

**Modern Visions of a Gendered Past: Reflexive practice and the  
archaeological interpretation of sex and gender  
from human remains.**

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*Dedicated to my teachers, family, friends,  
and all those people, living and dead,  
who have helped me on the Way*

*If learning is not followed by reflecting and practicing,  
it is not true learning.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

許多死漢、送一個活漢

*What a long procession of dead bodies follows the wake of a single living  
person!*

Chao-chou Ts'ung-shen

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## **Abstract**

This thesis considers whether a reflexive methodology can provide insights into the interpretation of sex and gender from human remains, and whether it may usefully be applied in practice. A reflexive methodology is employed to undertake the collection of research material. The methodology is used to investigate the central research question through a case study based in Ireland. The innovative approach to this investigation uses a depth interview method which delves into aspects of how we interpret sex, gender and human remains, and offers a different view of how culture, ideology and personal identity are reflected in the practice of archaeologists and osteoarchaeologists. By looking at the cases of four individuals from Ireland, this thesis makes a study of the particular in order to provide a better understanding of the wider issues and implications. The interpretation of sex and gender, how they relate, how they are conceptualised and what they mean to those who work with human remains are all addressed in the depth analysis of each case narrative. The great potential for using a reflexive methodology to provide us with a different way of viewing the material, as well as ourselves as archaeologists interpreting biological sex and gender is proposed.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my particular gratitude to those archaeologists and osteoarchaeologists who were participants in this research, including those who offered their time to be involved with the pilot interviews. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Steve Roskams for his guidance and debate over the years and Martin Carver for his support. I offer special thanks to Dr. Jake Lyne and Professor Kristine Mason-O'Connor for their involvement, interest and reflections as my 'second pairs of eyes'. For their wonderful support and inspiration, editorial assistance and cups of tea, my thanks and love to the Alexander family, Dr. Penny Spikins, Joanne Rothwell and Alastair Morrison. And finally, I would like to give special thanks Ken Jones for his beautiful poetry, Jannie Mead for encouraging me to engage with dialogue and David Brown, because he asked the question.

*Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha.*

## **Part 1. Bodies as Material Evidence: Introduction to the Thesis**

### *Iambs for the Day of Burial*

*Of all our private parts the heart knows best  
that love and grieving share the one body  
and keep a steady iambic tally  
of this life's syllables, stressed and unstressed.  
Our pulse divided by our breathing equals  
pleasure measured in pentameters,  
pain endured in oddly rhyming pairs:  
sadness, gladness, sex and death, nuptials,  
funerals. Love made and love forsaken –  
each leaves us breathless and beatified,  
more than the sum of parts that lived and died  
of love and grief. Both leave the heart broken.*

Thomas Lynch

Still Life in Milford, 1998

### **Introduction**

The central, pivotal point of this thesis is where and how theory and practice meet. My primary concern is with the archaeological interpretation of gender and biological sex from human remains and the mortuary context; the thesis will ask whether it is possible to gain a deeper insight into these aspects of the archaeological record by using a reflexive methodology to interpret them. In order to explore this question I will use Ireland as a contextual case study to investigate how interpretations are made by archaeologists, and reflect on the effect their cultural and personal context has on their visions of the past. To do this, I use a reflexive interview methodology as the primary instrument of



investigation, interviewing four archaeologists from Ireland whose work involves the interpretation of human skeletal remains or the mortuary context. This is done in order to discover how these archaeologists are conceptualising and understanding the archaeological material and whether a reflexive interpretation methodology may be usefully applied in practice.

The practice of excavating, recording and analysing evidence provided by human remains to inform the interpretation of past social structures is effected by cultural and personal understandings of sex and gender, whether they are perceived as 'theoretically informed' or not. Currently in mainstream archaeology and osteoarchaeology, this interpretation is made via a process of inductive reasoning based on universal gender and biological sex 'truths', a situation which has remained despite an international critique from Feminist and postmodern/postprocessual theorising. I will argue in this thesis that these theories and critiques have had a limited impact on the mainstream archaeological discipline as a whole and specifically on the interpretation of sex and gender as they have yet to develop and apply a unified, theory informed practice, and because within their critiques they are unable to define a workable understanding of the relationship between sex and gender. This thesis goes beyond the postprocessual 'hermeneutic' that observations are *influenced* by theory (Carver, in press), and investigates the personal and cultural perspectives, decisions and ideologies which inform the current practice that results in a dualistic *opposition* of the categories of sex and gender. Postmodern archaeologies have functioned as a tool for questioning whether a single theory for the interpretation of gender and sex in archaeology across time and culture is possible. However we must now take the awareness of the problems that this questioning has brought to the fore, and actually *do* something with them in practice; otherwise it remains an impotent intellectual exercise.

It is useful to note at this early stage that throughout this thesis, the term 'gender' should not be read as interchangeable with 'women' as it often

has been in mainstream archaeology and beyond as a result of the Feminist agenda. Nor is it necessarily descriptive of a women/men oppositional dichotomy. Rather, the possibilities of single or multiple genders should be held in mind and in cases where it is otherwise intended because of context, this will be made explicit. Equally, the term 'biological sex' should be considered as a 'finger pointing at the moon' - in other words, to question what biological sex is, without having an *idea* of what it is based in ontological categories. Challenging, perhaps, but while in this thesis I propose and use reflective modes of enquiry this should not be confused with the dissolution of reality or a lived, embodied experience of gender or sex categories.

*In Part 1 of the thesis* I set out the various contexts of the research. The introduction gives context to and lays out the general progression of the following chapters and addresses the boundaries within which the research is framed. This is done in order to make explicit what is (and what isn't) being dealt with in the research, as well as the theoretical location of the thesis. A review of the relevant literature is incorporated into the Part 1 chapters. Chapter 1 covers the three main contexts of the thesis, beginning with a discussion of contextual issues relating to mortuary and osteoarchaeology archaeology. This is followed by an overview of theories of gender and sex drawn from the social sciences, including Feminist and queer approaches. The third area to be discussed includes both cultural and socio-political contexts. These first three sections are then brought into finer resolution by addressing their relationship to the archaeologies of gender and sex. This chapter will therefore locate the research within its disciplinary, theoretical and socio-political contexts. Chapter 2 will discuss the methodology which I used to gather information for the thesis, and which is based on established qualitative methods of in-depth interviewing and reflexive interpretation. This chapter therefore locates the research method theoretically within a broader background and context of archaeological and qualitative research. To provide the reader with a 'map' of the methodological process used throughout, I make a discussion in this chapter of the central



importance of reflexivity in informing the methodology. This is followed by a description of the research process and the approach used for the organisation and analysis of the information collected, as well as the way the analysis informs the reflexive interpretation.

*Part 2 of the thesis* deals with the direct context of the Irish case study and with the research analysis of each of the individual cases within this. The introduction to Part 2 explores the rationale for the case study itself. Chapter 3 deals with the context of the cases including the cultural, institutional, intellectual and personal contexts and Chapters 4 to 7 presents the analysis of each of the individual cases of the research participants. An introduction which includes the interview setting, the participants' current practice and an outline of their 'life history' context is also provided in order to give broader contextualisation for the analysis. The interview analysis is then presented through a thematic discussion followed by brief researcher reflections. This section is anonymised where excerpts from the transcriptions are used in order to maintain participant confidentiality.

*Part 3 of the thesis* addresses the interpretations, conclusions and implications of the research as a whole. Chapter 8 deals with the interpretations of the research analysis presented in Part 2 and looks at the primary themes which have arisen from each case study before considering similarities and differences and making an overall interpretation. Chapter 9 then deals with the conclusions and implications of the research. It considers what the findings suggest, how this relates to the central research question and how the results relate to other research practice and theorising in archaeology. Potential barriers and possibilities for implementing a reflexive methodology in the archaeological interpretation of human remains are presented and I consider the openings for future research building on this thesis.

In this thesis I therefore endeavour to address the current problematic relationship between theory and practice in relation to the archaeology of

gender and sex in the mortuary context. Using a reflexive methodology to investigate individual cases from Ireland, I explore the sometimes overt, sometimes subtle nature of cultural, social and personal contexts and the implications of this for the archaeological interpretation of sex and gender. I explore the possibility of using a reflexive, theoretically informed methodology for the interpretation of human remains in context, and I do so by engaging with the archaeologists who interpret them.

## **Chapter 1. Contexts and Concepts**

*It does not appear likely that the present diversity of views represents merely the immaturity of archaeology or that in the future an objective and value-free archaeology is likely to develop. Instead the past will continue to be studied because it is seen to have value for the present; the nature of that value being highly variable.*

(Trigger 1984:368)

### **1.1 Introduction**

This first chapter provides a context for the thesis as a whole by addressing the three primary areas with which this thesis is concerned. These three contexts are central to the investigations made in the case study as well as the discussions, analysis and conclusions which unfold throughout Part 2 and 3 of the thesis. Although there may be an argument for starting with the general and working to the specific, this approach has not been used in this chapter. Rather a more intuitive approach is taken in order to allow the readers to situate the broad archaeological context of mortuary archaeology, then be lead into the more specific context of sex and gender in mortuary archaeology via a broader discussion of gender theories and the concepts which inform them. Think about this process as if you were standing on a ship looking for an island through a telescope. The first thing you encounter when you look through the lens is a large landmass - the mainland. But before you can then move on to focus on the island you are really looking for, before you can know that what you are looking at isn't just a promontory, you have to view open water, You need to understand the relationship between main-land and island-land by viewing the water in which both mainland and island sit. Mortuary archaeology is therefore in this analogy, the mainland, the theorising of gender and sex in the broader social sciences is water, the context in which the land is situated and finally, the use of these theories within the

archaeology of gender with a focus on mortuary remains is our island. Each is connected to the other as well as to other lands, other seas, but in order not to labour the analogy too greatly it is suffice to say that each of the contexts discussed is also interconnected in regard to the dominance of Western culture and ideologies.

Firstly, the development of mortuary archaeology as a sub-discipline will be located within its broader intellectual, academic and social history and the wider Western cultural and ideological contexts. An introductory discussion of colonialism in this context, and the cross-cultural concerns that arise from the West's relationship with other cultures in archaeological practice and theory, will also be made. How these issues then link to and inform the development in archaeological theory and practice will be highlighted.

Section two will therefore provide an overview of the multiple theoretical approaches to gender and biological sex within the wider academic context, with reference to concepts of *equality*, *difference* and *diversity*. Theories pertaining to biological sex are more nascent than those of gender in the social sciences; a position even more notable in archaeology, a discussion of which will be made in section three of this chapter. The complexity of the *relationship* between gender and sex and the universalising assumptions about the 'nature' of these categories is discussed. This discussion will be made with reference to the historical development of modernism and its postmodern critique, in particular Feminist, gender and Queer theories. Some of the problematic concepts of modernism and the concerns raised against these by postmodern scholars will be investigated. Once this broader academic and conceptual background has been painted, it then becomes possible to address gender and sex in the more specific context of archaeology.

In the third section the conceptualisation and interpretation of gender and sex in archaeology, primarily but not exclusively in the mortuary context is considered. Problems pertaining to the application of postmodern



gender theories to the practice of archaeology will also be explored. This is done against a background of the longstanding debate focused on the application of Feminist approaches to the archaeology of gender. The common call made by many Feminist and non-Feminist gender archaeologists, for an epistemological and methodological approach which will take 'gender' as subject forward to have a lasting effect on the 'theoretical orientation' (Boyd, 1997:26) is then discussed. This discussion highlights the issue of the theory/practice relationship and its implications. Going on to catalogue the various approaches to gender and sex currently being used in archaeology (and its sub-discipline of osteoarchaeology) and their major proponents leads to a consideration of nascent and unexplored approaches, in particular, Sofer's (2006) proposal for considering the body as material culture.

In the final section, the theoretical and methodological aspects will be further critiqued. This will offer an opportunity to situate the issues addressed previously in the chapter within contexts which have subtle as well as relatively obvious cross-cultural and colonial concerns. This discussion will be drawn against a background of Western archaeological, intellectual and sociopolitical conceptualisations and viewpoints. This chapter therefore marks the research boundaries, a process which plays an important role in a reflexive methodology.

## **1.2 Context and Meaning**

The aim of this section is to consider the relevance of mortuary archaeology in relation to the investigation of gender and sex and to place it within its historical and intellectual context. This will provide an important backdrop for the thesis overall, as well as a broad context for the case studies presented in Part 2. It is not the intention of the following discussion to produce a full historiography on the development of mortuary archaeology. This has been done elsewhere (e.g. O'Shea; 1984; Parker Pearson, 2001) in considerably more detail than is possible within

the confines of this thesis. The intention is rather to mark the evidential context and consider its implications for the research.

### **The relevance of mortuary archaeology**

Parker Pearson (2001) points out the paradox of our learning most about the life of individuals in the past through their dead remains, and about what once was a living society through its mortuary practice. While gender, sex and sexuality as subjects of theoretical and methodological inquiry could apply equally across a range of archaeological contexts – they might be applied to settlement, economy, technology or many other aspects of investigation into the social past, mortuary practices are pivotal to the archaeological understanding of these subjects. This pivotal position is afforded through an association with ‘the body’ and the archaeological and theoretical association between gender, sex, sexuality and corporeality.

Yan Sun and Hongyu Yang (2004:33) highlight the archaeological value of the relationship between mortuary practice and the reality of a living society in the past. They suggest however that only through combining the information that the mortuary context provides, with information from other social contexts, can a more realistic picture of gender relations and structures in the past emerge. This is an important observation as it illustrates the requisite, partial nature of the research presented in this thesis. However, Sun and Yang’s linking of mortuary practice and society is further complicated by a point which Høilund Nielsen (1997:110) makes very well in her paper *From Society to Burial and from Burial to Society?*:

The way from ‘burial to society’ is not a straight line, but a tortuous path passing through a lot of ‘disturbing’ layers that have to be taken into consideration: the political/historical situation, religion and ideology,

symbolic tradition, ethnic tradition, and probably several other phenomena too.

Although Høilund Nielsen is referring to the context and agency of the people who created the burials, as part of 'a strategy pursued by the living – the survivors of the deceased' (Spenser Larson, 1995: 249) there is another perspective to be considered along side this. Each of Høilund Nielsen's 'layers' is also equally relevant to the cultural context and personal perspective of the archaeologists who are undertaking the excavation and interpretation of the burial evidence. If in addition to considering context and agency in past societies an archaeologist is to recognise and work with self-awareness of themselves, their attempt to understand the relationship between society and mortuary practice becomes an even more tortuous path! Without understanding the interconnectedness of these issues however, the interpretation of evidence is at risk of being impoverished. The more awareness which is developed, the deeper the understanding possible. However in order to build this deeper awareness, it is useful to have a variety of evidence to draw comparisons. This is why mortuary archaeology is of particular use in addressing the issue of interpretation, as there is a great deal of material with which to work.

Mortuary archaeology is a sub-discipline rich in evidence and plentiful in research which provides primary sources of evidence for investigating gender and identity in past societies (Härke:1997). Inhumations, cremations, burial position, mortuary structures and grave goods have long been within the archaeologist's retinue for investigating past societies across the world. The nature of the material evidence, the physical remains of humans, the notion of 'bodies' and the peopling of the past also make the study of the mortuary context politically and ideologically powerful in the recent past and present. Katherine Verdery in her book *The Political Life of Dead Bodies* (1999) makes the direct link between the power of dead bodies as symbols/signifiers - 'different people can invoke corpses as symbols, thinking those corpses mean the



same thing to all present, where in fact they may mean different things to each' (*ibid*:24). She expands on this physical materiality by highlighting the more subjective, interpretive and metaphysical 'signified' meaning of human remains - '...corpses suggest the lived lives of complex human beings, they can be evaluated from many angles and assigned perhaps contradictory virtues, vices, and intentions' (*ibid*:29). This evocation of a range of interpretations which Verdeny points to is one of the more challenging and interesting aspects of the investigation on the mortuary context. The use of analogy based on ethnography and anthropological work on gender in mortuary ritual and practice is one of the means that some archaeologists use to help them negotiate these challenges and develop their interpretations.

One of the interesting and useful relevancies of taking the mortuary context as the research area for gender is the very fact that a majority of archaeologists consider burial to be the 'most obvious and reliable source of data from which to address these questions [of gender]' (Claassen accessed 03/10/2005). Contextualising the cultural and historical reasons for this 'obvious' link being made by archaeologists is both interesting and useful in the discussion and critique of identifying and analysing gender in the past. It should also be noted that mortuary practice has been one of the most common areas from which archaeology has developed its ideas around gender; contributions to the corpus of information has been considerable, covering a wide range of sites both temporally and geographically. Future work which places mortuary practice alongside data-sets from other archaeological contexts can only advance discussion, critique and understanding. However there is a real contribution which the study of gender in the defined area of the mortuary context makes to more holistic discussions regarding 'gendered' archaeological contexts. This is because of the relationship between mortuary practices and bodies/human remains. This central issue and theoretical tensions of embodiment in the interpretation of sex and gender across cultures is what makes the mortuary context so specifically suited to the questions being addressed in this thesis.

## **Development, approaches and problems**

Death marks the end of life as we know it but few cultures see it as the end of everything. What happens after death depends on two aspects of the world's cultures – their perceptions of that part of the human that survives after death and their perceptions of where that surviving aspect goes (Haley, 1999:1)

Haley's comment above, highlight the possibilities for mortuary evidence to be a rich and plentiful source of information for archaeological research. It is not however, simply the study and description of human remains, burial artefacts and pre-depositional, post-depositional treatment of the dead that is of interest. Rather it incorporates more elusive and esoteric aspects of the life experience of the dead and the intention and agency of the individual or society disposing of the corpse (Crass, 2001; Høilund Nielson, 1997; Parker Pearson, 2001; Underhill, 2000). Some archaeologists would even go further than this and delve into deeper metaphysical aspects such as the 'soul' (Haley, 1999). However mortuary archaeology is primarily concerned with attempting to understand societies by looking at the deposition of their dead. Social organisation including status, kinship, gender, roles and the structure of communities (Härke, 1997:19), interaction, function and meaning are interpreted through analysing various aspects of mortuary evidence. These aspects include how the body was treated before it was buried, how remains were deposited, the ways in which material objects (i.e. grave goods/offerings) were treated and deposited, and the structure within which bodily remains were placed. Today, human remains are investigated by looking at the structure and composition of bones, teeth, and any surviving tissues or hair either through direct visual observation or measurements or using bio-scientific analysis. From this evidence an analysis of age, sex, kinship, cause of death and other variables such as diet, disease and skeletal change as a result of activity are inferred.



An interest in the ancient dead as archaeological evidence did not begin with the early antiquarians, who often paid limited attention to skeletal remains as they did to context when excavating, and often did not bother to record them. However, with the beginning of what we recognise today as more systematic recording of excavations, human remains became a recognised archaeological source of evidence about the human past (Soafer, 2006:13). Developments in anatomical science in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries had an impact on the study of human remains, not least in relation to sex, as Schiebinger (1989) highlights in *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science*. Schiebinger points out when discussing the *Analogy Between Sex and Race* that during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, ‘Anatomists attempted to rank the sexes and races in a single, hierarchical chain of being according to cranium, and pelvis size’ (*ibid*:211) with skull size for the European male being largest, the African male or the European female being smaller and the African female being ranked the smallest (*ibid*). Theories of human as well as social/cultural evolution intertwined with current-day political and cultural concepts of the human body, were used as a measure against which human remains from the past were compared (Soafer, 2006: 13). The work of anatomists during these periods, inevitably had an impact on early archaeologists interested in the remains of humans, both ‘at home’ and in countries other than their own. We now view many of these early theories and practices as racist and sexist, however they remain at the origin of concepts of scientific measurement of sex (and racial) differences used today, their lasting influence on current osteological methodology is questioned and investigated only by few archaeologists.

However it should not be assumed that all archaeologists were, by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, not questioning how mortuary archaeology was interpreted. For example, Kroeber's 1927 cross-cultural study of mortuary archaeology suggested caution in funerary interpretations, and critiqued early 20th century assumptions about social meaning in funerary rituals (Rakita and Buikstra, 2005:2). Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the study of

mortuary remains then took a new direction, partly as a result of new analytical techniques being developed, and partly because of new theoretical frameworks drawn primarily from anthropology and ethnography. Following the social developments and challenges posed by the Second World War, the 'New Archaeology' of the 1960s was being influenced by anthropologists such as Goody (1962) who were developing a renewed enthusiasm for the possibilities presented by ethnographic studies of the role and the meaning of mortuary practices and extended mortuary rituals.

This anthropological resurgence spurred interest in archaeological circles, and by the 1970s works such as Saxe's doctoral thesis '*Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices*' which discussed a 'cross-cultural, nomothetic model of how mortuary practices interrelated with the sociocultural systems of the society' (Rakita and Buikstra, 2005:3) were appearing. Saxe's thesis considered the social identity of the dead and complex sociopolitical organisation of the society represented and symbolically manifest in the mortuary practice of community (*ibid*). Other scholars added to this questioning of ethnographic material on mortuary practices in the interpretation of archaeological remains; a development within an emerging processual approach in which formal analysis which used cross-cultural, ethnographic studies, combined with the formal hypothesis testing to seek social meaning in mortuary behaviour; this was further developed by Greenford and Brown, with Binford suggesting that mortuary remains do not reflect cultural features (*ibid*). This became known as the Saxe-Binford approach (*ibid*) which was to dominate throughout the 1970s and 80s. New approaches however began to relate skeletal data directly to other material remains in the mortuary context, for example Buikstra's (1981:124-128) study of paleodemography and palaeopathology from the Koster site in Illinois where she combines tool assemblages, personal adornment, burial positions and ethnographic data with the skeletal remains of burials to characterise the site and gain insight into prehistoric social organisation. This was followed by Braun's critique of quantitative approaches used by the processual archaeologists,



which he suggested failed to support their interpretive models based on the subjective ranking of the treatment of the dead (Rakita and Buikstra 2005:7). These developments in ways of thinking about mortuary archaeology were part of the post processual, symbolic and interpretive theories of archaeologists in the 1980s and early 90s. Each had their own nuanced theoretical arguments but were

...united, however, in their indictment of processual thought and their assertion that mortuary rituals are frequently utilised by the leading to negotiate, display, map, or transform actual or social relations. They further argue that the processual perspective glosses over significant variation that exists in the perception and practice of mortuary rights within a given society. (Rakita and Buikstra 2005:7).

This perspective considered *agency* in relation to cultural change and as a strong argument against cross-cultural generalisations. These critiques however, were not often associated with convincing case studies in prehistoric contexts. It was during this time that physical anthropology and social anthropology came to have a stronger link with archaeological interpretation through a discussion of their relationship. Cannon (1989 in *ibid*) began to discuss the assumption that funerary rights could be seen as an unbiased reflection of social status by suggesting that mortuary displays were often cultural phenomena associated with social and economic organisation. These *postprocessual* interpretive approaches all contained a similar thread, that of a context-specific emphasis. One of the challenges inherent in these theoretical approaches is their usefulness to methodology and application in *practice*. There has therefore been a consistent attempt to provide useful case studies to support context specific archaeology, which is being further developed through landscape archaeology, including sacred sites, and aspects of ancestors and the dead in the structures of the living.

Two of the primary issues surrounding method within the interpretation of sex and gender in mortuary archaeology create a methodological paradox. Despite long-term critique, in practice, biological sex continues to be ascribed using material objects found in association with burials; yet the *gender* inferred from burial goods is seen as being divorced from the biological sex of the human remains with which they are associated. Although in *theory* many archaeologists would now reject the idea of sexing a burial on the basis of what type of grave goods are found with it, in archaeological *practice*, this problematic association remains (Sofaer, 2006:102). Parker Pearson (2001:97) suggests that:

[w]ith the increasingly systematic application of rigorous osteological analyses, this [sexing through grave goods] ought to have been largely consigned to archaeology's own dustbin but it is still a problem in certain quarters, reinforcing contemporary gender stereotypes and furthering the invisibility of potential additional or transvestite gender categories.

Even if burial goods or items of dress or costume are interpreted as *socially gendered* (Sørensen, 2000:91) and therefore culturally constructed, *the biological sex* of the burial is not irrelevant. It is clear from the discussion in the previous section regarding the separation of sex and gender, that in fact sex is inherently implicated in interpretations of gender. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the social implications of gender, the cultural and the biological must be considered together. As Sofaer points out, current archaeological practice 'leaves the impression that identity resides in objects rather than in the people themselves' (2006: 103). Sofaer's methodologically helpful concept of the *body as material culture* locates both biological sex and gender within skeletal remains. It considers the skeleton as both material *and* cultural object, and in doing so blurs the boundaries between our perception of what is biological and what is social, highlighting the complexity of their interrelatedness. Stone and Walrath (2006:176) highlight this point in

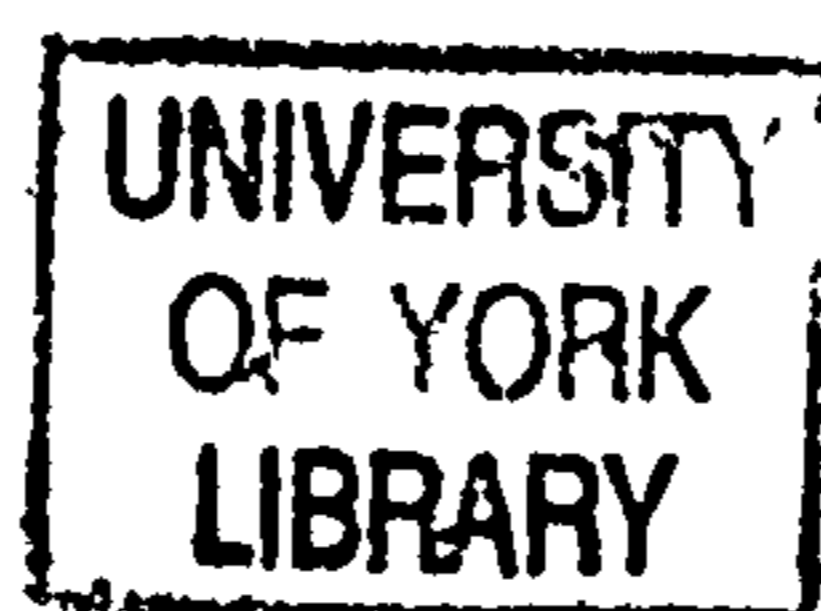


their paper *The Gendered Skeleton: Anthropological Interpretations of the Bony Pelvis*:

The discussion of gender, ideology, and power within anthropological frameworks requires that the skeletal data be integrated with other archaeological and ethnographic studies to fully understand the (pre)historical and long-term dynamics that include men, women, and children. It also requires a healthy reflexivity about our own scientific theories with an awareness of how gender norms and other socio-cultural values become interpolated into seemingly neutral scientific work.

However there is still a question about how the sex of skeletons is being identified in practice and how categorised remains are then associated to other types of archaeological evidence to formulate interpretations of gender structures and relationships. As Eisner (1991) comments, 'Although there are specific differences between the male and female skeletons, the determination on the basis of structure may be open to misinterpretation'. This poses some challenges for osteoarchaeology and the study of human remains more broadly. DNA testing may provide some level of insight into biological/genetic sex. However the application and scope of DNA testing human remains from the majority of archaeological excavations remains confined, primarily through logistical barriers such as time and cost, especially for large population samples. There also remains the challenges posed by the effect on DNA of decay processes and the impact of burial environment. So while DNA analysis of sex 'is seen by some as the way forward...this currently plays a limited role in archaeology' (Soafer, 2006:91).

The interpretation of mortuary archaeology can to some extent therefore be seen to be 'of its time'; a reflection of the sociopolitical movements and theories which shape the world of archaeological and academic enquiry more widely.





### 1.3 Complex Relations: Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Sex

What we understand about ourselves is crucial...  
Generalizations about women are, in effect,  
generalizations about men and about human society in  
general. (Burke Leacock, 1981:204)

How 'gender' and 'sex' are categorised and conceptualised and how they relate to each other and to the body is the central theme of this chapter. The intellectual and epistemological construction of knowledge forms the context of the following review of modernist and postmodernist theoretical approaches to the topic. It is important to consider these theoretical approaches from a wider academic perspective prior to discussing their application in archaeology specifically. This is because archaeology has drawn on various theoretical developments in both science and humanities disciplines in order to formulate its own theoretical propositions. Firstly, this section looks briefly at modernist concepts of sex and gender and how these came to be problematised through postmodern, primarily feminist and queer critique. Making clear the many complex interconnections which form these postmodern understandings of gender and sex is a challenging proposition. Therefore in order to make a comprehensive discussion of the primary theories they are split into three necessarily simplistic conceptual themes, *equality*, *difference* and *diversity*. The dilemma for practice which the various theoretical positions pose will be explored throughout the discussion here before moving on to the implications for archaeology.

At what point exactly in the distant past the seeds of a modernist, scientific perception of the world began to be stimulated is a point much debated. The modernist perspective thought of today as 'traditional', was however in its historical, developmental context, an innovative advancement. '[T]he "splitting apart" of reason' (Turner, 1992:8) or the separation of the natural and scientific, from the theological and hermetic

in the seventeenth century was a radical shift, 'the transformation of a limit, the substitution of one version of human finitude for another' (*ibid*: 9). By the eighteenth century in England, new scientific epistemologies were put forward proclaiming the value of mechanical, empirical approaches aimed at building knowledge based on a 'Solid Truth', quashing the old hermetic epistemologies (Little, 1994:541). The body played a significant role in this transformation from the theological to the secular. As well as practical aspects such as technological and medical advances the scientific approach had strong sociopolitical foundations which sought to regard humanity and the human body as important subjects of intellectual as opposed to spiritual modes of enquiry.

By the 1700s in the West sexual difference had become of primary interest to anatomists with particular regard to the relationship between sex and gender (Schiebinger, 1989:189). Sexual difference began to be considered not just in relation to sexual organs, but throughout the body. Sex was no longer believed to be "confined to a single organ but extends, through more or less perceptible nuances, into every part" (*ibid* quoting Roussel, 1775). It was the holistic 'separation' of the female from the male during this period that turned skeletal sex into a subject of study. This was exemplified by the debut of the 'female skeleton' following the first publication in 1726 of a description of 'female bones' (*ibid*:193). The bones of males and females, not just the fleshly or reproductive parts of their biology began to be seen to determine social behaviour and capabilities (Birke, 1994:68). The 'biological sciences' encompassing the study of the sexed human body only began to take on a more recognisably modern form in the nineteenth century, within the context of evolutionary theory and the life sciences. (Bowler and Rhys Morus, 2005:165). Anatomists during the 1800s discussed the male body as an exemplar of being 'fully human' and the female as being in a stage of arrested development, particularly with reference to the skull/brain (Schiebinger, 1989:206). In accord with Western evolutionary ideas of the time, the female of the species was considered in much the same light as non-European 'races', in other words, as *unequal* (*ibid*: 213).



It was not until following the Second World War when the postmodern critique began to develop that Western modern science and the theory of biological sex determining social relations began to be questioned. One aspect of this critique flowed from the fact that during the war period women had taken on *en-mass*, roles which had previously been regarded as only within men's capability. This shifting perception of male and female social relations played a role in the development of critiques on deeper philosophical levels. From the 1970s, the liberation movement in the West began to take gender theory into the practical mainstream through activism. The assumption of a 'prediscursive, natural realm of sex that is not the product of social interpretation' (McLaughlan, 2004) began to be addressed and critiqued in postmodern Feminist, lesbian, gay and latterly Queer thought. Both modernist and postmodernist theories on the body can be seen to have separated the biological from the social in regard to sex and gender. Some recent postmodern discourses on embodiment have begun to address the issue of corporeality as the 'link' between the two. The interrelatedness, multiplicity and complexity of the physical and conceptual body is therefore investigated using the corporeal self 'not a unit of analysis, but the locus of experience and awareness' (Tarlow, 2002:24).

For the sake of clarity, in this section rather than using the division of theoretical approaches 'Feminist', 'Gender' or 'Queer' in a mutually exclusive or chronological manner, interpretive concepts are considered. A tripartite division of concepts into 'equality', 'difference' and 'diversity' approaches is employed and explored through the work of some of their major proponents. The Westerncentrism of these theories is also highlighted in this section, as an exposition of the issue of colonialism in the development and application of theories of gender and sex. The following does not set out to be a historiography of the development of Feminist, Gender or Queer theories, as this is well documented elsewhere (McLaughlin, 2003; Evans, 1995; Harding;

Seidman, 2004). It will however present the contexts in which these theories developed and discuss the conceptual frameworks in which they are situated.

One of the difficulties with discussions of postmodern approaches to gender and sex is that the various broad theoretical groups of 'Feminist', 'Gender' and 'Queer' have a complex interrelationship. They can not be addressed in isolation from one another. There is also a variety of ways in which scholars interpret exactly what each theoretical approach 'means'. Therefore, rather than dividing into these 'theory groups', it is more useful in context of this thesis to consider the *concepts* which inform them more broadly. Evans in her book *Feminist Theory Today* (1995) suggests that gender theories fall into two main conceptual categories, those of *equality* and *difference*. To this dichotomous division however it is useful to add a third category, *diversity*. As a concept, diversity has developed from within the relatively recent acceleration of a Queer, postmodernist discourse and the dissatisfaction of *difference* Feminists with the notion of 'group' identities (Squires, 2001). However even these three categorisations contain variation in the way they frame the 'origins' of gender as being static, fluid, multi-layered etc.

The level to which each category constructs or deconstructs gender is also diverse within the political or ideological perspective by which it is informed. It is therefore a functional necessity of this section to somewhat 'caricature' each theoretical concept. As Squires notes, these positions are 'clearly archetypes' and it could be argued that the majority of scholars working on theories of gender and sex today 'would defy straightforward categorisation according to this schema' (*ibid*) and be better described as being ranged on a continuum (Evans, 1995). This following discussion will therefore simplify and consolidate within that range by looking first at theories of *equality*, through *difference* to *diversity*.



*The equality concept* in feminist theorising uses gender-neutrality as its principal dictum; that the categories of male and female *gender* should be considered as capable of being the same. The theory of gender equality has as its central tenet that a 'gendered' society creates a power hierarchy which places women in the position of being dominated. As gender is considered to be an entirely social expression of inequality, it can therefore be 'neutralised' by ensuring that women have equal rights, access and opportunities to men. Those who hold a gender equality position, such as the American philosopher and Professor of Law and Ethics, Martha Nussbaum, do not question the social and political systems within which this inequality arises. Their position is that through justice and by women infiltrating existent 'democratic' systems, they can be 'brought up' to an 'equal level of good functioning' (Bobnich, 1993) to that of men. In support of a gender-neutral position Nussbaum (2000) puts forward a theory of 'human nature' based on a highly problematic and Westerncentric list of 'Human Capabilities' which includes the capabilities of life, imagination, practical reason, affiliation, play etc. Nussbaum (1999) believes that,

Women in much of the world lack support for the most central human functions, and this denial of support is frequently caused by their being women. But women, unlike rocks and plants and even horses, have the potential to become capable of these human functions, given sufficient nutrition, education, and other support. That is why their unequal failure in capability is a problem of justice.

This statement implies that there are extant, universal, static categories and concepts of 'women', 'capabilities' and 'justice' and that therefore the same 'antidote' can be applied in all cases to women's 'failure' to be equal to men. Concerningly, women's empowerment is seen as

addressing women's deficit, implying that this defined category of 'men' are the standard by which humanity must be judged. Nussbaum's lack of critique of the androcentric and/or capitalist social and political systems which have produced the unequal access she highlights as the cause of women's inequality, is evident. Her view implies that any social gains made for women via the gender equality strategy will be 'an assimilation to the dominant male norm' (Squires, 2004).

The gender equality position as exemplified by the work of Nussbaum, could therefore be said to be unreflective. It does not recognise or undertake a critical analysis of the context in which it positions itself (for example white, Western, privileged, patriarchal/androcentric, Christian). Nor does it address the interrelationship of gender with other aspects of identity (Cott, 1986:49). Her insistence that she has developed a genderless, essential concept of 'human nature' informed by 'myths and stories from many times and many places' (Bobnich quoting Nussbaum, 1993) is difficult to give credence to in this light. By ignoring the systems within and through which gender is inscribed onto groups and the possibility of cultural variations in gender and gendered relations in regard to 'male dominance' (Burke Leacock, 1981:3) Nussbaum undermines her own position. This pseudo-anthropological perspective appears to have been developed through the lens of an uncritical Western perspective. This is despite her insistence that she 'attempt[s] to defend universal cross-cultural norms [by ensuring her research is] undergirded by fieldwork that attempted to understand the varied contexts in which women are striving for decent lives' (Nussbaum, 2001); curiously, she has no qualms about stating that the evidence she uses to support her theory was gathered during fieldwork in a single country, India.

Nussbaum's universalising perspective, highlighting as it does a need for women's *attainment* of 'sameness' to men, implies the inherent superiority of men. As such it is an archetypal example of equality theory at the extreme end of the scale. Other equality feminists, such as Carol Quillen, do attempt to address the issue of cultural variation but within the



context of human rights. Quillen (quoted in McLaughlin, 2004) supports a position of 'cultural recognition and collective rights [which looks to] retain a notion of what makes us all human and worthy of respect [and] enable, rather than obstruct, the contemporary Feminist quest for global justice and cross-cultural political work'. However if the Western cultural concepts which underpin this 'Feminist quest' are not reflected upon critically, it is difficult to see how the addition of 'cultural recognition' is more than simply a tip of the hat towards cross-cultural awareness and understanding. The very attempt to incorporate culture without self reflexivity expresses the theoretical weakness of the universalising and essentialist precepts of the equality position.

However the concept of equality was an important driver for the early development of Feminist thought. It was a new way of thinking about the rights of women, by an albeit limited social group of women in the West. The importance here of understanding equality as a developmental factor in gender theory is primarily because of its insistence on a 'natural' sameness (Cott, 1986: 51) of men and women. As Mitchell (1976: 388) points out 'in rejecting women as naturally different from men they are forced to define women as a distinct *social* group with its own socially defined characteristics', creating therefore a 'universal woman' that crosses cultures in ways which are social as well as biological. This social sameness became increasingly challenged during the late 1980s by the voices of groups who had hitherto not been engaged with the discourse on equality such as women of colour, lesbian women, working class women, women from outside of the West etc. A widening of the discussion regarding aspects of identity which interrelated with gender therefore highlighted the limitations of theories of gender equality and initiated its deconstruction. Squires (2001) in her paper 'Representing groups, deconstructing identities' highlights the distinctions between gender equality and gender difference positions. She notes that 'From the equality perspective gender *difference* is synonymous with inferiority and is to be rejected in the name of a more genuinely inclusive democratic practice' (emphasis added). This begs questions regarding the presumed



superiority of men, and the negation of women or men from within Western, non-Western/non-democratic cultures, who do not feel that this gender-neutral 'human nature' represents or speaks for them and their experience of life. The equality view of gender differences therefore works to a dualistic deficit model, which should not be confused with the explicit concept of *gender difference*.

*The gender difference position* proposes gender as a dichotomous social variable dependant on culture and identity. However despite the fact that scholars who use a gender difference approach clearly state that it is social, the lines of difference are drawn by biological sex. The opposition of female:male is generally maintained as the 'empirical stage' upon which the social dichotomy of woman:man plays out. From this perspective the difference between the two prescribed genders is the 'cornerstone of women's [and therefore also men's] identity' (Squires, 2001), where identity incorporates variation in culture, class and ethnicity. Difference in this context represents a 'diversity of experience...[through which]...Ethnicity, class, sexual identity and so on all affect our life chances and life experiences' (Letherby, 2003:49). In recognising variation there are therefore many diverse perspectives or standpoints which may be gathered under the banner of 'difference'.

bell hooks\* and Patricia Hill Collins' Afrocentric feminist standpoints are examples of the range of approaches which theories of difference have informed. These various standpoints suggest alternative epistemologies which challenge 'all certified knowledge and opens up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth' (Hill Collins, 1991). As Letherby (2003:50 after Lorde, 1984) comments:

Arguably, the second-wave feminist movement was

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\* lower case is intended; bell hooks uses a lack of capitalisation in her name to make a political point.

largely a white, middle-class, heterosexual one, and with the importance of diversity of experience in mind there was a growing insistence on the need for a politics of identity which did not focus on women as a homogeneous group but recognised diversity between women.

Moore (1994:3) clarifies this statement by highlighting that '[t]he experience of being a woman, being black or being a Muslim can never be a singular one, and will always be dependant on a multiplicity of locations and positions that are constructed socially, that is, intersubjectively'. However a position of *difference* is also often aligned with the proposition that only *women themselves* can truly understand and interpret women's experiences.

However the concept of a universally constituted, if culturally various, 'woman' defined by biology is one which has a positive political attraction for difference Feminists. It maintains a 'critical mass' through the unitary biological constant of sex, while recognising the very different experiences and evocations of 'being' a woman which accommodates variable expressions of gender cross-culturally and across classes. The case would be argued in the same way, it might therefore be suggested, for men. For Wittig (1981):

the 'category' woman as well as the category 'man' are political and economic categories not eternal ones...our first task, it seems, is to always thoroughly disassociate 'women' (the class within which we fight) and 'woman', the myth. For 'woman' does not exist for us: it is only an imaginary formation, while 'women' is the product of a social relationship.

In other words, it does not question the gender dichotomy of man/woman, although it recognises its social construction and political contingency.



In a further attempt to separate biological sex from gender, difference theorists have made use of psychoanalytical insights. For example Vice (1998) suggests we enlist the 'insights of psychoanalysis, in particular the concept of the unconscious, and the idea that gender is a psychic and not a biological identity'. Grosz (1990) describes the relationship between Feminist theory and psychoanalysis as 'uneasy and ambivalent' however, epitomised by the debate surrounding Freud's theory of 'female castration' as inherently phallogocentric and misogynist. However, there are other theorists such as Chodorow (1989) and Wright (1989) for whom the relationship is very *unambivalent*. Chodorow (1989) in particular comments on the way that sex and gender being the *central* categories in psychoanalysis make it 'a particularly apposite source of feminist theorising'. The 'power-symbolism' of the theoretical phallus which permeates much psychoanalytical discourse, can perhaps in part explain the 'mutual fascination' which Grosz deems Feminism and psychoanalysis to have for each other. The Lacanian emphasis that the phallus can 'theoretically be appropriated by either sex' (Grosz; 1990) has an attraction for certain Feminists who consider the 'power' of the phallus and therefore masculinity, in metaphysical terms. The theory that 'Cartesian dualism is rooted in the psychosexual development of men and represents a denial of the feminine' (Kemp and Squire, 1997) also helps to form the strong link between psychoanalysis and theories of gender which adhere to the position of difference which 'takes as central tenet the revaluation of femininity' (Squires quoting Fraser, 2001).

However even drawing on psychoanalytic understandings of gender the issue of a biological imperative is not effectively addressed within the theoretical discourse of difference. The internal logic of the drive for the formulation of various but 'specifically "female" knowledge' (Squires and Kemp, 1997) is also inherently problematic unless a biologically female 'universal' informs the social category of woman; a category which difference theorists argue does not exist. By bringing biology into the critical equation, difference theorising is forced into a position of having to face its own universalising conceptualisation of sex and its



relationship to gender. The argument for biological unity as separate from social difference, while politically and methodologically useful, is therefore theoretically problematic. This is because difference theories are inherently tied to a conceptualisation of gender based on the Western, scientised, oppositional male/female sex dualism. Thinking beyond this concept of the sex/gender relationship by deconstructing it and decentring the *a priori* position of gender among other aspects of identity, is one of the main projects of Queer and identity theories which inform the postmodern concept of *gender diversity*.

*Theories of gender diversity* represent the postmodern critique and destabilisation of the modernist categories and conceptualisations of sex and gender as dichotomous and biologically determined. They also highlight the Westerncentric, heterosexual-biased and thereby analytically problematic status of the equality and difference positions through debates regarding aspects of identity such as sexuality, race, class and culture. Rose's paper *What Does Feminism Want?* suggests that 'thinking about the difficulties of identification with a collective' (2000) means that feminist theories, in particular those with a difference position, are being 'seen by many as in some sort of crisis today'. Postmodern and in particular queer theoretical discourses on sexuality have added to the 'crisis'. For example, theorists such as Butler (1993) consider the fluidity and multiplicity of sexual identities as central, and as intrinsically debilitating for any kind of unity based on gender. This position represents the 'destabilisation' with which postmodern Queer thinking has informed theories of gender diversity. The critique of heterosexual assumptions such as the pre-eminence of gender and sex divisions based on sexual desires or biological reproductive capacity has therefore been valuable to the further development of Feminist theories of gender. Some Feminist gender theorists have become increasingly uncomfortable with the limitations of the category 'women' and its biological sex and sexual inferences in a cross-cultural context. As the anthropological theorist Moore says in her 1994 book *A Passion for Difference*, the 'pressing problem with regard to gender, the body and sexual difference [is the

need to work out] what bearing social and cultural discourse have in individual experiences'. Postmodern discourses on identity derived from the engagement of other 'traditionally' voiceless groups such as lesbians, bisexuals and gay men have fed into the debates.

Feminist and queer postmodernist theories therefore take issue with the whole notion of a gender specific standpoint (Millen, 1997:76). In the diversity approach there are no overarching truths, no answers, only partial knowledges which are constructed in the specifics of time and place (Williams, 1996). As Letherby (2003:51-52) points out:

Postmodernism opposes all forms of essentialism and is a theory which disregards the notion of unitary categories and the possibility of access to a single, objective form of reality. From this perspective there is no such thing as the category 'woman', no such thing as a stable, coherent self, no such thing as patriarchy. None of us can speak for 'woman' because no such person exists except within a specific set of relations.

Foucault's postmodern theory of socially constructed sexuality and identity has informed a burgeoning Queer theory. As mentioned above, a diversity perspective on gender 'seeks to *decentre* political theory with respect to gender altogether' (Squires, 2001). It attempts to 'deconstruct notions of normality and fixed sexual orientation' (McLaughlin, 2004) through a politics of subversion and by questioning sexuality, it questions the fundamental basis of the sex dichotomy. As with the two concepts of gender discussed previously, the diversity position sustains various approaches within it. Gender diversity aims at a deconstruction of gender, based on the wider deconstruction of identity and sexuality.

Seidman (1997) suggests that his Queer perspective on postmodernism is approached 'as a broad cultural and intellectual standpoint that aims to *decentre* or destabilize unitary concepts [including gender and sex] of the



human subject, foundationalist and objective views of knowledge, and totalizing perspectives on society and history'. It could be argued that Seidman's stance is commendable from a critical position, but that it can not be considered as a theoretical or methodological 'end point' in itself. To end (or not to end, depending on the possibility of infinite deconstruction) with an unstable and decentred 'human subject' bears little relationship to the lived experience of people who exist in relation to each other and to society. The deconstruction of gender to the point of creating a theoretically 'genderless' position is problematic in a similar way to the 'gender-neutrality' of the equality perspective. The reality of the social and political contexts in which people currently live do not provide the platform for equity of lived experience for all which either of these perspectives purport.

Although the destabilisation of gender categories can be seen as politically informative because it recognises the diversity of lived experiences, it also makes gender as a means of understanding past societies methodologically impossible to access. At its most extreme, diversity theory 'rests on an underlying misunderstanding: that there is no middle ground between the metaphysical modernist subject on one hand and the total deconstruction of identity on the other.' (Hekman, 2000). This statement by Hekman exemplifies one of the primary difficulties of the postmodern position of gender diversity. The total deconstruction of the modernist subject creates a political and analytical vortex with the white, Western, middle-class male at its centre. By deconstructing all groups to create a 'proliferation of multiple identities' (*ibid*) none of which holds more validity or position of prominence than the other, the traditional discourses of power remain unchallenged. Therefore although 'the transgression of all sexual norms, ignoring the whole issue of gender [may offer] a radical means to deconstruct oppressive identities...such a strategy – adopted in our highly hierarchical society – effectively legitimises existing power imbalances' (Kemp and Squires, 2001). This is why many Feminists although '[p]ersuaded by the theoretical appeal of a deconstructive approach to subjectivity...[are in general]...unable to



square this theoretical stance with their political commitment to the recognition and representation of women as a group within the public political domain.’ (Squires, 2001).

Queer theory is not therefore Feminist in its conceptualisation of, or approach to gender, because it removes ‘women’ or ‘females’ from the critical position of *subject*. However as Macintosh (1993) suggests:

Queer theory and queer politics...are important for feminists. They do not replace feminism, which remains as a humanist and liberatory project with its own more structural theories. But, on the one side, queer theory provides a critique of the heterosexual assumptions of some feminist theory and, on the other, feminists must agitate for an awareness of gender in queer thinking

This critical relationship between Feminist and Queer approaches can therefore be seen as valuable to the theorising of gender. However, this does not quite resolve the political, social or intellectual implications of Queer theorising replacing the ‘collective gender-based politics’ (Kemp and Squires, 2001) of Feminist theorising. Nor indeed, is it particularly helpful in formulating a methodology for the study of gender and sex in the past. In addition to this, the decentring and deconstruction of unifying categories means that queer approaches remain generally unreflexive. It is methodologically difficult to be reflexive if your identity position has no frame of reference. As a Queer theorist himself, even Seidman (1997) recognises that one of the limitations of Queer theory, as with other forms of postmodernist critique, is that ‘deconstructive critics have been notorious in refusing to articulate the ethical standpoint of their critique and politics making them vulnerable to charges of nihilism and opportunism.’ As Moore (1994) suggests, ‘The relation between sexual practice [implicating biological sex] and gender is surely not a structurally determined one, but the destabilizing of the heterosexual presumption of that very structuralism still requires a way to think the two

in a dynamic relation to one another.’. This is an important point, as it raises the question of the interrelationship of sex and gender as being practically necessary in creating a cohesive understanding of the body and society.

It would seem therefore that each of the conceptual positions of equality, difference and diversity do not currently provide a theory of gender which deconstructs critically, yet is able to incorporate an understanding of engagement with the social and political context of lived realities. This is a position which some of the ‘queerer’ Feminist theorists such as Hekman (2000) are attempting to address through her ‘argument for first, a middle ground on the concept of identity and, second, a politics beyond identity...informed by the conviction that feminists must transcend rather than replace the errors of identity’. One of the strengths of Feminist thought is that it ‘has always sought to engage with and reinterpret the foundations of the theoretical frameworks it coexists with and at times draws from’ (McLaughlin, 2003). This is particularly pertinent in archaeology, dealing as it does with the physical material of the past, and attempting to interpret it using theoretical approaches.

One of the major issues for those working on the ‘cutting edge’ of gender theory today is the development of a theoretical approach which is informed by practice. ‘Destabilising’ prior scientific ‘knowns’ about gender and sex is an important part of the process as it allows us to question how we look at and understand these categories and to consider what is valuable and what is not, to support our understandings about the people. However this is not the ‘end’ of the process by any means. Attempting to remove all boundaries so as not to fall into the trap of universalism or essentialism, results in exactly that which it aims to avoid. One possibility is that we might explore why it is we are asking the questions we are, and to do this, cultural and socio-political contexts need to be addressed.



## 1.4 Cultural and socio-political contexts

...what often passes for objectivity is a sort of collective European subjectivity. (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1999:37 after Asante, 1990:24)

The methodological and ontological issues which the study of gender in archaeology raises become increasingly apparent once archaeological theory and interpretation moves out of its generative (primarily Western) cultural context. Postmodern, socialist and feminist critiques of cross-cultural assumptions have provided archaeologists with the means of recognising a range of concerns which challenge the universalising and Euro/Anglo-centric tendencies of British and American archaeologies, in particular the development of theory. It could be suggested that the 'imperialist' domination (Trigger, 1984:363-368) of British and North American archaeological theoretical and knowledge generation results in a position where 'in spite of the extensive fieldwork taking place all over the world – ideas on how archaeological data should be evaluated are still being undertaken primarily in the West' (Özdoğan, 1998:111). However as Politis (2003:261) points out, the theoretical dominance of the United States of America and Britain over other countries in a dichotomous 'victim and victimizer' caricature is too simplistic a view. Rather he sees the current state of affairs as a result of various 'significant aspects...regarding research and recognition [which] must be understood within the context of production and legitimisation of knowledge determined by economic and political situations' (*ibid*). These 'significant aspects' which Politis identifies are part of the internal dynamics, such as economics and politics, of a country (in his case, Argentina) and the complex interaction of historical experience in its wider socio-political context including the internalisation of the discourse. Non-western countries which are producing archaeological theories that are neither exposed to or absorbed into the international theoretical discourse might therefore be said to be kept 'at-heel' by the complex and



interlinked tensions of both international and internal socio-political climates. The fact that the major international archaeological journals and publishers which deal with theory are controlled by Western institutions, which have their own internal political and historical agendas and relations with non-western cultures is also of considerable significance; an issue is raised in the case of South American archaeological theory by Politis (*ibid*:260-261). The outcomes of these complex internal and international relationships is of course not the same for all non-western countries; there are similarities, but these are always tempered by specific socio-political context. The outcomes for Britain and North America of these relationships are comparable, in their creation of a global dominance and presence in the development of theoretical knowledge.

This global socio-political context has led to a predominance of Western biased cross-cultural universals, including conceptualisations of sex and gender, in the formulation of archaeological theories. Alternative theoretical discourses exist throughout non-Western cultures. These alternative or 'eccentric' approaches as Pagán-Jiménez (2004) calls them (such as the South American 'Social Archaeology') might be considered as a reactive 'defence against North American [and British] researchers and their epistemological orientations' (Oyuela-Caycedo, A; Anaya, A; Elera, C.G.; Valdez, L.M., 1997: 367). However for a number of reasons including those of colonialism and hegemonic 'imperialism' highlighted by Politis (2003) and Trigger (1984) among others, these challenges to the pervasive theories of Western archaeologies remain marginalised and internationally unrecognised.

As Hodder notes in relation to Near Eastern countries and cultures, the '[a]rchaeological interpretation of the Near East has...been embedded within a Western construction which opposes the East or Orient as 'other'...constructed as a 'play of difference' within academic discourse' (Hodder, 1998:125). This situation is primarily a result of the emergence of an archaeology which served a European nationalist and colonialist agenda in the nineteenth century (Hassan, 1999:406) and in which current

mainstream archaeology in the West is still steeped. It is clear however that the cultural and political ‘innocence of the discipline, sometimes cloaked behind a façade of empirical objectivity, cannot be maintained’ (Kohl, 1998:224).

### **1.5 Interwoven Stories: Archaeologies of Gender and Sex**

Over the past couple of decades, archaeology has come to recognise the relevance of investigating and theorising gender as a structuring aspect of past societies. Archaeologists use a range of material culture to interpret gender. However one of the most informative sources of evidence is human remains from mortuary contexts. It is the physical body, or what is left of it, that has linked the study of gender to biological sex. The process of interpreting gender is not as straightforward as it may at first appear, or indeed as it has been presented by traditional archaeological approaches. This section seeks to explore the way that archaeology draws on the different theoretical perspectives, as discussed in the previous section, to interpret gender. It will also consider the emergent discussion within archaeology relating to the ontology of biological sex. In the following, the ways that various theories of sex and gender have been incorporated into interpretations of social relations in the past, will be discussed. The key debates which surrounds this, namely the relationship between biological sex and gender, and whether Feminism is a requisite for a valuable archaeology of gender, will also be explored. The aim of this section is therefore threefold: to discuss and critique the theoretical approaches to gender and sex in archaeology; to present the ongoing debates; and to explore the methodological challenges posed by the sex/gender relationship. However before being able to discuss or critique approaches or consider debates, it is important to have a brief overview of how archaeology as a discipline views ‘gender’. In order to do so, the development of ‘gender archaeology’ will be summarised.

Despite the repeated assertion that the study of gender in archaeology is ‘equally concerned with men and women’ (Gilchrist, 1991:497), the



majority of publications specifically relating to the theorising of gender in the past, have dealt with 'women' and are produced by women, a situation reinforced perhaps by the 'reluctance [of male archaeologists] in adopting gender [and masculinity] as a key concept in archaeological theory' (Knapp, 1998:365). There is an inevitability therefore that many archaeologists automatically associate the term 'gender' with the category 'women'. It is because of the historical triggers for archaeology's engagement with gender as subject that this situation has arisen. The primary cause is the originatory and ongoing role played by archaeologists engaged with the Feminist movement and feminist scholarship.

There are many overviews of the role feminism played within the development of an 'engendered' archaeology (see Claassen, 1992; Johnson, 2000; Sørensen, 2000; Wylie, 1999). This summary does not set out to cover the already well rehearsed discourse. It will however point to the general trajectory of changing phases of 'gender as subject' in archaeology. These phases, although 'not so sharply separable as to be exclusive of one another' (Wylie, 1991:32) started with 'finding' women in the archaeological record by debunking androcentric methods and interpretations...[and]...highlighting the contributions of women to the past' (Voss, 2000:182). Although 'open to debate' (Claassen, 1992:1) this initial phase is generally considered to have been instigated by the publication of Conkey and Spector's 1984 article *Archaeology and the Study of Gender*. This article was a response 'viewed through the lens of feminist criticism' (*ibid*:1) to the lack of gender objectivity or inclusivity in archaeology. It critiques 'the uncritical use of gender stereotypes in...scholarship [which] perpetuates and supports sexism and gender asymmetry' (*ibid*:3). Conkey and Spector also argued that female 'invisibility' in the archaeological record is not caused by a lack of potential data resources but as a result of 'a false notion of objectivity and of the gender paradigms archaeologists employ' (*ibid*:6). With varying degrees of revision, this critique has been retained throughout the development of Feminist-inspired gender archaeology. However it



rapidly became clear that more than a critique was needed, and so developed the next 'remedial' phase of working to make women visible in the past.

This 'remedial' phase sought to make 'visible' women in the past, by engaging with them as 'an object of archaeological study' (Gero and Conkey, 1991:xii). In order to do this it was proposed that archaeologists must endeavour to incorporate the 'conceptual and analytical category of gender...[in to]...archaeological research and interpretation'(1991:5). The result of this endeavour by both Feminist and non-Feminist gender archaeologists was a burgeoning corpus of literature through the 1990s. Seven years after the publication of Conkey and Spector's article, Gero and Conkey's 1991 edited volume *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory* was the first mainstream text dedicated to the subject of gender. This publication sought to apply Feminist social theory within an archaeological context by exploring the issues of why no archaeology of gender had previously been developed. Various aspects of analysis including space, material culture, subsistence strategies and visual representations were considered, for example Handsman's (1991) paper about the gendered interpretation of sculpture and carvings from the Mesolithic transition site of Lepinski Vir in Yugoslavia. He questions the interpretation of the Lepenski Vir 'artwork' as being 'about women' but not produced by them. The paper argues that the traditional 'male gaze makes us see the art of Lepenski Vir as something it was not' (*ibid*:360); representing women socially and sexually as controlled, objectified and without agency because of unquestioned androcentric and phallogocentric assumptions. To bring this criticism out of the realms of the abstract, Handsman primarily considers two forms of evidence. Firstly comparative burial treatment and placement of male and female skeletal remains and secondly, sacred and domestic settlement plans and their implied social stratification and lineage.

Reading through this and other early volumes and papers on gender archaeology, there is a clear dualistic conceptualisation of gender which is

rarely questioned. The association between biological sex, and social gender remained implicit. It was not until radical sociological and anthropological enquiries on the nature of gender and sexuality moved into archaeology's theoretical radar that this dichotomy began to be critiqued. Literature such as Herdt's 1994 edited volume *'Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and history'* with papers about the Native American Bedonkohe 'Two-Spirit' (Roscoe, 1994) and gender swapping 'Sworn Virgins' in the Balkans (Grémaux, 1994), highlighted the diversity of gendered societies across the globe. This research was informed by developing postmodern Feminist and Queer theories in the broader social sciences and humanities (Harding 1992; Sprague and Zimmerman, 1993; Seidman, 1994). These theories and case studies resonated with those gender archaeologists who felt ideas of cross-cultural dichotomous gender universals could now no longer be sustained.

The discomfort gender archaeologists felt during this time found a theoretical palliative in the developing postmodern critiques of gender and sexuality from outside of archaeology. Queer theorising and the diversity perspective on gender triggered some archaeologists such as Boyd (1997), Little (1994), Meskell (1997, 1999) and Voss (2000) to call for a reconceptualisation of gender categories where the dichotomy of 'women' and 'men' was theoretically destabilised. Meskell is one of the main proponents of what might be considered to be a postmodern archaeology of the individual which critiques the dichotomous categorisation of gender, sex and sexuality. She also proposes the notion of fluid identity (following the work of Butler, 1990, 1993, *et al*) as archaeologically relevant. Her work is situated in the critique of the 'rational, autonomous, subject of modernity' (1999:59) by highlighting its subjectivity and sexist epistemology.

Heavily informed by radical Feminist and Queer theorising by scholars such as Butler (1990; 1993) and Haraway (1997), Meskell (1999:58) views gender, sex and sexuality as elements of 'collective and personal



identities [which] are precariously and contingently constituted and...constantly renegotiated'. By deconstructing identity in such a hyperrelativist way, Meskell (1999:68 after Haraway, 1997) is also challenging the foundations of feminist epistemologies, suggesting:

As Haraway rightly asserts, if a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the bedrock of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics to contest the reification of gender is desirable, one that accepts the variable construction of identity as a methodological and political goal.

As Tarlow (2002:23) points out, the radical approach taken by Butler which Meskell draws on 'threaten at times to dissolve the body altogether into wisps and trails of discourse, whilst all the time insisting on its materiality'. This extreme diversity position can therefore be considered 'to undermine its own political and intellectual agenda as much as it does those repudiated' (Little, 1994:542). These relativist theoretical approaches have their own inherent problems for application in archaeological practice, an issue which has only very recently begun to be highlighted (e.g Sofaer, 2006; Tarlow, 2002).

As we have seen in the previous section there are a diversity of theoretical approaches to Feminism, or more accurately, there are *Feminisms* (Kemp and Squires, 1997). Yet mainstream archaeology tends to conflate these all under the banner of the 'second-wave' or remedial Feminism which is seen to 'prioritise' the category of 'women'. In other words, 'finding (certain) women at the cost of all others.' (Meskell, 1999:87), creating what then becomes perceived as a 'womanist', gynocentrically biased archaeology which effectively excludes 'men' from archaeology as subject and scholar (*ibid*:84; Knapp, 1998:365). Gilchrist (1991:495) suggests that this is further complicated by a 'confusion between issues [i.e. epistemological concerns and workplace equity issues] which are actually separate'. However, this 'separateness' can be debated at a deep



level concerning the interrelatedness between academic and intellectual pursuits in archaeology, and *who* is generating the knowledge that informs these epistemologies and practices. This is a well discussed and debated issue on the nature and power-relations of knowledge and knowing (Crowley and Himmelweit, 1992). As Boyd (1997:27) succinctly notes, it is our 'social interests that ultimately sanction the form of the knowledge system, so that social categories are ultimately reflected in and responsible for knowledge categories'. However Gilchrist's observation, pinpoints one of the central concerns of the debate, the importance or necessity of a Feminist archaeology of gender.

The debate in archaeology as to whether Feminist approaches are essential for understanding gender in the past remains ongoing. Feminism takes a political position which makes *women* its central (though not necessarily singular) subject of study and engagement, although it may be suggested that 'few feminists would support a body of theory based on the subjectivity of being a woman, regardless of time, space, age or ethnicity.' (Gilchrist, 1998:50). It is the overtly *political* component of Feminist approaches which is often of greatest concern for non-Feminist gender archaeologists and archaeologists more generally. Although as Little (1994:540) comments '[w]hether or not feminist archaeology should be worrisome depends a great deal on one's basic fears and assumptions. Whether or not feminist archaeology should worry anyone depends on what sort of feminism archaeologists might tend to embrace.'

For many years Feminism's political agenda resulted in the marginalisation of gender archaeology (Sørensen, 2000:5). It is the focus on the category of *women* which suggests to some that applying Feminism in archaeology means leaving men out of the picture. Archaeologists with an interest in gender argue that the term represents both women and men, and that to ignore one 'half' of the gender dichotomy is creating an unwarranted imbalance. As Knapp (1998:365) suggests in his own view, 'there is no point in replacing an androcentric

account of the world with a gynocentric one'. While certain Feminist archaeologists agree with this critique and suggest that in fact Feminism should *help* to recognise men as well as women (Wylie, 1992) in the study of gender by highlighting *difference*, there is little evidence to support this recognition in the Feminist literature. For example this is the case for the work of Conkey and Gero (1991) in their edited volume *Engendering Archaeology: Women in Prehistory*, which explicitly associates archaeologies of gender with *women*, using the two terms as almost entirely interchangeable.

Archaeologists such as Boyd (1997), Meskell (1999) and Wylie (1999) have all highlighted the need for archaeologies of gender to be inclusive of both 'men' and 'women' as well as addressing binary categorises and questioning exclusionary and asymmetrical gendered archaeologies. However the equation of *women* with *gender* remains in the mainstream archaeological consciousness. One such example is Stone and Walrath's (2006:168-178) publication, *The Gendered Skeleton: Anthropological Interpretations of the Bony Pelvis*. The focus of the paper is entirely on female pelvic morphology in relation to women's health in the past; its title and content using 'gendered' to infer female/women. Another is Cannon's *Gender and Agency in Mortuary Fashion* (2005) which focuses exclusively on the agency of women throughout, while noting that 'other examples might equally illustrate the agency of men or agency shared between gender divisions'. This is not to suggest that a defined focus may not be appropriate or indeed in this example, not clearly expressed, but to highlight the strong gender/women association in 'engendered' archaeology. Arguments for a specifically masculinist archaeology as counterbalance are, however, highly limited (see Boyd, 1997 and Knapp, 1998). The concern however for many Feminist gender archaeologists is that if 'approaches continue to subsume the female agent under a gender neutral individual which is implicitly male...the political impetus of feminism [is blocked] by negating the feminist collective in favour of the individual' (Gilchrist 1998: 50).



While gender in itself is seen as social category, the impact of socio-political, cultural context on these categories is rarely reflected upon. In direct opposition to this Wylie (1992:30) attempts to make an explicit association between the political structures of a culture and its cultural understandings. In other words, social structures, such as gender, are implicitly governed by socio-political context. Wylie's suggestions that knowledge claims be 'settled locally' (*ibid*) to avoid a universalising epistemic stance, coincides with her assurances that Feminist research in archaeology is not distinctively or 'worryingly' political. It is however methodologically problematic if archaeology is to be able to draw any comparative conclusions about gender. After all, if everything is politically and culturally relative, how can archaeologists hope to develop cross-cultural understandings and interpretations across time and space?

Gender archaeologists such as Sørensen (2000) and Gilchrist (1998) suggest in contrast that the political can be transgressed in the study of gender archaeologically. Gilchrist (1998:53) highlights that while it is important to raise the profile of women in the past in order to meet feminist objectives by acting as a 'catalyst for the consciousness-raising which leads to a re-evaluation of social attitudes', she also suggests that 'less critical and more strategically political' (*ibid*) approaches must be challenged. This 'a-political' approach suggests that 'gender studies...[may become] less distinct as a sub-discipline of archaeology as it becomes interwoven with all aspects of the discipline and integrated with its social theories (Sørensen, 2000:5).

Contextualising to the point of relativism is therefore problematic for the practical application of theories. The Western academic tradition finds the possibility of losing its conceptual foundation of empiricism and objectivity deeply disturbing. If this 'solid ground' upon which the discipline of archaeology is built were to be 'removed', would the structure crumble, or are there other possibilities? It is not just the 'objective' science disciplines which are being challenged. Wylie (2002:161), quoting Bernstein, highlights the perception of '...“objective



foundations for philosophy, knowledge, or language”...[if they] cannot be secured...we face the threat of “maddness and chaos where nothing is fixed”...an intolerable conclusion’.

The postmodern theoretical position recently adopted as a mode of inquiry by some archaeologists who are concerned with sex and gender can therefore be seen to draw on the work of sociologists such as Judith Butler (1990; 1993) and Donna Haraway (1996). As has been discussed above, postmodern critiques of the concepts of sex categories attempt to remove the binary and oppositional definitions of sex in order to accommodate other biological sex expressions. This is not in order to add a ‘third sex’ but to suggest that biological categories are constructed and ‘not only multiple, but also movable’ (Pugsley, 2005:165). The problematic evidence for this position is based in functions such as puberty and the changing perceptions (*ibid*) of ‘status’ based on sex which societies confer on groups. Meskell (1999:60) suggests giving up the ‘quest for a fictive cohesion’ as part of a ‘destabilising’ approach to gender and biological sex. However in relation to the interpretation of the physical material of human remains, without a practical methodology to support them, these theories alone offer little to address the real issues for the archaeological study of human remains.

More recently, Soafer’s (2006:142) approach considers human remains as a form of material culture, in order to investigate the:

...processes and complexity of the formation of the body in terms of its contingency in the context of its total development, rather than the absolute categorisation of individuals.

This offers some possibilities for a practical future direction which addresses these concerns over scientific assumptions of objectivity as well as theoretical issues. This different way of perceiving the material of human remains opens up new lines of investigation which may point to a

more unified approach. However another possibility is to look not just at our perceptions of the material with which archaeologists are working, but to consider the perceptions of the archaeologists themselves. As Soafer (2006, 2) comments:

While osteological determinations, particularly of age and sex, are regularly used as the basis of archaeological interpretation through the association between people and artefacts in mortuary context, there is no explicit framework of integrating osteoarchaeology within archaeological thought.

A methodology which when applied in practice offers archaeologists the means to bring together osteoarchaeology and archaeological theories of sex and gender would therefore be of benefit to the discipline, opening up the possibility of deeper insights into the lives and deaths of peoples of the past. The next chapter outlines the methodology used in this research to investigate how archaeologists understand, theorise and interpret gender and sex for human remains and how they relate this to their practice.

## **Chapter 2. Conversations with Archaeologists**

*Interviewing someone can only tell you what that person thinks or feels or values about what they think is real. It can never tell you what is actually real now or was actually real in the past.*

(Maxwell, 1996:56, quoted in Wengraf, 2001:57)

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the reflexive interview methodology used in the research for this thesis. As a methodology, the use of interviews is relatively unknown for investigating the ways in which archaeologists understand and interpret material evidence. To date, it has only tended to be used in the context of Heritage management studies or when drawing anthropological analogies. As Pluciennik (1999: 659) suggests:

...innovation in presentation (rather than content) is most frowned upon in science, where codes of representation are consensual and often taken to be unproblematic and transparent. In this sense, ethnographers have tended to be far more experimental than archaeologists.

Because it is an innovative application of the approach, it is therefore useful to begin this chapter by broadly locating the methodology within the Western scientific paradigm and the theoretical social science context from which the methodology originates. This will be done in section 2.1 encompassing a brief review of the pertinent literature. The methods used herein will be addressed in section 2.2 which explores the reflexive research cycle itself. It will discuss the reflexive process, the instrumentation of the interview sequence and the sampling strategies which form a part of the overall methodology. The selection of the case



studies and their framework, within which the research is contextualised, is also described. Section 2.3 then deals with the approach taken to analyse the interview material collected. This chapter therefore contextualises and sets out the primary methods and processes used to address the central research question of this thesis.

## **2.2 Locating the Research Methodology**

The recognition that approaches to information collection in social contexts can not simply be imported from those of the hard sciences is a concern that has driven the development of many methods used in the social sciences. However the scientific paradigm is one which still defines the parameters of enquiry in the social sciences in the West, which as well as sociology includes disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology. The research methodology used in this thesis is based on a reflexive approach which incorporates elements of sociological, psychoanalytic and anthropological approaches to interviewing as a means of collecting information. It puts reflexivity into practice throughout the process of information collection, analysis and interpretation as well as in the way the research outcomes are written and presented in this thesis. The following discussion will consider the scientific paradigm in terms of its process and how this has been translated for use in the soft science as a shift from quantitative to qualitative research methods. The issues which will be covered in this discussion are relatively general i.e. the nature of scientific enquiry and objectivity, the debate between soft and hard sciences and the use of qualitative data or quantitative information. It is however important to touch on them here in order to provide a context for the use of the interview methodology.

### **The Scientific Context**

The primary reason why it is important to address the scientific context in which this methodology is located is because a reflexive approach

includes recognising how perceptions of context influence our interpretation of the material. In fact, these two things are not separate. All forms of enquiry into the world we live in use particular frameworks of understanding or paradigms to make sense of what they perceive, to translate it into knowledge. By reflecting on the Western scientific paradigm, a deeper understanding of the reflexive method is possible. Considering the development of Western science and its interrelationship with its social, political and philosophical contexts means that when faced with a different paradigm for making sense of the world, for example religion, ideology or concepts such as mythology or story-telling we are able to maintain an equanimical view.

Paradigms are by their nature, limiting. They constrain through defined conceptual boundaries or rules of practice which are necessary in order to provide coherence for those who use them to better understand their world. This does not mean however that these conceptual boundaries are *absolute*. It is in the nature of enquiry that problems will arise which question those boundaries and it is therein that their functional value lies in regard to the development of learning and knowledge. As Becker (1994:205), following Kuhn (1962) points out, paradigmatic methods are like a double-edged sword because 'without them we can't get anything done. But they never really do what they say they do'. Scientific enquiry implies the use of a paradigm based on the positivist deductive model, in other words, a general theory is used to generate a hypothesis which is then supported or refuted by the collection of data relevant to the hypothesis (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1999:45). The historical foundations of this approach can be seen in the West from the Renaissance period with a further development in the 1700s during the Enlightenment. In order to develop knowledge using this model science proceeds using an empirical epistemology, which generates data or 'evidence' through a process of experimentation in order to test theories or hypotheses (Porter, 1997:340). The scientific paradigm as it has developed in the West is however only one way of making sense of the world and it is on this basis that it has been critiqued not only by the anti-



positivist, postmodern movement, but also by scholars who are working outside of the Western paradigm.

The validity of the scientific paradigm is critiqued and sometimes negated by postmodernist scholars because the methodology is considered to be philosophically unsound (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994:151). This is argued on the basis that nothing exists without subjectivity, refuting the idea that scientific 'objectivity' is able to access an 'absolute' truth. It could be argued that this is misunderstanding of the nature of science. As opposed to one 'ism' being right and the other wrong, science can be seen as a particular way of understanding or communicating interpretations of material just as other forms of 'knowing' or knowledge are generated within their own contextual frameworks. Science can in its purest sense be seen to embrace the philosophical 'fault' represented by subjectivity seeing it as the active means of further exploration and inquiry. In this thesis it is contended that modernism and postmodernism both have the paradigmatic capacity to suggest that an absolute truth is not attainable, yet both are also grounded in the concept of 'truth' which acts as leverage to support their paradigmatic epistemology.

The scientific paradigm evaluates evidence in relation to an already known theory or hypothesis. This process of enquiry proposes that a given evidential factor (or combination of factors) leads to a defined outcome. However this method of enquiry does not suggest that the outcome is true. Scientists do not necessarily believe that what they are saying is absolute, but rather that it is *probabilistic*. The nature of scientific enquiry might be said therefore to suggest that in defined cases, given factor variables increase the likelihood of a particular outcome (Lieberson, 1992:107). Science accepts as a general principal that as any given case is probabilistic, whatever becomes 'known' through a given procedure can be measured as a determination. This is because what they are suggesting is that they are *most probably* perceiving something accurately when they determine an answer or a causality, given their current context and understanding. Probability is therefore implicated in



regard to the objectivity of science. Science often stands accused of proposing that it is able to remove itself from subjectivity through the nature of its processes. However, as will now be discussed, this is not as straightforward as it appears, and it is the social sciences which have drawn critical attention to the issue.

The objective, scientific approach to knowledge used by early social scientists such as Durkheim and Comte suggests that regulated, methodological protocols ensure the control of outcome, without being influenced by the 'human' bias of the researcher (Payne and Payne, 2005:153). The validity of this objectivity has been critiqued by social scientists, many of whom have a postmodern, Feminist or Queer position (for example Collins, 1997; Harding, 1997; Heckman, 1997). It is argued here that the primary value of these critiques lies in their ability to problematise and explore the concept and meaning of objectivity. However once there is a recognition of the problems and issues raised by the critique, there must be an approach to address these concerns in a practical way. This thesis uses an approach with some concordance with Harding's (1993) *strong objectivity* and Haraway's *situated knowledge* (1988; 1991). It does so by questioning the nature of objectivity while recognising the 'real world' or experiential implications of denying its existence to the point of extreme subjective relativism. In other words, if the contingent nature of 'objectivity' is both recognised and built into research design, it can provide a flexible platform and practice from which to question dominant views, build awareness and knowledge and enable real world change that is empowering to disenfranchised groups. Where the perspective in this research diverges from Harding and Haraway's concepts is that it is recognised that this process is not confined to a purely feminist approach. This theoretical position however, requires a format through which it can be put into practice, and therefore in this thesis the concept of reflexive interpretation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000) is used.

Reflexive interpretation recognises that the dichotomy of objectivity vs. subjectivity is erroneous as they do not exist in isolation from each other. This is not a new idea; in fact it is simply giving a name to a phenomena which is constantly being played out in all types of research and enquiry (*ibid*: 247-254). Objectivity is a part of a Western cosmology and tradition based on a subjective perception of a historically constituted knowledge. This does not make it valueless however, or indeed purely 'subjective' in the most common, postmodern understanding of the word. Subjectivity is also a part of a Western cosmology which is based in a tradition of objective perceptions of 'reality', which it places itself in opposition to. Neither is 'better' than the other, inherently 'good' or 'bad' - both are useful and interrelated tools of enquiry within a reflexive approach to developing understanding and knowledge.

Whether or not science is the 'only' valid approach to research and what makes 'good' or 'bad' science is not discussed here. To explore these debates would require more space than is available, and there are many works dealing specifically with these issues to which the reader may turn for deeper insights. The scientific approach to understanding the material world has been traditionally seen as very different from enquiry where the aim is to understand 'ourselves'. This is a division which has fed conflicting views about what sort of methodologies are most appropriate for undertaking research in the hard and soft sciences. Hard sciences use methods which reflect the matter they are dealing with i.e. material elements without cognition. Therefore the transference of hard scientific enquiry methods in a simplistic way into the soft sciences, dealing as they do with human interaction inherently tied to cognition, can be seen as problematic. It is argued by Oakley (2000, in Järviluoma *et al*, 2003:24) that this effectively creates a 'paradigm war, in which we have two contrasting accounts of knowledge', which she frames as being 'gendered' i.e. male as hard/objective science, female as soft/subjective science. Her view is extreme, but it captures the fervour with which some academics reject approaches other than those they believe help us to get closer to an accurate representation of 'reality'. However it must be



recognised that qualitative methods of generating and validating knowledge about experience remain grounded in the same Western, scientific, academic traditions as quantitative approaches. As Wengraf (2001:62) notes:

Decades of research into the positivist model have produced numerous insights and many oversights...suggesting that, instead of a single coherent universal instrumentation theory, all that we can have is a constant reflection upon successes and failures, the strengths and weaknesses, of particular instrumentation practices.

This point brings us to the next area to be addressed, that of using qualitative approaches.

### **Qualitative Approaches**

The interview methodology used in the research for this thesis is a qualitative approach. Qualitative methods are distinctly different from quantitative methods in both process and objective. Quantitative methods such as statistical analysis are designed to *measure*. These methods were developed in hard science disciplines and therefore pose considerable problems when applied to more complex social interactions where measurement offers a limited and problematic form of insight and knowledge building. It is not the quantity of particular aspects of society here that is of interest, but rather their *qualities*. However qualitative methods of research enquiry still function within the dominant scientific paradigm in the West. It is the 'same but different' value status which causes much of the epistemological tensions between the hard and soft sciences, although this is gradually changing through the work of social scientists such as Wengraf (2001). This issue is of particular relevance in disciplines such as Archaeology and Health Studies where hard and soft approaches merge. The tension between qualitative and quantitative becomes tangible through the debate over *objectivity vs. subjectivity*.



However as has been discussed above, in an enquiry of any variety this dichotomy is simply an issue of perception, with both objectivity and subjectivity existing as separate entities because of the way we conceptualise them.

Qualitative social science research approaches such as the use of the case study, have been critiqued by those who propose that a quantitative approach can be the only way to obtain the 'truth' of a human context. Growing out of the postmodern critique of research methodologies, qualitative methods as we understand them today were considered by some in the not too distant past, as 'feminine:weak' in opposition to quantitative methods which were 'masculine:strong' science (Järviluoma *et al*, 2003:23). While it is important to note the debates between methodological approaches, the practical usefulness of simplistically 'gendering' research methods in the fashion suggested by Oakley (*ibid*, after Oakley, 2000:4) is questionable. However the continuing high value given to quantitative methods, particularly in some branches of archaeology such as osteoarchaeology, should not go unexamined. A case in point is the largely unquestioned quantitative measurements and analysis of the morphological formation of human bones commonly used to indicate biological sex.

The analysis of qualitative data, is primarily done through looking for themes, trends, commonalities and repeated key issues or concerns – in other words, patterns. These patterns offer a means for social-science data to conform to a positivist scientific approach. Even the so-called 'postmodern critique' which challenges positivist frameworks has not managed to be entirely rid of them. As O'Connell Davidson and Layder (1999:33) point out, the social science community 'attempts to apply a set of rules and standards to research in order to filter out biased or shoddy work'. This is done to differentiate what in the West would be considered 'legitimate research', from 'storytelling' (Usher, 1997:31). One of the difficulties faced by archaeologists is that they are effectively attempting to answer social science questions without being able to speak to the

people whose societies, cultures and actions they are studying. Patterning therefore becomes an important way of getting to grips with the material in order to understand its meaning. LeCompte's (1998:206) narrative on the usefulness of moving from what she calls 'item level' to 'pattern level' in the analysis of cases is informative on the issue:

At the item level, data sources provide description to answer the questions "What's there?" "How many are there?" "Where are they, and when do they occur". The pattern level takes objects or phenomena identified at the item level and discovers how the individual items fit together and relate to one another in patterns. In research sequence, the individual items were discrete studies rather than discrete empirically observed phenomena, and the sequence consisted of an orderly pattern of studies linked by an integrating theory or explanation of why things occur as they do.

Case studies provide a specified, bounded context within which to make sense of patterns and the basis of their selection must be grounded within the overall research methodology. The ability to replicate findings through patterning is considered to provide 'scientific objectivity' in a social science context (Berg, 2004:258). However, in a reflexive approach this replication takes on a different form, morphing in response to the developing context, information and insights generated by the research process itself.

## **2.3 The Reflexive Research Cycle**

### **Case Studies**

The use of case studies as a framework for the collection of information for this research is important because it grounds the methodology in 'real world examples'. Without these examples, theoretical arguments might

be made, but would remain highly general. It is argued here that intertwining theory with experience through practice is the basis for further insight into the central research question. The rationale behind using case studies as a means of investigating the research question of this thesis is explored in the following discussion. Why a case study approach as well as the particular *type* of case study employed are used will be addressed. The aim of this section is to show the holistic approach that case studies offer and why they are a helpful way of collecting, organising, analysing and interpreting qualitative research material. It will be argued that case studies are more appropriate than other forms of methodological approaches, such as a large-scale desk based survey of literature and documentation for investigating the central research question. This section therefore covers the *why* and *how* of the case studies.

Case studies are a useful means of investigating a broad research question through a purposively selected context. They do not function as isolated entities however, but follow a cycle of iterative knowledge development which builds on what is known in order to question further. The use of cases as a study of the particular, does not have universal approval in the social sciences. Those social scientists who endorse their use do so on the basis that a case study offers insight into larger questions and theories by looking at a specified and limited context of human behaviour in depth. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:66 quoted in Berg, 2004) suggest that ‘it is the task of the researcher to determine what it means he or she is studying: that is, of what is this a case?’. The case study serves two functions: rhetorical, using a strong example to offer insight and to persuade, and logical, in order to organise and sift ideas (Payne and Payne, 2004:32 after Platt in Burgess, 1988). While the theory of case studies is addressed in this section, the grounding of the paradigm in ‘real world’ exemplars is also considered.



Offering a resolution of detail not possible using other approaches to research, case studies are a study of the particular (Stake, 1994:243). They present an opportunity to gain insight into a question relating to causality which the often superficial assumptions and generalisations drawn from a review of the literature or a theoretical overview alone do not provide. Using case studies to frame a research methodology creates a context through which to focus in on the detail of a particular unit of analysis. It does so by using a combination of linked methods for gathering material from various angles, rather than using a unilateral approach to the focus. Not only are the methods linked, but the methods themselves highlight the interrelationships of the subjects of study (Berg, 2004:251). This necessitates further investigation in order to better understand the interrelationships; thus the method informs the subject and the subject informs the method in an interlinked, holistic approach. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 201) illustrate using an artistic analogy, 'Qualitative research design decisions parallel the warm-up, exercise, and cool-down periods of dance. Just as dance mirrors and creates life, so to do research designs adapt, change, and mould the very phenomena they are intended to examine'. Therefore case studies encompass various resolutions of information which give depth to the material, analysis and interpretations as well as further substantiating and transforming the research findings. This process of looking at the research unit of analysis from various angles, incorporates an approach known in the social sciences as *triangulation*. Triangulation simply means combining various methods to investigate a single research question, with each method functioning as a 'double check' as well as supplementing further information (Giddens, 1989:683). In the reflexive method used here, the researcher has developed this as a 'double-reflection' where external specialists in one aspect of the method, but who are otherwise unrelated to the research subject or material, give their reflections on the analysis made. This additional reflection is then used to inform the analysis of the following cases.

Experience is also central to the selection of cases to be studied.

Experiential causality is a concept which is close to the heart of case study research. The detail thrown into relief by the focused methodology makes visible the 'complex multivariate causal patterns [which] operate in the social world' (Lieberson, 1992:106). There is a need to have some kind of 'grounded' framework for theoretical concepts if they are to have any relevance within the society that constructs them. Using case studies gives power to theoretical and philosophical understandings, and makes the research more widely accessible. They give an 'objective' framework for the gathering of in-depth information and contextualise discussions and theory using a 'real world' exemplar. The internal logic of the case study also affords a 'check' on the credibility of the data collected and the findings through triangulation of the material and methods. An in-depth investigation into the detail of a real world exemplar is a useful way to bring better understanding to a research question. As Berg (2004:251) suggests, case studies capture 'nuances, patterns, and more latent elements that other research approaches might otherwise overlook'.

Case studies therefore offer a holistic approach to description and explanation (Berg, 2004:251) and exploration. There are a number of different case study approaches used by social scientists, and various ways of categorising them. Some of the most commonly recognised categories include those suggested by Stake (1994, 1995): *intrinsic*, *instrumental* and *collective* case studies. There are various ways which different scholars divide up case study design types for example, *exploratory*, *explanatory* and *descriptive* (Berg, 2007:292 after Yin, 1994:20), or the *snapshot*, *longitudinal*, *pre-post*, *patchwork* and *comparative* categorised by Jensen and Rodgers (Berg, 2007:293-4 after Jensen and Rogers, 2001). Yin's exploratory type has a framework but can be undertaken before a research question is defined, for example a pilot study; an explanatory type is useful for investigating causal aspects of a case, or particularly for identifying causal patterns in multiple cases; a descriptive case involves outing forward a descriptive theory which is used as the theoretical framework of the case study research and which

identifies units of analysis prior to defining research questions (*ibid*: 292-293). Which of the differing types is most appropriate to a particular case study is dictated variously by the research question, the unit(s) of analysis, the context and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Jensen and Rogers' snapshot case studies use a comparative hypothesis testing approach focusing on the detail of a study at a particular point in time; the longitudinal type is similar to the snapshot approach but looks at a single case across a number of points in time; the pre-post type, much as its name suggests looks at a case at two points in time between which a critical event has occurred which is linked to the case theory of impact; patchwork types use a number of case studies of a single entity but using a variety of the other types of approach to create a holistic view of the research entity; the comparative type makes a cross-comparison of a number of case studies often using qualitative and quantitative approaches Berg, 2007:293-4 after Jensen and Rogers, 2001. It is purely researcher preference as to the decision of which 'classification set' of design types (e.g. Yin's or Jensen and Rogers') are used to describe how they see the study; generally speaking however, the various terms used in each 'set' of types generally overlap.

Case studies are therefore a useful framework for investigating a research question which deals with the way people make sense of their world. In this thesis, those people are archaeologists who deal with mortuary remains, and who work in a socio-political context which either encompasses theoretical gender archaeology, or which does not. How the detailed data which the case studies help to frame is gathered, has not yet been addressed, other than that various methods are possible. However so far, the discussion has centred on the usefulness of the case study approach, not the type of case studies used in this thesis. Having theoretically situated case studies and their relationship to epistemology and methodology, the information gathering methods must now be explored. The primary method used in this thesis is the in-depth semi-structured interview, the process of which will be discussed next by considering the sampling strategies and the interview cycle



## Sampling strategies

Qualitative interview research requires two main resolutions of sampling, the case study level and the informant level. The first of these considers which case study to select and the latter which informants to select as cases within the study. At both resolutions the question is the same, why choose one sample over others. However the strategies used as the basis for answering this question may vary simply because at the interview level one deals directly with human informants who can interact with the researcher. Strategies fall into two overarching categories, purposive or randomised sampling (Wengraf, 2001:102-103). There are various recognised forms of sampling which Patton (1990:169-180) summarised as falling into three categories: randomised probability sampling, purposive sampling and mixed random and purposeful sampling, a hybrid of the two other categories.

Randomised sampling only functions when a discrete 'population' of samples is available at levels which are statistically significant. This type of sampling is based on the concept of *probability*, for example that it is probable that each individual unit in a population is equally able to provide the same level of significant information. It is therefore extrapolated that there is a significant probability that any sample of this group taken, using a calculated randomised approach, will be generally representative of the population as a whole. Randomised sampling is therefore primarily used in quantitative research and is useful in making broadly generalised statements about data. It is clear that when multiple factors within a population are taken into account, or where a population is very small, that this strategy would be of dubious relevance. When a population is small, for example the population of professional and academic archaeologists with a specialist knowledge/research interest in mortuary archaeology/ osteoarchaeology in Ireland used in this research, that a randomised percentage of those archaeologists will provide views representative of the whole population is statistically improbable. For example, working on the basis that your research resources are limited if

your population is 1000 and you select a 10% sample, you would be interviewing 100 people, a statistically significant number. If your population is 10 and you select a 10% sample, you would only be interviewing one person. On this basis it would be hard to justify and statistically invalid to suggest that this one person's views could be taken as a general representation of the views of the 10 individual archaeologists! You may consider that with a small population it would therefore be more valid to interview the entire population, however this is where the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative and quantitative research becomes clear. A qualitative research approach is concerned with a much finer resolution of detail about a case than quantitative research is, and it uses strategies which reflect this. The sampling strategy therefore needs to be designed with theoretical considerations in mind.

Because qualitative research often deals with case studies where populations are limited in number, the strategies used tend therefore to fall into the *purposive sampling* (in Patton's typology), otherwise known as *theoretical sampling* category. As Wengraf (2001:102) points out, this type of strategy 'selects information-rich cases for in-depth study. Size and specific cases depend on study purposes'. Therefore it is important that the strategy chosen is related to the theory informing the central research question. This is an important factor in qualitative research because generally the strategy being used is one of purposive or mixed sampling.

The main issue in the selection of cases in purposive sampling is therefore, why choose particular cases over others. Cases are generally selected to represent a wider group or 'population' of cases, in other words, those which are selected are not considered the *only* cases which might be useful in addressing the research question. In the social sciences, this is seen as selecting a 'sub-population' (Ragin, 1992). Purposive sampling is based not only on the case's relevance to the unit of analysis, but also on more logistical issues such as access, timescale



and resources. Stake (1994:243) argues that sampling is best weighed by whether a case offers ‘the *opportunity to learn* [original emphasis]’. He goes on to say that his preference when selecting a case study is:

to take that case from which we feel we can learn the most. That may mean taking the one that we can spend the most time with. Potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness. Often it is better to learn a lot from an atypical case than a little from a magnificently typical case (*ibid*)

There is after all, always more data that could be collected, other cases that could yield relevant and interesting data and so on, if only there were no logistical constraints. As Lieberman (1992:105-106) points out:

If data were available with the appropriate depth and detail for a large number of cases, obviously the researcher would not be working with these few cases (assuming a minimal time-energy cost). Since the data are not available, or the time-energy cost is too great, one can only approach these efforts with considerable sympathy for their objective.

This attitude towards the requirements of sampling is both positive and useful. It recognises the intention of qualitative research as being *quality* and not *quantity* and empathises with the frustrations that all researchers feel that there was ‘more they could do or have done’. It does not assume that the cases used are ‘deficient’ because there are not more of them, an attitude which may be seen as grounded in traditional, qualitative methodologies. Sampling in qualitative research therefore works very differently to approaches used in quantitative sampling. As has been highlighted, the sampling strategy is therefore informed by the theoretical framework of the interview methodology.



## The Interview Cycle

As Oakley (1981:41 quoted in Fontana and Frey, 1998:71) comments 'Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets'. Interviewing in a research context is a method of obtaining information in order to understand issues raised by research questions (Gillham, 2000:2). This method of capturing a purposive conversation is a principal tool of research in the social-sciences, including anthropology, as a means of gathering information (Rubin and Rubin, 1995:3). It is sometimes the sole method of inquiry but often combined with other qualitative and/or quantitative methods. Although it may seem to those who do not work with interviews that the process is a relatively straightforward one, there is indeed a 'secret world' which needs to be understood if interviewing is to obtain a depth of relevant information, in an ethical way.

There are a number of different types of interviews ranging from highly structured to entirely unstructured. The following discussion will theoretically position interviewing as an information gathering method and describe the process of the interview cycle. Why a 'semi-structured depth interviewing' approach was selected as the most appropriate method for the research being carried out will then be explored. As the methodology involves human participants, there are a number of ethical considerations in the design and carrying out of the research which must be addressed. The ethics of using this sort of approach will also therefore be explored.

In seeking objectivity, humanness has often been lost in the search for a solid 'truth' based on evidence. Kant argued that experience, through the process of perception, is mediated by categories which form the framework through which empirical knowledge and reality are formed (Lindlof, 1995:30). During the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century German sociologist Max Weber further developed Dilthey's anti-positivist concept of *verstehen*

(*ibid*) which sought to understand social action through empathising and identifying with social actors (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1999:31). Collecting empirical (i.e. based on evidence) 'data' which relates to human social *experience* therefore poses certain challenges to a Western academic tradition with its origins in Enlightenment period positivist, scientific data production. As discussed previously, the information which is produced using qualitative methodologies does not conform to the quantitative ordering and analysis favoured by the 'harder' sciences. However, as Fontana and Frey comment 'Why should the quest for [a perceived] objectivity supersede the human side of those we study?' (1998:71). The methodology of interviews in qualitative research is built on the basis that 'the social' can be investigated through talking to people and that knowledge can then be constructed through a process of listening to and interpreting what is said (Mason, 2002:225). As McCracken suggests (1988:17) the purpose of qualitative interviewing:

...is not to discover how many, and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world. How many and what kinds of people hold these categories and assumptions is not, in fact, the compelling issue. It is the categories and assumptions, not those who hold them, that matter...[they offer]...an opportunity to glimpse the complicated character, organisation, and logic of culture.

Although the quote contains various areas of contention between different approaches to qualitative interviewing, in particular the concept of 'cultural categories' and that individual's identities do not 'matter', the underlying point of what he is trying to convey is useful. To understand the real purpose of qualitative interviewing, the idea that 'more units is better/more valuable' must be transcended. In part this can be done by understanding the sampling strategy and how this is theoretically



underpinned by the social science paradigm, as discussed above. Qualitative research interviews are therefore a means of accessing information about *cultural, social* and *individual* processes through a communication with individuals who are identified as being a part of a specific culture/society/group, based on selected contextual criterion. They enable the researcher to gain insight into the perspectives people have about the world they inhabit through using a form of direct human interaction. Interviewing enables the collection of data using an approach which is 'interactive, situational and generative' (Mason, 2002:225). While all this is certainly the case, it must also be remembered that an interview is a communication within a particular context, at a particular point in time and with a specific purpose which is different to most conversations. The term 'interviewing' however, represents more than a single approach to gathering information in this way.

There are various theoretical and methodological approaches to interviewing, with differences in ways of conceptualising the interview interaction. However as Gerson and Horowitz (2002:200) observe, the researcher's cognitive style 'can have as much of an impact on the selection of...approach as the requirement for methodological strategies'. The most disparate types of interviewing, *structured* and *unstructured* broadly coincide with a deductive and an inductive approach to knowledge development respectively. In practice, interviewing can often be seen to use a combination of these types; travelling to different resolutions along a continuum between these two extremes at various points in the research process. This view of interviewing *strategy* underpins the methodology in this research, and reflects Wengraf's (2001: 2) concept of research 'moments' as will be discussed later in this section. However setting aside this conceptual interviewing continuum, social sciences research interviewing today is generally categorised into three types.

*The three generalised types of interview* which are generally recognised throughout the social sciences are *structured, semi-structured* (sometimes



known as *focused*) and *unstructured* interviewing (Rubin and Rubin, 1995:5). However as noted above, this division of structured/unstructured is to some extent 'false' as the majority of interviewers use elements represented by each extreme (Gillham, 2000:3). Whether or not this variability is recognised and used as a positive research strategy may depend on the awareness and experience of the researcher. Much research might once have been considered to fall into these 'extreme' categories of *structured* (for example a 'public health' questionnaire based interview) or *unstructured* (for example the feminist ethnographic interview approach used Shostak (1988) in her study of the !Kung women. However today, as O'Connell Davidson and Layder (1999:44) observe, there is a considerable and increasing amount of work which can be seen to 'fall somewhere between the two' by using a combination of approaches. This 'combination approach' to methodology is perhaps best represented by the *semi-structured* category. However it is more accurate perhaps to consider this approach as holistic, encompassing the entire methodological continuum, rather than as a kind of 'half-way house' methodology. The method used in this research is *semi-structured depth interviewing*, however in order to better understand the value of this approach, it is necessary to briefly consider the other two main categories of interview, structured and unstructured, and the way that theory is used to frame them.

*Structured interviews* are probably the most widely known type of interview; for example if we get stopped in the street by a Market Researcher, we are most likely encountering a structured approach to interviewing. Structured interviews use a positivist approach and aim at 'capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behaviour within preestablished categories' (Fontana and Frey, 1989:56). This is a 'straight-forward' question-answer process, where the interviewer is seeking direct answers to specific questions which are delivered in the same format to each interviewee. Questionnaires which are administered by a researcher can for example, be considered as the most extreme form of structured interview (Foddy, 1992:3-4). *Closed* question forms are

primarily used in this approach, which force respondents to select a response from pre-set, or specific or implied list of alternatives (*ibid:7*) defined by the researcher. The structured interview approach may be classed as traditional, and is based on the same positivist knowledge framework as qualitative methods, such as statistical analysis. The theoretical framework of structured interviews can be considered to be *deductive* or a *theory testing* approach to research which uses empirical evidence. Wengraf (2001:33) puts forward the idea that this type of interviewing might be viewed as containing 'sacred' aspects. He uses Durkheim's analysis of religion as consisting of a special time and place with special offices, between a 'truth-searcher and a truth-sayer, both part of the "...community of believers" in the "sacred of scientific truth" and of "research" '. A structured approach to interviewing may also suggest that the researcher is able to remain detached and disinterested and therefore able to eliminate 'human bias' including emotion and prejudice from the collection and analysis of data; effecting a 'split between the researcher's professional and personal or emotional life' (Powell, 1996:4). In order to do this, positivist interview researchers use a combination of strategic controls of 'variables' through design elements such as randomised sample selection, the linear progression of processes including question sequencing and exact repetition of question structure and content. This closed, linear method and process is both central to and informed by the structured interview's positivist theoretical concept of 'objectivity'.

The critique of the structured, positivist approach in qualitative research springs from the same source as in other epistemological and disciplinary arenas. Some social scientists have critiqued structured interviewing on the basis that it is impossible to remove all human bias and that in fact, recognising and working with the emotions, attitudes, social/cultural conceptualisations and personal perceptions in a reflective manner can actually add depth and understanding to the research. In particular feminist social scientists and anthropologists have made critiques of the paradigm to this extent. They have focused on the androcentric attitudes



which they consider to be inherent in assumptions made by positivist science and the impact that this has on creating a 'masculinist' knowledge (*ibid*:5). Social scientists such as Becker and Geer (1970:133), questioned the positivist 'objectivity' of the interview nearly forty years ago, raising theoretical concerns including inference and subjectivities, for example aspects such as the personal and cultural '*mythologies*' of the interviewee. Question-answer structured interviews are therefore seen to ignore the awareness that 'behaviour involves complex interrelationships between sociological, psychological and linguistic variables' (Foddy, 1993:xi). The absolute rejection of the positivist approach is therefore embodied by its opposite, the unstructured interview form.

*Unstructured interviews* are at the counter-point to positivist, structured approaches and seek not to form categorical boundaries within the interview but to let the interaction shape the process and the outcomes. Unstructured approaches developed out of a critique of structured methods of interviewing, with a particular focus on the *human elements of the interaction*. This type is most commonly known from ethnographic (in particular, feminist ethnographic research) and psychoanalytical therapeutic interview practices. The unbounded, postmodern theoretical approach engages with the 'human' elements of interview conversation. Its position is that 'objectivity' can not exist in social interactions which are driven instead by complex subjectivities. Similarly to the structured type, unstructured interviews are used in order to try and understand complex behaviours of a section of society; the primary difference lies in the way unstructured interviewing purposively implements strategies which are designed not to impose categorisations which might limit the investigation (Fontana and Frey, 1998:56). Fontana and Frey (*ibid*) talk about the essence of unstructured interviewing being a human-to-human interrelationship between the interviewee and the researcher, with the intention to develop understanding as opposed to building an explanation. The conversational interrelationship in the interview is not 'bound' by any pre-defined structures and questions and information flows in both directions. Unstructured methods at their most extreme might therefore



be seen as ‘a kind of verbal observation’ (Gillham, 2003:6). This ‘uncontrolled’ approach does not mean however that it is entirely untheorised, although an *atheoretical* approach is one extreme type of postmodernist interview methodology (O’Connell Davidson and Layder, 1999:43).

Unstructured interviewing methodology more generally uses a model which gathers information through an *inductive* process (Wengraf, 2001:2); in other words ‘the theory emerges directly from the evidence gathered during the research’ (O’Connell Davidson and Layder, 1999:45). As with all theory underlying methodologies, this inductive approach dictates the means by which the ‘relevant information’ is collected. It is the research instruments used for gathering information which marks unstructured interviewing as radically different from more structured forms, including semi-structured approaches. For example, some feminist approaches to anthropological interviewing methods use unstructured techniques such as open disclosure where the researcher shares personal views and emotions during the interview interaction. Issues such as the interview interactional relationship between the researcher and the respondent are considered as central to the process of this type of interview, creating a contextual influence on the answers given (Chase, 2003:80). As such, reflection is embedded within the methodology of unstructured interviewing. The structured tradition of the ‘cool, distant, and rational interviewer’ (Fontana and Frey, 1998:56) is rejected and the researcher becomes ‘human’ by allowing their emotions and personal responses to what the respondent is saying to be expressed throughout the research process.

*Semi-structured interviewing* uses a combination of elements of the deductive, structured and inductive, unstructured types. The term ‘semi-structured’ does not mean that the interview process is not planned. On the contrary, semi-structured interviews require more planning than other, more structured forms (Chase, 2003:83-4). The *depth interview* approach used in this thesis is a productive and reflexive form of the semi-

structured interview type. There are various different models which the semi-structured depth interviews can conform to, each with its own conceptual framework. Two of the primary conceptual frameworks can be categorised broadly as *interactional* and *anthropological-historical* models (Wengraf, 2001:38). The framework used in this thesis draws on the Briggs-Wengraf anthropological-historical approach to interview interaction (*ibid*:42). The following discussion will consider the semi-structured depth interview approach, and point to why this form of interviewing is highly appropriate for collecting information for this research.

The semi-structured interview uses elements of both structured and unstructured approaches. It should however not be considered either as a 'half-way house' between the two, or as an 'easy option' which avoids being one thing or the other. Using a range of deductive and inductive methods ensures that the most appropriate means of gathering data is used at the relevant time and is not limited by having to conform to a single approach. A significant advantage of the flexibility of the semi-structured approach to interviewing is that it allows 'the researcher to move back and forth in a cyclical way as the discovery of theoretical insights prompts adjustments in the research design.' (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002:200). Gerson and Horowitz (*ibid*) argue that all interview studies follow a deductive logic in that in the formulation of their research design there is always a certain amount of theoretical analysis and piloting required. They imply that only observation has a non-deductive (i.e. inductive) logic in its design. However, as will be further explored later through Wengraf's more fluid conceptualisation of semi-structured interviews, it can be argued that a suffusion of both types of logic offers a more beneficial approach.

The design of a semi-structured interview involves developing a single question or a series of questions which are generally but not exclusively, open. Closed questions may be used in follow-up to open questions for strategic purposes such as where an informant is asked a question in order



to prompt a reaction - for example 'You mentioned previously that you are categorised by people as a bioarchaeologist...so, is that what you consider yourself to be?'. The closed style used in this example is more strategically *assertive* than a *receptive*, open style of interview question would be in a similar case. *Assertive interview practices* are akin to the 'Active Interview' style (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997) which is more interrogative and provocational, with the person doing the interview effectively pushing for a response and hence exerting a certain amount of control in the interaction (Wengraf, 2001:155). A receptive practice on the other hand 'empowers the informant, enabling them to have a large measure of control in the way which they answer' (*ibid*:154). Open questions used in a receptive strategy are structured in a way which aims to be relatively non-directive, leaving the respondent to supply their *own* answers to what they infer the question to be about. The structure of the question therefore means that respondents are not *primed* by the question to give a particular response or to select a pre-set response (Foddy, 1993:60-61). However subsequent questions which draw on the answers given to open questions are therefore not able to be 'planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorised way' (Wengraf, 2001:5). Once again however these two forms of interview question practice must be strategically considered within the flow of the interview interaction. It is clear therefore that this requires a level of experience and confidence on the part of the researcher in using the two question techniques.

There is considerable value therefore in a design which partly (or *semi*) retains structure as an information gathering strategy. To start with it requires the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the link between their central research theory question and its interrelationship with the interview methodology, strategy and interaction. It also helps the respondent to better understand what sort of information is wanted and enables them to some extent to filter their responses within the interaction to ensure they are more appropriate. This is helpful in encouraging respondents to give fully developed answers and not to feel 'at a loss' as



to what is expected of them. In doing so, it is more likely that what the researcher is told will be relevant to the topic being explored. This is imperative to collecting a depth of information within the time limited context of an interview. The benefit of the interview being semi- and not fully-structured in this regard is two-fold. The structured, open questions encourage fuller responses which the improvised follow-up questions can probe and explore more fully. Therefore relevant themes can be investigated *in depth*, or unexpected areas of interest picked up on. If an interview were fully-structured this in-depth exploration would not be possible. Equally, using an entirely unstructured approach might miss the possibility of exploring themes and issues of particular interest in addressing the research question, as the participant takes full control of the interview direction. The researcher must therefore have a deep understanding of what information they are attempting to access through the interview questions. Therefore having a strong understanding of what the *theory questions* are which generate and underlie the *interview questions* is extremely important (Wengraf, 2001:51-54), especially as an interviewer will 'have to *improvise* probably half – and maybe 80% or more' of responses to the participants own replies to an '*initial prepared question or questions*' (*ibid*:5)

Theory questions are the questions which you want to discover answers to through your research; they include and are offshoots of the central research question. However the theoretical questions which form the foundation of the research rarely make good interview questions because they are generally too abstract and conceptually complex to be grasped during the relatively brief interview interaction. A participant faced with a theory question is much less likely to respond with an informative answer. However this is not necessarily because the theory is too difficult for them to understand. In an interview context, unless an informant works regularly with exactly the same theoretical questions as those of the research, it will take more time than is available for them to 'get their head around' the theory and then relate this back to their own experience which they can then tell you about. After all, it is their experience and

understanding of their world that a researcher is interested in. In effect, the translation of theory questions into interview questions is saving time, but it also has a more subtle emotional and interactional purpose. For example, a respondent who is asked a theory question may see their inability to answer it directly as evidence that they have nothing useful to say; or and perhaps more detrimentally, that they may consider that the question 'shows them up' by implying that they don't understand and respond by becoming defensive or by 'bluffing' their way through. None of the possible response scenarios are beneficial for developing the good interview *rapport* which is essential to gathering a depth of information. Theory questions asked in an interview can therefore be considered to prevent access to information which may otherwise have been offered had the theoretical concept been translated into a more appropriate theory informed *interview question*.

Theory questions are therefore an important part of design in the interview methodology. A researcher's understanding of their theory questions enables them to formulate interview questions which will provide access to the experiences and deeper narratives of the informant. Interview questions are therefore translations of theory questions into a *language* which is understood by the respondent. As Fontana and Frey suggest (1998:58 after Deutscher, 1968), this is particularly important when considering how to ask questions cross culturally, even where 'Respondents...[are] ...fluent in the language of the interviewer'. Effectively, interview questions might be considered to make *theory language* or *theoretical discourse* (Wengraf, 2001:53) more immediately comprehensible. He usefully expresses the *central research question* (CRQ), *theory question* (TQ), *interview question* (IQ) relationship as a design model algorithm - CRQ-TQ-IQ(II) (*ibid*:63) which also incorporates interviewer interventions (II) such as non-verbal listening signals, silences or statements (Dillon, 1990). Good interview questions must therefore be grounded in theory but draw on experience in order to encourage answers that will provide detail and a depth of information from participants (Chase, 2003:85). As Wengraf (2001:80) says 'Your



*product, your Answering – whatever the value of your data – can never be expected to be significantly better than your Questioning* [original emphasis]’. The information which can be gathered through the semi-structured interview therefore makes the approach highly useful when the aim is to gain insight into a question raised by a particular phenomenon or social theory. In particular, as Gerson and Horowitz (2002:201) observe, ‘Starting with an empirical or theoretical puzzle...often implies in-depth interviewing.’

*In-depth interviews* are designed to develop knowledge by gaining deep insight into the perspectives and contexts of respondents and thus of the research question itself. A well planned depth interview ‘uncovers’ a deeper resolution of information than other approaches by going into more detail. However there is another, somewhat more esoteric purpose behind the depth interview – a *sense* of depth. In order to obtain this sense of depth, a number of strategies and tactics must be employed in the planning, interview and analysis phases of the sequence. Using the various means outlined above in the planning of interview questions is just one aspect of the interview sequence. Planning other contextual elements such as the setting, mode of interview interaction and the collection of extra-interview information must also be considered. In order to plan in this way the researcher must have a reflexive approach to undertaking the entire research cycle. A more tangible sense of depth is only possible if the researcher is aware of their practice as being *located*. Reflexivity as well as a combination of knowledge and experiential awareness are integral to the depth interviewing approach. This holistic way of undertaking the interview cycle makes it a valuable approach, as it engages fully with the developmental process which interviewing inevitably involves.

As noted above, depth interviewing is an approach which incorporates two levels of gaining insight into the participant’s responses and hence to the central research question. The first is an ‘in-depth’ or detailed exploration of the information which is given in response to the interview



questions. The second is gaining a *sense of depth* via a contemplation of the complex nature of the interview interaction and discourse. Gerson and Horowitz (2002:201) talk about the importance of understanding the complexity and intricacies of the small-scale and individual in order to better understand the large-scale; the macro understood through the micro. This can be applied to the interview methodology itself, seeing the respondents as representing the 'small-scale' or, the interaction which takes place in each interview as the 'micro', the 'finer resolution' of investigation. This view of interviewing encompasses the first level of the depth approach. The researcher must have a number of strategies and tactics in their suite of interviewing skills and methods in order to explore this micro-scale effectively.

When undertaking semi-structured, depth interviewing, *listening* is the primary skill needed, from which all other skills and methods flow. Listening is however a skill which is generally less well understood, and less often carried out than might be assumed (Chase, 2003:83-84). Listening can be affected by various means including thorough preparation of the interview questions/guide, tactical use of modes of communication etc. which are all linked to a purposive style or strategy adopted by the researcher. The *deep listening* approach which is most characteristic of semi-structured depth-interviewing uses the receptive strategy discussed previously in order to encourage the respondent to speak in-depth about their world (Wengraf, 2001:154). Listening using this strategy modulates in accordance with the changing perceptions of both the researcher (reflexively) and the respondent (in response to what is said and how). This requires the researcher to have what Wengraf (2001:194) calls *double attention*. Double attention involves simultaneously listening to responses to understand what the respondent is trying to communicate as well as managing the interview in terms of timing and topic coverage (*ibid*). Listening in-depth requires skills which the interviewer must develop through both experience and through being reflexive in their practice. Actually undertaking interviews as well as going over interview notes, transcripts and listening to recordings of

interviews which the researcher has carried out are all important practices in the process of developing deep listening skills. This listening strategy reinforces yet again the need for well planned and well understood theory questions. Only the main interview question or questions can therefore be followed up with questions that are a result of deep listening to the responses of the participant, rather than sticking to planned questions on a guide (Chase, 2003:83-84). The quality of the researcher's listening directly effects the quality of the information gathered through an interview, and it relies heavily on strategy and skills, in particular, 'unaffected' or confident improvisation. But listening well also supports the second level of 'depth' in an interview by developing a stronger *sense* of what is being communicated.

Wengraf (2001:6) points out that the researcher contemplating 'how the apparently straight forward is actually more complicated, of how the "surface realities" may be quite misleading about the "depth realities" is an important part of developing sensitive interview skills'. Unlike other conversational interactions the depth interview has particular features; while they are different from other forms of social conversations, they are not *apart* from society and nor are they ahistorical (*ibid*:4). The actual interview itself involves various aspects which can be considered under the heading of *intersubjectivity*. Intersubjectivities include for example, the past interview experiences of both the researcher and respondent, and their defined and inferred social roles and statuses, such as 'researcher', 'academic', 'practitioner' etc. and perceived gender, ethnicity, etc. (Wengraf, 2001:46). These intersubjectivities exist simultaneously with the various modes of communication used in interviews. For example, in a *dramaturgical* approach to interviewing, based in the symbolic interactionist model (Berg, 2004:77) of Herbert Blumer (Foddy, 1993:19-20), the interview focuses on the intersubjective aspects of those involved, seeing the interaction as a 'performance'. Dramaturgical interviewing is similar to another form of depth interviewing called *creative interviewing*, an approach which involves 'using a set of techniques to move past the mere words and sentences exchanged during



the interview process...[to create]...an appropriate climate for informational exchanges and for mutual disclosures' (Berg, 2004:77). The 'performance' incorporates the *actors* and *audience* (variously the interviewer and interviewee at different times), the *stage* (the setting of the interview), the *script* (what is said/the interview discourse), *stage directions* (how words are said) and so on. This is a form of depth interviewing which therefore uses analogy to clarify some of the intersubjectivities of the interview interaction. This approach is useful to refer to as it offers insights into some of the types of communication which are part of the interview process.

Modes of communication in an interview cover more than words used in verbal discourse, referred to as the 'script' in a dramaturgical approach. However verbal communication should not be considered as being simply 'words' able to be turned into a transcript of what was *said*. As suggested by the 'stage directions', there are modes of communication which are expressed *through* words but not necessarily *by* them. These modes are known widely in the interviewing sphere as *paralinguistic* and *chronemic*. Paralinguistics include variations in the quality of voice, its volume and pitch, chronemics is the pacing of speech and the length of silences in the conversation (Fontana and Frey, 1998:68). In addition to verbal there are also physical modes of communication, commonly thought of as 'body language'. There are two types of recognised physical communication, *proxemic* and *kinesic*. *Proxemic* is the communication of attitude through the use of interpersonal space, the movement and postures of the body are known as *kinesic* communication (*ibid*). Although these jargon terms represent what are on the surface, relatively simple concepts, the skilled interviewer must not only have an understanding of them, but also be able to record and analyse their complex conscious and or subconscious use in concert with what is said, and later reflect of this as part of the analysis of the narrative. As will be discussed later in regard to the ethics of interviews, the researcher is able to make strategic use of various communication tactics during the interview interaction. The subtlety and awareness required by the researcher carrying out the interview and



employing these tactics is primarily gained through the experience of actually *doing* interviews; the theory cannot compensate for practice. Being reflexive in regard to interactions throughout the interview cycle is clearly developmentally important for the research as a whole. It is apparent therefore that the different types of communication must be understood and engaged with by the researcher if they are to gain a *sense of depth*.

The complexity of intersubjective depth interview communications illustrates well that interviews are ‘not arbitrary or one-sided...[but ]...a meaning-making occasion in which the actual circumstances of the meaning construction is important.’ (Berg, 2004:78 after Holsteing and Gubrium 1995). Interactional goals and strategies, in other words *why* the researcher and the respondent are doing the interview, *what* they want or expect from it, and *why* they are saying what they are, come into play at various levels. The participants involved in this research are not social scientists experienced in carrying out interviews whereas the researcher is experienced and has the ‘advantage’ of previously thinking about her strategies as part of the methodology. During the interview interaction itself interactional strategies used by the respondent are largely dependent on personal responses to the questions being asked and may or may not be used consciously. These strategies may include for example what Wengraf (2001: 27) terms *fencing* or *self-promotion*.

Fencing is descriptive of when the informant avoids responding with material relevant to the question; self promotion represents when the informant makes their role in the story they are telling more or less prominent depending on the view of themselves they wish to convey. The researcher carrying out the interview therefore needs to be prepared for these possibilities and build it into their strategy, the detail of which may not come to the fore until the analysis stage of the interview cycle. To assume therefore that semi-structured depth interviews are somehow an ‘easy option’ because they do not require as much preparation as structured forms is therefore a ‘*terrible* mistake’ (*ibid*:5). They are

however, means of gathering a depth of information which is not possible using other interviewing methodologies. The design of the in-depth semi-structured interviews and the relationship between researcher and those participating in the research should, as with any research of this nature, be considered from the point of view of ethics.

### **Interview Ethics**

In order for interviews to be done in an ethical way great consideration needs to be made of whether any harm may be caused as a result of the research. This may include aspects such as whether the interview process deals with issues which may cause distress or offence, and whether material gathered during the interviews may be used in ways which expose private information which was not intended to be made publicly available. This is why it is an important part of the research design to inform those who are participating of what exactly the research is about, what the involvement will require of them, and assurances of how the material gathered will be used from both a legal and ethical point of view.

As qualitative social researchers are acutely aware, the position of the researcher is a position of power (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994:56-8). The power inherent in this role should not be considered as negative however, but simply part of a role within a relationship. It is how it is *managed* during and after the interview that is important. Indeed both the participant and the researcher hold certain levels and variations of power before, during and after the interview interaction. However, the researcher is only responsible for how they manage their own power throughout the research cycle, based on ethically responsible conduct.

Working with a small sample of cases from within a relatively small sub-population of archaeologists within known contexts, raises certain ethical considerations when both collecting and presenting the data. The sample



context brings with it the possibility that if data were presented in full, even in a supposedly ‘anonymised’ format (i.e. removing references to names, places of work and job-titles), individuals would still potentially be identifiable through what they say. The information collected in depth interviews can often not be presented in a full ‘raw’ transcript format as to do so would infringe on the privacy of participants. Therefore the interview material is generally presented by extracting anonymised sections of the transcripts which relate to key deductive and inductive themes in the narrative and used in an integrated way along with an analysis or interpretation of the thematic areas. Full transcripts are only available on application to the researcher and with her and the participant’s joint permissions.

As previously observed, the interview is an intersubjective ‘meaning-making’ occasion (Berg, 2004:78). Of course the complexity of human intersubjectivity is a matrix which functions outside of interviews as well as within them, and this is one reason that the methodology can be seen as useful. It acts as a continuum of the wider experience of ‘meaning-making’ within which culture and identity, the discipline of archaeology and the conceptualisation of biological sex and gender exist. It also iteratively functions within the Western, paradigmatic context in which the research is undertaken and within which this thesis is being produced. After all, the issues around the central concerns addressed by this research might equally have been expressed in a series of paintings or a cycle of poems. The Western, academic and professional, archaeological community may however have found these approaches less valuable in providing insight into theoretical questions and aspects of practice! The semi-structured depth interview approach recognises the human side of the issues being addressed while remaining within the self imposed bounds of its paradigmatic context.

Wengraf’s (2001:2) approach to the semi-structured interview includes the concept of structured/deductive and unstructured/inductive ‘moments’ in a research cycle. An example of a ‘deductive moment’ might be the



researcher's decision to frame a question in a way so as to return the participant's narrative to one of the topics linked to the central research question if the participant has taken the interview in another less informative direction and time is limited. An inductive 'moment' might be where something that the participant says opens up a direction of inquiry in the narrative which may otherwise not have been considered by the researcher, and they decide to probe further into the response. This approach is extremely useful because it allows for a combination of strategies and tactics to be used, meaning that the researcher can be both inductivist and deductivist at various research 'moments' and at different levels (*ibid*:3). This approach is more holistic and enables the researcher to be deeply reflexive about what they are *actually doing* before, during and after the interviews.

The researcher, and the interrelationship between the researcher and the respondent is also considered in both the design and process of the interview sequence.

In a research interview you are the research instrument, and you are not a standard product. Interviewing style, like writing style, is to some extent a personal business. No matter how much you learn about interviewing, it is your own personal resources which breathe life into the technique and, in a way, take over from it. (Gillham, 2003:4)

The case study and semi-structured depth interview approach functions to bring the most useful and appropriate material and information to bear on the research question this thesis poses. They are used here in an explicit theoretically informed way which is often given little consideration in archaeology or indeed in the social sciences more widely (Ragin, 1992:1). It is, for example a common, foundational problem that:

[q]ualitative research interviewing tends to under theorise its data. It assumes too easily that an interview is an

unproblematic window on psychological or social relatives, and that the “information” that the interviewee gives about themselves and their world can be simply extracted and quoted, as the word of an omniscient and disinterested witness. (Wengraf, 2001)

It is important that the theoretical underpinning of the methodology used here is reflected upon, partly because the approach is a relatively new one in regard to considering archaeological questions and partly because it ensures that the information which is collected means something outside of the specific context of the interview room. It is also imperative that the researcher’s position and understanding of the methodology is made explicit. Jones (2002:6) points to the issue of researchers being ‘in a situated relationship to our subject of investigation...[and therefore that]...we must be extremely careful about our interpretations with regard to this relationship’. This is why reflexivity is considered here as such an important aspect of the qualitative research process.

Qualitative interviewing is not a ‘private and incommunicable art’ (Merton *et al*, 1956:17 quoted in McCracken, 1988:13). It offers the possibility to gain insight into many aspects of society and culture. The opportunity to turn interviewing towards investigating ‘ourselves’ as academic and professional archaeologists is too good to miss if we are to gain a better understanding of how the discipline can develop theoretically and methodologically. The discussion above has laid out the theoretical foundations and details of the semi-structured and depth interviewing approaches used in this research. Why they have been selected as the most appropriate methods for gathering data to address the central research question will now be considered.

## **2.4 The Case Study Interview Process**

This section explores the cycle of reflexive research used to gather information for this thesis. Firstly it addresses the reflexive approach and



process used throughout. How case studies were selected and the framework that they provide for locating the interview process is then described. This is followed by the core of the research methodology, considering the sampling strategies, interview instrumentation and finally, analysis and interpretation.

## **Reflexivity**

The 'reflex' in reflexivity implies a 'returning to' or reflection on what has been before to help inform future actions through a deeper understanding of the present. Like any mode of research, case studies and interviews might be considered as having a beginning, a middle, and an end. However this linear, notion of progression does not describe the reflexive approach to research methodology. The nature of reflexivity is to look back and contemplate on personal experiences and contextual understandings and use them to learn more appropriate ways of behaving, inquiring, analysing and interpreting, and to inform self-awareness. As a result, reflexive practice entails many moments of reflective awareness and insight, experienced repeatedly, which feed the development of the understanding and knowledge generated. Reflexive practice is therefore cyclical, not linear. Although there may be a point at which an individual has the initial inspiration for a piece of research - a concept, a question, a theory - this does not appear from nowhere, it is not an *absolute* beginning. What led to that moment is the biography of a life, the contexts and experiences of which interrelate in a complex way to stimulate the seed of the research inquiry. The culture, identity, circumstance and experiences of an individual as a part of a society (or societies) or group(s) all play a role in formulating what the central research question is and how it develops. The *academic* or what LeCompte (1998:200) calls the *intellectual autobiography* of a researcher is particularly relevant, as she comments, 'I have discovered that who one is [as an academic] serves as a screen for what one does as a researcher in the same way that cultures serve as cognitive screens for an ethnic group' (*ibid*: 204). However the academic and intellectual aspects of a biography



are not separable from other aspects of life - the personal and emotional. Interrelational elements that create cause and effect in the research cycle are contextually important to reflect upon if a deeper insight and understanding into interpretation is the intention.

For example, in my own autobiography I moved countries as a young adult and this had a real effect on the cultural way I learned to communicate with and understand the people and the world around me. Both countries were English speaking and yet I originally found the cultures to be very different, often in quite unexpected ways. Being aware of this means I can not only look at what this means for my research, but I can also look *outside* of it and consider what other perspectives there may be and how they may differently affect the research. The research may for instance be very different were I considering it from the position of a person who was born and raised in England, a country with such close and complex historical ties to Ireland. This awareness of perspective combined with reflection on what it means provides my research with a deeper insight into the ideas/theory and material/practice I am working with. In other words it provides the research with more *depth*.

### **Case study selection**

The framework of the case studies includes the historical background of the country and other aspects such as the socio-political and ideological contexts. The mode of selecting the case study country used in this research, using Stake's (1994:237) description of types, fall into the category of *instrumental case studies*. This means that they provide insight into an issue by addressing a 'unit of analysis' in order to be able to refine a theoretical explanation. Instrumental case studies also produce in-depth information with the intention of better understanding a theoretical question or problem. To clarify how these concepts link to the current thesis, the 'unit of analysis' is archaeologists in Ireland who are osteologists or specialise in the study of mortuary contexts. One of the

purposes of instrumental case studies is to advance the understanding of other research (Berg, 2004: 256) and theoretical questions. In the case of this thesis this is fundamental, with interview data acting as evidence to support insights into both theory and practice. The case study made for this thesis might also be categorised as *descriptive*, after Yin's division (1994:20), as the questions are directed towards considering 'how' and 'why' (Berg, 2004:257). Within any of the categories and types of case study however, there are decisions to be made about the boundaries of what is being explored. As Stake points out (1994:238) the 'researcher faces a strategic choice in deciding how much and how long the complexities of the case should be studied. Not everything about the case can be understood – how much needs to be? Each researcher will make up his or her own mind'. This concern applies to the framework design of the case study as well as its selection.

### **Interview Instrumentation**

This section deals with the interview instrumentation and the interview cycle itself, in other words, the interview *sequence* as a whole which includes what is going to be done, who with and how. The interview sequence used in the research for this thesis involves the development of the *research instruments*, the reflexive process of the *preparation* and *undertaking* of the interviews. The term *research instruments* is used in the social sciences to describe the means by which information is collected, in this case, semi-structured depth interviews. It is an important part of the interviewing methodology to have a detailed understanding of how the research instrument being used is formulated. This section therefore starts by describing the method, based on Wengraf's model for the development of interview design (2001: 63), which is used to develop the interview questions which form the *interview question guide*. Once the development phase of the research instruments has been dealt with, who is going to be invited to participate as interview informants are considered. Therefore a discussion of the sampling strategy used to identify informants for the case study interviews follows.



And finally the actual undertaking of the interviews is addressed. This includes a description of how the interviews are prepared for and how the information is collected before, during and after the interviews. It should be remembered that each of the three 'parts' which make up the interview sequence are not mutually exclusive, they occur within a *reflexive process*. This means that to varying extents, each element – a) the formulation of the research instrument, b) the sampling strategy, and c) the interviews - are all being continuously reflected upon and may be further developed or even altered during the process. Changes such as this are a direct result of the inevitable development of awareness, insight and understanding which comes through the experience of actually *doing* the research.

As was indicated above, the reflexive interview process is most usefully conceptualised as *cyclical* not linear. In other words undertaking the planning and interaction of semi-structured depth interviews is a reflexively iterative process. This is partly because it is heavily grounded in experiential development which is repeatedly reflected upon throughout. This reflexive process impacts on all of the research instruments involved in the methodology, including the researcher herself. This is an important part of the semi-structured depth interview cycle. The full cycle involves the design and planning of the interviews, the coordination and management of the interview sessions, the interview and extra-interview interaction and the follow-up phase and the analysis and interpretation of the information collected.

*The design of the interview questions* for this research drew on Wengraf's (2001:63) CRQ-TQ-IQ-II algorithm described previously. The sampling strategy employed can be classed as *purposeful sampling* combining in this case the three following approaches: *criterion sampling* and *snowball/chain* sampling, all of which were identified from Patton's typology (1990:169-183, summarised by Wengraf, 2001:102-103). Criterion sampling makes a selection of cases that meet a particular criterion related directly to the central research question. Snowball/chain



sampling, as the name suggests, identifies interesting cases through discussions with ‘people who know people who know what cases are information-rich; that is, good examples for study, good interview subjects’ (*ibid*:102). The purpose of these types of strategy, as discussed previously, is to provide a certain amount of flexibility and to cover various research and logistical requirements. In this research A and C, the two academic participants, were identified using criterion sampling, and the two professional practitioner participants were identified through a snowball approach. The interview cycle had begun once the sampling strategy approaches were decided, and the interview questions began to be developed. The development of interview questions overlapped with the process of contacting potential participants.

### **Participant Selection**

The sampling strategies used for this research, as mentioned above, are *criterion* and *snowball/chain* sampling, both from the purposive sampling family. When embarking on the sample selection, I made a review of the sub-populations available i.e. archaeologists who were working as or with a particular interest in mortuary archaeology or osteoarchaeology. This review involved literature and web searches as well as discussions with contacts within relevant areas of the archaeological community. Once initial potential interviewees were identified, the first contacts were made. As Gerson and Horowitz (2002:209) comment,

‘Securing the help of strangers is, in some respects, the most anxiety-provoking task of the interviewer. It takes a strong belief in the value of one’s project and a certain amount of *chutzpah* to ask others to share their most personal, intimate stories for no other reason than the advancement of knowledge and the possibility of increased personal awareness.’

The methods of contact used in this research were written approach by email and verbal approach by telephone. Both the sampling strategy as well as logistical constraints informed the contact methods used. For example, one contact was suggested by a person who had themselves agreed to be a participant (i.e. through a 'snowballing/chain' strategy - Patton: 1990: 169-183, in Wengraf, 2001: 103) and who was working on site without email access. Therefore she was contacted in the first instance by telephone. Not all of those who were initially contacted then went on to be interviewed; they did however provide information and suggestions as to other potential participants who were considered to be of potentially greater interest to the research.

Using a snowballing sampling strategy may mean that some participants potentially know who other participants are. From an ethical standpoint, transparency in communication with participants identified using this strategy allows for informed choice as to whether individuals choose to participate in the knowledge that they have been 'recommended'. Equally, those who do the 'recommending' are able to decide if they are identified as having done so. In practice, this was less formal than it sounds. For example, when one contact had in mind another participant for this research, they contacted them and between themselves discussed the research and involvement in the interview before contacting the researcher to suggest participation.

For ethical reasons, it was a conscious decision in this research to favour initial contact to be made by email. This was decided in order that information about the research itself and what involvement with the research would entail was presented to the potential informant in a non-pressured mode so that they could make an informed decision. The information sent to contacts initially can be found in the appendices. Where the telephone was the initial means of contact, the research was described verbally, and the information then emailed once interest in doing an interview was agreed. Once the interviews were agreed, the details of this were then confirmed by email, where possible at least a



week prior to the agreed date. This email was sent along with a copy of the Participant Informed Consent (PIC) form (see appendices). This form plays an important ethical function in that it covers the context and conditions within which the research takes place and the way the data collected will be used. It also offered the opportunity for me to be contacted if the participant had any concerns raised by what was being formally consented to by agreeing participation. In one case because of logistical constraints it was not possible to get the PIC form to an individual prior to the interview, so time was given *directly before* the interview for them to consider the content and ask any questions. The sampling strategy therefore informed how the contact was managed, both when a potential informant agreed to be interviewed as well as when they did not. It should also be noted that not all potential informants were contacted at the same point in time during the interview cycle.

### **The interview process as a whole**

The process of interviewing is an evolutionary one which explores and engages with a variety of experiences. In practice, this means that both the interaction between researcher and participant is constantly developing. For example, for this research an interview question guide was created prior to starting the first interview (as discussed above) and the development of these questions helped to inform who was contacted. It should be remembered here, that the status of the guide is as an *aide memoir*, intended to provide a general structure to the interviews, not a definitive list of questions. The reflexive development of the guide as well as the pilot interviews help to get to know the questions to the point where the researcher does not have to look at the guide itself during interviews. The interaction between the participant and the researcher therefore is able to develop in response to the researcher's experience of previous interviews. Two initial pilot interviews were undertaken which are not presented as part of the research. They were important not only because they provide an opportunity to evaluate how the interview questions and interview technique functioned together in the interview

interaction as a whole, but because they afforded a refining of the overall process. These early interviews therefore acted to inform the reflexive development of the question guide as well as the interview *sequence*, *interaction strategies* and *interview interventions* used in later interviews.

As each interview progresses it is not just the questions that develop however. My skills as an interviewer in encouraging a relaxed and information-rich interview also developed, a well recognised experience in depth-interviewing. Each research question and its related cycle of interviews bring new challenges and new contexts. Even a strong familiarity with the theory, questions and interview techniques does not avoid the particular responses which any interview interaction generates depending on the context and person being interviewed. This can be understood in various ways, including the *Gestalt Cycle of Experience* or the concept of the *Defended Self* such as Holloway and Jefferson use as a basis for their model of subjectivity the *Defended Anxious Subject* (2000 in Wengraf, 2001:158-9). Whichever model is used, what is at the core of this is a calm awareness of yourself and your participant during the interview, which enables a greater awareness of what is happening in the interaction and supports 'double-attention'. As Wengraf (*ibid*:159) points out 'Designing semi-structured interview interaction in this perspective means that you must not ignore, or hallucinate away, the problem of anxiety [in the interview interaction] but explicitly cater for, and monitor it'. In other words, managing the positive outcome of the interview by being self aware and, following the interview, reflecting on the interaction to learn from it.

I experienced this process during the interview cycle. My previous and ongoing experience of research interviewing provided insight into the fact that there is a constant refining, reflective questioning and internal negotiation of interview skills, which supported the interview process for this research. If at any point an interviewer felt they had now 'got it' in terms of interview skills, or that they had learned 'how to do it properly', this would be of considerable concern! This does not suggest that it is not



possible to develop different levels of skilful means, on the contrary, experience brings with it the development of practical skills as well as insight. However each interview should also be considered a 'fresh page' when it is entered into. This effectively means that before the interview an effort was made to 'forget what was known' in order to approach the interview with an open mind, a practice which formed part of the preparation for each interview.

In preparing for an interview even what the interviewer decides to wear is of relevance. For this research I chose relaxed but professional attire in black (as a neutral colour). Consideration was given to how I 'appeared' to others by asking various colleagues what they thought of me when I was wearing the interview clothes. Particularly in light of the subject being discussed, I was keen not to provide external indicators of any particular theoretical or personal standpoint. Irrespective of whether or not caricatures of the 'dungaree wearing feminist' or the 'postmodern, post-feminist woman' reflect reality or indeed apply in this case, assumptions based on appearance certainly occur. As an example of this type of phenomena in action, when I was carrying out interviews in another, previous research context which related to issues of race and ethnicity, on a number of occasions following initial email contact with interviewees, when I arrived to do the interview, participants either commented or implied that they had not expected me to be white, because of the topic of study. Another example was when I forgot to remove 'ethnic' style earrings prior to an interview. During the interview interaction, the (Irish) participant repeatedly looked at my ears, and at one point while doing so made a defended comment about people who think they understand 'ethnicity' just because they wear ethnic clothes and like ethnic food and music. It should be pointed out here however, that my awareness of what was happening in the interview enabled me to give subtle, non-direct reassurance to the participant and the defensive responses were dropped with the result that the interaction became more fruitful.

Once the preparations had taken place, directly prior to an interview, I would write a reflection. This offered an opportunity to see what was in my mind before the interview took place, and which therefore may have had a bearing on the interaction. The interviews generally began with a period of friendly conversation to help relax any interview anxiety on the participants' and/or my own part, followed by a more formal introduction where the rapport between myself and participant was further developed. This involved me both formally introducing myself and the research and verbally reviewing some of the basics of how the interview would work which were outlined in the participant information they had already received (i.e. how long it would take, that it would be digitally recorded and that the structure would be relaxed). I then asked if the participant was ready to begin and the recorder was turned on. The switching on of the digital recorder at the start (and indeed turning off at the end) was a particular 'turning point' in each of the interviews, as it distinctly changed the type of interaction occurring. This was generally notable in a shift in the participant's body language and verbal dynamic. Having been aware of this phenomenon from previous interview experience, I therefore approached the turning on of the recorder in a relaxed way which de-emphasised the action. However, for ethical reasons as well as 'the record' the participant was asked at the start if they were happy to be recorded, thereby making some level of 'shift' in context unavoidable. The interview interaction then followed, with a single question being asked, in common way to start each of the interviews:

For the first part of the interview, perhaps you could tell me a bit about your education and career in archaeology and how your personal interest in human remains/mortuary archaeology developed up until now? You can begin anywhere you like, I'll just listen at first without interrupting and take some notes.

From this point onwards the questions were asked in response to the interview interaction and the narrative developed by the participant. A



reasonable amount of time was given to allow the participant to develop their personal themes before they were directed to particular areas of interest relevant to the topic of the interview. This is a standard practice in semi-structured interviewing, and allows for areas of experience and particular interest to the participant to be explored. It also acts as a means of relaxing the participant and allowing them to ‘warm’ into the interview. More or less intervention by the researcher may be needed at this stage, depending on the individual being interviewed. For example, case A began talking in a personal mode directly the first question was asked and required very little by way of intervention to encourage him, whereas D required considerably more encouragement to develop her initial narrative by way of non-verbal interventions such as head nods, ‘mm hms’ and brief, probing/clarification questions.

During each interview, notes were made discretely, recording the non-verbal communications and contextual observations of the interaction along-side key words from the participant’s narrative so as to ‘locate’ them later when the recording was being transcribed. As can be seen from the two examples given below from the transcript matrices for cases A and D, the notes help to give insights into deeper meanings and the context behind what is being said. It should be noted, that the insights provided by the notes do not necessarily relate directly to the narrative in which they are expressed. As the example from A’s narrative below, the notes suggest that he is aware that what he is saying may come across as very ‘empirical’ compared to the more ‘postmodern’ view of sex/gender theory that he has been discussing prior to this comment. It may also be suggestive of a ‘defended’ position in this regard.

Interview Note	Narrative
<i>it is possible to determine biological sex</i> – A looks at me from under hooded eye-lids (tentatively?) then crosses arms.	...And at that stage I talk about the way in which...you know, it is possible to determine biological sex. Ah, through looking at human skeletal remains. Then in the <i>third</i> year, and now this is...so that would be in the <i>core</i>

	group that I would...[short silence]...for the, the <i>entire</i> second year class I would talk about human remains.
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Interview Note	Narrative
<i>females were quite powerful</i> – D looks fully at me and holds my gaze	Um, <i>but</i> , there is um...I <i>gather</i> , a strong tradition that females were quite powerful in the early Pictish period. Um, so, that <i>maybe</i> something...it <i>mayyybe</i> just a very tenuous link with something like that, but I, I <i>don't know</i> until I know more about it...

As part of the development of the narrative, these ‘snippets’ of information about the participant’s responses during the interview also help to understand the narrative as a whole to a greater depth. Notes such as this are therefore analysed not in isolation, but as a part of the whole; potential meanings are reviewed on the basis of previous and following actions as well as the flow of the narrative and the information it contains.

Notes are also made of any particular ‘interviewer’ perceptions which appear during the interaction, such as the example given below where I have noted a question to myself which has arisen during the interview. These notes help to understand the context and give a ‘sense’ of the interaction. They also give insight into my own responses (defended, enthusiastic etc.) to what is being said, which are of relevance when making the analysis and interpretation.

Interview Note	Narrative
<i>Male and female burials</i> – B involuntarily moves her foot (like a muscle ‘flicking’)	They do occasionally. But gender is <i>not</i> a big thing in um, Early Medieval burial practices. Strangely enough. I’m talking about the period up to about the 8 <sup>th</sup> century A.D. Ah, i...in, we noticed, we notice, you know, in burials when you’re digging up in the <i>ground</i> , for that period, that you get male and female burials.



Is this directed at me or more generally?	And people...some people who don't have a history, ah, don't have a knowledge of the history...the <i>background</i> history, to that period... <i>tend</i> to...wonder why these are <i>not separated</i> , and all of this sort of thing...
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Following the interview the participant was thanked and there was then a period which I call 'debrief', where the participant typically wants to talk in a more relaxed, conversational way and ask questions about me. This is not surprising considering that they have been asked questions as well as doing the majority of the talking for one hour, which is not a typical mode of communication for the average person. This 'post-interview' discussion, although not recorded forms part of the 'extra-interview' material and is reflected on in the field notes taken directly following an interview. Field notes are therefore made up of a pre-interview reflection, the notes made during the interview and the post-interview notes and reflection which include information about the initial 'set up' of the interview interaction, its location and circumstances.

The day following the interview, each of the participants was emailed to thank them again for their involvement, and offering the option that they may contact me if they have any queries. In the PIC form, the participant is also offered the option to request a copy of the transcript should they so wish. None of the participants interviewed for this research chose to take up this option.

## 2.5 The Analytical Process

This section addresses the analysis of the cases. It is relatively descriptive in form and deals with the major phases of the reflexive analytical cycle; recording reflection, transcription production, reflexive notation and interpretation.

The files for each case contain:

- correspondence with the individual during the research cycle
- a signed copy of their informed consent form
- a recording of the interview (stored in mp3 format)
- a *version zero* copy of the interview transcription
- a copy of the multi-layered, annotated interview transcription (transcription matrix)
- all interview field notes and reflections
- extra-interview reflective notes
- analytical memos
- ‘second pair of eyes’ reflections (explained later in the section)

The digital recordings of each interview are stored electronically. Prior to typed transcriptions being made, I undertook a reflexive process of ‘listening again’, a form of conscious ‘first impressions’. By revisiting the interview before getting down to the manual labour of typing out the transcription, a ‘holistic sense’ (Wengraf, 2001:209) based on memories, thoughts, senses, impressions and theoretical ideas is captured. This entails writing thought memos and reflections while listening to the recording, pausing as necessary in order to allow a ‘...“whole mind-body response” [to] get access to your conscious mind, giving your conscious mind time and opportunity to generate and sense new understandings of “what it’s all about”.’ (*ibid*). Following this, a transcript *version zero* is produced (Wengraf, 2001:212 after Porier *et al*, 1983), in other words a verbatim typed record which acts as a ‘pure’ reference document which is useful to return to for reflection during analysis. However, even during the production of version zero of the transcript, separate memos are written to capture additional thoughts, feelings and ideas about the interview itself and what was said.

A multi-layered transcription is then made which is divided into a matrix (following Wengraf, 2001:212). The transcript is divided into columns the first of which is for line number, as each line of the interview narrative is separately numbered by *speaker turn* – this helps by providing



detailed reference points for finding the way around a transcript quickly during analysis. The second column contains comments drawn from field notes taken during and directly following the interview as described in the previous section. Reflections and memos made during the reflective ‘first listening’ of the recording and the *chronemics* and *paralinguistics* of the interview are also added in this second column, which may be drawn from field notes or from listening again to the interview recording (e.g. word emphasis, voice pitch, volume, speed etc.). The third column contains the actual spoken words and indications of pauses or silences and laughter; who is speaking is also indicated in this column. The final column is for analytical notes made during the typing up of the transcription and the later analytical phases. An example is given below:

#	Researcher Notes	Narrative	Analysis Notes
042	<p>Struggles to communicate ideas</p> <p><i>straightforward correspondence:</i> hands forward, moving things about on the table.</p> <p>Voice sounds nervous – is this because he is saying that sex = gender?</p>	<p>Well I think, I mean I think ultimately they are...ah...[brief silence]...you know in, in a sense I think it's ah...in the vast majority of cases there's a straightforward correspondence between ah...at one level...between biological sex and gender in the sense that...ah...the straightforward duality between men and women as is represented in the, the biology approach, probably represents...I would <i>think</i>...um...um...you know represents the more straightforward gender interpretation of the data as well. But from, you know I...I think peop...work in anthropology has made us aware of for example, that, that there...it, it's not always as straightforward as that, but that there isn't, that there sort of can be a miss-match between somebody's sex in a broader way and the gender that they have. That some societies</p>	<p>Miss-match – i.e. not norm?</p> <p>Asserts his idea of relationship</p> <p>Struggles to link the theory of what he is saying here to the practice that he has been talking about?</p> <p>Defends: backtracks on previous assertion.</p> <p>Self-presentation – aware of postprocessual gender theory/ anthropology</p>

		<p>as well <i>don't</i> make a, the sort of straight forward distinction between male and female that we...we in many Western societies do. And so that, that...I think gender is a very useful ways of...um, looking at the blurring of those roles, that maybe, if you like it's that our...um...how will I put it? That might be the cultural and social <i>reading</i> of the kind of the biology. And that that is much more <i>varied</i> then the straight forward blanket breakdown into male or female.</p>	<p>Gender as multiple in 'other' non-western countries</p>
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Producing this multi-layered transcription matrix is in effect undertaking the first steps of the reflexive analysis. The analysis is always made bearing in mind that the narrative is produced within a specific context and represents a particular 'moment' in time and space. As Pluciennik (1999:660) notes:

While singular and simple narratives may offer a sense of final closure, it is equally possible (and normal in anthropology, history and archaeology) to present partial rather than totalising narratives, in the sense that the "end of the story" is obviously arbitrary and provisional...without claiming that no other stories remain to be told or that other narratives referred to within the text (e.g., gender relations, cultural dynamics) must begin or finish at the same point.

The process of analysis is therefore led by the material itself and begins directly the interview is completed. The post-interview notes and reflections are in effect, the first phase of considering the narrative in an analytical mode. It is from this point that questions begin to form and insights arise. The 'first listening' offers a creative opportunity to see what is noticed before complex ideas have been formed and generates the basis of a closer listening as the transcript itself is typed. As has been



seen above, during transcription, as analytical ideas, responses and reflections come up, they are noted in the matrix beside the corresponding narrative section. Once the transcription is completed the field notes and reflections are also incorporated in to the matrix. There may be correlations between these and some of the listening and transcribing notes and if this is the case they are reflected on and re-developed into a single analytical note which reflects the meaning. These processes effectively represent the 'first wave' of analysis.

The 'second wave' of analysis involves working through the transcripts using a holistic approach and is done in great detail, looking at the meaning of the narrative matrix overall and reflecting on what the context, content and narrative relationships are suggesting. This is followed by a full reflection on the case, offering an opportunity to 'step back' from the material and analysis, and consider how I am responding to it and whether there are any themes emerging. A period of 'distance' is then followed by an open re-reading of the transcript, without taking notes, to refresh my 'view' of the interview and confirm any themes; this acts as the starting point of the thematic analysis of the narrative.

Once the themes have been identified, the transcript is worked through again and the sections highlighted which relate to each of them; in some instances a section of narrative may relate to more than one theme. These narrative sections are then extracted from the full transcript and grouped together so that a closer, comparative analysis can be made. Notes are taken and it is at this stage that the thematic analysis begins to be 'written up', each with a reflection upon completion. Following the thematic analysis the case is 're-formed' and I read through the full transcript again before writing the case interpretation.

Two of the case analyses, B (practitioner) and C (academic), were sent to non-archaeologist specialists, who were otherwise unrelated to the research, for their reflections as a 'second pair of eyes'. I developed this approach in the methodology as a result of my experience of the process

as a whole, and the wish to bring in other 'views' which I then reflected on myself. The insights gained into the analytical processes and interpretations through doing this were then used to develop the analysis of the next interviews. The two 'second pairs of eyes' were an academic and a practitioner. The academic is a Professor whose specialist field is social-science and the linking of qualitative and quantitative methods to test social theory. The practitioner is a Doctor of psychology and Director of a regional NHS Psychology Services, with a particular personal interest in interview interactions. This approach was invaluable and resulted in a much deeper reflexivity on my part in regard to the way I was interpreting the material. Both of my external reflectors commented at how they had been interested in and enjoyed the process and that they considered it to be a highly valuable method to add to the reflexive approach overall.



## Part 2 – Bringing the Dead to Life: The Case Studies

### *Bone lady*

*She picks them out  
one by one,  
ancient disease dust  
from matching pair  
of syphilitic tibia,  
clouds at her touch.  
Pathology of past lives  
They say is science  
not people  
these hundreds lying in piles,  
jumbled bodies,  
long dead disarticulation.  
Skeletal mounds watched  
by rows of empty sockets,  
the shopping trolley filled  
with femur and fibula,  
a standing reminder  
of long lost legs.*

### **Introduction**

In Part 2 I set out the specific contexts of the Irish case study in Chapter 3, before moving on to present the research material and analysis from each of the four cases within the study in Chapters 4 to 7. The context of the case study addresses the cultural, institutional, intellectual and researcher contexts which act as a background to the material presented in the following chapters. The case studies are presented as individual chapters and all follow the same structure in order to enable the reader to understand and compare the studies more easily; starting with the specific

case context and followed by the analysis of each of the four key themes drawn from the material and their related researcher reflections.

The broader context of the interviews addressed in Chapter 3 plays an important role in the thesis as it informs the later analysis and interpretations. The reader may or may not have an understanding or experience of the Irish context overall, and while it is not intended to be an in-depth investigation into the contexts of culture, politics, religion and archaeology, the chapter offers insights into each. In particular the discussion of the religious and cultural context of death provides information that is less commonly known outside of Ireland itself.

The question at the core of this research, which is about whether using a reflexive methodology enables deeper understanding of sex and gender from human remains, could in practice be applied to any aspect of any type of material, to greater or lesser effect. The nature of qualitative research is such that there is no particular 'right' or 'wrong' example or indeed number of examples, but only a selection which the researcher perceives presents the most exemplary potential within the practical and methodological constraints of the research. The process of exploration which the case studies encompass could, theoretically, be carried out through a single case, pair or multiple of cases locally or from across the globe. The questions being asked in this research might therefore be asked of anywhere, however in making the choice of which case to focus on, Ireland had some very interesting as well as practical aspects which represented its potential for the research. This is the very crux of the matter in case study selection in the social sciences, the nature of research of this type does not 'seek an answer' but must be framed by its practice.

To begin with the practicalities, the logistics of the research was a key determinant in the case study selection. Certain criteria were important, as discussed in Chapter 2, including both time and resources. The balance between time spent in undertaking the research and the human and financial resources available (in other words Lieberman's (1992:105-



106) 'time energy cost') required the case studies for this research to be easily accessible. Potential research participants in Ireland were easily accessible from the base of this research in Northern England. Ireland is close enough geographically and of a size to be easily travelled around to undertake research interviews, within a closely constrained research schedule and within limited financial boundaries. It is within these limitations that this research is framed. However the conceptual possibilities for extending the scope and depth of the research is boundless.

In addition to these two criteria, language is also of considerable importance. The term *language* in this context, relates not only to linguistics, but also to cultural language, or the specific cultural *milieu* within which the research is carried out. It was possible, for example, for me to undertake in-depth interviews with archaeologists working in Ireland in English (even if their first language is not culturally English e.g. Irish). This made the interview process considerably more direct than if the interviewee or interviewer are using a second language (as in my experience in China referred to in Chapter 3). Even where the researcher or participant are bi-lingual, there is the potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of what is expressed verbally. As Fontana and Frey (1989:58) point out:

Respondents may be fluent in the language of the interviewer, but there are different ways of saying things, and, indeed, certain things that should not be said at all, linking language and cultural manifestations.

However I would add to this that in my experience an awareness of the non-verbal communication experienced in situations where verbal language is a barrier, often becomes more acute. If both researcher and participant do not get caught up in concerns over words, a deeper contact in relation to meaning may be established.

A slightly more subtle but none-the-less practical 'language' issue relates to cultural congruence. The academic and professional contexts of archaeology in Ireland are, while different in many ways, relatively comparable to those in England. When speaking for example of 'archaeological theory', 'rescue archaeology', or 'oste archaeology', archaeologists from both countries will have similar points of reference, if not exactly the same perspective. However, as a proviso to this, in an extra-interview conversation with participant A, he commented on how an English archaeologist with whom he had previously worked had contacted him to ask if he would contribute some of his research material on human remains from Ireland as case studies for a book she was producing on *English* archaeology. When he wrote back pointing out that, as she knew, he only worked with *Irish* material and he was therefore uncertain of the relevance for her publication, he received no reply.

However it is not only verbal language which should be considered in this light as the interpretation of *body language* may also be culturally constrained. Therefore the underlying meanings of the 'language' being used, requires less explanation or interpretation on the part of the interviewer if they are culturally the same or similar, again reducing the probability of misinterpretation. For example, in a recent communication with a friend, he mentioned that during an interview with a Chinese Buddhist Master, the Master had been very unhappy when my friend had crossed his legs. When the Master's displeasure became apparent, my friend asked why he was unhappy and was told that crossing your legs in his country was considered to a show of a lack of respect, and as such was offensive to him. When it was pointed out that in the West it was usually an indicator of being comfortable or relaxed in a social context, the Master was much relieved! Of course once again, cultural similarity in body language should not be taken for granted during the interview process, and retaining an open mind is the best policy.



## The Research Participants

The archaeologists who have taken part in this research have very generously given their time and offered personal views, ideas, questions and uncertainties on the topic being investigated. They have spoken about their own research and work, but they have also spoken about themselves personally, giving details of their life and histories as part of the interview interaction. They have done so with the understanding and expectation that what they have said will be treated with respect and in confidence, and that the results of the research will be used and presented ethically. As each interview is recorded, transcribed and then treated to a detailed analysis, the responsibility to undertake and present the research in good-faith is of the utmost importance to me as a researcher.

The participants include two academics and two practitioners. One academic is an osteoarchaeologist, the other deals with the interpretation of mortuary archaeology. Of the two professional practitioners, one is a consultant field archaeologist specialising in mortuary archaeology and the other is a consultant osteoarchaeologist. All the participants are Irish and currently live and work in Irish contexts. Two female and two male participants were interviewed, however as each case is individual within its own context, their sex/gender is not used for comparative purposes. In other words, the participants' sex/gender is only of relevance within its own contextual case interpretation as part of an individual's own identity. A mixture of male and female participants were selected for balance only, as this research does not draw comparative 'population' conclusions on the basis of sex or gender or 'male' or 'female' perspectives on the topic, but simply the *participants'* perspectives from their own identity position. As James points out:

Writing history, then, depends on the skills, insights and prejudices of its practitioners, who are products of the social political and historical circumstances in which they live. It is by recognising this, and examining the

implications, that we can hope to reach a closer understanding of earlier peoples...The views of the past which historians and archaeologists produce then, are coloured by the imperatives of their own present. (James, 1999:34)

Case Studies are explorations of real-world examples which provide us as archaeologists, with an awareness and understanding of why we do things the way we do, as well as into how things might change and develop. We can look to cultures outside of or very different to our daily experience to help us see more clearly the place we actually exist in or we can look to 'ourselves' for deeper insight.

From the point of view of narrative analysis, cultural ideologies are not interesting in themselves because we all know what they are just by virtue of being competent members of our society. What is interesting is what people do with those ideologies. And that is available to us through people's full, detailed stories. (Chase 2003:86)

The purpose of the case study is to investigate the interview narratives to provide insight into the central research question. Each of the cases will be analysed using the methodology outlined in Chapter 2. Firstly a brief outline of the participant's current practice is given, followed by details of the context in which the interview took place. This enables the reader to locate the analysis and interpretation within the case study context. Once the scene is set in this way, an analysis is made of 'life history context' as drawn from the narrative, which gives information about the education, career in archaeology and personal interest in osteoarchaeology/mortuary archaeology of the participant. These form the introductory aspects of the case studies and are followed by the analysis of the narratives using a thematic approach. Each of the thematic areas is followed by a generally short reflection from the researcher which gives insight into the context of



the analysis and interpretation made. Full case interpretations as well as the overall interpretation of the research appear in Part 3.

The first analysis made in relation to human remains/mortuary context and sex and gender addresses three areas of interest, how the participant conceptualises sex and gender, how they understand the relationship between sex and gender and how their concepts of sex and gender relate to or are applied in their work. The second analysis on the topic of the reflexive process considers if participants use reflective or reflexive approaches in their practice and if so, in what ways. Participants may or may not use the term 'reflection' or 'reflexivity' in their narratives; therefore this analysis is made by interpreting both what the participant says in relation to their practice as well as the approach they take during the interview when speaking about themselves and their work. The third and fourth sections of each case analysis address thematic areas individual to each participant's narrative. These analyses are made to provide deeper context and meaning for the deductive themes. They offer a different angle from which the narrative can be viewed and feed into a more holistic understanding of the issues being addressed by the central research question.

## Chapter 3. The Context of the Cases

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of some of the key aspects of context which frame the interview data. The main themes which will be discussed broadly are the culture, including the ideologies of religion and politics, the discipline of archaeology in Ireland, and the reflexive research contexts. It is difficult but necessary to limit the discussion by dividing it into these categorical groupings. The interrelationship of contexts is summarised in this section and acts as a frame the case studies presented in Chapter 4.

### 3.1 The Cultural Context

‘Culture’ is a term that can be broadly or narrowly defined, but in this case it is being used in its widest sense which encompasses the material, behavioural and ideological aspects and creations of humanity. The case studies presented in this research have the common cultural context that the participants are all Irish. What being Irish means to each individual may have variations as well as points of commonality. It should therefore be made clear from the on-set that the cases are not being used to *represent* a cultural context. In other words, the Irish archaeologists interviewed do not represent *Irish archaeology* or *Irish people* as a generic whole. The context in which these individuals have lived, studied and work does relate to their view of archaeology. While this context is located within personal frameworks, it still remains helpful to take a look at some of the cultural aspects which unite them at a broad level as it provides insight and ways into investigating the data. This is akin to Layder’s concept of the structural typology which ‘depicts the settings and context of behaviour and thus provide the necessary requirements for more inclusive and powerful explanations of social life’ (1998:74). However it should be remembered that just as national culture is not isolated or insular in the global, archaeological or academic context,



neither are individuals, particularly if they have studied and or worked overseas i.e. outside of their home culture. This section therefore presents a brief overview of Ireland's cultural context; the reader may choose to look elsewhere for a detailed account of the issues and debates surrounding the political and religious history and development of the country.

Ó'Donnabháin (2000:194) comments that 'modern Ireland is a product of the sum of all the influences – genetic, linguistic and social – that have touched this island over the last 9000 years. The broad cultural context of Ireland in the present day certainly holds reflections of its distant prehistoric and historic as well as more recent past. Ireland is currently a nationalist country with a strong political identity and while there are not unexpectedly a number of interpretations of the current political position within Ireland, the debates over the North of the country not the least of them, the most recent political development of significance is Ireland choosing to become part of an economically united Europe. Since the 1990s Ireland has experienced a 'tiger economy', and while this boom has begun to settle somewhat, it has had a considerable impact on the country and its people (Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 2002). Aside from a generally improved standard of living for the overall population, a proliferation of infrastructural development has brought with it a hungry labour market which has affected both Irish Nationals as well as encouraging immigration from across Europe and beyond. This action has in some ways moved the country on from many of the old ways of defining itself as a nationalist country in defiance of a past colonised period in Irish history. As Ni Mhaille Battell (2003:94) suggests:

Celtic tigerhood was an important stage in the construction of postcolonial Irish identity, arguably the first one that was not constructed on "otherness", on being anti- or not-British.

Ireland's 'reinvention' of itself and its people as it changes from one of Europe's poorest, to one of its most wealthy countries is therefore currently in progress (Ni Mhaille Battell, 2003:93). The political benefits or problems that have been created by the Celtic Tiger remain debated (*ibid*:102), however in regard to its impact on archaeology the changes it has engendered are considerable as will be discussed later in this section. It might be suggested that Ireland's national identity has a new economic force behind it where previously religion and political history were the primary drivers.

The Act of Union in 1801 heightened Irish concerns regarding Ireland's national autonomy and identity, and experiences of British rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did much to harden views. While there is debate as to the detail, Ireland's political domination by Britain's empire undoubtedly forged a nationalist identity in response to the hardships and suffering experienced by the greater majority of its people. While politicians such as Redmond had been working towards an agreement of 'Home Rule' (Shepard, 1912:567), a movement which had been initiated in 1870 by the Protestant Isaac Butt, (McCaffrey, 1973:526), the Easter Uprising of 1916 saw the declaration of Ireland as an independent state (Lee, 2004:20-37). Yet while the rising itself did not have widespread popular support and initially failed, the action which followed including the execution by British forces of the uprising's leaders and internment of many of those involved including Collins and DeValera who were held in Frongoch prison in Wales, did much to garner support from the Irish public (Laffan, 1999:64-66). The Easter Uprising is therefore used as emblematic of a nationalist Ireland, as a "Blood Sacrifice" that inspired the Anglo-Irish War leading to the Treaty, the Free State and finally the Republic' (McCaffrey, 1973:524) despite the failure in itself to establish an independent government. It was following the 1918 elections when the majority of politicians elected refused to take seats in the British Parliament that in 1919, Dáil Éireann was established and began to govern, overruling the British governance of Ireland with the support of



local government action. Waterford County Council for example, sent its accounts and reports to Dáil Éireann instead of the Local Government Board in Dublin and as a result a writ was served against them and the Finance Officer was arrested (*pers.com*. J Rothwell, Waterford County Council Archives). This type of local action was undertaken across the country with local authorities and other official bodies refusing to deal with the British government and taking orders from Dáil Éireann instead. The War of Independence (1919 - 1921) was well underway during this time, and it is as a result of these combined actions and events that the Free State government of Ireland came to be recognised by the British government (Lee, 2004:47). While the perceptions of this phase in Irish history vary from different political positions, the impact of this period on Ireland's identity remains strong; it can be seen reflected in the still current debate over language and terminology, with Ireland using the War of Independence and Northern Ireland naming it the Anglo-Irish War.

However Ireland's relationship with its neighbour, Britain, has a deeper past than this, a past with periods of mutual cultural transference, invasion, and cross-pollination as well as periods of relative cultural isolation from each other, the exactitudes of which remain in debate (Cooney, 1999:185-186). As James (1999:10) notes, there is a 'A widening gap of comprehension between the ways in which most people in Ireland and Britain understand their remote past, and the ideas archaeologists now hold about it'. If this state of affairs is accurate, there is a question as to why this is the case; the answer may be related to political rhetoric, but there are other possibilities, such as a reduction in the public interest in the past, or indeed a deficit in the way archaeologists are communicating their most recent interpretations. The position of the Irish Celt is however at the centre of this debate. One of the most important aspects of any Nationalist agenda is to make explicit a solid foundation for the identity of a country's people, and to support this with historical evidence for continuity of culture; Ireland is no different from any other nationalist country in this respect. While the political use of the

concept of the Irish Celt does not necessarily negate its historical or archaeological validity, as has been recently suggested by Simon James (*ibid*) in his thought provoking and contentious book *The Atlantic Celts: ancient people or modern invention?*, there is certainly cause for an awareness of this context in any interpretations made. Ireland's current cultural context is therefore woven through with themes of its political past as well as its present, however one of the most notable social influences on its cultural identity which sounds through the ages, is that of religion.

Ireland as a modern society has a closely entwined relationship with religion and even with recent changes in the population since the boom of the Celtic Tiger, the primary religious context is one of Christianity. In particular the Catholic Church has played a strong role in the development of the Irish culture. As McCaffrey (1973:528) quotes:

In the words of Patrick O'Farrell, Irish Catholicism was more "than the official pronouncements of the hierarchy: it is a set of values, a culture, a historical tradition, a view on the world, a disposition of mind and heart, a loyalty, an emotion, a psychology-and a nationalism.

While its influence should not be underestimated, the stereotyped view of Catholic Ireland ought not be taken as representative of the religious context in Ireland today for the majority of the population. This stereotype is largely based on the most recent period of highly conservative religious control represented by Article 44 of Ireland's Constitution which states the primacy of the Catholic Church within the state. This article, which was inserted into the Constitution in 1932 and only expunged in 1972, recognised 'the 'special position' of the Catholic Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of the citizens' (Lee, 2004:242). This religious conservatism was further embedded in the constitution by DeValera in 1937 as he 'made divorce



unconstitutional, banned the import or sale of contraceptive devices, and regulated dance halls, besides incorporating Catholic teaching on the family, [and] education...' (Larkin, 1975:1273). While the exposure of a number of scandals within the Catholic Church within the past fifteen to twenty years has done much to destabilise the role of Catholicism in Ireland's culture, the most recent census in Ireland (2006) shows that 70% of the population still consider themselves as Roman Catholic and just 2% indicating that they have no religious beliefs (www.cso.ie, 28/05/08).

The effect of religious ideology on the Irish context is complex and multi-layered, there are however some key themes which are pertinent here. The conceptual aspects of Catholic Christianity have a coalescent relationship with its practices and emergent outcomes in terms of the culture. The moral and social rules which frame the practices, the consequent perceptions of what is acceptable behaviour in society, and the relative values placed on actions, objects and places, all have an effect on communities in their political, individual and their personal contexts. This relationship also extends to the material culture, infrastructure and landscape of the country, to perceptions of the past, and treatments of the dead. Religious moral codes are expressed in both thoughts and behaviours, ideas and acceptance of what is considered right or wrong, the results of which extend into all areas of life. In modern Ireland, there is a notable relationship between religious moral ideology and the social experience of gender and sex. Within a society that traditionally conceives of gender (through a Catholic reading of the bible) as dichotomous and specifically linked to biological sex, ideas of what constitute acceptable gender roles direct social behaviour. Individuals and groups may concord or transgress these ideals at different times and in different contexts, for example, the establishment of the Magdalene Laundries in the mid-nineteenth century. These were Church-governed Catholic institutions where unmarried mothers and some women who were not pregnant and unmarried but whose behaviour was considered outside what was acceptable at the time, including prostitutes, were

literally 'locked up' for the majority of their lives; the ongoing influence of these institutions on behaviour is perhaps reflected by the fact that the last of these 'Asylums' was closed in Ireland in 1996 (Finnegan, 2001:242). This 'religious' response to social transgressions based on sex can be contrasted by the organisation of the Legion of Mary which is grounded in behaviour for girls and young women which is considered in concurrence with Catholic ideals. The Legion of Mary was established in Dublin, Ireland in 1921 (Grignion de Montfort, 2007:5) and is still in existence today. Members meet to pray and worship Mary having first made vows which relate directly to social behaviours including chastity before marriage. While attendance at meetings for school girls was and remains 'extra curricular', in the early days of the Legion for most girls to meet social expectations it would not have been exactly 'optional' (*pers.com*. J. Rothwell, Waterford County Council Archives). As Hill (2003: 118) notes, organisations including the Legion of Mary had branches 'established in most small towns and villages. The training of girls and young women in Christian principals was viewed as particularly important...'. Hill also notes how one member of the Legion from Cork recalled that whilst she was working in England, members of the Legion of Mary would visit her lodgings once a month to 'keep an eye on her' (*ibid*: 119). Religious expectations relating to sex and gender therefore had a considerable impact on behaviour.

One of the most clearly evident examples of the religious relationship with sex and gender is in churches, monastic institutions and the general and religious education which these institutions until recently almost exclusively supplied for the majority of the population. This context contains an emphasis on segregation by sex of both role and often physical location, for example the all-male priesthood, separate nunneries and monasteries for female and male monastic communities and single-sex educational establishments. Explicit religious morality and values which give structure to the wider society, are reflected in the behaviours of individuals and communities, whether within or outside of these boundaries. While individual responses to these boundaries undoubtedly



vary across time, context and circumstance, patterns of social behaviour can be identified. Examples of these behaviours include the use of disused Church burial grounds, *cillini*, up until the 1960s for the burial of un-baptised children (Finlay, 2000:408). As well as the behavioural and physical expression of religious transgression that this represents, the mortuary context also contains expressions of the post-mortem exultation of individuals considered to have great religious piety or vision. The grave of Little Nellie of Holy God (Nellie Organ 1903-1908) whose 'astonishing' spiritual development and constant talking to 'Holy God' were considered to be expressions of 'unusual sanctity' became a shrine and a memorial to her was unveiled in 1984 on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception at Ballybricken Church by Bishop Russell (Waterford County Museum, 2008). Church graveyards as places with social significance for the living and their relationship with the dead remain a distinctive aspect of Ireland's religious context as the annual Blessing of the Graves which occurs at every Catholic Church around the country attests.

The cohesive nature of religious practice within communities is also therefore of relevance. Religious traditions and practices associated with different points in the life-cycle imbue material objects, constructions and landscapes with religious meaning (here, the term 'material objects' may also be applied to the physical remains of humans as well as any grave offerings associated with them). The ethnographer Lawrence J. Taylor (1989:175) notes of Ireland's relationship with death:

...death seems to enjoy an almost casual pre-eminence there as both possible and actual event, and the rural wake is still the quintessential expression of communal values and relations. However, there is also the more patently religious side of Irish death...After all, what other religion reminds believers more often of their God's, and their own, passing.

While the Christian tradition for burials or cremations is often considered to be simple and without formal 'grave goods', in the modern context offerings of floral arrangements, personal objects of importance to either the deceased or mourners such as teddy-bears, wedding-rings, photographs, letters or poems are sometimes made. Mortuary practices and the treatment of the dead within the bounds of the Christian context in Ireland are centred around respect for and remembrance of the dead. Mortuary treatment, funeral rites such as dressing by an undertaker, waking, the position and form of burial, and expressions of remembrance such as memorial structures and acts of prayer or offerings such as flowers at a tended grave, are all given social importance and meaning. Communities are encouraged to fulfil these religious and social expectations not only through general encouragement, but through specific structures such as the right to take periods of compassionate leave from work to attend the wake *and* funeral of people outside of immediate family. Death notices are read out daily on local radio stations so that people can find out who in the community has died and decide whether they need to attend the funeral. As Taylor (1989:175) records, one of his ethnographic informants comments that listening to *Radio na Gaeltachta* means that he can '...hear when someone dies in another parish in time to make it to the wake'.

While death is only one context of religious practice and activity, and despite Cooney's (1995, after Aries 1981) suggestion that 'Increasingly in modern societies death is seen as something to be tamed, denied or made invisible...we tend to avoid rather than confront the difficulties raised by death', in Ireland, death and the mortuary context is ever present and highly visible within communities. Cemeteries and graveyards in Ireland are tended by relatives of the deceased, the Church and related local officials and the *Seirbhis Oidhreachta* (Heritage Service); continuing traditions of viewing the dead in open caskets at wakes and the not uncommon site of funeral processions with long trails of mourners following the hearse slowly down the street are all examples of the visibility of death in daily life in Ireland. It would seem curious to suggest



as Cooney does (*ibid*) that Ireland's population do not have a very clear engagement with death as an ordinary part of social and religious life.

This brief outline of Ireland's current religious and political contexts was intended simply to highlight their effect on its culture and people.

However it also raises the issue of how these two spheres impact on the current interpretation of Ireland's past by archaeologists. In Ireland, the role of the past in maintaining religious traditions is perhaps less well documented than its use and manipulation for political means. These contexts, while relatively widely considered within the discipline of history, were until very recently, rarely in evidence within archaeological discourses and interpretations of society in Ireland's past.

### 3.2 The Institutional Context

Chinese anthropologists themselves stress the importance of history in their vision of anthropology, but history is also important in their *version* of anthropology. (Guldin, 1994)

It may seem strange to begin a section on the disciplinary context of archaeology in Ireland with a quote about Chinese anthropologists! First, in explanation, it should be noted that Gulden uses the term anthropology to describe all of the 'anthropological sciences' which includes archaeology. The quote is used here to point to the way archaeologists in Ireland, although having a good grasp of the way that the history of their discipline informs the way they see *archaeology* today, appear to have a way to go before the cause and effect of their historical context on their *version* of archaeology is perhaps fully accepted by the discipline and recognised in the literature. This section offers a basic introduction to the disciplinary context of the participants who took part in this research. As such, it touches on the historical development as well as present-day circumstances of Irish archaeology. A more detailed summary of the history and development of the discipline in Ireland may be found in

Cooney's (1995) excellent overview paper *Theory and Practice in Irish Archaeology*.

The development of Irish archaeology as a discipline is considered as formally beginning with the National Monuments Act of 1930 (Cooney, 1995:276). However some of its roots remain in the considerably less laudable 'antiquarian pursuits' which were:

...almost exclusively the perquisite of the [English] Ascendancy, many of whom were concerned to prove that civilised life and its manifestations were confined to the period of English occupation...The 1833 Historical Commission in Ireland had the responsibility of 'describing the economic conditions and resources as well as the antiquities of the country'. It was abolished in 1839...one suspects, because of its revelations, not so much of the wealth of its monuments as of the conditions of life among the peasantry. (Estyn Evans, 1966:2-3),

Along with the revision and development of the National Museum of Ireland's Irish Antiquities division by the German archaeologist Adolf Mahr, the early 1930s also saw Ireland's earliest excavations using a scientific approach and with governmental support (Cooney, 1995:267). Cooney (*ibid*:268) suggest that the links which influential early Irish archaeologists such as Ó Ríordáin and Raferty had with German archaeology were 'an important factor influencing the strength of the empirical tradition ...which continue[s] to the present day'. The next forty years of Irish archaeology appear to have continued along similar empirical, research based lines within the country's Universities and Museums (*ibid*), with professional archaeological excavations during this period coming under the remit of the Commissioners of Public Works (Oibre, 1973:7). The next period of development in Ireland's archaeological context in the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s was the result of



the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI) and a change in Planning legislation. The Archaeological Survey of Ireland started in 1963 with one archaeologist, under the auspices of the National Monuments Section of the Office of Public Works (OPW) and gradually developed to the distinct unit it is today with the additional establishment of the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR). The aim of the ASI was and remains with the view to preservation and protection:

...the scientific recording of the archaeological content of each monument...The method of the Survey is to locate, examine, classify and record the nature and extent of all monuments from prehistoric times onwards.  
(Oibre, 1973:7)

In a personal communication with Paul Walsh, the current Senior Archaeologist at the Archaeological Survey of Ireland he summarised the background to the development of the Survey (paraphrased following): In 1983, on the advice of the Commissioners, the Minister for Finance approved a radical change of policy for ASI. The effects were a full detailed survey of monuments was to cease with the exception of county Louth which was well advanced...a rapid reconnaissance survey was to be undertaken and a Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) was to be produced for each county and it was intended to have a limited distribution for use by planners in local authorities etc. One of the principal reasons given for the change in policy was 'that the essential purpose of the National Survey, that is the protection of monuments, was not being achieved mainly due to lack of publication'. In order to speed up the preparation of the SMR and inventories it was decided to contract the universities of Cork and Galway in 1982 to undertake preliminary surveys of their respective counties. In addition the OPW contracted two archaeologists to compile SMRs for the sixteen counties not being worked on by the in-house ASI staff. This led to the establishment of the SMR Office in 1985. With the passing of the amendment to the National Monuments Act in 1994 a sub-set of the SMRs were reissued as [Records

of Monuments and Places] RMPs. The RMPs were issued to the public under regulations (S.I. 341 of 1994) between 1995 and 1998. It is important to note that while the RMP was established under the National Monuments Act (1930-2004) the primary protection of the monuments listed therein is under the Planning Act 2000 (end of *pers com.*).

From the point of view of preservation and protection, legislation and planning requirements for archaeological assessment or excavation prior to the granting of planning permission has played a considerable role in the development of archaeology in Ireland. While these changes somewhat increased the number of and funding for archaeological excavations and work, the mode of analysing, reporting and interpreting archaeological sites remained overwhelmingly empirical and largely descriptive - a reflection of its disciplinary history. As Eogan's report which 'describes the excavation of certain features, both primary and secondary, on the west-side of the area' (1974:13) of the nationally important excavation of the passage graves at Knowth in County Meath illustrates, at great length:

Up to and including 1972 twenty inhumation burials were discovered... None was protected in any way. Burials 1,3, 6 and 20 were in shallow pits that were dug into the subsoil. Nos. 7 and 8 were found in chambers, and Nos. 14 and 15 in the passages of megalithic tombs. Strictly speaking, some of the remains do not constitute formal burials; for instance, Nos. 17 and 19 consist of only skulls, while Nos. 7, 8, 14 and 15 were in a very fragmentary condition and appear not to have been in their original position. No 16 had been damaged in the course of excavation. The remaining burials were of complete skeletons. In No. 6 the skull was a short distance away from the rest of the skeleton, suggesting that the skull had been buried apart from the body. The evidence available suggests that the bodies in Nos. 10 and



11 had been decapitated before burial. The bodies in Burials 1-4, 9-13, 18 and 20 were in a flexed or slightly crouched position. Nos. 5-6 were in an extended position, although in No. 6 the spinal column was arched.

This state of the discipline has remained relatively constant until relatively recent changes, driven partly by the influence on professional practice of Ireland's economic development over the past 15 years. This economic shift has resulted in infrastructural development requiring 'a massive increase in archaeological excavation in adherence with planning processes' (Power, 2000:197). Even more recently however, a theoretical shift within the discipline has begun to change the traditional identity of Irish archaeology.

### **3.3 The Intellectual Context**

As James, (1999:44) notes, theory relates to wider cultural trends, political attitudes and the 'ideologically related assumptions about what constitutes 'facts', and which facts are significant and what they mean...'. Yet while Cooney (1995:264-267) and others (O'Donnabhain, 2000; O'Keefe, 2003) suggest that Irish archaeology has been theoretically undeveloped it would appear that this theoretical 'backwardness' is actually referring to theoretical uni-linearity, framed within the empirical tradition. However it seems that even this has not consistently been the case for at least the last 15 years, as this quote from Shee Twohig and Ronayne's (1993:156) introduction to their edited volume suggests:

...we discussed the question of subjectivity and biases of various kinds and how an awareness of inherent biases lends a new maturity to our approach to archaeological research. Many of these realisations have been emerging gradually since the early 1980s, but collected here [in the volume] for the first time they represent a long overdue recognition of the complexities

of using the archaeological record and demonstrate new developments in Irish archaeological research.

While this type of theoretically informed approach may not have been, nor yet be common, it is certainly not purely 'on the fringe', but part of the archaeological mainstream. Yet within this newly emergent theoretical development towards what are effectively more 'postprocessual' (i.e. postmodern) ideas '[w]ith the exception of a limited amount of debate on particular issues however, Irish archaeologists have shown little or no desire to engage in discussion about the influence of politics or nationalism on their work' (Cooney, 1995:266). Certainly, Ó'Donnabháin's (2000:192-194) work on the Celt in the archaeology of later prehistoric Ireland is part of the exception:

Stripping away the parts of a familiar Celtic past would leave us with many casualties and the appalling vista of the unfamiliar. At a broader level, it is easier to take an empirical approach to archaeologically generated data than to tackle a key element of Irish identity construction.

James (1999) raises the question of what is 'real' or 'original' in our interpretation of the past, and whether it matters or not that a 'Celtic' people and culture ever existed. The construction of an identity both cultural and political which takes the Celt as a strong defining characteristic as noted in the previous discussion of Irish nationalism, is in itself a worry which is entirely imagined. It is the fear of what may *not* exist if this stable ground is 'stripped' away that is the real concern. Perhaps if it is recognised that in the present, the only real 'matter' is how 'Celticism' is used to construct something which is in itself always shifting and illusive. The fear may become less relevant and a clearer understanding of the past peoples of Ireland may appear in its stead if this line of theoretical inquiry develops further.



The effect of political, cultural and disciplinary change in Ireland have therefore had an impact on the development of its archaeology as a discipline and as a professional practice. Yet while the context and historical circumstances of the development of the discipline in Ireland have prescribed this situation, it is most certainly not restricted to Irish archaeology or archaeologists. The current context of the discipline more widely in Anglo-American archaeology is one in which a self-awareness is beginning to develop as the cross-disciplinary volume edited by Chris Scarre and Geoffrey Scarre *The Ethics of Archaeology: Philosophical Perspectives on Archaeological Practice* (2006) indicates. Irish archaeology too, reflects this position. This currently emergent change can be seen reflected by publications such as *Lost and Found: Discovering Ireland's Past* (2003). However it appears that a reflexive approach remains associated with a postprocessual theoretical position which itself still faces challenges and critique for its inability to apply reflexivity in archaeological practice. It is reasonable to say that Irish archaeology along with British and American archaeologies has yet to fully address this as an issue and move beyond purely theoretical, relativist concerns. In Irish archaeology the 'tensions between 'scientific' objectivity and our own subjectivity are only just beginning to be recognised' (Twohig and Ronayne, 1993:1). However, although the concept of 'present perception' becomes evident in Ireland's archaeological literature from the early 1990s, fifteen years on, it appears to remain limited more widely in the discipline and profession as a whole. Twohig and Ronayne (*ibid*) use the poem *The Herbalist* by Roz Cowman (1990) to suggest that non-archaeologists can remind archaeologists of 'the essentially personal nature of their interest in the past'. They ask 'Can we ever be truly objective about the past?' (*ibid*) noting (after Shanks, 1992) that recent archaeological theory has highlighted the essentially subjective nature of interpretations, coloured by present social and political contexts.

Reflexivity in Irish archaeology is therefore gradually developing within a disciplinary tradition and professional context which retains a strongly empirical practice. Tadhg O’Keeffe’s ‘Discovering Versailles in the smallness of my own experience’ (2003) is a good example of this, bringing the personal/subjective clearly into focus. His discussion of what drew him towards archaeology is a personal reflection on his ‘discovery’ of Ballymoon Castle in Carlow as a child and what this means to him. As he comments at the end of his chapter ‘There are of course, many archaeologists who don’t like this ‘theoretical turn’ – they see it as faddish, and they claim it is irrelevant to the real business of reconstructing the past’ (*ibid*:224). While O’Keeffe goes on to say that there is room for all in the polar-opposites of ‘hard-line theoreticians’ and the ‘stop messing about with this “post-structuralism and hermeneutic stuff” brigade’ and everyone in between, he is clear that ‘we must accept that reconstructing the past is not an act of common sense. We must accept also that we, as archaeologists, are part of the stories that we tell about the past, precisely because our visions of the past are constructed out of the smallness of our own experiences’ (*ibid*). This view is echoed by Coles (2000:230) who suggests:

The big picture, if not global archaeology, then all-Ireland archaeology, must not overwhelm and outweigh the small intimate scenes that enliven our comprehension of the past. Small is certainly beautiful; we need smallness to refine the bigness that otherwise will mask the details of life. Of course, we need both viewpoints, but most of us seek to model behavioural patterns on a maxi-scale.

However despite the usual hallmarks of postprocessual/postmodern archaeology, relativism, multi-vocality and ‘story-telling’ there appears to be a somewhat different, peculiarly Irish way of approaching the current theoretical shift which comes across in the publications. While difficult to ‘put one’s finger on’, there seems to be something grounded in the



cultural context of Ireland's current and historical relationship with folklore and storytelling that grounds its emerging theoretical reflexivity in the practical and everyday. This reflects another of the contexts within which cases in this research are understood, that of the 'life history' and 'life story' contained in narratives.

'Life histories' is a term that has long been in use in sociology, psychology and anthropology to describe the real contexts, situations and experiences of an individual which frame the 'life-story' that is told. A life history is therefore a string of contexts and actions linked together by a particular individual and which is understood and communicated by them in their own subjective way. In the context of an interview interaction, the researcher's understanding of the participant's life history is necessarily limited to what the participant tells them combined with any extra-interview information that may be available to them. In this research, the participants involved each offer their own form of their 'life history context' within the narrative of their interview. The extent of these life history contexts varies depending on the way that the participant responds to the situation and the questions being asked by the researcher.

This context relates to the narrative offered by the participant as their lived experience, what is sometimes called the 'lived-life' narrative within an interview communication (Wengraf, 2001:232). This aspect of the interview narrative may or may not be given in chronological order, and will come out at various points through the progress of the interview. However, as Wengraf notes (*ibid*), while the interview participant sees the narrative they are telling as 'objective' in that it is they who are generating what is said about their life and experiences, '*the researcher as observer can look at the presentation and process of telling the story and thus discover the structure of its construction [original italics]*'. During the analysis phase therefore this information is pieced together to show the historical points of the participants' life as told, as well as the told narrative and self-presentation of ideas, conceptualisations and experiences. Drawing on its roots in sociology and psychology, much of

the view of life histories is obviously grounded in the theoretical probability of the participant telling the researcher 'the truth' - in other words, not *purposely* telling what they believe to be a falsehood. This assumption relies on the research context as well as the researcher's knowledge and experience of interviewing a variety of people. In the context of this research and with the participant population involved the probability of participants attempting to deceive the researcher about their life history is limited. However they may choose not to expose certain information, and it is this personal containment that the researcher may pick up on through verbal and non-verbal cues.

The working assumption that the participant is telling 'the truth' should however not be confused with a variation in perception of events. A participant is unlikely to have a mis-perception that they *received* a particular postgraduate degree for instance. However the way a participant narrated what led them to a particular topic of interest for the research for their degree (generally in this context relating to human remains or mortuary archaeology) may vary somewhat over time as memories are constituted within their present personal context and should not be read 'as straightforward descriptions of social experience' (Mason, 2002:237). This aspect represents the narrative 'told story', which is specifically constituted within the context of the interview. Its real value to the interview analysis is that it gives insights into the perceptions of the participant about the topic under discussion, in other words, how they understand and make sense of the issues being discussed. Life histories generated from interview data are therefore made up of a combination of what has happened in an individual's life and how this is interpreted within the bounds of the interview interaction. It is however, important to recognise that the participants interviewed for this research, whilst all experiencing differences based on personal circumstances, were all raised and educated in an Irish cultural context and were therefore influenced in some way by it. The various contexts of the cases has been explored above, however another important context in any reflexive research, is that of the researcher themselves, and it is to this that we now turn.



### 3.4 The Reflexive Researcher Context

The overarching context of this research, as with any research undertaking, is a personal one – that of the researcher herself. This section is not intended as an ‘intellectual autobiography’ in the mode of a Social Sciences approach; through reflective writing it does however aim to provide information which may be relevant to the way the data for this thesis is interpreted. Stating this information is part of the reflexive research process that has been undertaken throughout, it is made available here as a kind of reflective ‘photograph album’ to remind the reader of who it is *doing* the research and interpretation and to give insights into how this may affect the interpretations made. The point previously noted that who we are acts as a filter in our research is highlighted by LeCompte (1998:204) when she comments that she has ‘...discovered that who one *is* serves as a screen for what one does as a researcher...’. However what LeCompte does not suggest is that awareness and active recognition of this filter may help us to reduce the impact of its effect. Either way, the reader may decide for themselves the level of impact that the researcher’s personal ‘life history’ and context has on the collection, analysis and interpretation of the research presented in this thesis. The researcher offers what is in her mind at this moment and as an outcome of her investigations for this research. This section is a record of the personal reflections of the researcher in regard to her position at the time of completing the research cycle. It is presented as a first person narrative and addresses the researcher’s theoretical development and the linkages between her personal history and the research approach and sequence.

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My interest in the interpretation of sex and gender in an archaeological context dates back to my time as an undergraduate. This interest was generated out of a question I was unable to resolve - why archaeologists were currently defining and interpreting gender as ‘social’ and sex as ‘biological’ as if there were no relationship between the two. As an

undergraduate I read Archaeology and Anthropology, which was split into three subjects in my degree course – Social Anthropology, Biological Anthropology and Archaeology. This approach helped me to see humanity and the study of its present and its past from different perspectives. I was looking at the societies and cultures we create; our ideas, beliefs and actions, our material human form from genetics to bones and flesh, and part of that involved gender and sex. Different expressions of gender in different societies and at different times, and cultural ideas about biology as well as the nature of biological matter were all there, but their relationship in archaeological interpretation was not clear. A question arose for me about the relationship between biology and society and it came together in terms of archaeology and the way we *interpret* the past. It was about what it is to be human, and how we perceive that today when we look into the past to see where it is we have come from. This point has been central to me as an archaeologist – my research interest in this area stems from the idea that how we understand and relate to the past helps us understand ourselves today.

In the late 1990s my own early dissertation investigations into questions of sex and gender took me to China to interview Chinese archaeologists about how they interpreted gender from human remains. I made a case study of the royal tomb of a Shang Dynasty (Proto-Historic Bronze Age) Queen Consort, Fù Hǎo 婦好, who was recorded as having the official role of Military General. The oracle bone records from the time record her as having led vast hordes of soldiers in numerous military campaigns, including having done so while pregnant; her husband, the Shang King back at the capital casting the oracle divinations to find out whether she would give birth to a boy or a girl! With such a remarkable example of a gender structure different to what we typically conceive of in ‘Western’ archaeology, I was intrigued to find out how the historical knowledge of this woman related to her human remains and burial context. I wanted to find out why in the West we would have considered this a gender role/sex ‘mismatch’ and whether if we simply looked at her human remains and burial context without the proto-historical evidence from the oracle bones,



could we ever have conceived of the gender roles that existed in this context? I was also interested in how this evidence was interpreted in China, a culture at a great distance from my own, with a history that illuminated different perceptions of society in the past. My findings were unexpected, and led me to a greater interest into how our own context as archaeologists affects how we relate to and interpret the data at obvious as well as more subtle levels. Sex and gender became points of reference to base much broader questions on.

My use of the interviewing approach based on anthropological and qualitative methodologies from the social sciences therefore probably originates in my general experience as an undergraduate and in China. Putting aside my theoretical reasoning, I chose a semi-structured depth interviewing methodology for this research because it seemed clear to me from my experiences that if you ask people very directly about what they believe, you are more likely to hear what they think is the '*right answer*' to the question grounded in ideas and concepts, and not a reflection of their actual experience. In addition to this, in a structured interview or questionnaire where you ask '*do you do x, do you do y, do you do z*', you limit the response to what *your own* ideas are and do not open up possibilities for a response from another perspective. In essence, you direct the answers. The semi-structured, reflexive approach opens up my own perceptions to questioning by listening more deeply to what others' perceptions are. I am not going to pretend that I could see this quite so clearly when I started the research, it has developed from my real interest in the question and as a result of my research practice and experiences. My real awareness and understanding of the reflexive cycle has been generated through the process, not simply through a decision at early stages to be 'reflective'. This is also a part of my interest in the balance and relationship between theory and practice. The fact that I trained as an archaeologist in the field *prior* to studying the subject at university was a situation which came about through unexpected personal circumstances and my drive to be involved with archaeology, rather than as a conscious career route. Although I had had an interest in gender sparked initially by

the late 80s early 90s feminist movement, I always considered that what I understood by the term 'feminism' was not what most people understood it to be. It took me a number of years and a great deal of furrowed brow reading, thinking and experiences to come to terms with the fact that what I meant by it, wasn't Feminism. I had an interest in all people equally, not prioritising one 'sex' or 'gender' and I simply wanted to be able to ask questions about how people related to each other in the past.

I approached this in a very practical way. After working as a field archaeologist I went to university specifically selecting a course which had a strong theory focus and where there was not a large compulsory practice element. I had been in the field and now I wanted to explore other more conceptual aspects. Yet despite choosing a theory strong course, through the whole period of my study I always remained grounded in and informed by practice. I also came rapidly to feel it was important to 'keep my hand in' by excavating and doing archaeological survey during the holidays. There is not a separation between theory and practice in the way I conceive of archaeology; my point of reference has always been that there is no difference, that they are part of one whole. When theorising, I keep practice in mind; when I am in the field I contemplate theoretical issues to do with the past and the material remains. It is very likely that this is no different from any archaeologist in reality, but whether it is recognised and reflected in their work is perhaps another matter.

Being self-aware, recognising for yourself what is happening through reflection, and communicating the outcomes appropriately is one of the big challenges of using reflective or reflexive practice in an academic context. The association of this method for many with postmodern nepotism is not the most inspiring or encouraging to the reflexive researcher! My own reluctance to put onto paper certain aspects of my personal context is a true reflection of this. It was only assuaged by my being made to feel guilty by an Irish friend, who after reading a chapter of my thesis pointed out it was rather rich to be suggesting that the religious



context in which my research participants lived impacted on their understandings of sex, gender and death, without mentioning my own. So, after reflection (*sic*) I am writing about myself as a practicing Buddhist, for whom daily life involves ritual and meditation. This includes meditations on themes such as the death and decay of the human form, the nature of material form, and non-separation. Perhaps having been taught to meditate on mantras from the age of five does give a context to my life which affects my practice as an archaeologist and researcher; without doubt my faith in form as emptiness and emptiness as form, and a very real understanding of reincarnation, does. It is up to the reader to make their own minds up as to what this means for the research presented here. To me it is just an ordinary part of getting on with life and work.

Doing my PhD part-time as well as working in various jobs including academic research, administration, and teaching undergraduates I became increasingly involved in contexts which required me to find out about things by listening to people talking about themselves, their experience, their practice and their ideas. My personal interest in teaching pedagogies – what we learn and the way we learn – lead me down a particular professional academic route using social science qualitative methodologies, and in particular, interviewing. I was most drawn to semi-structured interview as it provided the type of information that suited the questions I was asking in a theoretically grounded way. However, this was an easy direction to take, as it was already something that I felt to be a natural and direct way of finding out about what people thought, encouraged by my early experience of going to China and talking to archaeologists. Being able to capture in that moment what somebody's ideas and meanings are, not from words they've polished and *presented* to the world, but just from their instant, in that moment response to a question, seemed to me to give much more valuable information for addressing my own research questions.

And so, within my professional life as an academic researcher I remained in that vein of qualitative interviewing drawing on anthropological methods, action research approaches, and reflexive practice. I then became particularly interested in the idea of Gestalt in interviewing, and the Gestalt reflective cycle, because it seemed to give further insight into a process that I had become aware was happening. So my development as an interviewer became a reflection of my conceptual understanding of what was actually *going on* in practice. Each interview is different, each conversation is different, each individual is different...but underneath it all there's a sort of a process that seems to be something to do with being human, and the way we communicate, learn and understand ourselves and our past. Reflexivity seemed to be one of the best methods for me to understand what people were saying about the topics that I am interested in. It became increasingly clear to me that you need to have some kind of self awareness of what your perceptions *are*, not what you think is happening; how your beliefs and understandings and situation inform this as well as how they can change. To be able to see that as part of a process of developing a deeper understanding of the research question I was asking was important. This may partly be a result of the crossover from bringing the two together, seeing how they are related even though they deal with very different contexts, has been enlightening. I became increasingly intrigued by the information I was gathering for this research about what it was that made people *struggle* so much to be able to communicate how they related sex and gender together. However it is not simply about people being unable to articulate how they understand the relationship –but about the difficulty of relating this to their practice that has been most fascinating to me.

During the interview cycle for this research I have been aware that while I have lived and worked as an archaeologist in Ireland, for the majority of my adult life I have lived in England. I was born in Australia and left there as a young adult sixteen years ago to move to England, where the majority of my family and relatives live. Despite not being born in England, I would not consider myself as an 'outsider' as my cultural



attitudes and behaviours, along with my accent, have changed over the years. But it *does* make a difference to the way I perceive Ireland's past as well as its present context, and to varying degrees it also makes a difference to the way the research participants appeared to perceived me. As a very general example, I have lived in England for fifteen years and would consider myself more a 'Northerner' rather than 'Australian' or 'English'. While sometimes in the UK people pick up very quickly on the slight Australian twang in my accent, in general when people meet me, they assume I am English. My experience in Ireland is that this is even more obvious - I am assumed to come from the UK. Being perceived of as an Australian researching aspects of Ireland's past and interviewing people with reference to culture is very different from being perceived of as an English person doing the same thing, for obvious historical reasons. During the research I noted that the interviews where participants realised before-hand that I had an Antipodean aspect to my accent appeared to be less defensive towards my position than those that did not. In the case of the interview with B, I was particularly conscious of this, indeed following the interview when I happened to mention my Australian background, there appeared to be a subtle shift in her attitude towards me. It is however hard to say with complete certainty that this is what *was* happening as other factors, such as general interview anxiety, may also have been at play.

In the last phases of the analysis and interpretation I have become increasingly conscious of the development of a deeper understanding of how my own personal context, experience and culture relate to the research. There is no doubt that the reflexive process I have undertaken has strongly encouraged this. One of the biggest challenges has been the question of how to communicate this in the thesis without creating uninformative generalities or misunderstandings. In writing this thesis, it has become clear that sharing the meaning of the research does not happen in the way you might think it does.

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## Chapter 4. Case A

### 4.1 Context

A is an academic archaeologist specialising in osteoarchaeology. His practice is primarily within a University context teaching undergraduates, supervising postgraduates and carrying out his own research. He has also acted as an external consultant in forensic osteology outside of Ireland. The interview is arranged to be held in A's office, however at A's suggestion it is agreed to move to a café instead. Outside, it is raining heavily and neither the researcher nor the participant have an umbrella but they walk to a trendy café ten minutes away that both parties know and like. The café is empty; however once settled at a table and about to order drinks and start the interview, a member of staff begins vacuuming and it becomes clear that recording won't be possible. The researcher asks the waitress if the vacuuming can be done later and explains about recording a research interview. The waitress says unfortunately it must be done then before the lunch crowd arrive and so they leave, agreeing to return to A's office again.

On the way back to the University the researcher and participant are now both getting quite wet from the rain. Both remain positive and A asks the Researcher about the background to her research and perspectives. The Researcher deflects the questions as much as possible so as to reduce the possibility of her responses biasing the interview, however to avoid being impolite she comments briefly about her interest in the relationship between 'theory and practice' and gives a small amount of information about why she went to study at York with her supervisor.

Both settle down for the interview once again, this time in A's office which is large and full of papers. Small piles of papers are everywhere, on the desk and on the floor, some appear to have been there a long time as they are covered in dust. One pile on the floor has the print of a shoe-



sole on it and others have the dried leaves, from a dead pot-plant on the filing cabinet above, covering them. A sits in the chair at his desk, the Researcher sits at the end corner in another chair facing each other with the desk to one side. The walls opposite the desk have floor to ceiling shelving which is jam-packed with storage boxes for bones. A long central worktable is also covered with bone boxes with various bones laid out. The bookshelf lining the wall beside A's desk has many books, both old and new on it. There are a number of anthropomorphic figurines and statues of faces in the office.

Towards the end of the interview, the digital recorder stops, and the Researcher having noticed this continues by taking more details notes with verbatim quotations rather than disturbing the flow of the interview at a critical point. Following the interview A insists on buying the Researcher lunch as the interview has carried on longer than expected because of the initial change of location. The rain has stopped and both go for lunch in a different, typical Irish café closer to the University. During lunch A speaks about an English archaeologist he knew and liked but who didn't understand that Irish archaeology was not the same as the archaeology of the British Isles. He then spoke further about his family's influence on his work, his experience as a young researcher in a non-western country and how this raised his awareness of politics. He also speaks about his more recent, personally moving experiences doing international forensic work.

A provides quite a bit of information about his personal context during the course of the interview, often dealing more with the context of events (such as education) rather than details about the events themselves. He begins by talking about his undergraduate studies undertaken in the late 1970s and early 80s in both archaeology and history, and notes that his interest in biological aspects of archaeology 'goes back 'til then':

And then I guess, in my, as a third year undergraduate I recognised that the kinda human element of the

environmental and biological side was um, underdeveloped and neglected, as it was basically on this side of the Atlantic in those days.

A's narrative is reflective, and he is clearly trying to address the question of how his personal interest in osteoarchaeology developed and progressed and the context for this rather than simply outlining details of his education and career which come across as of less relevance:

Um, so from there I um, at the end of my undergraduate training I spent a term studying in ah, [university] which is in [city name, USA], and met up with [archaeologists name] who later went on to edit [publication] and so on, and a bit like your *own*, biography, I then followed her, ah, I went to study with her. So I did a Master's here first of all, um, you know, basically compiling a bone report on [sample]. But I think for its time that was quite forward thinking, in that it, it tried to integrate the biological aspect with the kinda cultural in a way that wasn't particularly typical of, certainly in Irish archaeology in the early 1980s. Ah, subsequently I went to, I followed [archaeologists name] to the [university], and I did my PhD with her there, and then by accident really returned ah, to teach here. And, I suppose that that [city name, USA] experience broadened my perspectives and horizons quite considerably to...you know ah, I think I would have been very much in the kind of empirical, bone counting tradition, um, before that. Albeit now as I say, not to be too unfair, trying to you know, at least...like the..the...if you *look* at the kind of typical um, reporting of human remains in Ireland prior to the 1980s it's very much done on an anatomical model, um, you know kinda case history approach. No archaeological relevance at all, um, and my early experience at [university name, USA] had, I think, brought that in. Ah, and then the



[USA] experience, that was kind of in the later 80s, early 90s and you know, we were just moving from the kind of processual kind of things to post-processual, and osteoarchaeology was very much caught in a...very ambiguous *place* at that time. Um...so...I think things like looking at say, mortuary treatments other than those surrounding the skeleton and the body, um, came onto the horizon at that stage...

As is outlined in the above narrative extract, A did an MA in Ireland on an osteological topic, followed by a PhD in the USA, which it is clear he considers to have been influential in the development of his approach to the subject. A's own sense of being in an 'ambiguous place', between a scientific, empirical tradition and a more postprocessual, contextual approach comes across strongly in the narrative about his education and his current teaching practice. He notes that his teaching is 'split...about half and half' between 'straightforward' osteoarchaeology and approaches which deal more with aspects of 'the life course...and mortuary archaeology'.

Following this, A comments that early on in his career he 'very much liked fieldwork' and that his career had a 'strong kind of field element'. This may be compared with the comment that he has 'More recently...tended to retreat to the laboratory rather than...to excavate'. The context of this 'tendency' is given as being that he has a large backlog of material to work through and wishes to focus on this before generating more material. A talks about the influence of both his department and his family on his career direction and development and discusses both directly and indirectly, the personal importance of his teaching practice. In regard to his department, he speaks about it currently going through a 'transition phase' as the demographic of the staff changes, and speaks about how his own position has 'evolved'. This is followed by A talking about how he considers his professional identity:

A: ...I have difficulty with what I label myself, because, in the US I was in the department of Anthropology, and even within that I was in a kind of *minority* group in Physical Anthropology, um, so whether I'm an archaeologist or an anthropologist or a bioarchaeologist, I'm not quite sure...

R: [laughs]

A: I know, I know my own, my first love, if you like, was archaeology. And I, I always say...because there is this tendency I think, particularly around anything to do with environmental archaeology, that you become, the *specialist*, so you become pushed to one side. But I would see what I do as mainstream archaeology, to the...you know...to the...like I think it's ridiculous that somebody who studies something like Medieval *tiles*, um, you know, would see themselves as mainstream I, and somebody like me kind of, somewhere to the side [laughs] I would see myself as very much in the mainstream, so...

R: [laughs] 'Mm, uh huh.

A: I don't know if *labels* really help in that, so I, I actually just *tend* to use the word just archaeologist.

R: Right.

A: If I, if I can.

The narrative discussing his educational, career and subject context is lengthy. However once the interview moves into other themes, other influences on his career come out in the narrative, such as field-work he has carried out in other, non-western countries. What comes across from the narrative is that A feels almost drawn in two directions by his work, that there is a personal ambivalence regarding the context of his subject that has influenced the development of his career significantly. This



ambivalence appears to be a highly creative force in A's life history context.

## 4.2 Analysis

### *i) Interpreting human remains/mortuary context using sex and gender*

It takes a considerable time, more than half the interview, before the topic of sex and gender arises in the narrative. As A does not bring the topic up, it is instigated by the researcher in a question about the point at which A introduces ideas around gender and biological sex in his undergraduate teaching on osteology and the mortuary context. A's response is to explain how he introduces these topics at different stages in the undergraduate degree. It is clear that he considers there to be a relationship between sex and gender, which he refers to as an 'interface', however he does not expand to explain what he means by this. He goes on to note that it is in his second and third year teaching that he 'would distinguish between biological sex and gender' and in the osteology course clarify for his students that:

A: there is a distinction between sex and gender, um, and that you know, they shouldn't use the two interchangeably...

R: Mm hm.

A: ...which is, because people tend to do that until you point out that, you know, this is...not a good idea.

It seems therefore that A considers sex and gender to be separate although he does not articulate how he understands the 'interface' between them, but rather highlights the difference he perceives. When A is asked how he understands the terms 'sex' and 'gender' in archaeology, he subverts his personal response by telling how he would explain it to his students and through speaking about his ex-colleague:

R: Would...would you be able to um, maybe tell me a bit about how you understand the terms sex and gender in archaeology?

A: Sure...Well, what I would say to them is that, you know, biological *sex* is more of a *fixed* category, though I know that's kind of contestable...actually, let me put it this way, the way I put it is that, and, and this isn't something that I think everybody would agree on, like I mentioned earlier that this course that I, ah, teach the...[mortuary archaeology course]...was developed in conjunction with a former colleague of mine who's now left, she's at...[institution name]. And when we put that course together, I think one of the interesting things was, our different perspectives...

R: Mm.

A: ...and the way in which we interacted, I think, brought across to the students that you know, it is ok, to have a difference of opinion...

R: Mm hm.

A: And [name] was the woman's name. [She/name]...I, I came from the perspective that you have...[short silence]...you know you have the kind of infinite variety of cultural behaviours, but that underlying those, there is a certain universality, and that is human biology. Which does not, you know with all the variability that's within that...

R: Mm hm, mm hm.

A: ...you know, not recognising that as something monolithic...



From this narrative it seems apparent that A considers biological sex as a universal, static state and gender as cultural and behavioural (although he does not use the term 'gender' directly). He therefore conceives of sex and gender as different entities, and once again, the relationship between the two is not addressed. However his comments regarding 'different perspectives' may indicate that he perceives the relationship to be direct, with the implied suggestion that his colleague considered sex *and* gender to be variable categories, without a direct relationship. Shortly afterwards, A stops short of saying what he himself means... 'I came from the perspective that you have...' which is followed by a short silence. The silence suggests the possibility that A is either uncertain of his own perspective, or perhaps that he is uncertain about asserting his personal view directly for fear of coming across as suggesting that his perspective is the 'right' one. The fact that once he has put forward his proviso about 'infinite variety he then goes on to say that biology is universal suggests the latter. The impact of this assertion is then diluted by noting the 'variability' within human biology, however this is not expanded on further and while the implication is that he is referring to sex, his meaning is unclear.

After stating that his conception of biological sex as not 'monolithic', A then goes on to comment on the non-skeletal physicality of sex by referring to the differences between male and female genitalia. As this is where the sound recoding ends, the remaining narrative relates to note-taking as described above. While proposing that there are two sexes, based on the differences between reproductive organs, A continues by questioning the idea of 'third gender'. It is not clear whether his meaning is the existence of a third 'sex' but uses the term 'gender' because of the commonly known concept of 'third gender' from gender theory. He expresses his uncertainty about the concept and then gives detail of how he himself would identify sex from human remains, referring to diagrams of standard bone traits for sexing skeletons. He puts forward his understanding that there are two sexes and that while the extent to which an individual's remains fits into either category is on a 'scale' based

between two extremes they will always fall into one or the other category. A then comments that all societies understand sex to be dichotomous and notes the relationship between them as being conceived of in a similar way to other Cartesian dualisms such as night/day. It is at this point that A appears to become slightly uncomfortable as he refers to 'intermediate sex' (a reflection back perhaps to his earlier comments on 'third gender') and his uncertainty about the existence of such a category. He again speaks about his ex-colleague who believed sex to be on a continuum. He reiterates that it was useful to have her views combined with his.

Towards the end of the interview, A makes reference to the material he has been working on and discusses his analysis by looking at various traits to indicate sex. He then comments for the first time that he is uncertain about the relationship between sex and gender. Following this, A discusses one of his PhD students who is re-evaluating a collection of bone that A has himself analysed and interpreted as being all male. The notes on the narrative suggest A's sense of personal relief that his (female) PhD student also sexed the skeletons (including, unusually, the child remains that A did not sex\*) as being male. A then says that he didn't want to make any 'gender assumptions' in his interpretation on the basis of this analysis because he didn't want to place his views of 'male domination' onto the past. A comments that he is 'worried' following his student's study, and when asked why says that he has concerns that the male privilege he sees currently in society has existed all along. He relates this to fears that there may have been extreme views and actions relating to sex and gender in the past, like those of the Taliban today. This issue of domination directs the narrative to the issue of the interpretation of gender in relation to race. A uses the example of a colleague who conceives of himself as 'Celtic' which he (the colleague) equates with being 'artistic'. A relates this to the interpretation of the remains of a Scandinavian princess which have been studied with

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\* Skeletal remains of immature humans are generally not sexed by osteoarchaeologists as it is recognised that sex traits are not expressed or identifiable from bones prior to puberty.



reference to cultural identity, and raises his concerns about the 'deep racism' inherent in the cultural opposition of Ireland being associated with the 'arts' and 'femaleness' in contrast to the Germanic/Saxon 'scientific', 'solid, erect' male qualities. It is apparent that there is some depth of feeling in regard to this subject as A speaks about the political nature of this ideology and describes those who accept this stereotype as 'colluding, unhealthy and immoral'. This narrative strand seems to reflect A's concerns around gender/sex imbalances in society, and would appear to reiterate his strongly dichotomous conceptual framework of cultural gender and its direct relationship to biology including sex, as well as 'race'.

### **Reflection**

I am uncertain why it takes A so long to get around to discussing sex and gender in the interview. While I am aware that as this is my first interview and I wanted to enable A to develop his themes gradually, my introduction of the topic feels somewhat abrupt and unskilful. At the time I had the sense that A was aware of me as a young, female researcher during the interview and I was conscious of the subtle tension that this seemed to cause at certain points. This comes across to me again during the analysis and may suggest a reason for his initial hesitancy to talk about his perceptions of sex and gender, but rather develop his theme of himself as a teacher. I am highly aware while doing the analysis, of the loss of detail as a result of the recording stopping towards the end of the interview. While my detailed field notes and post-interview notes provide good information, I recall aspects of the interview with interesting details that I was unable to capture using this method, and am conscious of the reduction in depth of interpretation that this elicits.

### **ii) *Reflexive process***

A's way of speaking about himself and his experiences tends to be reflective in nature. He maintains self-awareness at various points in the

narrative, in particular when he is speaking about his approach to osteoarchaeology. The way he contrasts between the purely osteological approach and the more clearly theoretical aspects of mortuary archaeology suggest that he has considered his role in osteoarchaeology as a process and as a practice in regard to archaeological interpretation. He also speaks about the development of courses in a similar way, considering them as longitudinal processes with possibilities for change:

A: ...so, one of the things that we try to do in that course is to somehow kind of balance theory *with* practice. Ah, and as I say, osteoarchaeology is in this very kind of ambiguous kind of position in the sense that um, it's kind of dismissed by some sides of the house, particularly the *more* theoretical, um, as being to kinda science-based, too maybe essentialist or whatever.

R: Mm hm.

A: Um, and, you know I feel that it is those of who are within the practice, it's, it's our job to kind of counter that and try and um...not necessarily show our relevance, cause that's...but, but, you know, to try and work through that, and so...and that is something I do with the students, I, I don't have any answers to that...

R: Mm.

A: ...but, you know I'd throw out, you know I'd say these are the problems, this is where we find ourselves. Um, and in their work, I try and encourage them to um, you know, even if they are later to go on and do lots of statistical manipulations or whatever, at the beginning I want them to kind of consider the *role* of their work within the kind of broader...um...*practice* of archaeology as it is at the moment.



The narrative suggests that A uses an enquiring approach to his teaching, not expecting specific answers but encouraging his students to reflect on context and recognising that this will impact on future work or research. This indicates not simply reflection taking place, but an engagement with the application and relevance of the process. A indicates through the narrative that he uses theoretical ideas to inform his practice. When he is asked about this, A takes time to contemplate before giving his response, which is formed as the question ‘Well...do I?’ before going on to discuss his role as a teacher and his pedagogic approaches. While it is clear that A is thinking about his ‘practice’ as teaching at this point, the narrative suggests that the researcher’s intention was to find out about his practice as osteologist (i.e. his research). A’s response remains informative however as it seems he is considering the theoretical aspects of archaeology as being *applied* in a more generic way, by encouraging people to think, ‘and make people think critically’. However it is evident that A is also thinking about the role of education more broadly, beyond his subject as he notes that he is speaking not only of his ‘primary role’ within the institution, but also the ‘role of this institution’.

A appears to be well aware of not only his role as a teacher, but also of the way he thinks about his research. His narrative critiquing the ‘concept of the Celt’ is revealing, considering the very central role of this particular concept in Ireland’s past and present identity. A’s research as well as his teaching in this area suggest a certain amount of inward reflection in relation to having an Irish/Celtic identity and the impact of this on interpretive understandings about the past through the country’s archaeology. The narrative suggests that A values this approach and applies internal reflection in his teaching practice in a very direct, challenging way:

A: ... I critique concepts of the Celt, and how that has, how archaeology has contributed to the kind of development of this notion of this particular group in the past and so on.

R: Mm hm.

A: Ah, and, and, the basic message that I would push, that I push in that course is that this is a kind of...essentially a kind of racist colonialist construct, that has, you know, contributed, that contributes in this modern day and age, to the perpetuation of racism and colonialism and so on. Um, so, you know, it's about kind of picking apart elements of the identity of most of the kids in the class.

R: Mm hm.

A: Um, and just to kind of push them, like I, I see the job well done if I have pushed them into thinking beyond the kind of boxes within which they currently think.

When asked if this sort of approach had come from his experiences in Ireland and whether it is common there, he is confident in his reply. His narrative suggests that he does not consider reflexivity to be as a result of his experience as an 'Irish archaeologist' but of his personal, family context. The depth of A's self reflection comes across throughout the narrative and when considering each of the main themes he addresses. The direct statements and implied suggestions about the strongly empirical and theoretically weak, non-reflexive nature of Irish archaeology at various points in A's narrative give the impression that A is frustrated with this perceived state of affairs:

A: ...also maybe to the experience in the U.S., um, in the sense that *that* was like, the [USA university name] is this *very* different institution from somewhere like [his own Irish University]...

R: Mm hmm...

A: Um, and um, very kind of *strong* on intellectual kind of...you know, very much to the forefront at that time,



of changes in being kind of, *conscious* of changes in archaeological theory and so on...

R: Yeah.

A: ...where as um, I suppose there is a *tendency* within a small institution like *this*, which is under-resourced, where there isn't a huge change of personnel and so on...

R: Mm.

A: ...there is a tendency to...reproduce the same thing year after year.

R: Mm.

A: And which I can understand it, it's part of the dynamic...

R: Mm hm.

A: ...of the particular institution. So...But having said that, [his university] has been, you know also a, a very big influence in...kind of...my own biography is, is the actual process of teaching and interacting with students, and I'm not happy to...trot out the same...you know, stuff...

R: Mm.

A: ...year after year, I *want* it to be different, and I, I wa...simply because, as a teacher, you would get bored...

R: Yeah.

A: ...if you were doing that.

A contrasts the reproduction of 'the same thing year after year' with his own approach however, there is the clear implication that a reflexive approach to theory and practice is *preferable* to that which he sees as traditionally used in Ireland and within his own institution. There is no

sense that A is speaking in a righteous way, in fact whenever his narrative begins to sound too critical of Irish archaeology, he makes a conciliatory comment to reduce the impact of what he has just said somewhat. It would appear that A sees a reflexive approach as directly linked to personal context, but further to this, his narrative itself implies that being reflective requires a certain level of openness between people. His own conscious 'openness' regarding his personal context as well as his discussions of the intellectual processes he engages in for both his teaching and his research which support this.

There is a slight change in the narrative in regard to this theme once the interview turns to the topic of sex and gender. This shift appears to be related to a quite strongly felt personal frustration at being less able to balance his theoretical perspectives with his practice in the area of osteology. While this is never directly articulated, A's repeated reference to an ex-colleague whom he worked with to develop a course on the life-cycle and the context of death, and who was clearly strongly post-processual in her approach, suggests that he has a personal ambivalence in rationalising these two aspects. While he notes 'I think one of the interesting things was, our different perspectives...' A comes across as being slightly uncomfortable with his own more traditional perspective on the interpretation of sex and gender. It is at this point that the recording ends, however in the narrative relating to the themes of sex and gender towards the end of the interview A's reflective mode of speaking appears to become more oppositional. He talks about his own approach to analysing sex from skeletal remains, contrasting these with concepts from outside of the traditional osteological approach, such as intermediate sex or sex as a continuum, and maintains his own position in a somewhat more defended way. He points to evidence of sex as dichotomous, having a 'universality' and being 'definitely this and that' (i.e. male and female) in the analysis of human remains. He also speaks about cultural ways of understanding sex as tending to be dichotomous. While the meaning of this narrative should not be over-interpreted given the reduced level of



detail in the transcript, the impression is less that A is confident of what he is saying, and more that he is uncertain or somehow doubtful of it.

However, when A begins speaking again of the osteological analysis of sex in his role as a postgraduate supervisor, the personal reflexive approach returns to his narrative to some extent. He speaks about his concerns relating to his analyses of the sex of a group of skeletons, reflecting that he did not wish to put his own modern views of sex and gender onto the interpretation of the assemblage. He continues by giving a detailed account of his personal awareness of the impact of various cultural, political and religious contexts within which the interpretation of gender, sex and human remains in general are made. He uses examples of Celtic identity and the religious/political context of Israeli archaeology to illustrate his meaning, speaking of being unable to 'bear the racism' of Israeli archaeologists who wouldn't excavate bodies if they were anything other than Hebrew (including Christian, Muslim or Prehistoric remains). A therefore has a strongly reflexive approach in many aspects of his practice. However it appears that within the context of his osteoarchaeological work while reflective theoretically and intellectually, A finds it a greater challenge to bring this into his actual practice.

### **Reflection**

I recognise that I may be holding up a very high bar against which I am determining A's 'reflexivity' and this may be because his practice is already very reflective if not fully reflexive in some contexts. In particular I feel I take a slightly more critical tone at times in this thematic analysis than for other cases on the same theme. This seems to stem from a kind of personal frustration with A that his reflection sometimes comes across as impotent in practice, because of its intensity. In other words A seems to me to be more worried about reflecting than getting on with taking action following the reflection. It is for this reason that I have hesitated in calling his practice 'reflexive' rather than 'reflective'.

### iii) *The relationship and tension between scientific and cultural approaches in osteoarchaeology*

A first introduces the topic of the relationship between empirical and cultural approaches in osteoarchaeology early on in the interview when he speaks about his undergraduate studies. He notes that the:

...human element of the environmental and biological side was um, underdeveloped and neglected, as it was basically on this side of the Atlantic in those days.

Then referring to his MA research he points out that he tried to integrate the biological with the cultural 'in a way that wasn't particularly typical of, certainly Irish archaeology in the 1980s'. He goes on to describe going to the USA to do his PhD and sees this as an experience which 'broadened...[his]...perspectives and horizons quite considerably', commenting that prior to this he was 'very much in the kind of empirical, bone counting tradition'. However he highlights that:

...not to be too unfair, trying to you know, at least...like the..the...if you *look* at the kind of typical um, reporting of human remains in Ireland prior to the 1980s it's very much done on an anatomical model, um, you know kinda case history approach. No archaeological relevance at all...

A frames the opposition or tension between empirical approaches and what he considers to be more interpretive social/cultural approaches, within the postmodern shift from processual to postprocesual archaeology in the late 80s and early 90s. He considers that osteoarchaeology was in a 'very ambiguous place' at the time as '...mortuary treatments other than those surrounding the skeleton and the body...came onto the horizon...'. The sense of a tension between the two approaches comes across in A's narrative, with the empirical as the dominant perspective. He goes on to



discuss his practice as a lecturer, noting the teaching cuts at his Department mean that he has had to try and prevent his 'integrated' approach from being cut as a result. As an illustration he describes having to 'protect' a course that he co-developed which deals with cultural approaches to death and the body:

... you know, the life course and ah, aspects of mortuary archaeology, but, but *more* than that...um...you know issues such as gender, such as the nature of say childhood, or the nature of masculinity in past societies...

This suggests that the approach is not only important to him, but also possibly that he perceives the dominant, traditionally scientific approach as being generally more valued in his workplace. A considers that this course 'broadens students' perspectives' as well as his own. This suggests that he feels effort must be made to move beyond the traditional, empirical approaches in order benefit students' studies and his own research. A continues with a narrative about his Department having a reputation for strength in a particular strand of empirical archaeology. He notes that this 'position has eroded somewhat in recent years' proposing that this is however, just part of a cycle.

The narrative then turns to A's postgraduate teaching, specifically dealing with a course on osteoarchaeology that he has developed. He makes it clear that he values his scientific approach within the subject and the teaching thereof. It seems apparent that A has an internal tension and some uncertainty over his exact position in relation to his perceived opposites of science and culture:

...and that [osteoarchaeology course] very much focuses on issues around, like as I say, I was taken on as a *bio*archaeologist, and there, there's some debate within the Department as to who can claim the

bioarchaeology hat. To *me* bioarchaeology is specifically around human biology, ah, but that's just the nomenclature of the same thing in the US. Ah, where as one of my colleagues here who is a kind of *plant* specialist and so on, would see himself as a bioarchaeologist as well.

A goes on to reiterate the ambiguity of the relationship between theory and practice, which he appears to equate with the subjective/objective opposition he sees in science and culture. He comments that in his osteoarchaeology course he tries to balance the two aspects while:

A: ...it's kind of dismissed by some sides of the house, particularly the *more* theoretical, um, as being to kinda science-based, too maybe essentialist or whatever.

R: Mm hm.

A: Um, and, you know I feel that it is those of who are within the practice, it's, it's our job to kind of counter that and try and um...not necessarily show our relevance, cause that's...but, but, you know, to try and work through that...

Later in the narrative, A picks up this theme again by commenting that although much of his work is oriented towards bioarchaeology, he has 'never allowed...[himself]...to be kind of type-cast into that role'. He reinforces this by talking about a theory-based course he teaches which deals with identity, discussing the concept and politics of 'the Celt' in archaeology. Once again, A is highlighting his position by contrasting the scientific with the theoretical and cultural. This dichotomous, separate nature of science and culture is pointed to again later in the narrative when A talks about trying to 'weave notions of the, you know, the



biological...the, the, interface between biology and archaeology' into his undergraduate teaching.

Once again, when A is talking about his teaching, he comments on the 'different perspectives' that he himself and a previous colleague whom he worked with, brought to the mortuary archaeology course. This time however the theme of science and culture is reflected in the way he speaks about sex (as biological/objective) and gender (as cultural/subjective). He comments on his use of standard measurement diagrams to define sex 'traits' in skeletal remains, and that he is uncertain about the relationship between sex and gender. The same theme is then picked up towards the end of the interview while A is talking about the implicit racism that he perceives in the concept of the 'Celtic'. He discusses his indignation at the idea of the Celtic/Scandinavian cultural identity being associated with the arts (literature, poetry etc.) as female and maternal in opposition to the Germanic 'solid, erect' masculinity of science. The sense is that these polar opposites are seen as metaphors for a tension caused by dominance of science over culture which he conceives of as 'political' and 'immoral'.

The final reference in the narrative to this theme is A's observation that physical bioarchaeology outside Ireland is 'theoretically underdeveloped' and 'mainly empirical'. He notes that the work of Jo Soafer (author of *The Body as Material culture: Theoretical Osteoarchaeology*) is akin to his own perspectives, bringing theory and practice, science and culture together. However he comments that he is not aware of other work such as this being done in England which reflects a cultural approach to osteoarchaeology, as opposed to a purely biological anthropology position.

### **Reflection**

I am conscious of the point that I myself have wrangled with the tension between the scientific and the cultural in my own research at various

times. While I do not feel that there is much similarity between my own way of experiencing it and A's narrative expression of this theme, I am aware that it may well have a subtle impact on my analysis and interpretation.

#### *iv) Personal identity, context and values as imperatives*

The theme of personal identity, context and values as imperatives is very strongly reflected in the narrative. A speaks about issues of identity from a personal as well as a theoretical perspective, explicitly and unconsciously. Aspects of identity are addressed from the beginning of the interview, with close relation to the narrative regarding context. The issue of values is also linked to personal identity and context, specifically in the way that A sees himself as a teacher and what this means, but also in regard to his research practice.

From the off-set, A begins to assert himself as an archaeologist who has a long-term interest in developing the 'human element' of what he perceives as being the traditional, objectivist science of bioarchaeology/osteoaerchaeology. While this is partly a statement of fact, there is also the implication that A sees himself as an agent of change, as 'quite forward thinking'. The sense is that he considers his theoretical approach as bringing a more personal, social aspect – some 'humanity' – into a practice which is otherwise traditionally divorced from these concepts. A gives the context of his own education as a postgraduate, both at a personal level as well as within his own context of Irish archaeology more broadly, and contrasting this with the theoretical culture of archaeology in the USA. This contextualisation is expressed as an opposition between Ireland's empirical, procesual, objectivist approaches and the post-processual, subjectivist approaches from America. A speaks about 'following' his supervisor to the USA to study with her as a PhD student and offers this entire experience as giving context to provide meaning as to why his approach is *different* to that of Irish osteoaerchaeology generally.



When the narrative turns to A's teaching practice, it becomes evident that he considers his own personal interest in what he is teaching as an important factor:

A: ...and in my teaching now I would split it about half-half. I, I teach very kind of straightforward, um, what you might call osteology courses, ah, but I also teach um, one of the courses that I tried to *protect* because our, our teaching hours are being revamped at the moment and we're being pushed towards teaching core courses only we, elective courses are being pared...

R: Mmm.

A: ...which is a shame. Which means that the stuff that you actually really like, you don't teach anymore...

He sees teaching that is 'a little more *challenging*' of what he does, and which pushes him personally as more 'enjoyable'. This garners the impression that A perceives his teaching practice as linked to personal meaning, which is further supported by his narrative shortly afterwards, relating to student learning and the role of the teacher:

A: ...I see my *role*, like my *role* is, I see it as primarily around teaching, even in, even in terms of my research...I, I'd see that as, um, you know, a way of spreading information and spreading knowledge, and generating knowledge. And in my teaching, like, I think my principal *job* is not to necessarily impart knowledge about archaeology or the human career or...

R: [laughs]

A: ...whatever, but it's just, a...certainly at, at undergraduate level, it's to make people *think*, and make people think, and make people think critically.

R: Mm hm.

A: Um, and I do, and really I see that as, as my primary role in the, the, in an institution like...and, and, the role of this institution.

R: Mm.

A: Um, so, like for example some...a lot of my work is oriented around the kind of bioarchaeology side, but I, I've never allowed myself to be kind of type-cast into that role. So, another aspect of my research...ah, has focused on things like, like I teach one of the other favourite of my own courses is um, one called [title of theoretical course].

A's lengthy discussion of how he came to be where he currently is, giving contextual information about his department and the changes his job role has undertaken gives further indication of his association between context and meaning. This is contrasted however, by a section within this narrative where A speaks about 'chance' and 'accident' playing a part in his career:

A: Um, other influences on my career. I think accident and...

R: [laughs]

A: [laughs]...you know, chaos theory or something like that...

R: Uh huh [laughs]



A: ...you know, things you know, happened by accident, like I started off here and ended up here, but there was no kind of divine plan in that....

R: Right. Oh, ok.

A: ...it was purely accidental. Um, and ah, I, I think I would say the same about pretty much everything [laughs] in my career...

R: [laughs]

A: You know, um, as I say, master-plan there was not.

In this section, A offers an antithetical narrative relating to his career which abstains from providing any contextual information at all, either personal or cultural. The marked difference between this and other sections where personal meaning is strongly emphasised also raises a question mark here about what A is communicating. The point that A is so clear about his educational choices, in particular the decision to go to the USA to study is contrasted strongly with the implied randomness of returning to his own country and culture with all its 'traditional empirical' approaches to his subject. His reiteration of the point seems to reinforce the possibility that there are some quite specific, potentially very personal reasons for his career choices, which he does not wish to share in the interview. While this possibility can not be given full credence without further information, the amount of laughter from A and the researcher suggests some nervousness entering into the interaction at this point.

A's narrative about his own professional identity implies that he does not wish to define himself in what might be considered either a *subjective* (anthropological) nor an *objective* (bioarchaeological) role. He considers himself to be an archaeologist 'very much in the mainstream'. Again the topic of the importance of personal meaning in his teaching arises in the narrative:

...you know, to some degree you could say that things like archaeology and um, bioarchaeology are almost secondary to that, that [teaching] role.

A then reveals that he considers the 'biggest influence' on him in this regard is 'something very personal, in that it comes from my family'. He speaks about the influence of his 'Dad in particular' and his sister on his intellectual development. Being able to:

...bounce stuff [ideas/work] around between us, and that if...if...to me that, that has been the kind of principal thing that, where I kind of see kind of quantum leaps forward in my own kind of intellectual development, I would put it down to them.

However he also recognises that his experience in the USA also played a role because of the 'strong' intellectual approach which he encountered there, which made him 'conscious of changes in archaeological theory and so on'. A then goes on to talk about the value he places on personal engagement being part of intellectual engagement with the subject and teaching. He is clearly frustrated by the larger classes now common at his institution/in his department which prevent this type of interaction:

A: ...But ah, I've had say up to eighty individuals in that [mortuary archaeology] course, which means that any prospect of interaction with students is really reduced.

R: Yeah [laughs].

A: You know, to the point where...um, I don't know if I should admit this, but, you know, there are students who will go through the full three years here, and I might know their faces but I *certainly* wouldn't know their names.



R: Right, yeah.

A: You know. Which is a *shame*.

R: Yeah! [laughs] Yeah, absolutely.

A: Whereas when I was an undergraduate here, classes for the *year* of kind of, fifteen, or fourteen were typical, so...

R: Yeah. Yeah.

A: ...everybody knew everybody else, but that's no longer the case...

R: Yeah...no...no...That's a...do you...do you think that that ah, means that you...does that have an impact on the way you actually teach?

D: Yeah, oh, absolutely, like I think... first of all there's a greater distance if you like between the teacher and the student in the sense that we...you know...a kind of a *social* distance if you like...

R: Mmm. Mm.

A: ...we *don't* interact, we *don't* um...I don't know them, they don't, they don't know me for the most part, other than as the person who is at the top of the class.

R: Mm hm.

A: And that is very *different* from my experience here as an undergraduate. Um, where you did get to know um...you know, the tutors and the, the lecturers, and there was a great...

R: Mm.

A: ...quite a strong degree of interaction.

There is evidently a strong association for A between what he perceives to be good quality teaching and personal interaction within the learning context. This view appears to play a fundamental role in the way A sees what he does as 'valuable'. A speaks about encouraging students to pick apart 'elements of their identity' on a theory course he teaches relating to Celticism and it is this deconstructive approach to archaeology which appears to be reflected in A's narrative throughout. Political and ideological aspects to A's identity are hinted at through the narrative at various points, for example whilst speaking about the concept of the Celt and ideas of racism in Ireland and Israel. However as a political ideology is never directly alluded to in the narrative, it is difficult to say much with any certainty in this regard. It is interesting to note however, that while A provides much context within his narrative this sometimes offers less insight into this theme than those times when he is not intentionally trying to do so.

### **Reflection**

I have found this a challenging theme to disentangle from the narrative. This is partly because the theme itself is a complex one, but also I feel that the way the participant talks about these issues is expressed in a complicated way. The lack of clarity in the narrative seems to stem from A's attempts to explain issues of his identity and context rather than to simply talk about his experiences and ideas. It has required returning to this analysis a number of times to feel it has captured the essence of the theme – but have I managed to communicate it?



## **Chapter 5. Case B**

### **5.1 Context**

B is an archaeological consultant with a specialism in the area of mortuary archaeology. Her practice is mainly within the contract rescue archaeology context, working with the treatment, disposition and deposition of human remains. She also carries out independent research and publication, and lectures in a consultancy capacity. At B's suggestion, the researcher had arranged to be collected by her car from the station near her home. They drove to B's house in the outer city suburbs. The conversation on the way was about the development of the area, the building of a major new road and what this means in terms of rescue archaeology contracts and traffic for the area. B's home is large and well appointed. At first she proposes the use of her small, paper and book filled office for the interview and suggests that the researcher clear a chair (of papers) to sit on. As they settle down B asks the researcher if she would like a drink of water then suggests that the office is too cramped to be comfortable. They go together to the kitchen to get the water and from there B suggests the use of the adjoining light, spacious conservatory for the interview instead. The conservatory is a large, lovely space with wicker cane furniture. It looks out onto a well kept 'gardeners' garden and there is a brief conversation about gardening before the interview starts. The researcher sits on a chair near to a coffee table and B sits on a sofa at right-angles, quite a distance from the researcher, not looking in her direction. The researcher is slightly concerned that the microphone on the recorder will not pick up B's voice at the distance. Just before the interview begins, B comments that she feels there is little she can offer the researcher about the topic of the interview.

Following the end of the 'formal' interview, the researcher and Participant B continue their conversation for approximately half an hour, moving to the kitchen. They have coffee and eat muffins brought by the researcher. Participant B speaks openly and candidly about her faith and

the impact of this on her perspective as an archaeologist. B comments at one point that she is a Christian, but 'not *extremely*' religious. B also mentions that she realised part way through the interview, because of the type of questions the researcher was asking, that she must have a good understanding of archaeological practice, and was not just a 'theory' archaeologist, as she had expected.

B gives a very short and basic background history to her education and career, offering only minimal detail and no personal context. She outlines her early education, doing a BA and MA in archaeology during the early 1970s but does not give the place of study in Ireland or expand in any way. This is then followed in the narrative by mention of an MPhil which is when B says she 'really started working on um, mortuary archaeology if you like'. No detail is given on this MPhil research other than the simple topic of 'church archaeology'. It is while mentioning this that B points out that she also makes use of literary references to support her archaeology. She also outlines her periods of interest in relation to burial practices, all of which are Early Christian or Christian. B then mentions going to an Oxbridge university to do her DPhil 'in the same thing' as her MPhil, without any further detail given. A long gap in between the dates of her early education and her doctoral studies is evident from the narrative but is not addressed directly. However B then stresses '*I have been a practicing archaeologist for the last 30 years...and excavated all sorts of sites, not just burials*', suggesting that she was working as a professional field archaeologist during the period between her MA/MPhil and her DPhil. Information about this phase of fieldwork is not given.

B then brings the narrative to the present day, talking about her work as a contract consultant, mainly on rescue excavations prior to road and infrastructure constructions. Again no detail is offered, but she does say:

...If they're [the contractors] not quite sure what they [the burials] are, I get a telephone call...[laughs]...please come and have a look!



She then goes on to add that she also writes articles, does research and gives lectures. A limited amount of further information is then given about B's particular interest in mortuary archaeology. Once again, the written history of her periods of specialism is mentioned, this time as a starting point for her interest in church archaeology:

...I also did the um...at the time...started looking at the *history*. You know, the written history...of these particular churches... And um, that just aroused my interest in...um, when I started looking at some of the... I was actually quite surprised in the early...written history, how *little* information there was, about burial practices... Especially the very early periods, the early periods of Christianity... And um, I *suppose* it just aroused my curiosity, and ah...and just went on from then.

Any more direct detail in the narrative regarding B's education, career or the personal reasons behind her interest in mortuary archaeology is not offered until nearly half-way through the interview. B then begins to talk about her current research interest which has shifted from her typical periods of interest, to sites of pre-Christian periods, and which raise particular questions for B relating to gender.

## 5.2 Analysis

### i) *Interpreting human remains using sex and gender*

B has a strong dichotomous view of sex and this is not questioned at any point during the interview. It is also clear that B conceptualises gender as a direct reflection of sex and hence also dichotomous i.e. male and female equals man and woman, the social role only varying contextually (culturally) within the bounds of a dichotomous biology. B's conceptualisation of difference in gender as reflected in the burial data

from her periods of specialisation appears to be linked to the segregation. She talks about separation (or segregation) in ecclesiastical cemeteries as opposed to non-separation of females and males in what she terms 'lay cemeteries'. B appears to see this as evidence that there is no difference in the treatment of human remains based on sex and gender in the periods she is discussing. However she then goes on to explain that textual primary source data clearly indicates that men and women have various 'options' for burial depending on matrimonial, familial or religious considerations, depending on their gender. Her definition of gender impacting on the burial context seems therefore to be strongly associated with differential treatment in the *physical* evidence. From her narrative about the burial options for husband and wife it could be inferred that she considers there to be a gendered difference in burial only where there is apparent *inequality* or clear segregation. If men and women both have similar/equal options for burial, B considers this as non-differential based on gender, although male and female are still identified in the text.

In relation to the interpretation of sex from skeletal evidence, B highlights that she is not an osteologist and can therefore not confirm biological sex from human remains. However, she does state that she would 'know by looking'. This assertion is then partially retracted; clarifying that she would 'usually' know by looking and then further distances herself from her previous statement by saying in the third person that 'you could make a sort of educated guess'. This narrative suggests that B may believe that sex is clearly in evidence from skeletal morphology, but that she is not willing to fully trust her own instinctive judgement as she is not a specialist.

At various stages in the narrative, B stresses that gender and sex are not a 'big issue' or as she at one point says a 'big problem' either in the periods she deals with, or in Ireland:

...in the period I deal with, it's *not* a big issue...at this early period, it [gender] doesn't seem to be a big issue...I think



there is a *much* bigger um...concentrate...well, not concentration...*interest* in it [sex and gender], if you like, in, in Britain...Um...I *think* in, in Ireland, we tend to *accept* what we see and work on it...but I think the *reason* behind it is that it doesn't *seem* to be a big problem.

The meaning of these narrative reiterations appears to be that B does not herself see sex and gender as important or relevant topics in the context of Irish archaeology. However the underlying implication appears to be that B has a negative perception of gender as a topic for discussion. However this perception seems less to do with the topics of sex and gender than what she believes an interest in them to mean i.e. ungrounded and unnecessary theoretical debates.

B appears to suggest that separation of male and female in the burial context is directly linked to the church:

B: You know, this is the thing. Um, but after the 8<sup>th</sup> Century...lay cemeteries, for want of a better word...um, just seem to gradually, go out of use.

R: Mm.

B: And *that's* when you *might* begin to get separation of male and female...or more *obvious* separation should I say...

R: Mm. Right, right.

B: ...of male and female.

Pre- 8<sup>th</sup> century 'lay cemeteries' seem to be considered by B as more inclusive with men, women and children all buried in them. The introduction at this point of the topic of children into the narrative brings further insight into B's perceptions of sex and gender. Her 'obviously' associating babies and children to female burials reiterates her perception

of social roles (including gender) as inherently tied to biology even in death. However when the researcher probes for more information on this point to clarify meaning, B turns the topic to children's burials in a different context and time period, moving away from the issue of sex and gender. This narrative change may suggest that B feels uncertain of the assertion she has made regarding female and child burials, however this is the impression of the researcher which is unable to be supported without further information.

B then describes an interpretive approach which relates grave goods (i.e. social/ cultural objects) directly to the sex/gender of skeletal remains. It is relevant to note here that this approach has been considered as highly problematic, if not entirely discredited within the archaeological discipline in Anglo-American archaeology for the past fifteen to twenty years. However despite B's initial certainty:

Um...you wouldn't even...and...if you're looking at a Pagan period particularly, you wouldn't even have to *be* an osteoarchaeologist because you'd know by grave goods immediately. You've got um, gender, you know, you've got male or female burials.

She then reflects back on this assertion using considerably less 'certain' language and questions her previous statement in a good humoured way:

R: Mm hm. And, I presume, um...ah, that, like according to the *types* of, of grave goods that are with these people...

B: Mm hm....you can, you can say, you know, depends what the state is, you *might*, you *might* sort of *assume* they belong to...

R: Yeah.

B: ...whether they *do* or not [laughs] or not is another matter...



R: Yeah.

B: ...but you *assume* they belong to...you see, this doesn't arise in an Irish context because Irish burials, do not have grave goods.

This rapid u-turn might suggest that although B has a tendency to make inferences about sex and gender which are theoretically problematic, she is not unaware of this and is internally reflective. B's narrative goes on to further suggest that difference or variation of gender in the burial context is not associated with Ireland. The implication appears to be that where difference from the 'norm' exists it is always as an import or influence from outside of Ireland, whether it be burial goods, the treatment of human remains or social/cultural behaviours.

In the second half of the interview, B reveals for the first time that she has excavated 'one small cemetery which was all female'. As this line of narrative develops, it becomes clear that the topic of gender in relation to the site and others like it is of considerable interest to B and related directly to her present research. This further suggests that her defended position in the first part of the interview was linked to a strong personal and emotional association with the *meaning* of the topics of gender and sex in relation to human remains. As the site is pre-Christian, B does not have her usual ecclesiastical reference points. However, she does relate the evidence back to the [sagas] of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century to give her ideas about gender relations at the time. Once again, B suggests that the deviation (i.e. women in 'powerful' social positions) from what she considers as the Irish 'norm' is a cultural import from Britain to Ireland.

B changes to a very positive and inquiring tone while she is talking about the possibilities of her research into the female burials. For the first time in the narrative B directly associates difference in gender to the concept of social status and power:

B: Um, *but*, there is um...I *gather*, a strong tradition that females were quite powerful in the early Pictish period. Um, so, that *maybe* something...it *mayyybe* just a very tenuous link with something like that, but I, I *don't know* until I know more about it...

R: Mm hm.

B: ...yeah?

R: Yeah. Yeah.

B: But it's a big, we *do*, we *do* know, from some of the um Bean\* Dindshenchas, which are the old stories, ah, that um, especially from the female Dindshenchas, um the Dindshenchas I think it's called, ah, they do make references to some early kings having Pictish wives.

R: Right.

B: So, you know...there are possibilities there [laughs].

R: [laughs] Yeah.

B: May, maybe there's some...ah...[short silence]  
*matrilineal* thing going on? I don't know.

The lack of burial data that suggests difference between female or male graves means that B feels unable to make any interpretation based on gender: she hasn't 'noticed any...any specific difference in treatment, of male and female in an *Irish* context anyway'. The possibility that this lack of variation may itself indicate a social meaning is not considered. There appears therefore to be a conceptual connection that B makes between gender interpretations and the *difference* between males and females, possibly linked to ideas of social/power relations. B goes on to note the 'exceptional' prone burials which yet again highlights no differentiation between the treatment of female and male remains:

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\* *bean* is the Irish word for woman/female



So that [prone burial] *is* obviously a different treatment of *a* person... Whether that person be male or female.

Towards the end of the interview, when invited to explore any additional experiences or examples, B returns once more to her current research interest in the female burials. She again links female power with people making a political statement, and indicates that this is something she does not yet understand in the context as she does not yet have enough data. B appears unable to reconcile the possibility of female burials being socially important with her current conceptualisations of gender in the past. It is evident that she has many questions relating to gender which she sees as a 'work in progress', but which inspire her interest. B's final reference to gender in the narrative is to use the term to indicate biological sex as she describes an osteoarchaeologist looking at '*...actual gender* in the ground, as it comes up'.

B's interview narrative suggests that there are a number of things going on in relation to the topics of sex and gender, some of which relate to her very personal experiences and perceptions and some of which appear to be more cultural and ideological. It is difficult to disentangle the multiple layers of meaning about the subject in B's narrative particularly because of her initially strongly defended position. It might be suggested that B has a potentially un-self admitted agenda which relates to her wanting males/men and females/women as equal, and that conceptually associates sex and gender as dichotomous and inherently linked.

### **Reflection**

Although the term 'feminist' is never used by B in the narrative, I am left with the impression that some of her defensiveness is directed against people who have a political or post-modern agenda in regard to sex and gender. I am struck by the considerable variation between B's attitude towards discussing the topic at the beginning and at the end of the interview. It feels as if the interpersonal relationship between myself as

researcher and B's assumed perception of my position in regard to the topic results in an initially false reflection of her views.

There is potentially also an undercurrent of cultural perceptions which casts Irish archaeologists as practical/grounded in reality and British archaeologists as 'other' more theoretical/irrational. This seems tied to her experience in [UK elite university], and the extra-interview discussion appears to support this.

## ii) *Reflexive process*

The narrative at first strongly suggests that B primarily uses an empirical process (as discussed in theme d. of this case) for interpreting burials. Unlike a reflexive process this is based on a model of proving an interpretive hypothesis correct or incorrect by using objective means. However the narrative which at first follows this pattern (i.e. using written sources as supporting evidence of what is seen in the ground as correlative) is followed by what might be considered as 'reflective doubt'.

R: So your understanding...

B: Yeah.

R: ...of the, of the *social* context of what you're looking at if there's no separation...

B: Yeah.

R: ...that, that's drawn...pri...from, from primary sources, ah, *written* primary sources...?

B: Yep. Yes. Oh yes, I, I *always* use primary sources.

R: Right, ok. So, rather than, um, using, um, using the ah...material evidence?

B: Oh yeah, well you can...the things is, ah, my work *involves* both.

R: Right.



B: It involves looking at, um...the reason I *look* at sources is because I want to try and understand what we're seeing in the ground.

R: Mm hm.

B: And um...nine times out of ten, the two will correlate...now there, there will be instances when...you look at a, perhaps a cemetery which...I don't know, I haven't come across them myself but I'm sure there are some...um...where the, the, where this *norm* doesn't apply.

R: Mm.

B: Um...[sighs]...but I think they tend to be the exceptions rather than the rule.

R: Right.

B: Well, in an Irish context cert, certainly...

She makes the point that there may be 'instances...where...this norm doesn't apply'. This momentary questioning of the evidence even though she has not 'come across them [obviously 'gendered' graves]' herself, suggest a certain amount of openness to alternative possibilities. However this is offered as an almost grudging admittance of possibilities outside of her conceptual framework and her openness is reigned back with a sigh as B suggests that within her context this would always be exceptional cases.

The short narrative following again seems to briefly suggest 'reflective doubt', but this time in a somewhat good humoured, slightly challenging way:

B: ...but there's no difference between Christian and Pagan burials.

R: Mm.

B: At that period in Ireland at any rate.

R: Mm. Right.

B: In England you could tell the difference because they...Pagan ones sometimes have grave goods and...there, there may be Pagan ones *without* grave goods!

The dichotomous separation of Ireland equalling no separation between the sexes whether in Pagan or Christian graves without grave goods and England's Pagan burials with grave goods illustrating difference between the sexes, is questioned, however this possibility is again not explored further by B.

Another aspect of the reflective process that comes across from B's narrative is her inquiring approach '...it's a *form* of continuity and you want to find out why...'. Although this may be seen as concomitant with an empirical/scientific model of investigation, B appears to link interpretive inquiry to variation in perspectives, within a considered context. For example, she is willing to use the Dindshenchas to develop her ideas as long as they are used with an awareness of how they were created i.e. their context. The narrative then suggests that she is also open to other views from her own being applied to her interpretations:

B: So we just have to be *careful* about it [using the Dindshenchas stories] . But it *does* give you ideas to work on...

R: Uh huh.

B: ...and that is, very useful.

R: Yeah, yeah. Mm hm.

B: You can throw them out and let people...you know, *argue* about them...[laughs].



This contextual awareness is also hinted at by her later suggestion that she may 'look towards Gaul' for ideas about burial practices in certain cases. However, again an apparently characteristic restraint is evident in the narrative as she again draws back saying 'on the whole, I, I confine myself to Great Britain and Ireland [when developing interpretive ideas]'.

B is keen to highlight her practical experience and in doing so points to an intuitive approach which it is implied is something that she has reflected on herself:

B: Yeah. I think...in my case, because I *specialise* in burial practices, um...it, it, I suppose it's like somebody who specialises in some other form of, um...house structures, or...you know, prehistoric house structures, or castles or whatever...they go...when they go onto a site, and look at what's going on, ah...you have um...a *gut feeling* you *know*, because you *know* your subject, you *know* what you're looking at, and you could say to somebody, oh, that's a Neolithic house, it's obvious...look at this, this, this and this...'you know what I mean?

R: Mm hm. Mm hm.

B: Whereas the person excavating it might not be aware of that.

R: Mm hm.

B: And it's the same when I go to um, a cemetery site, ah, somebody will ring me up and say 'oh we've found *burials* and they're completely different, and we weren't expecting to find them and, you know, could you come down and have a look...

R: Mm hm.

B: ...and tell us something.' And you'd *know* by looking at what's there...um...from your own experience, really...

R: Mm hm.

B: ...you have a *pretty* good idea of what they're looking at.

R: Mm hm. Yeah.

B: And all you can do is *guide* them, basically.

R: Mmh.

B: But um, it depends after that on, on, on how well they excavate the site and, then, using radio carbon dates at a later stage.

Her narrative suggests a direct engagement with the material and an intuitive response grounded in her own previous experience and understanding of burials from her period of specialism. The 'checking' of this intuitive interpretation to confirm it using supporting evidence could be considered as part of a reflective process as B is not assuming her more experiential/intuitive interpretation as being an absolute. B's final comment that 'it's a question of theory *and* practice, you know. Both *combined*.' suggests an understanding of a more holistic, non-linear process.

## **Reflection**

My sense is that the early more constrained comments that B makes in the narrative are more influenced by a defensive position than her practice in reality. This defensiveness at the start of the interview appears to come from B's perception of me as a 'theory' person without any practice experience, which is further supported by extra-interview information (see field notes at start of case). The narrative also potentially hints at an intellectual defensiveness, but this is not certain. I am aware of the fact that I entered the interview conscious of B's 'closed' interaction with me from the onset, and that I consciously made an effort in the interview to encourage her to relax through my body languages and non-verbal



interventions. One of the results of this is that the interview has considerably more turns than other interviews in the research as I constantly offer encouragement for her to continue speaking. Despite B's original defensiveness, I liked her from the onset and am aware that this encouraged me to make an extra effort for the interview to develop positively. I am uncertain at this point as to what impact this may have had on the data.

### **iii) *Expressions of religious context and meaning in gender/mortuary archaeology***

The theme of religion and the church is introduced by B from an early point in the narrative. This is partly as a description of her personal educational history; however it also reflects her interest in the development of Christianity in a social context, specifically in relation to the treatment of the dead. B initially relates the sex of burials to religious practices through the ecclesiastical and monastic. Her narrative about the Céili Dé movement becoming more conservative in relation to women makes a clear association with ecclesiastical, institutional power and the differential treatment of male and female burials.

B re-confirms the context of her narrative repeatedly, drawing back her statements to within the boundaries of her period of specialism and the cultural context of Ireland. She links the change in burial practices to religious dogma and is 'quite convinced' that the Céili Dé are responsible for the change/separation of burials by gender/sex. This idea is further developed in the narrative by highlighting the lack of separation of female and male burials prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, even as she notes, between Christian and Pagan burials.

B mentions the *Collectio Hibernensis* as giving 'quite a lot of information' about ancestral cemeteries. This is at odds to a statement made earlier in the narrative that she was surprised at 'how *little* [written] information there was, about burial practices' in this text. B talks about

this ecclesiastical text referring more to ancestral aspects of burial, which she does not relate to aspects of sex or gender. Yet she goes on to comment on marital relationships, ancestral relationships and religious/church affiliation, all in association with burial and being a 'husband' or 'wife'. This suggests that B is seeing 'gender' as being something other than representative of ordinary social relations or engagements. Once again however, she makes the point that this is not representative of 'difference' between men or women:

B: But there's little or *no* reference [in the *Collectio Hibernensis*]...the only reference to, to gender is, are those references where you know, somebody obviously asks a question, um, if a woman dies before her husband or after her husband, where is she entitled to be buried, *must* she be buried in the same place as her husband's ancestors, ah, it's more of an ancestral thing...

R: Mm hm.

B: ...than anything else...e...sh, she's given the option.

R: Yeah. Yeah.

B: In some cases.

R: So um...

B: Unless she belongs to a church...

R: Unless...?

B: If she belongs to a church, she must be buried in that church.

R: Right. Oh that's...oh, ok.

B: The same with men...if they, if, if they also, they, one of the questions which comes up in the canons is, if a man ah, dies, should he be buried among his ancestors, or...and the thing is that he should be...if he is attached to a church, in other words if he's even very loosely clerically involved...

R: Mm.

B: ...ah, then he must be buried in that church.

This seems to indicate that B has a concept of 'difference' between sexes or genders as equating with 'inequality' of treatment i.e. that it implies a power relationship imbalance. There also appears to be an association between this imbalance and the power/constraints of Church (as separate to Christian) law.

B then turns the topic to the modern context of child burials associated obliquely with the constraints of the Church:

And in Ireland, and in, in, in the past...three hundred years at any rate, it's, it's a modern phenomenon, it doesn't occur any more, but you find, ah, burials of un-baptised...what they call un-baptised children, um, in old, neglected church, churches, you know, places that have gone out of use...

Although on the surface this narrative about cillín burials appears off topic, it does give some indication of B relating the power of the Church to death and non-conformity. It has already been seen (in section i. of this case) that B associates child burials directly with females/women. Therefore it may be suggested that here she is actually making a subverted comment about women's experiences of non-conformity in regard to the Church, death, and burial. However, the topic would need to have been further explored (and was not due to interview time constraints) to make more solid inferences on this issue.

B then gives specific detail about burial practices and their intimate relationship to religious beliefs. She goes on to comment that she is uncertain about equating the treatment of people in life to the way they were treated in death. The idea is put forward at first as being related to accepted Christian belief structures:



But um...especially in a *Christian* context, you know when I'm, when I'm talking, you know in, in the mind-set of the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> century or whatever, ah, I think they regarded in *death* all people being equal...where they may not have been equal in *life*...but in, in *death* they would probably be regarded as having been equal because they were all going to the one place so to speak...This statement appears to be at odds with her previous narrative.

This statement appears to be at odds with her previous narrative; however it then becomes clear in the following narrative that this interpretation of the evidence is closely linked to her personal view – she discloses that she herself is a Christian and that as such she has the impression that it is ‘...a question of everybody being equal in death...’. This is then followed by a re-statement that this situation changes in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century (i.e. in relation to Church dogma).

B then discusses her interpretation of the female burials she is researching, being associated with political and religious (power) developments in Ireland. These are framed within both external (Roman Britain) and internal (the Ui Néill and other clans’) influences. B’s final reference on the topic of religion returns the narrative back to her earlier discussion of working on rescue sites. She comments that if the sites are small and not associated with churches that people will ‘know... [she’ll]...be interested’. This hints at the possibility that while B’s specialism is in the area of church and early Christian burials, her real interest lies in questions about death and burial outside of the traditionally conceived institution of the Church. Churches are seen by B as giving ‘context’ to aspects of her work, but it may be suggested that she considers this as less inspiring to her personally.

## Reflection

B started off by saying before the start of the interview that she had nothing interesting to say about sex or gender. It is only later in interview while discussing her current research interest in the female burial sites that it becomes apparent that she has a quite specific interest in sex and gender in burial contexts. I recall that at the time of the interview I was less aware of this transition; more just pleased that she had relaxed and was discussing her practice and interests more openly.

### *iv) The tension between experience/insight and scientific/empirical practice in analysis and interpretation*

The first expression of the tension between experience/insight and scientific/empirical practice in analysis and interpretation encountered in B's narrative is in the way she identifies the sex of a skeleton from looking at it in the ground. B's narrative implies an intuitive sense of what sex the skeleton is, but she appears not to consider herself to have the specialist knowledge to make an accurate identification. For this she relies on the expertise of an osteoarchaeologist to '*confirm* to me, that they are male or female'.

Following on from this, the theme is repeated a number of times throughout the interview narrative, but expressed through various contexts. At one point while talking about the female burials it appears that B is imbuing scientific/empirical methods with the qualities of an interpretive 'truth'. She does not appear to be willing to expand on or give full credence to her interpretive ideas without a grounding in a 'significant' sample:

...we don't have a *big enough* number of them, yet, to be able to draw any, any, any definite conclusions.

B then speaks of her concern about using information to support interpretation which is not produced at the same time as (i.e. in the same century) as the archaeological material being analysed. She reiterates this point repeatedly stating that 'You've got to be very careful' when using material produced 'at a distance'. This narrative is related specifically to the use of the traditional 'old stories' (Dindshenchas) in comparison to ecclesiastical texts (the *Collectio Hibernensis*) for interpretive insights into the past. Her point about 'even *folklorists*' telling us that things can change over a short period of time is not related back to the ecclesiastical records being used as references spanning at least a century. This suggests a long-term applicability of the written word recorded by the institution of the church over the later recordings of oral stories. The implication of reliable sources compared to relatively unreliable sources of information is again reflected by B's use of place names in relation to a site. Her narrative suggests that if a church is recorded then this acts as confirmation of a particular context upon which she will then base her interpretation.

### **Reflection**

I am very aware of the fact that as B was quite defensive/hesitant, that I offer more positive encouragement in the form of 'Mm hnis' and wonder if the approach was successful in its aim, or whether it prevented topic development.



## Chapter 6. Case C

### 6.1 Context

C is an academic archaeologist with a specialism in the area of mortuary archaeology. His practice is therefore a combination of limited research excavation where he deals directly with contexts containing human remains, interpretive research (publishing interpretations of the excavation material from his own work and the work of osteoarchaeologists/other archaeologists), and teaching (inclusive of the topics of death and burial). The researcher met C in his departmental office which was large and filled with books and papers on shelves and in piles. He suggested they go to get a cup of tea somewhere else and the interview was moved to the Senior Common Room (SCR), a bright, busy place. As refreshments, C bought tea; the researcher had brought with her for the interview a scone and pain au chocolat from a near-by patisserie. It was noisy in the SCR and the researcher was aware that she was somewhat irritated by people talking and dishes being crashed about, concerned that it would impact on the recording. The interview was conducted on low 'comfortable' sofa chairs with a coffee table between. Shortly before the end of the interview the researcher noticed that the digital recorder was about to run out of space and began to take detailed verbatim notes. She chose not to stop the interview as she preferred not to interrupt the flow or the trust relationship that had been built up during the interview. Conversation between the researcher and Participant C continued for approximately half an hour following the end of the 'formal' interview. Participant C showed a strong interest in the research being undertaken and spoke of potential for a future conference session together.

C gave a relatively rapid outline of his personal history which was focused entirely on historical 'events' representing key points in his education and career. He started by offering the dates relating to his undergraduate, MA and PhD degrees, however he does not give details of where these were undertaken. Momentarily touching on the topic of his

MA thesis relating to tombs, he then goes on to explain briefly the topic of his PhD thesis. This again is offered with minimal information, giving the topic as an analysis of prehistoric society using a scientific methodology for patterning settlements. He then clarifies that he has had a 'continuing interest in tombs and Bronze Age burials' although this is not directly reflected by what he has just outlined. His interest may therefore have been in the background of his history but no personal information about his interest in mortuary archaeology is offered. His reasons for this are not clear, but his considering this early educational period of his life as less relevant to answering the question is one possibility. This possibility is tentatively supported by the following:

I suppose this [interest in mortuary archaeology] really came to afore when I was writing with [name of archaeologist]...it *then* became apparent how, became apparent to us, how *important* the burial data was in terms of building social reconstruction...And so I, I suppose that would, on reflection, that's probably...was a key kind of *engagement* with the material.

His points of reference then move from educational degrees to professional and personal 'markers' represented by publications. It is after this initial 'engagement' while co-authoring a book that C then speaks about a period in the 80s and 90s where he began to undertake reinterpretations of burial evidence. This seems to represent a period in his life history where he is becoming open to the possibilities of varying interpretations from the material evidence. This may be reflected as a change from his earlier more empirical archaeological analysis using patterning, to a more interpretive orientation:

[I began to offer] new interpretations of burial data...[lists sites]...suggesting that there were ways of ...the data was open to, different kinds of interpretation, um, than had originally been suggested.

C then touches briefly on the topic of ‘complex ways of treating human remains in the past’ as something which has arisen from his openness to the possibilities of varying interpretations. This is again linked in the narrative to work on a more recent publication. However this ‘continuing interest’ is not expanded on at this point and C changes the topic to his teaching experience.

C makes a basic reference to the theoretical courses on which he has taught where he has:

...tended to focus on...death, and I have linked to themes of monumentality and ah...treatment of the dead...ah, the idea of, you know, that...the next question of how our ancestors are recognised and how we deal with that as archaeologists.

However this reference to teaching is again a practical way to link to his next publication (in final draft stage at time of interview) and interest which brings him ‘up to date’ (i.e. the present day). This can be seen in the jump from teaching topic to personal research interest/question seen in the quote above. It is at this point in the narrative where C’s direct account or ‘told story’ of his life history ends.

## **6.2 Analysis**

### ***i) Interpreting human remains using sex and gender***

The first point at which C’s view of sex and gender is evident in his narrative is in the discussion of his involvement in the excavation of two mass graves. The first grave contains skeletons sexed as adult males and the interpretation that is given is one which directly links gendered social role to the skeletal evidence:



...Although it was interesting *there*, that, that um, the first grave that we discovered there...it did appear to be all, six individuals there appeared to be all young, adult males, and so we were building an...an interpretation of, of, you know this might represent a particular cohort like a ship's company or something like that. But this...the later bones that we've discovered are much more varied... And, it's possible that there's been a...that we may be...that is may not just be a, a *male* cemetery, but that there are females there as well.

The gendered interpretation only changes when remains sexed as female also appear in the second grave. The original 'male cemetery' possibility discussed bases the social interpretation of the cemetery status on sex i.e. that these people were buried together *because* of their sex. This is apparently because of the common factor that all the skeletons in the first grave being sexed as male is seen as significant, and linked to the social/gendered role of the individuals. C notes that this was only questioned when the further evidence of a mixed grave appeared, which suggests that female sexed skeletons necessarily alters the gendered interpretation.

The category of sex is considered by C to be a basic human axis along with age which combine to provide evidence for the social/cultural, illustrating C's perception of a direct relationship between sex and gender. However in the narrative, C is certain about differentiating sex as biologically and gender as culturally/socially defined and separate, with sex being dichotomous and continuous throughout the lifecycle and gender variable:

C: And in the [publication] again, I've tried to differentiate between the study of sex and gender...sex as being biological and say gender as being culturally defined. And I think it's very useful in terms of um, talking about

the distinction that um, between, um...sorry I should say, the *lack* of distinction that might have been before initiation, between young, you know, boys and girls. And then the different status that women had in society, that we *might* be able to divine in terms of how they were buried, what was placed with them and so on, *rather* than just the sort of blanket assignation that they were male or female and so on. Um... and I think drawing out those issues of the distinction between gender, sex, and how somebody's...how some...how, how, how some, the perception of somebody's gender might change over time as well...is a, a, very useful way of either [inaudible] interpretive *meaning* to the data.

R: Mm hm. You've talked about um, the, looking at the difference between sex and gender, um, could you tell me a little bit perhaps about how you...think the two relate, or might relate?

C: Well I think, I mean I think ultimately they are...ah...[brief silence]...you know in, in a sense I think it's ah...in the vast majority of cases there's a straightforward correspondence between ah...at one level...between biological sex and gender in the sense that...ah...the straightforward duality between men and women as is represented in the, the biology approach, probably represents...I would *think*...um...um...you know represents the more straightforward gender interpretation of the data as well. But from, you know I...I think *peop*...work in anthropology has made us aware of for example, that, that there...it, it's not always as straightforward as that, but that there isn't, that there sort of can be a miss-match between somebody's sex in a broader way and the gender that they have. That some societies as well *don't* make a, the sort of straight



forward distinction between male and female that we...we in many Western societies do. And so that, that...I think gender is a very useful ways of...um, looking at the blurring of those roles, that maybe, if you like it's that our...um...how will I put it? That might be the cultural and social *reading* of the kind of the biology. And that that is much more *varied* then the straight forward blanket breakdown into male or female.

This separateness/disassociation between sex and gender is not reflected in the correlation between women/females as different in social and biological terms to men/males which is evident in C's narrative. C suggests 'we *might* be able to divine [a dichotomous, direct link] in terms of how they were buried, what was placed with them and so on', associating the social expression of sex to gendered material and treatment. This indicated further support for an interpretive relationship between sex and gender which does not separate biology and culture/society, as C's initial statements suggest.

C appears to find it difficult to express clearly how he understands the relationship between sex and gender, but when attempting to explain this conceptually refers to them as being *different*. His theoretical position seems to be that the two are distinctly different categories, yet what is implied by his illustrative examples and narrated experiences in practice, appear to suggest that the two are closely related and not separable when giving 'interpretive meaning to the data'. This is then put forward as a statement in the narrative that 'in the vast majority of cases' there is a 'straightforward' dualism of sex which directly reflects dualistic gender i.e. male/man and female/woman. However when C is talking about this 'straightforward correspondence' he is verbally hesitant and the field-notes from the interview record that while saying this he sits forward and begins moving things about the table. It appears that in making the statement that sex and gender are usually directly related and *not* different, C begins to feel less certain of the position he is putting



forward. This analysis is supported in the narrative, as C pulls back from his position by discussing the anthropological work that has been done which ‘has made us aware of for example, that, that there...it, it’s not always as straightforward as that’ and that the sex/gender relationship ‘is much more *varied* than the straightforward blanket breakdown into male or female’.

C spends some considerable time making a discussion in support of the anthropological perspective on gender variation, suggesting the potential for a ‘mis-match between somebody’s sex in a broader way and the gender that they have’. This issue of culture is raised and the ‘Western’ view is suggested by C in the narrative to be ‘more ‘liberal’ than in many other societies towards gender and sex ‘mis-match’:

‘Cause I mean we’re, we’re...it’s *clear* that we are, again in Western societies, there’s a more *liberal* attitude, to say...um...you know...an, an, un...an notional *understanding* of a variety of gender roles that people that people may *take*. That there is in many other societies, and that if we think about the way, um...you know in small scale societies...[brief silence]...the ah...a strictness with which people are meant to um...obey social rules, well...you know, you wonder whether that, that may also have applied in terms of, of their cutting across, you know gender rules...or how people were treated who *didn’t* take it on...and ah...and again there are of course anthropological examples that may turn out to be very *useful* in talking about this more, open approach to gender.

The language used and what is said in the narrative suggests that C has an awareness and knowledge of the alternatives to the ‘straightforward’ approach he has indicated. However his conceptual framework remains within the boundaries of a direct, dichotomous sex and gender correlation. He uses the idea of not fitting with social rules in a society as an

opportunity to question the meaning of sex and gender within that society i.e. considering what does not fit inside the boundary to help understand its extent. C continues this thread by reflecting on the fact that sometimes the sex of skeletons in the archaeological record does not 'match' the gendered context they appear to be in, giving the example of a female skeleton ('woman') 'occupying what's meant to be a *classic male* position'. This example is offered as an illustration of how models of society vary and 'how gender might be different from sex'. The intimation is therefore that any evidence which *does not* appear to fit into his conceptual framework is in fact further evidence of 'difference' between sex and gender and therefore means that it *does* support the framework.

C then passes on to discussing relationships in societies, specifically commenting on the social relationship between men and women being identified from the death assemblages created by the living. C proposes that a 'complex range of arguments' can be made around 'the reality of what might have been', suggesting that the interpretations made are not necessarily reflecting reality in the past. C gives an example of a site where a female skeleton was found in a context which is 'generally taken to be indicative of male burials'. He gives his interpretation as being that this female must therefore have been a respected ancestor 'a woman of the kind of status that in normal communities, was, was given to a man'. This reiterates his previous concept of a sex/gender mismatch in the burial context representing an abnormal social situation which he uses to indicate that social variation existed in different societies in the Early Bronze Age. Once again in the narrative, C pulls back from his interpretation and offers alternative interpretation possibilities. These alternatives include the processual/traditional view that the woman was being used to reflect male power and position, or the postprocessual/postmodern view that the individual represented a blurring of male/female boundaries who 'in some senses *was* a man, but was also a woman...'. Again, C uses this as an illustration of 'how there might be, a very distinctive difference between sex and gender...'.



C's pattern of making a bounded statement from his experience then giving examples of theoretical alternatives followed by a reiteration of his position of sex/gender difference, gives the impression of him feeling ungrounded in his own experience of the material. He appears to remain open to possibilities while in reality being closed to what the alternatives he puts forward might mean to his own conceptualisation of sex and gender. This narrative ambivalence is then followed by a questioning of what C has previously been discussing, based on his recognition of the point that 'very often...in prehistoric osteological assemblages, it...isn't possible to definitely say in all cases whether somebody is, whether their sex is male or female'. This is a questioning of the boundaries of his conceptual framework which he construes as 'a definitional blurring of...in physical terms to discriminate between male and female'. C suggests this is a useful 'analogy for the *blurring* of gender lines as well...' with the addendum of a return to difference, although with less certainty – 'even though it, it's not necessarily the same thing'. C points to the distinction between sex and gender as being something which is not traditionally reflected in Irish society or the Irish archaeological discipline, but that this is changing.

C: You know that there is more awareness of the distinction between gender and sex than there was [in Irish society and the archaeological discipline], and the significance of talking about um, of gender roles and so on.

R: That's something you've seen fairly recently is it?

C: Yeah, well I think Irish archaeology has changed a lot in fairly, in the last ten years.

R: Mm.

C: It was...um...you look at...well...indeed some things written today won't make any distinction between sex



and gender...they'll assume they're one and the same thing.

He is evidently critical of the assumption that even in 'some things written today' it will be assumed that sex and gender are 'one and the same thing'. Although he is critiquing this, the narrative analysis seems to suggest that this actually reflects his *own* deeper conceptualisation of sex and gender.

C returns again to the issue of the distinction between the biological and the cultural again later in the interview. He obliquely addresses the possibility of more than two sexes (or a variety of sexes) by saying that the '*evidence...suggests that the duality works far better in the vast majority of cases in terms of the biology*'. He once again draws the comparison between this and gender as culturally constructed and therefore 'much more variable' and which can change through the lifecycle (potentially implying the 'static' of biological sex throughout life and into death). At the end of the interview, C reflects on the issue of assuming that gendered grave assemblages being used to suggest the sex of a skeleton is 'very dangerous'. Just prior to this he has commented that if a male burial followed all of the norms of other male burials, the gender of the burial would not be questioned. That it is only where the '*sex of the objects don't match the sex of the skeleton*' that the question of gender would be raised. C's final comment on this theme at the end of the interview is then comparatively brief and to the point. It is also the first time during the interview where he has directly addressed the issue of the way sex and gender relate (rather than how they differ) and he says 'it would be difficult to talk about gender if it didn't come down to sex'.

### **Reflection**

One of the things which has come up a number of times while working with the data in this theme, is questioning whether I am understanding C's meaning about the *separation* between sex and gender. I have asked

whether separation in form necessarily implies separation in meaning, and whether C's use of the categories of biological and social/cultural *material* necessarily means that he sees these as conceptually separate. Because of the confusion that comes across in C's narrative relating to this conceptual relationship it is hard to be clear on this point.

My own way of posing the question about the relationship of sex and gender is rather clumsy and on reflection this very direct question about a conceptual issue potentially elicits a confused answer. In fact the answer is much more clearly defined when C is speaking about illustrative examples throughout the narrative, although this is not his purpose/intention in telling them.

I am aware that the narrative is partial, that words may be construed to have meaning where in fact they have none but are simply a function of the narrative such as C speaking about the 'sex [rather than gender] of the objects' not matching the sex of the skeleton. A longer association with the participant and further discussions on the topic would be needed to gain more accurate insight into the potential meaning (or lack thereof) with which this statement may be imbued.

## ii) *Reflexive process*

C expresses a wish that archaeologists be more reflective when addressing gender. The concern that appears to drive this statement is a concern about subjectivity – that the current, contextual understanding of gender is not simply transposed onto past societies. He doesn't want to just 'translate *our* approach and our cultural attitudes back in time'. His concept of reflection appear to be as a means of removing direct subjectivity from interpretations. His own intellectual, reflective approach seems to be to consider various possibilities for interpretation of the evidence – 'is this somebody who has blurred the *lines* between male and female? And who in some senses *was* a man, but was also a woman...and that's a very interesting way to think about it...'

This wish for a more reflexive practice to help archaeologists *avoid* subjectivity is followed later in the interview with a statement that suggests that subjectivity cannot actually be avoided. C noting that ‘this recognition that the data is written in the present, and we *do* write about the past from our own social context...[and]...that we have to be continually aware of that’ is at odds with what he has previously wished for. This sets up a paradox in the narrative; that in order to be good/reflexive researchers, subjectivity should be avoided when making interpretations of the past, but that it is good/reflexive to be aware that subjectivity cannot be avoided when making these interpretations. C makes it clear that reflexivity is not easy to put into practice through the ‘unspoken’ undercurrent of his narrative about reflexivity being ‘often forgotten’. He does however follow this with an allowance that the basic level of reflexivity, or self-awareness, has value, putting forward the idea that we are all:

...operating in a...particular society and that all you’ve been through as an individual, from your earliest experiences, from your schooling to your broader social context, all of those have an impact and influence on what you write about [in interpretations]...and even recognising that is useful.

C therefore considers awareness of personal and total context to be helpful in thinking ‘outside the box in the sense of looking at the past’. He speaks about transparency of personal context as something that archaeologists ‘should be’, but notes that he thinks people reluctant to do so. C shows this reluctance himself during the interview although at this point he is gently critiquing those who are unwilling to do so. He chooses not to offer his insights into the possible reasons why people are reluctant to be ‘transparent’. His statement, made in the third person, is followed by a short silence before changing the topic to the issue of sex and gender interpretations being ‘influenced by your own gender’:



Yet, I don't think you ever totally *escape* your social context. Um, where...I think you can, you can, and you should, be *transparent* about where you're coming from. And I think people are still very reluctant to do that, because then, for a variety of different reasons...um...[short silence]...um...so again undoubtedly I think, and, and, and when you're dealing with issues like gender and sex I think undoubtedly you are influenced by, and of course you are influenced by your own gender as well...ah...and I have absolutely no doubt at all that...there, there is a...you know...there *is* a difference between the way that male and female archaeologists write about the past. And, and the *kinds* of senses of affinity with...and a...and so there's that personal level, but I think also there's this social, um, level as well. Um...

Later, C pulls back from discussing his personal experience of reflexivity in the way he has previously outlined, taking his time to consider the researcher's direct request for information about this. He then gives an example which is not related to the topic of sex and gender being discussed, commenting that he doesn't think he is answering the question directly. He then reiterates a much earlier discussion about the way in his teaching he encourages students to reflect on how 'we in Ireland *today* treat the dead, and the way the dead were treated in the past'. It comes across from the narrative that C does not wish to discuss openly his personal experience of the theoretical concepts of reflexivity he has been outlining as important.

Another angle of the reflexive process that C raises later in the narrative can be considered as reflective of experiential development. He suggests that it is only with some distance from the research, once it has been *done* that issues of subjectivity/personal context may become apparent:

'Cause sometimes you're so concerned about the issue that you're dealing with the part that...the issue that you're dealing with at hand...that you get so into it, that, that the sort of issues that we're talking about, only become apparent after you've actually done the *research*, because you know and, and ah, um...um! But no I do, I do think it, it's an important issue and that, and I suppose as well it's something that when we...that in talking to colleagues about, I think people would...are becoming much more aware of...of the...and maybe, going back, you know, maybe this is to do, is also a reflection of the changes in Irish society.

C doesn't give an explanation for this process, instead he seems to express a slight frustration at his inability to put into words what he has in mind. Towards the end of the interview C asks the question 'I wonder do we as archaeologists, um, often think enough about different roles that people have at different stages in their lives?'. The narrative is showing reflection in action. C is asking a question about what puzzles him about interpretive archaeology; a personal reflection on his own and others' practice.

### **Reflection**

In the first-listening memo I note that it comes across to me from the interview that C wants to be able to be more reflective/reflexive and that there is some frustration at recognising his own 'forgetting' of reflexivity. I am aware of the way I am seeing C as someone who is able to intellectually discuss reflexivity and who values it, but rarely puts it into practice. I am also seeing the reflexive process functioning at a different level in the interview narrative itself, of which C appears to be unaware.

**iii) *A concern with death in the past relating to death in the present***

C talks about death as a 'universal' issue which people 'cope' with in various ways dependent on their context and experience. It is this contextual and experiential level that he sees as a means of engaging with the past personally (as archaeologists/ students of archaeology). In his teaching practice he directly links the interpretation of human remains back to the personal experiences of the individual doing the interpreting in the present – and specifically to the possibility of their own experiences relating to death:

... one of the things I try and do is...in a sense to, to grapple with this issue of death being universal, but at the same time that the way people cope with it is...social and cultural and historical conceptual [inaudible word]...but I think that's a way of both engaging with the students, and getting them to reflect about their *own* experience of, of death...and the social context that occurs... I do think it is an issue that em, the students are very interested in. And sometimes it's a subject, I mean I...I think again it...on the other hand it's possible just to...ah...I suppose, not to be sensitive enough to the fact that if you're talking about, to a class of say 50 or 60 students the possibility is, there's somebody who may have, you know, suffered a recent bereavement and...I suppose that's something I consciously try and be aware of, but perhaps not as aware of it as often as I should be ... You know because I do think it has an impact, particularly you're talking about death. It does have an impact on 'em, in a way that maybe other archaeological issues are further from the student, they find it easier to deal with something that may not directly effect them, whereas if it's somebody who's *recently* affected by death and you're talking about death I think it is, something you have to be aware of.



His noting that some will have experienced bereavement and that death in the past becomes a particularly potent subject in this context, particularly if the bereavement is recent suggests a strong personal sensitivity to this issue. He reflects on the need to be aware of this in any practice context and then leads into an example from his own practice of excavating two mass graves where he notes that the personal experiences around death were reflected upon. He begins to give an account from his experience on the site ('reflecting on the sorts of issues that other people were up...') but then stops and redirects his narrative to the fact that they treated the dead *respectfully*. However after giving some of the details of the excavation and material he then changes from the original direction of the topic. He began with the issue of emotional *engagement* with human remains from the past, and then switches to the possibility of emotional distancing/separation when dealing with human remains on the scale of the example given. He suggests in this context to 'become less aware of the humanity of the people that were' is a possibility, suggesting an emotional separation when engaging with death directly. He then removes himself as agent from the example given by deferring his experience to allude to osteoarchaeologists being particularly aware of and sensitive to emotional engagement with human remains:

C: ...I suppose it's, it's...[short silence]...you know when you see these very large assemblages of, of human bone, I think it is sometimes possible to allude to, to kind of become less aware of the humanity of the people that were...

R: Mmm.

C: ...but then on the other hand, I think perhaps some of the people who are perhaps most aware of these issues are osteologists who are in tune with the material...

Later in the interview, C returns to this theme again, relating his practice as a researcher and teacher. He explains that he encourages archaeologists/students to consider the way they understand and perceive the treatment of the dead in the past:

C: ...getting both readers and students to be...um...more aware of the differences and contractions between the way we in Ireland *today* treat the dead, and the way the dead were treated in the past.

R: Right.

C: And sometimes I think we...[brief silence]...um...[brief silence]...at first glance, things may, things that people did to their relatives and friends and so on, or indeed their enemies in the past, many seem utterly bizarre and...inhuman, to some people.

He gives a recent example of the treatment of bog bodies to illustrate his point that the treatment of the dead in the present day society is less different from the past than people may think. He then illustrates this with the example of debates over ancestral rights (i.e. human remains repatriation cases) today, being not so different to examples from the past of human bone relics in the Catholic Church ‘...as a, in sense as a sacred object’. In his final comment relating to this theme C talks about ‘getting people to try and tack between past and present...’ as a method or means of understanding the archaeology of death.

### **Reflection**

In my field notes, I record that after the interview we talked about cultural differences in modern funerary practices (between Ireland and England) contrasting the focus on community and family in Ireland and the ‘stiff upper-lip’ in England. We also spoke about emotion being important and C referred me to the Irish-American poet, Thomas Lynch, who is also an undertaker. This, combined with his deferring speaking about his own

personal experiences in the examples given, seem to suggest a very personal engagement with death beyond a purely professional interest. This does appear to have an impact on the way that C treats and addresses the issue of human remains. That in reality, he does not separate himself from the material emotionally.

*iv) An interest in death and/or gender linking to lifecycle and change over time*

C directly links the way the dead are treated, with various aspects of the lifecycle at different points in his narrative. He first introduces the theme by referring to the 'question of how our ancestors are recognised and how we deal with that as archaeologists'. The use of the term 'ancestor' (rather than older, mature adult) reflecting a particular societal position for the dead suggesting seniority and respect. However the links between sex and gender and the lifecycle are not introduced until later in the interview when C is discussing his experience of excavating human remains from a mass grave where all six of the individuals were sexed as male, but also significantly as young adult. It is the combination of these two points of reference (sex and age) that are then used to infer social context/gender role:

...so we were building an...an interpretation of, of, you know this might represent a particular cohort like a ship's company or something like that.

The implication here is that at a particular point in life (youth) people of a particular sex buried together reflects a particular job or social role (which can be directly linked to their age and sex). The later discovery of female as well as male remains in an associated mass grave resulted in a requirement to re-evaluate the given interpretation. Sex is therefore used alongside age to infer which roles were/were not the probable social gendered roles of those buried. These three axes of sex, gender and age are then explicitly linked in relation to using them as a means of



interpreting where the three categories can be used to talk about ‘what that might mean in social terms’.

C then continues on to comment on the possibility of age and gender being associated through a *lack* of social differentiation prior to ‘initiation’:

I think it’s very useful [differentiating sex as biological and gender as cultural] in terms of um, talking about the distinction that um, between, um...sorry I should say, the *lack* of distinction that might have been before initiation, between young, you know, boys and girls. And then the different status that women had in society, that we *might* be able to divine in terms of how they were buried, what was placed with them and so on, *rather* than just the sort of blanket assignation that they were male or female and so on. Um... and I think drawing out those issues of the distinction between gender, sex, and how somebody’s...how some...how, how, how some, the perception of somebody’s gender might change over time as well...is a, a, very useful way of either [inaudible] interpretive *meaning* to the data.

However within this possibility he clearly retains the distinction of biological/sex difference by further clarifying that this lack of gender differentiation is between ‘boys and girls’. This is then compared with identifying differentiated social/gendered status in adulthood by giving the example of a different status for women in society, interpreted it must be assumed, from their burial context and associated burial goods. This suggests that the biological sex of an adult female may be seen as ‘different’ to the male role and that hence as adults, differentiation between gender may be recognised in the burial data. These two examples (pre-initiation and adult burials) are used to illustrate his point that across a lifetime, although sex would remain constant, gender may

vary and may not be simply dualistic. However this is done without any reference to how gender may actually be different from sex at these different points in the life-cycle.

Commenting specifically about the use of distinct categories of sex and gender (reiterating previous narrative) C suggests again that they are a means of understanding change over time and are useful in providing interpretive insights into the *meaning* of the data. These categories are considered by C to be particularly helpful where other evidential material (context/detail) is less good:

...it is very useful to start with the idea that, that, you know...start with age and gender as, or age and sex as two ways of differentiating data.

C then returns to the issue of ancestors (the later phase of the lifecycle) and this transition, or as C puts it, the 'translation' from living person to dead ancestor. He relates this to an example of an elite female burial, suggesting that the respect offered to this individual in death may represent her transition to the role of ancestor. This is then linked in the narrative back to her sex through the point that the burial context for this female was the same as for many (comparable) male burials. It is suggested in his interpretation that she was a woman who held a status that in 'normal communities' would be a role for men. This directly links her sex to her social role/gender – being a (biological) woman in a (biological) male gendered role.

A new, reflective aspect to the theme is then introduced. C talks about the inevitability of the effect of personal context and experience throughout life, marked by different points of reference, on how interpretations are made (as archaeologists). He also suggests that the life-context (an individual's own sex, gender, age experiences etc.) 'undoubtedly' have an impact when interpreting sex and gender in the past. C goes on to talk about how gender changes over time for an

individual, but that the *relationships* between people in regard to sex and gender are also significant:

C: I suppose the other thing...I mean I haven't really...um...[short silence]...talked about it, but I mean I think gender is also about the relationships *between* people. Um...and how they change over time as well.

R: Could you um...you said you hadn't really talked about it...

C: Well in terms of the interview.

R: Oh, ah huh....but uh, how...a...if you, you've thought about it, maybe you could tell me a bit about that.

C: Well, I...[long silence]...I think that, that, the different...I wonder do we as archaeologists, um, often think enough about different roles that people have at different stages in their lives? They move from, you know...[brief silence] being young through initiation, to being of child-bearing age, ah, both male and female, you know in terms of...of...ah, that, and then, how that changes when they become, if you like when that stage of life finishes, when they become grandparents or whatever, um...

This is linked to a reflective comment about whether archaeologists think enough about this issue. Inferences about relationships of sexuality and family come across from the narrative and C questions how this (change in gender) works across generations. He goes on to question the relevance of gender when people move into the transition/'translation' stage of life 'halfway between life and death' as elders in a community. This is associated with the relationship between gender and the body (biology) at different ages.



Finally, C makes the point of cultural assumptions about social realities of gender at particular ages, he does so with the brief example interpreting a burial of a 14 year old. His point being that in our social context they would be interpreted as ‘a teenager without any responsibility’ but that in other societies they may have had different roles to this both in relation to biological sex (as a mother) or in relation to gender (as a warrior) with ‘full’ social roles.

### **Reflection**

This theme seems to be of particular personal interest to C. He refers back to it a number of times and is often positing questions in relationship to the theme, rather than making decided statements about meaning. Interestingly, I note in my field notes made directly after the interview that I did not have a sense of C ‘noticing’ me as female, but more that he noticed me as ‘youthful’ – a reflection perhaps of his view of himself as being at a ‘later stage’ in the lifecycle where gender is ‘irrelevant’ as he moves towards ancestorhood!?

## Chapter 7. Case D

### 7.1 Context

D is a professional osteoarchaeologist who works primarily with archaeological material, but also with modern forensic cases. Her practice involves the analysis of human remains in the laboratory, however she is also involved on sites as a specialist advisor and continues to be involved in the excavation of human remains when ever possible. She writes professional reports and papers on the analysis and interpretation of human remains from an osteological perspective. The researcher goes to interview D while she is working 'on site'. The rough bare earth is littered with small fragments of human bone that crunch under foot when walking across the site. The interview is conducted outside the burnt-out remains of a church, sitting on plastic chairs in the churchyard. The researcher and participant are surrounded by great piles of human bones on tarpaulins, plastic crates full or processed (sorted) bones and rows and rows of skulls on long wooden trestle tables. In one corner of the site is a supermarket shopping trolley filled with human long-bones packed vertically. The small excavation team is working near-by, sorting through the piles of thousands of bones, chatting away to each other. The sun is shining.

After the interview the researcher and participant are joined by two other men, one of whom is an older man from the excavation team, the other is the archaeologist who brought the researcher to the site initially. Together the small group take a tour of the site and go down into the crypt to look at where the bones had previously been stored (following previous, poor, mechanised excavation) before the crypt was broken into recently by drug addicts to be used as a den and the bones strewn throughout the churchyard. The men explain this story as the group walk through the narrow crypt with flashlights. D tells that she was alerted to the situation by the police when she was called to do a forensic analysis when the bones started turning up around the city, including a skull on a street bollard. Following the interview and tour, D says she would be

happy for the researcher to be in touch again and return to the site if she was interested in the bones.

D is relatively brief and concise about her educational background and the development of her career, she does not appear to wish to go into personal detail about the context of her studies. D provides no dates relating to her periods of study; however she does give information about where in Ireland she studied both her undergraduate and Masters degrees. The first thing that D points out is that she did not originally train as an archaeologist for her undergraduate degree, but took a science degree which included the study of biology and anatomy. It is not until towards the end of the interview, when the researcher asks that it becomes clear that D originally began with the study of medicine, but then transferred to 'a degree with anatomy and burial, which was an *ordinary* science degree'. It is not entirely clear from D's narrative whether she went on to study a second undergraduate degree in archaeology, although this may be implied. The reasons that D gives for her move from being an 'ordinary' scientist to osteoarchaeologist are narrated in a relatively personal, but abstract way, giving no factual details:

D: Well I *was* a scientist, and I had done biology and anatomy, so I was always interested in that end of things. Then I studied archaeology and discovered that there was a whole *field* of archaeology that was associated with human bone.

R: Uh huh.

D: And when I looked into it, before I started I just had this...idea of scientists measuring skulls, you know, that was utterly boring...

R: Uh huh.

D: ...but when I looked into I discovered that you could find out *so much* just from somebody's bones, I was



really fascinated by the whole thing. So um, I did a Masters qualification in that, and I've been working in it for about fifteen years now.

Towards the end of the interview, D comments that when she was 'first starting off' in practice she attended a conference in 1990 which suggests that her MA was shortly before this, however it is not clear if there was a gap between her undergraduate and postgraduate studies. D speaks briefly about her MA specialising in osteoarchaeology and comments that she 'studied a whole...cemetery' but offers no further detail about topic or context. She then moves on to note that she briefly studied forensics in the UK, however this appears not to have been for a qualification. While D makes reference on a couple of occasions to the forensic work that she undertakes, she does not go into any detail about this. Later in the interview, D speaks about having a great deal of work keeping her very busy in recent times, and that she is now in a position to 'pick' her sites and '...do the nice ones'. This suggests that D is a professional with a good reputation within the field.

## **7.2 Analysis**

### ***i) Interpreting human remains using sex and gender***

The first point at which D speaks about this theme is while she is talking about the importance of being on site as an osteologist. She comments that she has to start thinking about sex '...generally before I've hardly got a look at the thing. If I'm coming out on site, there's *always* somebody standing round the grave-side who'll say 'what sex is it?'...'. The sex of the remains of an individual appears to be an entirely straightforward, practical matter to D – something to be identified from within specific boundaries. As she begins talking about the topic, the first point of reference is the pelvis, and she immediately offers to show the researcher some examples of pelvises from the boxes of bones surrounding them:

D: I've got one...I'll try and find some...[long silence with sound of bones clinking together]. Ah...there won't be any *complete* ones, but that's the way it happens in the field, that you often get...

R: Mm hm.

D: ...now...*that* I would say, is a female pelvis, because this angle here is almost a right angle.

R: Mm hm.

D: ...it's almost like that... [indicating angle]

R: Yeah.

D: ..and *males* have a sharper angle like *that*. [indicates angle again]

R: Mm hm.

D: This is also quite small and shallow as well...um [short silence with bones knocking together]...and the *pubic* bone is...is the best indicator of sex.

R: Mm hm.

D: This is actually a very good example for you to...it's *male*...but, it has...it's not as sharp, males usually have a very sharp angle here...

R: Mm hm.

D: ...no concavity here. But this is a...it's not a hundred percent let's say...

R: Mm hm. Could...could um, just for the recording could you describe which bit you're actually looking at there.

D: This is the pubic bone, the *angle* of the pubic bone between the bone and the...I've got my finger here, this very sharp angle.

R: Mm hm. Mm hm.

D: So *that*...indicates a male. Um, this part of the, the  
issue pubic ramus, is broad, so that's male as well.

R: Mm hm.

D: Ah...and there's a nice sharp, clean line *here* in front of  
the pubic bone...

R: Mm hm.

D: ...which is male.

D clearly has a conceptualisation of sex which is dichotomous – female and male – and sees the morphology of the bone as fitting into one or the other category depending on traits measured against a mental reference. However, her recognition of the somewhat interpretive nature of what she is doing becomes apparent as this narrative continues:

I'll try and find a female one, for...comparison [long  
silence with sound of bones clinking together]. Not too  
many of them around. [long silence with more bone  
clanking]. Ok...this looks like a female [short  
silence]...it's actually another in-between one, do you  
know that?! ...You get some which aren't as clearly  
defined...

Her inability to find an example of a female pubic bone appears to frustrate D and she passes on to commenting about sexable traits from the skull, noting males as having 'prominent extra, supra-orbital ridges...and very large temporal process'. D uses a comparative framework common in the sciences for identification of sex which measures against a standard i.e. *x* is male because indicator bone is narrower/more prominent/ larger than female equivalent, or vice versa.

As the narrative continues, D explains another approach briefly:



Um...then when, when you...afterwards if you didn't have enough pelvis and skull left, another thing I do is actually measure the *ends* of the bones like...the um...[sound of bones clanking]...mostly the femur, but sometimes the humerus as well. And, the diameter of the *end* of the bone is *bigger* in males.....so if it's over forty-eight millimetres, it's...a male, and if it's less than forty-five, it's female.

However when asked about her use of this method of sexing, D's narrative suggests that this metric measurement approach is an inferior method that she would only use if there were no other option; her reasons for this are not given. D contrasts this method with the morphological approach, saying that 'the shape of the pelvis...[has been]... the same since the beginning of time basically... It's all geared for child-rearing'. D's clear conceptualisation of sex being a reflection of the reproductive activities of living bodies highlights her functional view of sex in relation to the skeleton. There appears to be no value judgement in relation to gender or sexuality being attached to her understanding, she speaks purely from a 'practical' perspective.

Later in the interview as the narrative turns to sex trends in populations, D comments that she:

would always look at ah, where the burials are located, to see was there an area reserved for females or children, sometimes you get an area reserved for children. So I obviously look at it, but I haven't, I can't say I've actually *found* anything based on sex, you know, I haven't um ...  
You know, it's one thing I would look out for, but I haven't found anything startling.

This seems to suggest that when considering sex from a population perspective, D is looking for differential treatment along a dichotomous division. There is no indication that she considers a lack of differentiation

as relevant. When D is then asked how she understands the relationship between sex and gender, her position is indicated by her answer:

D: Ah...you know, I'm not really sure what you mean you see.

R: Ok.

D: What do you, what do you *mean* when you say gender?

It is unlikely that D has not heard the term 'gender' before, in particular as she agreed to take part in an interview for which one of the stated topics was gender. This part of the narrative therefore suggests that D considers sex and gender as not separate, to the point where she chooses not to recognise the use of the term 'gender'. It appears on this basis that for D, the term sex represents social as well as biological aspects, with both grounded in a dichotomous physical reality. Unusually here, the researcher answers her question; however the outcome in the narrative of this intervention provides further insight into D's way of conceiving of sex and gender in the burial context:

R: Um...well I suppose in terms of the theory, or the, the *social* aspects.

D: The *social* aspects, mm. See I don't think I really *think* much about that at all to be honest [laughs]

R: Uh huh.

D: [coughs] I ah, I just try and interpret the burials. The personal life and what happened to them...and...I...no I don't really think about gender at all.

Gender here seems to be being interpreted by D as the personal experiences of the individual, not the larger social interactions.

Later in the narrative once again D clarifies her understanding of biological sex as a dichotomy; in the way she interprets it, if bones which are sex indicative do not fall into either male or female categories she considers them as 'indeterminate'. However, D makes the comment that of those which are indeterminate it is 'Either because...*usually* because, there's not enough of the right bone present, you know...if I only had arms and ribs, you know, you couldn't interpret sex from that'. This suggests that in general, D is able to categorise skeletons as female or male. The narrative then returns to the issue of gender with D retreating from her earlier comment about not considering gender:

...[short silence]...the *only time* actually, I'm thinking, the *only time* I'd actually think about gender is if I found some really clear cut difference between males and females...you know, when I...interpret pathology and put down my diagnosis, then I will always look at how many males have it and how many females have it.

D then gives an illustrative example, which highlights the material information but curiously avoids making any explicit social interpretation at all. Despite this however, the gender relationship that D appears to be implying is clearly one of opposition within the context of violence:

D: And actually, I can only remember one instance recently, um, that was the burials at the front of *this* church, that [name] was telling you about [coughs] there was, ah, let me see...if the males, if, if anybody had broken fingers, they were males.

R: Mm hm.

D: No females had broken fingers. But, there were some males with broken ribs, but *most* people with broken ribs were females.

R: Right.



D: So, I thought to myself, why did that turn up! [laughs]  
and that's the closest I ever came to thinking about  
gender and what people got up to.

As this interpretation goes against what she has previously said about not thinking about gender, it suggests rather that she chooses not to engage with it professionally. Possibly, as with sex identification, this is because she prefers not to make a statement unless she is able to do so with certainty. This possibility may be supported by her following narrative, relating to the analysis of pathology patterning based on sex. Here she gives the example of variation between female and male occurrence of arthritis in certain bones, which she suggests can be 'hard to prove...I say, it's *hard to prove* sometimes, ah, but you have to get a really deep statistical analysis to see...if it's...I say, here's what I found you know and, you *can* interpret it this way if you want'. D then continues with her previous topic of implied gendered expressions of violence by commenting that:

D: I mean one thing about gender I will say, that, any  
burials that are found with sword wounds, have all been  
males.

R: Right. Oh, ok!

D: So [laughs] that's for sure.

This makes a clearly gendered association between a social artefact and the biological sex of skeletal remains. It is also the only point at which D relates human remains and sex to grave goods in the burial context and makes an implied gender interpretation.

D's final reference to this theme is in her discussion of attending a conference. Her narrative tells of the speaker suggesting that the sexing of skeletons where remains did not fall clearly into either male or female categories is considerably biased by the sex of the person doing the

analysis. D's resultant adoption of an approach after hearing this comment means that she chooses not to sex what she considers to be 'indeterminate' remains. This appears to exemplify her way of perceiving sex as something which either falls into dichotomous, oppositional categories or is not able to be recognised in terms of sex for interpretive purposes.

### **Reflection**

The point that D appears to assume a lack of knowledge and experience on my part in regard to the physical morphology of the bone seems to work in favour of the interview. This is because she feels she must explain things simply and clearly. If she had considered me as 'knowledgeable' in this area, she may have omitted to say things that give insight into her perceptions. This is quite interesting from the point of view of the interview methodology, as it was not intentional on my part. However I recognise that at one point I become slightly defensive about her assumption and try to make my understanding clear by using the technical term 'sciatic notch', so she does not feel she has to explain everything. This has the reverse result of my intention, by putting D on the defensive herself and it appears to stop her from saying anything more. Rather foolish of me, but something to learn from.

### **ii) *Reflexive process***

There are only limited references in D's narrative which indicate a reflexive approach or process. Her interview suggests more that the reflective, self-awareness she has in relation to her work is kept deeply personal and there are only hints and insights into this within the narrative. As a result, the interpretation of this theme within the case study is somewhat speculative in nature, based partly in the narrative, and partly in the context in which the words are spoken. D's personal methodology is expressed as being highly empirical, within the traditional scientific sphere. However it is within this context that D first discusses

her practice in a reflective way when she is speaking about her preference for being involved directly with the excavation of skeletal remains:

D: I, I *still* excavate, you know, I don't just all the time look at bones *afterwards*.

R: Mm.

D: I still go off and excavate skeletons you know...

R: Mm hm. [laughs]

D: ...every once and a while I like to get out, and ah, although I haven't actually *excavated* one for a while.

R: Uh huh.

D: I'll go out. I like to go...ah...the way I *work* is I actually prefer to be *on* the site that I'm going to be working on.

R: Yeah.

D: I don't like getting a collection of bones afterwards...

R: Yeah.

D: ...I prefer to be involved right from the start.  
Ah...*excavating* myself or just being there to help other people excavate and interpret anything.

R: Uh huh.

D: Ah, there's a lot that you can interpret about a body while it's still in the ground, before it's ever lifted.  
Some, some information might be lost forever if you don't actually see it...

This narrative suggests that D recognises the importance of her personal experience of the context in which remains are excavated.



While D's awareness of how information is generated contextually is evident at some points in the narrative, this appears to be used as a support for an empirical framework i.e. that the *more* information and detail the better the quality of the interpretation/result. However, early on in the interview when speaking about her experience of interpreting the partial remains of an unusual female Bronze Age cist burial, D's narrative hints at a more inquiring, reflective approach in her practice than she otherwise indicates:

D: But *this* was kind of like a *square* sort of feature, and so they didn't realise it was a grave...

R: Right.

D: ...until they excavated it. So, and they found *bone* and ah, I think they disturbed a bit of the bone to start and then realised it was a burial so it was *kept* in situ and ah...[hem]...give...took photographs...

R: Mm hm.

D: ...and then afterwards sort of give me the bone, and...the photographs [voice tails off]. Now I'm *really* disappointed...

R: Mm.

D: ...that I hadn't been on site. *But*, I *knew* it was kind of a rare kind of burial, so I, I took it. As I say, I don't normally take them unless I've seen them...

R: Mm.

D: ...*and* I was looking at a description that they had *put* in of the burial...I was looking at the *bones* I had, and I was saying this doesn't match *up*! There's something not *right* here. Because from my experience I always *know*, I, I could tell, even if you didn't tell me, I could tell which side a body was *lying* on...

R: Right.

D: ...ah, just by the preservation...

R: Yeah.

D: ...and *that*, you know. But these *bones* don't add up, so [tut] I looked and looked, looked at what I had and looked at the photographs and finally I twigged, that this woman had actually been buried face down. And there was very little bone left. Only the pelvis, legs, a bit of skull and *some* arms...and as far as I could tell as, that explains it and that's why I had this preservation...

This narrative suggests that as well as her technical knowledge, D uses intuition based in her experience to make sense of the burial. Her frustration at not having direct, hands on access, to experience the context herself, is evident.

It is much later in the interview that this theme reappears, again in relation to an example of an unusual burial of a female with a hunched back (spinal pathology). D discusses her interpretation of the burial based on reflections of mortuary rituals from her own modern, Irish context:

D: And because they couldn't put her flat in the grave, they had actually *propped* stones underneath, and what I *originally* thought was collapsed, I was able to relate that to the pathology that she had...

R: Mm hm. Mm.

D: ...and say, they were actually trying to prop her so that she was lying face up and not rolling to one side...

R: Right.

D: ...so then I thought to myself, well *why* would they want to do that, you know? So, the only thing I could think of which helps interpret this society is that...whereas

today, well, I don't know um, it's probably different in England, but today in Ireland if somebody dies, you have a wake, you keep the coffin open...

R: Mm.

D: ...and people come to the house to view it. So I was thinking, that maybe it was part of the burial ritual, ritual that, she was actually open and visible, and people came to pay their last respects...

R: Mm.

D: ...and the family came, and *they wanted to see her*, and they didn't want her rolled over to one side.

At the end of her narrative about this example, D makes the comment that 'it might be far-fetched, but I got all this from her pathology [laughs], you know, so!' This comes across almost as a subtle self-parody, suggesting that D is aware that she is using a more subjective interpretive approach. At one point, D is discussing the analysis of disease pathology and potential correlation with sex category. Within this context, D makes the comment that she would say 'here's what I found you know, and you *can* interpret this way if you want'. This may indicate that D recognises that there are various possibilities for the interpretation of data, even that which is scientifically deduced.

The final narrative section where D makes a statement which suggests reflection at a personal level is when she is discussing her way of seeing her practice as a 'scientific exercise'; commenting that she does not consider people's bones when she is looking at people walking down the street, as she would 'go mad if...[she]...was going to do that all the time...'. D appears to be suggesting that she has reflected on the emotional impact which working with human remains may have on her and has a strategic approach accordingly – she separates work from her



personal life in a clear-cut way, which despite appearances may actually imply that D has a level of self-awareness which is clearly reflective.

## Reflection

I was aware of my own desire to find indications of conscious reflexive practice in this interview where my actual sense was that there was very little at this level. This appears to be supported by the analysis. Partly this seems to be borne out of a frustration in myself that there is more happening which *is* reflective ‘under the surface’ of this interview. I am aware that this feeling comes directly from the experience of carrying out the interview including the interaction itself and D’s paralinguistics and body-language.

### iii) *Right and wrong ways of dealing with the excavation, analysis and interpretation of human remains*

This theme is clearly delineated in the narrative, and weaves its way throughout the entire interview. It is first apparent as D talks about her preference to be ‘on site’ when a body is being excavated. The fact that D considers that if there is not the presence of an osteologist on site that ‘some information might be lost forever if you don’t actually see it’ suggests a ‘correct’ practice. It also positions her and other osteoarchaeologists as ‘experts’, ‘there to help other people excavate and interpret anything’. That to D having an expert on site means that the interpretation will be more valuable, and that this is the right approach to take, comes across clearly when she is describing an example where she was the nominated osteoarchaeologist:

D: Now let me see, say sometimes you’ve got a burial with a *stone*. Oh! A stone on it...well I did find a burial one time, it was a *female* actually as it happened, and she was buried *waaay* apart from everybody else. And she wasn’t in the proper extended position either, she was sort of half, semi...flexed. And she had a *large* stone on

her body, right, as if that was...well it *was* deliberately put there...

R: Mm.

D: ...to hold her down.

R: Mm.

D: So, you like to see that kind of thing in the ground.

Now. There was *one* instance *lately*, ah, last year, somebody excavated a burial...and I *was* the nominated osteoarchaeologist, but, they *didn't* call me. They *forgot* to call me. And, but I think part of the reason was they didn't realise they were dealing with a grave until they actually started to excavate it.

...[section removed]...

D: ...until they excavated it. So, and they found *bone* and ah, I think they disturbed a bit of the bone to start and then realised it was a burial so it was *kept* in situ and ah...[hem]...give...took photographs...

R: Mm hm.

D: ...and then afterwards sort of give me the bone, and...the photographs [voice tails off]. Now I'm *really* disappointed...

R: Mm.

D: ...that I hadn't been on site. *But*, I *knew* it was kind of a rare kind of burial, so I, I took it. As I say, I don't normally take them unless I've seen them...

...[section removed]...

D: ...the photograph now was a really *bad* digital photo so it wasn't even great...

R: Uh huh. [laughs]

D: [laughs] I was *so* pleased that I had interpreted it...

R: Uh huh.

D: ... and her *legs* were slightly flexed, and I saw *one* other burial like it in a forensic context, where somebody had been executed at the side of the grave and, and this is the way that they're falling...their arms like this, and their knees slightly bent.

R: Oh right.

D: So ah. I was really, I was *really*, I was *so* happy and delighted that I was able to interpret this from this *small* amount of very decayed bone...

R: Yeah!

D: ...and I phoned the person that directed it, but she didn't seem that *impressed*, I was awful *pleased* with myself!

This narrative shows D as able to remarkably salvage a good interpretation from badly excavated and recorded material. It illustrates what she perceives to be the 'wrong' approach to dealing with human remains, although from the reaction given by the site director, this was not necessarily a shared perception! D highlights the lack of care/interest from the site director, apparently associate 'bad practice' with an uncaring attitude towards the archaeology of human remains.

This topic of dealing properly or appropriately with the interpretation of human bone is once again returned to as D speaks about her key role in getting the presence of an osteoarchaeologist made a standard requirement on sites with remains. She points out that as a result of this it is now a requirement of the licensing application for excavations a fact which she is '...sort of quietly pleased about...'. This is another indication of the value D places on what she perceives to be 'good practice'. This valuing is potentially linked to the more empirical methodological and conceptual framework within which she chooses to



work. While she recognises that ‘wrong’ interpretations can be made (i.e. human error), her narrative about sexing human remains highlights that she maintains a personal distance from interpretations being made without due care and attention:

D: And if I can see clearly [the sex] I’ll tell them. But if I can’t I’ll say, no I’ll have to wait till afterwards. No. Because, I learnt from experience not to say *too* much until you’ve got, you know...

R: Mm hm.

D: ...the *sim*...you can get things wrong. It’s...especially if you’re just looking at something in the ground, you *can* actually get it wrong occasionally...

R: Uh huh.

D: ...until you actually see the bone in front of you, you’d get a good idea, so...

R: Uh huh.

D: ...I’m always very careful what I say, and I always tell people, but you can’t quote anything I say out on site...unless I *write it down*, in a report, it’s not valid [laughs].

D certainly appears to have quite specific self-imposed rules about how to analyse and interpret human remains. Shortly after the above narrative, D turns to the topic of bone morphology (the shape) of specific bones (pelvis and skull) to indicate sex, and follows this with a discussion about using metric measurement as a sex indicator. D emphasises that she uses morphology as her prime sex indicator, only using metric measurements ‘if there’s nothing else...Actually, that’s the *last* thing I would use is metric’. This suggests that D considers the methodology she uses as fundamental to the accuracy of her analysis. As she points out, ‘the *measurements* are from modern, ah, forensic contexts...The shape is just

ah, the shape of the pelvis is the same as since the beginning of time basically'. D goes on to give further examples from her experience which illustrate her dedication to interpretive accuracy. She speaks about only interpreting 'the burials', not speculating as to issues of their 'personal life and what happened to them'.

One of the clearest insights into this theme is the last time that it arises in the narrative at the end of the interview. D is talking about an experience at a conference early on in her career, where a speaker of considerable repute and whose work she respected had an impact on D's future practice:

D: ...[he] looked at diet and everything, and it was a *very* comprehensive study, and he'd *pooled* information that *different* people had done from different sites...so...

R: Right.

D: ...so you'd have, be dealing with *large* numbers and be able to interpret it better...so anyway, he went through his whole presentation and we were *all* fascinated...

R: Mm hm.

D: ...*but*, he hadn't mentioned *sex* at all!

R: Mm.

D: So somebody asked him had he not, *why* had he not, looked a difference between males and females...and he says, the reason is, because *most* female colleague pathologists...if there's any doubt would tend towards the female side, where as a *male* worker, if there's any doubt would tend towards the *male* side!

R: Mm!

D: And he said you couldn't rely on it! And so for that reason unless one person was doing all the sexing, he wouldn't rely on the sexing!

R: Really?

D: Yeah! I've *never* forgot that, I found it fascinating!

R: Ah huh.

D: Which is why I, I always, I, I, if there's any doubt, I, I just say I can't determine the sex anymore, which it was, definitely male or definitely female.

This might be understood as simple scientific 'removal of bias', or it may be considered as a way to further separate the personal from the interpretation in order to have a more valuable, 'correct' result. There is an indication in the narrative that D's reasoning lies with the latter. She appears to perceive the speaker's meaning to be that if you are in doubt about the sex of an individual *no* identification should be made as it is likely to be effected by the sex of the interpreter. However from the narrative she relates him as having said that he would only rely on data which had been entirely interpreted by one specialist, presumably so that potential bias would be consistent and could be more easily accounted for. D's interpretation therefore appears to suggest that she does not wish to have her own sex biasing her interpretation in any way to reduce the 'validity' of the data.

### **Reflection**

During the analysis of this theme, at times I was tempted to cast it as a 'right way' is good, 'wrong way' is bad dichotomy. However I was not entirely confident that this simple opposition was what was being suggested in the narrative. My sense was that there were overtones of 'doing the right thing' which could be extrapolated to a Catholic upbringing, but as there was no indication of this either in the narrative or



in the interview interaction I remained somewhat sceptical of my interpretation across the entire interview. This was because of my impressions of the woman herself and her evident personal dedication to her subject.

iv) *Human remains as science not people?*

D makes it clear that her career began with her training as a scientist. This educational background appears to have had an ongoing influence on her conceptual framework in relation to the interpretation of human remains. Curiously however, her narrative around the development of her interest in osteoarchaeology hints that she actually finds scientific approaches uninteresting:

D: And when I looked into it [osteoarchaeology], before I started I just had this...idea of scientists measuring skulls, you know, that was utterly boring...

R: Uh huh.

D: ...but when I looked into I discovered that you could find out *so much* just from somebody's bones, I was really fascinated by the whole thing. So um, I did a Masters qualification in that, and I've been working in it for about fifteen years now.

R: Mm hum.

D: And I *still* haven't lost that initial fascination with *bones*...

R: Uh huh.

D: ...and everything that you can find out about...

R: Uh huh.

D: ...people, and um, even *populations* you know. When you look at each individual *as* an individual and then

you combine all your results to look at the populations from different periods...

R: Mm hm.

D: I just find it all fascinating.

This narrative gives an insight into D's passion for her subject, and suggests that one of the aspects of osteoarchaeology that draws her to it is that it offers a way to get to *know* about people as individuals as well as a collective. What D appears to be indicating in the narrative above is that it is *people* not *science* that interests her; this first reference to the theme appears to be at odds with the impression that D otherwise tries to assert throughout the majority of the interview narrative. As the interview unfolds, an ambivalent tension appears between what D asserts about her position and approach towards the material in regard to this theme, and what she appears to be saying when she is speaking about her experiences. The impression that is given from what she says is that she is only concerned with the science of human remains and not the people personally. This seems to be a reflection of her belief that the classic empirical removal of the individual from the 'data' to ensure objective results is 'good', as opposed to a 'non-scientific'/subjective reflection of herself.

D shows a preference towards methodological approaches which take account of context, as is suggested by her narrative around always preferring to be 'on site' overseeing the excavation of human remains, and not just 'getting a collection of bones afterwards'. This approach appears again later in the interview as D talks about interpreting the morphology of bone being preferable as a method of sexing than the more straightforwardly scientific method of using metric measurements:

D speaks about specific burials where she has interpreted aspects such as the pathology, position in the grave, and mode of deposition through

information from the bone itself, its preservation and contextual structures. While her interpretations remain firmly grounded in these features generally, at one point she moves beyond this into a more social interpretation of the remains and their mortuary context. In the example she talks about excavating the remains of an 'old woman' from a stone-lined cist burial, which looked as if the stones had collapsed underneath the burial at one side. During the recording of the burial, D noted that the skeleton had a hunched back, some fused vertebrae and other arthritic problems. This information led D to begin to make a more social analysis of the burial as an individual:

D: ...and I thought to myself [coughs]... actually *because* of the shape of her back, they couldn't actually put her flat in the grave

R: Mm.

D: And because they couldn't put her flat in the grave, they had actually *propped* stones underneath, and what I *originally* thought was collapsed, I was able to relate that to the pathology that she had...

R: Mm hm. Mm.

D: ...and say, they were actually trying to prop her so that she was lying face up and not rolling to one side...

R: Right.

D: ...so then I thought to myself, well *why* would they want to do that, you know? So, the only thing I could think of which helps interpret this society is that...whereas today, well, I don't know um, it's probably different in England, but today in Ireland if somebody dies, you have a wake, you keep the coffin open...

D: Mm.



R: ...and people come to the house to view it. So I was thinking, that maybe it was part of the burial ritual, ritual that, she was actually open and visible, and people came to pay their last respects...

D: Mm.

R: ...and the family came, and *they wanted to see her*, and they didn't want her rolled over to one side.

D: Yeah.

R: So, there may have been something like that, something...obviously there was somebody at the graveside, so there may have been a bit of a while where, where she was on view, before she was covered over and buried.

D: Mm hm. Yeah.

R: So. I don't...it might be far fetched, but I got all this from her pathology [laughs], you know, so!

This indicates that D is thinking more about the personal circumstances of the woman buried, those who buried her, and the society they lived in more broadly when she is making an interpretation, than other parts of her narrative might suggest. It is shortly after this however that in considering the social aspects of gender, D comments that she 'really doesn't think much about that at all to be honest'. Whilst this may simply mean that she doesn't think about this particular aspect of society (i.e. gender) but does others (such as mourning and burial rituals) is not clear however. Her social interpretation of the skeletal remains by bringing in ideas from her experience of the modern Irish context of death and burial practices is a clear indication of D thinking about the 'person'. What is potentially underlying the end of this narrative is a certain amount of defensiveness at a lack of scientific methodology she is using here, as is suggested by her comment about the interpretation being potentially 'far fetched'.

Half way through the interview narrative, D makes the comment ‘...you see, I try...see I think of it as a scientific exercise most of the time’. She goes on to clarify this in a way however that suggests her scientific approach is less a function of a desire for absolute objectivity and more a means of protecting or containing her research for personal reasons:

D: And even interpreting, you know in view of what’s happening there, a scientific exercise, and ‘cause *people* are always askin’ me, oh when you’re walking along the street do you look at people and say look at the shape of their bones or their skull, and I say no I don’t. Because I’d go, I’d go mad if I was doing that all the time...

R: [laughs quietly]

D: ...you know. So I completely *divorce* what I’m doing, from *real* people.

R: Right.

D: Even though I; *sometime* I...have to apply what I’ve learnt to forensic situations, to more *modern* cases.

R: Yeah.

D: And, I actually *feel* more for the *modern* cases than I do for the...

R: Ah.

D: ...you know ca....this is a *scientific exercise* and I *don’t* carry it into ah, ordinary day life...

R: Right, right....

D: ...you know. I always if I, if it’s to do with something forensic I, just thing it was terrible what’d happened to this person and...you could get affected by it...[laughs]

Later in the interview when D is commenting on the research being undertaken by the researcher for this thesis, she comments 'I would...don't envy you. I prefer some scientific you know facts and figures...' She then goes on to speak about 'getting to know' the human remains she has worked with in a way which suggests the opposite of a purely 'facts and figures' conceptualisation:

D: Yeah, I, I like to stay in touch with the field side as well, so and I like to be *involved* in the site and um, and of course years ago when I wasn't so busy I, I felt like I really *knew* the skeletons that I was doing.

R: Mm.

D: And then when I got them in the lab and, I sort of *knew* them, as it were.

R: Mm.

D: But ah, I'm so busy now I, I don't get to *know* them all individually...

R: Yeah.

D: ...but at least I get involved in the site you know...

R: Yeah. [Archaeologist's name] was saying you, you'd done *thousands*...

D: Yep.

R: ...of bones. Thousands of...

D: Yeah about six thousand [bodies] at least.

R: Wow! [laughs] Oh my goodness, that's a lot, that's a *lot* of bones!

D: It is, yeah. Well you don't often see it all, all massed like this [laughs].

R: No, no.



D: You get them one at a time [laughs].

This narrative then continues on with a description of how she is working with this mass of bone (morphological, and pathological identification and ‘bone counting’ for population statistics). This final reference to the theme highlights the apparent tension between science and people in the theory and practice of D’s work with human remains.

### **Reflection**

I am aware of the sometimes subtle nature of the ‘tension’ I have attempted to draw out in this analysis. I found D’s ‘scientific’ persona to be quite ‘closed down’ during the interview when she was speaking about methodology – appearing more in a ‘teaching’ mode and adopting a dry tone. When she spoke about other more interpretive aspects of the human remains she seemed almost to ‘come alive’ and her passion and interest became evident in the way she spoke, as well as notably, the volume of her voice increasing.

### **7.3 Review**

These four chapters have presented the analysis of each case individually, and considered the main deductive and inductive themes contained in each interview narrative. The constant of the two deductive themes helps to link each of the case interviews directly to the central research question and allow for a cross-case interpretation to be made. The variation in the inductive themes presented here reflects what is more personally important to the individual participants within the wider context and offers a different way into the overall interpretation. The value of approaching the analysis in this way is that it offers deeper insight into the narrative prior to the overall case interpretations. These are presented in the next chapter along with the full research interpretation and a reflection on some of the useful methodological lessons learned from the research process.

### **Part 3 – Interpretation and Conclusions**

*Over the exit stream is a rickety footbridge, which has to be crossed one at a time. On the hill opposite a ruin is being slowly devoured and spat out by the westerlies. Disgwylfa – the Lookout. Stones trickle from its sightless windows.*

*The few small irregular fields are bounded by banks of coppice hazel gone wild, and hoary ant hills, each its own long shadow, dot the pasture. An ancient landscape, worn thin and pressing close.*

*A track up onto the moor fades out among nettles, bracken, and small yellow flowers*

*Charnel ground  
beneath the turf  
singing bones*

*Last year a visiting shaman friend crooned along with them. My deafness saddened her. But in this vast, bleak landscape, which can only be swallowed whole, it is the skylarks that I hear.  
Singing their hearts out. As they do.*

*Autumn ebbing  
wandering through yellow gorse  
a broken fence*

Ken Jones

from the haibun, *Pull of the Tide*, 2007

### **Introduction**

Part 3 brings the thesis full circle by firstly making an interpretation of the analysis and then drawing the conclusions and considering the lessons and implications of the research. This is done by firstly addressing each of the cases individually, then developing these through to a full

interpretation of the material in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 looks at what the research means and offers suggested ways forward to further develop the use of a reflexive methodology for the interpretation of human remains.

This thesis has taken as its central theme the question of whether a reflexive methodology can help us to gain further insights into the interpretation of sex and gender from human remains. This question has two aspects to it. In the first, it addresses using the reflexive method as has been done here, to delve into the ideas, experiences and meanings of archaeologists who work with human remains or their context. The 'workings' of this thesis show this to be the case; a reflexive methodology *can* offer us considerable insight into the way archaeologists interpret sex and gender. The second aspect to the question is whether a reflexive methodology can help archaeologists and osteoarchaeologists to interpret the material they work with. In the discussion made in this final part of the thesis I suggest that those who work with human remains may indeed benefit from using a reflexive approach to their work. Insights into the material come through being able to reflect on what the material means to us. The questions which arise as a result of reflection enable a greater self-awareness of the processes taking place in our interpretations. We are then able to feed the insight that this brings into our present practice in a reflexive way. Being able to question why we are interpreting sex and gender in the past in a particular way is highly pertinent to the resulting interpretation and its development. As humans, sex and gender hold meanings as strong as those of death, and as has been seen in the analysis of each of the cases, people's experiences and contexts greatly influence these meanings.

If an osteoarchaeologist looks at a collection of bones and reflects on what it is that categorises them as either male or female, and on what basis they are making this judgement, it opens possibilities for different ways of understanding the material. It may for instance offer a way to resolve questions such as D's, about how to sex remains which are 'indeterminate' without her own sex influencing the outcome. However,



the real value of the approach remains to be seen by those who choose to undertake a sustained application of the methodology in their practice...not simply reflecting on a question one day and forgetting its meaning the next.

## Chapter 8. Interpretations

### 8.1 Introduction

As is suggested by its title this Chapter deals with the penultimate aspect of this thesis, the research interpretations. Prior to the growth of a postmodern (including Feminist and Queer) critique of science, little attention was paid in archaeology to the issue of subjectivity in the interpretation of material evidence. What was created by many of those who are now termed 'processual' archaeologists, was a theoretical discourse which 'claim[ed] to represent the world 'as it is'...to represent analytically true statements about social reality' (Crowley and Himmelweit, 1994 [1992]: 237). Although this approach is often considered as 'scientific', if its product is to confirm a pre-determined outcome about the evidence, or to generate an absolute and unquestionable truth, its process has little to do with the true investigative nature of science. Gero and Conkey (1995:14) reflect on this point in relation to the archaeology of gender:

'The study of gender, like all of what we do, is a knowledge-making enterprise. Our 'tests' are not against an absolute truth; we are 'testing' alternatives and evaluating plausibility arguments, and all of these have confirmational implications'

Our interpretations of the past are about what we understand *now*. This does not mean that the way we interpret the past is not about reality, nor that the past did not exist and so we may say what we like about it as everything is equally true. We experience the results of the past every day through cause and effect, in fact we ourselves are living evidence of this! On the contrary, our interpretations of the past are like a snapshot of how we understand the evidence we have at this moment in time. This snapshot is based on the interrelationship of physical evidence, our own historical experience and understanding, our total context, and our present

perceptions. David Lowenthal (1985) expresses this rather poetically in his book *The Past is Another Country*:

...we feel quite sure that the past really happened; its traces and memories reflects undeniable scenes and acts. The airy and insubstantial future may never arrive; man or nature may destroy humanity; time as we know it may end. By contrast, the past is tangible and secure; people think of it as fixed, unalterable, indelibly recorded...We are at home in it because it *is* our home – the past is where we come from...Yet we can no more slip back to the past than leap forward to the future. Save in imaginative reconstruction, yesterday is forever barred to us; we have only attenuated memories and fragmentary chronicles of prior experience and can only dream of escaping the confines of the present.

So what of our inability to ‘escape the confines of the present’ (Lowenthal, *ibid*)? One of our first questions must surely be whether archaeologists *need* to break free of these confines. As Gadamer says (1975:298), the ‘temporal distance’ between past and present which makes interpretation a necessity should be considered ‘as a positive and productive possibility of understanding’. This statement offers the reflective archaeologist with a much more encouraging, grounded position than the ‘classic’ postprocessual paradigm of relativist deconstruction which uses reflective approaches as further extensions of the subjective unreality of ‘self’; or the ‘classic’ empirical view of the processual paradigm which refutes the need for reflective practice based on the existence of an absolute truth which can be obtained through objectively investigating the evidence.

Too much ‘dreaming’ (Lowenthal, *ibid*) may lead us in unexpected directions, however, as the relativist attempt to deconstruct the past to the point of a disjoint from shared lived experiences highlights. This position, taken by a postprocessual archaeology which supports



'multivocality' offers a view in which the interpretations of all individuals and groups in the present are equally valid. This is drawn from postmodernist theory, illustrated by the Foucaultian suggestion that interpretations of the past represent a truth only created within a discourse understood through the filter of subjectivity (Crowley and Himmelweit, 1992). This theoretical position does not however engage with our material perception of the world nor with the issue of cause and effect and shared experiences. Suggesting that our interpretation of the past is a subjective view which has no grounding in reality and is thus only meaningful to individuals, denies the very living reality of our experience as human beings - whatever the personal and cultural context may be. It removes the container of our humanity. While this may be an interesting mental exercise, without a practical application its value to our understanding of both the past *and* the present is greatly limited. But perhaps this is too harsh an evaluation? One of the values of this postmodernist deconstruction of our interpretations of the past is that it acts as a reminder to be reflective; to question ourselves by considering the many and various experiences and perspectives of others. Taken to its extreme, to the exclusion of a grounding in our shared and individual material experience of the world however, it becomes the very thing it claims to explode - an *absolute* truth. We have only to consider the very 'down to earth' comments of Martin Carver (forthcoming) to perhaps appreciate some of the very *real* implications of interpretation in the field of archaeology: 'Interpretation – what a site means – carries authority; it is what gets published and what makes reputations, and these in turn win appointments and earn money'. These issues of publication, reputation, jobs and money may or may not represent the things that we as individuals greatly value, but the *meaning* is clear. Interpretation is not simply an idea, it is something generated by a whole string of happenings that results in an effect. Whether that effect is perceived to be good, bad or indifferent is determined by ourselves.

## **8.2 Individual Case Interpretations**

This section provides the individual interpretation for each of the cases, followed by a full interpretation of the entire case study. It may be helpful to remember that the participants who took part in this research undertook a process of interpretation themselves. In addition to the basic information provided to them with the participant consent form which 'located' the research and the researcher, the participants had no personal information about the researcher herself prior to the interview. None of them either knew of or had met the researcher before agreeing to take part in the research. Some chose to try and find out more about the researcher informally prior to the interview, such as A asking questions about the researcher's background as they returned to the University from the first café. However for the most part, the participants interpreted the meaning of the research from the interview interaction itself. The impact of this can be seen reflected in the individual analysis of the cases in the previous chapters, with echoes in the interpretations of each case, presented below, before they are brought together in the full case analysis.

### **Interpretation of Case A**

There were some strong themes which came across from the case narrative of the interview conducted with A, the osteologist from an academic context. A clearly seems to recognise his very personal association with his approach to his research and teaching practice. What appears to be suggested by the narrative is that this is connected with a set of personal values held by A relating to what he perceives as valuable, ethical and moral. There is no indication that these values are linked to a specific ideology, but rather that they reflect his own sense of what is 'right'. The personal ideology of 'right' and 'wrong' poses the question of whether A's cultural context has had an influence here, with the likelihood of experiences with a Christian, though not necessarily Catholic, influence in early education/upbringing. Therefore while this is not directly indicated through the narrative, it may potentially have been a moral influence within his wider context. The contextual information the



narrative does offer suggests more that these values come from family, and potentially political influence. The narrative regarding A's career and 'chance' suggests that A may have a strong personal attachment to the meaning that lies behind it. It is interesting to consider here that it is the points at which A is *not* purposefully trying to offer information about his identity, context and meaning that suggests the most insight into them.

A spends a considerable amount of time developing the topic of his teaching practice. This redirection of the interview appears unusual, and may be related to A wishing to locate himself within the interview interaction itself, as it is certainly understood that the topic of the interview is sex, gender and the interpretation of human remains. However his narrative along this alternative stream offers insights into the way that A addresses these topics in a more personally distanced way. It is perhaps interesting here to note that A is recorded in the field notes as having spent the majority of the interview directing his gaze over the right hand shoulder of the researcher, suggesting a personal distancing from the researcher which is not reflected in his apparent wish to be 'open' with quite personal information about context and identity. It is indicated in the narrative that A approaches his work with a mind that both questions deeply held perceptions of identity, while at the same time maintaining some very clear views about what he perceives as being a valuable or 'correct' approach. In other words, in the teaching context, encouraging students to deconstruct their 'Celtic'/Irish cultural identity, particularly on the basis of its political and historically constructed meaning, is seen as positive. This is in comparison to his discussion of the man who actively promoted the concept of the 'Celt' as part of his identity, which A sees as a strongly negative position, calling it 'racist...colluding, unhealthy and immoral'. The relationship that A has with the idea of 'the Celt' must be located within a broader Irish context, as the conscious association of Ireland with the Celts of Europe as opposed to the Anglo Saxons of Britain is an interesting political point. A discusses aspects of identity and context a great deal, particularly in relation to the education or work of others, however he only relates his own subjective identity position to



his practice on one occasion, in the discussion of male assemblage being reinterpreted by one of his graduate students.

Whilst he does not explicitly address it in the narrative, A gives the strong impression of viewing sex in human remains as directly reflecting his perception of living biology. His reference to genitalia, and to cultures recognising sex as dichotomous suggests that he associates the physical expression of sex with more social aspects within the context of interpretation. However there is a form of almost circular argument which is reflected in A's narrative, played out within an apparent opposition between inquiry and certainty in his personal beliefs about the meaning or categorisation of sex. He seems to intellectually/theoretically journey into inquiry about possibilities such as sex as a continuum or 'intermediate' sex, but consistently returns to his grounded certainty about dichotomous sex within the practice, supporting this by asserting that it is the way 'cultures experience' their biological differences. This ambivalence in the narrative seems to generate a feeling of personal defensiveness while at the same time wishing to remain 'open' to alternative theoretical concepts, shifting between extremes.

### **Interpretation of Case B**

Case B, the interview with the professional specialist in mortuary archaeology, could almost be seen as a 'game of two halves'. The interview interaction is split – firstly the participant is intellectually and communicatively defended/closed and latterly she offers more open and inquiring communications. There are alternative possibilities for the cause of this however it may represent an intellectual defensiveness which is only quelled at the 'turning point' when B recognises that the Researcher understands field archaeology, not just 'theoretical' archaeology. The narrative reflects the participant as a highly experienced and inquiring person whose true enthusiasm for her area of interest is somewhat constrained by her perceptions of theoretical concepts. These perceptions in regard to sex and gender and how they

related to each other and the burial context might generally be viewed as 'traditional' and empirical. She clearly sees gender as being a culturally variable social expression of dichotomous biological sex. Although this perspective is not explicitly laid out by B, her narrative implicitly maintains the connection between the two throughout, with no suggestion of alternative possibilities put forward. However this view of B as a traditional empiricist would represent a shallow reading of the interview interaction and underestimate the depth of the responses that B offers in the narrative.

B's concern that archaeologists confine themselves to the practical realities of evidence, or the 'common sense'/'accept what we see' approach to interpretation comes across in relation to sex and gender as well as the other aspects of archaeology discussed. Despite the distinctly rationalist and empirical view put forward, particularly in the 'defended' parts of the interview interaction, B's narrative suggests a more flexible approach to practice in reality. She is open not only to various types of evidence which give different perspectives to interpretation (i.e. ecclesiastical texts, Dindshenchas, and archaeological material) but also to more intuitive, experiential and reflective approaches. There is however a hesitancy that comes across regarding her more experiential 'gut feelings' about burial material and contexts. She retains her sense of wanting to confirm these intuitive interpretations by scientific/objective means.

While at first B offers very little of her personal 'life history' context and takes on a defended position in relation to the topic of gender and sex, in fact the narrative develops to offer a number of insights into her context and conceptual world. In particular, the significance of religious belief and the Church emerges as a strong conceptual theme which runs throughout each narrative topic of discussion. Even the topic of her current research into female burial sites, which date to pre-Christian periods, is of note here because of its very difference to her usual research frame of reference. Undercurrents of power and politics (of the Church or



of sects/Pagan ancestor worship) play throughout the narrative thematic strands. It becomes increasingly apparent that B conceptualises gender as being a topic of relevance or in her words a 'big issue' only when difference is expressed through inequality of status between men and women/males and females. The overall narrative leads to the impression that B has perceived an imbalance between men and women in her personal experience and that this has led her to defend an equality position which is not reflected in her wider context, in particular within the auspices of the Church in Ireland.

The exuberance of B's interaction with the researcher once she is confident enough to share her current research interest is notable by its variance from the early narrative. It is when discussing the topic of the female burials that a sense of B's real engagement with concepts of sex and gender in the burial context comes across for the first time. She is curious and open to possibilities, while still retaining her personal sense of political meaning in the interpretation of the evidence. While B's conceptual framework for practice is grounded within an apparent self-consciously empirical tradition, the discussion around the context of the female burials indicated that in practice, B is considerably more open and reflective. There are hints that while B does work within the constraints of radiocarbon dating, osteological analysis and qualitative data collection, the narrative actually suggests that her practice involves engaging with other, more subjective forms of 'evidence'.

While without further discussion, it would not be possible to say with certainty that B uses her empiricist practice as a form of unconscious 'shield' from academic/ professional critique of a more intuitive, reflective way of working, there are certainly indications that this may be the case. B's engagement with the human remains themselves appears to be pragmatic, with the only possible exception being a potential personal association coming through in the narrative relating to child burials. It would appear that B's subjective relationship to the material appears to have a close association with aspects of faith.



## **Interpretation of Case C**

C is the academic with a particular specialism in the interpretation of the mortuary context. His case is an interesting one which reflects him as an intellectually inquiring person with a real desire to make his practice of interpreting human remains and teaching students about this as considered and contextualised as possible. The majority of his personal perceptions of the relationship between sex and gender and how he conceptualises these in relation to human remains and the mortuary/burial context are more clearly expressed by the way the narrative itself unfolds, and the language used rather than through what is actually said as 'answers' to the questions asked. This seems to be because many of C's explanations and examples, on the surface, are contradictory. In particular his critiques are often aimed at those issues which appear to remain unresolved in his own position. In the transcript, often when C seems about to say something as a personal example from his own experience or practice or to give his perspective, he pulls back from doing so and gives a 'third party' example or uses distancing language which depersonalises it. It is difficult therefore to extrapolate that these examples directly reflect his personal position, although they may be carefully considered as potential inferences or metaphors.

It is clear from the case narrative that C has a very deep engagement with the subject of human remains and their treatment. Much of his discussion and the language that he uses to frame it is strongly emotive. An example of this is the use of the emotive word, 'cope', when discussing death as a universal experience (rather than a distancing word such as 'address', 'understand' or 'conceptualise'). It is also expressed in his focus on relating the personal experience of death and the impact of this on the way students/archaeologists engage with/interpret the material. It is possible that the emotional disengagement with the material that C mentions when discussing his excavation of the mass graves is reflective of his own coping mechanism when dealing with the materiality of death, rather than the theory of it. His comments about osteologists knowing

better than most about 'these issues' (of emotional engagement with human remains) potentially point to his experience on the site being discussed, where in the narrative he stops short of giving a direct experiential example, '...reflecting on the sorts of issues that other people were up...[against?]', but which is suggestive that someone on the site was dealing with a very personal experience of bereavement.

His linking of personal experience to the interpretative process is an undercurrent across each of the narratives key themes. The categorisation of aspects of human remains into sex (and age) and gender are, by contrast offered in an objective manner as methodological categories used to differentiate biological and cultural aspects of the material. They are seen as a functional means of bringing meaning to the data – sex being biological and gender being socially/culturally constructed. However C's way of conceptualising the relationship between sex and gender appears to be removed from the way he speaks about this relationship. When talking about his own interpretations there is always a direct, dichotomous correlation between sex and gender. This is expressed even when considering that these may be notionally 'mismatched', thereby assuming that the correlative categories are givens which can be switched over in certain non-typical or abnormal contexts. The very direct relationship between sex and gender that C perceives is stated clearly only at the very end of the interview. This position is however, not always expressed throughout the narrative without an awareness of what is being implied. This is reflected by slight stumbling over words and changes of topic in the narrative when he is attempting to explain the relationship.

C seems on a couple of occasions to allude to the issue of gender being linked to biological sex through the context of a sexual relationship i.e. prior to adulthood, sex may not be socially significant as it remains 'inactive' as factor in the dichotomous relationship between the sexes. This theme is not picked up in the narrative itself; however the issue of sexual relations between male and female individuals appears to be tied



into the interpretation which C gives to gendered roles as being typically dichotomous.

Throughout his narrative C appears to reflect that he struggles to put reflexivity into practice, but that he tries to have an awareness of his own contextual subjectivity; something he considers to be valuable in itself. C suggests that talking to colleagues helps to become more aware of his own subjectivity as getting another's view brings 'distance' from the research to allow for an interpretation less hampered by contextual complexity. Overall, the case gives helpful insights into the challenges of putting theory into practice through the vectors of the material and interpretation. It also gives the impression that the limitations of scientific method can be a frustration when considering a more reflexive approach to the interpretation of the material of human remains and their contexts.

### **Interpretation of Case D**

Case D, that of the practitioner osteologist, is notable in that it seems to be a wonderful expression of the subtlety of personal context at work in the interpretation of human remains. D's narrative seems to highlight the interpretive interplay between the material, the archaeologist and their relational context. The enthusiasm which D has for working with human remains appears almost to be slightly dampened by the scientific framework within which she chooses to work. However this may be less to do with the actual process of investigation itself and more to do with her idea of what constitutes a 'correct' approach to interpretation. Her use of this approach might also be considered to extend across into her personal way of dealing with working with human remains in a very direct way and on a massive scale; as she points out towards the end of the interview, she has dealt with the remains of over six thousand individuals during her career. The mass of bone that surrounds her and the researcher during the interview is a very visceral reminder of what D works with. It might therefore be suggested that while the scientific



approach that D uses places certain boundaries and controls onto her interpretive scope, it also enables her to express her more creative interpretation without becoming removed from the reality of what she experiences on a practical level. D puts forward her position as a scientific one right from the beginning of the interview when she notes that she '*was a scientist*'. Yet there would seem to be more personal aspects to her context, which despite her limited detail and scientific framework appear to speak for themselves in her narrative about divorcing what she does from 'real people'. The insight into her personal experience becomes clear as she speaks about feeling more for the modern, forensic cases she deals with. D then retreats from expanding upon this line of discussion however by reaffirming that:

...this is a *scientific exercise* and I *don't* carry it into ah, ordinary day life...you know. I always if I, if it's to do with something forensic I, just think it was terrible what'd happened to this person and...you could get affected by it...

This would seem to suggest that D is strongly effected by her emotional response to the human remains, and in recognising this, prefers to contain this emotion within an empirical, professional approach. This would appear to be followed through with D saying that in relation to gender she does not think about the 'personal life and what happened to them' as this could also be seen as part of her intellectualised division between the scientific/biological and the personal/social implications of the material. However there is often an apparent mis-match between much of what D says about understanding the material as a science not considering them as people, and what her stories and example suggests.

It is at times difficult to fully disentangle the way that D conceptualises sex and gender in human remains from the response to the topic generated by the interview interaction itself. At certain points it seems that D is

defensive about speaking about the topic. As an example, when D is asked about sex in relation to burial populations she says ‘obviously I look at it, but I haven’t, I can’t say I’ve actually *found* anything based on sex...’. Yet shortly afterwards she begins talking about the bone pathology of a site where it appeared that arthritis patterning on one specific site, and ‘in general’ seem to show that ‘females were getting more arthritis in their fingers and wrists than the males’ and that ‘males tend to get more arthritis in their hips and knees’. This suggests that D may have a particular idea in mind of what the researcher is interested in that she does not wish to relate to her own work, or is defensive about doing so. Clearly however, D has a practical engagement with interpreting human remains in relation to sex at various levels. Her response to the topic of gender, to the point of not ‘recognising’ the meaning of the word, might be interpreted as a strongly traditionalist response (i.e. not differentiating gender from sex). There is however the possibility that D has a very clear idea in her mind about what gender means – there are suggestions that for D, the meaning of ‘gender’ may be equated with the word ‘Feminism’ or a highly theorised postmodern position. If this is the case, there would appear to be a negative association for her with these positions, which may go some way to explaining her reluctance to engage with the topic when directly prompted, but not when she is actually talking about what she does. It is interesting however that D has many relevant examples and stories which do relate to the interpretation of sex and gender from human remains. However these rarely come out in the narrative as a response to a direct question, but when the conversation is flowing in other directions.

D clearly considers that there is a correct way of excavating, recording and analysing human remains, and this follows through into her approach to sex and gender. She perceives it as appropriate for her to be addressing the biology, the *science* of the bones and the burial context, not the *social* aspects of the people who these remains once were. This appears to be a direct reflection of herself as she does not wish to become emotionally related to her subject but to maintain what might be considered a social



distance from the remains she studies by using the filter of a scientific method. This analysis of the participant does give some indication of how our own perceptions relate to the way we interpret archaeological evidence. Although case D comes across on the surface as being highly 'empirical' in nature, it also holds deep resonance with the personal relationship D has with the material. Her grounded approach seems to allow for the more subtle depths of her interpretation to come to the fore, simply because she is not attempting to explain them.

### **8.3 Full Case Interpretation**

Each of the cases within this case study reflects different, very individual ways of making sense of and engaging with the archaeological remains of humans based on their own experiences, circumstances and context. However through the identity and narrative of each person, common processes and tensions are played out and expressed. These processes reflect the ways the participants contemplate, learn from and understand the material they are working with within their personal, professional and cultural contexts. The cases clearly illuminate the tensions which drive the participants' desire to interpret the material and communicate their understanding. The processes and tension can be more easily explored by considering them within the common thematic areas of *conceptual framework*, *experiential engagement*, *ideology* and *self-definition* which arise from the cases themselves.

Whether it is explicitly or implicitly expressed in the narrative, the predominant conceptual framework evident within all of the case studies is an empirical one. The intensity of this overriding belief in an empirically defined objectivity is however mitigated by the individuals' personal context in each case. Differences in levels of questioning or acceptance of the empirical framework is therefore expressed through the narrative; this is particularly clear in the way each of the participants conceptualises sex. All of the participants have a general theoretical concept of sex and gender which seems to shift between what is



categorised as a 'traditional' model, however other aspects also come out which reflect 'difference' and 'equality' approaches. While each individual speaks about sex as a biological constant, it is however only the two academics, A and C, who raise this as an explicitly defined topic of theoretical discussion, and challenge their own perspectives reflectively through the narrative. For instance, A talks about knowing that 'biological *sex* is more of a *fixed* category' before he goes on to recognise that this is 'contestable' and not 'something that I think everybody would agree on'. In a similar vein, C speaks about his differentiation between 'gender as being culturally defined' and 'sex as being biological', a 'straightforward duality between men and women' which anthropological work has made him aware is 'not always as straightforward as that, but...that there sort of can be a miss-match between somebody's sex in a broader way and the gender that they have'. B and D however refer to the dichotomy of biological sex without questioning its meaning. As an illustration of this, while the researcher refers at various points to biological sex, throughout the entire narrative B only uses the term 'sex' once in relation to burial differentiation, saying 'the sex makes no difference'. Without problematising the terms, she does however refer repeatedly to male and female, in response to questions from the researcher regarding biological sex. D also responds to questions without questioning the concept of biological sex at any time, consistently referring to physical skeletal indicators of sex in regard to male and female or on occasion 'indeterminate' as clearly fitting into either category '*usually* because, there's not enough of the right bone present' presenting the difficulty as a purely analytical, not a theoretical or conceptual one.

The way that A interprets osteological remains in terms of sex is framed by his concept of a universal biology, both of the living and the dead. He frames this within the oppositional dichotomy of male and female, and becomes uncertain and 'worried' by concepts such as third or intermediate sex which do not comply with this dualism. This is a similar situation to the case of C, who is also intellectually troubled by, although

somewhat more self-reflective of, his own empirical conceptualisation of sex. Although C cannot resolve his uncertainty he appears to be more comfortable with this situation than A, who returns to a defended position when he himself raises the topic in the narrative commenting that even though there is a 'kind of infinite variety of cultural behaviours... underlying those, there is a certain universality, and that is human biology'. As is noted above, both B and C speak about male and female in regards to human remains without raising the possibility of any other alternative conceptualisation of biology. This theme is also reflected in the narratives relating to the interpretation of human remains more broadly, with each of the participants speaking about methods of interpretation which are grounded in empirical approaches to the material. Once again the extent to which this is adhered to within the narratives, varies across and within the cases. A and C are the most reflective in a verbally explicit way, although both consistently return to an empirical position. B and D by comparison are more direct about their empirical approaches with reflection implicit within the narratives about their practice. B makes repeated references to 'confirming' interpretations using empirical approaches, while D is even more explicit about her approach to her work, referring to it as '*a scientific exercise*'. The individual ways in which each of the participants relates to their conceptual framework appears to be an expression of their level of conscious engagement and reflection on the theory of scientific, empirical enquiry. It should, however, be noted that this does not imply that the processes of reflection are not at work subconsciously, or even in a conscious but 'hidden' way. The process of reflecting on the empirical approach is therefore occurring across all of the cases, with the level of personal engagement and expression of this varying. This raises some interesting possibilities in regard to the causes of these variations.

It may be suggested that the gender of the participants plays a role in the approaches taken towards the empirical, objective framework for conceptualising sex and the interpretation of human remains more broadly. In the narrative, the way the two female participants talk about



their practice makes it clear that it is consciously grounded in scientific methodologies, including their interpretative processes. However, despite the objective, evidence based analyses and interpretations that frame the examples they give, their narratives implicitly express intuitive approaches; as B terms it her 'gut feeling' or *knowing* something about the evidence, while D is even more subtle with her own way of 'knowing' coming through by implication in the way her answers and examples are constructed. A good example of this is her narrative about the site with male skeletons with broken fingers and female skeletons with broken ribs. Therefore while maintaining scientific methodologies as a framework both are also using more intuitive approaches with confidence and without questioning their authenticity. It may be possible that there is a stronger sense of needing to 'be scientific' on the part of the female participants because of a concern about not being seen to meet with the objective/scientific rigour which traditionally defines the disciplinary context, particularly in Ireland. This might be considered to be a mirror reflection of the two male participants who both display an unproblematic confidence in the empirical biological approach to evidence, but are more tentative about the validity of their clearly intuitive responses to analysing and interpreting the material.

However this somewhat simplistic and generalised interpretation based on gender opposition is not fully supported by the narratives. Although B's interview strongly reflects the pre-eminence of empirical science in her personal context, at various points the way this is expressed does not come across as a 'checking' of her intuitive, experience based knowing, but more that she is paying respect to her chosen conceptual framework:

Now...if your burials are...[short silence]...you, you, I can, and it, it's usually a *gut* feeling to start off with...usually tell what period it belongs to...Um, this would obviously, usually um, so far, 'touch wood' [laughs]...the, these would all be sort of clarified at a later stage by radio carbon



dating and things like that...cause that's what we have to depend on.

B's narrative appears not to reflect a tension between her conceptual understanding as 'empirical' in opposition to 'intuitive' but rather an ambivalence of faith in either one, highlighted by her narrative relating to Christianity. Whereas D's interview appears to suggest more that she is using the scientific method as a means of protecting herself from being required to deal with the more personal, subjective and emotionally driven aspects of working with human remains. In D's narrative her intuitive confidence, although slightly less obvious than B's, does not appear to be separate from her empirical confidence in her 'knowing' about the material. There is no sense of D having to meet an external empirical expectation, but rather that the decision to frame her research within the empirical context meets a personal and professional need. The tension here also appears as a personal one relating specifically to the emotional field. What does come across from each of the narratives is that there is to some extent a 'fear' of accepting the more intuitive aspects of interpretation without positioning it within an empirical framework.

A and C both raise different ways of understanding the empirical approach to biological sex and its relationship to gender. While A related this strongly to his personal experience of working with a female colleague who brought a different perspective to his more empirical conceptualisation, C explores various theoretical issues which maintain the dualistic definition of biology and culture while avoiding saying anything about how they are related. C also at one point notes that he believes that being a male or female archaeologist affects the way that they write about the past. This echoes D's narrative about the conference speaker's discussion about the sex of the archaeologist creating an interpretive bias when sexing skeletons. Once again, a simplistic gender based interpretation might be drawn, suggesting that as men working within an empirical context historically created by a primarily male academic group, they are more confident in asserting biological, scientific

interpretations. It might follow then, that the recent change in regard to theory in the Irish academic context, which has shifted the emphasis away from this 'traditional' approach, has resulted in a feeling of ambivalence. For both A and C this ambivalence is certainly suggested in the narrative. However the role of their gender or sex in creating this tension may once again be questioned. It is clear that A draws his approach to the human remains he analyses from his own experience of working with them, his understanding of the sexual difference of living bodies, as well the way this is recognised in other cultures as dichotomous. However the ambivalence generated appears to come more from A's desire to recognise other aspects of culture which are not able to be resolved for him through an empirical understanding. This is particularly evident through a more personal and political ideology in A's narrative. In a similar way, C's narrative regarding the treatment of human remains functions as the intuitive opposition to the purely biological. His emotional engagement, despite his academic framing of such, once again reflects a personal, contextual tension which is less to do with being 'male' or a 'man' and more to do with who C is as an embodiment of his background, various contexts and experiences, and identity, of which maleness/masculinity is only one aspect.

It is clear that both A and C find it difficult to resolve in their narratives the tensions they perceive between sex/biology and gender/culture or more broadly the empirical/objective and intuitive/subjective.

Comparatively, B and D have less difficulty with the first, but are equally challenged by the second of these spheres of reference. Gender undoubtedly plays a role in the personal context of each participant, however it is each individual's context which is of relevance when interpreting their conceptual framework and related way of practicing. The personal experiences of the participants therefore appear to have more relevance than generalising about the individuals on the basis of their gender, or indeed as may be more accurately stated as the basis of this, their sex.



Another, perhaps more accurate way of understanding the differences in approach between A and C, and B and D, is to consider their professional context for investigating the past. There appears to be no significant similarities between the two osteoarchaeologists in the way they engage with the material and likewise the specialists in mortuary archaeology, as the nature of their subject determines. There is however as may potentially be expected, a difference between the way those working in a professional practice context and those working in an academic context expresses the way they conceptualise and frame their understandings and interpretations. This may be a combination of the individual's choice of working environment and approach as well as a result of working in specific institutional or professional contexts. While A and C verbalise their process of exploration and reflection in regard to theoretical concepts and questions, B and D appear to reflect a more internal, although similar process. Both practitioners do not talk about the process of reflective questioning, but rather it is expressed as an aspect of their work. In the case of B, this is most clearly evident when she speaks about not being willing to put forward an analysis or interpretation of the female cist burials until she better understands what is going on, while at the same time she explores possibilities, speaking about the Bean Dindshenchas and her ideas about boundary markers. Similarly, when asked on site D does not give an interpretation of the sex of human remains if she is uncertain, having:

...learnt from experience not to say *too* much until you've got, you know.....until you actually see the bone in front of you, you'd get a good idea, so...I'm always very careful what I say, and I always tell people, but you can't quote anything I say out on site...unless I *write it down*, in a report, it's not valid.

They both play with the theoretical possibilities in a different way to A and C, who engage in a much more external theoretical dialogue. While this may arguably be because two are practitioners, more interested in



working things out before sharing the results and two are academics who choose to work out their results by sharing ideas, each approach reflects a common process of resolving personal tensions through inquiry.

Each of the interview participants appears to have a tension between two opposites, that of an empirical, objective and an intuitive, subjective way of understanding sex and gender in relation to human remains. The extent to which this tension is expressed varied between individuals as does the way each of them deals with it. This duality is reflected at different levels; between the object and the subject in terms of the way communicate interpretations, between sex and gender as a means of understanding bodies and social relationships, and as female and male in regard to these understandings. The opposition also plays out more broadly in the perceived divergence between theory and practice in relation to gender and sex. A's frustration at his perceived inability to resolve these tensions comes across mainly as a kind of confusion. His awareness of both aspects is very clear and yet his attempts at expressing their relationship becomes 'hijacked' by his own rationalisation as he returns to the side of the opposition he is more comfortable with – that of an empirical approach to biology. To some extent, each of the participants does the same thing and returns to an empirical frame of reference when they are unable to resolve the tensions between theory and practice, in whichever context this is expressed. This might be viewed as a negative occurrence by some, as a way to return to the 'safety and certainty' of an objective approach. However, while this may be so, each of the participants appear to show that this retreat functions as a kind of 'time out' before they make further attempts to penetrate into the fundamental tensions they are attempting to resolve. It is not therefore, an 'absolute' position, but part of the longer-term process of inquiry.

While there may be less to suggest that the sex or gender of the archaeologists has a primary influence on their *conceptualisation* than the personal context of each individual, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent their sex /gender bears a direct relationship to their interpretation of

the sex or gender of human remains. It is evident that each of the participants is basing their interpretations of gender on the physicality of biological sex, even accounting for some variation in the way the relationship is conceptualised. There appears to be no suggestion within the narratives that the sex of the participant influences how they view the sex of remains. In fact, the exact opposite would seem to be the case for D, as she chooses not to sex skeletons which are indeterminate exactly *because* of this concern. The fact that she is female would seem to bear little relation to this decision. Only C perceives that the sex of an archaeologist influences their way of interpreting the past. However this idea is neither clarified nor expanded on to suggest what his meaning is and one is left to ponder what experience has led C to believe this to be the case.

The social experience of being a particular sex, in other words the gendered experiences of the participants within the Irish context will have most certainly had an influence on the personal context of each of them. Both B and D are of an age where they are likely to have either been members of, or experienced the influence of the Legion of Mary for instance. However the impact of the social roles of sex/gender within the culture are not evident from the narratives in a generalised way. The only hint of a clearly gendered response to the topic of sex and gender is the defensiveness of both B and D in regards to the term 'gender', something which is not reflected in the narrative with either of the male participants. Otherwise the sociocultural experience of sex/gender appears to be subsumed by the experiences of individual participants. The complexity of each individual creates a response to the material which is entirely unique when considering interpretation. Sex/gender are most certainly involved within these personal experiences, however the responses to this depend on each individual. It seems it is a more useful approach to consider the overall personal context when attempting to understand the means of interpretation. It may therefore be suggested that the personal perceptions created by the background and context of the archaeologist has a direct relationship with the way they interpret archaeological

material. Yet while this is not a surprise, nor even a new concept in archaeology, the question of how to work with this situation as opposed to either ignoring or denying it remains; and it is this issue which is addressed in the conclusions to this thesis.



## Chapter 9. Conclusions, Lessons and Implications

*Our theories are blueprints of known situations, and if our pieces cannot fit into any of them, it simply means that either this is a new situation completely, or that we do not yet have enough pieces. There can never be any “cutting the foot to fit the shoe”, as the Chinese saying goes. (Chang 1980)*

The interpretation of sex and gender from human remains using a reflexive methodology offers the potential for a deeper understanding of the past through the vehicle of a deeper understanding of ourselves. Recognising that interpretations are created by the experiences and mind of the individual, the possibilities of theoretical creativity open up. This provides a way to resolve the questions we are exploring and better understand their meaning by gaining insights into the material. The tensions inherent in the process of interpretation have been highlighted by the cases presented in this thesis. They are reflections of experiences we all have as archaeologists trying to understand the meaning of the past, whether through skeletal, mortuary remains or other forms of material. This thesis has shown the relationship between sex and gender within the context of human remains as a metaphor for a multitude of questions which are underpinned by a tension between the empirical and the intuitive. As the cases have illustrated, this tension is negotiated in highly personal ways and it is this which brings the visions of the past to life, putting flesh onto old bones.

It may be said that this thesis is a work more of anthropology than archaeology, and perhaps there is an element of truth in this; however the practice of excavating and the theory of interpreting physical remains of humans beings from the past resides at the very core of this work. The initial point of inspiration that drove the central research question was born out of a frustration that the interpretation of sex and gender in

archaeology did not seem to offer a real method which could be used *in practice*. Many theoretical debates and discussion were available, and indeed the question of whether a methodology was even *possible* had been put forward by some archaeologists, as we have seen in preceding chapters. However we can only balance on one leg for so long without support. Theory alone cannot stand up (*sic*) to the rigours of an applied academic discipline such as archaeology without a grounding in the very thing which it declares itself to be exploring. This thesis began with the question of whether a reflexive methodology might be used to provide deeper insight into the interpretation of sex and gender from human remains. To investigate its potential I have applied the method itself. The insights gained by using the method to research into one context, that of the living, confirmed the valuable potential for its use in another context, that of the dead. This chapter therefore addresses the conclusions, the main lessons learned, and their implications for taking the research forward more widely.

## 9.1 Conclusions

Theorising about gender has been one of the re-invigorating directions of research in archaeology in recent years. In many ways gender has a tangible feel about it for archaeologists - artefacts, their relationship to skeletons and social spaces, osteological and biochemical data from human bone, it all provides the kind of evidence which archaeologists can get hold of and start to make deductions about gender in the past. Once doubt about the interpretations of these types of evidence starts to develop it provides fertile ground for theorising. As can be seen clearly in this research, the relationship between the theory and the practice of interpreting sex and gender remains problematic for archaeologists working in both professional and academic spheres. As Soafer (2006:104) notes:

Within the Archaeological community there is a lack of clarity in terms of the relevance of the physical body to

understandings of gender in mortuary contexts, particularly as sex and gender are not regarded as equivalent.

It would seem therefore that a method for understanding the relationship between sex and gender is key to understanding these aspects of human society in the past. Reflexive methodology offers one route to this understanding. There is a user warning that must be adhered to in applying the method, however, if it is to offer up its true potential rather than sending the researcher into a confusion of relativist imaginings which communicate little and do less to aid understanding. Reflexivity is not the same thing as narcissism.

Postprocessual attempts to use reflection as a means of interpreting the past have often been derided because they offer highly personalised reactions which provide little insight into the meaning of the material. It is interesting here to point to Hamilton's (2000) discussion of the contextual, reflective analysis of gender in the Catalhuyuk site, where she comments on the contested interpretations having been a 'battle of ideology rather than fact'. This is suggestive of highly personal agendas and responses to the material, and retains the traditional empirical versus intuitive framework indicated by the idea that objective 'fact' can be separated from the subjectivity of ideology, whether of an individual or group. It also implies a hierarchy of interpretation as one ideological perspective competes for the top position as the 'right view' of the material, reflecting the '...“top-down” approaches that still perpetuate many traditional hierarchies of power' (Chadwick, in press). Hamilton (*ibid*) continues by making the curious statement that the 'constant self-surveillance' which she considers reflective practice to represent, results in a 'loss of paradigms' which she sees as a 'serious stumbling block' to the method. This view of reflective practice is drawn from a postmodern/postprocessual concept of deconstruction, and represents a misunderstanding of the potential and application of the method by confusing it with a theory. This confusion would seem to be why there is often the sense of a lack of authenticity in this approach to reflection. The



main way to ensure that the method is being used appropriately is to understand its nature as a practice, not an idea. Once this is clear, the ability to recognise how the results of the reflective process can be communicated effectively follows; it is not simply sharing everything and anything in an attempt at personal 'transparency'.

As has been seen in the case narratives for this research, much of the meaning is contained not in the direct or 'transparent' personal information given, but in the discussions of what the participants had done in practice, their ideas, and the overall context of what was being said. It is possible to suggest that it is the perception of what reflection is, in particular equating it with 'transparency', that causes many to be 'turned off' using the approach. This may be through a choice not to expose themselves to scrutiny in what is viewed as an inappropriate context, or a fear of doing just that. Speaking in an overtly personal way, or indeed in a highly theoretical way, can be exclusionary/distancing and is often a means of masking real meaning. Despite the over-complicated 'theory talk', Pluciennik (1999:660) appears to be suggesting this in the following quote:

It is generally at the level of the appropriateness of approach and attribution of possible meaning – the nature of the plot and the type of narrative object constructed – that paradigmatic archaeological debates take place.

One of the important roles of theory in archaeology is that it helps us to understand context, meaning and our 'view' of the past. It is rare that a clear understanding can emerge directly from a great personal jumble of words, thoughts, emotions and responses. Reflection as a method may therefore be considered as a means of cutting through this confusion in order to have a better idea of how to carry out the interpretive practice of archaeology. This may perhaps act as a way of addressing the political concerns raised by Sørensen (2000:3):

The problem consistently encountered is how to translate theoretical and political convictions about the importance of gender into practical application when investigating strange [*sic*] and unfamiliar societies.

It may be suggested that this type of problem is encountered because there has to date been no workable method available for addressing it. We cannot expect to jump directly from a theoretical perception of the material to a full understanding of it without first investigating where it has come from and what that means to us. Meaning about the past is only rarely fully understood without looking deeply at it and the reflexive method offers an opportunity to put this investigation into practice.

Reflexivity is a method highly suited to the practice of archaeology. In itself it might be likened to a process of intellectual excavation: excavating layers of perception, stopping now and again to record how they relate in context, exploring into an unknown or only partly understood feature in the mental and physical landscape to try and discover its extent and gradually reveal what it contains. As archaeologists, when excavating we record surface configurations, however features and landscapers are only fully comprehended when we get below the surface. It is through the process of recording and relating different resolutions of data, including data which may later become redundant, that we gain a deeper understanding. In just this way, the iterative process of reflection undertaken during each phase of this research has been a revelatory one.

At first, reflections on the process and material formed very much a part of a practical methodology in a 'processual' kind of way i.e. plan interview, reflect, undertake initial pilot interviews, reflect, prepare for interviews proper, reflect and so on. While at times frustrating or constraining, maintaining this discipline was both important and valuable to the process and the research, not necessarily because of what the



reflections produced in and of themselves, but because it revealed the purpose of the method at ever deepening levels.

Using reflection in this way, as a regular method of getting to grips with the experience of the research and actually putting it down on paper was not always an easy task. At various times it was felt to be a frustration, a simplistic record of engagement, a pointless task, a confusing list of questions. Sometimes the reflections were highly valuable and sometimes they were less so; it seemed the degree to which they were a real reflection of what was in mind played a strong role in determining this. 'Real' in this sense refers to being honest with oneself, not masking responses with the usual mental tricks and habits we all use to avoid thinking about something which is uncertain or uncomfortable. Getting used to the feeling of discomfort at what were felt to be frustrations or failures, recognising feelings of pride, competitiveness and prejudices as well as the refreshment of recognising research insights and personal meaning was an important part of the experience. Coming to terms with these types of emotional responses, accepting them for what they were and inquiring into them, gradually became an inseparable part of the research, not simply a 'method' to be applied. The value of the reflexive method lies in using it as a tool for inquiry, not as an idea or theoretical concept. Constantly exploring questions about yourself as a researcher, your engagement with the material and the research experience helps to define directions to take which enable the inquiry to penetrate the central research question. One of the interesting things about the reflexive method is that putting it into practice refines it and results in a more holistic understanding of the material. Being able to consider the information gathered as well as the research experience itself, from different angles, sheds new light onto the questions being asked, and the interpretations being made.

The reflections made during the interviews for this research have a different quality to them than those done during the analysis. This appears to be because the interaction during the interviews is an



interaction between two people, whereas the analytical phase is an individual one, although the use of external 'reflectors' to some extent opens this process up. The different quality therefore represents the type of interaction that is being reflected upon i.e. an external engagement with another person, or an internal engagement with self and the material. Having the perspectives of my 'second pair of eyes' who are well versed in interview methodologies from different analytical perspectives brings another dimension to the whole. However much we self-reflect, having the view of others outside of ourselves sometimes helps to bring things into rapid focus. As an example of this, one of the external reflectors made the comment that a note of competitiveness on my part had perhaps caused some confusion at one point during the interview with C. We had been talking of the relationship between theory and practice in the interpretation of sex and gender and I had become internally critical of what he was saying, which had clearly been felt by us both, although nothing was actually said. The surprise and relief with which I read his reflection was encouraging, as it helped me to make sense of an interaction in the narrative, which had hitherto been a sticking point in the analysis. This also then opened up another possible question to consider in the other interview narratives if and when confusion arose in the analysis. It may not always be pleasant to think of oneself in terms that are less than admirable, but it may reflect the truth of a particular interaction. It is often this particular aspect which is missing from reflective practice, as it is one which is much more palatable to ignore. Having an 'outsider view' from people not otherwise involved with the research, or with the specific subject of the research, is therefore a valuable reflexive resource. This acts in a similar way to what A describes in his interview as the impact of his family's comments on his work.

It may seem from the above that reflection is entirely related to what is 'wrong' with the research, or how to face what can be seen as difficulties in the research or analysis. This is not the case. Reflection which exposes problem areas to the benefit of the research is certainly valuable,

but that which highlights what works well and is useful, is of equal status in the process. The researcher is able to reflect on what was valuable as regards method and approach once an interaction is completed and the knowledge gained applied to the next encounter. However each encounter needs to be viewed as an *interaction*; the particular experience and circumstances of each will be unique, just as each participant burial, skeleton or site is. Getting caught up in the idea of a 'good' or 'bad' interaction is of little use to the research. Reflection can be used as a means of encouragement when it can be seen that something useful has been learned, or something interesting uncovered in the process or analysis of the interaction – it is a way of moving the research forward. Using this approach when interpreting archaeological human remains means viewing each engagement with the material as an interaction; applying reflexivity as a tool to challenge and encourage at various points in the process can therefore be of great value to the researcher.

This exploration of reflexivity in action can help us to understand how it might be applied to target specific areas of inquiry, such as sex, gender, and human remains. As has been noted, putting a reflexive method into practice helps in understanding the method itself, its purpose and meaning. For the sake of explanation it may be easiest to think about the method having two aspects, one which is *enquiring* and the other which is *distancing*. Enquiring implies looking into something and questioning it, without any preconceptions of what will be discovered. This reflection is a means of investigating our motivations, conceptualisations, assumptions etc. that arise from our personal, social and cultural context and experiences; looking directly at ourselves as if in a mirror, to see what is there. It is this that is perhaps most commonly what is thought of as reflective method within academia; however the other aspect is less usually understood in this context. Distancing involves resting the mind without focusing directly on the question being asked, to allow creative ideas to arise, without thinking about them. This is a kind of reflective opportunity for inspiration and avenues of investigation to appear, which may otherwise remain hidden in the subconscious, crowded out by all of



our thoughts about the material. Here it has been termed ‘distancing’ not because it removes the self in a scientific way, but because it implies giving oneself some mental space, akin to putting something at the back of ones mind and not worrying at it directly. We may all do this at times, but it is a different matter to apply it as a method. Through experience gained by undertaking the method in practice, the two aspects of reflection become a natural part of the process. Keeping them in mind can help at the start, to give direction to the method, and to get into the mental habit of reflecting.

The method reflects dialogue – with oneself, with others, and with the dead. The material remains of humans may not be able to tell us verbally about their past, but they are able to communicate it to us as archaeologists in other ways. Being able to recognise the material as something other than projections of ourselves and our own minds helps us to ‘hear’ what the material is communicating about society and culture, experiences, identity, sex/gender, age, life and death in the past.

Scientific methods may provide us with the basic information through which we ‘listen’ to the material, but it is ourselves and our minds that interpret the meaning. This point highlights a recognition in this research that the term ‘reflexive’ does not fully encompass the nature of the method proposed here. At many points during the research there have been indicators of a more appropriate term, however it has not been until the very end that I have come to accept this and consider what may be more appropriate to a method which suggests a dialogue with archaeological material: a Dialogic method. Proposing a method that engages with dialogues as this thesis does, reveals possibilities if new ways of understanding the material remains of humans in various contexts: on site and in the laboratory and with regard to areas of concern to archaeologists such as ethics and repatriation. The possibility of applying a method with regard to this last area has potential benefits for archaeologists and communities struggling to hear each other and to resolve long-standing debates on stewardship/ownership and the treatment of human remains.



The applicability of this method to the type of questions being asked archaeologically may be more or less evident, depending on the experiences of the reader. If we take as our understanding that an archaeological interpretation is exactly *that*, our own vision of what the material evidence is telling us, we are already half-way there. This thesis has used as its central example the interpretation of sex and gender from human remains. As was noted at the start, the method itself might be applied to any topic of interest; however this subject holds particular resonance because the topics of sex and death are strongly personally emotive for individuals, and for groups.

## 9.2 Lessons

The 'lessons' of this thesis do not relate to what the interpretations alone have to teach. It is perhaps what can be learnt from undertaking the research, and the reflections on the process and outcomes, that is truly valuable. Indeed this section is itself a reflection of the experience of the reflexive/Dialogic process. It is easy to suggest in retrospect that something done during the process was a 'wrong' approach to take, but in fact these mistakes represent some of the most insightful points during the research. They are a means of re-directing and honing the research to discover more appropriate means, deeper understandings and the development of research methods, skills and confidence. Surprisingly, it was often the case that something which seemed at first to be a major difficulty, such as the digital recorder stopping running during an interview, resulted in unexpected benefit. It typically encouraged a lesson to be learned, such as ways of dealing with the interpretation of an 'imperfect' record or partial data - something with which we are constantly faced with as archaeologists dealing with the fragmentary remains of the past. The tensions generated by apparent 'mistakes' such as in the case of D, my use of the technical term 'sciatic notch', generated interesting insights into the participant's way of dealing with difficult personal contexts and uncertainty. As Järviluoma (2003:31) notes, 'tension, conflict and lack of understanding between researcher and

researched can sometimes lead to better information than a mutually accommodating relationship'. While Järviluoma is here referring specifically to tensions created by 'gender' in an interview, the same applies across the board to any interview interaction.

One of the main lessons to be drawn from the research was the importance of maintaining a regular and organised reflective practice. Writing reflections at various key points such as following interviews, after the first listening of the recorded narrative and following each stage and section of a case analysis, resulted in a twofold benefit. Firstly, by regularly producing reflections, the slight discomfort of writing in a very different mode about the research and the uncertainty about the validity of what was being expressed gradually dissipated as an understanding of the meaning and value of the method developed. It is effectively training oneself to approach the research from a different angle, leading to the second benefit, that of awareness.

Through the experience of doing reflections regularly, towards the end of the research, reflections began to arise spontaneously out of the process itself as internal awareness developed of when something needed exploring. These reflections represented various things; a personal response to an experience or part of the information being analysed, an uncertainty or question the meaning of which was not understood, or being doubtful about what had happened, been said or thought, or something as subtle as an intuitive feeling which may be 'positive' or 'negative' in nature. Developing awareness through reflection is something like having a mental torch switched on. As something slips past in your mind, the torchlight catches it and one says 'Oh! What was that?'. Once there is an awareness that something is there, the reflection helps to capture and articulate it. Capturing a reflection enables it to be returned to, offering the possibility of spotting patterns of response which may be more to do with one's own personal or emotional reaction than the situation or material at hand, and therefore provides insights in regard to deeper levels of interpretation. An example of this was the analysis of



case C. The interview reflections, field notes, first listening and analytical reflections all contained references to C's 'frustration' at being unable to communicate the relationship between his theory and his practice. Over time, an awareness of something arose until one day it was caught in a reflection:

I have become aware of the fact that I am getting trapped in the idea the C was 'frustrated' by an inability to relate his theory to his practice, and to express this. I have begun to wonder if this is more about me picking up on his emotion in the interview and not necessarily what he was saying. In fact his frustration seems to be more that he couldn't communicate/find the right words or examples to get across what he felt to be the case *in the interview*. I have become aware of myself as becoming frustrated and 'critiquing' what he was saying, rather than being open to what it was that the narrative is telling me about – what is arising from it, rather than my ideas about the data influenced by the sense of frustration in the interview context.

As this example illustrates, the use of reflection can help the researcher to understand the various levels of interpretation occurring and allow for a greater understanding of the material. Without repeated written reflections it would have been much more difficult to isolate this point, my *own* frustration that C was not able to express what I sensed in the interview he could not find the right words to communicate – his own struggles with resolving the theory/practice relationship in his work. Without having undertaken the regular practice of reflecting, my understanding of the material would certainly have been considerably more shallow.

The way this may work in practice when interpreting human remains can be suggested using the example that D makes of the bones from one particular 18<sup>th</sup> century site where the male skeletons commonly have



broken fingers and the female skeletons broken ribs. In regard to the interpretation of sex and gender, the implication from D's narrative is potentially one of violence between the sexes. Hypothetically speaking, if D were to be using a reflexive methodology and for example noticed over time through her reflections that her interpretations, questions and ideas showed a pattern tending towards the direct, violent opposition of the sexes/genders to the exclusion of other possibilities she may wish to investigate the meaning of this further. In other words is the interpretation a true reflection of the material in its context, or part of a response to what the material is personally understood to *mean*?

To continue with this example for instance, could the broken ribs of the female skeletons be associated with the wearing of corsets in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a fashion known even at the time for causing internal damage and deformity to the women who wore them (Schiebinger, 1989:198). Might the broken fingers of the male skeletons be the result of a particular form of labour common at the time, or the popularity of drunken pub brawling or boxing? This is not to suggest that the possibility of domestic violence or any of the other potential interpretations may well have been true of the experience of those individuals in the past. By reflecting on ourselves and our ways of interpreting the material over time, insights may emerge and offer other possibilities and new theories as ways of understanding human relationships and society in the past. In the use of the method, recognising through experience when to let go of reflections once their usefulness had been explored was an equally important lesson to learn. By seeing reflections as being fluid/impermanent impressions of the movement of my mind at that time, this process of letting go allowed for developments in understanding the material. This 'knowing when to let go' is in effect, something which people must experience for themselves to fully comprehend.

The reiterative cycle which was an integral part of the research analysis offered up another valuable lesson. By working over the material again and again using both analytical and reflective approaches, as well as the

combination of listening to and reading the narratives and hearing the reflections of others on the material, greater depth of understanding developed for each of the cases. As a result, the interpretations naturally became richer. This is a working example of the reflexive method in practice and a case of getting to know the material very, very well. It was evident that working through each of the cases in a straightforward manner was not always the best way to approach the analysis. Allowing the cases to dictate the order and progression of the analysis through my own awareness of what questions and barriers were arising brought about an interesting lesson in practice. For example, the primary transcription processing and analysis of case C (the first case to be analysed) was made as one whole from beginning to end, while the others were done in sections, interspersing the phases of analysis of one case with that of another when reflective doubts posed 'blockages' in the process. It became clear that sometimes the best way to deal with a 'blockage' or resistance to the analysis was to send it to the back of my mind and work on another case. This distancing allowed for insights to arise into ways of resolving the doubts of one case by undertaking the analysis of another. At other times, the discipline of continuing on despite doubts or confusion in the analysis broke through these analytical barriers. In case B my confusion about what the narrative was saying caused considerable frustration and uncertainty at one point in the analysis. Continuing to work simply allowing these responses to be there in my mind and not letting them bother me, an insight suddenly appeared that her faith in herself as a Christian both reflected and was placed in opposition to her faith in science. The reflexive process of analysis outlined here therefore encourages discoveries about the material akin to Wallace's (2003:3) description of:

...flashes of inspiration in which an experienced eye, through background knowledge, and a desire to put a number of jigsaw pieces together combine to answer a conundrum so that both the solver and his envious



colleagues will ask why they hadn't thought of it before,  
the answer being so obvious now that it is solved

Working with the material in this way also meant that each case could stand alone yet they were inherently linked through the experience of doing the analysis. This made interpreting them a much more straightforward matter as it began the process of interrelated understanding at an early stage in the analysis.

From carrying out the whole reflexive research cycle it became increasingly clear that while cultural context was important in understanding the material being generated, it was only important in that it provided part of a whole. To make generalised statements about the cultural context of the participants, including their sex/gender, and the impact that these had on their conceptualisations and interpretations became nonsensical without also considering the specifics of their personal context. This resulted in a different view of the research material and of the analytical and interpretive process, locating it within the individual (including, reflectively, myself as the researcher) and understanding the interpretations as the means of communicating personal expressions and experiences of shared processes and contexts. Carrying out the research also formed a lesson in understanding the nature of change in regard to interpretation.

My own experience of resolving the question of the relationship between sex and gender was not separate from this process but a part of it. By constantly interrogating and reflecting on how I was interpreting the way others conceptualised the relationship, my own understanding gradually grew in clarity over the course of the research. The resolution is actually quite simple and straightforward – sex and gender as categories are always related as there can be no separation, but that relationship is not necessarily directly equivalent. Expressed another way, the relationship is a paradox, as it both exists and does not exist, it is only the ideas and perceptions that we have of the relationship in life and death that varies.



At the start of the research I was asking why archaeologists were separating sex and gender in interpretation because I could not conceptualise how this could be, despite much of the theory relating to sex and gender suggesting that this was valid, and that sex and gender did not have a direct relationship. At the close of this research it has become clear to me that there appears to be a misunderstanding; sex and gender are indeed interrelated because we require the categorisation of biological sex to be able to define and describe gender. The relationship is not necessarily an *equivalent* one; in other words biological sex does not necessarily equate to a specific gender, but it must be *cast in relation to it* to be defined as either *the same* as or as *different* to what we understand as the sexual characteristics of a physical human form. Gender is therefore not an absolute category, but in order to be able to discuss it as an analytical category we must always employ the variable of biological sex. Traditionally, archaeologists and osteoarchaeologists may have seen the equivalence of sex and gender as a ‘given’, questioning this has resulted in a deeper theorising of what these categories mean and whether they relate at all, but the questioning is not *it*. They are both important phases in a process of understanding sex and gender, however our way of describing them is key. There is no real difficulty in using biological sex and gender as attributions for investigating societies, considering a variety of intersections which vary culturally and across time. Difficulty only arises when we forget that both attributes hold no absolute form outside of the way they are defined and experienced, both of which are important factors in the way we communicate about ourselves, our lives, our deaths and our pasts.

While the dialogues, reflections and analyses represent ‘moments’ in time and space, they are not in themselves static. The impermanence of interpretation shifts these moments into a constant present which can be conceptualised at various levels. The interpretation of the meaning of the central research question, the interpretation of an interview interaction as it happens, the interpretation of material, all alter within a process of understanding as deeper insight develops. On reflection, it would have

been interesting to carry out follow-up interviews at a later date to see if and how the perceptions of participants changed over time, whether being involved in the research interviews had any impact, subtle or otherwise on the understanding or interpretation of sex and gender, and to see what effect this may have on the analysis and interpretation of the cases. A lesson learned which invites further research.

### **9.3 Implications for Implementing the Methodology**

In practice, this research has suggested that some archaeologists who work with human remains are already using elements of reflectivity or reflexivity in their approach to practice; raising the possibility for further developing it as a more defined methodological practice. It might be suggested that those who take a more processual or empirical approach will be less inclined to use the method. It is hoped that this research goes some way to illustrating the practical benefits that the method offers to interpretation and will therefore 'bridge' the imaginary gap which exists between empirical and subjective approaches.

The approach that a Dialogic method to interpreting human remains takes links into other areas which have begun to be addressed by archaeologists in recent years such as cognitive and psychoanalytic aspects of human development (Spikins, forthcoming; Oliveira Jorge, forthcoming). Bateson (1973), an anthropologist, and Leiman (1997; 2002) a psychoanalyst, both proposed dialogic means of understanding the self, and a further exploration of their scholarship is imperative to the further development of a Dialogic methodology in archaeology. Undertaking reflexive interpretation requires a certain amount of confidence – not to be too concerned about what will be uncovered through the inquiry. This also requires a level of academic maturity which may be the most challenging step for some to take. This is because being reflexive opens up possibilities that one may be on the wrong track, that personal emotions about the material are unduly impacting on the interpretation or that the interpretation is entirely wrong. Being worried about being seen



to make mistakes and letting people into the more personal aspects of one's relationship with the research are two of the main areas which appear to concern those faced with being reflective. Some osteoarchaeologists may even turn away from this type of method on the basis that they have no personal relationship with their interpretation of data, that it is just objective 'facts'. While it is certainly their prerogative to do so, they should not assume a reflexive Dialogic method to be so very different from a scientific process simply on the basis of a misunderstanding about its application. What is needed, if this methodology is to be seen to have wider value, is for osteoarchaeologists and archaeologists with processualist and postprocessualist approaches to try out the method and see if it works for them. It is not a revolutionary idea, nor should it be considered as the 'only' way for interpretation to be done. What it *is*, is a methodology which offers archaeology a practical way to engage in enquiry at a deeper level. Implementing the method is the only way to understand its real value to interpretation; putting it into practice brings it to life.

This thesis has functioned as a unified whole in its own right, but it is also part of a larger process. Future research should be directed towards the archaeological material rather than the archaeologists themselves, a topic addressed in a paper I am currently developing with the working title: *Putting Flesh on Old Bones: Exploring the practicality of a Dialogic approach to interpreting human remains*. This will bring another dimension to the understanding of the method and offer further insights into how it works in practice. Because this method for interpretation is flexible and can be tailored to some extent to particular contexts there are also possibilities for application addressing other aspects of people or society such as age, the life-cycle or indeed wider contexts such as archaeological landscapes. The method would also be suited to working in cross-cultural contexts, and may be of particular benefit to those who are working in cultures very different from their own. This is not simply because the contextual difference will afford a different viewpoint in the way we relate to and understand the material as 'outside' our common



experience, but also how the interpretations relate to modern contextual meaning in regard to cultural identities. The possibilities therefore for collaborative work across cultures is exciting. To be able to bring together in a reflective way an interpretation which takes into account the specific contextual location (both within the place and the person) may offer valuable insights into the past, as well as new approaches to the methodology. First developing a deeper understanding of examples 'close to home' may help to raise questions and provide insights which place us in a better position from which to undertake future research, exploring interpretations in other countries and cultures that are further afield. This thesis should therefore be considered as a 'first step' in a much longer journey.

We are all constantly taking part in dialogues and reflexive processes in our personal life and in our work. However if we are not recognising that this is happening when we are making archaeological interpretations, we are unable to make the best use of the process to help us gain greater insight and deeper understandings of the questions and challenges which arise. The result of this can sometimes be to get 'stuck' in a particular question or approach in the belief that it is *'the way'* and our interpretations become dull and lifeless - without new insights to help us reach a resolution. In the same way those who never spend long enough reflecting on their interpretations of the past to notice the insights within it become dull as they attempt to apply their theory to every possible context without understanding how it might be applied in practice and given shared meaning. Defensiveness and a lack of confidence in their reflections may well be factors affecting this, but who can say they are without these at certain times? Using the method of Dialogic reflexivity to help us move through these 'sticking points' into the next part of the interpretive cycle of understanding may therefore be considered as beneficial.

Sixteen years ago, Shanks (1992:12) expressed his own view of the tension he experiences in the interpretation of the past by commenting that:

There seems to be presented a choice: write poems, novels, paint watercolours – subjective fictions; or do archaeology – concerned with the past itself. I want to deny that there is this simple choice.

By denying the possibility that there is a ‘simple choice’, Shanks appears to also be denying that a tension exists for him. To ignore a tension by pretending that it does not exist helps nobody when they are faced with the very real experience of difference. This can be seen reflected in the practical, experiential difference between the work of an artist painting a landscape and an archaeologist digging it up or indeed in the difference of experience in having a body which is categorised as male, female or hermaphroditic. Perhaps if Shanks had said - there are many ways in which people interpret the past, through writing poetry or prose, through painting, or the science of archaeology. *The choice between them is simple – there is none* - I may have been more convinced he understood the real meaning of subjectivity, fiction and the past.

To make a mathematical analogy, it is the showing of a problem’s ‘workings’ which results in ‘high marks’, rather than getting the ‘right’ answer at the end. In this thesis, I have presented my workings in relation to the interpretation of sex and gender and using reflexivity as a means of entering the convergence of opposites such as the empirical and the intuitive. The only thing that is left to say is something about death. Throughout the process of this research I have been aware of the meaning that death holds for me personally; my experiences both personal and professional with the dying, the dead and what remains. Whether we are archaeologists, artists or mechanics we all have our own experiences of death and what it means to us. Using a reflexive method to explore my own tensions in the research has brought me closer to the reality of what

it is to interpret the dead, and how it relates to the past. Being aware of my own responses and reactions during the research, and taking the opportunity to reflect on them in relation to how they affect the process and outcomes has been like opening an eye into the meaning of the material. There were moments when sitting talking to the participants, the dead arose between us as imagined visions of the past, or lay in silence on the ground or in boxes around us and revealed the archaeologist's dream of secrets hidden in bones, spoken in whispers from the past.



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## Appendix A. Further Information for Interview Participants

### Further Details of Research

#### Thesis title:

‘Modern Visions of a Gendered Past: The interpretation of gender and sex in cross-cultural mortuary archaeology’

#### Thesis Summary:

The point of axis in this thesis, is where and how theory and practice meet. It is concerned with the archaeological interpretation of gender and biological sex in the mortuary context. However its specific focus is to question how these interpretations relate to the cultural context they are produced in, and what this means for cross-cultural archaeologies of gender and sex.

The practice of excavating, recording and analysing evidence provided by human remains, burial goods and mortuary structures makes use of theories and epistemologies of sex and gender to inform the interpretation of past social structures. It is the contention of this thesis that theories and critiques of sex and gender have had a limited impact on the archaeological discipline as a whole because they have yet to generate a theory informed practice. The dominance of Western (Anglo-American) cultural concepts, frameworks and ideologies in archaeology means that the practice of gathering and interpreting data on sex and gender is problematic in the cross-cultural context. This goes beyond the postprocessual ‘hermeneutic’ that observations are *influenced* by theory (Carver 2005 – in press). It problematises the cultural choices, decisions and ideologies which inform the practice which *results* in those observations.

Postmodern archaeologies have functioned as a tool for recognising that a single theory for the interpretation of gender and sex in cross-cultural archaeology is not possible. However we must now take this awareness and do something with it, otherwise it remains an impotent intellectual exercise. There remains a need to develop a reflexive, theoretically informed *methodology* for interpreting gender and sex, which is both culturally and sociopolitically aware and informed. The possibility of developing a 'real world', practical methodology framed within an actively self-aware theoretical context is the central tenet of this thesis and based within Soafer's theoretical osteology which views the body as material culture.

In order to collect data for the case studies, archaeologists will be interviewed using a semi-structured, in-depth interviewing methodology grounded within the social sciences (see below). Participants can expect to be asked about their views on biological sex, gender, the interpretation of these

## **Information about Interviews**

### **Interview process**

Interviews are scheduled to take approximately 1 hour and will be recorded on a digital sound-file. All interviews will be undertaken on a one-to-one basis with the interviewer and the research participant, unless prior agreement is made between the two parties e.g. in the case of requiring a language interpreter. Further information about the research being undertaken and the agreed date, time and venue of the interview will all be communicated in writing to the research participant in advance of the interview.

The interviews will be carried out by Wendelin Romer, a DPhil candidate at the Department of Archaeology, University of York, England as a part of the research for her thesis.



A transcript will be made of the interviews for research use only, and will not be published. Quotations from the interviews may be used in the DPhil thesis (or related publications) however all quotations will be used in a way which does not identify the interviewee unless prior written has been agreement has been received. A copy of the transcript can be sent to the interviewee should they wish, upon formal written request and with the agreement that the contents are not used for research or publication purposes, but for personal record only.

### Interview methodology

The part of the data collection for the research outlined above is being collected through a schedule of interviews with archaeologists who have a particular interest, experience or expertise in one or more of the following areas:

- gender and/or biological sex
- mortuary archaeology/osteoaarchaeology
- identity
- socio-political context of archaeology

The interviews will be undertaken using a semi-structured approach. The researcher will be guided by a schedule of questions, but that the interview progression will be partly led by the interests and responses of interviewee. The reflexive framework of the research means that the researcher will also be considering the interview process, her own role as interviewer and the data that is collected during interviews, in a way which consciously reflects on the contexts of the research.

## **Appendix B. Research Participant Informed Consent Form**

### **Research Participant Informed Consent Form**

#### **Research title:**

Modern Visions of a Gendered Past: Cultural interpretations of gender and sex from mortuary remains

I, \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in the research study being carried out by Wendelin Romer (DPhil Researcher, Dept. of Archaeology, University of York, England).

#### **Purpose of the research:**

To (a) investigate how and to what extent culture, identity and socio-political context effect the way gender and biological sex is interpreted based on evidence from archaeological mortuary contexts, and to (b) investigate the ways that this affects the interpretation of mortuary contexts across-cultures. This research uses a descriptive case study approach .

#### **Duration of participation:**

The schedule of interviews for this research phase are expected to be conducted between September 2006 and January 2007. Interviews will take approximately one hour. Research Participants are only expected to participate in one interview. Follow-up contact, usually by email or telephone, may be requested by the Researcher if clarification is required or queries arise regarding the content of interviews.

#### **Research procedures:**

The primary procedures used in this research will be interviews with participants, possible follow-up communications for clarifications and

desk-based document/publication searches. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

Expected outcomes of the research:

This research is expected to provide insight into the effects of culture, identity and socio-political context on the way archaeologists analyse and interpret gender and biological sex from mortuary contexts, and how these effects impact on interpretation when archaeological work is carried out cross-culturally.

Confidentiality procedures:

All data generated in the course of this research will be kept in a secure place either at the researcher's home residence or the Graduate School Offices at the Department of Archaeology, University of York. The identity of research participants will be removed prior to the preparation of research reports, the subsequent thesis and any associated publications or presentations. Interview audio-recordings will only be accessed by the Researcher and a professional transcription service coordinated through the University of York Disability Services. Full transcripts will only be viewed by the Researcher with an exception in the case of the Researcher's DPhil Supervisor, Steve Roskams. If the Research Participant below signed does not wish the Research Supervisor to view full transcripts, this may be requested by ticking this box .

Research participation:

Participation in this research is voluntary.

Who to contact with questions pertaining to the research:

Contact the Researcher, Wendelin Romer c/o the Department of Archaeology, University of York, King's Manor, Exhibition Square, York, YO1 7EP or email [wr3@york.ac.uk](mailto:wr3@york.ac.uk)



Consent:

Participant's signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher:

Researcher's name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This form is based on an original design by T. R. Lindlof from his 1995 book *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* published by Sage, Thousand Oaks California