



## Men pause and women talk too much: Power and gender negotiations in eliciting data during semi-structured interviews

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### Abstract

**Aim:** Rather than solely analyzing interview data, this interpretive study considers how the interview was conducted. The study's overarching objective is to learn about graduate students' perspectives and sentiments during their academic journey.

**Method:** The phenomenological method was chosen for this investigation so that researchers could better comprehend the participants' first-hand accounts of the phenomenon under study. Three current MSc students at the University of Exeter were interviewed; two were male, and one was female. All three interviews were semi-structured.

**Findings:** It was clear from the data that the power dynamic during the interview was more pronounced between the two men than it was between the woman. Power dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewees surfaced at various points.

**Implications/Novel Contribution:** This assignment in Interpretive Methodology lays the groundwork for future researchers interested in pursuing similar projects. It taught me things about research that will be useful in the future. A researcher's understanding of what is expected of them and how to handle sticky situations during interviews can be bolstered by reflecting on their own semi-structured interviews.

*Keywords:* Gender negotiation, Power struggle, Reflexivity

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### INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a surge of research into the correlation between gender and academic performance in the classroom (Clifton, Perry, Roberts, & Peter, 2008; Hadjar & Buchmann, 2016; Levi, Einav, Ziv, Raskind, & Margalit, 2014; Ogunkunle, 2018). Most master's degree programs are extremely demanding and require exceptional time management and multitasking abilities. Morgan (2013) study apparently found that women are superior to men at multitasking. According to the news article, some men are slower and less organized than women when switching between tasks. The authors of Stoet, OConnor, Conner, and Laws (2013) gave both men and women eight minutes to complete a series of tasks, including, but not limited to, finding a restaurant and taking a phone call, as part of their study comparing gender differences in multitasking. These were challenging tasks to complete in the allotted time, so participants had to make tough choices while keeping cool. Only on the task measuring "high-level cognitive control" did women in the study perform better than men. As a result, it was contended that women were superior to men at juggling multiple tasks simultaneously and that women were more vulnerable to stress than men (Robson, Francis, & Read, 2004). There may be some differences between male and female students regarding their classroom behaviour and interaction, as suggested by previous research (Hayes, 1992; Robson et al., 2004).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In their report for the National Association for Women in Education, Briggs (1986) suggest that academic classrooms can provide an uncomfortable setting for many women, which for some, could lead to negative outcomes. They synthesized studies that reflect on negative classroom experiences which some female students experience. Schulze and Tomal (2006) acknowledge Briggs (1986) views on gender inequality in the classroom for women and

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argued that some female students were not granted all privileges during their academic experiences compared to male students. Consequently, reports have found that some university departments may have been discriminating against women by not providing them with the strategies to succeed (Greasley, 1998; Schulze & Tomal, 2006) .

Robson et al. (2004) suggest that stress is associated with students discipline of the study. They also propose that some lecturers perceived women to be less confident and more anxious than men, especially during an examination. It indicates that stereotypical gender expectations might impact negatively the student experience. In her study about the effect of gender on learning, Greasley (1998) suggests that males and females adopt different learning styles at the university level. The study reveals that female students were preoccupied during their course of studies with the idea that they can possibly fail rather than focusing on their studies. Consequently, Greasley (1998) implies that this fear hindered some female students from developing a deep understanding of the subject matter and resulted in their feeling of just wanting to pass their courses. Greasley (1998) further reports that some female students might be more affected by stress about speaking in tutorials that they hold back from speaking and refrain from sharing their ideas, in case they were wrong, to avoid taking risks. This stress and fear of failure have driven students to read more about the subjects before engaging in writing, which positively affected their academic outcomes. In a similar study, Sander and Sanders (2007) suggest that some male students are more likely to cope with stress than females and that some males tend to rate their academic capabilities higher than females. Males are also more likely to be egocentric and less concerned with social interaction issues than their female counterparts (Clark & Rieker, 1986; Jackson, 2003; Lijano, 2018; Sander & Sanders, 2007).

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are different notions of the female and male debate. The term gender is sometimes referred to as the socially constructed roles assigned to individuals which challenge the biological definition of being either a male or a female (Wu, 2015). Hence, the categorization of individuals as male or female becomes a prominent notion in the society that dominates every aspect of our lives like language, relationships and academia (Monro, 2005). The ongoing debate of nature versus nurture suggests that individuals behave in a particular way due to their biological makeup (Bandura, 1999).

Conversely, this social norm has been challenged during the past century as individuals are resisting the stereotypical social classification of females and males. furthermore, A post-structural view suggests that individuals cannot be detached from the social forces and are always attached to them (Joas & Knöbl, 2009). Baxter (2016) states that identities are governed by a range of subject position (ways of being), approved by their community or culture and that individuals are assumed to act within the social context of their culture. However, the ones who divert from the norms and act in a way that does not conform to the social structures might get stigmatized and labeled (Baxter, 2016). According to these social norms, males are assumed to show less stress and anxiety than women, whereas women are allowed to show more emotional distress than men.

In the same vein, Foucault and Bourdieu reveal that our social contexts shape the way we talk and think about reality and social objects (Aléx & Hammarström, 2008; Tatiyanantakul, 2017). Accordingly, the way we behave and think in one discourse varies from another. For example, in the classroom contexts, students are bound to a variety of institutional discourses that provide the expected ways for them to speak and behave based on their gender. These institutional discourses and acceptable social norms are different from one context to another; therefore, the performance of femininity or masculinity differs from one context to another (Baxter, 2016). It implies that there is not a single notion of femininity or masculinity to a particular individual. Consequently, Bandura (1999) suggests that there is a dynamic interplay that exists between individuals and social structures rather than a dysfunctional dichotomy. As a result, competing or resisting social structures does not suggest that the individual is in fact inconsistent, but rather complex and multifaceted (Baxter, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Questions

- How do male and female students talk about their academic experience in the Master of Science in Education (henceforth, MSc) at the University of Exeter?
- To what extent do students believe that gender plays a role in shaping their experiences in the MSc programme at the University of Exeter?

### Rationale for the Choice of Topic

The aim of this study is to understand students experiences during their postgraduate programme. The MSc programme at the University of Exeter requires serious demands and dedication from students. Previous research discussed the pressure and stress involved in postgraduate studies (Fraenza, 2016; Holmes, Waterbury, Baltrinic, & Davis, 2018; Xu, Liu, Rose Chepyator-Thomson, & Schmidlein, 2018). Baker (2017), that there is an increasing dropout rate from UK higher education institutions. According to HESA data, the average dropout rates for students above 21 years old in 2014-2015 is 11.7%.

Whereas, the drop-out rate for part-time students up to age 30, who would withdraw after the second year is 37.3%. Baker (2017) suggests that these high dropout rates might be related to mental health issues, anxiety, and stress. This proposes that students may have been facing challenges that lead to anxiety and stress during their academic year. Accordingly, the cohort of 2017-2018 studying in the MSc programme at the University of Exeter has been experiencing some overwhelming experiences with the assignments, deadlines, and dissertations especially those progressing to complete their Ph.D., as reported by colleagues. From a personal perspective, I have encountered a number of challenges during the course of the programme. Consequently, being a current MSc student in 2017-2018 has driven my interest to conduct the current study in order to explore students experiences as being MSc students at the University of Exeter.

### Interpretive Research

Weber (2017) argues that every meaningful value-judgment about someone else's aspirations must be a criticism from the standpoint of one's own Weltanschauung; it must be a struggle against another's ideals from the standpoint of one's own. In that sense, Weber (2017) contends that our values are not objectively driven. Weber (2017) suggests that this subjectivity in value positions makes individuals differ from one another. Weber (2017) also linked the term *Verstehen* to interpretivism, which means understanding a particular social phenomenon. He further elucidates that it is essential for researchers to grasp the meaning of a particular phenomenon from the participants' viewpoint. However, Wilhelm Dilthey juxtaposes *Verstehen* with the term *Erklären*, which means explaining causal relations in natural sciences (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivist research is a world view that aims at understanding different realities from the different subjective experiences of individuals (Bryman, 2016; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2002; Crotty, 1998). It emerged as a rejection of positivism which suggests that the social world is governed by fixed laws (Crotty, 1998). Unlike the objective positivistic approach, Interpretivist researchers tend to utilize participants' experiences to interpret their understanding from the gathered data (Bryman, 2016).

The ontological assumptions of interpretivism are relativism, as depicted in this study, and it suggests that the investigation of a particular phenomenon is value-laden and cannot be established through an objective truth (Crotty, 1998). Moreover, the epistemological assumption of interpretivism adopted for this study is social constructivism which suggests that the knowledge of reality is socially constructed by human interaction (Adams, 2006). Therefore, understanding the world from a more subjective viewpoint and seeking explanation through participants lay the ground rules of interpretivist research rather than an objective observation of actions (Ponelis, 2015).

Interpretivism suggests that multiple realities exist which are socially constructed through interaction between individuals in the same setting. Interpretivism aims to interpret the socially constructed reality that meanings emerge from individuals interacting with the social world (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2002; Crotty, 1998). Interpretivist researchers, unlike positivists, are not concerned with the generalization of their findings and their data is not representative as they do not represent universal truths (Cohen et al., 2002).

Interpretivist researchers do not hold a rigid way to seek answers for their questions. However, they approach reality from the perspective of their subjects. This anti-positivist approach suggests that research is approached subjectively from the inside through individuals direct experiences rather than being objectively approached from the outside (Cohen et al., 2002). Most theories constructed under the interpretivist paradigm draw between the inside-outside; so those who are in the same setting may experience the social reality in a different way (Cohen et al., 2002). However, interpretivism has been criticized for subjectivity, which plays a major role in interpretivist research where the researcher can become greatly biased during the interpretation of data (Cohen et al., 2002).

Three main traditions to interpretivism have emerged; hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Furthermore, hermeneutical researchers tend to interpret the meanings of the phenomena, phenomenologists are concerned with understanding the life experiences of a particular phenomenon, and interactionist researchers tend to focus on the language that participants use to construct meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

I have adopted the phenomenological approach in this study in order to understand the participants own experiences and own description of the phenomena. Phenomenology was first founded as a philosophy by Edmund Husserl in 1900, who criticized psychology as a science that tried to relate natural sciences to human issues since individuals do not automatically and predictably react to stimuli. His argument provided the grounds of phenomenology, which studies the world as lived by an individual and not separate from the living subjects (Kvale, 1996). Phenomenology is concerned with describing the phenomenon through the life experiences of the subjects and It was later developed as an existential philosophy by Martin Heidegger (Kvale, 1996). In this study, I tend to understand the experiences of MSc students and I do not tend to break down their experiences or provide causal relationships, which aligns with the aims of interpretive research.

### **Conducting Interpretive Research**

This study seeks to understand students experiences in the masters level programme at the University of Exeter with the purpose of uncovering the reality of the phenomena under study. The study entails different aspects of the students experiences which relate to time management, knowledge of programme requirements, and stress from students perspective. The study also aims at understanding whether participants interpret their own experiences as a consequence of their own gender or whether they challenge this assumption. Willis, Jost, and Nilakanta (2007) argues that individuals act in certain ways and are influenced by their environments. The meaning of the world according to the person, is a crucial aspect in understanding a particular phenomenon. The interpretivist framework provides the context to explore students interpretations of their own experiences in the MSc programme. The aim of interpretivist research is in line with the current study objective since it aims to understand a particular phenomenon rather than explain it. Semi-structured interviews will be utilized in the study to understand better the challenges and stresses that students encounter during their course of study and allow the interviewer an opportunity to view the phenomenon from the interviewers standpoint (Bryman, 2016).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

According to Hammersley (2003), interviews have become an obsession with educational researchers as a means of revealing personal anecdotes/experiences/secrets about the participants. Semi-structured interviews intend to understand individuals lived world and experiences from the participants standpoint (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviews are seen as a two-way conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee which makes shared knowledge about social sciences possible (Kvale, 1996). The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to obtain a description of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale, 1996). The interest in conducting semi-structured interviews emerged after the wide preference of using observations for data collection which became the most used data collection method in qualitative research (Roulston, 2006; Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Qualitative research interviews allow every individual to have their own voices in research and to freely present their life situations in their own words (Kvale, 1996).

Interviews, more than any other data collection method, provides an understanding of the participants meaning that they gain from their experiences.

However, sometimes qualitative research interviews are criticized by positivists as being a non-scientific method of data collection (Kvale, 1996). In the same vein, Hammersley (2003) criticizes interviews in that the voice given to the participants and their experiences are not necessarily authentically true which does not provide an accurate representation of themselves or their world. Hammersley (2003) questions the data collected from the participants through the interviews and is skeptical to what extent participants expressions correspond with their actions. Hammersley (2003) further condemns the use of interviews by saying that what participants share in interviews are particularly related to that specific context and is not concerned with presenting facts or the world, in other words, it does not reflect true factual representation.

### **Characteristics of Semi-Structured Interviews**

Implementing semi-structured interviews in social sciences may often become compromised by the interviewees leading questions and entailing epistemological issues in which interviews do not lead to merely objective findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The link between semi-structured interviews and qualitative data is drawn even though quantitative data would be possible, but it would be a waste of an opportunity to exploit the detail of the verbatim interview data (Kvale, 1996). However, Smith (1995) suggests that semi-structured interviews provide a more flexible method of gaining a detailed perspective of individuals beliefs and experiences than surveys and structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews, as depicted by phenomenologists, tend to provide an understanding to themes of the everyday world from the participants standpoint. They allow the researchers to pursue interesting emergent discussions during the interview, which, in return, will allow the interviewee to have the freedom to elaborate on those experiences (Kvale, 1996). Therefore, semi-structured interviews are a useful tool to allow participants to communicate to others their lived experiences from their own perspectives and provide interpretations of the meaning to a particular phenomenon (Miller & Dingwall, 1997; Kvale, 1996).

### **Designing the Interview Schedule**

For designing the interview schedule, I have adopted the plan for the interview schedule used by the Inventing Adulthoods study (Holland & Thomson, 2006). To begin with, I divided the topic I wanted to explore into categories that I later used as subheadings. The interview schedule resulted in a total of six subheadings, and I have generated questions under each subheading that allow for an understanding of the participants experiences from their own perspective. This resulted in constructing a semi-structured interview guide that is divided into three sections and six themes (see Appendix A), which include suggested questions, while during the interview, it can be amended and modified (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The first stage of the interview was to welcome participants and give a brief overview of the topic (Kvale, 1996). I also enclosed ethical considerations according to *Ethical guidelines for Educational Research* (2011), to ensure participants confidentiality and anonymity. I have also asked for their permission to record the interview. I have initiated the interview with a vignette, which allows participants to visually remember their first year at the MSc programme since it may be difficult sometimes to draw on previous experiences and report exactly how they interpreted the situation without vividly recall the situation. The use of Vignette also allows to establish rapport with the participants and ease them into the interview process (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013).

Prior to conducting the interview, I have followed the interviewing criteria provided by Kvale (1996). The questions that I have included in my interview schedule (see Appendix A) are short, easy to understand and aim to allow participants to speak about their feelings and experiences (Kvale, 1996). The first subheading includes questions about students knowledge of the requirements of the MSc programme that they are enrolled in. The second subheading deals with students time management skills that they have used to help them satisfy the programme requirement. The next subheading consists of students multi-tasking strategies to determine if there is a difference between male and female students in terms of their multi-taking skills and time management strategies. The succeeding section asks students about their level of stress while in the programmes and how they

deal with it. The following section entails students experiences in the MSc programme as male or female and how they feel about being in the programme. The final section is actually a closure to understand students overall experience of being in the MSc programme and to give opportunities to participants to share their experiences openly.

**Reflection**

This is a small scale semi-structured interview study. To satisfy the requirements of the current assignment, I have conducted three semi-structured interviews with two males and one female who are current MSc students at the University of Exeter, during the time of the interview. I have adopted a phenomenological methodology to understand the experiences of MSc students from their own perspectives and how this experience differs from females and males. The three interviewees come from different socio-political backgrounds and have different responsibilities outside the classroom. Two males were interviewed to determine whether the experience of being in the programme is similar between males. Only one female was interviewed to satisfy the objective of the assignment.

My role as a researcher, particularly about this topic, was compromised since I have interviewed my classmates, and I was enrolled in the same programme at the time of the study. Several themes came to surface while interviewing the participants. However, the most prominent theme that was pertinent in the study is the power struggle between me, the interviewer, and interviewees.

**Power**

In most interpretive research, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is sometimes blurred, and the control over the research is often shared by both of them (Miller & Dingwall, 1997). Aléx and Hammarström (2008) suggests that power is manifested in all human interaction and all relations, therefore, it is changeable according to the situation in which they occur. Similarly, Ramazanoglu (1993) suggests that power is not maintained by one person, and resistance usually exists where power is found. However, Aléx and Hammarström (2008) suggest that researchers ought to be conscious of the power hierarchy that exists between the interviewer and the interviewee, which can be minimalized by practicing reflexivity. They also suggest that reflexivity can minimize objectifying the interviewee by the interviewer and achieving self-awareness throughout the interview. This section discusses the manifestation of power between the interviewer and the participants during the scheduled semi-structured interviews with Mark, Eric, and Mandy . Since the aim of this assignment is to reflect on the process of conducting the interview rather than analyzing the interview data. Therefore, I have selected excerpts from the datasets that are relevant and in line with the aims of the study. Due to the word count limit of this assignment, I have discussed only my experience with the two male participants as the power struggle was more prominent during the interview with them than with the female participants. The interview situation resulted in power tension instances between the interviewer and the participants, which are summarized in (Table 1); a detailed discussion is provided further in this section.

Table 1: Manifestation of power during the interview

Power Tension	Mark	Eric
Confidence	✓	✓
Superiority of Knowledge	✓	X
Interrupting the interviewer	✓	X
Drifting of topic	✓	X
Long answers	✓	X
Brief Answers	X	✓
Derogatory comments	✓	✓
Urge to engage in a debate with the participant	✓	✓

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the interviewer claims power during the interview by setting the stage and ask interview questions according to the research interest. Therefore, the interviewer selects the place of the interview and the topic, initiates the question, and critically follow up on answers. However, in the case of this study, participants selected the place and their most convenient time to conduct the interview. Initially, the

interview started with the interviewer maintaining the power of the interview situation by introducing the topic, asking permission to record the participants, and briefing the participants about confidentiality and anonymity. The first interviewer broke the traditional interview situation by saying (even though we are close friends, I will not make this an issue in our interview and I will provide honest answers) (Mark). By saying that, the interviewee gained power over the interview situation and claimed authority where the role of the interviewee is to be the informant and not brief the interviewee. It also seems that the aspect of personal closeness that I share with the participants and always being in a casual situation with them has affected the interview situation.

In qualitative research, the interview dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee is not necessarily traditional where the interviewer asks a question, and the interviewee simply replies (Kvale, 1996). In the case of my interviews, the interviewees actually interrupted the questions and sometimes opposed my interpretations. For example, I asked Mark whether he is good at multi-tasking or not, he basically dismissed my question and gave me a brief description of what it means to multi-task, he said: (for me is that multi-tasking is that you do it right now, you see, like you have a project, and you do everything simultaneously, thats multi-tasking, you see) (see Appendix B, section 2.5). This interruption and the tendency to educate me is a pattern that Mark kept on several accounts during the interview (see Appendix B, sections 2 & 3). As the researcher, I accepted the deprivation of power and the role given to me by participants. Even though I had a clear idea of what is meant by multi-tasking, I was passive and accepted the role because I never anticipated that my participant would actually explain and define the concept for me.

Moreover, being a female interviewing a male participant influenced the power tension during the interview. According to Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) on women interviewing men, men often try to employ control over the interview situation by minimizing the role of the female interviewer. When females interview males, men tend to perform their masculinity by trying to show themselves as powerful and more knowledgeable than the female interviewer in an effort to gain control over the interview situation (Pini, 2005).

The power struggle is evident with Eric as well. Since I am also a current MSc student, I am very well aware of all the requirements of the MSc programme. During the interview, I asked Eric about what is required from him throughout the course of the study? Eric said: (you have to get above 60, and then for the dissertation, you have to get 60 and above to pass the MSc and go for the Ph.D.) (see Appendix B, section 3.1). During the interview, I had to fight the urge to negotiate with the participant and correct this misconception, but I had to step back and carry on with the interview. This struggle made me wonder about my role as the interviewer and how much I can get involved with the participants if I knew that the information that my participant is sharing is incorrect. This urge for me to break the pattern of being just the interviewer and engage in a discussion also existed when Eric talked about his female peers and told me that (I dont understand why women want to do their jobs in a perfect way,) (see Appendix C, section 3.2). His sarcastic tone alerted me, but I did not want to turn the interview into a negotiation. My silence and submission when I was interviewing Eric as he mocked women was probably an effort to empower myself and objectively listen to his views regardless of our dissonance to carry on with the research (Johnston, 2016). When disagreeing with participants, Bellah et al. (Kvale, 1996) suggest that there would exist a thin line between uncovering participants claims and imposing our own ideas upon them as researchers. Therefore, researchers would engage in a dangerous encounter that may force participants to share information that they would later regret (Kvale, 2005).

During the interview, I have tried to exercise power by directing the interview with the three participants. I tried to follow the subheadings of the interview schedule whenever the interviewee drifts during the conversation. However, with my interview with Eric, he kept the answers very short and brief (see Appendix C, section 2). It was very difficult to keep the flow of the conversation going. According to Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001), in the case of female interviewing a male, some men tend to keep their answers to a minimum to emphasize their masculinity and seize power over the interview (Pini, 2005). It is evident that when interviewing Eric and Mark, they both used terms like (confident, I did a great job, and I am proud) (see Appendices B & C, section 1). Pini (2005) suggests that some male participants tend to exert power in an effort to present themselves as powerful and superior with having expert knowledge in the field during an interview setting regardless of the gender of the interviewer. It suggests that both male participants conquered the interview situation by forcing their masculinity and showing

confidence throughout the interview, either by providing brief answers like in the case of Eric or by offering lengthy ones that are sometimes irrelevant, like in the case of Mark.

From a different perspective, Eric's tendency to keep his answers short may be due to the close relationship that I hold with him as an insider, being his classmate. [Daly \(1992\)](#) suggests that when a sense of familiarity exists between the researcher and the participant, where they share the same experiences, participants may be withholding information that deems crucial assuming that the researcher is already familiar with that information and the researcher, in turn, might overlook critical aspects in the participant's experience based on the shared experience.

On the contrary, Mark kept his answers long and elaborated on each question. However, he maintained power by interpreting my questions based on his own understanding and talking about issues he wanted to talk about, regardless of its relevance to the interview (see Appendix B, section 4). Mark shifted the direction of the interview to start talking about personal issues like his relationship with peers in the programme and how it affected him personally. In another instance, to seize power, Mark labeled his classmates as Lazy and thick (Appendix B, Section 4.2), which suggests that he seemed to have confided in me and found me as a trustworthy person. It is one of the many instances during the interview that I questioned my role as the interviewer and whether it would be ethical to disagree with the participant or show him that what he is saying is condescending and arrogant.

I was torn by my role as a researcher, understanding that adopting an interpretivist research entails understanding the participant's reality from his standpoint, and being a moral person who strongly thinks that calling others with offensive names and not accepting differences is inhumane. This explicit derogatory comment by Mark was in the sense of criticism of others, which could be his attempt to gain control over the interview [Johnston \(2016\)](#) since the interview was directed based on his account and not the intended topic. From a reflexive standpoint, the participant's openness might have been related to the fact that I am a female and a friend, where men tend to share their feelings and experiences in details based on their own expectations and the imagined realization of females [Arendell \(1997\)](#).

Both Mark and Eric seized power of the conversation differently, regardless of sharing a gender. Mark kept the flow of the conversation going but based on his own preference and adopted a superior role to redirect the interview or to educate me (see Appendix B, section 2). He seized power by actually verifying concepts for me and drifting the conversation to talk about things that appeal to him personally, which [Enosh and Buchbinder \(2005\)](#) termed as deflection and power games.

In his metaphor the gentle and enticing wolf (Figure 1), [Kvale \(2005\)](#) raises the issue of researchers exerting power over interviewees, as being the wolf. However, during my interview with both males, I was in fact the Little Red Riding Hood where both interviewees devoured the interviewer. The interview process with Mark and Eric was paradoxical in nature, where in the case of Mark, we both wanted to take control over the interview, but at the same time, and some instances, were also submissive and were directed by the other.



Figure 1. Gentle and enticing wolf. This image reflects on the metaphor used by [Kvale \(2005\)](#) to relate to the gentle and enticing wolf. Image downloaded from <https://bit.ly/38sZltp>



## CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This Interpretive Methodology assignment provides the building blocks for future research that I wish to undertake, especially with my dissertation. I have adopted an interpretive research methodology for my Ph.D. dissertation, and having done that now, it provided me with the insights I need to accomplish my future research successfully. Reflecting on the semi-structured interviews provided a solid foundation to know what is expected of me as a researcher, and how to manage situations during interviews if issues arise, especially that my future research will be conducted in a patriarchal context where the power struggle is most evident between men and women. I anticipate several issues in terms of being a female interviewing male participants in Saudi Arabia. Power struggle in the context of Saudi Arabia as I foresee it in the future is not only pertaining to gender issues per se; it also includes age, location, education, and ethnicity. Furthermore, by briefly reflecting on the insider-outsider role for this study pieces fell into place and I acquired the knowledge to accommodate issues related to being in such a position if they arise in the future. This practical knowledge will deem useful when I conduct my semi-structured interviews for my dissertation or future research as this experience was thought-provoking and allowed for an in-depth reflection on the interview process.

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## **Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule**

### **1. Welcome**

I am interested in understanding students experiences of being in the MSc programme. Today I would really like to explore your perceptions of what it was like to be an MSc student at the University of Exeter. To do so, I would like to ask you a range of questions relating to the course of your studies.

### **2. Ice-Breaker**

Can you go back with your memory to the first day of coming to the University? Now imagine that a friend of your contacts you and tells you that he is starting university next year and is interested in studying for the same degree as you are. They have asked you for advice, what would it be (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013).

### **3. The Interview**

#### *3.1. Requirement of the MSc*

- Tell me about your experience in the MSc programme so far
- Tell me about the programme of study you are involved in currently?
- What types of assignments or work is expected from you during the course of your study?
- What are time management techniques do you utilize to get your work done?
- How do you manage to submit assignments on time? Have you missed an assignment submission before?
- What do you like most about it?
- What bothers you about being in the programme?

#### *3.2. Time management*

- What are some of the strategies you use that help you with the programme requirement?

#### *3.3. Multi-tasking*

- Are you good at multi-tasking?
- How do you manage different assignments and projects? You finish each separately, or do you work in parallel?

#### *3.4. Stress level*

- How stressful is the programme for you? 1 - 10.
- How do you deal with stress?
- Have you ever thought of dropping out of the programme?

#### *3.5. Experience of being female/male in the programme*

- What are the other responsibilities you have outside the classroom?
- Are you progressing to Ph.D.?
- Why are you studying at a Ph.D. level?
- Who do you live with?
- Do you have enough time to study, work on your dissertation, and have a relaxing family life?
- Do you think that there is a difference between you and your f/male counterpart in handling or managing the assignments or the programme?

#### *3.6. Experience as a student overall*

- What are the aspects of the programme that are stressful for you?
- How do you manage that?
- Are you scared of failing? Do you think about it often?
- What is most important to you from being in the MSc programme?
- Did your expectations meet your reality?

## **Appendix B: Extracts from Marks Interview**

### **1. Showing Overconfidence**

1.1. Interviewer: Tell me about your experience in the MSc programme so far.

Mark: I was very lost, very anxious, stressed, and overwhelmed because I didnt know how to not I didnt know but it was really hard to grasp all those inputs. so far so I am happy and proud of who I am now.

1.2. Interviewer: How did moving from a very relaxed programme and background into a very intense one impact you?

Mark: I think back home, yeah you are right but in terms of my personality, I am very studious and very linear and structured like I like work, so I like to study, so it didnt really impact me negatively.

1.3. Interviewer: What do you do to cope with stress?

Mark: Maybe I am confident because I know I will get more than 60 which is like the merit I know that Im gonna get it because I know what I have produced — I dont really get stressed because I tackle all the points that tutors want us to tackle

### **2. Educating the Interviewer**

2.1. Interviewer: Tell me more about when do you study and do research?

Mark: usually I work pretty much every day ... its like you have to work every day it depends on you ... maybe you want to take Monday off or its not a rule; it's only you and your workload if you feel that you need to progress, then you do it .. if you feel like you need like two days off and to chill you just do it

2.2. Interviewer: Have you ever missed any submission

Mark: No- no I hope no why you thought of that

2.3. Interviewer: What are your strategies for multi-tasking?

Mark: which kind of multi-tasking?

2.4. Interviewer: Multi-tasking is like..

Mark: Yeah yeah

2.5. Interviewer: Can you elaborate, in what ways are you good at multitasking?

Mark: I set dates for each assignmentI progress simultaneously. For me is that multi-tasking is you do it right now, you see like you have a project, you..you.. you manage this this this and that and you do everything simultaneously, thats multi-tasking, you see. But for us, its multi-tasking but in in a very relaxed way. Like you work this on the first day, and the third day, you move to the next assignment, like very slow multi-tasking.

### **3. Interruptions**

3.1. Interviewer: What do you like the most about the programme?

Mark: Hmmm one thing one particular thing?

3.2. Interviewer: Tell me things that (Interrupted)

Mark: I would say.. I would say the modules

3.3. Interviewer: Do you have time to practice daily hobbies reg (Interrupted)

Mark: Ah daily hobbies yeah, I tend to go to the gym, I like to

3.4. Interviewer: So (Interrupted)

Mark: I wanted to do drama classes

3.5. Interviewer: Do you work during (interrupted)

Mark: Yes, I am part of the multilingual corner, and I have the signage and notices to do and coordinate everything.

### **4. Drifting Off-Topic and Giving Long Answers**

4.1. Interviewer: What do you do besides university wok reg (Interrupted)

Mark: I wanted to do drama classes. I really want to do that I feel like its like thats what I want to do currently Ive started to look for some drama classes but yeah you just reminded me to do something because Ive emailed one drama school they got back to me when it was snowing they told me it is snowing now we will get back to you, but they didnt so I need to chase them up so thanks for raising this point.

4.2. Interviewer: What bothers you about being in the programme?

Mark: Some of my classmates sometimes I find them very not very, I should be careful with my words; I just find them lazy like lazy. They dont interact. They dont engage in class. They dont engage in conversation. Thats the purpose of the programme sometimes I feel Im just lonely and nobody wants to feel something and people are creating subgroups like I dont really like this thing. I am more towards collaboration discussion and everything, but I dont feel like its there and thats the downside of this programme. It has nothing to do with the quality of the programme it has to do with people, so I mean they are thick sorry for the word, but it bothers me and annoys me.

## **Appendix C: Extracts from Erics Interview**

### **1. Showing Confidence**

1.1. Interviewer: Does it really upset you? The grade?

Eric: No, because I was very confident in myself, and I did a great job.

1.2. Interviewer: How do you deal with stress?

Eric: I was like I did my job so if you do your job even though its good or not so its like thats my personality, you know. like I would get afraid if I didnt do my job well, but you know and thats it.

### **2. Providing a Brief Answer**

2.1. Interviewer: Can you tell me about the strategies you utilize to study and do university work?

Eric: No, I have to do it each assignment by itself I cant do it

2.2. Interviewer: When do you feel the most stressed?

Eric: Before the due time of the submission

2.3. Interviewer: How do you deal with stress?  
Eric: Eating

2.4. Interviewer: You eat?

Eric: Yeah

2.5. Interviewer: Can you tell me about your life outside the university? What hobbies do you practice?

Eric: I dont know if that is considered a hobby or not, but I like doing playing PlayStation and riding a horse

2.6. Interviewer: Did your expectations meet reality?

Eric: Yeah

2.7. Interviewer: In what way?

Eric: Feeling.

2.8. Interviewer: Can you tell me about the strategies you utilize to study and do university work?

Eric: No. I have to do it you know each assignment by itself.

2.9. Interviewer: Can you tell me about the difference between you as a male student in the MSc programme and your female colleagues?

Eric: Yeah

3. Instances where I had to fight the urge to engage in discussion with the participant

3.1. Interviewer: What is expected from you during the course of the study to progress to the Ph.D.?

Eric: Its like 60 for each assignment. You have to get above 60, and then for the dissertation, you have to get 60 and above to pass the MSc and go for the Ph.D.

3.2. Interviewer: Are you talking about the emotionality of women?

Eric: Yeah I think we (men) are stronger emotionally and stable emotionally thats what I think I think its not science like my perspective of saying that, I dont understand why women want to do their jobs in a perfect way, even though they are doing good, but they want to be perfect way I think that it is their personality or something about their gender, so I dont know thats what affects their