions and conflicts within the cohort model. I argue that this background is necessary to understand how the dynamics of power, either subtle or direct may have possible influences on the choice of theory by doctoral students.

Participant Joey stated that she was part of a gender cohort, but that was a separate gathering of only students who were involved in gender studies, and not the general cohort system. In principle it was similar to the larger cohort but she felt that it did not influence her theory choices in any way. Joey suggested that while the gender cohort was useful from the point of view of reworking her thesis and receiving feedback on ideas she may have missed, at times the feedback was confusing, as many as six people gave feedback from different perspectives, an experience also described by Dusty who expressed that the diverse comments from several supervisors was difficult to follow. These assertions find support in Govender & Dhunpath’s (2011, p. 6) study

where participants of the Focus Group who were cohort supervisors themselves, also felt there too many supervisors assigned to each cohort and this had the effect of “submerging student voices”, and leading students in diverse directions thereby confusing them. The Framing model of Prospect Theory (Beresford & Sloper, 2008) provides a perspective on this occurrence. It claims that people perceive, organize and interpret information differently about the same information, and therefore solutions can vary. The manner in which relevant information is perceived and processed is crucial to how individuals make decisions (Beresford & Sloper, 2008). According to Soman (2004) individuals may be cognitively processing the same stimulus differently. This suggests that the different supervisors who were giving feedback were responding from their own theoretical and experiential positions and not accommodating the student’s view, and this vast amount of diverse feedback was perplexing to the student. However, this explanation by the Framing Model implies an unconscious cognitive process on the part of the cohort supervisors, and does not include issues of intentional show of power by supervisors, and other issues described by participants²⁶. The descriptions of particular anecdotes in the cohort are important to understand the dynamics of power that exist therein. In this regard one can consider Dusty’s observations.

His first encounter with the cohort system of supervision was disturbing and he recalled how a particular student broke down and cried in response to hostile feedback from cohort supervisors about his theoretical framework and abilities as a doctoral student, which Dusty regards as “intimidating” and a humiliating experience. On a subsequent occasion when Dusty was required to present his own study, he describes that he “left that place more confused” than he was, suggesting that the comments from cohort supervisors who had diverse orientations perplexed him, and he was aghast that he even received suggestions that he should shift his study into another discipline. I propose that such goading is capable of swaying students’ thoughts and depending where students find themselves so coercively located, their particular choices of theory will also be influenced. Dusty asserted that there have been students who have withdrawn from their doctoral studies because of their negative experiences in the cohort and he himself decided to discontinue his participation. Dusty conceded that the original idea of the cohort as a supportive structure to students is to be lauded, but feels its operation had changed with time. He

²⁶ As well as reported in the study by Govender & Dhunpath (2011)

gives credit to the cohort system for the cases where students may not have effective supervision from their personal supervisors, and therefore the feedback from the cohort is useful to them.

In terms of agency students have in making choices of theory, Dusty expressed that there are particular historical and traditional factors that influenced the way individuals operated within the system. In this inherent status quo, one is “at the mercy” of the more powerful voices that have established themselves in this community. Dusty suggested that there was an unspoken expectation that the opinions of seniors were not to be challenged, and an alliance amongst seniors that discouraged the dissonant view, even if students were honest and sincere. In this regard, Govender & Dhunpath (2011, p. 6) reported that some students also felt “forced to submit to pressure from the cohort supervisors to change the focus of their studies against their own inclinations”, issues described by the participants in my study. However the Focus group interviewed in their study “frowned upon” the cohort supervisors that pressurized students into using “particular research genres and working within pet paradigms and favoured methodologies” (Govender & Dhunpath, 2011, p. 7). I propose that this suggests two things: firstly, it indicates that the administrators of the cohort neither intended that cohort supervisors engage in such coercive practices, nor support it; and secondly, the existence of the phenomenon of coercion by supervisors described by the participants in my study is shown to be plausible, the authoritative power of which may produce the effect of silencing dissenting student voices and can be assumed to have ramifications for student’s choices of theory.

Rene, who stated that she was not quite aware of the choices at that time, did not participate in the cohort, but felt that she could have benefitted from the cohort had she participated. However, she drew on her experience as a Master’s cohort supervisor to comment on the influence of the cohort. She suggested that the cohort supervisors were aware of the iterative nature of research, and that “research is messy” and not “as cut and dried as theory, methods, analysis” and felt that the cohort system did allow sufficient flexibility. She suggested that (as in her case) a student’s theoretical lens may change as the project evolves. While Rene may have suggested that this was the case, she was not a participant in the cohort system as a doctoral student and did not receive feedback from the cohort about her proposed study; had she been, in the light of other student’s experiences perhaps her responses may have been different. According to her

responses earlier in this chapter it is understood that her own stance is multicultural and multi-theoretical and therefore her opinion may be informed by such a perspective, making her more flexible in responding to doctoral students' theory choices.

Govender & Dhunpath (2013, p. 230) suggested that while the cohort model had both positive and negative factors, the cohort model alongside the traditional model benefitted PhD students by providing access to a wide range of discipline “experts as well as methodological expertise and generic research support”. Thus the cohort system emerges as a powerful influence on the direction of doctoral students' studies by manifesting both positive and negative influences.

Where individual supervisors are lacking in their guidance to students, the cohort emerges as an important forum to direct students towards ideas of theory, to test their ideas against opinions of experts, and receive advice about structural dynamics of writing a doctoral dissertation. It is suggested that students who participate in the cohort must be able to handle the critique that is presented in the forum but simultaneously supervisors need to be aware of their own dominance and manner amongst dissenting views and allow students independent thinking (Govender & Dhunpath , 2011). Given the particular power dynamics that occur in the cohort system, it is possible that doctoral students' theory choices may be influenced by the sanction or prohibition of particular theoretical views, by the manner of spoken and unspoken critique, and expectations in terms of the inherent status quo, that may allow certain voices or silence other voices, dissuade students from innovative theoretical perspectives or from participating in doctoral studies completely.

In the next subsection I examine another category that influences how decisions are made, i.e., access to and amount of information the decision maker has.

4.1.5 Knowledge and Choice of Theory

The Adaptive Decision-Maker model of the Information Processing Approach explains how persons decide between various conflicting choices, especially when no single choice has prominent qualities that would make choosing easy. Decisions in this category, known as preferential choice problems, are made after seeking a solution through acquiring information about the alternatives, and then evaluating them. The Framing Model of Prospect Theory

(Beresford & Sloper, 2008) also describes the importance of the amount of information the decider has before making a decision. Decisions made will be based how desirable the features of the option are to the individual, the certainty of actually achieving the attribute value, and how willing the individual is to lose or gain one feature of the choice for another (Payne & Bettman, 2004). In the case of quick decisions, sometimes too much information may debilitate against the decision and heuristics may be used (Payne & Bettman, 2004); this may be appropriate for decisions that require less input – e.g. choice of colour, route to take, menu choices, or making a decision in an emergency. However, in the case of the doctoral students, the process of their theory choices is a deliberate, long process as it is reliant on vast amounts of information from extensive reading, scrutiny of various research resources and discussion with supervisors and other academic experts. To develop their research, students have to establish the actual phenomenon or topic of study they wish to pursue; interrogate what the scholarly literature says about it; demonstrate their understanding of the meaning, and role of theory; seek existing theories that explain the phenomenon or alternate inter-disciplinary ideas and evaluate their applicability; determine the appropriate methodologies that will be used to understand the problem, as well as the limitations and contentions, and produce an analysis, interpretation and critique of the data. From the data, it is understood that participants in my study engaged with large amounts of information to make their theory choices. In this section, I attempt to understand how the access to, or absence of knowledge about theory impinged upon the doctoral students' theory choices under the following headings which arise from the data: participants' understanding of the meaning and role of theory, and knowledge about theory from their undergraduate to doctoral studies.

4.1.5.1. How the understanding of the Meaning and Role of theory affects Choice

In the interview the participants were asked to respond to what they understood by the term *theory*. The rationale is that participants could only engage with theory and choose theories for their studies if they had a clear understanding of what theory meant. When asked to respond to what they understood by the meaning of theory, participants indicated similar ideas of what theory meant. Joey suggested that theory could be understood as “a system of ideas, ways of trying to understand something”. She suggested that one way of understanding theory included having an idea about how a particular phenomenon operated, what in research is called a

hypothesis, a formal supposition that can be researched to determine whether it is true. She also asserted that theory could also be understood in its common meaning – that, theory was just someone’s explanation of something, a type of conjecture that might arise from a person’s experience of an event or phenomenon. The role of theory according to Joey was to reveal the thoughts and disseminations of thinkers that have researched the same phenomenon before her. Theorizing meant being able to ascertain to what degree those explanations could support what she was researching, or being able to reject those propositions and finding novel ways to understand her phenomenon of research.

Similar ideas about theory were expressed by the other participants. Kai suggested that theory was a “set of ideas or principles that someone has actually come about with that best explains a phenomena or an event”. Rene understood theory to mean “a frame of thought which will help me understand a particular phenomenon” as well as inform her methodology and assist her data analysis. Asher regarded a theory as “bodies of knowledge that we work with to explain particular experiences of reality, experiences of life, of behaviour”, also adding that the word *theory* itself means it could change and be “reworded, relooked at and revised”. Dusty also regarded a theory as a “collection or combination of related ideas” by which we could understand the world, ideas that gave rise to concepts that formed abstract categories to “make meaning of experience”.

In all of the participant’s understandings of theory above, the meaning of theory emerged as a pre-existing system of ideas that could be used to understand particular phenomena in the world, which concurred with the ideas of theory described by several researchers, viz.: as “structured lenses” to study the world (Klette, 2012); a framework for explaining “how: and “why” events occurred (Johnson & Christensen, 2007) and as a systematic formulation and organization of ideas to make sense of data (Schumm et al., 1993). According to Hammersley (2012) who provided several descriptions of how theory was commonly used, such definitions of theory suggested normative, *apriori* expectations of its value and reasons for use, an idea which is strongly influenced by the natural sciences, an assertion also made by Reeves (2008). The responses from the participants concurred with the idea of theory as paradigmatic; an idea that has come to dominate the social sciences originating from Kuhn’s historical account of the

natural sciences (Hammersley, 2012). Most of the participants also indicated that theory was an important starting point for their research. In retrospect Joey mentioned that she could have used multiple theories to understand the phenomenon she was studying. Kai stated that she was initially quite uncertain with her initial experience with theory, but when she subsequently received a scholarship, she became part of a group project that introduced her to Bernstein and Foucault. Rene who initially worked at another institution as a lecturer prior to completing her doctorate at the current university, claimed that she understood the meaning of theory and its importance, but realized that her perspective was shaped by the positivist paradigm of the natural sciences, an understanding that had to shift when she encountered the anti-positivist stance of the institution in my study. These responses indicated that the participants emphasized the importance of finding a theory or theories that would underpin their research. What this data suggests is that depending on one's choice of paradigm, one's choices of theory will also be affected.

In exploring the responses above, I sought to illuminate the participants' ideas on the meaning of theory but what also emerged was an inherent assumption on the part of the participants that theory *has* an important role to play in research and that the position of theory was seen as necessary. However, Asher questioned the idea of the place of theory in research, "that's what we are being pushed into especially at this institution, is that there has to be theory, to say that your work can't stand on its own". He suggested that one's research would only be regarded as significant if it was "pitched up against a particular theory" and questions why research could not be conducted without relying on any theory.

Asher's questioning of theory versus *theory* emphasizes an important debate about the role of theory in research. In this regard Carr's (2006) asserts that the debate on theory has a historical trajectory; particular forms of theory have emerged in certain intellectual and cultural contexts which make theory seem compelling. Thomas (2011) declares that theory has gained a status of conferring academic legitimacy to research, and due to this, only particular kinds of endeavour in educational enquiry are reinforced and propagated. Any researcher promoting an atheoretical stance is interrogated and disparaged. According to Thomas (2011), theory, rather than liberating intellectually, serves to fortify the status quo. Thus it seems taken for granted that

theory is necessary, and research not underpinned by theory is regarded with scepticism. In the data, it is observed that participants regarded theory as an essential part of their research and their positioning on the meaning and role of theory in research assists in understanding how and why they chose particular theories for their doctoral studies. Therefore, the participants *will* choose theory because they see it as needed.

4.1.5.2. Looking Back from the Doctorate: Theory from Undergraduate and Choices

I was interested to understand at which point in their academic trajectory participants began to interact with and use ideas of theory. My supposition was that knowledge about theory and its applicability would inform how students made their theory choices. I questioned participants about their exposure to theory from their undergraduate days to their doctoral engagements.

Joey stated that in her current lecturing to her undergraduate students, theorists like Plato, Dewey and Rousseau are featured, which prompted her memory that these were the theorists that she was exposed to as an undergraduate herself, although her recollections are vague. She admitted that she did not understand the role of theorists and their relevance to her ‘reality’ then. She attributed this incomplete understanding to a lack of readiness, immaturity (of her age and capacity perhaps) and the type of teaching they were exposed to. She recollected that her undergraduate experience consisted mostly of note-taking from an overhead projector and that her lecturers did not encourage critique or prompt them to analyse the relevance of these theories. Thus it would appear that as students, the critical understanding and application of theories was not emphasized. Joey admitted that her understanding of theory was not clear, even at her Masters’ level and only became clear “perhaps in my second year in PHD studies”. This, she attributed to the fact that, in her Masters studies there was a lack of theory modules, like “discourse analysis modules and understanding academic literacy”, a lack of support as far as writing and research was concerned, and lack of supervisor support, which forced her to work on her own without a clear understanding.

Although Kai had enrolled for a coursework Masters programme, she also recounted similar experiences. She stated that in her Masters study she did not have “a firm theoretical grounding” and her understanding of the role of theory was “weak”. Even though she had to attend lectures

for the different modules, there was “no strong introduction or orientation to various theories”, and she felt she had to read a lot, and emphasized her confusion as “trying to fumble and find your way around”. She explained that even with a structured programme, and compared to the type of guidance current lecturers give their students, (“kind of hold their hand and take them through that process”), that was absent in her Masters experience.

Rene who had a BEd Science degree, found it difficult to straddle two disciplines. She found it more difficult to understand the education curricula than the science courses in her undergraduate years and could not recall any theories that stood out for her in the undergraduate years. Even at her Master’s level, she admitted that her engagement with theory was not “to a great extent” and since she had enrolled for a full Masters dissertation, she did not attend any modules in research or theory discourses. Being trained in the pure sciences she found that it was difficult to engage with the different ways of thinking in the Humanities, especially in her case – in Education. The theory at Master’s level only became clearer when she was actually writing up the thesis in that she “had to have something about theory”. She felt she had not “looked at it very carefully at the time, although in retrospect” she found that she did choose correctly.

Asher recalled that as a BA undergraduate, he had encountered *Piaget* in his undergraduate Psychology course. Citing similar experiences to other students, he felt that in his undergraduate years the idea of theory was not clear to him and did not adequately prepare him for postgraduate studies. He ventured a reason that the lecturers then were not well “versed in research and theories”. He explained that “with time and with the more reading” that he had done, he had arrived at his current understanding of theory, but also felt theory was “evolving”. Due to this, he felt his current idea may not correspond with what theory currently means, and that it was a continuous reflective process. Engaging in his Masters coursework, which was a general study Masters, exposed him to various modules, but his exposure to theory actually came about in a module on Social Theory where, for the first time he was introduced to theorists like “Foucault, Derrida, to the concept of deconstruction, and postmodernism”.

Dusty was also exposed to theory from undergraduate studies and his ideas of theory were informed by a wide range of liberation and postcolonial readings, even from his school days. His responses indicated that he was enthused to have been exposed to Literary Theory from his undergraduate course, which began to inform his thinking and his discourse, and in the process he “began to formulate my own world view” and was exposed to “feminist literary theory, post structuralism, postcolonialism, postmodernism”. Dusty felt that his exposure to theorizing in undergraduate years informed his understanding, and consequently his deeper exchanges with his lecturers in the postgraduate courses. Due to this understanding he was able to engage with his lecturers on several topics of discussion, while his peers were not often able to participate in the discussions, since they had no exposure to a similar type of training. According to Dusty, his contribution and participation were noted by his lecturers, and it appears that this afforded him a particular status as he was recognized and marked as a potential employee.

At the doctorate level, the importance of reading widely prior to identifying theory choices is emphasized by several participants. For Joey, her interest was triggered by the many readings about social constructionism, gender and masculinity from her Masters, ideas that she extended into her doctoral study. While she regarded the authors that she had encountered in her Masters study as inspirational, she emphasized the fact that she had to read further for her doctorate to enable her choices. Joey suggested that her wide reading was especially necessary since the doctoral study process did not expose her to a systematic presentation of diverse theorists that she could consider. However, she maintained that she “didn’t use a particular theorist” but referred to several researchers and theorists who had contributed to the understandings of gender and masculinity. A reading of her thesis indicates that theories of Gender, Critical Men’s Studies and Social constructionism are overarching theoretical frameworks used to underpin her study, and in particular the theorizing of Connell, Burr and Morell are significantly featured. At the stage of submitting her proposal she recollected being “dubious” since she could have used a “more eclectic approach”, and included gender power theories. This illustrates the uncertainty of the doctoral student in making theory choices as well as the diversity of theories that are extant from which to examine particular phenomena.

Kai, who originally used the theorizing of Bernstein, gravitated towards the works of Foucault, whose concepts, especially of *governmentality*, she found resonated with her ideas, and she began reading further about Foucault. She suggested that using Foucault was “not an option, it was a choice” suggesting it was a conscious decision to use his theorizing as her theoretical framework. However, when questioned about how widely she had to read before making this choice of theory, Kai’s vehement response seems contradictory:

No, no, no, I didn’t read, it was just happening. It wasn’t a conscious decision you know, now I am going to..... In fact the key question that I had in my study, emerged from Foucault’s work, it directed my work...

That she made a conscious choice about Foucault and her statement above appears contradictory; this could be understood as follows: it was not that she had a list of theorists with Foucault being one of the many options to choose from. She suggested that as she read Foucault’s work, the ideas that she explored found concordance with his disseminations; in that sense it was not conscious but automatic. She explained that she found alignment with Foucault’s work from her proposal stage and stayed with it throughout and simply deepened her understanding and application of his ideas. Subsequently, she read and used a diverse range of theorists to underpin other aspects of her theorizing. She used Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to understand discourse theory, and Giddens work to understand identity, modernity and the impact on the individual. She also used Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and Victor Frankl’s concept of logotherapy.

In response to how widely she had to read, Rene stated that she had to read “very, very widely”, which included internet searches until she was convinced that the feminist theories of empowerment “seemed to fit given the gendered underpinnings of the spread of HIV”. Asher also stated that he had to read “quite extensively on the theory in order to convince myself that this was an appropriate theory to use”. Asher advised that students should be well informed about the ideas of theory and the role of theory in research, because he felt that one’s contribution “becomes much more significant when it’s presented in a particular framework according to particular theories”. As previously described, the data revealed that Dusty was a

zealous reader from his youth, already having read Steve Biko's liberation philosophies from his schooling days. At university he continued reading avidly and was fortunate to be exposed to literary theory, emphasizing his exposure to protest poetry and South African writers like Ezekiel Mphahlele and Jabulo Ndebele, and reading the anthology of South African short stories like *To Kill A Man's Pride* "and all those stories that were influenced by Black consciousness". Despite that, he revealed that his doctoral proposal was rejected three times, due to the many gaps that had arisen from his lack of correct understanding which emanated from a lack of information. To supplement his lack of knowledge, he enrolled for a course in Systemic Functional Linguistics to be able to make a more informed choice about his theory.

Except for the experiences of Dusty, what emerges is that in the undergraduate years, students may be introduced to certain key theorists in subjects like Psychology, Social Science or Education. Most participants in the interview responded that their understanding of theory and its role and relevance in undergraduate years was not clear, and that critical engagement with these theories was not emphasized. They explain this lack of understanding of theory due to immaturity on their part, a lack of readiness, as well as deficiencies in the teaching of such ideas. The data also reveals that confusion around theory continues to permeate studies even at Masters' level, and its understanding is also not so clear in the initial stages of the doctoral studies. Some participants attribute this to a lack of structure, organization and discussion around the theorists, lack of training in research methodology and application of theory. Participants in the study appear to have arrived at the understanding and use of theory in their doctorates by meandering through a large amount of self-researched readings. The data accentuated that students' choices of theory was influenced by a solid knowledge base informed by wide reading. Students indicated that they made informed choices based on their wide reading. Reading widely on various theories provided the student with the current debates around those theories and provided details on how such theories have been applied to the understanding of similar or other phenomena, as well as provided them with a sense of self-empowerment in making decisions about theory choice. According to the Framing Theory (Beresford & Sloper, 2008), availability or access to information is shown to be a very significant influence on the choice of theories that doctoral students make.

Thus, in the above analysis, participants in the study allude to institutional, peer and supervisor influences on doctoral students' theory choices, and at least one participant directly described how she made a choice of theory based on what was popular in her peer group due to being under pressure of time and a lack of knowledge. The analysis suggests further that the doctoral students' access to information and knowledge is a crucial component in making a choice of theory, and is informed by three aspects, viz., the students' understanding of the meaning and role of theory, exposure to theories from their undergraduate years, and the amount of reading students engaged in prior to choosing. In the next section I examine the applicability of the theories of decision-making that formed the theoretical lens for the analysis.

Part 4.2: A Critique of the Models of Choice

In Chapter 2, the theories of decision-making, viz., the Adaptive Decision Maker Framework (Payne & Bettman, 2004), and the Framing decision-making model (Beresford & Sloper, 2008) are presented. Using the understandings that emerged from the data analysed in section 4.1 above, in the next sections, I provide a critique of the applicability of these models to the process of how doctoral students make theory choices.

4.2.1 The Adaptive Decision-Maker Framework (ADMF)

The Adaptive Decision-Maker Framework (Payne & Bettman, 2004) postulates that when persons make decisions, they try to reduce cognitive effort by using *heuristics*, which are simplification mechanisms that people use to select and process information. Several heuristics were described in Chapter 2, and in this section, I further evaluate their explanatory value in the process of doctoral students' theory choices with reference to the data.

According to Goldstein (2004), sometimes people are compelled to make decisions quickly without much information, and they use heuristics. Payne & Bettman (2004) describe the following: in terms of the Lexographic strategy (LEX), people use a fast and frugal heuristic to solve a problem within a relatively short time using little information by identifying and choosing the option with the best value on the most important characteristic. They may use Satisficing Strategy for Decisions (SAT) to make a decision by comparing the attributes of

options in relation to a pre-determined cut-off point, and stopping at the first option that reaches the cut-off level, which may or may not be the maximum alternative. Sometimes decision makers combine the strategies of both LEX and SAT, which is called Elimination by Aspects (EBA) which means that the choices that fail to meet a minimum level, or do not have a preferred characteristic for the essential attribute are excluded. The elimination process is repeated for the next most important attribute and continued until only one alternative remains. However, with EBA the decision accuracy is often compromised by a selective attention to irrelevant attributes (Beresford & Sloper, 2008; Payne & Bettman, 2004). Gigerenzer (2004) makes similar observations about the Take the Best (TTB) and Tallying heuristics. The data shows, however, that doctoral students in my study are not involved in systematic tallying strategies where several theories are listed and the merits and demerits of each one weighed against each other and sequentially eliminated; neither do they conduct a random search amongst the attributes of theories until a theory is found.

Goldstein (2004) also describes two heuristics: the recognition heuristic, and the social heuristic. The recognition heuristic operates when a person's choice is based on an option that seems familiar, and the social heuristic is involved when a person's choice is based on what the majority in one's peer group (Gigerenzer, 2004) is choosing. At least one participant in my study directly explained how her peer group influenced her choice of theory. When a decision maker has to make quick decisions needed in practical, daily living, or in clinical and managerial contexts, the use of heuristics may result in significant savings in cognitive effort. However, in the case of the doctoral students in my study, the process of theory choices is long and complicated, and in many cases may take more than a year to finalize. Furthermore, their theory choices appear to be influenced by diverse factors and involve much iteration; therefore they do not use the LEX, SAT or EBA, TTB or tallying strategies in any organized or planned way as described by the psychological or cognitive models of choice. Therefore, the idea of using heuristics to minimize cognitive effort in choice does not feature prominently in the data and reveals the contrary – that there is a great investment in cognitive effort and time on the part of the doctoral student, before a theory is chosen. Further, the use of heuristics to explain decision-making still places it within the ambit of rational, positivist models to explain decision behaviour. Underpinned by the interpretivist lens, I used the models of decision-making

proposed by Beresford & Sloper (2008) and that of Payne & Bettman (2004), to propose a model that explains how doctoral students make theory choices.

4.2.2 Proposing the Doctoral Students' Theory Choice Model

Doctoral students' theory choices arise from a complex permutation of factors that is understood through the Framing model of decision-making (Beresford & Sloper, 2008, p. 17; Soman, 2004). This model, which appears flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of factors that influence decision-making, viz., individual, contextual, and informational factors, is relevant to the understanding of doctoral students' theory choices.

For the purposes of convenience, I represent Beresford's & Sloper's (2008) model here again:

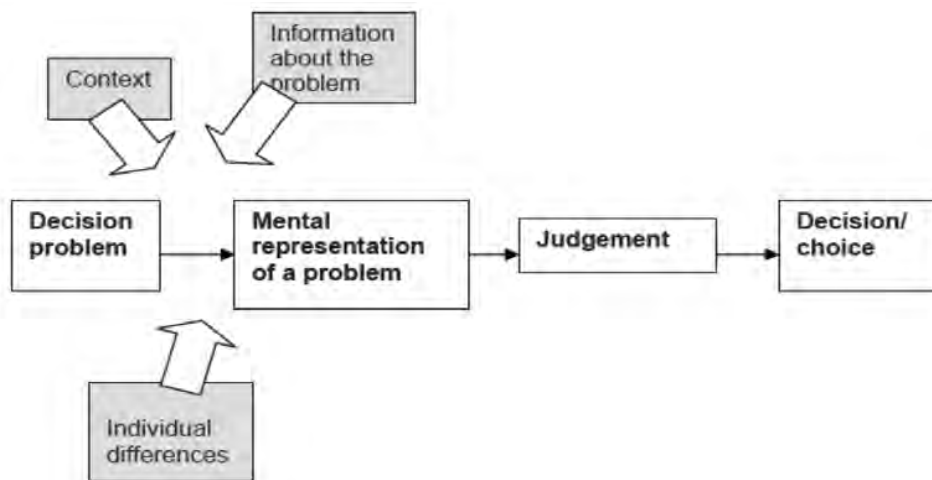


Figure 4.1. The role of mental representation in decision-making: Beresford & Sloper (2008, p. 17)

Drawing on the above *Framing* model by Beresford & Sloper (2008, p. 17) introduced in Chapter 2, I extend the model by using the themes derived from the analysis of the data. The data indicates that the choices of theory by doctoral students are influenced by a diverse permutation of factors, which I have already analysed into themes, in Part 4.1 above. I propose that the Framing Model of Beresford & Sloper (2008) is useful insofar that it is a launching point

to explain how certain factors predispose doctoral students to make particular theory choices for their study. However, particular factors remain unexplained by Beresford's & Slopers' (2008) model.

In the model proposed below, I attempt to represent in a diagram, the factors that influence doctoral students' theory choices that I have specifically identified from the data, viz., sociocultural background, intuition/personal consciousness, worldview, academic context, and knowledge.

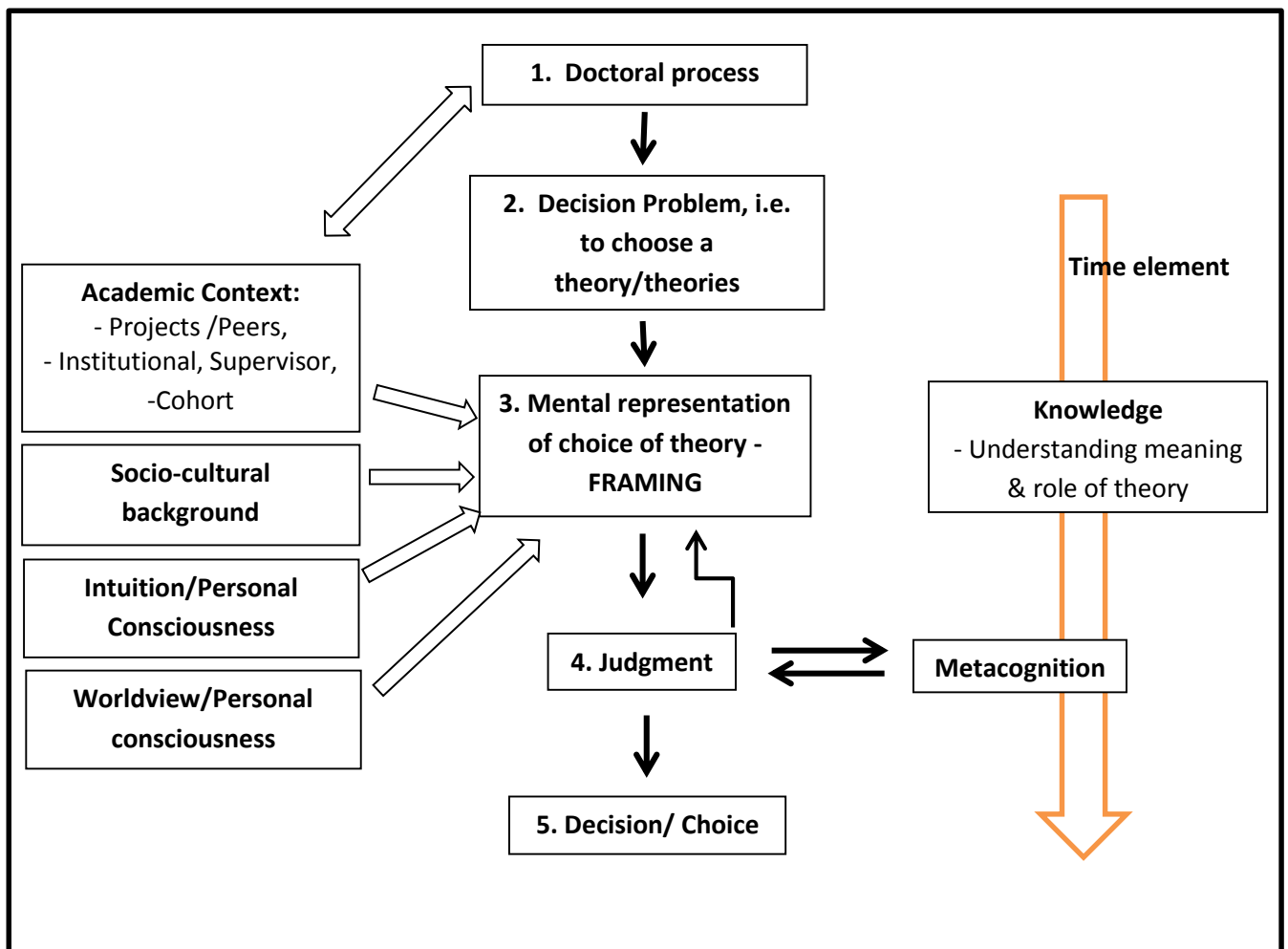


Fig. 4.2. The Doctoral Students' Theory Choice Model

4.2.2.1 An Explanation of Doctoral Students' Theory Choice Model

The model should be conceptualized as follows:

Step 1: Doctoral Process – the student enrolls for her doctorate and she becomes part of the *Doctoral Process* as the first step. She may or may not have a research problem in mind that she wishes to pursue at this point. Once the student enrolls, she is subject to the formal requirements of the doctoral programme, viz., administrative requirements, official declarations, writing the initial proposal, the need to find a supervisor and /or attending the cohort, the need to concretize the research problem, and consider the design of the study, which includes deciding about the theoretical framework. The *Doctoral Process* is represented on its own since it concerns merely the administrative and technical requirements. The *Doctoral Process* and *Academic Context* are illustrated as linked to each other reciprocally because the components of the *Academic Context* arise within the university academic ambit and any changes there will influence the doctoral process, e.g. attending the doctoral cohort is a technical requirement, but also a possible influence upon how students choose theories. For example, if for some reason the university excludes the cohort system, then both the process and the context will be affected with a corresponding effect on the student.

Step 2: Decision Problem – The *Doctoral Process* flows to the *Decision Problem*, which, in this case is the student's proposal and choice of theoretical framing. Once the student has satisfied all the technical and administrative requirements, the student begins to consider choosing a theoretical framework, signified by the block called the *Decision Problem*. This is the starting point where the student begins to consider the appropriate theories to underpin her study. The decision is not as simple and straightforward as the psychological and cognitive models make it out to be (as discussed in section 4.1 above).

Step 3: Framing –The student attempts to frame or *mentally represent* her theory. The mental representation is influenced by several factors shown on the left hand side of the model, viz., Sociocultural background, Intuition and Worldview (personal factors) of the student, and

*Academic Context*²⁷ and *Knowledge* (external factors). I will discuss these factors below, beginning with the *Sociocultural Background*, which, according to the data, shapes the students' perceptions and choices in particular ways.

- **Sociocultural Background**

The participants' *background* experiences from their familial, social, cultural and religious situations, as well as particular events and personal experiences have informed their perceptions and shaped their academic trajectories as students. Participants describe certain periods of their lives where they had deep introspection and reflection about events and experiences, especially in terms of gender, apartheid, social justice issues, role of education, access to and types of knowledge, tending towards an acceptance of critical to postmodern/poststructural ontologies in which pluralist worldviews from different sources is acknowledged.

A component not considered in the Framing model of Beresford & Sloper (2008), is the role of *intuition* in decision-making.

- **Intuition/ personal consciousness**

Hogarth's (2001) avers that there is an increasing awareness that intuition is more influential on choices than previously acknowledged. Normative models, which specify pre-emptive rules about how decisions should be made, play a very minor role in participants' choice of theories for their studies. Doctoral students in my study claim a "feeling" that the theory they chose was the right one. There appears to be a more intuitive process, a feeling that crystallizes when the "correct" theory is encountered, referring perhaps to a more metacognitive process (Strle, 2012; Fletcher & Carruthers, 2012).

- **Worldviews and Theory Choice**

The students' worldviews or ontologies seem to have predisposed them to particular theoretical ideas. The cognitive framework by which the doctoral students in my study perceive the world, are visible in their particular recurrent patterns of thoughts and verbalizations, which appear to

²⁷ Although *Academic Context* is shown as the first influence, it is placed here for the convenience to show its interaction with the Decision Problem block

have informed their choice of theories in specific ways. The worldviews of the participants are informed by issues of social justice, gender, epistemological access and empowerment of students and communities and self-empowerment. The importance of the participants' personal consciousness as researchers, and the idea of independent thinking recur amongst the participants. There appears to be a "passion" or an excitement to engage with the theory, something that is consistent with one's own personality and "who they are".

Beresford & Sloper's (2008) Framing Model describes context as a component influencing decision-making. Beresford's model, however, does not clearly elucidate the dynamics of context. In the study, the *Academic Context* appears as a strong influence on doctoral students' theory choices and four aspects in this context have been identified.

- **Academic Context and Choice of Theory**

Four aspects of the academic context on doctoral students' choice of theory were explored, viz: participation in research projects and peer influence; institutional influence; individual supervisor influence and the influence of the cohort supervision model. Students who enrol as part of an existing **project** are expected to dovetail their research to the objectives of the project. This often dictates in particular ways, the topic of research, or the particular theorists that the student should use, which includes subtle influences from peers to use specific theorists. The agendas and provisos of a project also influence the student's choice of theory in specific ways.

The university's **institutional culture** may impinge upon the doctoral student's theory choices through its paradigmatic posturing and normative expectations. This also extends itself to the types of theoretical perspectives that particular disciplines subscribe to, and any student working within that discipline will encounter certain expectations from the guardians of the theoretical traditions. This introduces ideas of institutional identity, gatekeeping on the type of research, and the issues of power on student choices of theoretical framing.

The influence of the **individual supervisor** is described by most participants as positive and supportive. In terms of how they have been directed to particular theorists, students claim that they had agency in the choice of their theories. Students do intimate, however, that supervisors

direct students to theories that they themselves are familiar with or in their respective fields of expertise. Participants suggest that both study programmes, Masters and Doctorate, are influenced by supervisors.

The **cohort system** emerges as a powerful influence, both positive and negative, on the direction and form of doctoral students' studies. Where individual supervisors are lacking in their guidance to students, the cohort emerges as an important forum to direct students towards ideas of theory, to test their ideas against opinions of experts, and receive advice about structural dynamics of writing a doctoral dissertation. Negative aspects of the cohort relate to how some students have been treated, issues of power, and confusion amongst students. The cohort system appears to influence doctoral students' theory choices by sanctioning or prohibiting particular theoretical views; exerting particular subtleties of power both in the manner of spoken critique, and unspoken in terms of inherent status and expectations that may allow certain voices or silence other voices, dissuade students from innovative theoretical perspectives, or from participating in doctoral studies completely.

- **Knowledge and Choice of Theory**

To ascertain the influence of information on the doctoral students' choice of theory, the students' understanding of the meaning and role of theory was explored. An attempt was made to also determine how the students' undergraduate to postgraduate experiences informed their ideas of theory and eventually their choices at the doctoral level.

Participants' ideas of the meaning of theory generally concur with that which appears in the general literature on theory, and students accept the status quo that theory is essential for research. Furthermore, all participants indicate reading widely before making choices of theories for their studies, which include information about the current state of research, theories that explain the phenomenon and applicability to the study, the theoretical debates, methodologies, limitations and contentions, to enable their choices. What the Framing Model of Beresford & Sloper (2008) does not describe is the factor of *time* taken to make a decision, nor does it suggest the voluminous amount of knowledge that a doctoral student sifts through to make a decision. The data, however, reveals that doctoral students may take a long time to finalize their theory

choices, even more than a year, as their decision involves much iteration, discussion and information gathering (knowledge). Thus *Knowledge* appears to be a strong component in doctoral students' theory choices; it forms an important precursor to choice.

In the *Theory Choice Model*, I attempted to represent the cumulative influence of the factors identified from the data upon the doctoral student's choice of theory, viz., socio-cultural background, intuition, worldview, academic context, and knowledge. These factors impinge upon the third step as described (Mental representation of choice of theory – FRAMING). This leads to the next step where the student makes a *Judgement*.

Step 4: Judgement –The evaluation of the theory choice then occurs, shown by the *Judgement* block in the model. At this point the student may reflect upon the feasibility or the correctness of her decision, or her own thoughts about it – called *Metacognition* – shown alongside the *Judgement* component of the model. Some vacillation could occur at this point. If the student feels unsure, she will then revisit her decision (hence the arrow from *Judgement* back to *Mental Representation*). At this point, she may check with authorities like supervisors or other academics, revisit her research, read more, make adjustments if necessary, and then execute the *Decision/Choice*. This revisiting process, which could take place many times before the students finalize their decision, demonstrates the iterative nature of the doctoral students' decision-making.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to analyse the data using the theoretical lens provided by Choice/Decision theories described in Chapter Two, particularly using the *Framing Model of Decision-making*, as well as juxtapose the responses with assertions and findings made by other researchers. Doctoral students' theory choices arise from a complex permutation of factors which are not clearly elucidated by the Framing Model of Beresford & Sloper (2008) and therefore, I proposed the *Doctoral Students' Theory Choice Model* which attempts to represent the factors and process of how doctoral students choose their theories based on the data elicited from my study. While I attempted to represent the multiple factors that impinge upon the doctoral students' choice of theories, the data that emerged from the study suggested several

deep issues about that impinge on doctoral students' theory choices, notably issues of power, location of theory, issues of epistemological access and ideas of alternate knowledge systems, which the psychological and cognitive theories of decision-making appeared inadequate to address. Given the initial interpretivist framework through which I chose to view the data, I found that I was unable to deeply interrogate those issues if I remain bound by such a framework, as the psychological and cognitive models of theory choice lack sufficient criticality to discuss specific issues that emerge that underlie *why* doctoral students choose their theories. I did not have a sense of satisfaction that the psychological and cognitive theories of choice provided a sufficient medium to understand the process of choice of theory by doctoral students. Something was amiss.

Due to the limited ambit of an interpretivist framework, in the next chapter I wish to adopt a more critical view which I feel will allow me to delve deeper into the issues of *why*, and provide an interpretation of a possible broader canvas that exists in the background upon which the smaller strokes of doctoral students' theory choices are painted. Therefore, I wish to shift my perspective to a more critical one and examine some of the issues from a perspective that steps aside from a western vision, and in fact questions the foundations of a western academic imposition (Pascale, 2011; Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2011). In the following chapter I will argue for my shifting to a critical perspective, especially examining contentions about theory from a *decolonial* stance, and attempt a deeper analysis using selected stories to explore its significance beyond cognitive and psychological theories.

Chapter 5

Beyond Cognitive and Psychological Theories in Framing the data

“All knowledge, and the methodological practices and constructs that birth them, are inextricably connected to the worldview assumptions, histories, and discourse vocabularies of those who create the knowledge”. Gehl (2010)

5.1 *Shi...ft* happens

One of the aspects that emerged from the data analyses in Chapter 4 is that confusion and vacillation besets the choice of theory by doctoral students. My initial choice of an interpretivist lens underpinned by the framing of psychological and cognitive theories was insufficient to respond to the *why* question of my study, as I observed ideas emerging from participants' responses that needed a deeper interpretation and more critical insight. In this chapter I firstly discuss my reasons for shifting from an interpretivist lens to a more critical view and discuss some of its salient assumptions. In Chapter 3 (Research Methodology) I described how I used an interpretivist approach to collect, organize and analyse the data to understand how and why doctoral students make particular theoretical choices. Several issues were raised by participants that sensitized me to the idea that there were certain mechanisms in the background that were producing particular responses that I could not unpack using an interpretivist perspective. This necessitated my shifting to a more critical stance.

In this chapter, I underpin my critical stance by referring to what is called the *Decolonial Turn*, which includes a diverse array of positions that view *coloniality* as the problem confronting the modern world (Maldonado-Torres, 2011). To do this, I review the literature on postcolonial theoretical views of Said on *Orientalism*, Gayatri Spivak on the *subaltern*, *Southern Theory* by Connell, and *Decolonial Theory* by Quijano, Mignolo and Grosfoguel, and discuss the relevance of decolonial theory for South Africa. While I refer to the data in certain paragraphs in this chapter, in the main I present the theoretical basis to argue for my shifting to a critical analysis of the data, which occurs in the following Chapter 6.

5.2 A Critical View

At the outset my intention was to understand and describe the qualitatively diverse ways how and why the phenomenon of doctoral students' theory choices manifested itself. This was in

keeping with interpretivism as I understood it from Cohen (2007, p. 19), that it should allow a researcher to “understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants”. The interpretivist approach provided me with particular categories of description, but it did not allow me to enter deeply into the question of “why” such responses emerged, although these responses alluded to possible reasons in some places. In the data, mention of Western versus non-western systems of knowledge, issues of epistemological access, and issues of power appeared. I needed a methodology that would allow me to elaborate further on these ideas. Interpretivism was limited in that it did not examine possible “political and ideological influences on knowledge and social reality” (Mack, 2010, p. 9) and lacked the criticality I needed to challenge particular patterns that were observed in the data. Critical theorists understand that our existence has been acutely shaped by several forces, socio-political, economic, cultural, and ideological, that have become so enmeshed into our social structures that we accept them as real. Therefore Cohen et al. (2007, p. 26) avers that research in the critical paradigm is conducted for “the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society” so that the particular politico/socio/economic influences which seem normal in society and which impinge on research in education (Kincheloe & Maclaren, 2002) may be exposed. The critical standpoint provides me the liberty to critique particular ideologies that emerge in the data. Several participants suggested a refusal to be defined by postcolonial, grand narratives that emanate from Eurocentric locations. Shifting to a critical view allows me the scope to interrogate further the data to elaborate upon the dynamics that produced recurrent themes of power. Besides exposing inequalities, a critical perspective elevates the critical consciousness of its participants and facilitates transformation (Mack, 2011), which resonates with the intentions of the participants in my study who expressed their desire to transform the thinking of students particularly in issues of epistemological access and exposure to adopting alternative worldviews. In the next section, I describe the position of postcoloniality and a few prominent proponents, and thereafter examine an important historical development within the critical perspective, known as the *Decolonial turn* espoused by Mignolo (2011) and Grosfoguel (2011).

5.2.1 Beyond the legacy of colonialism

Consisting of a diverse inter-disciplinary set of views, theories and methods, Postcolonial studies and Postcolonial theory tries to analyze and explain how the legacy of colonialism and

imperialism continue to dominate current intellectual, social and cultural discourses (Fischer, 2010). It draws on postmodern schools of thought to deconstruct these discourses and analyse how and why colonialism and neo-colonialism continues to be perpetuated. Although anti-colonial protestation emerged with colonialism, colonial critique only began to emerge in a systematic way long after the official demise of the great Colonial empires. The word “post” in postcolonial, does not only refer to a period “post” or “after” colonialism but describes the academic critique and deconstruction of colonial notions and conceptions impelled by developments in literary and cultural studies, and thereafter in history and the social sciences (Fischer, 2010). The works of several writers such as Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad have informed postcolonial discourse (Sawant, 2012) and explored how colonial power was perpetuated as the means of representation and perception in postcolonial civilizations. In this section I will not discuss all of these proponents in detail. I will attempt to encapsulate the salient features of the works of Said and Spivak as prominent examples of postcolonial thought whose work demonstrates how the entrenchment of colonial power could be interrogated.

Edward Said rose to prominence through his seminal work in 1978 called *Orientalism*, in which he interrogated the influence of colonialism through the history of Oriental Studies. His works have been inspired by Michel Foucault (1926–1984) and Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Said described the position of the *subaltern*, that is, the social group who were excluded from the power structures of society and have no voice. He specifically looked at how the Eurocentric view categorized the Orient in particular ways (Said, 2007), constructing them the exotic lands of fantasy and strangeness, with stories of the savage and monsters, waiting to be explored by European adventurers. This created a dichotomy between Europe and the *Other*; thus the West misrepresented the Orient as culturally and intellectually inferior which provided a misdirected rationale for the West to impose its “superior” culture. Thus the Eurocentric discourse of Orientalism excludes the voices of the subalterns, the *Other* (Sharp, 2009), and the Western production of knowledge was an intentional agenda to serve colonial supremacy manifested in the exploitation of the subaltern through various ways (Fischer, 2011), education being one of them. Said’s attempted, therefore, to interrogate this false dichotomy between the West and East and undo the misconception of Western superiority.

Another postcolonial theorist, Gayatri Spivak first became known for her translation and preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in 1976. Since then she has applied deconstructionism to several theoretical analyses ranging from Feminism, Marxism, and Literary Criticism to Postcolonialism. Impelled by her membership of the Subaltern study group which focused on all aspects of subordination in South Asia, her paper, "Can the subaltern speak?" in 1985 catapulted her into prominence by contesting Western academia's myopia of race and class inherent in its methods of research (Singh, 2012). Here she interrogated the role of power vested in the investigator/researcher over the subaltern participant since such research is located in an imperial framework. Sharp (2009) suggests that non-Western ways of knowing are delegated to the periphery and relegated as myth and folklore. The oppressed are only given a hearing if they adopt the Western ways of thinking, reasoning and language – the true voice and knowledge of the subaltern is therefore not apparent because they are subject to intellectual and cultural filters of Western conventions. This alludes to Rene's response that "science education in itself is rooted in Western philosophy". She suggested further that "what Africa as a continent has done, is that it has imported a discipline which is based and embedded and grounded in very different philosophical underpinnings", a point that I will analyse in further detail in Chapter 6.

Other postcolonial writers like Homi Bhabha and Dipak Chakrabarty interrogated similar issues. These writers interrogated the concepts, theories and methods developed by the West that created an expectation that the rest of the world should follow them, which effectively created a stranglehold on alternative worldviews and relegated the *Other* to the periphery (Fischer, 2011). The European-*Other* distinction possibly emanated from the subject-object view of scientific positivism which served to entrench the advantages of the dominant and view the *Other* as objects. Postcolonialism challenges the dominance of the imperial and elitist and advocates the knowledge and cultures of the subaltern. To do this, it draws on multi-perspective views derived from postmodernism, poststructuralism, socialism, feminism and environmentalism. Postcolonialism differs from these framings, however, in that it is located in the third world, and gives precedence to the subaltern perspective (Digole, 2012). According to Sawant (2012), Postcolonial theory has a diverse group of contributors, and this poses some difficulty as some come from European cultural backgrounds, others come from Third World cultures, and also others originating from Third World cultures that have relocated themselves in academia in the

West. Sawant (2012, p. 125) asserts that this produces a particular tension for postcolonial theory as well as a “theoretical and practical gap” amongst those who train and live in the different locations of the West and Third World.

5.2.2 The Decolonial Turn

The history of social research is marked by *turns* as they are described - important points in change of perspective or philosophical views about social phenomena. Early in the twentieth century, an important development in Western philosophy was the *linguistic turn*. This was followed by the *cultural turn* that de-emphasized positivist methodologies and made culture a focus of contemporary academic debates (Steinmetz, 1999; Bonnell & Hunt, 1999). Maldonado-Torres (2011) declares that just as there have been linguistic and cultural turns in theory and philosophy, so too has there been a *Decolonial turn*, which refers to the development of a group of diverse positions that regard *coloniality* as a central problem of the modern and postmodern age. The *coloniality of power* is an expression created by Anibal Quijano (2000, p. 533) to describe the structures of power, control, and hegemony that have arisen during the modernist era, the era of colonialism, which extends from the annexation of the Americas to the present day. While the concept of coloniality may have arisen in the context of Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. perspectives, it is not limited to these regions. Maldonado-Torres (2007, p.243) explains that while *colonialism* referred to a historical event in which one nation extended its power over another through its own political and economic system, *coloniality* refers to, “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations”. He asserts that the effect of colonialism has been so entrenched in our thoughts and activities that it is regarded as a normal part of our daily living and that it is “alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience”. Grosfoguel (2009) extends the concept *coloniality* to refer to the presence of all colonial forms of domination; even though the direct colonial presence has withdrawn the coloniality of power continues to be perpetuated over the non-European and subaltern states through institutions like the IMF, World Bank and NATO.

The period of discovery that characterized the West, which Maldonado-Torres (2011) suggests could be called the *colonizing turn* in Western thought, perpetuated capitalism, racism and other forms of exploitation. Decolonial thinking appeared as an opposing force since the inception of colonization by European colonialists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Maldonado-Torres traces a brief genealogy of the rise to prominence of decolonial thinking from the beginning of the twentieth century with seminal theorists like W.E.B Du Bois in the early twentieth century, Franz Fanon in the mid-twentieth century, to philosophers and scholars like Enrique Dussel, Gloria Anzaldúa, Lewis and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who became prominent in the late twentieth to early twenty first centuries. The decolonial turn was given its impetus by several historical events like the two world wars, the independence of several countries from colonial rule, especially in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, and the formation of liberation movements of previously marginalized ethnic groups and feminist groups, gaining momentum, self-awareness and collaborative effort in the twentieth and twenty first centuries .

Decolonial thinking resists all colonial intrusion; it requires a specific type of “scepticism and epistemic attitude” that engenders specific types of critical questions, and strives to decolonize coloniality by connecting with indigenous and African cosmologies and alternate ways of knowing, what Maldonado-Torres (2011, p. 1) calls an alternative “geopolitics of knowledge”. Although decolonial thought may have emanated from the early spaces of ethnic, women or gender studies, its ambit is much larger, extending into the heart of decolonization of all knowledge, particularly in universities. The researchers like Maldonado-Torres, Mignolo and Grosfoguel who belong to the same school of thought, draw their inspiration from seminal theorists like Dussel and Quijano, and therefore subscribe to the same theoretical perspectives, namely, *decolonial theory*. Parallel to the developments in decolonial theory, another theorist, Connell, located in Australia, asserts that a Northern versus Southern dichotomy occurs. According to Daniels (2011, p. 5), the reference to southern does not apply to a geographical location but to any research context that does not fit the hegemonic context, and the word *colonial* also does not only refer to the imposition of foreign and western powers – it encompasses all “ethnocentric, imposing and dominating research”. Connell’s perspective, informed by *Southern Theory*, a concept which she formalized, is that modern social science perpetuates a hegemony that fosters the perspectives and ideologies of a Northern metropolitan

society. She maintains that, although the North which has colonized and exploited the southern hemisphere has physically withdrawn, the ramifications are still visible in the realm of thought and academic research in the south. In other words, colonial thought and western capitalism still continue to determine the type of research that occur in postcolonial southern contexts (Carrington, 2008; Connell, 2007; Daniels, 2011). Connell claims that this is to our intellectual and academic detriment since “colonized and peripheral societies produce social thought about the modern world which has much intellectual power as metropolitan social thought, and more political relevance” (2007, p. xii). This view resonates with Mignolo’s (2002; 2009; 2011) ideas that there exists a historico-structural dependency that structures the world both economically and epistemically, and that as soon as categories of knowing have been institutionalized into western scholarship and translated as common sense, they become totalitarian preventing any other kind of knowledge to be admitted or accepted. Similarly, Grosfoguel (2011) asserts that one of the global hierarchies of power of the political economic system in which we all live is the *Westernized* university. To use the word *capitalist* to describe the present world system is misleading according to Grosfoguel since people immediately think of the economy. He states that it is, however, one element of a *colonial matrix of power* which consists of a “capitalist/patriarchal, western-centric, / Christian-centric, / modern/colonial world- system”. Distinguishing between the terms “westernized”, and “western” he asserts that the epistemological foundations of a westernized university promote a “Eurocentric fundamentalism”. In the following extract taken from one of his lectures²⁸, Grosfoguel (2011) emphasizes that the “westernized” university is a “world problem” because no matter where a student enrolls, one is likely to find the “same curriculum, and the same authors and the same disciplinary divisions in the social sciences and the humanities anywhere you go”.

In this excerpt, Grosfoguel makes two important points: the first point is that the Eurocentric influence is so pervasive that irrespective of which country a student finds herself in, the Westernized university is one which is dominated by the same canon of thought, and the same authors, curricula and disciplines, which he attributes to an existent structure of power. The second point is that this pervasive system of power successfully creates “westernized elites” in

²⁸ Ramón Grosfoguel: "Decolonizing the University". 2nd Decolonial Days, Berlin 2011, You Tube video URL <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKgL92yqygk>

the peripheral locations, who become the agents by which the same canon of thought is perpetuated in the Third world. Similarly, Connell (2008, p. 9) asserts, "sociology was formed within the culture of imperialism, and embodied an intellectual response to the colonised world". According to her, there exists a common theoretical standpoint in the metropolises of the North; an assumption of universalism which presumes valid applicability to societies of the South, which makes sociology an imperialist discipline. What has sociology have to do with education? With reference to the historical outline of theory (previously discussed) in the educational and social sciences (Carr, 2006; Thomas, 2007), education's obsession with its credibility saw a borrowing from diverse fields, and indeed sociology of education was developed as a foundational discipline.

Pearson (2007) contends though, that the focus on the European historical lineage of university education in knowledge production is over-emphasized. She interrogates what she feels is a deeply ingrained opinion that the Australian doctorate and university education derives from a common legacy with European higher education, that emanates from medieval Europe, a view that underpins much of the debate on transformation and development in doctoral education. Pearson (2007, p. 123) asserts that although some continuity exists in the use of terminologies like 'master' and 'doctor', the "historical variation in Australia and elsewhere" makes the narrative of doctoral education as arising out of a "tradition", problematic. She avers that, given the spread of globalization, and its diverse meanings that include the idea of Westernization, economic and ideological processes, and supra-territoriality, to suggest that research in higher education still descends from "older colonial and post-colonial commonwealth linkages risks missing the significance of contemporary global developments" (2007, p. 128).

However, Tlostanova (2010) explains how most postcolonial studies have either a British or French centring, following the genealogy of theorists within these locales. It becomes problematic when these contextually constrained understandings are universally applied to radically different locales. The essential logic of modernity and the Western dominance reproduce the coloniality of knowledge – the *other* is still interpreted through the concepts of the *same* (Tlostanova, 2010). Decolonial theory can be regarded as extending the anticolonial project into the spheres of being and knowing, while simultaneously considering postcolonial

explanations of cultural discontinuity and imposition (De Lissovoy, 2010). Some of the main concepts that characterize decolonial thinking are: *coloniality of power*, *critical border thinking*, *epistemic delinking*, and *pluriversality*. I have sufficiently described *coloniality of power* above and will describe the other concepts below:

Critical border thinking refers to thinking from the position of suppressed knowledge. It emerges as a reaction to the “violence of imperial/territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of salvation” (Tlostanova, 2010, p. 26). This does not refer to a border change literally, but it is about changing the epistemic line. Therefore, it avoids making abstract universals and thinks from the perception of the marginalized, which include folklore, indigenous cosmology, religion and non-rational knowledges. I question the use of the word “folklore” as this suggests a judgemental imposition of what constitutes truth to a particular culture.

In the light of this concept of critical border thinking, one may consider whether hegemony of academic strictures emanating from Western models is dictating to doctoral students’ theory choices. This does not automatically imply that the participants in my study are subjugates under current political oppression and that their academic freedom has been curtailed by draconian laws, which relegates them to the category of the subaltern or the other. In this regard, Becher and Trowler (2001) assert that the boundaries of disciplines are controlled by determining the content as well as the type of problems and phenomena that may be researched, which means that the PhD dictates eligibility about who can proclaim knowledge in a discipline, and confers authority to only those who understand and abide by the standards of the discipline. Indeed, it may be presumptuous on my part to believe that my role is to emancipate my participants, who are academics in their own right, from such suppression, however, the data obliges me to adopt my role in particular ways. My purpose is to create awareness that imperial mechanisms may still be at work in choosing particular theoretical perspectives linked to Western genealogies and monopoly of knowledge. The responses of the participants suggest that this may be occurring. Rene is emphatic that science education is “embedded within the Western science framework”, and it was colonization that has resulted in the negative way in which we viewed alternative knowledge systems, especially relegating them as illegal and barbarous, a view still held in society. Asher also suggests in the postgraduate modules at university there is “a bias towards

the continental philosophers to post structuralists”. When asked about his choices of theory, Dusty suggested micro narratives rather than “grand narratives” in his study were more relevant “as opposed to relying on the first world constructions of me”, explaining that his postcolonial stance was more to “do with defining ourselves on our own terms rather than the former colonizer telling us who we are”.

Decolonial thinking does not subscribe to the genealogy of Western theorists and avoids the western framing of subject (who is studying) and object (which is studied) (Tlostanova, 2010). It goes beyond the critical theories that are formulated within the “European ego-politics of knowledge” and attempts to dismantle the dominant imperial discourses. Therefore decolonial thinking involves *epistemic disobedience* (Mignolo, 2011). It encompasses the common experience of those who were subjected to the colonial matrix of power, seizure of their land and resources, imposition of colonial governments, police and martial supremacy, and the colonization of their knowledges – that is language, categories of thought and belief systems. Mignolo (2011) feels that the coloniality of power from Western (Greek and Latin) categories of thought is so pervasive that it is difficult to extricate ourselves from it, and therefore *epistemic delinking* is advocated– de-linking entails epistemic disobedience rather than the constant search for “newness” (implied in the schools of poststructuralism, postmodernism, that there is some kind of evolution to newer concepts to examine power, racism, and the like). In other words, the locus of enunciation is relocated in the subaltern spaces, in the responses to colonization, that is, shifting from Western understandings and bringing forward “other principles of knowledge and understandings, another economy, other politics, and other ethics” (Tlostanova, 2010, p. 27).

It seeks to move away from strict disciplinarity to transdisciplinarity – of disrupting the social sciences by moving to building theories without disciplines or beyond disciplines. The *decolonial shift* means to unlearn what we taught before, and to delink from the imperial programming embedded in our culture, education and environment that we were subjected to. All the participants in my study embraced feminist, postmodern or poststructural paradigmatic positions. Although not directly using decolonial theory, the data suggests that participants’ theoretical choices indicate attempts to disrupt the status quo, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. According to Tlostanova (2010) decolonial thinking examines one’s own

behaviour, one's self-positioning, which means a critical assessment of oneself as a scholar, an activist and human being. The decolonial scholar, is not simply a public intellectual, but a true activist, living according to the very principles they define and becoming an integral part of what is being understood. Decolonial thinking opens up a more profound space to engage with other religions and cosmological traditions; it has at its centre a genuine interest in engaging with indigenous knowledge. Therefore it promotes *pluriversality* rather than universality, which Mignolo (2007) calls an act of "epistemic disobedience". The task of decolonial thinking is not to take over power structures, as most academics are helpless in this regard, but to transform consciousness by altering previous engagements and "shifting to spiritual, aesthetic, nonrational and virtual practices instead" (Tlostanova, 2010, p. 29), which mirrors the theoretical choices made by some participants in my study.

5.2.3 The relevance of decolonial thinking for South Africa

Given the location of the decolonial thinking in Latin America and the Connell's views emanating from Australia, where does South Africa fit into the decolonial thought? In an attempt to relate to the *why* question of my study I present the following discussion. Jeremy Cronin (2012)²⁹ states that South Africa's history has had its peculiar circumstances, and we continue to perpetuate both the first and third world, side by side. Cronin (2012, np) states that although "apartheid was a mid-20th century political project of the National Party", it cannot be dissociated from a much larger worldwide and local history, or viewed as a standalone historical emergence. To do that would disengage it from the last 500 years of colonial dominion and "persisting patterns of global inequity and neo-colonial domination" which set the scene for an opportunistic group of racists to begin implementing policies that would continue to have negative ramifications even up to the present. The Dutch first landed at the Cape, then the British took over, which started the Great Trek, and eventually a group of Afrikaners won the elections, started ruling South Africa and implemented Verwoerdian apartheid ideology from 1948. According to Cronin (2012), the English, White speaking liberals have tried to absolve themselves from the exploitation of South Africa's past by blaming apartheid on the Afrikaners, but they have forgotten that the main principles of the despised apartheid system were in place years before 1948 – appropriation of land; native reserves; indirect rule by selecting "traditional"

²⁹ Speaking then, as the Deputy General Secretary of the South African Communist party and Minister of Transport.

leaders who would implement their bidding; pass laws; the migrant labour system; a racially divided labour market; and segregation of residential areas –all these arrived with the Dutch and British colonialists. Apartheid became a more “aggressive application of these measures in the face of the deepening crises of the earlier segregationist policies” (Cronin 2012, np). South Africa also inherited a colonial legacy. I suggest one possible understanding for the unfolding of this phenomena, is that the *othering* of the indigenous population of South Africa (and other colonized regions of the world) by the British and Dutch, encouraged the rationale of military invasion and the Christian agenda of conversion whose self-extolled model of civilization was seen as the panacea for saving the heathen other from themselves.

Cronin (2012) asserts that the discovery of gold and diamonds introduced a more insidious agenda, ramifications of which continue in modern day South Africa. He states that South Africa’s industrial revolution did not start from within – rather it was a deliberate strategy by highly sophisticated foreign stock companies whose agenda to exploit the mineral wealth of South Africa for their own benefit buttressed by the vast wealth and largest military force of the time. To overcome particular geographic and organizational difficulties in unearthing South Africa's mineral wealth, large investments were required, skilful artisans, and vast transport infrastructure (rail and harbours), and cheap unskilled, manual labour driven by the former colonial structures, particularly racial segregation and coercion (Cronin, 2012). Although democracy has apparently changed all this, the structural realities still exist in current South Africa and the vestiges of apartheid are still visible in the demands for housing, essential services, and education. Furthermore, several foreign companies are still quite prominent in the mining industry. Cronin (2012, np) explains how the economy of South Africa still relies heavily on the export of unprocessed ore, as the manufacturing sector and small and medium enterprise sectors are generally underdeveloped. This suggests that there is an increasing need for skilled labour at these levels that would boost local industry and hence minimize South African reliance on overseas industries, which bind us to particular power dynamics arising from a dependence on world markets, hence the emphasis of the South African government on higher education.

Given the global skills demand for highly educated populations, the demand for university education is constantly growing. Governments are under increasing pressure to compete in

global economy and the percentage of educated population, particularly at postgraduate level, have become a marker for development. ASSAF (2010, p. 22) describes the South African government's emphasis on "the importance of the PhD in securing a competitive advantage for a national government that is seeking to compete in a global economy", which I suggest, is an indication that education has become subject to a global neoliberal agenda. Therefore governmental expectations in response to global economic influences, need for innovation, and increased research productivity influence universities to position themselves in particular ways in terms of policies, structure, curricula, and programmes (Chetty, 2012; Blackmore, 2007; Elliot, 2007). Maistry (2012, p. 515), who analysed particular tensions of administration and management of higher education institutes, also strongly asserted that universities have thoughtlessly appropriated "neo-liberal, western-performance driven models" that produces subtle and sometimes overt 'violence' and humiliation of "marginalized individuals and groups within the university community". This also alludes to Waghid's (2008) suggestion discussed in Chapter 1 that "neoliberalism's market driven assault on universities" propagates the idea that only knowledge with significant commercial value is valuable, and those with little commercial value are unimportant, which will eventually lead to the redundancy of such knowledge in the "hierarchy of academic knowledge". The particular power dynamics of such a neo-liberal agenda could manifest itself in the type of knowledge that is generated at universities, since research priorities will be dictated to by university policies that come under the sway of funding agencies, donors, governments and corporates. This will have an influence on the type of research that will be undertaken by researchers, and (to revert to the purpose of my study) could impinge on how and why doctoral students make particular theory choices and the type of knowledge they generate. Based on the literature, a parallel may be drawn between neoliberalism and colonialism — a similar capitalistic agenda is being perpetuated, but in a subtler form, through the coloniality of power over the non-European and subaltern states through institutions like the IMF, World Bank and NATO (Grosfoguel, 2009). This coloniality, I contend, presents itself in university education through the internationalization agenda, world university rankings, research funding, and academic gatekeeping by particular disciplinary statuses, and institutional allegiances to theoretical frameworks grounded in Northern and Western metropolises. To sustain this argument, I refer to certain excerpts from The Bologna Declaration on the European space for higher education (The European Higher Education Area,

1999)³⁰. Although the Declaration states that its objective is to “achieve greater compatibility and comparability in the systems of higher education” (which is a European matter) there are other statements that allude to the particular contention I made.

Paragraph 8 of the declaration states:

The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.

In this paragraph, the intent to make European education “attractive” internationally is directly declared. Central to the declaration is a self-beatified promotion of the European culture and science regarded as “extraordinary”, whose intent to impart its particular values and worldviews over the globe, is quite unambiguous. Furthermore, The Confederation of EU Rectors’ Conferences and the Association of European Universities (CRE, 2000), explains that the Bologna Declaration explicitly expresses “the need for European higher education as a (cohesive) system to become more attractive to students from other world regions” and therefore “invites European institutions to compete more resolutely than in the past for students, influence, prestige and money in the worldwide competition of universities”.

That the Southern contexts are deriving much financial support from the European Union by way of project and research funding, and the aspirations by Third World students to study abroad, the ramifications for research agendas and types of study choices are obvious. This alludes to the data in which Kai’s doctoral choices were influenced by her participation in a research project, Rene’s suggestion that Science education in South Africa is based on “Western philosophy”, and Dusty’s comments that projects may impose particular paradigms or theories upon their participants – scenarios which resonate with Grosfoguel’s

³⁰ The Bologna Declaration (1999) is a joint undertaking by the Ministers of Education of 29 European countries to reform the structures of their higher education systems in Europe conjointly.

assertion that a pervasive Eurocentric influence has the power to successfully create “westernized elites” in the peripheral locations. Mignolo (2002, p. 57) suggests that one has to start shifting the “geopolitics of knowledge”. This has to be done by unearthing the foundations of western categories of knowledge, and the principles and values that dichotomize epistemologies. In this regard one can reflect upon the striking pertinence of Daniels’ (2011) assertion that, unless southern researchers begin to claim new areas of research rather than following hegemonic western impositions, southern theorists run the risk of making minimal epistemological contributions to knowledge. The danger, I feel, is that the postcolonial and decolonial theorists also run the risk of a purist view of exclusivity just as much as the Northern/Western theorists they are critiquing, if the theoretical contributions that originated from Europe and America are ignored.

5.3 Conclusion

In my discussions of the literature, two critical positions on the use of theory appear: the anti-theoretical stance advocated by Thomas (2007) (as discussed in Chapter 1), and the decolonial option (Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel; 2011). Theory, according to Thomas, is a historically cultural and intellectual insertion of Western modernity, an epistemological insertion whose dominance continues to hegemonize knowledge generation. Educationists have loosely used the word theory as a panacea for all research when indeed what they are referring to may just be a collection of ideas, and may not always be what they are hoping for in the social sciences: it may not have relevance. The decolonial view is that the theorizing in academia is hegemonized by a modernist/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system (Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2011) that privileges knowledge emanating from the Westernized world as that which is only capable of universality, and dismisses non-Western knowledge as particularistic and thus inferior. How do I link these two ideas then? I agree with Thomas that the term theory has been overused, and prefer to understand it rather as bodies of knowledge or arguments that may inform one’s view or reflections, focusing more on the utility value of such knowledge. In this regard I take note of what Wilson (undated, p. 8) declares: theory “is like language – it’s pervasive. Yes, it can blind you, but it also opens your eyes to see. Precisely because of its considerable power, theory users should take pains not to abuse or use theory uncritically”. Wilson is willing to compromise that in this age of pluralist perspectives and ideologies, the researcher should remain amenable to

many theories (preferably called ideas, bodies of knowledge, arguments!) but be very judicious about one's choice.

This allows me to be fully mindful of: the hegemony of theory itself, the hegemony of a western imposition on theory, and being able to examine doctoral students' theory choices from a critical decolonial viewpoint, without adopting a decolonial purist stance that could condemn useful knowledge from any location to oblivion.

In the next chapter, I revisit some of the data in an attempt to explore some of the issues more deeply, in particular using some of the concepts of a decolonial critical perspective to analyse some of the responses of the participants that allude to issues of power that could impinge upon doctoral students' theory choices.

Chapter 6

Revisiting the Data with a Critical Gaze

6.1 Introduction

In the last two chapters I discussed the reasons for my shifting to a more critical analysis of the data, especially using a decolonial framework to do so. In Chapter 4, I have already interrogated in detail participants' responses, using an interpretivist lens underpinned by psychological and cognitive theories. Although this allowed me an understanding of the first key question, *how* do doctoral students choose their focal theories for their doctoral studies in Education, I found it inadequate to provide me with a deeper understanding of my second key question, *why* do doctoral students make particular theory choices. The participants raised several issues that sensitized me to the idea that there were certain mechanisms in the background that were producing particular responses that I could not unpack using an interpretivist perspective, particularly ideas of Western versus non-western systems of knowledge, issues of epistemological access, and issues of power. Therefore, I suggest that responding to the *why* questions demands a more critical insight. In this chapter, I use some of the key concepts from Decolonial Theory in an attempt to answer the key question, *why* doctoral students' make particular theory choices, and also interrogate how the *coloniality of power* continues to manifest itself through an analysis of selected students' responses.

6.2 The Romance of Theory

An exploration of the participants' understanding of the meanings of theory in Chapter Four (section 4.1.5.1) reveals that the participants agree that theory is considered a type of framework, a set of pre-defined ideas that inform the nature of one's research. Their responses concord with the ideas of theory described by several researchers, viz.: as "structured lenses" to study the world (Klette, 2012); a framework for explaining "how" and "why" events occur (Johnson & Christensen, 2007) and as a systematic formulation and organization of ideas to make sense of data (Boss et al., 1993). In the data, my participants' descriptions of theory suggest normative, *apriori* expectations of its value and reasons for use, an idea emanating from the natural sciences (Hammersley, 2012). Inherent in these ideas is that theory *must* inform research to make it credible.

Thomas (2007) expresses his personal dilemma and experience with theory, in his book *Education and Theory: Strangers in Paradigms*. He describes his helplessness as a younger academic to confront the accepted status quo of theory when all around him his colleagues and masterminds like Wilfred Carr in 1995,³¹ commended the virtues of theory. Therefore it was a welcome surprise to Thomas that Carr, eleven years later in 2006, made an about turn to an anti-theoretical stance. I have discussed Carr's historical tracing of how theory entered into education earlier in Chapter 1, the nebulous nature of theory, and the contentions around the definitions and uses of theory. Thomas appears to have a vehement objection to the use of the word *theory* as it is used in the social and educational sciences, contending that education is obsessed with the attraction of theory based on the epistemological legacy of other domains, in particular the natural sciences. He also asserts that the term is so loosely and disparately used that it causes much confusion, and makes no real contribution to education. Thomas contends that theory constrains thought, and is a "process of legitimizing mental activity" that "is part of the institutional rule-making that buttresses existing forms of what is permitted to count as rational" (Thomas, 1997, p. 101).

In this regard, one can also consider the Decolonial stance that suggests the age of rationality that characterized the late nineteenth century, the commencement of modernity, as a significant influence on our construction of knowledge. It views this as a period that produced a belief that social progress would only occur if society abandoned tradition, custom, and dogmatic ideas, and that truth could only be understood through universal standards of objectivity known as science perpetuated by a Eurocentric, Western system of knowledge. Thus theory in education would be regarded as emerging within specific intellectual and cultural contexts, especially Western, which make educational theory, seem compelling. This also alludes to the assertions by the decolonial thinkers that the Eurocentric/imperial influence permeates all structures of society and has produced what Grosfoguel (2011) calls the *Westernized* university.

In the first phase of my data collection, in which I read through several doctoral theses (see Appendix A), I have observed a borrowing of theory from diverse fields to explain phenomena in education. In my interviews, the responses of the participants indicated an acceptance of theory

³¹ in his book *For Education*

as something to be included in one's research, a situation observable in many other studies in education. Only one participant questioned the need for theory, but was ambivalent and did not make any substantial argument about why it should not be used. It appears that theory's position as a framework to underpin one's research is taken for granted amongst the participants. I contend that the reliance on theory may arise from the power inherent in the status of theory to lend credibility to research. The power of being "scientific" moves one to search for a theoretical framework since it appears that no new knowledge can be generated or alternate knowledge can be admitted if it does not fall within what has been established as credible. Theoretical framing, however, may not always be about legitimization or creating impressions; it may reveal the researcher's perspective of understanding. The question still remains though, how that perspective was shaped. My participants have questioned the location of theory, with Rene directly referring to the Western influence on theory, and Dusty refusing to be dictated to by grand narratives that he suggests are Eurocentric and have no relevance to the phenomena he is researching in the local context of South Africa specifically. Further the observation that all participants underpin their research with critical feminist, gender theories, poststructural, postcolonial or postmodern frameworks suggest their awareness of the hegemony of theoretical positioning and a willingness to use alternate frameworks to disrupt the status quo. In this regard one can consider the contention of Grosfoguel (2011) and Mignolo (2011) that the idea of *theory* itself can be regarded as a Western hegemony, arising within the period of Western modernity, a travelling idea that became successfully institutionalized all over the world, further entrenching the coloniality of power. I further contend that once we insert into the mind of the student the premise that a theoretical lens is necessary, the student becomes motivated to look for one, relying on a crutch that trails through the literature until she can find one to fit (or make it fit).

Asher declared quite enthusiastically that his cultural and linguistic background significantly informed his research, which was about exploring the possibilities of using the Bhagavad-Gita³² to teach value education in Life Orientation at schools. A postcolonial and decolonial stance would laud his attempt at using his cultural and religious background as a point of departure to engage in his research since he is disrupting the status quo of using Western framing and introducing a perception of religion and non-rational knowledge from an Eastern standpoint.

³² A central religious canon of Vedic thought originating in India

Asher stated that he initially did not engage with a theory but subscribed to a postmodern perspective:

Asher: All I knew is that I wanted to work in a kind of postmodern, use some kind of postmodern theory. Because again, if you use, if you use some kind of modernist theory then trying to get to convince people of the use of the Bhagavad Gita, I felt would be more difficult. So I knew that I wanted to locate myself within a kind of postmodern thinking.

In the extract above, the student is concerned about locating himself in a postmodern paradigm as this would allow him the flexibility of a fluid view of reality to “advocate” (as he described) the use of the Bhagavad-Gita as a resource for value education. He wanted to use a paradigm in which he could find a theory that would make exploring a traditional text more acceptable in an academic arena that is not accepting of what could be regarded as a conservative, essentialist tradition of the Bhagavad-Gita. Postmodernism, which underpinned Asher’s perspective in how his research would proceed, could also be argued to be a theoretical positioning as the idea of theory as paradigmatic dominates the social sciences (Hammersley, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Asher argued for the use of the pluralist theory that would allow him to present his ideas on the Bhagavad-Gita since this theory suggests that there are multiple ways of knowing. Together with his supervisor, they found that this theory could work. After the examination of his thesis, Asher analysed the comments from his external examiner. Asher commented that although we are in the twenty first century (intimating that we are expected to be more open-minded), that “we still have people with exclusivist ideas”. This he derived from the comments of the external examiner who seemed to resist certain propositions about the use of the Bhagavad-Gita for value education that Asher feels emerged from the examiner’s “own Christian bias is coming out very clearly in his report”. One could argue that Asher’s arguments were perhaps insufficient, not strong enough, or even unconvincing or irrelevant, but to establish that is beyond the scope of this study as this researcher has no access to the examiner’s report. The comments of Asher reflect one interpretation and it is not possible to confirm this. Furthermore the issue is not related directly to theorizing, but refers to the context that was problematic. However, I will argue that the context has relevance to theorizing in a specific way. Such an experience alludes to the comments by Grosfoguel (2011b) that there exists an institutionalized global church that

privileges “Christians over non-Christian/non-Western spiritualities” and an institutionalized global university system that privileges “Western knowledge and cosmology over non-Western knowledge and cosmologies”. What if the Bhagavad-Gita was used on its own merit as the theoretical perspective from which values education was discussed, without having to refer to any postmodern/western method to buttress its acceptability or credibility? Thus, epistemic delinking would mean shifting the locus of enunciation to epistemic critique in which Western forms of pedagogy/values would be analysed from the subaltern perspective and not the other way around.

Concerning the postmodern stance of our participant, Tlostanova (2012) explains that the decolonial stance varies from the postmodern view in that decolonial thinking would not try to provincially fix itself on Western experience as a point of reference. In the study done by Asher one sees that the Western view of postmodernism is the reference point from which to make the study acceptable to a set of examiners located in a Western paradigm. The essence, logic and methodology are still very much part of a Western perspective. Relatively new material, the Bhagavad-Gita (new in the sense of being introduced into Life Orientation academic studies) is still being analysed by postmodern tools. In *other* words (pun intended), the *other* is still being interpreted through the concepts of the *same*.

The theory choices of Kai also demonstrated the allurements of theory. Kai registered for a doctorate by applying for and receiving a scholarship. Kai admitted that her initial application for the scholarship in a particular discipline was influenced by what was the “buzz word” in research – directly indicating that she looked for the particular area of research that was in vogue, that which would increase the credibility of her own studies. As she was part of a project, she was expected to dovetail her research with the objectives of the project. Furthermore, she was under pressure to catch up with the rest of the team as she had joined the project late. The team consisted of a select group of researchers and those who were presenting papers on their research at different universities in the country, where other high profile academics had gathered. Being part of the project influenced the types of choices she had to make. By her own admission Kai indicated she was not really aware of what she had to initially do –“I went into the program without a clear conceptualization of where I needed to go” but had to develop a proposal very

quickly to make an impression – to “up my game, because I was amongst the country’s best and people were there critiquing”. Thus the pedigree of the researchers she was surrounded with pushed her choices in particular directions. Her choices of theory were also influenced by her peer group as she was working with those who subscribed to the theories of Bernstein.

Now I was in the university and the people at that time were all proponents of Bernstein, there was X proponent. I first went to him for my study. He is a proponent of Bernstein. There is Y, Z; there is a whole spectrum of people who were promoting Bernstein. I didn’t know anything about Bernstein, all I knew is that if I wished to survive in that environment, in that academic environment I needed to find out something about Bernstein.

Given her participation in a group, the peer influence on her choice of Bernstein becomes obvious in her responses above. Her choice of theorist as a need “to survive” indicated her need to be accepted as a credible researcher, and although not directly stated it may be assumed that this would allow her access to the benefit of other academic privileges as well. Subsequently she included the works of Foucault which she admits was a name that “would add credibility” to her study. She suggested that her choice was influenced by her need to:

...look good, you had to have a sense that you are coming from a credible position for that theory seemed to add to that credibility of your position as an academic, as a research and so on.

The choice of theory based on being accepted as a credible researcher by underpinning one’s research by credible theorists, in this case Foucault, emerged clearly in her response. It appears that Kai felt the risk of rejection by academic peers was lessened by using prominent theorists who other senior researchers could identify with, and might evoke a certain benign attitude to those they regard as being in their fold. She also described the subscription of academics to particular theoretical camps, either Bernstein or Foucault. Klette’s (2012) assertion that researchers have reverence or “adulation” for the ideas of great thinkers, which could prevent a critical engagement of the theorist’s work, is relevant to Kai’s response. A decolonial analysis of Kai’s leaning towards the continental theorists in her choice of theory, alludes to the contention

by Tlostanova (2010) that most postcolonial studies have either a British or French centring, and following the genealogy of theorists within these locales becomes problematic when these contextually constrained understandings are universally applied to radically different locales. This Eurocentric dominance suggests that the *other* is still interpreted through the concepts of the *same* (Tlostanova, 2010).

Dusty, another participant also reflected upon power issues of supervision, and suggested that supervisors may coerce students into accepting particular theoretical positions since they have a project agenda, and there was an imposition on students to “use this paradigm, this theory, this instruments, you know those kinds of things”, which undermined the student’s independence as a researcher. This may be understood using the decolonial view of Grosfoguel (2011), who claims that the Eurocentric influence is so pervasive that irrespective of which country a student finds herself in, the same canon of thought, the same authors, curricula and disciplines and theorists dominate due to the power inherent in the status quo. Grosfoguel suggests that this pervasive system of power successfully creates “westernized elites” in the peripheral locations, who become the agents by which the same canon of thought is perpetuated in the Third world; in the case of Kai it is observed that her engagement with these theorists emanated from a reverence that was constructed by her peer group. Another intriguing phenomenon arose in the response of Kai, when I asked her to retrospectively reflect on her choice of theory for her doctorate. She suggested that she would have used the same theory, but volunteered that she had a dilemma:

Kai: I think my battle in my dilemma is now is putting in all of this, using all of this. See my supervisor hasn't actually published with me. Because he says he can't find himself in my work.

Kai emphasized this point by repeating the statement that her supervisor “can’t find himself in my work”. While this may seem a non-consequential statement by the participant, in the context of her dissertation and from a critical perspective, the response reveals a deeper dynamic. Kai had introduced into her study the ideas of intuition and identity as a *soul*, concepts that she stated that her supervisor felt were “risky”. In Chapter 4, I discussed this response from Kai’s supervisor, suggesting that the risk referred to a possible non-acceptance of an intangible concept of “soul” by examiners, hence intimating gatekeeping issues. Anecdotal evidence indicates that

at the end of the doctoral student's study, the supervisor and student may produce co-authored research papers and try to have them published in academic journals. A deeper critical analysis of the issue of the supervisor not being able to find himself in Kai's work reveals particular issues of inclusion or exclusion. In Chapter 1, I discussed Bak's (2011) contention that most academic communities bestow upon the students numerous privileges if they follow the academic lineage of the supervisor. This forces the student to adopt the epistemic position of the lineage and by making the "right" choice, she gains access to immense advantages, and the wrong choice excludes one from such opportunities. This may create an emotional dilemma for the academic (as Kai experienced) who will also have to relinquish access to the network of opportunities like publishing and presenting, tantamount to what Bak earlier refers to as "academic excommunication" (2011, p. 1058). Although in Kai's case the choices of Bernstein and Foucault were theorists used in the school in which she pursued her studies, several concepts which she introduced into her studies seemed to be new or foreign to the supervisor, hence he did not "find himself" in Kai's work. This may have had the disadvantage of excluding Kai from publishing a paper with him. However, in claiming that this was a reason for not publishing a paper, one could also question the agency the student claimed that she had.

From a critical, decolonial perspective, the data suggests that both direct and subtle influences steer new researchers in particular ways. This seems especially embedded in the epistemological foundations of universities; in this regard, Grosfoguel (2011)³³ declares that the predominant theorists that students read or learn about:

"happen to be the ones to be promoted as social scientific theories or critical theories or the ones that produce the canonic knowledge of the disciplines – they are coming from five countries – from Italy, France, Germany, England and the USA."

Grosfoguel explains that there exists a "pretention" that it is only the social-historical experience of the Euro/Americo countries that will be responsible for producing social scientific theory and critical theory, and that these theories will be used as a lens to understand the social, historical

³³ Ramón Grosfoguel: "Decolonizing the University". 2nd Decolonial Days, Berlin 2011, You Tube video URL <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKgL92yqygk>

and cultural experience of the rest of the world, even though they are quite different. This is what he refers to as the pretention of *universalism*. The responses of the participants in my study indicated an awareness of the Western influence on knowledge generation and suggested the need to incorporate alternate and indigenous knowledge systems. Rene directly indicated that she was aware that “Science education in itself is rooted in Western philosophy” and that “other knowledge systems should also be privileged”. Asher described the *pluriversality* of knowledge and that “there isn’t one particular way of coming to know things”. Dusty’s response indicated his astute awareness of the universalism described by Grosfoguel. Dusty strongly asserted that:

I do not have to buy into the grand narratives that have attempted to define the world in ways that universalize what experience means and what phenomena actually mean...

Dusty’s response resonated with Grosfoguel’s assertion, that a Eurocentric social-historical experience permeates social scientific and critical theory. Dusty refused to be constructed by the universalizing aspect of grand narratives, which he feels are irrelevant to his own “world” and “identity”. His response indicated that he was fully aware of the colonial influence on construction of knowledge and he was opposed to being dictated to by Eurocentric, “first world” theoretical lenses of “the former colonizer” to understand the social, historical and cultural experiences of his own context. He suggested that his choice of postcolonial theory and SFL allowed him to disrupt the universalism of grand narratives, preferring rather to engage with micro narratives that would enable his understanding of his research phenomenon in a local context, and to “define” his own identity and those with whom he felt he shared this identity. His conscious rejection of the colonial discourses that continue to pervade postcolonial Africa, can be understood in terms of the concept of *coloniality*. Maldonado-Torres (2007) differentiates between *colonialism* and *coloniality*. Colonialism referred to the political and economic rule of a nation by the colonizers (historically European powers). *Coloniality* refers to the entrenchment of all colonial forms of domination in politics, law and economics, culture, arts and literature, intersubjective relations, education, knowledge production, criteria for academic performance, identity of people and their aspirations, which continues to exist long after the colonial power has withdrawn. Dusty’s response indicated the possible existence of coloniality in doctoral students’ theory choices. For those who are unaware of such dynamics, their choices of theory may be

subject to particular Eurocentric influences. For those who are aware, they may make conscious choices of theory that disrupt the status quo, as seen in Dusty's case.

Thus it is no wonder that Connell (2008) also declares, that the "reading lists of students" (and supervisors' bookshelves, allow me to add!) are populated by the theoretical elite like "Weber, Keynes, Friedman and Foucault," indicating a reliance on particular Western frames, a point that concords with Grosfoguel's (2011) thoughts about predominating theorists and canonical knowledge from five countries, which could further illustrate the choices made by Kai. Other participants in my study also mentioned that their initial exposure to theory in postgraduate studies (Honours and Masters) was to the continental theorists like Piaget, Foucault, Derrida, amongst others, and poststructural and postmodern ideas. In my first level analysis (Appendix A) in which I randomly selected 25 doctoral studies, at least seventeen studies used theorists that allude to Grosfoguel's (2011) statement that five countries dominate the academic canon of thought, which make the assertions of Quijano, Mignolo, Grosfoguel, and Connell of a pervasive Westernized epistemology, more convincing. It is therefore possible that Kai's choice of theorists (Bernstein/Foucault) and other researchers in similar situations may have been influenced on a deeper level by a globally institutionalized academic status quo that positioned Northern/Western theorists as credible, sustaining the case of the Westernized elite in the Third World stated by Grosfoguel (2011).

In the next section I continue to use a decolonial perspective to excavate further the influences on doctoral students theory choices.

6.3 Excavating the Eastern/Western and Northern/Southern Influence

The idea of Western versus alternate knowledge influences on theory choices emerged in several cases in my study. Rene, who was involved in Science education, presented some insightful responses about Western and alternative influences on theory and knowledge generation. She mentioned that her choice of multiculturalism used in her Masters in which she engaged with both Western and non-Western/local theorists, shaped her view of theory for her doctorate.

Rene: here when we look at multiculturalism we are looking at it to cater for a majority of African people. Also, Science education in itself is rooted in Western philosophy. It is rooted in a Western notion of the nature of Science. What Africa as a continent has done is that it has imported a discipline which is based and embedded and grounded in very different philosophical underpinnings.

By referring to multiculturalism as catering for a majority of African students, she was raising the point about the importance of contextual understanding and relevance of one's teaching in a South African context. Rene was also interrogating the positivist notions of Western science which she felt is an ideological notion that had been "imported" into Africa, which did not concord with the ideologies of the local, and as such was foreign to the thinking of the local people; which may be one of the reasons that translated into poor understanding and achievement by students. The response above alludes to the earlier discussion about the Northern versus South debates (Connell, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2011) and supports the decolonial viewpoint that Western-centrism is part of an academic fundamentalism. Rene's response indicated an epistemic delinking from the "premise that there is only one sole epistemic tradition from which to achieve Truth and Universality" (Grosfoguel, 2011b, p. 4), which Rene declared is a fallacy that she is trying to address. She believed that although school science was embedded within the Western framework, science existed in every culture. Rene claimed that colonization ensured that several indigenous forms of science and medicine in different cultures, like indigenous European, the Eastern science of Ayurveda and African practices, were banned or relegated to witchcraft, which successfully ensured their exclusion from the category of knowledge. This concurs with Pascale's (2011) assertion that a hegemonic Eurocentric discourse has permeated research for hundreds of years, and that it has marginalized, minimized and isolated entire civilizations, relegating them to categories of barbarism and savagery. Other researchers have also declared that knowledge generation in the social sciences is shaped by particular ideologies. Quijano (2007, p. 169) describes how colonizers repressed the modes of knowing of the colonized and "imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning" upon the dominated; Mignolo (2011), Grosfoguel (2011) and Connell (2007) describe the dominance of the Northern metropolises on epistemology. These works lend support to the assertions made by Rene above.

That Rene was open to the idea of using alternate knowledge systems was seen in her implementation of radical ideas that disrupt the embedded western methods. She described how she engaged a local *isangoma* (African traditional healer) to teach her class about the usefulness of an indigenous plant called the Blackjack, which she said Westerners regarded a noxious weed. Thus she engaged both the Western and African (Southern) in a critical dialogue by a serious consideration of “the epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of critical thinkers from the Global South”, in this case from and within “subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces” (Grosfoguel, 2011b, p. 4) which concurs with the decolonial thinking of *pluriversality*.

Rene’s inclination towards empowerment of participants and using peers as researchers in her study impelled her towards the use of a feminist approach, finding a nexus between feminism and participatory action research. Given the focus of her study on empowering secondary school learners to explore risk perceptions and the role of gender amongst young people in the context of HIV/AIDS, she appeared quite well informed about the issues of feminism and referred to using the works of local researchers. I probed her intention for that and her response was that the local researchers “have an insider take on social scientific issues like HIV and Aids”. Rene discussed how the perspective of theories were influenced or limited by the location and context of where they originated, elaborating the issues of feminism and the contentions around it also.

Women in different contexts have different experiences. Their power differences and the way in which they lived reality is different and so a feminism which evolves in a particular context might not suit them in another context.

Rene argued that although critical feminist theory appears to provide a universal critique of the positions of women in society, feminism in North America originated to understand the circumstances of “white, middle class women”. Therefore women from the South, from Africa, chose to disassociate themselves from this idea of feminism, as it did not explain their particular contextual situations, preferring rather to use the term “womanist”³⁴. Rene suggested that

³⁴ The word “womanist” is accredited to Alice Walker who introduced the word into feminism in her book called *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, published in 1983. The word expanded the concept of feminism

multiple feminisms exist, and “women in different contexts have different experiences”, that is, they experience their realities differently, so feminist theory in one context may not be suitable in another. Essentially, Rene referred to the debate that concerned the dominance of a Northern theoretical understanding of the female experience applied to Southern or peripheral locations; which subaltern researchers and marginalized communities in the South feel are impositions upon them, and are not related to their contexts and therefore fail to provide a proper understanding of social phenomena in the South. This concurs with the decolonial option that critiques the claims of universality of Northern/Western theoretical impositions and suggests that the intersection of decolonial thinking and the insights of Third World women will do much to reintroduce the “forgotten spaces, people and concepts erased from contemporary humanities and social sciences” (Tlostanova, 2010, p. 28). According to Tlostanova, western feminist confrontations with sexist language may be appropriate in Western European languages but may misrepresent other cultures through Western gender categories. Decolonial gender discourse questions the falsely universal idea of egalitarianism in politics, economy, society and psychology, explaining that this idea is often absent or negatively perceived in communitarian societies, e.g. in Mesoamerican cosmology, egalitarianism is absent because the universe is regarded as a balance between elements, in which the individual is part of a complex whole. For a group like the Zapatistas³⁵, they do not think that two beings can be totally equal and therefore object to Western feminist views of “excluding men from all alliances and struggles” (Tlostanova, 2010, p. 32).

Rene further explained the challenges in understanding of her selected phenomenon within the context of Southern Africa:

Rene: *The context in which HIV and Aids spreads in this country, in Southern Africa, for that matter, the context, it's quite context specific, the challenges that people have in this part of the*

beyond its focus on dilemmas of the white middle-class women, and signified the incorporation of issues of race and class in feminism (Napikoski, L. (undated). Womanist: Feminist definition. abouteducation. <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/a/womanist.htm>).

³⁵ Zapatistas or EZLN is mainly an indigenous peasant based Movement originating in Mexico's most southern and most destitute state, Chiapas. The forefront is the Zapatista National Liberation Army, a rebel group whose three central objectives are democracy, freedom and justice. Graham, J. (undated). The Zapatista Mexican Rebellion, Its Revolutionary Objectives and Tactics. <http://www.historyorb.com>.

world are, in my view, quite peculiar to this population given their cultural and political histories. So I think that the context is one that is quite different.

Her responses indicated her awareness of the Southern contextual influence on the choice of theory, specifically on her topic. She felt the topic and especially the gendered spread of the disease is what impelled her towards the feminist theory. Her responses indicated that her choice of theories for her doctoral study on HIV/AIDS was informed by her knowledge about the current debates on North versus South debates on theory, and the need to contextualize her research to a southern context, that is, South Africa. The topic and the context of the gendered spread of the disease was an important foundation in enabling her choice to use feminist theory and to privilege local theorists. Later in our interview, she raised further issues about institutional influences on students' choices of theories:

Rene: In this institution, so whose knowledge counts, why does one knowledge system get privileged over another? What kind of freedom do we have? Now that we are a democratic country are we still prisoners intellectually?

By implication, Rene was questioning a particular worldview, one that existed in the history of this institution alluding to the apartheid laws that governed the country and hence shaped the intellectualization at universities, and suggests the need to question the status quo of science education. She clarified her stance by explaining how science education is dominated by a Western viewpoint, and that only a single knowledge system has value (i.e. the Western) is a “fallacy” she was trying to address. She further asked about the kinds of ideas Science teachers have about Science, and their awareness of “whose Science are they teaching”. Her questions interrogated the positionality of science and the thinking of science teachers, suggesting that such questions were embedded within a social justice framework. She hoped to achieve educating teachers about “the wisdoms in other knowledge systems, to other ways of knowing, to other ways of doing, and to liberate them intellectually” by encouraging an interrogation of Western notions of Science. Her strong response indicated her passion to engage such knowledge in her own teaching, to look at such questions in her “professional life” and her “personal life” which also signified the worldview that informed her critical feminist theoretical stance in her doctoral

study. What appeared then in the responses about Rene's choice of theory was ardent enthusiasm to empower her research participants through questioning dominant theories of science and encouraging diverse theoretical choices, and a willingness to introduce innovative methods of research, particularly those that can be seen to be relevant to the local African context. This has informed her theoretical choices for her study. Her theory choices continued to be underpinned by multicultural, gender and feminist theories which found fit with the empowering aspect of her doctoral study. Although her thinking aligned itself with the decolonial option, through her own description, it still indicated a feminist position aligned with Western feminism.

Lest the reader feel that an adoption of a decolonial perspective may promote an exclusivist, purist view that falls into the same trap as an exclusivist colonial perspective, I draw attention to an important point made by Rene, which tempers my own stance. Given her explanation of Western versus non-western categories of knowledge, Rene's further response indicated how she reconciled the use of researchers like Foucault and other continental theorists in her study.

Rene: While in this interview, I might have possibly emerged as taking an anti-Western stance, my stance is not anti-Western. I believe that we should take the best from each system. We should take the best, all theoretical constructs like from Foucault, we should take the best of the theoretical constructs, the knowledge systems, the ways of knowing and we should use them.

Rene felt that knowledge from different locales and cultural systems are equally valid especially in science, "whether it is a knowledge system, a way of knowing, knowledge in itself", and it should not be dominated by any one way. Her own position is to accept a multi-perspective view of knowledge. The decolonial option's itself asserts that multi-theoretical perspectives on issues are required. However, what is needed is that current academia recognize itself as dominated by a historico-structural system that is Eurocentric and Western, and make a shift to accommodate and recognize that equal, if not more valid knowledge emanates from the periphery that can inform knowledge generation, and that the periphery has as much epistemological right as anyone else.

6.4 Language and epistemological access

Another participant, Dusty, using a critical stance, explored epistemological access for students in Higher Education. When I asked Dusty how he made a choice to use Systemic Functional Linguistics and Genre theory, he explained that as a doctoral student he was quite concerned about epistemological access in the HE institutions. Dusty felt that the disciplines at university denies access to students by not informing them how to conduct themselves linguistically in the discipline; students were given facts but the linguistic register and specific conventions that students needed to understand or construct knowledge were not given by the respective lecturers to students to ensure their success in the discipline. Dusty felt that as a discourse community it was essential that academics should be explicit about “how we speak and engage with our practice”. Although academics have internalized the particular language and ways of representing meaning in their particular disciplines, Dusty was concerned that their inability to communicate that, excludes students from participation and results in high failure and dropout rate of students. This failure, he believed, is not the sole responsibility of students but that of the lecturer also. He reported asking senior academics about what they regarded as constituting knowledge in their respective disciplines and the impact of that on their pedagogic practices, and indicated a disappointment with the unsatisfactory answers he received, suggesting that even senior professors themselves were “uncomfortable” with his questions. This suggests that his stance may have been disruptive to their thinking. Dusty suggests that a lecturer should exhaust all possibilities before he fails a student and should be able to answer his question:

Have you made explicit to them how to behave linguistically in this discipline so much so that your conscience is clean when you fail them?

Although Dusty’s focus was on undergraduates, his responses above indicated a critical view of student failure arising from lack of epistemological access that he felt was a product of systemic inefficiency in terms of the theory, module design, and pedagogic practices in English and the personal inadequacy of academics. That this resulted in the failure of students could be contested, as there are other reasons for the high failure rate of students at universities in South Africa (see Bradbury and Miller, 2011; Letseka & Maile, 2008). The data in my study does not

suggest that the participating doctoral students themselves have been subject to a language filter that marginalized them.

Although Dusty's focus was on undergraduates, his concern, however, does concur with the assertions by O'Brien (2008) that the academic language of universities favours influential groups to perpetuate "unequal power relationships" (O'Brien, 2008, p. 56). For students to grasp the deeper meanings, O'Brien states (2008, p57), they have to penetrate the "complex linguistic barriers", and its "exclusive and distancing" nature. In a further statement that concurs with decolonial thinking, O'Brien, in her study of indigenous students, asserts that universities fundamentally subscribe to a western mode of knowledge production, especially by using academic language. Laurillard (1993) also suggested that teaching at university is a *rhetorical activity*; that the language of the discipline within the university system exercises rigid control and "faithfully reproduces its own meaning which students are required to understand".

Learning at university then becomes learning of other's worldviews, articulated by a lecturer to passive students. Doctoral students may not fit this category of passive students as described by Laurillard, but exposure to other worldviews is certainly anecdotally evident.

Corson's study (1993) which focused on language, minority education and gender, examined the concepts of power, institutional violence and academic language. Corson contends that the complex vocabulary and high lexical language of academia is status awarding to those who can imbibe the status quo, and excludes indigenous students or those who are unable to speak the dominant language. Dusty, however, was not questioning the use of English as a language of teaching, but critiqued the theory, module design, and pedagogic practices in English modules which he felt disallowed students from negotiating meanings successfully within disciplinary discourses. From a decolonial perspective, however, the critique is extended beyond this to understand how, for a student to be deemed successful he or she must be able to subscribe to the rhetoric and conventions of a Western mode of knowledge, which the subscription to successful communication in English is one such expectation. This will be especially pronounced in a university that uses English as its official language of instruction but enrolls students whose first language is not English. This analysis concurs with the decolonial perspective that regards the dominance of European languages as a Eurocentric influence of power, and therefore students

who are forced to adhere to the language of the university may be subtly coerced into imbibing the status quo.

The decolonial option regards the European languages that derived from Greek and Latin (namely, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, French and English) as providing the tools to develop a particular concept of knowledge that expanded over time (Mignolo, 2009). In other words, knowledge production is bound to linguistic practices. Mignolo (2009) refers to a profound description of the power of language written by Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. This is what Fanon (1952, p. 18) wrote:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization . . . The problem that we confront in this chapter is this: The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionally whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.

Fanon is speaking in reference to the position of a Black person in France (or French colony) at particular historical point, and one may argue that social research has developed sufficiently since 1952 to accommodate the issues of racism, and marginalization beyond the historical delimits of Fanon's assertions. Mignolo, (2009) however, feels that it applies to all disciplines and the overall sphere of knowledge; whether one is the "Negro of the Antilles", or from India, Middle East, Africa or New Zealand, one's humanity is recognized only in proportion to her grasp of the disciplinary norms. To use a particular language means embracing the particular cultural context in which the language arose. Certain languages also allow one access to the main disciplinary debates, as well as ones' voice to be heard or excluded. According to Mignolo (2009) a researcher has a better chance of having her work read if it is in German, French or English, which he feels is a result of Western sociology. Thus, the attempt by Dusty to improve epistemological access for university students by ensuring their development of appropriate linguistic and academic skills may be emphasizing the greater background in which such an expectation developed, a background stemming from a Western sociology that marginalizes the linguistic groups outside of its ambit. This is perhaps the rationale of the introduction of *IsiZulu*

as a language of instruction at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal³⁶ as a move towards a dual medium policy (Jenvey, 2013). The ramifications of this implementation are still to be experienced. How the dynamics of “unequal power relationships” (O’Brien, 2008) shifts with the implementation of IsiZulu has yet to be seen. It may also be surmised, that as long as the accredited academic journals are dominated by languages like English, French and German, the use of IsiZulu or other indigenous languages will still continue to have local relevance, and researchers will still have to subscribe to the language register of the dominant, as African scholars will continue to depend upon the professional publications and journals printed in the First World (Hountondji, 1997, p. 2002).

So how should the Dusty’s analysis and the assertions of the decolonial stance be viewed? It seems that one understanding may be to learn and participate in the dominant language as Dusty suggested, and hold the academics accountable for ensuring that their students develop the appropriate linguistic skills, the empowering aspect being greater proficiency on the part of students in English. If on the other hand, writing in the indigenous language allows the student to better encapsulate his ideas, then that should be encouraged, although such writing will still need translation into one of the dominant journal languages to be published. This can ensure their participation which would allow researchers to present decolonial ideas in the language of their ‘masters’ – a strategy of participation and change of consciousness from within. The researcher must be mindful, however, of the epistemic position from which she writes, and epistemic delinking suggested by Mignolo (2008), Grosfoguel (2011), Maldonado-Torres (2007; 2011) appear as appropriate positions to begin from. Theories are embedded with coloniality of power, and researchers need to be mindful of how and why theories produced to account for problems in other historical points and other locales may be perpetuating such power in the explanation of their own research. It may be useful for the future to explore to what extent language at this university, or other in South Africa, allow or deny epistemological access to doctoral students.

³⁶ In Durban, South Africa

6.5 Curriculum structure

Asher, who was in charge of developing postgraduate modules, provides particular revealing information about structured courses and modules for students at selected programmes³⁷ at university.

A focus theorist, for example, I would look at Derrida in one week or might look at Gramsci in another week.

Asher explained that the course developers try to give the students a “sense of all the theorists that are there” to enable them to make a choice of theorists to locate themselves in for their own studies. He states that there existed specific programme in which information about different theorists were being taught by different lecturers to give postgraduate students sufficient grounding in the major theories. Other participants in my study also described the need for this type of information due to it not being available in any structured way in their own experience as students. I enquired from Asher about the basis on which these theorists were chosen, and he responded:

I think it is about who the lecturer is. Very often it is about what is the personal preference.

Asher explained that it was not only his choice, but also that of a group of academics that determined which theorists featured in the course. The personal preference of the lecturer alluded to possible supervisor influences on doctoral students’ choices of theory, since several of the lecturers were involved with postgraduate supervision. Asher suggested that there was also a “bias towards the continental philosophers” and particular contemporary theorists³⁸, that “have been chosen because the co-ordinator located herself within a particular kind of theory, framework”. He stated that it was not a process where “we are taking a whole spectrum from one end to another and then letting the students decide for themselves”.

³⁷ The name of the specific programme is not mentioned to prevent the reader from identifying the academics in charge

³⁸ Name of specific school of thought removed for protecting the identity of certain academics

Asher's responses demonstrated an emphasis on continental theorists and specific theoretical schools of thought.³⁹ The "bias" towards continental theorists was also visible in the first level data analysis (Appendix A) where a recurrent mentioning of theorists like Habermas, Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu, and other Western theorists, gives credibility to Asher's claim. From a decolonial perspective it may be assumed that such continental theorizing will be given prominence since the epistemic positioning of the *Westernized* university is very much aligned with the North; and particularly, if powerful members of the theoretical lineage perpetuate these ideas through structured courses, which in itself exerts a specific type of officialdom, it compels students to regard both the courses offered and the theorists with reverence. Depending on the institutional or disciplinary inclination, there is a possibility that only certain theorists may be privileged which in turn may influence students' theory choices.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to revisit some of the data with a more critical gaze, which allowed me to interrogate the framing of doctoral students' theory choices particularly from the standpoint of a decolonial option. The responses of participants in my study indicated an awareness of issues of Western/ Eurocentric influences upon their theory choices and attempt to engage with theories to disrupt the status quo. While the participants adopt critical, feminist and postmodern perspectives, the data does suggest that for the doctoral students in my study, theoretical choices are influenced by: particular background ideologies; contexts bound to the allurements of theory; particular norms and structures; and a locus of enunciation cascading from the historical epistemic Northern and Western epicentre.

In the next chapter I use a metaphor of the *Geography of Reasoning* to describe how the epistemic position is beginning to shift to, as well as from the periphery, and suggest using a decolonial perspective as a viable alternative from which future research may be conducted.

³⁹ Again, I had to remove the specific school of thought as a measure of confidentiality. See my explanation under "Ethics" in Chapter 3, Research Methodology.

Chapter 7

The Geography of Reasoning

7.1 Introduction

Many reasons have emerged that indicate how and why doctoral students made particular theoretical choices for their doctoral studies. In light of this data, the claims of decolonial theorists like Mignolo (2011), Grosfoguel (2011) and Maldonado-Torres (2011; 2007) appear plausible; theoretical choices in the periphery have been influenced by deeper issues that emanated from a historical upheaval of the world over the last 500 years, which created a core and peripheral East/West–North/South polarization geographically and epistemologically. The metaphor of the chapter title appears in the works of several prominent researchers, viz., Said (1983) speaks of *travelling theory*; Maldonado-Torres (2011) and Grosfoguel (2012) both mention *geography of reason*, Mignolo (2002) speaks of the *geopolitics of knowledge*; Pascale (2011) calls it the *cartography of knowledge*, and Sharp (2009) speaks of the *Geographies of Postcolonialism*. The responses of the participants in the study suggest that there is a theoretical reliance on continental, Eurocentric theorists, fostered by institutional and disciplinary allegiances, but there is also an emerging critical move to disrupt these categories by engaging with alternate knowledges. This observation impels the use of the metaphor *The Geography of Reason*, to describe the historically conceived epistemological influence originating from the core, its translocation, and a re-shifting within and from the periphery, an idea I elaborate in three features, viz., the physical division of the North/South; the metaphorical ascension of an imperial world system, and thirdly, the development of an epistemic shift from and within the periphery.

7.2 The Geography of Reason in Three Features

The first feature of the *Geography of Reasoning* I refer to is a literal understanding, by which I wish to depict the physical divisions of the North/South hemispheres divided by the equator and the respective positions of the wealthy, developed nations of Europe and North America, and the poor, underdeveloped countries of Africa, Asia, South America and the Pacific. This is not to generalize, however, as Jolly (2008) indicates, that the North/South division is coterminous with wealth and inequality, but merely to clarify an existent geopolitical hierarchy. According to

Jolly (2008), East /West divisions are more laterally conceptualized and even considered rival loci of civilization (compare the great civilizations of Egypt and Asia with Greece) while the conceptions of North and South which are similarly opposed, are more hierarchically constructed. Secondly, I use the idea of *Geography of Reasoning* metaphorically to describe the ascension of an imperial world system from a Eurocentred locus, its outward radiation, and its successful relocation and concomitant reshaping of culture, political structure, spirituality, language, and epistemology in peripheral contexts. This derives from Grosfoguel (2011, p. 9-11) assertion that the supremacy of this Eurocentric world system has been constructed through a complex interaction of multiple hierarchies that has produced a colonial matrix/global hierarchy of power. He draws on several theorists from Wallerstein to Spivak to provide a detailed analysis of 15 components of this colonial matrix, the salient features of which I will attempt to paraphrase here.

Grosfoguel (2011, p. 9-11) avers that there are specific hierarchical divisions in society that entrench this power. There exists a worldwide division of labour organized in such a manner to extract maximum surplus from labour and from profit of sales in a global market. That labour is organized by coercion. There also exists a system of political and military organizations, whose nature is both Eurocentric and patriarchal. The class and race hierarchy gives preference to European people over non-European people; and a world gender division exists that positions European Judeo-Christian patriarchy as superior, males as superior to females, homosexuals and lesbians as inferior to heterosexuals. Grosfoguel also maintains that an entrenched Christian spiritual hierarchy, particularly Catholic, and subsequently Protestant, that regards non-Christian/non Western spiritualities as subordinate, dominates the world. There also exists an epistemic hierarchy “privileging Western knowledge and cosmology over non-Western knowledge and cosmologies” that has become embedded in the worldwide university structure, and an upholding Cartesian forms of pedagogy as superior. Furthermore, European languages dominate over other languages of the world and thus entrench Eurocentric communication, theoretical and knowledge production, while regarding the subaltern as only capable of producing only folklore and myth, not theory or knowledge, as well as categorizing non-Western art as inferior to Western aesthetics. An important, increasingly dominant influence is the information technology and worldwide media, controlled by the West, in which those from the

non-west have no power or capacity to express their ideas. Grosfoguel (2011) also criticizes the West for the accepted value that regards the elderly (over 65 years) as dispensable, compared to non-Western cultures who revere their aged. One of the fundamental influences is an ecological division that regards the Western conceptions of objectifying nature as a means towards an end (which results in destruction of both human and non-human life) as superior, to non-Western notions of ecology that considers its role in the sacralization of life and the cosmos as an end in itself. Lastly, Grosfoguel asserts that there is also a geographical/spatial hierarchy privileging the urban over the rural, with resultant destruction of rural communities, farmers, and agricultural production on global level.

The above interrogation reveals the deep-rooted social and historical connections, as Grosfoguel (2011) asserts, that have been responsible for shaping particular theoretical/ epistemological worldviews that present themselves in the context of our research, which possibly impinge upon theoretical choices made by researchers. Given the policies, provisos and agenda of research determined by the North in North/South research collaborations and internationalization of Higher Education, I propose that the First World continues to attract students and researchers from the periphery by its epistemological sway.

Yet within such trends, an epistemic shift is occurring; this is the third feature of *Geography of Reasoning* that I use to encompass an epistemic disruption that is emerging in previously hegemonized locales, which Grosfoguel (2011) calls *epistemic disobedience*. While there continues to be insertions from the North and West, that may determine particular theoretical inclinations and choices of theory on the part of doctoral students in the periphery, an epistemic shift is occurring. As observed from the data, students chose critical, feminist, gender, postcolonial and postmodern theoretical stances, and indicated that, had the choices been available they would have accepted alternate knowledge frameworks to underpin their studies. A word of caution though: not everyone who is socially located in the periphery is automatically thinking from a “subaltern epistemic location”; indeed the success of the colonial world system has been to create agents who perpetuate the Westernized canon of thought while socially located in the Third world (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Thus the shifting the geography of reasoning is integral to the decolonial option. It involves the consciousness that knowledge is not produced only by the “questions, concepts, and standards” of the views and needs of only one region of the world, especially if that region is a colonizer of other regions. Decolonizing knowledge necessitates shifting the geography of reason “beyond Eurocentric and provincial horizons, as well as producing knowledge beyond strict disciplinary impositions” (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 10). A critical thinker who enters the doctoral research space is subject to the norms and disciplinary controls of who can claim to produce knowledge as well as what the nature of that knowledge is, and has to subscribe to the existing locus of enunciation of an epistemic and institutional framework that decides on one’s inclusion or exclusion. However, the use of a decolonial worldview means confronting our assumptions about culture and history, and re-conceptualizing our research in the context of sensitivity to difference. According to Mignolo (2011), as long as the anticolonial project does not include epistemic delinking, the periphery will continue to perpetuate the centre. Epistemic delinking means challenging normally un-interrogated assumptions implanted in the psyches of both academics and students. It also demands a reconsideration of our ethical views, as our ethical relationships in research are integrated with our ontological perspectives. The participants in my study do suggest that a broader epistemic perspective is necessary than only a Western view.

Historically, the tendency to disobey particular hegemonic controls has produced innovative research, disrupted the status quo and shifted paradigms. Although we have developed a reverence for theorists from the North, there are other forms of knowledge besides the western tradition, which are equally valid. As Daniels (2011, p. 5) analysed, the word *colonial* does not only refer to the imposition of foreign and western powers – it encompasses all “ethnocentric, imposing and dominating research”, and ultimately the decolonial option seeks to excavate all hegemonic foundations of knowledge and epistemic fundamentalism arising from any location.

In my study, the endeavours of my participants indicate attempts at disrupting the status quo in several ways. Rene identified the unequal power relationships between the researcher and participants, and chose to empower her participants. Using a framing of participatory action research, she drew on Empowerment Theory to engage her youth participants as peer researchers, as well as drew on the theorizing used by several “local people”, that is, South

African gender/feminist specialists. She also directly commented on the dominant influence of Western paradigms on science and extolled the equal validity of alternate knowledge and a multi-perspectival view, a position that concords with the decolonial option. Asher explored the possibilities of using the ancient text, the Bhagavad-Gita, for teaching of values in Life Orientation. His study is an attempt to dislocate the status quo of Western framing by introducing a perception of religion and non-rational knowledge from an Eastern standpoint. Dusty who adopted a critical perspective, explored the lack of epistemological access for students. He suggested that the possible reasons for student failure was systemic inefficiency in terms of the theory, module design, and pedagogic practices in English, as well as personal inadequacy on the part of academics to communicate ways of representing meaning in their particular disciplines, which further contributed to the complex linguistic barriers that marginalized and excluded students. The data suggests that students *are* excavating the Western foundations of knowledge. However, while adopting postmodernism and poststructuralism paradigms as epistemological projects to shift the geography of reasoning, students still continue to remain located within the Western canon as a critique of Eurocentricism from within Eurocentricity. Thus, Mignolo (2009, p. 4) suggests it is insufficient to change only the “content of the conversation” but the “terms of the conversation” must be changed too. As long as the same frame of reference (terms of conversation) is not interrogated, the control of knowledge remains unquestioned. Critiquing the western foundations of knowledge while accepting the western epistemic rules will not do much to excavate the coloniality of power; one has to uncover the assumptions that sustain the locus of enunciation. The data does suggest, however, an overt attempt at disrupting the status quo, alluding to a sense of what I call *epistemic dissonance*.

7.3 Epistemic Dissonance

To produce shifts in the status quo, as well as produce new understandings of phenomena that researchers are interested in, I propose the concept of *epistemic dissonance* as a necessary quality of the decolonial researcher. *Epistemic dissonance* means looking for alternate forms of knowledge and worldviews that will continue to disturb and disrupt the current status quo. It means developing a consciousness of the particular power, hegemony and ideological forces that are eroding our own concept of humanity. It refers to an awareness of how particular

epistemologies shape one's perception, and the concordant effect of that upon society, the environment and the world. *Epistemic dissonance* means stepping out of a Western framework and a willingness to use indigenous/local/alternate knowledge worldviews to disturb and disrupt tyranny in the realm of thought – a reversal of positions, which will empower and place other worldviews as equal and viable options through which realities may be understood.

So what does it entail to be epistemically dissonant in a westernized university?

The first matter is for such universities to acknowledge that they *are westernized* and that their epistemic foundations are derived from a western, colonial perspective. Secondly, universities should ask how epistemic diversity can be implemented, or perhaps the more direct question could be, “How can local knowledge/ indigenous knowledge/alternate knowledge systems be used as frameworks to direct curriculum development in education, as well as inform educational practices and policy in higher education?” Another question must be, “What are we doing as academics to identify and decolonize the coloniality of power that may be insidiously present within our particular disciplines?” To call for the transformation of the canon of thought, the curriculum and forms of knowledge production is a mammoth and revolutionary task, one that is likely to receive vehement subjugation by the institution, although such institutions claim freedom of thought and speech.⁴⁰ The threat of losing one's job or access to funding and academic privileges will certainly dampen one's critique and call to action. One has to include, as Rene suggested, local knowledge in all epistemic spaces in the university. One has to create spaces, as Dusty suggested, to ask what the disciplines are doing, and even question the discipline ideologies. This means that the local knowledge should be included across the disciplines, not as some standalone disciplines which relegate them further into ghetto-ized categories within the university without an effect over mainstream thought (Grosfoguel, 2011a).

There are examples of how this could occur. The Intercultural University of Indigenous Nations and Peoples (UINPI) “Amawtay Wasi” in Quito, Ecuador is one such alternative. Founded in 2004, as a cross-cultural university, it focuses on new, radical, intercultural forms of knowledge,

⁴⁰ There are several instances where critical thinkers have questioned the policies and practices of the university only to have the full might of the university law thrown at them.

which originate in traditional and occidental⁴¹ ways of knowing, and emphasizes the need for social justice. The reformation of education, and its communication through the learning community structures, is revolutionary and innovative. Degrees cover knowledge areas like ecological or sustainable agriculture, traditional or ancient architecture, and intercultural relations, to name a few. The detail of this example is beyond the scope of this discussion and is included to indicate that there are workable alternatives that inform knowledge production in the twenty first century.

7.4 Conclusion

The Geography of Reason *is* shifting. The data alludes to an intricate interaction among the components of ideology, knowledge and theory. It has already been suggested that, as tertiary institutions are involved in the generation of knowledge through research, theory is connected to knowledge generation. However, theories do not arise in a vacuum but develop within specific ideological or historical contexts. Given the connection between knowledge production and theory, and that theoretical choices of doctoral students may be influenced by several factors, the data suggests a particular nexus between theorizing and knowledge – theoretical choices are shaped by exposure to certain knowledge and ideologies which inform theory. The manner in which that knowledge is constructed and influenced by the components of power, emerge in the data, and thus signifies a particular type of precedent vis-à-vis how doctoral students' theory choices are influenced in specific ways. That shifting, for the doctoral students in this study, appears to be towards pluriversal, alternate, indigenous knowledge to inform theoretical choices.

Bolstered by an intensifying human rights culture, the previously muzzled voices of the subaltern are being increasingly heard, heralding a literal and epistemic relocation of the Geography of Reasoning to, and from, the periphery. Just as the postcolonial shift has occurred, the decolonial turn is making its mark in academic thought. It is believed that adopting *epistemic dissonance* will further displace the coloniality of power and dismantle the status quo through a change in consciousness – that change in consciousness will enable doctoral students to interrogate, with increasing criticality, the particular theoretical positions, suppositions and ideologies that they

⁴¹ Referring in this case, to indigenous inhabitants of the Western hemisphere

come under sway, allowing us to confront our assumptions about culture and history, and re-conceptualize our research in the context of sensitivity to difference. This scrutiny will also dislocate our constructed reverence for theory, and will prompt students not to be defined by grand, universalizing discourses, but to disrupt the Western epistemic gridlock on how and why doctoral students make particular theoretical choices.

It is also believed that the current global developments afford novel prospects for multi-knowledge perspectives that will undeniably add value to what we know, provided that the existing status quo releases its stranglehold on its central epistemic locus of enunciation. The awareness of this stranglehold is not to be understood as pessimism emanating from an African locale. Rather, it emphasizes the role of an epistemically dissonant researcher, who has a pronounced (and positive) responsibility of being constantly cognisant of the forces that impinge themselves upon our epistemic and theoretical choices. *Epistemic dissonance* as an academic project means we are conscious of all forms of epistemic fundamentalism, always surveillant, and positively impatient to break the epistemic shackles that bind us, whether it emanates from East or West, or North or South.

Epilogue

One may question my reliance on western thought, my dependence on a system of critique that has arisen within a system of democracy that has Western origins, as I interrogate particular theoretical perspectives which have arisen from Western metropolises, whose influence according to several researchers, polarize research locations into north/south, east/west, subaltern and periphery. I must admit that the West has given me a language of critique, social justice, and of reflexivity, and has also recognized and critiqued its own complicity in many kinds of injustices. I concede that my own education which could be framed as *Western*, has given me particular benefits, ways of seeing, thinking and acting, the freedom of thought that I value, and allowed me to critique the very process that I am engaged in as a student. Given the autocratic regimes that still exist on our planet, it could have easily meant that my critique of bureaucracy and indoctrination would have subjected me to censure, or worse, imprisonment and torture had I been located elsewhere. Therefore I am grateful that I have this latitude for self-expression within a democracy. I was fortunate, however, to have my Western education tempered by my cultural upbringing, which I confess I was distracted from, for a large period of my life due to the seduction of a Western lifestyle. Upon retrospect I find that this cultural input allowed me certain perspicacity about the world, which provided a platform of increased self-reflection, channelled me to re-enter into the philosophies of the east, and reconnect me to an understanding of life that I had begun as a child.

This situation, however, poses a dilemma of choice of theory for my own study: I question the necessity of theoretical framing, and the dominance of theory from particular ideologies, but am simultaneously bound by the process of an academic system, if I use Grosfoguel's (2011) insight, that may be described as *Western*. Therefore one may criticize my assertions as insubstantial. In my defence, perhaps I can propose that it is almost automatic that both examiners and students are drawn helplessly to certain strictures impelled by particular external forces that have become the status quo in academic research. These govern my comportment as a doctoral student, and entrap me in a perennial concern that to prove myself credible, or at least present my work as examinable, I need to adhere to such strictures. Will I be subject to reactive academic vituperation for excavating issues about academic gatekeeping and epistemic policing? I

contend that it *is* my participation in a Western framework that allows me to examine and comment on its defects, allows me to point out the academic arrogance of subscribing to a view that is totalitarian, and the defects of not accommodating alternate theoretical viewpoints which can only be to the detriment of a more complete understanding of the human social condition. Without this we are like the proverbial five blind men who tried to describe an elephant, each by feeling a different part of its body.

The doctoral process, as I was often reminded, is about proving one's scholarship, something that is only supposed to emerge towards the end of the doctoral study after one reads voluminously, explores some phenomenon, examines the data, interprets it in certain ways, and supports, refutes or extends existing theories about it, and then produces a written piece of work that examiners decide whether it makes the grade. With regard to these disciplinary impositions, I suggest that the doctoral process is itself deeply embedded in a Western set of norms and will continue to perpetuate such normativity. I assert that the process of doctoral assessment assumes that one's scholarship is a product rather than a process, and thus it does not recognize the student's experience, intuition and knowledge (scholarship) from other contexts, especially non-academic/non-Western contexts, and excludes knowledge and philosophizing that does not subject itself to the academic process.

I have already discussed how the data suggests that the embeddedness of the researcher in western paradigms may shape theoretical choices that could produce a concomitant limitation of knowledge, misrepresentation of participants, silencing of voices and submerging of data. There is another influence also, one that is alluded to by Dusty and Rene, but may be invisible or undetected if not viewed critically. As derived from the literature, there is a global trend of higher education towards internationalization and international rankings driven by its compatibility with political and neoliberal agendas. This commodifies Higher education. It will continue to vest power in the Northern institutes who provide the funding, the research agenda, provisos and stipulations, in which is embedded a linguistic stranglehold that delimits publication and presentation by indigenous researchers. The neoliberal agenda, manifest in Higher Education policies and administration, will also dictate the type of knowledge generated at universities, and will simply be an extension of the same colonization mentality, as local

knowledge systems may be considered only to the degree they can be appropriated for the benefit of the existing status quo.

In exploring the theoretical choices of the participants of this study, I initially did not think that my research would place me historically as a traveller on a ship voyaging out across the oceans from a powerful nucleus carrying a formidable epistemological cargo that would produce fallout centuries after the ship docked in the nether regions of the World. That journey of discovery belied the mission of redemption and conversion tentacled in the colonial matrix of power that would infiltrate every nook and cranny of the lives of the damned. Perhaps we may not be the *wretched of the earth*⁴² in this twenty first century, but we should not tarry any longer as starry-eyed beggars grasping at imported respite and benevolence.

I therefore suggest that, to embrace *epistemic dissonance* means to accept positive recourse, hope and a strong optimism, that the mainstay of a particular epistemic centrality or economic and political agendas on knowledge production in Higher Education can be disrupted, if not tempered. Adopting epistemic dissonance will encourage a resoluteness to erode the artificial dichotomies that polarize knowledge into East/West, North/South and will provide a vanguard to detect the invisible and obvious influences that permeate our epistemic, and hence, our theoretical choices.

Perhaps the following best sums up the thesis of my presentation.

⁴² A term used by Fanon in 1961 to describe the African under French colonialism which he called “The Negro of the Antilles”

Epistemic Dissonance

Research is influenced by particular ideologies,
Intuitively I have questioned Western epistemologies,
That academic bent shaped by Eurocentric hegemony
Relegating the *Other* to denigrating obscurity.

A powerful academic from the North,
Disseminated her theories in the South,
After her intriguing class
An innocent question I asked:
“Where would you African indigenous knowledge locate,
In the global curriculum ideas you disseminate?”

Her answer I must declare was tragic,
“*We don’t admit African Black magic!*”⁴³
A humiliating statement from the past,
The retort left me quite aghast.
I reflected on her influence and pedigree
And the likely influence on her students’ theory.

Decolonial critique in the twenty first century,
Accepts as contingent our social reality;
Yet dance we still to imperial homogeneity,
Enunciating theories of epistemic universality.

Long have others’ knowledges not been admitted,
Academic gatekeeping has purposefully omitted.
“Whose knowledge is most worth?” we have heard,
Yet excludes certain knowledges, classifying it absurd.

With wagging tails we imbibe with glee,
international disseminations forsaking local identity.
Unaware, the cabal of academic tyranny –
pervading an invisible hegemony.

From the imperial hands that feeds
will not germinate the seeds,
to fulfil to our ultimate needs.
Our perception must be to see,
Volumes we decree
Yet make no claim, epistemologically.

No more cudgelled are we by constructed reverence,
Epistemic dissonance erodes such subservience,
Moving us from what we think we know,
Undeniably shifting,
the Geography of reasoning,
from the embedded status quo.

⁴³ Mindful of the ethics, I declare this utterance is the truth, as I have also referred to this in a paper I presented at a conference.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Random Analyses of doctoral theses showing theorists used

No	Subject Focus	Theorists used
1	Roles and responsibilities in decentralized School Governance	The locus of decentralised decision-making power -Murphy and Beck's (1995) and Leithwood and Menzies' (1998) / Policy implementation -Huberman and Miles (1984) and Smyth and van der Vegt (1993) / Educational change theories -Bennett, Crawford, & Riches, 1992; Fullan, 1993
2	Inclusive Education Policy	Re-culturing (Doyle, 2002 ; Clarke, 2000; Stoll & Fink, 1996) / Philosophy of inclusion (Mittler , 2000; Engelbrecht, 1999; Jenkinson, 1997) / social constructivism (Donald 2002 / Vygotsky , 1962) Innovation diffusion (Clarke, 1999, Rogers, 2003); Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner , 1986, Donald, 2002)
3	Arts and Culture Curriculum in a school context	Classical period of narratology such as Barthes , Todorov, Chatman and Genette (1960s and 1970s); Bal, Rimmon-Kenen and Prince (1980) Russian Formalists and French Structuralists . Focault 's notion of discourse (1972). Poststructuralist discourses.
4	HIV / AIDS	Self-study research model Loughran (1999) and Mitchell (2005)
5	Teacher Professional Development	Peer-driven model (PDM) Day (1999); Ball (1999).
6	Gender and Leadership	Postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, plurality / rejection of conceptions of certainty, truth, and objectivity (Bryson, 1992). Liberal feminism (Beasley, 1999); Radical feminism (Tong, 1989). Marxist and socialist feminism (Bryson, 1992); African Feminism (Mama, 1996; Arndt, 2002)
7	Gender and Identity	Critical Men`s Studies Approach. Messner (1989); Connell (1995; 2000); Hearn (2007) in the field of masculinity studies. and focus primarily on Connell`s (1995) masculinity framework.
8	Autoethnographic study of doctoral identity	Bourdieu 's three concepts of positions, position taking and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1994). / Nature, Institutions, Discourse and Affinity (Gee, 2000)& The positioning and rhetorical re-description (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999)

9	HIV/AIDS	Eco-systemic framework; Bronfenbrenner (1979); The HIV/AIDS Susceptibility & Vulnerability Pathway Model of Bishop-Sambrook (2003).
10	Curriculum Policy	Foucault's concept of archaeology (1972); Religious education conceptualizations of curriculum, Hull (1984, 2007). Derrida (1976); Gramsci's concept of hegemony (1971).
11	PBL Curriculum and Assessment	Constructivism; Principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1975, 1998; Brookfield, 1995); Self-directed learning (Colliver, 2002); Life-long learning (Miflin et al., 2000) and Deep learning (Biggs, 1994; Rushton, 2005).
12	Teacher Leadership	Action Centred Leadership (ACL) theory (Adair, 1968, 1973, 2003, 2005); Burns (1979) Transactional leadership vs transformational leadership; Collins (2001); George (2007) Authentic leadership (AL); Goleman (2001) emotional intelligence (EI); Servant leadership (SL) Greenleaf; Halpern and Lubar (2003); Koestenbaum (1991); Maccoby (2007); Stoll and Fink (1996); Ngambi (2004) ubuntu
13	Curriculum / Service learning	Charmaz' (2006) "constructivist stance" on Grounded Theory; Gee's understanding of Discourse (1999). Dewey, Freire.
14	Education Policy	Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005); Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984); Activity Theory (Vygotsky, 1981; Nardi, 1996; Engestrom, 1987; Leont'ev, 1979), & Network Theory (Scott, 1994)
15	Didactic Methods for Mathematics teaching: HE	Theory of Didactical Situations in Mathematics (Artigue, 1994; Brousseau, 1997; 2004; Douady, 1991) and by the Zone of Proximal Development (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Meira & Lerman, 2001; Rowlands, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978)
16	Supplemental instruction in Engineering and Chemistry: HE	Social constructivism (Piaget, Vygotsky 1934); Lave & Wegener, 1991; Conceptual change and meta-cognition (Flavell, 1979).
17	Conceptual development of Mathematics: HE	Triad concept of Piaget and Garcia (1989); Concept of reflective abstraction (APOS - Action-Process-Objects-Schema) as proposed by Dubinsky (1991)
18	Gender and Literacy	Critical research theory, feminist theory, critical pedagogy; critical literacy theory; Dewey, Freire, Habermas's (1972) four stages; Giroux, 1988;

19	Curriculum	Hicks (2007) curriculum model- Typical Influences on Curriculum.
20	School Leadership and Management	Foucault (1980) concept of power; Habermas (1982)
21	Academic literacy: HE.	James Paul Gee's (2001; 1996) theoretical constructs of discursive identity, Bourdieu's cultural capital and habitus (see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977/1990; Bourdieu, 1977), Bernstein's (2000; 1990) pedagogic device and Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning.. Critical realist ontology.
22	Teacher Professional development	Rogers' humanistic learning theory, social learning theory (Berger, 1983) and holistic learning theory (Dewey, 1993). Social identity theory], Bourdieu (1990) and Foucault (1984) Bernstein, Bowles & Gintis; Wenger (1998)
23	Curriculum	Theories of curriculum: technical (Cornbleth, 1990); practical (Eisner,1967); & emancipatory (Apple, 1982; Bernstein, 1976) linked to Habermas' three same cognitive interests, (1972). Curriculum theory as autobiography and biography (Goodsen, 1988)
24	Assessment:	Black and Wiliam's (2009) theory of formative assessment; Wiliam and Thompson (2007). Ramaprasad (1983) three key processes in learning and teaching & agents of assessment.

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

28 March 2012

Mr Shakti Manickchund Ramson (205519769)
School of Education Studies

Dear Mr Ramson

PROTOCOL REFERENCE NUMBER: HSS/0070/012D
PROJECT TITLE: Exploring Doctoral Students' Theory Choices in Education


EXPEDITED APPROVAL

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process:

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



Professor Steven Collings (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

cc Supervisor Professor R Sookrajh
cc Dr Nyna Amin
cc Mrs S Naicker/Mr N Memela

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT AND DECLARATION OF PARTICIPATION

416 Golden Birches
100 Entabeni Road
Paradise Valley
Pinetown
3610
Date 2013

TO: Dr

Your Consent to Participate in Study and Confidentiality Declaration

1. My name is Shakti M. Ramson, and my Student number is 205519769.
2. I am currently registered for my doctoral studies at University of [REDACTED], School of Educational Studies, [REDACTED]
3. My research focuses on the exploration of what theory/theories doctoral students use to inform their studies, why were these theories chosen, and how theory is understood by doctoral students. My proposed title is: **Exploring Doctoral Students' Theory Choices in Education.**
4. I wish to interview you for my studies.
5. Your participation will indeed contribute to advancing doctoral knowledge generation and assist me tremendously in furthering my studies.
6. I humbly seek your kind permission to meet with you twice – the first meeting to conduct the interview, and the second to validate the transcription of the interview and clarify any ambiguous issues. If in principle, you can agree to be interviewed, I will make further contact to set up a time and place convenient to you.
7. I do need to audio record the interview for the purposes of facilitating my transcription later on.
8. The interview will be treated as confidential, the audio data and transcriptions will be kept in secure storage for the minimum period of five years as per university requirements, and thereafter destroyed by incineration.
9. Please be assured that all information gathered from the interview, its recording and interpretation thereof will be treated with the strictest confidence and used for study purposes only. Your name will not be used in the study.

10. Your participation is voluntary and you are at liberty to withdraw from the interview at any time without any explanation.

11. My contact details are:

Tel (H): 031 7083508
e-mail: ramson@[redacted].ac.za.

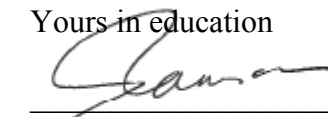
Tel (W): 031 2603669 **Cell. No.** 0844020251
Address: 416 Golden Birches, 100 Entabeni Rd,
Paradise Valley, Pinetown, 3610

12. My supervisors' contact details are:

NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL	DEPARTMENT / INSTITUTION
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Dr N. Amin	031 [redacted]	amin@[redacted].ac.za	School of Education, [redacted] [redacted] campus

I thank you in keen anticipation

Yours in education



S. M. Ramson

DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT (as required by University)

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

.....
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

.....
DATE

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank you for volunteering to be interviewed for the purposes of my doctoral studies titled: *Exploring Doctoral Students' Theory Choices in Education*

Please provide the following details:

Biographical data:

Gender: M F

Age: < 30 years 30 - 40 years 41-50 years 51-60 years

Nationality: _____

Occupation: _____

Specialty: _____

Interview

I am really interested in understanding the choices you made about theory and why you made the choices. During the interview I may ask for clarification or elaboration of some of your answers. Please feel free to provide as much detail as possible. (Please consider this as a reflective exercise, and try to position yourself retrospectively when you were a doctoral student).

1. Background

1.1. Tell me something about your educational background (starting from secondary school).

1.2. Please give me an idea of what the trajectory of your tertiary education was like?

1.3. In your **undergraduate** years, what was your exposure to theories/theorists?

1.4. Are there any that made an impression on you then?

2. Choosing a Theory

I am quite interested in the theoretical orientation of your doctoral study.

2.1. What is your understanding of theory? As a student when did this become clear?

2.2. To what extent did you engage in theorizing at the Masters level? Did you attend any modules in research or theory discourses?

2.3. What were the main theories that you used in your Master's study?

2.4. Why did you pursue a doctoral study?

2.5. In your doctoral study, I see that you chose to study the phenomenon of Tell me more about this - Why did you choose this phenomenon?

2.6. How did you come across theories for your doctoral study?

2.7. How broadly, widely did you read before making a choice of theory for your study?

2.8. Did you use the theory you chose in your research proposal for the thesis? Why/ Why not?

2.9. How did you choose that theory, and what influenced your choice?

Please relate some experiences you went through in your choice of theory? (*highlights, striking moments, give me your story*)

2.10. Did you consider other theories prior to this - did you have other choices? Please elaborate.

2.11. Tell me more about the theory/theorist you used (*background*).

Do you think the theory you eventually chose was the most suitable one? Please elaborate.

2.12. Were you part of the doctoral cohort system? Did that have any influence on your choice of theory?

2.13. Do you feel that you had agency in choice of your theory?

2.14. From your own experience and of other students, how do you think doctoral students choose their theories?

2.15. Did your chosen theory enable your contribution to knowledge generation? How?

3. Reflections

3.1. What do you think was the most difficult decision you had to make in terms of choosing your theory?

3.2. In your evolution to post-doctorate status, reflecting retrospectively upon your study, would your choice of theory have been different? How? Why?

(linked to above)

3.3. What alternative theories would you have considered?

4. Emerging Issues

4.1. How are your ideas of theory shaped now?

4.2. How does this influence your choices now in terms of your academic work? How do you use theory in research post the doctoral degree?

4.3. How does the theory you chose resonate with your personal life?

4.4. What advice can you offer to doctoral students about their choice of theory for the doctoral study?

I sincerely express my deep gratitude for your time and energy in responding to my questions.
S.M. Ramson



Epstein, B. (2013). Six Chix. In *Daily News*. King Features Syndicate cartoon. 3 January 2014.