

**Repertoires of Resistance: A Discourse  
Analysis of the Rhetoric of  
Parapsychologists**

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyses the discourse of researchers associated with the field of parapsychology - a field of contested knowledge and controversial academic standing. The thesis is positioned as an update and extension of the discourse analysis methodology and analytical framework implemented by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984). Ties to the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge are also delineated within the literature background. Core aims of the thesis include; analysing the discourse of researchers connected to a field of controversial positioning and revealing the social action(s) behind this discourse as points of construction. Uncovering interpretative repertoires was the primary focus of analysis. The thesis also expands upon previous discourse studies by actively exploring the connections between the potential repertoires - presenting an overarching theoretical binding that is noticeably absent from prior analysis within the literature.

Researchers with current or previous career ties to parapsychology and UK academic institutions were interviewed in semi-structured phone interviews - discussing their careers, connections, and perspectives of parapsychology. From this interview data, three interpretative repertoires were identified. The 'categorisation and stake' repertoire revealed how the researchers managed presentations of identity and stake towards category constructions. The 'outsider repertoire' demonstrated how the researchers' discourse constructs identity borders that differentiate between concepts of 'insiders' / 'outsiders' and how this is a key tool for ideological positioning. Finally, the 'reflection of contingency' repertoire illustrated discursive reflective informal formulations of personal biographies that were used to construct presentations of contingency for scientific and academic practice. Whilst each repertoire is distinctive the social actions between them are connected, including; field boundary work, group border identity construction and personal identity construction. The thesis presents an overarching theoretical concept that binds these actions together: the 'Positioning Construction Device'. It is proposed that this discursive device incorporates the three identified repertoires as multiple layers of a single device where the main function is positioning within the communicative context.

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## ACCOMPANYING MATERIALS

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A SanDisk USB 16gb memory stick accompanies each copy of the thesis - containing the full (unedited) recordings of the researcher interviews that are analysed in the empirical sections of the thesis. Each memory stick has been included in a separate envelope (2 in total - one for each external examiner).

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Thesis Overview

The main objective of the current thesis is to analyse the discourse of researchers who are associated with a contested knowledge claim. Researchers purportedly tied with the field of parapsychology - a purported fringe science - were interviewed about generalised issues relating to the subject and their experiences in or around the field. This content was then analysed in an attempt to gain insight into the possible discursive strategies that may exist within their responses.

The current thesis is positioned as both an update and extension of core sociological literature - primarily a contemporary use of the discourse analysis methodology and analytical framework implemented by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984). The constructionist approach to the sociological work done through language, such as identity presentation, also has ties with the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) literature. How researchers in fields that are perceived as outside of the mainstream position themselves and draw boundaries around and in-between these subject(s) also relates to this thesis.

Ultimately, the core aim of the thesis is to analyse the discourse of researchers connected to the field of parapsychology and look at how they use their discourse for social action, to construct their social world in the communicative context. Broadly, parapsychology can be defined as an academic field that focuses research towards the investigation of phenomena that is interpreted as being beyond conventional scientific interest - for example paranormal phenomena such as clairvoyance (please refer to section 1.4.1 for further elaboration).

The focus on researchers attached to a field of contested knowledge is intended to reveal more of an insight into these discursive practices as this area has not been cemented, is still in flux and therefore more likely to reveal the underlying interpretative repertoires used by the researchers to navigate this social space. Such an approach has been utilised throughout SSK research, for as

Martin and Richards (1995) state:

“Accounts are not directly given by nature but may be approached as the products of social processes and negotiations that mediate scientists’ accounts of the natural world. The study of...controversies have the further advantage that these social processes which ordinarily are not visible to outsiders, are confronted and made overt by the contending disputants.”

(Martin and Richards, 1995: 512)

Discourse analysis is the core analytical focus of the thesis. Research adopting this focus from Gilbert and Mulkey’s (1984) original study through to recent studies (for example, Whittle and Mueller; 2016) has demonstrated the theoretical usefulness of adopting such an approach. Analysing the discursive practices of individuals can reveal the mechanisms they use to construct their social world, representations and identity within the communicative context. Fundamentally, this is important to understand how people actively use their discourse to shape their world and how language is used as a medium for social interaction. The current thesis aims to develop this analytical focus by attempting to expand the theoretical approach.

The current chapter will serve as a generalised introduction - with the above providing a comprehensive overview of the content of the thesis. The next sections will provide the background and context for the focus towards parapsychologists and the field of parapsychology - along with an outline of its progression within the UK. This will then be followed by a brief historical overview of parapsychology’s progression as an academic discipline and focus on how the field has been a topic of sociological analysis. Finally, the chapter will position the thesis in accordance with the wider academic literature summarising the key aims, its purpose and the overall structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Background: Parapsychology As a Subject of Controversy**

This section will look at how parapsychology is a subject of controversy by providing examples of tensions that have occurred between parapsychologists and their critics.

A recent definition of parapsychology presents the subject as the following:

“Parapsychology is the scientific study of ostensible parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy and psychokinesis...phenomena in which information or energy seems to have been apprehended or transferred without the operation of the known senses or logical inference...usually referred to as psi phenomena. Parapsychology is the study of these phenomena, and it includes consideration of both common psychological explanations as well as explanations in which mind may be a basic, irreducible aspect of reality that may transcend the perceived limitations of the body.”

(Cardena et al., 2015: 1-2)

In 2008 an article was published in the Society of Psychical Research (SPR) based *Paranormal Review* which outlined the academic growth of parapsychology in the UK. Carr (2008) depicted the field as exhibiting signs of substantial growth within the academic sector, maintaining a significant presence within a number of established universities, including Northampton and the University of York. This presentation of parapsychology suggested that the subject was gaining notable acceptance and interest within mainstream academia. However, despite this portrayal it is apparent that parapsychology still struggles to be fully recognised by the scientific mainstream. An observation which is perhaps best illustrated by Professor Robert Winston’s public condemnation of the subject in 2006. *The Telegraph* (2006) reported Professor Winston’s reaction to the British Association inviting parapsychologists to present at the 2006 British Association Festival of Science (the largest science festival in Europe). It was detailed that Professor Winston took exception to the inclusion of such subject matter, depicting parapsychological research in the following manner:

“I know of no serious properly done studies which make me feel that this is anything other than nonsense.”

(Professor Winston, *The Telegraph*, 2006)

This view was supported by Prof Peter Atkins (of Oxford University) who went on record as saying:

“Work in this field is a complete waste of time. Although it is politically incorrect to dismiss ideas out of hand, in this case there is absolutely no reason to suppose that [ESP] is anything more than a charlatan’s fantasy.”

(Professor Peter Atkins, *The Telegraph*, 2006)

These examples of direct criticism towards parapsychology create a paradox. From an objective point of view parapsychology has developed and seen substantial growth within the UK academic infrastructure (Carr, 2008). Arguably the subject is experiencing the greatest expansion within its history in the UK. Furthermore, the very fact that parapsychologists were even invited to take part in such a prestigious event suggests progression. Yet, conversely it still appears to incite hostile denunciation from mainstream science. For two leading scientists to dismiss an area, that over its 150 year history has amassed substantial research, as “nonsense” and a “charlatan’s fantasy” is surprising and indicative of real intellectual disparity and juxtaposing academic perspectives - especially from someone such as Professor Winston who is prolific in the media and public eye. This creates an interesting sociological position: with parapsychology existing as both a fringe discipline that is disregarded but also one that has integrations with established scientific and academic communities.

The controversy surrounding Edinburgh University’s Koestler Chair also demonstrates the dissonant attitudes generated by parapsychology and its inconclusive positioning. Bob Morris was the first incumbent of the Koestler Chair (from 1985 until his death in 2004), a position which became the focal point of UK parapsychology - producing significant numbers of undergraduates and research initiatives. Following his death there were high levels of uncertainty surrounding the position. Edinburgh advertised the post, creating the impression that the university was still supportive of the parapsychological regime installed by Morris. However, their subsequent actions created consternation in the parapsychological community as, of the four candidates short-listed, three were individuals who were highly sceptical of the field and the fourth was a sociologist with no formal parapsychological training (Personal Communication). Inevitably this was judged as antithetic towards the legacy of Bob Morris and the progression of parapsychology in the UK (Personal Communication). Furthermore, it was revealed that the Koestler Chair had been renamed the ‘Robert Morris Chair’, without the consent of trustee John Beloff who had orchestrated the establishment of the original position (Playfair, 2007). Eventually it was announced that all four of the short-listed candidates had been rejected, whereby the post has remained unoccupied. It is purported that of the CVs submitted for the position none of the parapsychologists were suitable due to their lack of expected impact in the forthcoming Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), stemming from their reduced presence in mainstream academic publications. A factor which was not at issue with the four short-listed “outsider” candidates (Personal Communication). Eventually, it is rumoured that the non-appointment was a conscious

strategy by the university to alleviate pressure surrounding the post, amidst rumours of legal challenges and pressures from the parapsychological community (Personal Communication). Also, there remained confusion regarding the exact nature of the Koestler/ Morris chair with suggestions that it has not been renamed and remained two separate (unfilled) positions (Playfair, 2007). Ultimately, following the death of Morris there has been no senior figurehead of parapsychology in the UK. A factor which suggests a dilution of support for the field from the university and further tension between its boundaries and that of the mainstream.

More recently, the controversy surrounding Rupert Sheldrake exemplifies the different opinions directed towards the field and the positioning of parapsychology. Sheldrake is a renowned parapsychologist who originally worked as a biochemist and cell biologist at Cambridge University. Core to his parapsychology work is the concept of 'morphic resonance' (Sheldrake 1981, see also 2011) - which proposes that all natural systems and entities inherit a collective memory from all previous iterations of their kind/ type. Stemming from this theory are proposals of forms of telepathy between organisms. Sheldrake's research has garnered significant criticism from the scientific community (Gardner 1988; Samuel, 2011; Sharma 2012). For example, Adam Rutherford (deputy editor of the journal *Nature*) in 2009 wrote an article for the *Guardian* about Sheldrake's 'A New Science of Life', entitled "A Book for Ignoring". The article is highly critical of Sheldrake stating that "Sheldrake persists in his claims, despite the fact that there's no evidence for them. This is bad science". The review ends with the following:

"A book exists to be read, so a far, far worse punishment for Sheldrake's crimes against reason would be to simply ignore it. Incidentally, I recognise the irony in writing an article suggesting we should deny him the oxygen of publicity. Nevertheless, here's my final word: don't read this book, it will make you stupider."  
(Rutherford, 2009)

In 2013 there was further controversy around Sheldrake as he claimed his Wikipedia page was being targeted and edited by those who he described as 'Guerrilla Skeptics':

"There is a conflict at the heart of science between the spirit of free enquiry and the materialist worldview. I gave a talk on this subject at a TEDx event in London earlier this year, in which I discussed the ten dogmas of modern science. I showed that by turning the dogmas into questions they can be examined critically in the light of the findings of science itself...My talk was removed from the TEDx web site after furious

protests from militant skeptics, who accused me of propagating pseudoscience. This sparked off a controversy that went viral on the internet, documented here. Most participants in online discussions were very disappointed that TED had been frightened into submission, and TED themselves retracted the accusations against me. This summer, soon after the TED controversy, a commando squad of skeptics captured the Wikipedia page about me. They have occupied and controlled it ever since, rewriting my biography with as much negative bias as possible, to the point of defamation. At the beginning of the “Talk” page, on which editorial changes are discussed, they have posted a warning to editors who do not share their biases: “A common objection made by new arrivals is that the article presents Sheldrake’s work in an unsympathetic light and that criticism of it is too extensive or violates Wikipedia’s Neutral Point of View policy.”...The Guerrilla Skeptics are well trained, highly motivated, have an ideological agenda, and operate in teams, contrary to Wikipedia rules.”

(Sheldrake, 2013)

Sheldrake’s accusations have been disputed within the mainstream media. An example is an online article posted on ‘New Republic’ entitled “Pseudoscientist Rupert Sheldrake is not being persecuted, and is not like Galileo”:

“Rupert Sheldrake is a pseudoscientist who has made his name promoting various kinds of woo, including telepathy (including in dogs!), immaterial minds, and his crazy idea of “morphic resonance,” a Jung-ian theory in which all of nature participates in some giant collective memory. (He was once a real scientist, trained in biochemistry and cell biology at Cambridge, but somewhere went off the rails.)...Sheldrake and his supporters always defend themselves as beleaguered scientists whose correct theories are unfairly attacked or neglected because they buck the current “materialistic paradigm.” That is, he thinks himself an unrecognized genius, persecuted like Galileo.”

(Coyne, 2013)

Such an exchange between a scientist conducting parapsychological based research and the criticism directed towards him highlights the controversy and tensions that still remain towards the field.

The events outlined above create a juxtaposition. Parapsychology can be interpreted as having successfully enhanced its reputation and credibility within mainstream academia, evidenced by its greater presence in higher education (which will be outlined in the next section of the chapter).

Contrary to this, it can be seen that tensions and scepticism are still largely directed towards the field, encouraging a perception of parapsychology as a pseudo-science. Such a contradiction is encapsulated in Collins and Pinch's (1979a; 1979b) early sociological studies into parapsychological's standing and perception within the scientific community. They revealed how parapsychologists main strategy for merging into mainstream science cultures was one of 'metamorphosis' - of mimicking central aspects of that culture, such as creating university posts, PhD studentships, research and publications in orthodox journals and academic literature forums (1979b: 253). Despite this, the field was still subjected to significant and potentially unfair criticism; "[some] seem visibly influenced more by the desire to reject psi in particular, than by considerations of universal standards. Thus many criticisms would have a devastating effect if turned against parts of orthodox science" (Collins and Pinch, 1979b: 239). A notion that is supported by Stokes (2008) who argues that in modern physics there are examples (such as string theory) that have no testable implications and can therefore be considered as pseudosciences.

What this situation represents is an opportunity to investigate a unique sociological scenario that explores how boundaries within academia are formed, the integration of fringe concepts, and how researchers frame (and manage) their careers and identities within contested fields. The integration (or non-integration) of parapsychology within mainstream forms of education and research sectors allows us to observe the process of two boundaries potentially merging - enabling us to witness the interactions and sociological processes that surround such an event - on both an individual (micro) and cultural (macro) level. The research within this thesis will focus on the principle actors associated with this contested area - researchers who are currently (or who have been previously) associated with parapsychological based research.

The primary subject matter will be an analysis on the researchers' discourse - the linguistic interpretative repertoires they use to represent, construct and define their social world in relation to the field of parapsychology. By talking to these researchers about the position of parapsychology in academic institutions it is hoped that this reveals their underlying discourse strategies that surround this area of contested knowledge - demonstrating how they formulate their identities against being associated with such a controversial area. This in itself provides a unique arena to explore the discourse of the principal researchers involved. Allowing an insight into how these individuals manage their careers, perceptions of academia and their peers through their discourse. Collins and Pinch (1979b) highlighted the usefulness of such sociological



investigations into parapsychology as “the element of conflict within the parapsychologist’s programme is rewarding in the context of a sociological study, for controversy highlights social processes with particular clarity” (1979b: 238).

By providing a sociological analysis of the discourse used by purported parapsychological researchers, it is intended to reveal the repertoires and strategies contained within this discourse. This will provide numerous benefits. It will allow an insight into how researchers in alleged fringe areas negotiate barriers of scientific legitimacy and criticism through such repertoires. Furthermore, it will aid the general understanding of how scientific knowledge emerges and is negotiated via discourse.

The next section in this chapter will provide an overview of the status of parapsychology within the UK, mapping its presence within academic institutions. This is significant, as the thesis’ empirical analysis revolves around interviews with UK researchers associated with the field. As such, it is important to provide a contextual snapshot of how the field has developed within UK academia.

### **1.3 Parapsychology’s Presence Within Academia in the UK**

The current thesis uses researchers who - at the time the research interviews were conducted - were (or had been previously) associated with parapsychology and who had close associations with UK academic institutions (see Carr, 2008). Each of the researchers had varying ties and connections to the field - ranging from being heavily involved with parapsychological research at the time of being interviewed to having severed ties with the field and moved their research focus into more (what could be considered) mainstream areas. As such it is useful to provide an overview of the state of academic parapsychology within the UK at the time the interviews were conducted (2010-2011).

#### **1.3.1 Snapshot of UK Academic Parapsychology in 2010-2011**

By 2010-11 in UK academia there appeared to have been a significant growth in the presence of parapsychologists and integration of their research. Carr (2008) constructed an overview of the

geographical spread of parapsychology for the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), denoting that in 2008 there were sixteen university departments that contained parapsychology groups or research. What makes this figure notable is the fact that only twenty years prior there was only one such group (Edinburgh). This rapid expansion, according to Carr (2008) is surprising, when the controversial elements of the field are taken into consideration. The article also made the observation that UK research was now in the position whereby it was mainly supported by universities (as opposed to private funds) – a scenario which predominantly lay in contrast to the rest of Europe and the USA at the time. Whilst this situation could largely be attributed to the efforts of Bob Morris (Koestler Professor at Edinburgh) to ensure that his research students extended the parapsychology network throughout other academic institutions in the UK, it resulted in the UK being at the forefront of parapsychological research at the time this thesis' interviews were conducted.

The University of Edinburgh historically has the closest association with the field, with a dedicated unit - 'The Koestler Parapsychology Unit' (KPU). The KPU was established in 1985 and is a faction of the Psychology Department at the university. The research group is fully active in terms of teaching and research in a wide spectrum of parapsychological issues - including the following subject matter:

- the possible existence of psychic ability
- belief in the paranormal
- the psychology of anomalous experiences
- pseudo-psychic deception and self-deception
- the social and historical relevance of parapsychology

Historically, parapsychology has been a notable presence in the university since 1962, when Dr John Beloff was appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Psychology – where he researched and taught parapsychology until his retirement in 1985. The KPU was established following the deaths of the author Arthur Koestler and his wife Cynthia who bequeathed their estate to the creation of a Chair of Parapsychology at a British University. The main intention behind this was to develop research into "...the capacity attributed to some individuals to interact with their environment by means other than the recognised sensory and motor channels" (KPU, 2010). Beloff and his work within parapsychology was integral in Edinburgh successfully hosting the Koestler Chair. Robert Morris filled the position of Koestler Professor of Psychology from

December 1985 until his death in August 2004.

For the period he held the position, Morris endeavoured to integrate parapsychology into the wider academic community. In this respect, he can be viewed as the main point of origin for the significant proliferation of parapsychological research in the UK. Morris supervised over 100 undergraduate projects and over 30 postgraduate students. The significance of this relates to the fact that many of these students progressed on to other education institutions, teaching parapsychology and establishing research units - with two examples being Chris Roe and Richard Wiseman. Chris Roe is responsible for establishing a parapsychology research unit at Northampton (see below) and for being the first person in the UK to receive the Parapsychological Association's Award for Outstanding Contribution to Parapsychology in 2014. Richard Wiseman, who after graduating from Edinburgh, remained attached to research within the field but from a more sceptical perspective has produced several best-selling mainstream books on areas related to parapsychology and psychology, combined with a significant media presence. Subsequently, the KPU can be viewed as the most prestigious parapsychology institution within the UK, for without its influence (and specifically the endeavours of Morris) the subject's current status and visibility within higher education would be questionable.

The KPU adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to parapsychology, covering four main areas:

- (1) Psi Hypothesis
- (2) Pseudo-Psi Hypothesis
- (3) Psychology of Paranormal Beliefs and Experiences
- (4) History of Parapsychology

Collectively, these areas encompass paranormal abilities, extrasensory perception (ESP), belief and interpretation of these areas combined with a historical perspective. The promotional material for the unit states that "our approach does not assume that psi exists, but treats the existence of psi as a hypothesis that can and should be tested scientifically" (KPU, 2010). Primarily, the Ganzfeld experimental paradigm has been implemented in the past by the KPU to investigate ESP, with emphasis also placed on the possible role of experimenter effects (through psi influence).

Behind the KPU the University of Northampton has the most significant integration with parapsychological research with its 'Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological

Processes' (CSAPP). Contained as part of the psychology division within the university, the CSAPP specialises in parapsychology and transpersonal psychology research. The centre consists of six full-time academic staff, one part-time senior researcher, three research degree students and three research assistants. CSAPP's central goal is outlined as primarily seeking a scientific understanding of phenomena of a parapsychological nature through careful application of a range of interdisciplinary methodologies. The department provides a substantial teaching resource that structures various modules dealing with a range of parapsychology based material, reflecting the broad interests of its members.

In addition to Edinburgh and Northampton during 2010-2011 the following UK academic institutes contained a notable presence of parapsychology and dedicated units:

- Liverpool Hope University - The Parapsychology Research Group; focusing on the study of anomalous and potentially psychic experiences that broadly encompassed ESP, psychokinesis, human personality and consciousness.
- University of London, Goldsmith's College - Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit; adopting more of a sceptical orientated approach to purported paranormal claims and the psychology of paranormal beliefs and anomalous experiences; strong affiliation with anomalistic psychology.
- University of York - Anomalous Experience Research Unit; focus on the development of an interdisciplinary social science research on anomalous experiences, such as ways in which anomalous or exceptional experiences are mediated through language and social interaction.
- Liverpool John Moores University - Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology; centring on specific psychology and philosophical (of religion) based material, yet also forging with links with parapsychology and also its relationships with transpersonal psychology.
- University of Derby - The Psychology of Paranormal Phenomena Research Cluster.

Beyond these there were a number of Doctors and Professors tied to parapsychology working individually across multiple universities, including the University of Greenwich; Bournemouth University; Queen Margaret University; University of Hertfordshire; University of Central Lancashire; University College London; Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge; and Coventry University.

From the brief depiction above, it is evident that at the time the interviews for the current thesis

took place there was a significant presence of parapsychology within the higher education infrastructure of the UK. What becomes immediately apparent from browsing the promotional material of each university is that every parapsychology based unit/ research group is attached to a larger more established department. The majority of groups are sub-sections of psychology departments (with the sociology focused AERU at York being a notable exception). Parapsychology appears to be closely tied to psychology, with numerous sole parapsychologists being located within psychology departments. Indeed, these individuals do not actively teach parapsychology – predominantly teaching psychology based modules and conducting parapsychology based research separately. This raises the question of whether they conduct their research as an aside due to their position within psychology dominated surroundings or whether it may be damaging to do otherwise (in terms of reputation, funding opportunities etc.).

The apparent growth and increased presence of parapsychology within the UK is notable when viewed in contrast to the status of the field in the US. As outlined earlier in the chapter, parapsychology largely originated within the US - specifically the academic and scientific guise which the subject now operates under. However, after a surge of interest in the 1970s, which largely stemmed from the Rhine influence(s), there has been a significant decline in interest and predominance - to such an extent that the UK is now seen as the leading source of parapsychology (Odling-Smee, 2007).

It should be noted that since the start of this thesis the Liverpool PRG unit has since been closed down by Liverpool Hope. Key figures left the department and in relation to the current economic climate the department was no longer deemed viable by the university. Subsequently, one of the main centres of experimental parapsychological research is now no longer in existence. Carr's (2008) depiction of growth of parapsychology in higher education presented the PRG unit as one of the leading departments in the country and yet in a period of only approximately two years all parapsychological work has been abandoned by the university. This serves to illustrate the point that, despite such growth that has been outlined above, the presence and acceptance of parapsychology as an academic pursuit still remains uncertain and far from established.

To provide an ample context and understanding of the subject matter relating to parapsychology the following section will extend the understanding of what parapsychology actually is and represents as a field - outlining a brief history of the field, providing a background to its

progression and move towards mainstream academia.

## **1.4 Historical Development of Parapsychology as an Academic Discipline**

### **1.4.1 Definition of Parapsychology**

Parapsychology as an academic discipline is primarily concerned with the scientific research of phenomena that appears to exist outside the realms of conventional science. The Parapsychological Association (PA) have defined the subject as the investigation of:

“...apparent anomalies of behaviour and experience that exist apart from currently known explanatory mechanisms that account for organism-environment and organism-organism information and influence flow.”

(PA, 1970: 394-95)

This definition covers a wide range of experiences that include extrasensory perception (ESP), psychokinesis (PK), precognition, out-of-body experiences, spiritual communications and generally most instances that can be defined as ‘paranormal’ in origin. However, an important distinction should be made when looking at the subject matter of parapsychology. When parapsychologists refer to the term ‘paranormal’ they use it in a much narrower and more defined scope than other groups such as the mass media, general public and those from a sceptical position (Hess, 1993). It is this significant distinction that raises parapsychology from being merely concerned with matters of the ‘occult’ or the ‘supernatural’ and gravitates it towards being a scientific endeavour. Colman (2001) suggests parapsychology could simply be defined as the study of psi phenomena - which Bem and Honorton (1994) elaborate as anomalous processes of information or energy transfer that cannot be explained by a known physical or biological mechanism.

The next section (1.4.2) will provide a general focus on parapsychology as an academic subject, charting an overview of the history of the area. The following section (1.4.3) will present an overview of the sociological literature that focuses primarily on parapsychology - centring on the debate regarding whether parapsychology can be considered to be a legitimised scientific pursuit. These sections are intended to provide the context for both the emergence of the field and how/

why the area became the focal point for sociological analysis.

#### **1.4.2 Growth of Parapsychology as a Subject of Academic Interest**

As the sample of researchers interviewed for the current thesis were supposedly from a parapsychological background - the current section provides useful contextual detail to understand the development of the discipline and its research focus.

Interest in events of a parapsychological nature have permeated the social and cultural consciousness throughout human history, yet it is only over the course of approximately the last hundred years that academic investigation of such phenomena has occurred (Irwin, 2004). Parapsychology as a discipline can be traced back to the late 1700s, the period when mesmerism had gained noteworthy prominence as a fringe medicine. The somnambulistic state induced by the mesmeric process revealed purportedly hidden depths within human capabilities, whereby certain individuals demonstrated a capacity for ESP. Beloff (1997: 17) points to this as the forerunner for parapsychological research whereby “perhaps for the first time in history, a procedure was available for eliciting paranormal powers under controlled conditions of observation.” Indeed, the phenomena associated with mesmerism is the core focus of contemporary psi research. However, it was the rise of interest in spiritualism in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that can be seen as a more immediate and direct progenitor of parapsychology (Utts, 1991). The importance of this movement is emphasised by Beloff (1997):

“First, it revived the age-old question of a life after death in an empirically testable form. Secondly, from the séance-room there issued a steady stream of puzzling phenomena, much of it a physical nature, which, irrespective of its implications for the survival problem, cried out for impartial investigation.”

(Beloff, 1997: 38)

Spiritualism was introduced to England from America in 1852, following an outbreak of interest in 1848 based on the mysterious rappings within the house of John Fox in Upper New York State. Mr Stone pioneered interest in England by bringing the first professional medium, Mrs Hayden, from America. Ensuing interest spread rapidly and over the subsequent years led to a multitude of mediums emerging. Palfreman (1979) describes how the growing intrigue in spiritualism, up until the early 1870s, was suppressed by the scientific community. Therefore, whenever public interest

became too exceptional “men of science” (1979: 210) intervened to provide criticism and ridicule, essentially commenting on the movement in the same context that had befallen the ‘fad’ like trend. Throughout the spiritualist era there was a constant underlying notion of fraud associated with the mediums and the phenomena they produced. Magicians and conjurors, such as Maskelyne (who wrote ‘Modern Spiritualism’ in 1876), led these exposures by successfully imitating the mediums’ effects and illustrating that most of the phenomena surrounding spiritualism could be achieved by trickery. Despite such claims spiritualism continued to thrive so that after 1870 the number of mediums and their apparent effects increased substantially.

The resultant effect of this growth was that investigations into the phenomena changed accordingly, with more methodological research implemented by scientifically minded individuals, most notably that conducted by a leading scientist of the period, William Crookes. His involvement in the area alone generated considerable interest and further investigation into the field. This proliferation of interest in researching the phenomena surrounding spiritualism and the need to concentrate on the less controversial and “salubrious phenomena of mental mediumship” (Beloff, 1997: 57) led to the formation of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882, where the main purpose was to:

“...investigate that large body of phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and spiritualistic...without prejudice or prepossession of any kind, and in the same spirit of exact and unimpassioned enquiry which has enabled science to solve so many problems, one not less hotly debated.” (Palfreman, 1979: 226)

Within the SPR five working parties were established to investigate the areas of thought reading; mesmerism; Reichenbach’s phenomena; apparitions and haunted houses; physical phenomena; and a party to perform a literary or documentary survey. In 1885 the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) was created following the success of its British equivalent.

According to Beloff (1973, 1977) the creation of the SPR is arguably the most significant event in the history of parapsychology, as it represents the first genuine attempt to organise a collective body of research into paranormal phenomena, capitalising on the zeitgeist conducive to psychical research at that time. Researchers from the organisation conducted investigations in a more systematic fashion and tried to establish links with orthodox science (such as psychology).



Subsequently, this attempted to raise parapsychology into the academic arena, presenting the subject matter as one of considerable relevance, thereby stimulating further work in the area.

In the period following the creation of the SPR there was a steady expansion in the amount of psychical research conducted. However, this work was generally limited in its experimental scope and largely focused on individual cases of particularly gifted individuals. It was through the “Rhine Revolution” (Beloff, 1997) that parapsychology began to gravitate more towards an experimental approach that was more purely scientific in nature. The research program spearheaded by Rhine at Duke University in the period throughout the 1930s set the precedent for subsequent psi research and presented parapsychology as a genuine scientific endeavour. Rhine’s focus on ESP implemented the use of standardised methodological trials that could easily be replicated over a large number of subjects. McVaugh and Mauskopf (1976) argue that Rhine’s work was not necessarily “revolutionary” within parapsychology, and was more a synthesis of earlier innovations in the field, successfully combined into a singular project. Collectively, what the Duke initiative did produce was a number of important elements that were of critical importance to psychical research (Allison, 1979). Fundamentally, it stressed an experimental distinction between facets of ESP, such as clairvoyance and telepathy, illustrating the percipient as the active agent. Moreover, Rhine also introduced standardised procedures and fixed terminology with an emphasis on the use of statistical methods.

In general terms Rhine’s work is cited as being highly influential in establishing parapsychology as a professional endeavour. Allison (1979) outlines the factors of Rhine’s research which legitimised interest in psi, citing the strong evidence that emerged from the experiments that indicated that ESP ability was present in large numbers of ordinary people. An outcome which had previously been found at an above-chance level of scoring, and one that provided future researchers with a methodological model to emulate with the confidence that statistically significant results could be found. In addition to demonstrating potential psi effects, the researchers also studied the physical, psychological and physiological factors in relation to the phenomena. In accordance with this increasing body of research Rhine founded the ‘Journal of Parapsychology’ in 1938, a move that gave further legitimacy to parapsychological research (Beloff, 1997).

Overall, the work conducted at the Duke University provided the groundwork for future investigation into paranormal phenomena (particularly ESP) and in essence, presented a blueprint

for a long-term initiative of research into psi (Beloff, 1997). The increased methodological control and movement towards a more experimental approach presented parapsychology as a potentially valid area of investigation to the scientific community. Rhine's publications during the period, most notably *Extra Sensory Perception* in 1934, generated interest beyond scholarly concerns and into mainstream culture. Subsequently, the "Rhine revolution" changed the nature of parapsychology through its inclination towards experimental design and the way in which it attempted to cement psi research within academia. The research foundations, set by Rhine, allowed investigations into parapsychology to progress and expand in scope. This led to research initiatives such as the Maimonides Dream Laboratory, the development of experimental initiatives such as Schmidt's research into micro-pk effects in the 1970s and 80s (Schmidt 1971, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985 and 1987) and a general movement towards a more purely scientific, statistically focused research which is perhaps best characterised by the Ganzfeld paradigm from the 1980s onwards (Schmeider, 1994; Storm and Ertel, 2001; Hyman and Honorton, 1986; Bem and Honorton, 1994; Storm and Ertel, 2001). Beloff (1997) cites the Ganzfeld paradigm as being a key point that led to the growth of experimental parapsychology and its subsequent infiltration into more mainstream scientific arenas. The Ganzfeld experimental procedure involves placing a participant in a state of mild sensory deprivation (known as the 'receiver'), then another separate participant (known as the 'sender') attempts to communicate mentally specific targets to the 'receiver'. The 'receiver' speaks aloud what they can "see" and this is recorded. The intention is to assess whether the sensory deprivation allows for psychic channelling between two people. The significance of this experimental process is that parapsychologists cite the results of this research as providing sufficient evidence that proves the existence of psi and is perhaps the closest parapsychology has come to producing statistically significant evidence via a replicable phenomena/ paradigm (Honorton, 1977; Honorton et. al, 1990; Honorton et. al, 1992). Despite criticism and questions over the validity of the findings (for example, Hyman, 1985; Milton and Wiseman, 1999) the debate and research around the Ganzfeld has continued - recent examples being Goulding et. al (2004); Storm et. al (2010); Rouder et. al, (2013); Bem et. al, (2001); Bierman et. al, (2016).

Beyond the experimental paradigms depicted above, alternative approaches to the study of parapsychology have focused on the underlying motivations and reasons behind interest in such subjects. One such example being the analysis of the differences between believers and non-believers of paranormal related phenomena (Ross and Joshi, 1992; Irwin, 1991; Bainbridge, 1978;

Gray and Mill, 1990; Musch and Ehrenberg, 2002; Wiseman and Watt, 2006; Coelho, 2005). Such research can also be seen to be seeded within other academic disciplines - most notably of which is 'anomalistic psychology' - an emerging branch of psychology. Anomalistic psychology itself can be defined as:

"...attempts to explain paranormal and related beliefs and ostensibly paranormal experiences in terms of known (or knowable) psychological and physical factors. It is directed at understanding bizarre experiences that many people have, without assuming that there is anything paranormal involved. While psychology, neurology and scientific disciplines are rich with explanatory models for human experiences of many kinds these models are rarely extrapolated to attempt to explain strange and unusual experiences. Anomalistic psychology attempts to do just that."

(French, 2001: 356)

As such, anomalistic psychology can be interpreted as not opposing or contradicting parapsychology (French, 2009), but instead looking at the same phenomena from a different perspective - namely more psychological and purely scientifically oriented. Parapsychologists throughout its history have attempted to merge its phenomena with psychology in an attempt to gain legitimacy for the field (see Brenninkmeijer, 2015; and Sommer, 2012).

The research conducted in the US migrated to Europe and inspired parapsychology initiatives within UK institutions. The field slowly began to make in-roads into academic settings within universities, for example through anomalistic psychology - with Edinburgh existing as a focal point for seeding researchers around the country (Carr, 2008). Section 1.3 has already demonstrated the multiple in-roads parapsychology has forged within UK academia - mapping out the development of the field throughout the country.

A recent overview of parapsychology by Cardena et al. (2015) provides a contemporary snapshot of the field. Work continues in the field along with continued criticism and negativity directed towards it (Cardena 2011; 2014). Parapsychological researchers are still engaging in debate with critics over the validity of their arguments (McLuhan, 2010; Storr, 2013). What this demonstrates is that the field remains entrenched in the same problems and issues that have been persistent throughout its history, from its origins, to the time the interviews for the current thesis were conducted, and even in the years since then. From the overview provided by all of the

contributors contained within the parapsychology handbook compiled by Cardena et al. (2015) it is clear the field has struggled to make real progression and gain notable acceptance within scientific communities (Zingrone, et al. 2015).

Since 1977 the the main experimental emphasis within parapsychology has been on studies of ESP and PK (for example, Marcusson-Clavertz and Cardena, 2011; Parra and Villanueva, 2003). Bem's (2011) research into presentiment was, at the time, interpreted as a milestone within the field. A respected member of the academic (social psychology) community, Daryl Bem, presented statistically significant findings that suggested evidence for ESP. His research focused on 'anomalous retroactive influences on cognition and affect' and was key for introducing psychological research methods towards ESP phenomena. The paper was published in what was considered a 'mainstream' journal - Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. This was notable in the interviews from the current thesis - many of the researchers referenced Bem's (at the time) upcoming paper and the hope it would validate the proof of the existence of ESP - and was even referenced as potentially "another Ganzfeld" (Personal Communication). Since then, Bem's work has garnered criticisms and multiple failed attempts at replication, for example Galak et. al (2012) published a failed replication attempt in the same journal that Bem's original study was presented (Journal of Personality and Social Psychology).

Beyond this it is also worth noting the extension of ESP research that incorporates psychophysiological measures as a test of unconscious ESP (Radin, 2004; Tressoldi et. al, 2011). A recent meta-analysis of studies of predictive physiological anticipation revealed a significant overall effect (Mossbridge et al, 2012; Ambach, 2012). As such, it is notable that despite continued dismissal of effects and failed replications, such as the Ganzfeld paradigm and Bem's research, parapsychologists continue to persevere conducting studies in parapsychology.

### **1.4.3 Analytical Potential of Parapsychology Within Sociology**

The history of parapsychology outlined above is a very brief depiction of the subject's advancements over the short period in which such phenomena has become a significant concern for research. The elements that have been discussed illustrate parapsychology's development from an initial predisposition to relatively large-scale macro phenomena to a narrowing of focus to more measurable micro-effects that can be observed in controlled experimental conditions.

Ultimately, this development charts parapsychology's attempts to evolve into a legitimate scientific subject. The three major periods discussed above - the creation of the SPR, the work of Rhine and the improvement of scientific implementation - signify the attempts by the parapsychology community to validate their work by accentuating the phenomena associated with the subject as being of genuine academic concern and worthy of being a scientific discipline. However, parapsychology's status as a science has remained uncertain and a matter of significant sociological debate (which will be discussed in section 1.5).

The field of parapsychology provides a unique opportunity for sociological analysis. It remains a disputed field yet has maintained a presence within UK academia. This in itself presents an interesting dichotomy concerning controversial knowledge claims and the processes governing the acceptance or rejection of specialised fields. Universally, studying parapsychology as it currently stands in the UK should provide an insight into the mechanisms by which associated researchers construct both their personal identities and wider identities, such as the identity of the field and its ties with the academic infrastructure.

Whilst not an immediate concern for the empirical analysis and focus - on a broader scale it is hoped that this thesis will have greater sociological significance beyond discourse analysis. Essentially it will be investigating discourse relating to disputable knowledge claims - providing an insight into their level of reception and seeing if, how, and why these have come to be resolved discursively. In particular, the discourse generated through this research may address the issues of what challenges researchers in this field face when attempting to develop and present research and the impact on their careers. The production and acceptance of scientific knowledge is an integral aspect of the 'Sociology of Scientific Knowledge' (SSK) agenda. It is intended that this project will add to that body of literature and hopefully act as a more contemporary reference point for further research - as prior interest in this specific topic (i.e. parapsychology and its acceptance) significantly decreased approximately thirty years ago. Essentially the project will be an updating of earlier sociological literature within this field. These themes will be addressed more extensively in Chapter 2.

The next sub-section will now provide an overview of the sociological analysis that has focused on parapsychology. Such context is integral to appreciating the content and references of the discourse and constructed accounts that are analysed in the later empirical chapters.

The content of such literature is closely tied with the development and progression of parapsychology as a field and also integrates with the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) - literature that informs the development of discourse analysis that will be discussed in Chapter 2.

### **1.5 Development of the Sociological Analysis of Parapsychology**

The current section will provide an overview of the sociological literature focusing on the controversy surrounding parapsychology and whether it should be considered suitable for academic scientific focus. This remains an issue that is central to the subject's history and also its contemporary position as a focus of academia. The debate over whether parapsychology constitutes as a scientific discipline is a key point central to the historical context of what the interview participants refer to within their interview responses. Its very nature illustrates the boundaries of what separates the perception of accepted science in relation to controversial knowledge claims. By analysing its identified status in accordance with mainstream conceptual identities (such as physics or biology) it provides an insight into the possible sociological forces surrounding its acceptance and levels of recognition and how this may relate to the sociological strategies employed by actors within this controversy (for example, how it may influence their discourse constructs).

#### **1.5.1 Debating Parapsychology as a Science**

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s there was a proliferation of interest in sociological studies of parapsychology. Fundamentally, this focus was largely inspired by the growing cultural intrigue in aspects of the occult, witchcraft and the predominance of figures within the media such as Uri Geller. However, from a sociological perspective the emergence of parapsychology, and specifically its position in relation to mainstream science, provided an opportunity to analyse the underlying social processes that determined the ways in which the scientific community addressed controversies and contentious knowledge claims. Pinch (2001a) states a more succinct explanation for the focus on fringe sciences, such as parapsychology; "because looking at the abnormal tells you something about the normal" (2001a: 225). Subsequently, sociologists by looking at a pseudoscience, can analyse live disputed knowledge claims and can observe the sociological

channels which function in either their acceptance or continual dismissal. Such a unique case study allows the researcher to look at the construction of knowledge and the social-cultural elements that inform the channels of validating scientific knowledge. In addition, Pinch's (2001a) perspective suggests that by examining parapsychology's relationship with the scientific community there is the potential for a greater sociological understanding of how critics interact (in terms of strategies etc.) with scientists who are adopting a controversial position and potentially how such controversies eventually become accepted. This section will now explore the initial research into parapsychology's status as a scientific subject.

The relativist SSK research (which will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 2) provides an important insight into the social and contextual processes that govern science based controversies. This can be seen to relate directly to parapsychology and its status within the scientific community. Collins and Pinch have extended their research from conventional controversies in science to include the positioning of parapsychology in the academic community and its reception. This focus has included an analysis of how organised scepticism undermines parapsychological findings (Pinch and Collins, 1984) implementing negotiated perspectives via different media which ultimately differ from those applied to 'conventional' science. Pinch (1979) has highlighted the purported inherent lack of validity of the accusations of fraud that are constantly levelled at parapsychology and suggested that critics fail to successfully demarcate the true science within the research literature from the pseudo-science, merely consigning the majority to the latter label. Furthermore, Collins and Pinch have analysed the nuances of experimental replication in parapsychology based research (Collins, 1976, 1985; Pinch, 1987), and the exchanges between critics and researchers within institutional contexts along with the strategies employed by both sides (Collins and Pinch, 1979a, 1979b).

Collectively this research (including Collins' gravitational wave studies) begins to provide a valuable sociological comprehension of the social and cultural mechanisms that operate beyond the research of parapsychology. Of critical importance is the understanding of the social-cultural-political processes that may govern parapsychology's status as a science. This understanding produces an insight into the processes (including discursive processes) that potentially shape scientific knowledge – processes that go beyond the objective nature of emerging data from experimental paradigms and into potentially subjective judgements that are based on cultural value(s).

Collins and Pinch (1979b) provide a key discussion based on the strategies employed by both parapsychologists and its critics concerning the subject's position as a valid science. They assert that the main tactic used by parapsychologists for gaining scientific legitimacy is 'physical metamorphosis' (1979b: 241) – of literally changing themselves into scientists - a strategy which the authors hint at as being merely presenting a façade to the academic community that parapsychologists are true scientists. Subsequently, Collins and Pinch (1979b) suggest that it is the disciplines hope in this façade that might eventually lead to parapsychology gaining scientific credibility. This presentation of parapsychology as a science can be observed in the research programmes initiated in the field. Parapsychologists have entrenched themselves in utilising the symbolic and technical hardware of science, developing increasingly sophisticated statistical analysis and experimental techniques. However, despite this, parapsychology's presence as a legitimised science remains far from cemented:

“Since Rhine's work there have been many accounts of good experiments to be found in the literature, and these may appear completely convincing. Indeed many of the most 'hard headed' parapsychological researchers have come into the field as a result of reading this literature though they themselves may have never seen or experienced any type of paranormal effect whatsoever...It might be thought that a number of such carefully conducted experiments completely reported and presented in the constitutive forum, would be sufficient to establish the existence of psi phenomena...The situation is, however, far more complicated than this.”

(Collins and Pinch, 1979b: 244)

From the earlier overview of the state of the field in UK academia (Section 1.3 of this chapter) it is evident that parapsychology at the point of 2010-2011 had gained moderate success by emulating psychology – thus presenting itself as a legitimate scientific discipline. This reflects Collins and Pinch's (1979a; 1979b) proposals. Therefore it appears that parapsychology has attained growth in the UK higher-education system by being bracketed with psychology and through an emphasis of the 'similarities' between the two in terms of scientific endeavours (see Carr, 2008; Beloff, 1997).

Alcock (1987) presents a more negative assessment regarding the status of parapsychology and its integration;



“...at best parapsychology struggles to maintain a toe-hold at the fringes of academia; mainstream science continues to ignore its subject matter or even to reject and ridicule it.”

(Alcock, 1987: 554)

The above statements highlight the gulf between parapsychologists and its critics. Despite attempts to constantly establish itself as a science in its own right and producing a significant body of research parapsychology is still regarded with deep scepticism. Collins and Pinch (1979a: 223) highlight this potentially fruitless effort to gain mainstream acceptance:

“...parapsychologists have expended a great deal of effort in infiltrating the formal institutions of science such as universities, professional associations and journals – hardly the sort of effort that would be expected of those with anti-scientific interests. It seems then, that perception of the subject as scientific or anti-scientific depends not on the relationship between the ideas of psi and science, but upon the arguers interests as regards the legitimacy of parapsychological ideas.”

(Collins and Pinch, 1979a: 246)

Subsequently, according to this perspective, parapsychology’s continual existence on the fringes of science appears to be a result of its conceptual potential. Therefore the academic infrastructures within the field and the prominent scientific integrity of professional parapsychologists that mirror researchers in other scientific specialisms (as outlined by Allison, 1979) will constantly face deep criticism due to the ideas they generate. Collins and Pinch (1979b) go on to outline the fundamental distinction between parapsychology and its critics in general sociological terms:

“One group of actors perceives the set of ideas associated with parapsychology to be perfectly compatible with science and attempts to seek scientific recognition for them, whilst another group of actors perceives the ideas to be incompatible with science and attempts to disarm the first group by attacks *from science* on them.”

(Collins and Pinch, 1979b: 223)

The above suggests that one of the primary areas of scepticism displayed by critics towards parapsychology relates to its association with unscientific beliefs. Historically there is a widespread suspicion towards the subject’s external basis in spiritualism and potentially occult associations.

Rawcliffe (1959) claims parapsychology is essentially a “cult of the supernatural in technical dress”. A notion supported by Price (1955) who states that the subject “although well camouflaged with some of the paraphernalia of science, still bears in abundance the markings of magic.” These attitudes are presented principally as a result of parapsychology’s direct emergence from spiritualism and also to the general perception of paranormal phenomena. This view is also perpetuated through the subject’s sources of funding, which largely consist of wealthy individuals (with no links to academia) who possess an interest in the paranormal - a factor which serves to remind critics of “the science’s origins in the murky world of spiritualism” (Collins and Pinch, 1979b: 255).

Parapsychology’s relationship with spiritualism has allowed critics to emphasise the potential presence of fraud in its research, from its origins the subject has been the focal point for accusations of fraud and trickery as an explanation of any unexplainable phenomena (Collins and Pinch, 1979b). For example, from the early attempts to discredit prominent mediums to more recent accusations such as Hansel’s (1966) repetition of Rhine’s experiments using technical tricks. Another example being Hanlon’s (1974) attempts to discredit the Stanford experiments on Uri Geller by the proposition of a scenario whereby normal sensory communication was achieved through concealed radio transmitters and a receiver embedded in Geller’s tooth, presenting a deceptive illusion of ESP. Collins and Pinch (1979b) outline that there does not have to be any evidence of fraud available for critics to discredit research merely the possibility, and from this they can “extend the conspiracy” (1979b: 251) to outside sources and even the experimenters themselves:

“The logic of the fraud hypothesis not only appears to remove any need for empirical tests from the scientific decision-making process but can also be put forward without any empirical evidence that fraud actually took place.”

(Collins and Pinch, 1979b: 252)

They argue that this attitude implants paranoia into the researcher, thus hindering them, and that the presence of such scepticism is noticeably less prevalent throughout the rest of science.

Perhaps the most substantial criticism levelled at the scientific orientation of parapsychology is the

lack of replicable research (and subsequent results) and the interpretation of its findings. Beloff (1973, 1977) outlines how within the field there is still no repeatable experiment whereby the experimenter can verify a given phenomenon and that Rhine's research provided parapsychology with all the tools necessary for it to become an accredited science except arguably the most important; the know-how to produce results where required. According to Beloff (1973, 1977), this lack of direct replication leaves any phenomena or significant results generated by psi research open to criticism - it enables commentators to speculate on positive outcomes as possibly the result of methodological inconsistencies or merely fraud on the part of the subject or the experimenter. Tart (1977) and Parker (1978) comment on the erratic nature of psi performances which have led to a lack of replicable results in the literature, and even Rhine (1947) referred to psi as an "incredibly elusive function". Kurtz (1985) elaborates on this point:

"...the point is that we cannot predict *when or under what conditions* above-chance calls will be made (with Zener cards, in precognitive dream labs, with random-number generators, in remote-viewing testing situations); one is much more likely to get negative results."

(Kurtz, 1985: 508)

Alcock (1987) comments that due to this lack of consistency the evidence for the existence of psi remains debatable, with "nothing substantive to show" (1987: 564). He goes on to conclude that "a century of parapsychological research has gone by, and the evidence for psi is no more convincing now than it was a century ago" (1987: 563). Critics of the field argue that for the scientific establishment to consider psi as a matter of significant importance substantive and replicable evidence of psychic phenomenon needs to be produced, as "without it, parapsychology can never become a science" (Alcock, 1987: 565).

On a more fundamental point parapsychology generates criticism on an interpretational and conceptual level. The theoretical frameworks applied to positive results generated by psi research have led some critics to question the explanations presented by parapsychologists for their apparent anomalous phenomena:

"It is precisely here that the motivational system exerts its greatest influence: ESP is taken to be a more likely explanation than subtle cueing or some unrecognised but normal influence when guessing is

successful at a level above chance; psychokinesis is seen to be a more probable than experimental artefact when subatomic particles apparently violate probabilistic views. It is in the preference for paranormal explanations over any other, and the attempt to explain away failures to replicate, and the insistence by some parapsychologists that science should accept the reality of the paranormal even though the criterion of strong replicability has not been met, that parapsychologists often stray from the pathways of science.” (Alcock, 1985: 561)

Thus, from this viewpoint, it is the intellectual schemas and belief systems brought to the research by the experimenters that generates criticism regarding their explanations of experimental outcomes. Alcock (1985) outlines that if there is some anomaly that emerges from research that deviates from normal expectation then this would require explanation, even of possible paranormal origin. However, the researcher(s) should never begin research with an explanation orientated around parapsychological based concepts. Indeed, Blackmore (1983) urges researchers to abandon the psi hypothesis even whilst they continue to study anomalistic phenomena, proposing that the availability of the hypothesis can prove to distract researchers away from other possible (normal) explanations. For Blackmore (1983), using psi as a default explanation of phenomena in such research can potentially impede the development of the understanding of anomalies. Extending upon this, Alcock (1987) criticises parapsychologists for their “anything goes” attitude towards explaining their findings - theories of ESP, psi or even retroactive PK are all incorporated as possible interpretations of what is occurring in the experimental scenario to generate anomalous results. There is no limit to this process according to Alcock (1987) and all things become possible no matter how intangible they appear to conventional thinking. A factor that is highlighted largely due to the un-falsifiability of psi effects, whereby concepts such as experimenter effects, decline effects, psi-missing and linger effects are used too much as an explanation rather than a description (Alcock, 1987). Therefore from this critical perspective, the psi hypothesis becomes unfalsifiable through the numerous concepts employed to explain away null results and non-replications. Indeed for critics such as Alcock (1987), the ‘experimenter effect’ itself has far reaching consequences, for if the experimenter can demonstrate psi effects over the research then this possesses implications for all scientific research conducted in an experimental situation. Ultimately for sceptics such as Kurtz, what these aspects highlight is the lack of a clearly worked out conceptual framework that is absent throughout parapsychology:

“Without such a causal theory the parapsychologists can slip from one ad hoc explanation to another...

make[ing] it difficult to determine precisely what, if anything, is happening.”

(Kurtz, 1985: 515)

Kurtz (1985) argues that a definitive outline and universal theory of the properties of psi needs to occur, and until that aspect of definition is cemented then the outcomes generated through parapsychological research will continue to be met with deep criticism and even inherent cynicism (as demonstrated in the quote below):

“To define a concept purely by eliminating alternatives, with no positive content whatever in the concept, seems to be unknown outside of parapsychology...There seems to be a hidden agreement that you do not investigate the modus operandi of psi...Its as if they do not *want* to find out how it works...The deliberate avoidance of experiments on the properties, or limitations, of psi encourages further suspicion: that parapsychologists are, by motivation, not problem-solvers but mystery-mongers.”

(Scott, 1985: 497-8)

### **1.5.2 Parapsychology and its Critics**

Overall, parapsychology since its early inception as a field of academic inquiry has undertaken numerous measures to establish itself as a true scientific endeavour (Beloff 1973, 1977). However, despite these efforts the degree of true acceptance has remained limited and there has been a constant barrage of criticism (Collins and Pinch, 1979b). An achievement of parapsychology is that it has maintained a foothold in professional institutions in the face of intense resistance from mainstream scientists (Carr, 2008). There have been claims of unfair practices, blatant bias, discrimination and refusals to publish valid bodies of work in established journals (Allison, 1979). Parapsychologists appear to exist in a perpetual state of battle against scepticism leading to constant modifications of experimental design in order to counter criticism and validate their work (Zingrone, 2000). The end benefits for gaining legitimacy from the scientific community will be the resources (recruitment, funding, communication etc.) that are largely controlled by the “gatekeepers” of science (Alcock, 1987: 554). Whilst there is some evidence of parapsychology gaining some credibility it remains arguably on the fringes of mainstream science (Allison, 1979). As outlined above, according to its critics the main reason for this is largely due to the lack of replicable evidence and concrete theoretical explanations of phenomena such as psi. McClennon (1982) proposes that this negativity is due to the threat that paranormal phenomena poses to the

prevailing scientific worldview (also see Morris, 2000 for a breakdown of perceived problematic aspects).

However, collectively, the vast body of literature conducted in the field suggests that some effects may be occurring consistently. For example, Radin (1997) proposes that the statistical use of meta-analysis provides sufficient evidence for the existence of parapsychological phenomena. However, critical positions remain - with Kurtz (1985) advising caution when interpreting the significant results of any research that claims psi effects:

“Rhine and other parapsychologists have performed tests in which they maintain that they have achieved above-chance runs. What are we to conclude at this point in history? Simply *that* and no more.”

(Kurtz, 1985: 513)

For critics such as Kurtz (1985) and Scott (1985) such results do not prove the existence of psi - psi remains only a theory employed to explain the above-chance results. According to their critical position, psi in itself conflicts with existing scientific principles and contravenes ordinary experience, thus the evidence needed to overturn this knowledge would have to be extremely powerful and substantial:

“Parapsychologists should recognise that, by simple objective criteria, their science is *not* a normal one and that there are good and honest reasons for doubting their conclusions and for requiring from them more rigorous evidence than is often demanded in other sciences. Parapsychology is in a unique position and will need to make unique efforts if it is to convince mainstream science to accept its results.”

(Scott, 1985: 500)

Parapsychology can be viewed as a bridge between science and religion (Tart, 1977), for as Rhine (1947: 209-227) stated; “what parapsychology has found out about man most directly affects religion”. To Rhine it was essential to demonstrate the reality of ESP and PK if one were to have any hope of putting the existence of the soul, or at least the principle of mind-body dualism, on a solid scientific footing (Alcock, 1985). Indeed, the origin of psychical research was born out of attempts to come to terms with emerging scientific perspectives (such as Darwinism) whilst maintaining the understanding of the self that religious tradition had transmitted (Cerullo, 1982). Therefore parapsychology stemmed from academics needing a middle ground between the

emerging scientific perspective(s) and religion (Beloff 1973, 1977). According to Alcock (1985: 555) the difference between science and parapsychology is that “psychical research was not carried out *despite* religious needs and beliefs, but it seems, *because* of such needs” – it was born out of a desire to see beyond the existence of the materialistic philosophy. Researchers such as Rogo (1982) and Perry (1982) point to the vast presence of parapsychological phenomena within the bible. An observation that has led Thouless (1977) to conclude that psychical research gives a new credibility to the reports of miracles in the religious literature, and subsequently brings belief in God back into respectability. McConnell (1982) even suggests that religion itself merely arose out of misinterpretation of the true nature of paranormal processes and that organised religion is simply the “cultural expression of psi phenomena” (1982: 140). However, as Roberts (2001) argues, perhaps parapsychology’s purpose is to continually exist within this middle ground between science and religion, serving those who are unable to find belief or meaning in either.

Zingrone (2000), in her paper “Failure to go the Distance”, argues that critics have continually set the agenda for academic debate regarding parapsychological issues, they have held a monopoly over debates regarding research and subsequent purported evidence. The criticisms themselves, according to Zingrone's (2000) argument, have not advanced in accordance with parapsychology as a subject of concern. What this paper represents is a proposed imbalance between parapsychologists and their critics. On the one side parapsychologists have valued criticism and evolved the discipline through the numerous attacks levelled towards the research conducted in this field, conversely Zingrone’s (2000) line of argument outlines critics have remained entrenched in the same mindset they have always espoused despite parapsychology progressing as a scientific pursuit. For example, Gordon (1982) investigated parapsychology's status and growth as a deviant science and found that parapsychology closely mimicked the features of non-deviant sciences - indicating that parapsychologists have advanced the subject significantly and yet continually face the same steadfast line of criticism(s). Zingrone (2000) outlines four fundamental ways in which critics have failed to engage with parapsychological research: 1) lack of critical thinking; 2) lack of self-reflection; 3) lack of openness to communication; 4) lack of interest in the consequences of their criticism. What these amount to from Zingrone's (2000) perspective is critical claims that have no supporting evidence or research, followed by the erection of barriers of communication that prevent an open discussion of the issues at hand. Ultimately, Zingrone (2000) accuses the critics of being ignorant of the issues debated and unaware of the consequences their writings have on the parapsychological community, as collectively, these apparent facets of the critical

stance towards parapsychology can be destructive. Zingrone (2000) observes the lack of evidence or supporting research conducted by critics in the presentation of their arguments which is then followed by a lack of communication between critics and researchers. Subsequently, a lack of dialogue and effective communication leads to further disparities and polarised viewpoints between the parapsychologist and their critic(s).

Honorton (1993) provides an overt attack on the overly skeptical critics of parapsychology. He supports Zingrone's (2000) proposal that critics have failed to engage with the material they berate and that the large proportion of their arguments are uninformed and could even be levelled at more conventional sciences (such as psychology). Throughout the paper Honorton (1993) addresses each of the major criticisms of parapsychology (such as lack of cumulativeness, conceptual failures etc.) and outlines substantial flaws in the critical arguments. He presents critics such as Alcock and Randi as being largely uninformed (and in some cases ignorant) in their dealings with the research material – whereby they ultimately display an inherent subjective presentation of their beliefs. For example, in the Druckman and Swets (1988) NRC report and its damning presentation of parapsychological issues - a report which Palmer, Honorton, and Utts (1989) dismissed as bias, lacking balance, selective reporting and severely limited in its scope and presentation.

Pinch (1979) focuses on a more specific line of critical argument. His paper questions the validity of the fraud argument in relation to parapsychology and its relevance as a means of devaluing this supposed pseudo-science:

“The problem being raised here can be briefly stated. What are the characteristics of these hypotheses (or of their contexts) which enable us to demarcate one as part of acceptable scientific knowledge and permit us to relegate the other to the realm of 'pseudoscience'? In other words, what makes the 'fraud' hypothesis a better scientific explanation for the results of the parapsychologists than the 'paranormal' hypothesis? I hope that a discussion of this question will throw some light on the more general problem of the demarcation of science from pseudo-science...

...The difference between allegations of fraud in parapsychology and in other parts of science is that, in parapsychology, they are levelled not only at particular experiments but at the whole discipline. No-one considers that one case of fraud at the Sloan-Kettering Institute means that the whole of cancer research can be explained away, but to show that one parapsychology experiment might have involved fraud is,



apparently, often enough to dismiss the whole enterprise.”

(Pinch, 1979: 330-331)

Pinch (1979) argues that our current conceptualisations of what constitutes as genuine scientific knowledge (as opposed apparent pseudo-knowledge) needs re-addressing:

“We simply admit our cultural bias in favour of present knowledge, and side-step the issue of how we know that our present knowledge is 'scientific'. It would seem that, if the problem of demarcation of genuine scientific knowledge from spurious knowledge is to be solved, it must be approached by the delineation of characteristics of science that are independent of the content of particular knowledge claims.”

(Pinch 1979: 332)

Pinch's (1979) reaction to this is to analyse how well the same arguments that are used to question the scientific status of parapsychology (such as issues of replication and adequate theorisation) fare when applied against the fraud hypothesis. Ultimately, what Pinch (1976) shows is that the fraud argument, which is consistently levelled towards parapsychology as evidence of its scientific failures, can itself be rejected as unscientific:

“[The fraud hypothesis'] failure to meet the very same canons of scientific rationality which, it is claimed, place the paranormal hypothesis outside of science raises the problem of why it has only been the latter which has been rejected for such reasons. As both parapsychology and fraud fare equally well (or badly) against demarcation arguments, it would seem that we need to explore just what more general role (if any) such arguments play in science.”

(Pinch, 1979: 341)

“In my view, demarcation criteria do not provide us with independent access to the scientific validity of beliefs. That such criteria seem to work equally well against both fraud and parapsychology indicates that they alone cannot account for parapsychology's rejection. Their use against parapsychology seems to have served primarily as a means to legitimate present orthodoxy.”

(Pinch, 1979: 343-344)

Hardin (1981) responds to Pinch's (1979) paper regarding parapsychology and fraud. Hardin (1981) outlines an apparent flaw in Pinch's logic in comparing the two theoretical proposals

(parapsychology versus fraud). According to Pinch these are two comparable theories that should be judged on the same merits, thus creating an illusion of equality between the two arguments. However, Hardin (1981) asserts that the two hypotheses are not directly comparable using the same criteria for validation, and are thus intended to function from different theoretical angles:

“We may get some sense of this difference by comparing the outcomes of two imaginary situations. In the first instance, suppose that several parapsychological experiments of a crucial character could be reproduced with positive results by a variety of experimenters, previously unbelieving as well as previously believing in ESP. The fraud hypothesis would be swept aside as beside the point, for, even if it were supported in certain historical cases, it would no longer undercut the claim that we are faced with phenomena of a sort which require a drastically new type of explanation. Disputes would then turn about the detailed character of such explanations, and the legitimacy of the field of inquiry would have been established. Now suppose, instead, that there should be several strong replications of fraud. In this scenario, fraudulent research reports confirming previous work would be accepted by editors of parapsychological journals and leading parapsychologists would point with pride to powerful new support for their cause.”  
(Hardin, 1981: 250)

Hardin (1981) continues to highlight the apparent disparities between the two hypotheses. Where Pinch (1979) presented them as largely equal and thus viewed from the same perspective, Hardin outlines numerous differences which suggests they should be assessed on different terms. He points out that parapsychological theories are constructed to provide generalised descriptions of large classes of occurrences, “an attempt to formulate a previously unknown set of natural laws”. In contrast, the fraud hypothesis is more limited in its scope, attempting to explain a limited set of experimental occurrences. Subsequently according to Hardin (1981), the fraud hypothesis should not be interpreted as a general theory in the way Pinch (1979) presents it, as it does not focus on generating a scientific theory. Hardin (1981) concludes:

“A careful examination of what ought to be expected of the ESP and fraud hypotheses reveals, I think, that they bear burdens of proof proportional to their aspirations, and that the aspirations of an ESP hypothesis are, by the nature of the case, far grander than the merely critical goals of a fraud hypothesis. That they should be differently regarded by the orthodox scientific community ought not therefore to seem surprising, nor should it require a special sociological explanation.”  
(Hardin, 1981: 254)

Pinch (1981a) replies to Hardin's (1981) criticisms with the following:

“Hardin does not seem to disagree with the main claim of my paper - namely, that the fraud hypothesis fails to meet various canons of scientific rationality which have been used to reject parapsychology. He argues, however, that this is irrelevant because it is inappropriate to compare their relative scientific merits in the first place, given their differing logical tasks. The task of parapsychology, according to Hardin, is to give a general account of an indefinitely large class of instances, in an attempt to formulate a previously unknown set of natural laws. The task of the fraud hypothesis is to give a set of explanations for a limited set of particular historical circumstances. It seems the former task is to be associated with the goals of a real science, but that the latter task is part of the domain of historical explanation or criticism...The difficulty with this distinction is that it appeals to an over-idealized (philosophical) picture of science in which the essence of scientific activity is conceived as the search for universal laws which cover indefinitely large classes of instances. Recent studies of groups of practising scientists indicate that analysis of the development of scientific knowledge is difficult to separate from the social negotiation of quite specific laboratory episodes.”

(Pinch, 1981a: 255-256)

Ultimately, Pinch accuses Hardin of oversimplifying the development of scientific knowledge – of failing to take into consideration the complex social processes, negotiations and cultural considerations that occur within research communities. As a result of these processes it is redundant to simply categorise the two different hypotheses as being almost separate entities with different objectives. The reality, from Pinch's (1981a) perspective (and that of relativism in general) is that such rigid boundaries rarely exist, and if they do then their reinforcement is questionable - as seen from studies conducted by the relativist programme, the lines are frequently blurred within scientific communities.

The joint communiqué between Honorton (a parapsychologist) and Hyman (a critical psychologist) in 1986 is an example of collaboration between parapsychologists and critics. Hyman and Honorton (1986) realising that they “agree to disagree” (1986: 354) attempted to find a platform for progressive debate. They both strived to perfect the methodologies implemented within the Ganzfeld research paradigm, in the hope to prove the exact nature of the effect that emerged in earlier experiments.

Parapsychologists (such as Zingrone, 200) criticise their critics through promoting the potentially damaging effects that criticisms that do not fully engage with the material may have on parapsychology, using Hyman and Honorton's (1986) work as an example of a perceived ideal:

"Previous controversies around parapsychological research and its legitimacy as a scientific endeavour have lost sight of, and extremists on both sides have dissimulated, the fact that parapsychologists and their critics have many common objectives. The Hyman and Honorton paper is a most welcome reminder of these common goals, which rational minorities in (or maybe between) both camps have been tirelessly emphasizing for a while. It is high time that both parapsychologists and their critics become more aware of these common objectives. It is high time that parapsychologists and critics join forces on a larger scale and look for ways toward closer and more fruitful collaboration. And, in my opinion, it is high time that all parties concerned work hard on eliminating the deplorable parapsychologist-critic dichotomy as soon as possible and as thoroughly as possible....I have never been able to understand why scepticism should not form part of parapsychology, and why ...[critical theorists] should not wish (or be allowed) to do their own 'parapsychological research' and empirical tests of their own or others' hypotheses. After all, the only thing that matters is the quality of the scientific work and the quality of arguments. So what is needed is close collaboration between all the parties involved."

(Hovelman, 1986: 368)

Concurrently, these debates regarding the legitimacy of parapsychology as a science provide an insight into not only the sociological debates that have occurred around the field but also parapsychology's development as a discipline. The communication between supporters of parapsychology and its critics illustrate the turbulent status the subject holds regarding its validity as an area of academic focus. Within the context of the current thesis this literature provides a backdrop by which to understand the controversy that exists at the core of parapsychology and its contested knowledge claims. This is useful background context material to aid an understanding of how this may affect the sociological (including discursive) strategies of researchers attached with this controversy.

Sociological analysis such as Collins and Pinch's work centred on ethnographic work whereas the current thesis will focus on discourse analysis. The core element of the thesis will be an analysis of interview data from researchers who are currently (or have been previously been) attached to

parapsychology. The focus of the project is to explore the discourse repertoires implemented by these individuals associated with the field (researchers operating within universities). Investigating in a sociological context how researchers operate with their relationship(s) to parapsychology, managing both their careers and identity and how they construct the subject with regards to its academic positioning via their discourse.

Discourse analysis research that relates to (and emerged from) Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) work has demonstrated the insight gained from looking at the discourse of scientists and researchers within an area that is a contested knowledge claim (this research will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2). Such a focal point provides an interesting opportunity for discourse analysis. A search through the discourse analysis literature reveals a scarcity of studies that have been conducted specifically on the discourse of parapsychologists. As demonstrated above, parapsychology exists as an uncertain concept within mainstream academia and scientific circles. This uncertainty means its intellectual borders, cultural presentation and identity are still in a state of flux. As such, looking at the discourse of researchers linked to the field of parapsychology may offer an opportunity to inspect how these individuals manage these representations through discursive action - representations that relate not only to the field but to their personal presentations. For example, how they construct their personal identity as well as that of the subject.

The final section of this chapter will now define the aims of the thesis and map out its structure, detailing the content of the remaining chapters.

## **1.6 Summary of Thesis: Aims and Structure**

### **1.6.1 Thesis Aims**

The current thesis is positioned as an update of core sociological literature - primarily a contemporary use of the discourse analysis methodology and analytical framework implemented by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984), with the focus being on revealing interpretative repertoires used by the sample of interviewed researchers. Sampson and Atkinson (2011: 90) observe that despite

continued interest in the sociology of science “there is a lack of analytic focus on the narrative accounts of scientists themselves and an absence of a sustained research tradition building on the work of Gilbert and Mulkey” (see also Traweek, 1992; Sampson and Atkinson 2013). They elaborate on this further:

“...an audit of contemporary citations of the work of Gilbert and Mulkey does not reveal a continued close analytic focus on the language and practices used by scientists themselves. Equally, major sources reviewing STS reveal little or no continuing development of the work by Gilbert and Mulkey. While there are numerous references to Gilbert and Mulkey themselves in the standard works of reference...there is no indication of any development of their line of analysis of accounts. The same is true of major works on constructivist analyses of knowledge production...the topic remains under explored.”

(Sampson and Atkinson, 2011: 90)

Subsequently, the work contained in this thesis will provide a contemporary extension of Gilbert and Mulkey’s research and analytical approach.

From analysing the researchers’ discourse the key research questions that will comprise the analysis will be:

- How do these individuals present their discourse?
- What is their discourse achieving?
- What actions are being performed through the language?
- How are elements (such as identity) being formulated via the discourse within the communicative context?
- What are the commonalities between the researchers’ discourse?
- Do these commonalities form interpretative repertoires?
- If there are multiple repertoires - are there links and connections between them?

The thesis’ focus on parapsychology is intended to fully utilise this area of scientific controversy to provide a rich insight into the discursive repertoires used by associated researchers to construct formulations of both their personal identities and that of the field itself. On a grander sociological scale Kuhn (1962) proposed the importance of looking at such controversies, whereby controversy and conflicted knowledge areas are perceived as the natural outcome of the way in which the scientific enterprise becomes established. Collins (1975) compared pieces of knowledge with ships

in bottles and proposed that it is only through the examination of scientific controversies such as parapsychology that the process by which those ships (scientific findings) get into bottles (validity) can be understood. Whilst such sociological concepts do not inspire the focus of this thesis they do form part of the consideration when analysing the discursive constructions of the interviewed participants. For example, the discursive strategies they are using in the communicative context of the interview to build presentations of these knowledge claims and their identity relating to them.

In addition the current thesis aims to progress the analytical focus utilised by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) by attempting to expand the discourse analysis theoretical approach. Prior discourse analysis work has tended to reveal discrete, self-containing repertoires that has never extended to showing how such repertoires may be related to each other or how they may be a coherent overarching and complementing set of resources. This analytical deficit can be seen from the early work of Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) through to more recent literature that centres on the discourse analysis of interpretative repertoires, such as Lawes (1999); Rouse and Finlay (2016); Golden and Pomerantz (2015); Whittle and Mueller (2016); Hsu (2016); Huzzard (2015); Jackson and Hall (2016). Collectively this literature has provided great insight into how people use their language as a point of social action across a wide range of areas. However, all of this work follows the same pattern of presenting multiple repertoires related to a particular area of discursive interaction (for example, terrorism in the case of Jackson and Hall, 2016) - but then no further analysis is included that builds on this which looks at how these repertoires may complement, link or engage with each other to form a larger discursive function. The current thesis attempts to fulfil this problem by firstly outlining a set of interpretative repertoires and then analysing how they may connect towards an overarching discursive tool.

In summary; the core aims for the thesis can be defined as follows:

- Analyse the discourse of researchers associated with a field that has blurred boundaries (in terms of whether it is considered 'fringe' or 'mainstream') and what could be considered a scientific controversy.
- Replicate the methodology of Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) for how they conducted interviews and analysed the resulting discourse.

- Investigate the performative and constructive aspects of the interview data - identifying possible interpretative repertoires.
- Attempt to provide a theoretical connection between the emerging repertoires - identifying how they interact, connect and complement each other as a set of discursive resources.
- Fulfil the deficit within the literature that was highlighted by Sampson and Atkinson (2011) - that “there is a lack of analytic focus on the narrative accounts of scientists themselves and an absence of a sustained research tradition building on the work of Gilbert and Mulkay” (2011: 90).

### **1.6.2 Thesis Structure**

The thesis will consist of 7 chapters and will adhere to the following structure:

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The second chapter will provide a review of the sociological literature that relates to this thesis. The first section will outline the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK); its emergence as a sociological approach; its adoption and methodological use of relativism and the theoretical value behind focusing on scientific controversies. From there, the next section of the chapter will present the literature relating to discourse analysis, its adoption within sociology, the use of interpretative repertoires and specific focus on the research conducted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984).

- Chapter 3 - Methodology

The third chapter will outline the methodological approach adopted by the thesis; how the interviews were planned and conducted; the selection of interview participants, implementation of the data collection; how the interview data was delineated and analysed; empirical presentation stemming from this analysis.



- Chapter 4 - Categorisation and Stake

The first empirical chapter presents and discusses the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' - how the interviewed researchers used their discourse to build categorisation alignments around different themes and construct stake management against ties (such as towards parapsychology). Analysis is considered across both micro and macro approaches, ranging from individual identity strategy towards more generalised boundary delineations - all through their discursive formulations.

- Chapter 5 - Construction of Identity Borders

The second empirical chapter presents and discusses the 'outsider repertoire' - how the researchers' discourse constructed identity borders that delineate between concepts of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The portrayal of a distinct 'outsider' identity is identified and again discussed against micro (identity) and macro considerations (ideological positioning).

- Chapter 6 - Reflection of Contingency

The last empirical presents and discusses the 'reflection of contingency' repertoire - how the researchers formulate reflections of personal biographies to construct presentations of contingency for scientific and academic practice. As with prior empirical analysis within the thesis, the potential discursive functionality is analysed across micro and macro perspectives - looking at themes such as concept formulation, power functions and reframing devices.

- Chapter 7 - Discussion and Thesis Conclusions

The final chapter of the thesis will provide a general overview of the thesis as a whole - tying together the empirical proposals emerging from the previous chapters and situating these in context of the wider sociological literature that is presented in the second chapter. Furthermore, thematic similarities from the analysis of the researchers' discourse will be presented alongside the thesis' conclusions and reflections for further research. The chapter will analyse the identified repertoires and look for connections and an overall overarching function between them.

The next chapter will now provide a review of the sociological literature that relates to the thesis, where the broad focus will include the SSK approach to research into scientific practice and will then provide an overview of the role of discourse analysis.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE OVERVIEW

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### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a general overview of the literature relating to the key theoretical areas associated with the current thesis. As the focus of the thesis spans different thematic sociological areas this chapter will be split into two sections.

The first section (2.2) will act as an extension to the content introduced in Chapter 1, which presented the progress of parapsychology as an academic discipline and the sociological focus on the field. This section will chart the historical development of the sociological analysis of science and scientific knowledge. Focus will centre on the evolving sociological approaches to studying science and scientific practices. Central to this is the emergence of relativism as a methodological position - marking a significant shift away from traditional approaches to addressing science within sociology. This literature is important as the content of this sows the seeds for the development of discourse analysis, which will be the focal point of the second section (2.3). The main principles of discourse analysis will be charted along with its development as a function of the sociological positions discussed in 2.3.

Collectively the two sections of this chapter aim to provide a basis from which to understand the context of the development of the sociological analysis into science and the production of scientific knowledge - a product of which is the beginning of sociological studies into contested knowledge areas such as academic parapsychology. This history then leads into the emergence of discourse analysis as an analytical tool - a development which informs the theoretical perspective of this thesis. Furthermore, the chapter will demonstrate the significance of discourse analysis as an analytical tool, how key sociological principles such as methodological relativism have informed its development and how it can be used to investigate the way in which key actors navigate controversial spaces (such as parapsychology) sociologically.

The next section will begin by looking at the emergence of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK). In the context of the current thesis this is integral - as it informs the emergence of discourse analysis and the theoretical stance behind its methodology - particularly the study conducted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) which informs the fundamental approach of this thesis. SSK changed the sociological interpretation of science and the production of scientific knowledge. This is important in relation to the thesis for two reasons. Firstly, it incorporates areas such as parapsychology into its analytical focus. Secondly, it changed the approach to analysing such areas - viewing science as a socially and culturally negotiated area that was actively constructed by those involved.

## **2.2 Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK)**

### **2.2.1 Emergence of SSK**

Pre-1970s sociology of science focused on the examination of social institutions of science, analysing its collective norms, motivations and structure. Fundamentally, such analysis enforced the idealistic perspective of scientific practice and adhered to the view that scientific knowledge production was a purist endeavour. Prime examples of this being Merton's (1973) dissection of institutional values and legitimising norms; or the organisation of communities within science (Crane, 1972). Kuhn's (1962) 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions' began to seed a change of perspective towards this position - suggesting that natural science could itself be interpreted as a function of cultural forces.

During the 1970s the sociological analysis of science underwent a transformation that changed the core perception of scientific knowledge and its construction. Sociological focus initiated "opening the black box" (Whitley, 1972) of science, such as constructionist conflict theory (R. Collins, 1975). Analysis shifted away from the institutional infrastructures and more towards the actual content of science, highlighting the cultural production of knowledge and the role of interpretation that yielded different scientific conclusions (Dolby, 1971). This new approach challenged the traditional perspective of the implementation of science at all levels and introduced how "the role of human factors in science and how scientific knowledge is contingent and constructed by the operation of these factors - the social character of scientific

institutions” (Labinger and Collins, 2001: 5).

The research initiatives stemming from the work of Harry Collins, Michael Mulkay, Barry Barnes and David Bloor can be interpreted as the origin of what became known as the ‘Sociology of Scientific Knowledge’ (SSK). These researchers provided the blueprint for the interpretative and methodological focus by which to analyse science, particularly Bloor’s (1991) ‘Strong Program’, governed by the principles; causality, impartiality, symmetry and reflexivity. In general, two research initiatives generated the bulk of SSK research. The ‘Bath School’ of SSK focused on micro-sociological processes, implementing observational methods; alternatively the ‘Edinburgh School’ concentrated on macro-sociological processes and historical methodology. Researchers under SSK, such as Hess (1997), Gieryn (1982, 1995, 1999) and Mulkay (1976a) outlined the idealism that was synonymous with prior sociological analysis of science, for example Merton’s (1973) depiction of the four norms of science. This idealism was not representative of the social processes that may actually be occurring within scientific communities and could be labelled as descriptive rather than prescriptive (Zingrone, 2002: 7).

Collins (2002), a key proponent of this new direction, refers to this change as “the second wave of science studies” (2002: 239). Central to this was the incorporation of a social constructivist perspective towards how science functions and how scientific knowledge is produced and governed:

“In the social studies of science and technology, the term “social constructivism” is often used as a general label for studies that examine how social variables shape the pattern of choices about what research gets done, how it is done, how choices among theories are made in controversies, and the extent to which observations, laws theories, and other knowledge claims become accepted in wider scientific communities.” (Hess 1997: 35)

The sociologist’s fundamental role changed from one of documenting how the scientist functioned in their environment to now questioning how they negotiated knowledge claims (Collins and Evans, 2002). Research focus now centred on how research and knowledge claims are accepted or rejected as much on the social and political elements surrounding them as on their empirical merit.

The work of British sociologist Harry Collins was a driving force in developing in-depth ethnographic studies of scientific knowledge, implementing a methodological relativist approach as part of SSK. As such, reviewing aspects of his work provides an illustration of the key attributes of this approach. Collins' research has predominantly focused on controversies and debates in high prestige areas of physics. His early work examined the detection of gravitational radiation, providing a representation of the social and political machinations that underlie knowledge disputes (Collins, 1975). His investigations revealed that the experimental work into gravity waves became governed by social-political forces and not by objective science or the phenomenon itself. For example:

"...scientists' conclusions regarding the existence of gravity waves rested on the degree of charity invested in their interpretations of events...In science [a] lack of charity implies a defence of the status quo and a licence to expel anomalous findings from the body of scientific knowledge. Charitable interpretations imply the opposite...The existence of gravity waves is now literally *incredible*...their demise was a social (and political process). Where Weber distinguished between the physics and politics of experiment, I have tried to show that they are not so easily distinguishable."

(Collins, 1981b: 53-54)

The above quote is personified via the scientist Quest and his actions against Weber's gravitational wave experiments in Collins' (1981b) study. Colleagues confided to Collins that Quest had made the scientific controversy a personal matter. Descriptives such as "holy crusade"; "vindictive"; "obnoxious" and "self-delusion" (Collins, 1981b: 46-47) were used to depict Quest's apparent vendetta against the phenomenon of gravity waves. One scientist encapsulated this sentiment with the reflection that the debate became "no longer about physics" (1981b: 46-47). Collins' research successfully demonstrated how a supposedly objective scientific problem had become a deeply personal issue. Essentially, Quest initiated a "holy crusade" to nullify Weber's original findings in the shortest time-frame possible. Instead of constructing a research programme that would test the complete enigma of gravitational waves, Collins (1981b) revealed how Quest's team simply developed an experimental position from which they could destroy Weber's findings. A finding which highlights the necessity and usefulness of the relativist perspective when undertaking sociological analysis of scientific controversies. Collins' (1981a, 1981b) methodological stance allowed him to gauge the true extent to which the gravitational

wave debate had gone beyond objective science. A perspective that allowed the conclusion that, in this case, social and political pre-dispositions were governing the outcome of scientific research as opposed to the science itself.

Collins' (1998) later research into the sociology of gravitational wave detection showcases further cultural nuances within scientific practice. The analysis of different laboratories (Italian versus American) displayed that the meaning and interpretation of scientific data is largely dependent on the "evidential culture" of laboratories (1998: 293). Subsequently, contrasting evidential cultures, 'open' versus 'closed' or 'individual' versus 'collective', influences the interpretation of research findings. Collins (1998) highlighted how different laboratories employ different levels of statistical significance and interpretative risk when analysing their research, thus leading to different comprehensions of outcomes and decisions concerning the publication of findings. This research depicts the way in which the cultural climate dictates research and its practices – mainly due to the pressure of securing funding. Ultimately, this highlights a deep-rooted concern of how data and published papers will be received in the immediate scientific community, a consideration that appears to influence the analysis of the data itself:

"But keeping report and interpretation distinct are not easy; the meaning of a paper is in the eye of the beholder. It is not always the case that papers are read or interpreted in the same way as the authors intends...it is more than just the science...How to present and analyse their potential findings are set within a framework of considerations that stretches in many directions...The very notion of 'data' [itself] depends on different scientific traditions and patterns of institutional forces...[Scientists should therefore] have to accept the possibility that structural forces might affect their larger judgements in subtle and invisible ways."

(Collins, 1998: 309-311)

Collins' (1999) confirmed this proposition by revealing that different audiences, at different distances from the core-set, analyse scientific papers in different ways (1999: 163). Looking at the reception of published papers Collins notes:

"Results of experiments mean different things to scientists in marginal groups, as compared to the mainstream; a positive finding for researchers in a 'rejected science' is merely ill-analyzed noise for the

mainstream.”

(Collins, 1999: 165)

This analysis illustrates how different audiences demonstrate different interpretations, seemingly going beyond the objective science within the experiment/ paper. Subsequently, research that has the potential to be highly significant in its relevant field becomes invisible within the core-group; Collins (1999) uses Weber’s research (Weber and Radak, 1996) as a specific example. When a subject or scientist becomes progressively marginalised their research output becomes ignored and deemed irrelevant within the core-group, to the extent that papers aren’t even read and prejudice is overtly expressed – with no pragmatic reflection on the potential impact of the research within the field. Subsequently, even the most revolutionary and ground breaking research could be shunned simply because the values of the core-group exist in juxtaposition to the findings – creating a “poisonous atmosphere” (1999: 180).

Beyond Collins’ research other SSK research examples during the period include:

- Frankel’s (1976) delineation of corpuscular optics and how “in each case social factors combined with intellectual ones to influence the scientist’s perceptions” (1976: 175) - demonstrating the inherent complexities surrounding the production of science and emerging scientific knowledge.
- Collins and Harrison’s (1975) analysis of communication and transfer of knowledge (tacit knowledge) amongst scientists.
- Pinch’s (1979) illustration that demarcation arguments are culturally dependent.
- Gibbons and King (1972) detail the historical scientific controversy which centred around the development of ovonic switches - Ovshinsky’s introduction of a new kind of of semi-conductor based on randomly ordered amorphous materials. The study highlighted that a main contributing factor to the controversy was not the empirical basis of Ovshinsky’s work but his position as a perceived ‘outsider’ to the scientific community and the subsequent contextual factors by which his suggestions were presented.
- Amick (1974) and Mulkay (1976b) analysed the influence of scientific elitism and gatekeepers of science, suggesting a substantial difference between those that can be categorised as elites versus non-elites. Such elitism can be seen most clearly during contested knowledge claims through the resistance of new scientific ideas within science itself (Duncan, 1974).

Collectively this body of research contributes to what Collins and Pinch (1993) defined as the view that science does not exist as an automated mechanistic process that yields flawless truths. SSK presents science as a human pursuit that is governed by social process and cultural elements that influence and dictate the human production of scientific knowledge. This remains key to the development of discourse analysis studies of scientific practice, and by extension this thesis. Work such as Collins' highlight the social and constructed aspects of these scientific cultures and knowledge-claim debates. As such this informs the perspective that perhaps the scientists' discourse in these areas is worth exploring - how are their discursive practices contributing to this constructive aspect?

The next sub-sections (2.2.2 and 2.2.3) will focus on the adoption of the relativist perspective within SSK. In relation to the current thesis this is an important theoretical facet as it is incorporated within the emergence of discourse analysis and informs that approach. Reviewing relativism within SSK allows a perspective of what informed the discourse analysis approach, including the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), and also by extension subsequent discourse analytical work - the foundation of the current thesis.

### **2.2.2 Relativism Within SSK**

The main feature of SSK research initiatives was the adoption of a relativist theoretical perspective (constructivism) whereby knowledge claims were considered to be a cultural phenomenon and socially produced, with science re-conceptualised as a social activity (Collins, 2002):

“What has been shown under Wave Two is that it is necessary to draw on ‘extra-scientific factors’ to bring about the closure of scientific and technical debates – scientific method, experiments, observations, and theories are not enough.”

(Collins, 2002: 239)

This perspective lies in stark contrast to the standard model of science, scientific knowledge is reconstructed from a universally objective entity to a subjective ‘cultural activity’ (Collins, 1992). As a result, knowledge of natural laws becomes treated like the individual knowledge of art or politics (Pinch and Collins, 1984: 522). This has become a controversial position, with those



adopting the position attracting numerous criticisms. The most predominant of these criticisms brands the relativist perspective 'anti-science' (for example Leavitt, 1999), interpreting the perspective as one that denies the existence of a "real world", with scientific laws being of pure social construction without relation to objective natural laws. However, according to advocates such as Zingrone (2000) this seems an extreme and reactionary interpretation of the work done under the banner of 'relativism' and does not reflect its subsequent output. In response, Zingrone (2002) provides perhaps the most succinct and accurate reflection on what defines the relativist approach to scientific knowledge:

"The classical constructivist position, in the main, believes that the world is real, that nature exists, but that the shape and movement of the natural world - its dimensions, its causes, its laws - can be interpreted imprecisely. Further, this imprecision arises, at least partly, from the state of the art current-day science, that is, from present-day limitations in theory, method, mode of observation, and measurement. But - and this is the key point that the constructivist analyst makes - the imprecision also arises from the sometimes profound influence of social, political, and personal variables on the scientist herself or himself at the point of measurement and at the moment of interpretation (among other loci), that is, on science practice itself... Sometimes the shape of the natural world and the social-psychological-political surround of the scientist combine in equal measure to determine what is taken as a scientific fact... However, sometimes when method, theory and knowledge are not so developed, or when the social-personal-political surround is overwhelming, the contour of the natural world becomes lost and extra-scientific, non-epistemic factors determine the production of knowledge... what the social constructivist is trying to say is that, at different levels of what is *already known*, epistemic and non-epistemic factors vary as determinants in the production of what is coming *to be known*."

(Zingrone, 2002: 12)

Collins' research was central to the adoption of methodological relativism. His 'empirical program of relativism' was a key component which invited multi-faceted interpretations to components of the scientific research process (Collins, 1983). Collins and Cox (1976: 424) deemed this approach as "sociologically necessary". Expansion and utilisation of this program was a factor in subsequent research; for example Pinch and Bijker's (1987) social constructionist analysis of technology programs.

Central to this use of relativism is the starting point of the sociological analysis. The sociologists concern is not the science or relevance of the research being analysed. The concern is the social and cultural processes that surround this research; such as what constitutes one piece of knowledge over a competing proposition. Primary analysis involves the sociologist interviewing scientists to uncover the social influence(s) and political machinations behind their research (Collins, 1981a, 1981b; Harvey, 1981).

This approach that views science as a cultural activity is defined by Collins (1992):

“...the relativist attitude demands that the analysis of the way that knowledge is established is not shackled at the outset by common sense judgements about what is true and what is not true. The question is, rather, how things come to be seen as true or false.”

(Collins, 1992: 3)

This approach has garnered significant criticism (for example Dixon, 1977; Bricmont and Sokal, 2001; Leavitt, 1999; Laudan, 1982; Gieryn, 1982) - primarily aimed at the view that the root philosophical stance of relativism denies the existence of a real world in its analysis. Proponents of a constructivist approach have always maintained that a natural world exists (Latour, 1999; Barnes and Edge, 1991; Barnes et. al, 1996; Bloor, 1991; Collins, 1976). Fish (1996) provides a defence for social constructionism, arguing that critics' fundamental argument (that when a sociologist proposes a fact is socially constructed they are claiming it is not real) is incorrect, facts are real, they are open to change through changes to definition(s) and measurement criteria for example, therefore they exist simultaneously as socially constructed and real.

The progression of SSK studies, and particularly the increased focus around the sociological implementation of the relativist perspective led to wide-scale hostility between sociologists and scientists. This episode, referred to as the “science wars” was instigated by Alan Sokal's (1996a) article “Transgressing The Boundaries” (published in *Social Text*). Initially, the article appeared to be an analysis of aspects of mathematics and physics from a post-modern perspective. Principally, the paper argued that language, politics and interests, rather than objective reality, determine the nature of scientific knowledge; written in the idiosyncratic style of postmodernism. However, the paper was revealed to be a satire of sociological analysis. Sokal printed a notification in *Lingua Franca* (1996b) revealing that the article was constructed as a parody, constructed to investigate

whether sociologists could see the difference between a serious publication and deliberate fabrication. As a direct consequence of this the “science wars” developed, with numerous arguments being conducted throughout the media. Fundamentally, the locus of discussion was the question of whether cultural commentators should be able to offer opinions of science. With practitioners of science on one side of the debate, and observers of science on the other. The main problem from the point of view of the scientists was the increasingly involved analysis cultural commentators were conducting. Up until the 1970s sociologists of science tended to examine the institutions of science, norms and motivations of the community, and was in many senses flattering to scientific practice and thus was no perceived threat. However, from this point sociology studies begin to re-direct their focus, perceiving that natural science could itself be thought of as a culture-building exercise. From the 1970s onward SSK was developed, with new analyses of the content of scientific knowledge. Systematic programs were established (for example, the ‘Edinburgh Strong Programme’) – emphasising the cultural bias of scientific knowledge. Subsequently, from the perspective of practitioners of science, sociological analysis of their field transformed itself from conducting un-intrusive, supportive analysis to challenging traditional concepts of scientific enterprise. SSK questioned the fundamental knowledge claims espoused by scientists, reducing them to merely cultural products and therefore questioning the subjectivity of empirical “interpretations”. This reduction of scientific implementation to being contingent on the construction of human factors was viewed as hostility and a conscious attempt by the SSK community to reduce science's authority (Labinger and Collins, 2001: 5). However, Pinch (2001b) has asserted this presumption as false, and that sociologists are merely “level[ing] the playing field” (2001b: 18) by viewing science as just another skilled practice – placing it on the same sociological level as that of religion or politics.

In a general response to critics Collins summarised the use of methodological relativism as follows:

“Methodological relativism says nothing direct about reality or the justification of knowledge. Methodological relativism is an attitude of mind recommended to the social-scientist investigator: the sociologist or historian should act as though the beliefs about reality of any competing groups being investigated are not caused by reality itself.”

(Collins, 2001: 184)

Implementing methodological relativism as an approach has allowed sociologists to analyse aspects of scientific practice and knowledge production that had previously been disregarded as a focal point. Utilising such a perspective has provided an analytical tool by which controversies, disputes and the acceptance (or rejection) of knowledge claims are enacted (Woolgar, 1988; Collins, 1992; Collins and Pinch, 1982). Adopting relativism can be viewed as essential in such scenarios as Collins (1992: 143) argued, “some ‘non-scientific’ tactics must be employed because the resources of the experimenter alone are not sufficient” to lead to the resolution of some scientific controversies. Relativism allows the social dimensions to be gauged in contested areas of science - without providing analytical focus to the verisimilitude of the phenomena being debated.

The next sub-section will focus on a specific literature publication that was key in the development and adoption of the relativist perspective within sociological studies of science.

### **2.2.3 The Relativist Manifesto - *Social Studies of Science***

In a special issue of *Social Studies of Science* dedicated to relativism, Collins (1981a) outlined the relativist manifesto which emerged out of a form of explicit relativism, namely that “the natural world has a small or non-existent role in the construction of scientific knowledge” (1981a: 3). The issue contains a collection of studies implementing a methodological relativist approach, attempting to reveal the flourishing empirical programme and promote its worth within SSK. Travis (1981) reported a case study centred around learning in planarian worms – specifically “the transfer of the memory of certain forms of learned behaviour from trained to untrained animals by means of chemicals...extracted from the brains of trained animals” (1981: 3). Pickering (1981) presented a case study focusing on the history of PSOP's magnetic monopole claim, from its production in 1975 to its withdrawal in 1978. Harvey (1981) describes a case involving a series of experiments performed over a number of years to test the theory of Quantum Mechanics. Finally, Pinch (1981b) focuses on the production of scientific knowledge in solar neutrino science. When viewed as a collated whole, these studies demonstrate the sociological merits of applying a relativist perspective to the scientific practices. Each of them specifically highlight the culturally and socially contingent factors that led to the acceptance (or rejection) of particular types of knowledge claims. Subsequently, the resolution of controversies in these case studies were dependent upon external factors that were of no direct relevance to the actual raw data produced

in the research. Whilst these case studies are radically different in the scientific topics they address, from a sociological point of view they are very similar. This similarity extends towards studies dealing with parapsychology and the socio-cultural hurdles research in this area faces in trying to gain acceptance. The following excerpt from Travis' (1981) paper illustrates this point:

“...The acceptance of planarian learning seems to have come about not through decisive experiments alone, or through the simple addition of positive results. To be sure, some experiments are taken to be more important than others and scientists’ reviews of the area naturally seek to present their conclusions as following from the experimental evidence. However, the replicability of the phenomenon seems to have followed as much from its acceptability, as its acceptability followed from its replicability. Replicability and acceptability are inextricably interwoven.”

(Travis, 1981: 21-26)

Travis notes that “some of the actors were explicitly conscious of the social processes to which they were contributing, and aware of the ambiguity of the notion of replication” (1981: 26). This awareness led to the acceptance of the research despite the ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in the replication data. It seems that it was the acceptability of the phenomenon that led to its consolidated position more than the empirical data. Consequently, this suggests the need to adopt a relative perspective when dealing with such sociological issues. For example, when looking at a topic like parapsychology, which is less acceptable to the scientific mainstream and has continued to struggle to gain acceptance - despite purportedly producing replicable research paradigms (such as the Ganzfeld) - in contrast to the subject matter discussed by Travis (1981). What this represents is an apparent lack of equality when dealing with disputable knowledge claims – whereby some are deemed more acceptable than others due to social, cultural, or political aspects as opposed to strict scientific guidelines (such as data significance or replicability). An observation which is outlined by Pickering's summations of the magnetic monopole debate:

“In essence, we will see that the monopole debate was structured by prior social agreements concerning the validity of particular experiments: that these agreements were constituted within socially-available theoretical conceptions of the world; that such theoretical conceptions themselves constituted the vehicle for ‘transmitting’ agreements from the context of one experiment to another; and that the conduct of the debate was structured by participants’ attempts to maintain these agreements... Both PSOP and their critics were engaged in the same process of assessing simultaneously both instrumental practice and natural

phenomena. PSOP's critics, however, had the advantage in that they reached a *socially-acceptable* assessment, manipulating the available cultural resources in such a way as to preserve existing agreements, while violating none...[Subsequently] the monopole debate was structured throughout by the participants' decision to confine their arguments within a limited range of socially acceptable conceptualizations of the natural world."

(Pickering, 1981: 65-87)

Again this proposes that it is the social context in which the scientist operates that has as much relevance to the fate of a particular knowledge-claim as the empirical data. A proposal which is succinctly summarised by Pinch:

"The technical conclusions reached by scientists can be understood as resulting from a process of 'social negotiation'. The apparent certainty of scientific knowledge is the outcome of these negotiations. This means that the degree of certainty of a piece of scientific knowledge is, in itself, available to different perceptions, interpretations and presentations...

...In essence, when scientists call into question the certainty of another area of science in this way, they are doing something very similar to the work done in recent sociology of science. By the examination of the micro-processes of scientific activity, sociologists have been able to show that scientific knowledge rests upon detailed social negotiations and that, in principle, all the assumptions that go into scientific arguments can be challenged. That such a messy and contingent process can lead to reliable knowledge is a problem not only for the sociologist then, but also for the scientist."

(Pinch, 1981b: 131-146)

Within the special 'relativism' issue it is arguably Collins' (1981b) 'Son of Seven Sexes...' paper that provides the best example of implemented methodological relativism and the sociological issues which arise from this, in relation to SSK. In the paper, Collins (1981b) builds upon work published in 1975 ('The Seven Sexes') – namely, observing scientists attempting to substantiate the detection of gravitational radiation. Ultimately, Collins (1981b) documents the social processes that lead to scientific knowledge becoming a by-product of cultural negotiations. Collins (1981b) notes that the main problem concerning Weber's (the lead scientist that claimed to have found gravitational radiation) findings was that "he seemed to find far too much gravitational radiation to be compatible with current cosmological theories" (1981b: 36). Therefore, according to Collins, Weber's apparent findings were hindered from the outset – he was promoting research findings

that existed in juxtaposition with conventional scientific beliefs. A position which echoes the placement of parapsychological research on the fringes of mainstream science. Controversial knowledge claims by their very definition are less likely to be supported within scientific spheres due to the potential impact successful validation of their claims would entail:

“We felt that the way he was doing his statistical analysis was open to great misinterpretation ... By massaging data again and again, knowing what you want for an answer, you can increase the apparent statistical significance of any bump... I’m pretty sure he could get there out of pure noise.”

(Sceptical Scientist - Collins, 1981b: 40)

“All the scientists I spoke to thought that Weber’s presentation of his statistical techniques was less than convincing. A large number agreed with the sentiments expressed in the above quotation, and backed this up with detailed description of Weber’s techniques, explaining how the fudging could come about. In several cases an explicit (and unprompted) comparison was drawn with the use of statistics in ESP research.”

(Collins, 1981b: 40)

For Collins, the above quotes embody the determined nature of Weber's critics, clutching at any possible angle to explain the nature of his results – whether or not there was any evidence for these apparent statistical flukes. Such feeling is illustrated in the replications that were attempted - whereby six negative experiments were cited as contradictory to Weber’s findings. However, only one of those experiments was an exact copy of Weber’s methodology and process. Weber criticised the replications heavily and “trenchantly” (Collins, 181b: 42). Following these replications Quest conducted a final experiment into the phenomenon. Whilst this final experiment remained the smallest experimental replication (in terms of application and structure) its impact on the community was highly substantial – a factor that was largely attributable to the way in which it was presented. Collins' interviewees support this notion:

“As one scientist put it: ‘... as far as the scientific community in general is concerned, it’s probably Quest’s publication...that generally clinched the attitude. But in fact the experiment they did was trivial - it was a tiny thing... But the thing was, the way they wrote it up... Everybody else was awfully tentative about it... It was all a bit hesitant... And then Quest comes along with this toy. But it’s the way he writes it up you see.’ Another scientist said: ‘Quest had considerably less sensitivity so I would have thought he would have made

less impact than anyone, but he talked louder than anyone and he did a very nice job of analyzing his data.' And a third: '[Quest's paper] was very clever because its analysis was actually very convincing to other people, and that was the first time that anybody had worked out in a simple way just what the thermal noise from the bar should be... It was done in a very clear manner, and they sort of convinced everybody.'" (Collins, 1981b: 43)

Therefore despite being considered essentially "trivial" by a majority of scientists Quest's experiment provoked the most momentous backlash against Weber's research. Through the analysis of the data and the overall means of presentation Quest was able to convince the scientific community to doubt the findings Weber had proposed. What is significant about this instance in Collins' (1981b) paper from a sociological point of view is the nature of Quest's attacks on Weber. For Collins, his ability to present data in a particular way was enough to convince the majority of the scientific community of the apparent fallacies inherent in Weber's analysis. Yet in real terms this experiment was largely insubstantial as a replication of the original research – suggesting that the presentation was significantly more of an issue than the actual data. This lends weight to the relativist argument regarding the importance that social and cultural processes, surrounding the scientist, play in leading their research to be either accepted or refuted as knowledge claims (Collins, 1981b).

Collins (1981b: 45) reveals that Quest's sole motivation was "dissuasion", with his experiment and its findings being merely a means to an end – the best way to imbue negative feeling towards Weber's work within the scientific community. His replication allegedly had little to do with actually trying to detect gravity waves but was more a way of targeting Weber on some kind of personal mission - one of the scientists commented that Quest "went after Weber" and how he had been "vindictive" towards the point of "self-delusion" (Collins, 1981b: 47).

Collins (1981b) arrives at the conclusion that Quest's research group's primary objective was to discredit Weber's findings in the most efficient and quickest time frame. This social and political process moved the research away from objectively investigating the possibility that gravity waves may exist and became exclusively about proving their incredulity:

"[A scientist] in Quest's group [outlined]: ... well we knew what was going to happen. We knew that Weber was building a bigger one and we just felt that we hadn't been convincing enough with our small antenna.



We just had to get a step ahead of Weber and increase our sensitivity too. At that point it was not doing physics any longer. It's not clear that it was ever physics, but it certainly wasn't by then. If we were looking for gravity waves we would have adopted an entirely different approach...You're just not going to detect anything... and so there is no point in building one, other than the fact that there's someone out there publishing results in *Physical Review Letters*... We knew perfectly well what was going on, and it was just a question of getting a firm enough result so that we could publish in a reputable journal, and try to end it that way."

(Collins, 1981b: 47)

Collins surmises that the demise of gravity waves was a social and political process (1981b: 54), whereby the physics of the phenomena became indistinguishable from the politics of the surrounding scientific community. Ultimately, what this case study illustrates is that the phenomenon of a particular knowledge claim itself does not direct how the debate or controversy will be settled.

The papers cited here from the 1981 special relativist issue of *Social Studies of Science* collectively promote the need to adopt a relativist perspective when addressing knowledge disputes and subsequent academic controversies. The case studies reveal how complex and multi-dimensional the interactions between knowledge and social/ cultural factors can become – whereby the acceptance of knowledge claims are heavily reliant on the various contexts in which they are proposed. The adoption of relativism allows the sociologist an insight into these social processes – processes which have resulted in the prior assumption, that it is findings of experimental research alone that guide opinion on natural phenomena, to be severely inadequate within a sociological framework.

The development of the relativist perspective and emerging sociological position that stemmed from the work cited above was integral to the development of discourse analysis of scientists. For example, Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) research approached discourse as an active social process where the main function was construction and presentation of knowledge claims. This would not have been possible without the developments of SSK and relativism - which changed the perspective of how science and knowledge claims should be analysed. Central to this literature is the investigation of scientific controversies - a feature which is a core component of this thesis, looking at parapsychology. The next sub-section will outline the importance of using scientific

controversies as a point of sociological focus.

#### **2.2.4 Investigating Scientific Controversies**

As illustrated in the previous sub-section (2.2.3) the SSK research focus and the adoption of methodological relativism was particularly effective in the sociological analysis of scientific controversies and highly disputed knowledge claims:

“Although there were a variety of approaches within the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), what united them was a concern to reveal the underlying social processes through which knowledge claims were produced and validated by the scientific community. This, however, was tricky: once the scientific community reached a consensus about a particular theory or empirical claim, and it became accepted as part of the store of knowledge and found its way into textbooks, those processes were lost to sociological analysis. Consequently, sociologists became very interested in scientific disputes where a consensus had not yet emerged, because the social processes which underpinned knowledge production were still in operation, thereby making them available for sociological investigation.”

(Wooffitt, 2005: 14)

Kuhn (1962) had originally suggested the importance of analysing scientific controversies, whereby these areas of conflict between scientists are the natural process in which science as an enterprise has become established (also Hagstrom, 1965). The methodological importance of these controversies can be summarised below:

“One metaphor for understanding why controversies have taken on such methodological importance is that of "punching" a system. Scientists on occasion gain insight into natural systems by punching, or destabilizing, them. For example, one may learn more about the laws of momentum by bouncing one billiard ball off another than by watching a stationary billiard ball...The methodological assumption underpinning the study of controversies is similar. By studying a scientific controversy one learns something about the underlying dynamics of science and technology and their relations with wider society. For instance, during a controversy the normally hidden social dimensions of science may become more explicit. Sites of contestation are places to facilitate the investigation of, for instance, the metaphors, assumptions and political struggles embedded within science and technology.”

(Pinch and Leuenberger, 2006)

Collins (1975) used the comparative imagery of pieces of knowledge as ships in bottles and declared that it is only by examining scientific controversies that one can truly understand the mechanism by which scientific knowledge/ findings (ships) become to be understood and accepted (placed in bottles). Adapting relativism enabled this mechanism to be exposed, for example by highlighting the social influence within controversies and the construction of scientific knowledge (Collins, 1981a, 1981b; Travis, 1981; Pickering, 1981). As Pinch and Collins (1994) proposed “during controversies Nature’s voice appears indistinct [h]umankind is seen to have a more active role in the construction of knowledge” (1994: 522). From this view, it is during controversies that the contingent features of scientific activity are highlighted the most. Disputed claims lead to a process of negotiation and differentiation between opposing viewpoints, thus highlighting the negotiated character of science. This negotiation is potentially more socially governed than empirically based:

“...[scientific] disputes are not settled according to epistemological maxims but rather as a result of a process of ‘social negotiation’”

(Pinch, 1985: 29)

“During controversies Nature’s voice appears indistinct. Humankind is seen to have a more active role in the construction of knowledge...knowledge about nature is rather like knowledge about art, or politics, or the law...”

(Pinch and Collins, 1994: 522)

Through studying areas of controversy and disputed knowledge claims such as parapsychology (Collins and Pinch, 1979a; 1979b) and adopting a relativist stance, SSK proposes that the true underpinnings and machinations of the scientific process are revealed - it is only through observing fields in a state of flux where this can be truly achieved; when there is no overriding consensus. In conditions such as these, social devices/ strategies such as “interpretative flexibility” (Collins, 1981a, 1981b) and cultural delineations between the competing groups (for example, “core sets”) are revealed (Collins, 1981a, 1981b; Rudwick, 1985). This highlights the potential importance of focusing on contested knowledge areas as the basis for sociological analysis in areas such as scientific practice, and informs the reasoning behind the current thesis’ choice to look at researchers associated with parapsychology.

This section has reviewed the SSK literature, the development of the relativist approach and the sociological focus on scientific controversies such as parapsychology. Collectively, this body of literature is the foundation for discourse analysis into such areas and by extension the current thesis. The research changed the way sociologists perceived and approached the study of science and scientific knowledge. Stemming from this Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) were able to perform their discourse analysis on scientists in a contested field and generate insights on how knowledge was actively constructed and presented. To adopt Collins' (1975) phrasing - they showed how scientists rhetorical tools may aid the process by placing the ships in the bottles and actively contribute to negotiating knowledge claims.

The next section of the chapter will now chart the emergence of discourse analysis - the key methodological and analytical component of this thesis. Background and development of the approach will be presented along with the use of interpretative repertoires (a key consideration of this thesis). Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) study will be detailed and explored due to its close ties with the current thesis.

## **2.3 Discourse Analysis**

### **2.3.1 Emergence of Discourse Analysis**

As a consequence of the focal shift of the 1970s and the changes described above, within sociology, the use of discourse analysis emerged as a key analytical tool. This was from a combination of the development of SSK - including the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) which will be discussed in depth later in the chapter - and developments in social psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Use of the term 'discourse analysis' was first used by Zellig Harris (1952) to depict a way of analysing speech and writing, examining language beyond the surface and exploring the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Mills (1997) highlights how discourse analysis can be used differently by different researchers. In general, discourse analysis holds discourse as the central aspect of all investigation, including all mediums of verbal and textual materials (Colman, 2001). For the analysis, the primary aim is to breakdown such materials and analyse how such accounts are constructed - and the interactional purpose for such

constructions, revealing the performative aspects (Butler, 1990, 1997, 1999, 2004; Hall, 2000; Cameron, 1998; Pennycook 2004, 2007; Otsuji, 2010). Discourse in this sense is treated as both constructed and constructive (Potter, 1996b), or as action-orientated, situated and constructed (Potter, 2004).

Potter (2004) reflects how the concept of discourse analysis is a contested area of interpretation:

“Discourse analysis is understood in a range of different ways across the social sciences. One of the reasons for this is that analytic and theoretical approaches have been developed in a range of different disciplines – notably linguistics, sociology, psychology, social psychology, philosophy, communication, literary theory and cultural studies. While some concerns are shared, disciplinary home typically inflects method and research questions in significant ways. Sometimes discourse analysis is a convenient name for a practice of analysing discourse which can include a variety of different approaches such as speech act theory, narrative analysis, conversation analysis and so on; while at other times discourse analysis is treated as a fully-fledged analytic position. Sometimes ‘discourse’ is treated simply as a word for language in use; at other times a ‘discourse’ is theorized as a linguistic object that can be counted and described. Sometimes discourse analysis is further specified as continental or critical.”

(Potter, 2004: 607)

Regarding ‘discourse’ itself Potter and Wetherell (1987) note the persistence of terminological confusion and contradictory representations surrounding its definition (also Van Dijk, 1985). For the sake of clarity the current thesis will follow the interpretation outlined by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984), viewing ‘discourse’ to mean all forms of spoken interaction and written texts (across both formal and informal contexts). Such mediums hold significant sociological value:

“...social texts do not merely *reflect* or *mirror* objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they actively *construct* a version of those things. They do not just describe things; they *do* things. And being active, they have social and political implications.”

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 6)

Unlike studies such as Gilbert and Mulkey’s, this thesis will focus solely on verbal, spoken discourse and will not encompass any other mediums (such as text) for analysis. The discourse analysis that will be central to this thesis will adhere to the definitions outlined below:

"...[focus] on talk and texts as social practices, and on the resources that are drawn to enable those practices. Rather than try and explain actions as consequences of mental processes or entities, [discourse analysts'] interest has been in how mentalist notions are constructed and used in interaction."  
(Potter, 1996c: 30 )

"Discourse analysis, then, is the attempt to identify and describe regularities in the methods used by participants as they construct the discourse through which they establish the character of their actions and beliefs in the course of interaction...  
...participants' discourse, although varied, displays certain observable patterns."  
(Gilbert and Mulkay 1984: 14-39)

Bhatia et al. (2008) outline two main factors that distinguish discourse analysis from other forms of linguistic analysis; the emphasis of the analysis of language on the textual as well as structural level; also the outlook that language should be viewed as a mechanism for social action (seeded from Wittgenstein, 1953).

Instead of proposing explanations of behaviours or attitudes relating to the individual (for example, the origins of racism) discourse analysis focuses on how such instances are managed within interactional scenarios (for example, the construction of racism in the communicative context). This is due to the 'interactional space' between discourse and reality (Potter, 1996a; 1996b). Such research is more likely to focus on controversial events that situate opposing perspectives and thus different, competing constructions on the same event/ phenomena. It is though such events that the constructive nature of discourse surfaces more visibly, and also highlights fundamental reflexivity; "that descriptions are not just *about* something but they are also *doing* something...they are not merely *representing* some facet of the world, they are also *involved* in that world in some practical way" (Potter, 1996b: 47). Thus discourse analysis exists as the investigation of the way that accounts and formulations display an *action orientation* (Wooffitt, 2005: 78): "empirical analysis of the organisation of talk (and texts) has focused on the wider interpersonal or social functions served by a passage of talk...the management of interaction *per se* is rarely the focus of research" (2005: 80). Potter and Wetherell (1987) provide a further comprehensive delineation of the role of discourse analysis within sociological analysis:

“One of the themes strongly stressed by both speech act theory and ethnomethodology was that people use their language to *do* things: to order and request, persuade and accuse. This focus on language function is also one of the major components of discourse analysis...

...What is happening...is that people are using their language to *construct* versions of the social world. The principle tenet of discourse analysis is that function involves construction of versions, and is demonstrated by language variation. The term ‘construction’ is apposite of three reasons. First, it reminds us that accounts of events are built out of a variety of pre-existing linguistic resources, almost as a house is constructed from bricks, beams and so on. Second, construction implies active selection: some resources are included some omitted. Finally, the notion of construction emphasises the potent, consequential nature of accounts. Much of social interaction is based around dealings with events and people which are experienced *only* in terms of specific linguistic versions. In a profound sense, accounts ‘construct’ reality...

...Discourse analysts...[focus] on discourse as a topic in its own right. That is, we aren’t to trying to recover events, beliefs and cognitive processes from participants’ discourse, or treat language as an indicator or signpost to some other state of affairs but looking at the analytically prior question of how discourse or accounts of these things are manufactured.”

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 32 - 35)

Hess (1997: 105) notes how SSK moved the study of science and scientific practice towards more investigative methodologies such as observations and interviews. It was from this shift that discourse analysis became a force within the sociological analysis of science. For example, Waterton et. al’s (2001) analysis of scientists’ reflections on their own work (also Michael, 1996). Central to this is the use of a form of the constructivism discussed earlier in the current chapter:

“Discourse analytical approaches take as their starting point the claim of structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic philosophy, that our access to reality is always through language. With language, we create representations of reality that are never mere reflections of a pre-existing reality but contribute to constructing reality. That does not mean that reality itself does not exist. Meanings and representations are real. Physical objects also exist, but they only gain meaning through discourse...the ascription of meaning in discourses works to constitute and change the world.”

(Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002: 8-9)

Whilst discourse analysis tends to incorporate aspects of the programme of relativism - mainly the notion of not analysing the phenomenon at the heart of the scientific analysis/ dispute or its

inherent veracity - the core approach is one of constructivism (Edwards, Ashmore and Potter, 1995), and one that places language as the main functional variable for this.

As the appreciation that social reality is constructed via discourse has grown, researchers have incorporated discourse analysis into multiple disciplinary starting points (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). Examples include Goffman's (1974) and Van Dijk's (1977, 1980) work on "frames"; Schank and Abelson's (1977) "plans" theory; narrative analysis of 'storylines' (Bruner, 1990; Harré, 2001; Bamberg, De Fina and Schiffrin, 2007). The most significant and closest disciplinary tie with discourse analysis has been psychology and the development of discursive psychology - described by Billig (1996: 20) as "one of the major trends in social psychology" - outlined first by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and then developed by Edwards and Potter (1992) who then introduced the label. Discursive psychology has developed the focus on discursive practice and how people use this form of communication to construct versions of the world and present their relationship(s) to these constructs (Wiggins and Potter, 2008). It is based on the social constructionist belief that the individual self is not an isolated, autonomous entity (Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002) and this entity is in constant dynamic interaction with the social world (Harré and Gillett, 1994; Wetherell and Maybin, 1996). Language is framed as not simply a vehicle for expressing or describing experiences, instead language constitutes experiences and the formative subjective psychological reality of the individual (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Shotter, 1993). An example of this is Wetherell's (2001) analysis of the Diana Princess of Wales' BBC Panorama interview (aired by the BBC in 1995), where Wetherell outlines how she 'construes' her social world through her responses to the interview questions and through this a "formulation of the world comes into being" (2001: 16).

Discourse forms minds, selves and identities which are constantly negotiated and reshaped in social interaction - such as the construction of gender identities (Brundson, 1991; Walkerdine, 1990, 1993). The individual self is 'relational' (Wetherell and Maybin, 1996) and is a function of ongoing active change through discursive practices in social interactions. For example, Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) analysed how people assemble certain identities as a resource in an account of a given action - these identities are purely products of social interaction and as such remain highly fluid (also Potter, 1996a, 1996b; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Te Molder and Potter, 2005; Wood and Kroger, 2000). Socially situated identities thus remain not fixed and are constantly being reconstructed and negotiated (Casanave, 2002; Gee,



1996, 2011). This fluidity is notable in the high degree of variability within discourse and its constructions - variability that functions across groups and even across different accounts by the same individual (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Research into online chat environments are a more recent illustration (Thomas, 2007; Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004; Tsang, 2000), along with the construction of gender identities through discourse (Butler, 1993; Livia and Hall, 1997; Weatherall, 2002; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; Swann, 2002; Richardson, 2000; Cameron, 1999, 2005; Saunston and Kyratzis, 2007). Beyond the individual construction, there are also discourse communities, evidenced via studies of telephone call centres in the UK (Swales, 1990; Cameron, 2000; and also McConnell-Ginet, 2011; Devitt, 2004).

The inherent variability within discourse is illustrated in the study by Mulkay, Potter and Yearley (1983), whereby comparisons of spoken and written discourse (such as letters and formal compositions) yielded different descriptions of the same event. Edwards and Potter (1992: 28) outlined this principle as “versions are likely to show variability according to the different interactional contexts they are constructed to serve”. The same piece of discourse can be comprehended differently by different language users and interpreted differently according to context (van Dijk, 1997a 2008, 2011; Halliday, 1971, 1989; Sinclair 2004; Carter, 2004). As such, discourse needs to be analysed with this variability as a key consideration; “accounts...need to be examined as pieces of discourse - as contextualised and variable productions that perform a pragmatic and rhetorical work” (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 54).

A large ranging body of work has formed from the interrelation (and at times methodological tensions) of discourse analysis and discursive psychology. Examples include: Wooffitt's (2000) investigation of clairvoyant 'fact' origin construction; Dickerson's (1997) analysis of claims of news interviewees; Lawes' (1999) review of relationship partners' constructions of infidelity; Locke and Edwards' (2003) analysis of President Clinton's grand jury testimony; Georgaca's (2000) investigation of 'delusional' speech traits in psychiatric practice; Potter and Edwards (1990) study of accounts from journalists and politicians throughout a political controversy; studies relating to the construction of questions in market research focus groups (Puchta and Potter, 1999, 2002, 2004); and analysis of media reports on China's economic propensity (Engardio and Roberts, 2004; Harney, 2009). Particular research focus has been on forms of oppression - primarily racism and sexism - that are perpetuated in discursive constructions (Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Wetherell

et. al, 1987; Ahmed et. al, 2000; Stratton, 1998; Van Dijk, 1987, 1993; Abel, 1996, 1997; Nairn and McCreanor, 1990, 1991; Cameron and Kulick, 2003).

Recent studies using discourse analysis as a methodological focus include Duffy and O'Rourke's (2015) analysis of strategy workshops - which identified particular dialogue patterns in the talk of executive managers discussing strategy in a workshop setting, highlighting shared understandings over debate success. Dick and Collings (2014) also looked at strategy discourse relating to senior managers - centring on subjectivity and power effects and exposing the instability and contingency of strategy discourse. Whittle and Mueller (2011a) conducted a review of the role of storytelling in accounts that described the financial crises - highlighting key discursive devices that framed characters associated with the crisis as either 'villains' or 'victims' and constructed moral stories that were central to peoples performative aspects of storytelling. Crystal (2008) conducted an analysis of Barack Obama's victory speech when attaining the US Presidential election - revealing the use of 'parallelism' (repetition of certain grammatical structures for rhetorical effect). Higgens (2008) also analysed the same Obama speech but from a more socially oriented analysis and Williams (2008) discussed the speech in relation to the political and economic context(s).

Critical discourse analysis has extended the interpretative scope of focus, beginning with the belief that language use is always social and that discourse both "reflects and constructs the social world" (Rogers, 2011: 1). This form of analysis is an exploration of the connection between discourse aligned with the social and political context (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). From this perspective discourses "are always socially, politically, racially and economically loaded" (Rogers, 2004: 6). Examples of such research include: KhosraviNik's (2005) review of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants discourse in the UK press and the reproduction of negative attitudes via perpetuated stereotypes; Montgomery's (2011) analysis of the representations of the 'war on conflict' in UK newspapers; and Kandil and Belcher's (2011) examination of web-based news reports on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (sourced from CNN, BBC and Al-Jazeera).

The next section will provide an overview of interpretative repertoires - a key analytical resource within discourse and one which informs the empirical investigation of this thesis.

### 2.3.2 Interpretative Repertoires

One of the central aspects of discourse analysis is the use of interpretive repertoires. Potter (1996b: 115) cites that an overriding finding from work concerning scientific discourse is that scientists tend to draw on different vocabularies (interpretative repertoires) for work related discourse. A repertoire is a “broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, commonplaces... and figures of speech often clustered around metaphors of vivid images and often using distinct grammatical constructions and styles” (Potter et al, 1990: 212). Potter and Wetherell (1987: 149) depict these as “recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena”. Wooffitt (2005: 35) elaborates further and describes how such “repertoires may be characterised by a distinctive vocabulary, particular grammatical and stylistic features, and the occurrence of specific figures of speech, idiomatic expressions and metaphors”.

Potter (1996c) elaborates on earlier definitions:

“Interpretive repertoires are systematically related sets of terms, often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence, and often organised around one or more central metaphors. They are historically developed and make up an important part of the common sense of a culture; although some may be specific to institutional domains. The idea of an interpretative repertoire is intended to accommodate to the the twin considerations that there are resources available with an off-the-shelf character that can be used in a range of different settings to do particular tasks, and that these resources have a more bespoke flexibility which allows them to be selectively drawn on and reworked according to the setting...Participants will often draw on a number of different repertoires, flitting between them as they construct the sense of a particular phenomenon, or as they perform different actions.”

(Potter, 1996c: 31-32)

Potter and Wetherell (1987) depict the advantages of the analytic notion of linguistic interpretative repertoires compared with social representations:

“...repertoires are not constructed as entities *intrinsically* linked to social groups, so research has not been hampered by the need to engage in the often problematic exercise of identifying natural group boundaries... it is much more fruitful to accept that repertoires are available to people with many different group memberships, and patterns of accounting may not be the neatest way of dividing up society, or confirming

conventional group categorisations...in discourse analysis, groups and the way they are constructed in the course of accounts have become an important topic of research in themselves...

...there is no attempt in discourse analysis to find consensus in the use of repertoires in the sense that some people are found to *always* use a certain repertoire, and certain people another... Interpretative repertoires are used to perform different sorts of accounting tasks. Because people go through life faced with an ever changing kaleidoscope of situations... analysts do not assume that on other occasions these people would necessarily produce the same repertoire..."

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 156-157)

Broadly, each repertoire can be considered as a resource that an individual (or group) implements in their discourse to construct versions of reality in a communicative context. There is no analysis of the mental, cognitive underpinning processes behind these - such as attitudes or beliefs. The analytical focus remains solely on the use of language and the way the people construct their accounts for different purposes.

The labelling of 'interpretative repertoire' is used to distance and to avoid abstraction when analysing discourses, emphasising them as an active resource used as a form of social action (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1988, 1992):

"The aim of the analysis is not to categorise people (for example, as nationalists, racists or 'green' consumers) but to identify the discursive practices through which the categories are constructed. People cannot be expected to be consistent; rather, it is to be expected that their texts and talk vary as they draw on different discourses in different contexts. Thus the analysis also places emphasis on the content of discourse in social interaction as something important in itself, not just a reflection of underlying psychological processes. This perspective...combines a poststructuralist focus on the ways in which specific discourses (conceived as 'interpretative repertoires') constitute subjects and objects with an interactionist focus on the ways in which people's discourse is oriented towards social action in specific contexts."

(Jorgenson and Phillips, 2002; 107)

It is important to note the variability inherent within interpretative repertoires across different settings and contexts, "participants will often draw on a number of different repertoires, flitting between them as they construct the sense of a particular phenomenon or as they perform different actions" (Potter, 1996b).

Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) research was one of the most influential studies that addressed interpretative repertoires within scientists' discourse - they isolated commonalities (wording and phrasing) from the discourse generated by the researchers they were investigating. The importance of this methodological approach, identifying such repertoires "allows researchers to better understand the culture and ideology shared in certain communities" (Hsu and Roth, 2012: 1444). A recent example being Sampson and Atkinson's (2011, 2013) extension of Gilbert and Mulkey's research - looking into the emotional repertoires utilised by scientists during scientific discovery. (Please note Gilbert and Mulkey's work will be discussed in more depth in the following sub-section.)

Potter and Reicher's (1987) discourse analysis of the Bristol riots is another example of the use of using interpretative repertoires as a methodological focus. This analytical priority avoided attempting to discern what actually happened in the event and instead looked at the constructive and constitutive patterns of discourse sourced from newspaper articles, television reports and interviews. Through this form of analysis the researchers were able to discover distinct forms of descriptive commonalities used by groups; one example being the 'community repertoire' - a common repertoire of phrases and metaphors used to construct close social ties, agency and proximity (Potter and Reicher, 1987).

The use of repertoires has been used extensively across the discourse analysis literature beyond the examples cited above. For example, Lawes' (1999) examination of the discursive strategies utilised when constructing representations of marriage - the "romantic" and "realist" repertoires were identified - demonstrating that "marriage as a discursive object is highly changeable, even in constant flux...discursive constructions of 'marriage' can be varied and even contradictory" (1999: 18). Roth and Lucas (1997) in their study of students' claims about scientific knowledge proposed nine repertoires (historical, representational, rational, religious, intuitive, cultural, perceptual, authoritative and empiricist). Reis and Roth (2007) identified five interpretative repertoires relating to environmental educators and their narratives relating to curriculum design (expertise, empiricism, relevance, knowledge transferability/ translatability and emotionality) (also Crawford, 2005). Horton-Salway (2011) proposed two repertoires to define the language used to describe ADHD (biological and psycho-social).

The next section will provide an overview of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) research - a study which informs the core approach of this thesis.

### **2.3.3 Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) - 'Opening Pandora's Box'**

Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) adopted the core methodological considerations that have been discussed in this chapter; sociology of science, relativism, constructivism, discourse analysis and interpretative repertoires to investigate the scientific dispute within biochemistry which centred on the complex molecule adenosine triphosphate (ATP). Potter (1996b) reviews their methodological stance:

"In effect, Gilbert and Mulkey's analysis extended the general emphasis on methodological relativism in sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) to scientist' accounts of their actions and beliefs. Just as empirical relativists did not attempt to decide, say, which theory of... was correct... discourse analysts of science did not attempt to judge which description that a scientist gave of theory choice was correct. They were not looking at accounts of choice in research papers, interview or even scientific jokes, for their truth; the interest instead was in how that account was constructed and how it was used to manage interactional tasks."

(Potter, 1996b: 152)

Their 1984 research implemented discourse analysis to observe the sociological processes surrounding opposing scientists associated with the two contrasting theoretical positions that had emerged relating to ATP. Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) were unsatisfied with the methodological positions and insights of previous sociological research into such areas:

"If this were a typical sociological study...We would proceed by extracting from our data what we took to be the most coherent and comprehensive version of 'what really happened' ...  
...sociologists' attempts to tell *the* story of a particular social setting or to formulate *the* way in which social life operates are fundamentally unsatisfactory. Such 'definitive versions' are unsatisfactory because they imply unjustifiably that the analyst can reconcile his version of events with all the multiple and divergent versions generated by the actors themselves."

(Gilbert and Mulkey 1984: 1-2)

Gilbert and Mulkay outlined the issues with previous sociological research into SSK related material using discourse as data - focusing on Blissett's (1972) analysis of the role of political manoeuvrings implemented by scientists within their fields:

"The difficulty with taking any collection of similar statements produced by participants as literally descriptive of social action is the potential variability of participants' statements about any given action."  
(Gilbert and Mulkay 1984: 6)

They then, using Halliday's (1978) argument relating to the variability in language, asserted that:

"If there *is* a strong connection between the form and substance of discourse, on the one hand, and the social situation in which discourse is produced, on the other hand, it follows that discourse can never be taken as simply descriptive of the social action to which it ostensibly refers, no matter how uniform particular segments of that discourse appear to be. For similarities between different statements are just as likely to be the consequence of some similarity in the context of linguistic production as of similarity in the actions described by those statements."

(Gilbert and Mulkay 1984: 7)

In a series of prior papers Gilbert and Mulkay (1982a, 1982c, 1983) analysed scientists' theory choice. When reviewing the collated research they noted a significant presence of variability:

"Not only do different scientists' accounts differ; not only do each scientist's accounts vary between letters, lab notes, interviews, conference proceedings, research papers, etc.; but scientists furnish quite different versions of events within a single recorded interview transcript or a single session of a taped conference discussion."

(Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 11)

Due to the high degree of variability found within their collected data they proposed a generalised four-step process to negate issues of variability within qualitative sociological research:

1. Obtain statements by interview or by observation in a natural setting.
2. Look for broad similarities between the statements.
3. If there are similarities which occur frequently, take these statements at face value, that is, as accurate

accounts of what is really going on.

4. Construct a generalised version of participants' accounts of what is going on, and present this as one's own analytic conclusions."

(Gilbert and Mulkay 1984: 5)

Prior to this point there was a general inclination within sociological approaches to generalise accounts pertaining to actors and actions to wider relating social categories. In addition, there was the belief that the analysts themselves were suitably informed enough to critically assess which accounts were deemed of greater reliability and accurate representations of the reality of the knowledge areas being analysed. Overriding these principles was the assumption that some of the accounts were accurate representations of the core social reality behind them. Gilbert and Mulkay's perspective contrasted with these established principles. Primarily, they did not believe the social scientist was informed to a level by which they could accurately differentiate the veracity or objectivity of accounts. Furthermore, they argued that the accounts generated by research must be considered in the context of their production (for example, an interview constructed for sociological research). Subsequently these accounts, due to these similarities in contextual origin, must not necessarily be taken as objectively representative of the situation or topic of discussion. The researcher should exercise caution in assuming that commonalities within the participants discourse is anything but indicative of the same interactional context in which these accounts were produced - and to imbue restraint in drawing conclusions beyond this.

Finally, Gilbert and Mulkay advanced the notion that sociological research failed to address the notion that, in regard to language, social actions can hold multiple meanings. They suggested that social actions and events can retain multiple meanings - the same instance can be described in a plethora of different ways, with different sub-aspects being highlighted in each subsequent description. From Gilbert and Mulkay's perspective, research up until this point had failed to appreciate and accommodate for this nuance - discourse was treated as a straightforward, linear, reflection of social (and underlying psychological) reality. This somewhat basic approach neglected to appreciate that discourse is constructed from both the context in which it is produced and also the functional aspects it is intended to perform:

"...It follows that discourse can never be taken as simply descriptive of the social action to which it refers, no matter how uniform particular segments of that discourse appear to be."



(Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984: 7)

In response to these traditional failings within sociological research, Gilbert and Mulkey promoted the use of discourse analysis as a methodological approach. This analysis focused solely on the participants' language, accounting for variability within such discourse and the elements which lead to such differences. Ultimately this placed the discourse itself at the heart of the analysis, observing its sociological production and functions, thus eradicating the previously ingrained sociological notion of providing discussions centring on the social reality of what really occurred:

"It seems best, then, to conceive of the meaning of social actions, not as a unitary characteristic of acts which can be observed as they occur, but as a diverse potentiality of acts which can be realised in different ways through participants' production of different interpretations in different social contexts."

(Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984: 9)

The unstable nature of direct observation strengthens the proposal that the methodological priority of the analysis of participants' discourse holds more value. As such Gilbert and Mulkey centralised the use of discourse as a productive analytical tool (1984: 13), focusing on their participants' discourse as a topic as opposed to merely a resource:

"...the social world is not composed of a series of discrete, one-dimensional actions which can be more or less accurately represented. Once we begin to conceive of the social world in terms of an indefinite series of linguistic potentialities which can be realised in a wide variety of different ways and which are continually reformulated in the course of an ongoing interpretative process, the simple procedure of sifting good from bad accounts becomes entirely inappropriate...no degree of craftsman's expertise can enable the sociologist to sort out the interpretative dross within the participants' discourse from what is sociologically valuable."

(Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984: 10)

Gilbert and Mulkey's form of discourse analysis was founded on the appreciation that discourse is both highly variable and context dependent. The analytic focus of their study into ATP scientists was to investigate how these participants contextually organised and systematically structured their discourse to communicate accounts of beliefs and actions. Two specific contexts were addressed - formal and informal. 'Formal' encompassed such elements as published research papers and the content of established academic journals, whilst 'informal' included aspects such

as interviews. What emerged from the study was that the scientist participants' discourse was systematically different across the two contexts - through implementing the 'interpretative repertoire' classification approach (discussed in section 2.3.2).

Gilbert and Mulkey proposed that within formal contexts the scientists deployed the use of what they termed the 'empiricist repertoire' within their discourse. This was characterised by formal language that upheld conventional perspectives of scientific culture and work, whereby the scientist remains personally detached from the outcomes of the research and objectivity is paramount. In contrast, the 'contingent repertoire' was predominant within informal contexts - where objectivity is removed and scientific practice is re-framed as a social activity. The scientist invokes more individual features relating to scientific activities, research and knowledge claims - aspects such as personal opinions and interpretations. More generally, the practice of science is characterised as being a function of social factors, such as the interpersonal relationship between colleagues and sub-cultures within different fields. The empiricist repertoire isolates the scientist away from the process of science and the experimental process, whereas the contingent repertoire places them at the centre of these endeavours as a social-being informed by personal motivations and beliefs.

After establishing the criteria that constructed these repertoires Gilbert and Mulkey investigated how their participants utilised them within their discourse. The scientists used the empiricist repertoire to support their own stance and scientific beliefs, implementing objective scientific terminology to validate their own position. Opposing theories and counter research was presented using the contingent repertoire - whereby such elements were depicted as being weighted with social elements and personal agendas. Subsequently, counter-ideologies were presented as distorted and highly subjective in contrast to the scientist's own objective and "pure" scientific endeavours. In this manner the participants were able to use the two repertoires as discursive resources to validate their own position(s) and dualistically undermine opposing scientists (and research). Contradictions that materialised through the use of the two polarised repertoires were reconciled using, what Gilbert and Mulkey labelled, the 'Truth Will Out Device'. Use of the device included highly generalised, unspecific terms such as "with more experimental evidence" which vaguely predict that ultimately scientific evidence will eventually be produced to resolve any current debate or controversy surrounding the phenomenon. Discrepancies in their accounts can be explained using this device which resolved that the scientific method will

eventually prevail and settle the disparity that has arisen due to purported incorrect research that is generated as a result of flawed scientific beliefs. As Gilbert and Mulkay (1984: 94) explain: “gradually, it is implied, the realities of the physical world will be recognised; and idiosyncratic, social, distorting influences will consequently be seen as such”.

Within the study, all of the scientists had their proposals denounced by other scientists in this manner, with their theories being depicted as distortions based on objective experimental results. Ultimately this demonstrates that sociological researchers cannot determine the verisimilitude of a phenomena based on the accounts (discourse) espoused by participants. As Gilbert and Mulkay showed, scientists abandon pretences of objectivity in relation to the scientific process when presenting and framing research that lays in juxtaposition to their own. Subsequently, a “true” account of the phenomena is prevented from emerging in these accounts. This led Potter and Wetherell (1987: 152) to note that “this seems a very good reason for not taking...discourse as a model of what is the case.” The significance of this for general sociological enquiry extended beyond SSK concerns, as elaborated by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984):

“...[The] basic argument...that traditional forms of sociological analysis of action derived in an unexplicated manner from participants’ discourse and that discourse analysis is a necessary prelude to, and perhaps replacement for, the analysis of action and belief, is a completely general argument which applies equally well to all areas of sociological enquiry.”

(Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 190-1)

Wooffitt (2005) outlines how despite the potential impact of Gilbert and Mulkay’s methodological approach their research failed to have significant repercussions within wider sociology. He proposes multiple reasons for this:

- The proposals were too radical, as the fundamental premise of the research held that sociological research which was based on people’s accounts was fundamentally flawed. Such a challenging and potentially revolutionary concept would essentially make a large body of sociological work theoretically and methodologically redundant.
- Geographically, the conceptual notions proffered by Gilbert and Mulkay may not have had the same resonance in different research climates beyond their immediate culture.
- Neither Gilbert or Mulkay elaborated on the the key proponents that emerged from their research. There was no follow up research that directly developed the implications that arose

within 'Opening Pandora's Box'.

However, the study did lead to further research into the construction of discourse and its use within social contexts. For example, over a series of studies into discourse and recollections Edwards and Middleton (1986, 1987, 1988) presented evidence to suggest that memory and recollections should be analysed from an ethnomethodological and social constructionist perspective - whereby recollection of memories were socially organised entities within discursive features.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) produced an extensive argument that undermined prior sociological methodology which had neglected to take into consideration the variability and strategic elements that are present in language construction. Their publication of *Discourse and Social Psychology* can be seen as an extension of the principles outlined by Gilbert and Mulkey, demonstrated in the following delineation of discourse analysis:

- "1. language is used for a variety of functions and its use has a variety of consequences;
2. language is both constructed and constructive;
3. the same phenomenon can be described in a number of different ways;
4. there will, therefore be considerable variation in accounts;
5. there is, as yet, no foolproof way to deal with this variation and to sift accounts which are 'literal' or accurate' from those which are rhetorical or merely misguided thereby escaping the problems variation raises for researchers with a 'realist' model of language;
6. the constructive and flexible ways in which language is used should themselves become a central topic of study."

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 35)

The above list emphasises certain aspects that were absent from Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) research which focused more on the variability of the scientists' accounts rather than analysing fully the construction and function of those accounts. Furthermore, as illustrated in Wetherell and Potter's (1992) study of racist discourse within New Zealand, discourse analysis can be used as a tool to examine how ideologies are embedded within cultures and reproduced via discursive practices. In addition, the application of the interpretative repertoire has been criticised for being difficult to apply as a discursive tool (Silverman, 2001).

Despite these purported limitations - beyond Gilbert and Mulkey's work, interpretative repertoires have been used in a number of studies relating to the discourse of scientists and their practices. Such work ranges across similar identification of discursive patterns in scientists' discourse in contentious fields (Burchell, 2007; Kerr et. al, 1997; Michael and Birke, 1994); how argumentative letters are constructed (Mulkey, 1985); the construction of scientific jokes (Mulkey and Gilbert, 1982b); scientists' accounts of theory choice (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1982c, 1983; Mulkey and Gilbert, 1983, 1985; Potter, 1984); how scientific knowledge is applied (Potter, 1982; Potter and Mulkey, 1982); how scientists read and interpret scientific texts (Potter, 1987); to accounts of models (McKinlay and Potter, 1987). In addition, Myers (1990) extended Gilbert and Mulkey's work by conducting a study around how rhetorical and textural resources operate during controversies. More recently Augoustinos, Russin and LeCouteur (2009) used the same theoretical framework to investigate how stake and interest were managed through discursive representations of the storm-cell cloning fraud episode.

A more contemporary review of the literature demonstrates a continuing use of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) framework - and particularly the adoption of interpretative repertoires as a form of analysis across a wide range of issues beyond investigations towards scientists and science.

Recent examples include:

- Selseng and Ulvik (2016) - positioning and interpretative repertoires in discourse about substance abuse and change
- Rouse and Finlay (2016) - interpretative repertoires used in discussing the responsibility for diabetes management by adults with intellectual disabilities and supporters of those individuals
- Huzzard (2015) - interpretative repertoires in discourse of innovation
- Golden and Pomerantz (2015) - interpretative repertoires used by low-income African American women's in reproductive health care
- Karlsson and Olin-Scheller (2015) - internet discourse and the interpretative repertoires that construct gender within Harry Potter fan fiction sites
- Jackson and Hall (2016) - interpretative repertoires within terrorism
- Garcia-Favaro and Gill (2016) - interpretative repertoires within sexism online
- Whittle and Mueller (2016) - constructive repertoires used by bankers accounting for the banking crisis
- Hsu (2016) - interpretative repertoires present in the discourse of preservice science teachers

Despite this wide ranging literature, as touched upon in Chapter 1, there has been an absence of sustained discursive investigations into analysing the accounts of scientists that builds upon and extends the work of Gilbert and Mulkay (Traweek, 1992; Sampson and Atkinson, 2011; Sampson and Atkinson 2013). The current thesis intends to address this deficit and provide a contemporary update of their original work that extends their theoretical focus.

## **2.4 Overview**

The current chapter has provided an overview of the development of sociological approaches towards the study of science and the production of scientific knowledge. This has encompassed the emergence of SSK and the dynamic change in perspective towards these areas of study - with the main focus switching towards scientific practice being a socially governed, socially constructed pursuit. The relativist methodological approach which stemmed from this perspective change was a significant departure, and one which informed the basis of discourse analytical studies: where the scientific phenomenon or claims by the scientist is completely removed from consideration. The validity of the scientist's work is irrelevant - it is the social processes by which they construct, present, orientate their identities, reflections and concepts that is of interest. It is this literature, from the historical SSK work through to discourse analysis, that informs this thesis. The overview that has been presented in this chapter, alongside the sociological focus of parapsychology and the history of the field in Chapter 1, is integral contextual detail that is the foundation for the project.

Fundamental to the approach and methodology of this thesis is Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) study. The work conducted by Gilbert and Mulkay was central to the progression of discourse analysis and cementing its methodological focus. The study integrates well with the SSK philosophy and relativist stance of attempting to uncover the sociological, cultural and political machinations that exist behind scientific practice and production of knowledge claims. Their 1984 analysis did not address the verisimilitude of the phenomena being discussed by the scientists and instead focused on the discursive practices implemented by the scientists to construct versions of reality within the communicative context, through distinct interpretative repertoires. One of the main points this study illustrated was the benefit of adopting such a constructionist approach when analysing

the discourse. The high degrees of variability within the accounts renders a different approach inappropriate.

Chapter 1 and 2 have provided the background and sociological context for the current thesis. The ideas, studies and perspectives presented across these two chapters are what inform my research. The SSK background that evolved into discourse analysis is what shapes the focus of the thesis towards analysing the discourse of researchers in a field of contested controversial knowledge claims: parapsychology. The discourse analysis work that began with Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) is what informs my conceptual view and approach towards the empirical analysis, with the predominant focus being on revealing interpretative repertoires.

Chapter 3 will now detail the methodological approach that was used for the discourse data collection. This methodology will be used as the basis of the later empirical analysis and proposed interpretative repertoires that emerged from the interview responses.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

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### 3.1 Introduction

The methodology of this thesis will be centred on interviews with researchers that are connected to the field of parapsychology. The methodology is intended as a contemporary update of the approach followed by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and their discourse analysis of scientists involved in a scientific dispute concerning contested knowledge claims. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) conducted numerous interviews with leading scientists involved in a dispute. From the content that arose from this investigation they performed a discourse analysis and formulated observations and theorisations regarding the discursive strategies implemented by the scientists in their talk. Particular focus was attributed to interpretative repertoires, commonalities which could be observed across numerous respondents' independent responses. This thesis will mirror that approach - conducting interviews and then producing a discourse analysis on the empirical outcomes generated. The research will aim to emulate the work done by Gilbert and Mulkay and their interview discourse analysis.

Theoretically, the project will adopt a relativist perspective – implementing methodological relativism. Such a perspective is ideally suited to investigations that study fringe knowledge claims- such as the work conducted by Harry Collins and his research into fringe sciences (specifically the work on gravity waves) as described in Chapter 2. By adopting a view that regards knowledge production as a predominantly social process allows the investigator to observe a deeper reflection of the mechanisms surrounding controversial knowledge claims and their eventual acceptance or rejection. Essentially, relativism provides an equilibrium for viewing the processes and interpretations that influence emergent or contentious knowledge claims.

As such, the analytical focus will follow the constructive approach of discourse analysis - it will be on the discursive strategies contained within the responses of the interviewed researchers only. No analytical space will be attributed to the validity of the knowledge claims themselves or to the



verisimilitude of the participants constructed representations, for example concerning identity and social ties.

### **3.2 General Methodological Focus**

The implemented method of investigation for the current project was qualitative interviews, featuring both unstructured and semi-structured elements. Interviewing was chosen as a primary method for a number of key reasons. First and foremost, the practical considerations of parapsychology's presence in the UK allowed for the possibility of contacting and interviewing key personnel. The geographical structure of the UK combined with the relatively small size of the field were two variables that enabled a significant representative sample of the field to be contacted and then interviewed - this became less of a consideration when phone interviews were eventually chosen as the sole medium. Secondly, and more significantly the interview method was favoured due to the anticipated insight it would provide into the discursive practices of the researchers. By interviewing researchers it was hoped that the output would enable a greater understanding of potential interpretative repertoires used when they were discussing facets of parapsychology; including its current status, infrastructure, identity and position as a field of contested knowledge. Furthermore, by discussing such issues in a largely unstructured capacity with the researchers themselves, it was expected that more honest appraisals and opinions of the subject would emerge - thus more revealing discourse. Through this, the thesis aims to reveal the true nature of the researchers' discursive strategies - revealing how they construct their identity management and methods of operating via their discourse. By discussing their work, experiences and opinions towards the subject the underlying discursive mechanisms should become visible. Such information may also have significance for insight into the sociological underpinnings of science and knowledge production in general. In summary, the interview method was chosen as it was anticipated that this would provide the greatest level of insight into the intended target(s) of analysis.

Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) demonstrated the successful use of this method for a similar sample of participants and used it to good analytical effect when interpreting the resulting discourse. This thesis is analogous to this approach - attempting to interview a specific section of a community involved in a scientific/ academic controversy. Potter (1996c: 131) states that "an interview can be

a particularly effective way of getting at the range of interpretative repertoires that a participant has available as well as some of the uses to which those repertoires are put” (for example Billig, 1992; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The SSK and discourse literature cited in Chapter 2 also illustrates the rich sociological insights that can emerge from interview based investigations into controversial research. The work conducted by Collins and Pinch is central to the current thesis’ origins. For example, both Collins’ (1981b) and Pinch’s (1986) ethnography research illustrate the benefits of conducting interviews with scientists and interacting with them directly. Despite focusing on disparate areas (Collins focused on gravity wave detection whereas Pinch was concerned with solar-neutrino detection) the two studies adopt similar principles in terms of methodology. Both involved the sociologist observing and interviewing researchers embroiled in the controversial fields. What stemmed from this approach were candid and highly revealing findings regarding the way these scientists operated, interacted and how they were governed by numerous external social forces. Subsequently, Collins and Pinch were able to construct strong sociological narratives relating to science and the influences of accepting controversial knowledge assertions. Ultimately, this highlights the benefits of adopting such a methodological approach when studying a field such as parapsychology. The empirical material generated by such studies and the ensuing sociological concepts validates the adoption of the interview technique implemented by the current research. It is intended that these SSK examples can be transplanted into a discourse analytical approach that also mirrors the core approach Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) implemented in their interviews and the analysis of participant responses. As Wooffitt (2005) elaborates, work such as Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) still informs contemporary discourse research:

“There are two broad goals of Gilbert and Mulkay’s work which still inform discourse analysis. First, they wanted to ‘document some of the methods by means of which scientists construct and reconstruct their actions and beliefs in diverse ways’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 188). The recognition of the intrinsic variability of accounts forced them to abandon their original aim of producing a single, coherent sociological narrative and instead examine how these variable accounting practices fashion versions of the world. Second, they wanted to explore the functions achieved by difference accounting practices: what have descriptions been constructed to do? Although this was not a major focus of Gilbert and Mulkay’s study, it has become a key feature of many subsequent discourse analytic projects...”

(Wooffitt, 2005: 43-44)

Therefore, using Gilbert and Mulkey's work as a basic template for the methodological focus of the current thesis holds value. As Wooffitt (2005) stipulates, this approach has been seeded throughout discourse analysis research and as such can be interpreted as a solid foundation from which to base a discourse analysis thesis.

### **3.3 Participants**

#### **3.3.1 Participant Criteria and Selection Process**

General consideration of participation inclusion was the following: participants were chosen based on having had close association with parapsychology at some point in their academic research careers. More specifically, the criteria for selection included the following requirements (in no order of priority):

- Post-Doctoral or Professor level of academic status.
- Had published research on parapsychological related issues (such as belief) or phenomena itself (such as ESP) in parapsychological journals. Key parapsychological journals include: Journal of Parapsychology, European Journal of Parapsychology; SPR Journal + Paranormal Review; Journal of the Society for Psychical Research; Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research.
- The critical position of their approach to the field was not a defining aspect for selection - therefore they could be either from a critical sceptical position or hold the perspective that parapsychological phenomena are real.
- Stemming from the above point - that they had been closely associated with parapsychological work and actively conducted parapsychological orientated research at some point in their careers.

The main focus of participant selection were Individuals who were based in the UK and who at the time of interviewing had (or previously had) strong ties with the field. These were isolated to those who were established researchers or lecturers in the field, and did not include research students or post-graduates such as PhD or MSc students.

The UK was chosen as this is the location where parapsychology has developed and prospered

more closely with the academic (and research) infrastructure (Carr, 2008; Beloff, 1997) - as presented in Chapter 1, section 1.3.1. Furthermore, all participants would have had similar experiences from this infrastructure - as opposed to a different country such as America where the academic and research process is different. This would imbue a commonality amongst participants which - although not integral for selection purposes - would allow for a similar loosely structured range of questions within the interview. In addition, I believed some level of similar background amongst the participants was important to compare their responses and discursive actions.

The above were the general principles that informed my participant selection. For the actual identification of researchers to contact for inclusion I used Carr's (2008) article 'The Growth of UK Academic Parapsychology'. As outlined in Chapter 1, parapsychology has multiple definitions and interpretations, ranging from psychological interpretations such as anomalistic psychology to purely paranormal investigations concerning mediums and apparitions. Therefore I wanted to use a central, and what could be considered 'official', source to outline which researchers could be considered academic researchers in the field. Carr's (2008) article fulfilled this as it was published in the 'Paranormal Review' which is the official magazine for the Society for Psychical Research. In the article Carr outlines the growth of parapsychology in UK academia and provides a snapshot of the field at the time. This is achieved through a 'family tree' presentation of all the people who were either currently studying for a doctorate in parapsychology or who had already obtained one. Of more immediate use to the current thesis was Carr's map illustration (Carr, 2008: 25) of all the UK academic departments (including sub-departments) and personnel dedicated to parapsychology within UK universities at the time of publication. It was this article which I used for the majority of participant selection. Only two of the researchers interviewed were not included within Carr's article; one was a Doctor who teaches at the 'Centre for Parapsychological Research' at the University of Derby, and has published research relating to parapsychology and who supervises parapsychological focused PhD students; the second was a famous parapsychologist [referenced throughout Chapter 1] who now works and publishes independently of the UK Higher Education sector - but was previously closely tied to the sector.

Carr's (2008) article was a perfect starting point for delineating UK academic parapsychology and provided an interesting mix of participants that were closely (or had been closely at the time the article was published) associated with the field. This mix also included researchers known for their

sceptical approaches and critical publications in the field. Such a stance was not a barrier for being included in the current thesis. The important aspect for my selection purposes was that these researchers had been *associated closely* with parapsychology (irrespective of position or approach). This association took the form of:

- being included in Carr's (2008) 'family tree' outline
- being attached to UK academia within their careers - through teaching of parapsychology and/ or supervision of parapsychology PhD students
- publishing in parapsychology based journals

It was hoped that a range of varied researchers - all tied by the same classification(s) outlined by Carr (2008) and who were tied to parapsychology - would provide an interesting insight into how these individuals used their discourse to construct concepts, such as identity. It was intended that what emerged from the data would be an analysis that could be incorporated into other strands of discourse analysis or sociological analysis. Potter and Wetherell (1987) have cited the wider sociological benefits for using such a sample of participants who are established and integrated in their (academic) field:

"If interesting discourse processes can found even in this rarefied environment [i.e. scientific areas] it is extremely likely that they will also be found, probably in more exaggerated forms, in everyday conversation, newspaper stories and in all other kinds of talk we will encounter. Science is a useful hard case where discourse analyse can hone its claims."

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 64)

### **3.3.2 Initial Participant Engagement**

Carr's (2008) article which mapped the presence and location of researchers linked to parapsychology in the UK provided a starting point for locating potential interviewees. From this a provisional list of 34 people was created - ranging from researchers highly involved in the field, recently retired researchers, and to researchers of an overtly sceptical predisposition towards parapsychology.

A general email of introduction was sent to everyone on the list - explaining the research, its aims, format and asking whether or not they would be inclined to participate (please see Appendix 1).

The interview was presented as one that was looking at the sociological underpinnings around the growth of parapsychology within UK academia, as opposed to a discursive analysis of their responses. It was intended that this format and the topic of the interview would allow them to speak more freely on the subject without being conscious of their own discourse.

Overall, a total of eighteen people were able to take part in the research and were successfully interviewed - seventeen via phone, and one by email correspondence. After agreeing to participate, and once the interview format had been finalised, a second generalised email was sent to all people willing to take part in order to cement the details and arrange the interviews themselves (please see Appendix 2). From this point onwards all individual arrangements were conducted via separate bespoke emails and/ or telephone calls.

Initially I was concerned that seventeen interviews was an insufficient number. However, as the interviews progressed this relatively low number did not prove to be a detrimental issue. In terms of volume, all of the interviews averaged between 40-60 minutes - this generated a lot of content and discourse directly from the interviewed researcher(s). This content proved to be very rich for analysis, with the participant researchers freely discussing issues and opening up about numerous aspects of their work, careers, biographies and personal perspectives. Finally, the detailed focus of this thesis' discourse analysis meant that the amount of collected interview data was sufficient for my analytical purpose. As my analysis started - looking for potential interpretative repertoires - it was clear there were enough interviews and enough rich content to build the thesis and its analytical plus theoretical positions. This point is reflected in the subsequent empirical chapters and analysis throughout the rest of the thesis. Because of these reasons I did not conduct follow-up interviews or attempt to find additional researchers to take part.

### **3.3.3 Consent and Ethical Considerations**

As illustrated in the generalised communication to participants (please see Appendix 1 and 2) it was stated within the emails that I intended to record all of the interviews for the purposes of my thesis. Once the researcher had agreed to take part in the project I again sought their consent for this prior to conducting the interview and prior to recording. This was done across all of the interviewed researchers, with seventeen participants holding no objection to being recorded.

One of the participants (Researcher 13; R13) refused to be taped but was willing to answer questions via email correspondence. In this instance the question matrix, which was used as a guide for the interviews, was emailed to him and they emailed back with responses (the question matrix is outlined in sub-section in 3.4.2). It should be noted that the email correspondent's responses were not suitable for analysis. The responses ranged from one-word to four-word replies - with the predominant answers being singular "yes" or "no" replies. When compared with the other interview content from other researchers I subsequently made the decision not to include this content in the empirical analysis contained within this thesis. Researcher 13 (R13) is omitted entirely. The researcher had shown a reluctance to participate in the research, refusing to be interviewed directly, and I felt that his emailed responses reflected this.

Regarding confidentiality and anonymity - initially during the interview process participants were asked whether or not they wished to remain anonymous within the research. The response was mixed with some people wishing to not be named against their responses and others having the opposite view. Subsequently, it was decided early in the process (after the sixth interview) to render all interviewee responses anonymous. From this point onwards all participants were not asked for their preference and were instead informed that the content of the recorded interviews would be entirely anonymous. The comments and quotations themselves would be attributed to labels of "Researcher 1", "Researcher 2" etc. and would in no way be referenced back to the original contributor's identity. It should be noted that each label of "Researcher X" maintains a consistent identity within the transcriptions and overall thesis - therefore each response labelled "Researcher X" originates from the same person. For example, all of the extracts attributed to 'R1' are from the same researcher ('Researcher 1').

At the end of each interview - after recording had ended - every participant was encouraged to contact me if they had any follow up questions or concerns about the interview, my research or anything related to the thesis. None of the interviewees contacted me following the interview with any such questions or concerns. A couple of participants did contact me post-interview to wish me luck for the thesis and to express that they enjoyed the interview. None of this correspondence forms the analytical focus or empirical presentation of the thesis.

## **3.4 Interview Method**

### **3.4.1 General Interview Approach**

The interview methodology followed the ten stages of discourse analytic research outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987). The ten stages are as follows:

“Stage One: Research questions

Stage Two: Sample selection

Stage Three: Collection of records and documents

Stage Four: Interviews

Stage Five: Transcription

Stage Six: Coding

Stage Seven: Analysis

Stage Eight: Validation

Stage Nine: The report

Stage Ten: Validation”

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 160-175)

These ten stages were the focal point for the general structuring of the method of the thesis. This started with outlining the research objectives plus research questions, and then progressed through the next stages of sample selection and implementation of the interviews. Whilst this path from Potter and Wetherell (1987) was useful as a broad structure for the methodology it is noticeable that the stage of analysis (Stage Seven) is not given more precedence or significance in their presentation. Potter and Wetherell (1987) focused these stages towards social psychology as formal documentation for carrying out empirical work. As such, their exploration of the actual analysis of the discourse remains limited in their 1987 framework description. A more extended discussion of the analytical process conducted within this thesis will be provided later in the chapter. Specific reference to the analytical stages - Stages Six onwards in Potter and Wetherell's (1987) framework - will also be made further in the current chapter.

For the current project's method, researchers associated with the field of parapsychology were interviewed and recorded over the phone, with the content then being transcribed for analysis.



From a methodological position the interview is the most commonly used tool in sociological research of this nature where it is estimated that 90% of all research conducted in the field have utilised it (Briggs, 1986; Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). Hammersley (2003: 120) notes the four generalised ways of how interviews are used as evidence, with the one most relevant to this project being “[as] a source of evidence about the constructional work on the part of the informant (and perhaps also the interviewer) by means of which interview data are produced”. Work by Lee and Roth (2004) and Abell and Stokoe (2001) have illustrated that identity and areas of self presentation are both actively constructed and revealed in interview formats. Indeed Potter (1996c) has cited that interviews are an effective medium for exposing interpretative repertoires and the functions behind such devices (examples being, Billig, 1992; Edley, 2001; Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Potter and Mulkay, 1985).

The medium of phone interviews was primarily chosen because it allowed for a greater degree of flexibility to the researcher; interviews could be arranged and conducted quickly within an adequate time-frame (in contrast to the more problematic features of arranging face-to-face interviews). In addition, the medium of phone interviews has also been argued to generate more usable data for the researcher, allowing the participant to be more focused and more forthcoming (Fielding and Thomas, 2001). The strength of using phone interviews as a method was assessed as the data collection process occurred. At the outset it was decided that if the phone approach was not producing adequate material (judged on the first few interviews) then the method would be switched to face-to-face interviews. However, as the interviews progressed it was apparent that the empirical data being collected was highly usable and extremely insightful. Subsequently, all interviews were performed via phone.

### **3.4.2 Interview Structure and Presentation of Questions**

Qualitative interviews were conducted as this method provides a greater focus on the interviewees’ perspectives and encourages greater expression for the person being questioned, providing an enhanced insight into their opinions and views (Bryman, 2001). The greater flexibility of this approach allows the interviewer to deviate onto tangents that may arise during the course of the interview, generating content that may not otherwise emerge in a more structured approach (for example Beardsworth and Keil, 1992). It was preconceived that this particular strategy of investigation would allow the interviewer to prompt a greater understanding into the

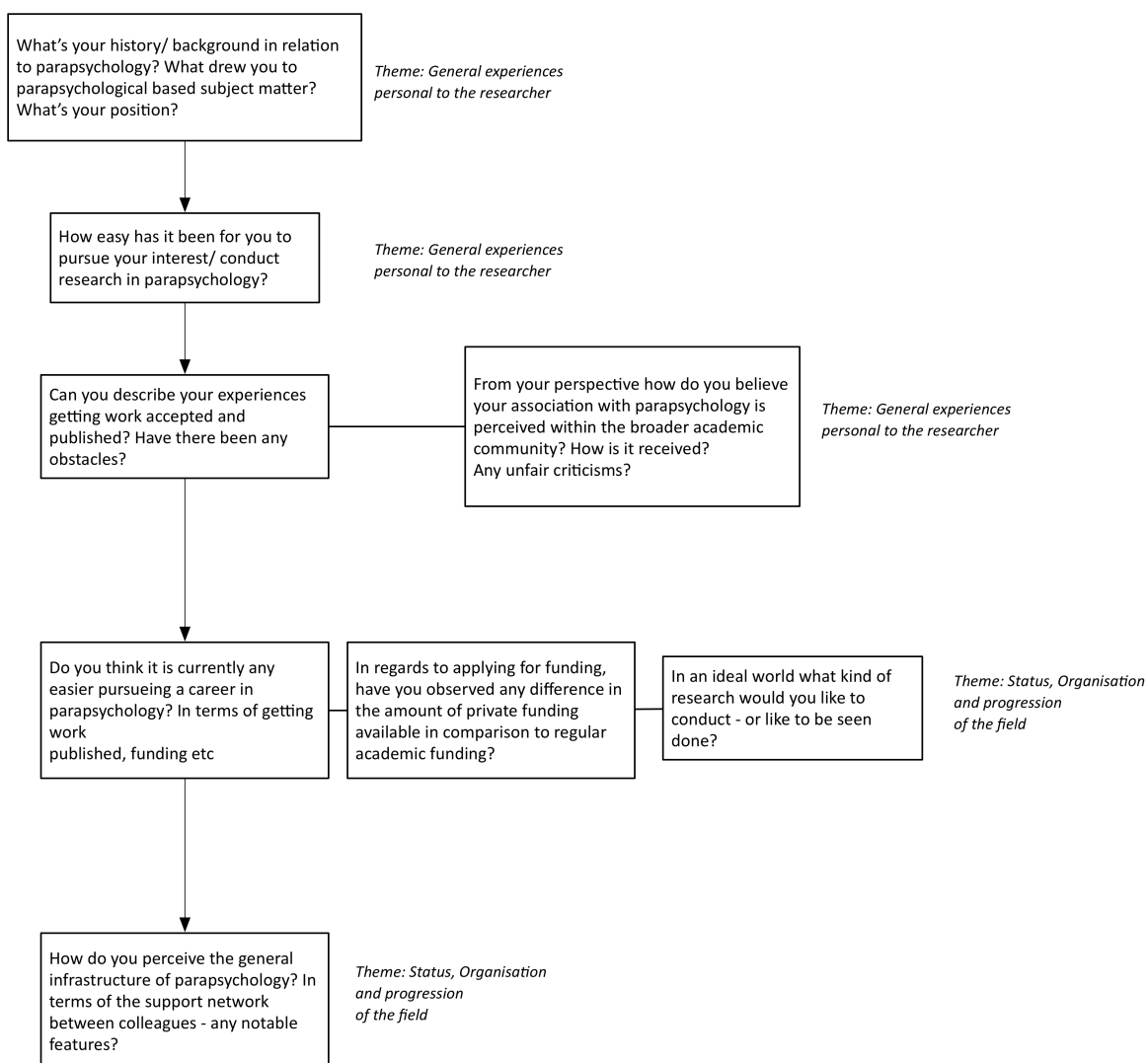
attitudes and beliefs of the parapsychologists being interviewed. A qualitative approach would allow them to speak more freely and openly on the issues discussed and enable the interviewer to improvise in certain areas if interesting subject matter was emerging, renewing the focus on this (as opposed to having to stick to a pre-determined structure). It was intended that the interviews resemble the characteristics of a general conversation (Burgess, 1984). This unstructured technique was mixed with more semi-structured features. The interviewer possessed a number of questions and specific topics to cover throughout the course of the interview. However, these were intended merely as prompt material to provide a semblance of guidance for the interviewer - demonstrating Lofland and Lofland's (1994) notion that the fundamental quality of a research interview is a 'guided conversation'. Improvised questions were administered as I (the interviewer) picked up on things said by the researchers and then a different focus was centred on different key topics depending upon the trajectory of the interview.

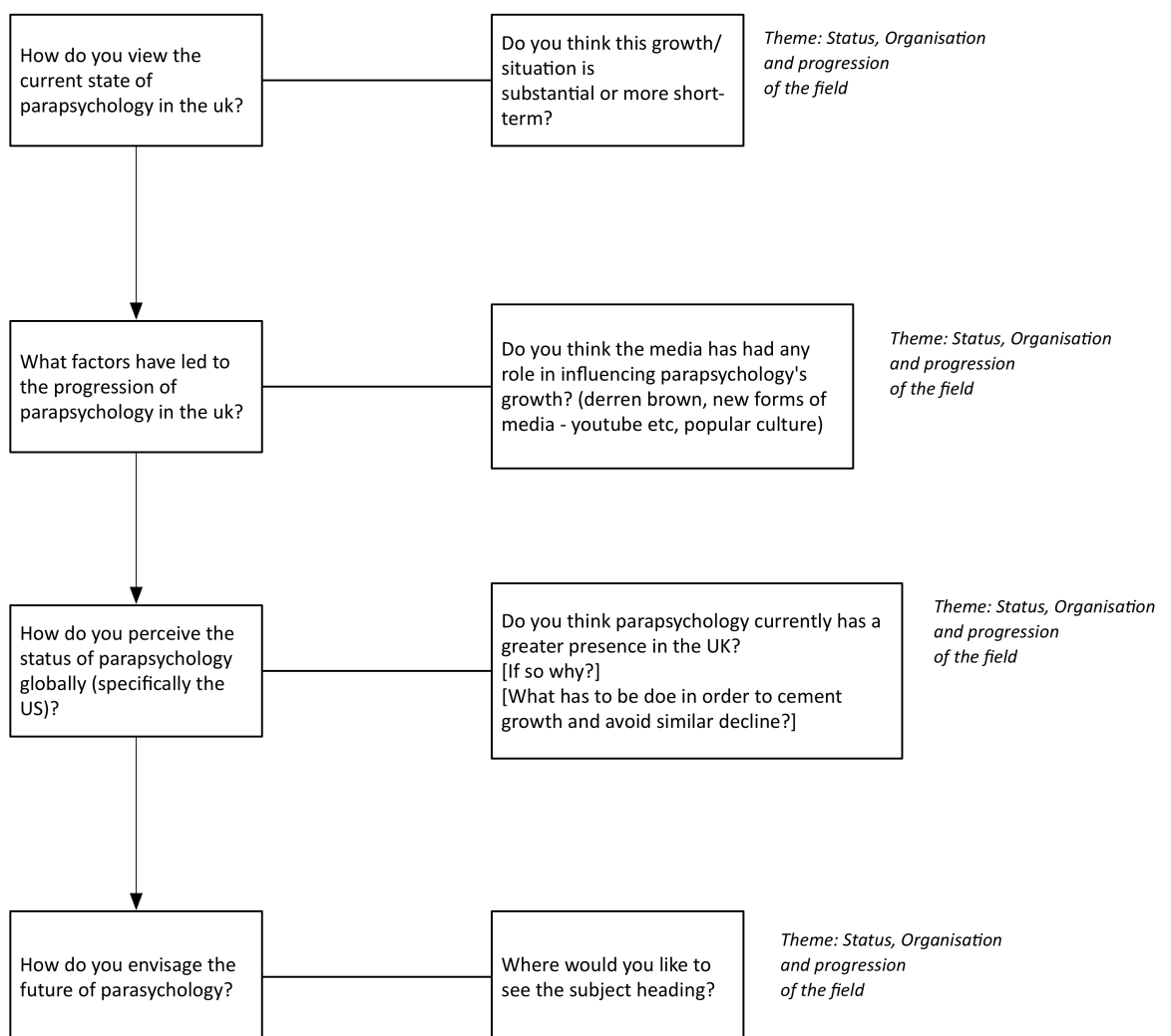
The formulation of the interview questions adhered to the following rule: "...[it] is crucial that the questioning allows interviewers to glean the ways in which research participants view their social world and that there is flexibility in the conduct of the interviews." (Bryman, 2001: 317). Initially, three key areas were identified to be the focus of the interview; the participant's experiences in relation to parapsychology (getting work published, perception etc.); the current state of parapsychology in the UK and its future; and parapsychology as an academic/ scientific subject. These areas were chosen to engage the researchers and get them to talk about about how parapsychology operated as a field within the current academic climate whilst also providing an insight into the world of the individual researcher, revealing their social and cultural experiences in relation to the field. It was hoped that this subject matter would reveal the active and constructive nature of their discourse through interpretative repertoires around these areas.

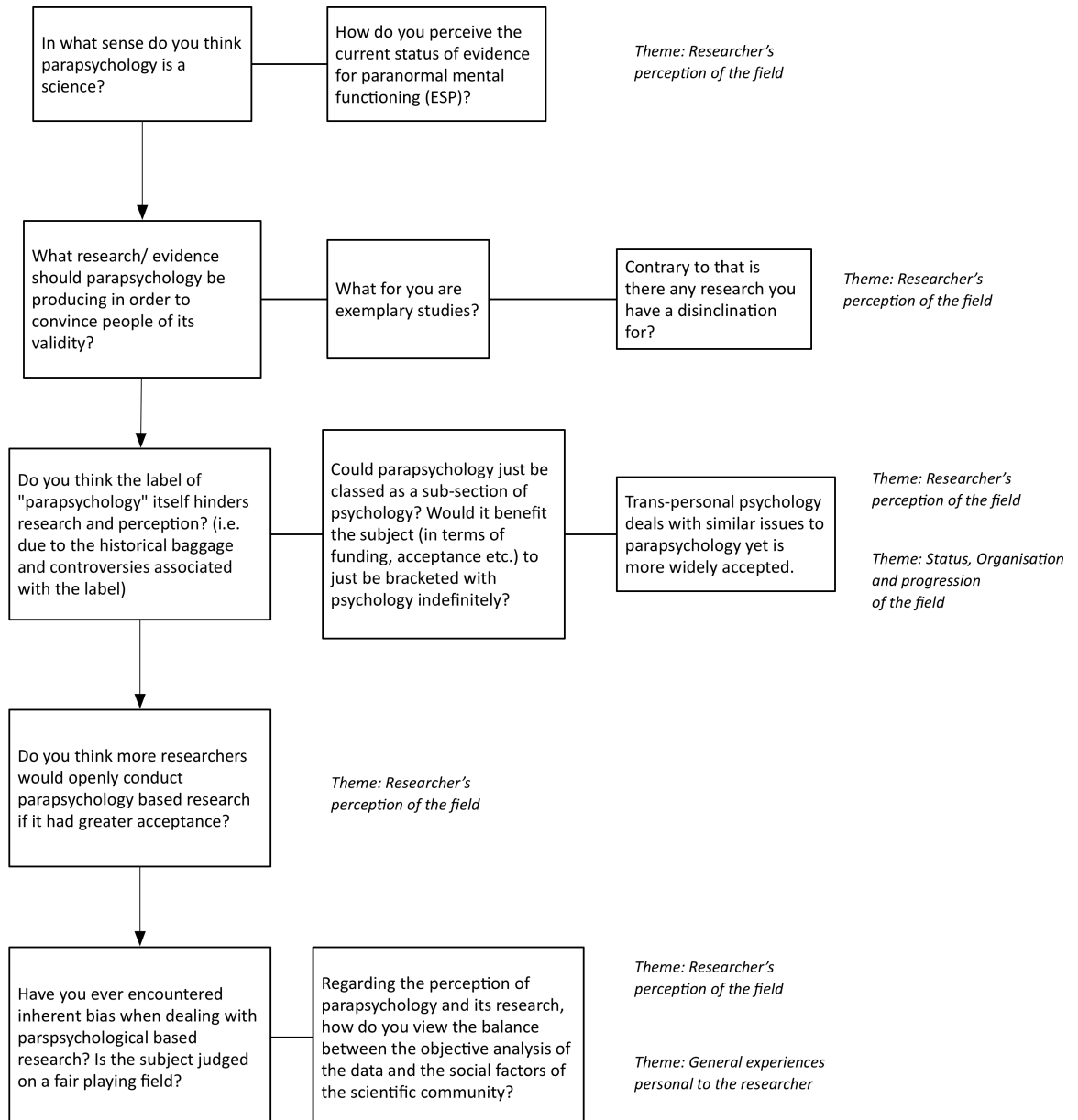
Extending from this, numerous pertinent questions relating to these areas were generated and then narrowed down to a succinct manageable few. Eventually, a semblance of order and semi-structure began to emerge. A rudimentary question matrix was produced as a rough guide for the interviewer to follow, with questions deviating off from other connecting questions (depending upon the response). The questions were formed around three broad themes:

- General experiences personal to the researcher
- Status, organisation and progression of the field
- Researcher's perception of the field

Each of the themes (with questions overlapping themes) were chosen to get the researcher to talk about parapsychology, their personal career biography and their overall perspectives about the field's progression including critical opinions or ideas for future direction. It was intended that such themes would enable a constant flow of discourse from the interviewed researchers. The question matrix is presented below:







When constructing the prompt questions the two main principles invoked by Fielding and Thomas (2001) were used as guidance:

“Two principles inform research interviews. First, the questioning should be as open-ended as possible, in order to gain spontaneous information rather than a rehearsed position. Secondly, the questioning techniques should encourage respondents to communicate their underlying attitudes, beliefs and values, rather than a glib or easy answer. The objective is that the discussion should be as frank as possible.”

(Fielding and Thomas, 2001: 126)

The interview strategy incorporated strong unstructured elements, so in some cases areas were not addressed or new threads of thought emerged. Again, the nature and structure of each interview became largely participant dependent. The question matrix provided a semi-structure so that a sense of flow could be incorporated into the interviews. For example, the opening question of, “What is your background in relation to parapsychology?” was included mainly to make the participant at ease and to allow them to open up. By talking about their history and direct personal experiences it was intended to place them into a sense of amiability and assist the interviewer by providing a launch-pad whereby they could then direct the interview. Throughout the interview process itself the interviewer attempted to adhere to the ten criteria outlined by Kvale (1996) as being integral for monitoring the interaction; being knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering and interpreting.

Throughout the interview process there was a constant awareness on behalf of the interviewer not to invoke bias, direct opinions, or guide the responses relating to the material. Merton and Kendall (1946) outline that the input of the interviewer should remain at a minimum, thus allowing the subject to fully define and express their opinions. Whilst this remains an important issue, Fielding and Thomas (2001) also outline that due to the largely unstructured nature of the qualitative interview process, elements of possible subtle guidance and direction on behalf of the interviewer may emerge. However, for the purposes of the current research such instances (if present) would arguably have little effect on the responses generated - due to the sample. All of the participants were established researchers in academia, with considerable experience relating to interviews and being questioned about such issues. Subsequently, they would perhaps demonstrate a larger propensity to being immune to any interview direction or guidance that may have emerged during the course of the (conversation styled) interactions. A point which is

supported by Selltiz and Jahoda (1962) who suggest that the interview process is conducted by human beings, as opposed to machines and thus differences will emerge between interviews - a factor which is especially pertinent in the context of the current qualitative methodology.

Reflexive considerations on the role of the interviewer's ascribed categorisation of the sample as 'parapsychologists' in relation to the researchers' discursive actions is considered later in the chapter (Section 3.8).

## **3.5 Implementation of the Interviews**

### **3.5.1 Timeframe**

All data collection was conducted in the period between November 2010 and March 2011. Every interview was conducted across a single phone call session with no follow-up interviews being conducted for any of the participants.

### **3.5.2 Process and Equipment Used**

The interviews were implemented over a standard telephone and BT home connection. They were recorded directly onto a cassette-tape recorder: a 'PhonaPart 2-Way Telephone Recorder', Model No.: TL1076. This plugged directly into the phone-line and recorded the call audio onto cassette tape - 1 tape per interview.

Each cassette recording was then transferred to a digital .mp3 file for ease of analysis. This was done by connecting the 'PhonaPart' to a MacBook Pro with an audio auxiliary cable - from the recorder's "audio-out" port to the "audio-in" of the Macbook. The cassette was played back in real time and recorded digitally onto the Macbook's hard-drive using audio software 'Ableton Live'. Once playback had completed the digital audio was then exported and converted from the 'Ableton Live' format to an .mp3 file. This was for accessibility purposes and ease of playback. It should be noted that there was no degradation of the quality of the interview recording through this process and no loss of content.

Playback of all interviews for analysis was done via iTunes media player software through a range of headphones.

The .mp3 audio files were stored on the Macbook Pro's internal hard-drive and were copied to two external USB drives (two SanDisk 16GB models) for backup and also for provision with the final thesis to external examiners.

*[NB: all recorded phone interviews have been provided in their entirety on a separate USB drive with each copy of the thesis]*

All of the original tape-cassette recordings remain in storage and are available on request.

### **3.6 Reflections on the Interviews**

On reflection, throughout the conducting of the interviews there were no significant issues. Initially, there was a concern over the amount of responses I was receiving from my original email requesting participation. But in total seventeen recorded interviews were conducted - with each interview roughly averaging between 40-60 minutes. I had planned to arrange follow up interviews if there was not enough content to form a substantial discourse analysis, but the original interviews provided more than enough material with which to formulate an empirical analysis for the rest of the thesis.

From the first interview I judged the phone call format to work successfully. The interviews flowed well and the interviewees opened up and freely discussed issues along with their personal perspectives. Therefore I conducted all of the interviews via phone. All of the participants were engaging and very helpful with one exception - one of the researchers answered questions in just single sentences and didn't elaborate on any of his answers, even when prompted. That was the only interview which I felt was unsuccessful.

The unstructured approach combined with the loose question framework, I believe, contributed to the success of the phone interview process. The interviews, from my perspective, seemed relaxed and open with areas of discussion between myself and the participant(s). The question



matrix allowed me to move to different questions quickly if I needed to, without keeping stringently to the structure. As such there were very few lulls or silences in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. In summary; I believed the interviews to have been highly successful in their implementation.

## **3.7 Empirical Analysis**

### **3.7.1 Reviewing the Interview Content**

Six of the interviews were transcribed completely verbatim. Only six were transcribed initially because of time and resource constraints. For the remaining eleven phone interviews, extensive notes were made for each, using a mixture of abbreviated notes, rough paraphrasing and highlighting key (time) points for notable material to be potentially included in the empirical sections. These notes would be the basis for going back and conducting further discursive analysis along with transcribing key areas for dissection. All empirical presentations in the later chapters of this thesis are full transcriptions of interview content.

Only transcribing six of the interviews in their entirety did not hinder the empirical analysis from my perspective. In practice, extensive notes and analysis were conducted across all of the interviews. As the empirical presentations of the later chapters demonstrate, key interpretative repertoires were able to be identified. This analytical process is detailed in the next two sub-sections.

### **3.7.2 Analysis of the Interview Content**

A discourse analysis was conducted on the interview data. The analytical focus was inspired by the research conducted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984). With the core focus being on how the researchers' accounts were used to construct and reconstruct versions of the world - and the functions behind these discursive formulations within the communicative context. The methodological approach to the analysis also mirrored more contemporary discourse analysis research - such as, Jackson and Hall (2016); Garcia-Favaro and Gill (2016); Whittle and Mueller

(2016) or Sampson and Atkinson (2013).

The start of the analysis began with coding the common themes and topics of discussion throughout the discourse, using the principle logic outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987):

“The first thing to note regarding coding is that it is quite distinct from doing the analysis itself. The goal is not to find results but to squeeze an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks. It is an analytic preliminary preparing the way for a much more intensive study of the material culled through the selective coding process...as coding has the pragmatic rather than analytic goal of collecting together instances for examination it should be done as *inclusively* as possible...At this stage in the research we are in the business of producing a body of instances, not trying to set limits to that body. Thus all borderline cases, and instances which seem initially only vaguely related, should be included.”

(Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 167)

More recent discourse analysis methodological literature was reviewed to ensure Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) approach was still valid (for example, Willig, 2001; Wood and Kroger, 2000; Wooffitt, 2005).

Following transcription, each interview was analysed, with summary notes outlining the key topics and emerging concepts. Systematic comparisons and contrasts of the material were conducted across the multiple interviews. To achieve this, each interview was extensively dissected, noting the apparent discursive themes and sociological constructs emerging from the data. Following which, a synopsis of each participant was produced. These summaries depicted the main subject matter, observations and narratives inherent within the interaction. Commonalities and connections between the interviews were then delineated. In order to clarify and determine thematically connected relationships a mind-map was produced - succinctly illustrating the connections between different areas and links between response types.

Analysis of the interview content consisted of finding reoccurring patterns within the discourse that would be the basis of the core themes of the empirical content of the thesis and subsequent discussion. Reoccurring concepts were pinpointed through finding common phrasing, references and comparable content. From this, interpretative repertoires were identified. Again, the process mirrored that outlined by Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) framework:

“Analysis is made up principally of two closely related phases. First, there is the search for pattern in the data. This data will be in the form of both variability: *differences* in either the content or form of accounts, and consistency: the identification of features *shared* by accounts. Second, there is the concern with function and consequence. The basic theoretical thrust of discourse analysis is the argument that people’s talk fulfils many functions and has varying effects. The second phase of analysis consists of forming hypotheses about these functions and effects and searching for the linguistic evidence...[T]here is no analytic method, at least as this term is understood elsewhere in social psychology. Rather there is a broad theoretical framework, which focuses attention on the the constructive and functional dimensions of discourse, coupled with the reader’s skill in identifying significant patterns of consistency and variation.” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 168-169)

Throughout the interview process there were three main elements that were touched upon by all of the interviewees. First and foremost was the structure and characteristic nature of parapsychology – this theme involved the researchers talking about the infrastructure of the field and how it operated in relation to the H.E. sector and academia in general. Secondly, the identity and overall perceptions of parapsychology were predominantly discussed. This theme touched upon numerous facets of the field, ranging from its identity and relationship towards psychology, changes in publication strategy and the perceived perceptions of people towards the field. Finally, the third theme revolved around the individual experiences of the researcher. This centred on the researchers’ descriptions of their personal experiences as parapsychologists or interactions with the subject, how they managed their identity, careers and publications. Once these themes had been substantiated, the interviews were reviewed and material which fell under these concepts were identified.

After this process of data analysis the three key themes that dealt with core sociological issues were outlined. The three themes comprised of 1) the identity and perception of parapsychology as a field; 2) the infrastructure and defining characteristics (nature) of parapsychology and 3) the identity and practices of the contemporary (individual) researcher. Once these themes had been demarcated, each interview was analysed for relevance to these themes and how the researchers used their discourse to construct representations of these themes. Areas were highlighted that signified relevance to a particular topic (such as identity of the field or identity of the researcher). From this extensive examination of the data and its core themes a sociological narrative began to

emerge around the discourse. In order to structure this narrative each theme was sub-divided into relevant sections. For example, in the theme that deals with the identity of parapsychology as a field there were numerous sub-themes of relevance, such as the referential constructions towards relationship between parapsychology and anomalistic psychology.

For every 'Researcher' each interview was narrowed down to material which was suitable for inclusion in the empirical section of the current thesis. This material was then divided and then included under the relevant core theme(s) - a reductionist process which also included narrowing down the data to be categorised in its relevant sub-section and attributable interpretative repertoire. A specific outline of my process for identifying and analysing interpretative repertoires is outlined in the next sub-section.

### **3.7.3 Identifying Interpretative Repertoires**

To identify potential interpretative repertoires within the analysis the general analytical principles outlined above were followed, encompassing: repeated listening and extensive reviewing of the interviews; comparative and cross referencing areas of discussion; highlighting immediately noticeable similarities in terms of content and presentation. To put this in context I will outline an example of my approach and how I identified and began the analysis of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' (which will be presented and discussed in more depth within Chapter 4):

- The first part was looking for commonalities and similarities throughout all of the interviews. I recognised that all of the researchers at some point in their interview presented and discussed their association with parapsychology. In the case of this repertoire, what would be counted and included was all instances where the researchers discussed or referenced what they considered their career focus to be in relation to parapsychology. This generally encompassed instances where they spoke of their research focus and how they presented this - for example, did they proudly present themselves as parapsychologists? Did they dilute or refute this by using other conceptual frameworks, such as psychology? Did they discuss these ties? All aspects relating to this was included in analysing the potential repertoire. In addition, any similar instances that occurred across the interviews where the researcher framed parapsychology as a field that had similarities with their framing of their own careers was included. Collectively this created discursive content that spanned both micro (personal biographies) and macro (field presentation).

- I listened to each interview and marked out the exact points/ timings in the interview when the researcher was addressing their association(s) with parapsychology. These isolated points in the interview were transcribed in their entirety for later analysis.
- The transcriptions that emerged from the above point were reviewed and analysed. The analysis took the form of looking at what each researcher was actively doing with their discourse. What were they presenting? How were they presenting? What language were they using? What social actions were they achieving through this discourse? What had the interviewer asked as a question prior to their response?
- In identifying an interpretative repertoire it was clear that in these extracts all had discursive similarities across the different researchers. All of the researchers were doing what could be considered constructive work in presenting their associations with the field. To narrow down the criteria of what this interpretative repertoire may be, the transcribed extracts were again analysed to look more closely for similarities. For example, highlighting areas where the researcher discusses both parapsychology as a category/ label and their relationship to that construct.
- A review of research literature was conducted to place the empirical analysis in context. It became apparent that the concepts of 'categorisation' and 'stake management' had close links with my empirical data. In discussing their associations the researchers were actively discussing and re-defining what the label of 'parapsychology' represented, whilst dualistically seeming to also be a careful exercise in managing their presented stake towards that same re-defined label within the communicative context.
- With the skeleton of this 'categorisation and stake' interpretative repertoire established I re-reviewed the interviews to narrow down the key features. Again, looking for the key questions of: what are the researchers doing with their discourse in these instances? What are they constructing?
- Relating to the above point: to identify the discourse actions of the repertoire I looked at what they allowed the speaker to do. I gave specific focus towards identifying what they allowed the speaker to achieve, asking the following: what constructions were the respondents making in their discourse? What commonalities existed across the constructions? How did this impact their formulations (such as identity)? What were the social actions of the discourse? In the case of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' I looked at the thematic similarities across all of the responses for these aspects.

The above formed the basis of starting the empirical presentation and analysis found in Chapter 4, a process which was replicated for the identification of all the repertoires that forms this thesis. The next two sub-sections elaborate more on the above discussion. These will outline thematic examples of what was tied to each of the three identified repertoires to define the criteria for the content selected against them (sub-section 3.7.4) and then the key identifiers for looking at the work each of the repertoires do (sub-section 3.7.5).

### **3.7.4 Criteria of the Interpretative Repertoires**

Below are some examples of the discourse content (subject matter) that counted as being tied to each repertoire. This is intended to provide an insight into what discourse content I focused on for each repertoire:

#### Categorisation and Stake Repertoire

- reference to personal career biography
- presentation of research/ career
- discussion of ties to parapsychology and/ or different fields of research
- reference to parapsychology and its relationship with academia, other research fields and the mainstream
- any reference to identity and/ or reflections on the presentation of that identity
- instances of anything that could be classed as category work, such as defining interpretation of labels
- any instance where the researcher is constructing/ referencing an attachment or position (stake affiliation)

#### Outsider Repertoire

- discussion towards parapsychology as being different from other fields
- references to “mainstream” and/ or references to parapsychology as “fringe”
- discussion of unfair treatment, such as bias
- outlining obstacles in career and/ or the field
- outlining personal experiences in relation to any of the above
- descriptions of career success and/ or failures
- justification for career success and/ or failures

### Reflection of Contingency Repertoire

- informal language and presentation
- references to contingent aspects in career and/ or scientific practice in general (contingent variable examples would be political or socio-cultural aspects influencing scientific judgement/ practice)
- reflections on careers and/ or the field of parapsychology
- any other discursive turns that could be considered a reflection
- any instance where the researcher is constructing a potential “insight” into the subject matter they are discussing

### **3.7.5 Identifying Actions of the Interpretative Repertoires**

After defining the common criteria of what comprised the interpretative repertoires the main part of the analysis then focused towards identifying the work the repertoires were doing. To explore the social actions of each repertoire I looked closely at how previous discourse analysis studies (those cited throughout the thesis) analysed and unpacked their repertoires. For example, Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) study analysed their repertoires by looking at the common thematic instances around their composition. Their ‘empiricist repertoire’ emerged from the observation that there were common ties between their researchers’ responses - and stemming from that, at certain points, these researchers used a particular formal style of presentation. From this they analysed and theorised what they might be achieving through such discursive acts - in this case preserving the presentation of science as a pure (non-contingent) endeavour.

For my analysis I took a similar approach, looking first at the common themes that were noticeable once I had narrowed down the criteria for the potential repertoires. Examples of this criteria has been outlined in the previous sub-section (3.7.4). After establishing that common themes were present (i.e. not isolated to just one or two of the researchers’ responses) I then focused on the following analytical considerations as starting points for analysing each repertoire (examples cited are all related to the ‘Outsider Repertoire’):

- The basic, primary actions achieved through the discourse. *For example, establishing an “outsider” group identity.*

- Secondary actions that are achieved through the same discourse. *For example, by establishing an “outsider” group identity this also begins to formulate an opposing “insider” group.*
- Presentations of parapsychology. *For example, as a fringe discipline.*
- Looking at how the identity of the researcher is being constructed in the communicative context. *For example, presenting themselves as an “underdog”, unfairly treated or even “lucky”.*
- Assessing the potential communicative strategies behind all of the above. *For example, accounting for success through using the concept of ‘luck’.*
- Establishing whether the responses operate on an individual (micro) level or more globalised (macro) level, or both. *For example, presentation of the researcher’s individual career as an outsider, versus presentation of the field as an outsider.*

Using these points I began to construct the empirical analysis around extract examples that highlighted the actions I had found as commonalities and what could be considered as distinct interpretative repertoires.

One of the key, unique, purposes of the current thesis is to extend the analysis of these interpretative repertoires beyond the point that all prior discourse analysis stops - by analysing and looking for an overarching theoretical concept that ties them together. To achieve this, once all three of the repertoires had been finalised and delineated, I attempted to look for a common social action that all three repertoires achieved through their discourse. From the analyses conducted across the empirical chapters there appeared to be one overriding theme: positioning. All three of the repertoires could be interpreted to share this same function. I used this as the starting point for my analysis that links the repertoires and presents connections between them (this analysis is presented in Chapter 7).

### **3.8 A Reflexive Framing**

Prior to presentation of the empirical analysis, a reflexive framing of the interviews and the role of the interviewer’s discourse should be included. Issues of reflexivity have been long-standing within discourse analysis. Fuhrman and Oehler (1986) highlight the significance of addressing the



“recurring issue of reflexivity” (1986: 293) within discourse analysis and that for any such analysis to succeed such issues needs adequate review (see also, Shapin, 1984; Mulkay, Potter and Yearley, 1983).

In the context of the current thesis, the interviewer’s use of the label “parapsychologist” and the reference to the researchers as “parapsychologist” should be considered. Section 3.4.2 outlines the questions the interviewer hoped to incorporate within the semi-structured interviews. Throughout these questions the interviewee was consistently referenced to as a “parapsychologist” and asked about their involvement and relationship to the field of parapsychology. Also, the correspondence sent to the researchers seeking their participation in the interviews presented the research as being focused on parapsychology in the UK and that the content of the interviews would revolve around their relationship to the field. The logic behind labelling them as “parapsychologists” stemmed from the selection criteria of their inclusion in the project, sourced from Carr’s (2008) overview of researchers associated with parapsychology currently (at time of publication) operating within in the UK. This article was used for all of the researcher’s approached for this thesis (with the exception of two researchers who were included in the study outside of Carr’s review - referenced in Section 3.3).

In the context of the interview questions, interaction and subsequent empirical analysis the interviewer’s use of the labels “parapsychology” and “parapsychologist” are used as generalised terminology. These are descriptives that were not intended to differentiate between the different facets of what parapsychology and research into the field represent. For example, in using the reference of “parapsychology” the term could be open to association with either proof positioned research, process positioned research, sceptical (critical) perspectives, anomalistic parapsychology or transpersonal psychology. As discussed in Chapter 1, research into parapsychology can adopt different empirical forms and analytical positions. Subsequently, the interviewer’s use of “parapsychology” and “parapsychologist” was intended as an umbrella term - comparable to how use of the term “psychology” can incorporate multiple facets of the discipline label (cognitive, social, criminology etc).

A reflexive view on this labelling choice can be analysed as influencing the emergent discourse within the interactive contexts of the interview setting. Having an ascribed label (and subsequent identity affiliation) presented by the interviewer: the interviewee’s choice of discourse response

may have been different than if the label of “parapsychologist” had not been used. There are two perspectives for how this issue can be interpreted in relation to the implemented methodology and empirical analysis of the thesis. Firstly, the interviewer should not have ascribed the identity of “parapsychologist” as a prior; or secondly, by utilising such phrasing the interviewer has opened the opportunity for different forms of discourse to emerge from the respondents in response to the ascribed label.

Beyond the use of such labels, some of the questions used in the interviews could be considered as positioning parapsychology in a certain context. In sub-section 3.4.2 of the current chapter the interviewer’s motivations towards the interview structure was cited as: *These areas were chosen to engage the researchers and get them to talk about about how parapsychology operated as a field within the current academic climate whilst also providing an insight into the world of the individual researcher, revealing their social and cultural experiences as parapsychologists.*

Extending from this, questions that address areas such as experienced bias or obstacles not only position the interviewees “as parapsychologists” they also can be viewed to promote a perception of parapsychology itself as a fringe entity. This engendered seeding of cultural values by the interviewer’s line of questioning may have been integral to the resulting repertoires that are analysed in the forthcoming chapters of this thesis.

Ultimately, the responses from the researchers cannot be viewed in isolation without also including a consideration of the role the interviewer’s discourse and the interview context. This issue of reflexivity will be discussed within the empirical analysis of Chapter 4 and the researchers’ use of categorisation work within a repertoire. Further considerations will be included in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 7 the reflexive framing discussed here will be reviewed again in the overall context of the thesis and the empirical findings. It should be noted that discussion of this issue of reflexivity is not intended to devalue the empirical analysis or mitigate findings within the current thesis - it is intended to draw awareness to the interviewer’s role within the communicative context of the interviews and to highlight the full interview as an interplay of discourse, avoiding sole focus on the researchers’ responses.

### 3.9 Empirical Presentation

The following three empirical chapters of the thesis will outline the main findings from the conducted interviews. Numerous themes regarding the possible interpretative repertoires apparent within the discourse will be discussed. Throughout, extensive extracts will be used from the interview data. Within the extracts the questions (or context) and discourse by the interviewer themselves is included due to the interpretative nature of the analytical approach - in the intention that it can be also used as “interpretative resource rather [than] treated as contaminate” (Duffy and O’Rourke, 2015: 411).

With regard to empirical representation, initially during the interviews participants were asked whether or not they wished to remain anonymous within the research - the response to which was mixed. As a result it was decided early in the process (for the sake of clarity) to render all interviewee responses anonymous. The comments and quotations themselves would be attributed to labels of “Researcher 1”, “Researcher 2” etc. and would in no way be referenced back to the original contributor’s identity. It should be noted that each label of “Researcher X” maintains a consistent identity within the transcriptions and overall thesis - therefore each response labelled “Researcher X” originates from the same person. For example, all of the extracts attributed to ‘R1’ are from the same person.

All interviewees are referred to throughout the thesis as a ‘researcher’ or ‘researchers’. When the empirical analysis references “the researcher” this is a direct reference to the interviewee *not* the interviewer or person conducting the research for the current thesis. The label of ‘researcher’ was chosen to represent the respondent/ interviewee within the thesis as this label is intended as a generic, generalised label that does not ascribe a direct identity within the analysis itself, in contrast to labels such as “parapsychologist” or “psychologist”.

The empirical section of the thesis has been split into three separate chapters, each focusing on a different interpretative repertoire:

Chapter 4 - the categorisation and stake repertoire

Chapter 5 - the outsider repertoire

Chapter 6 - the reflection of contingency repertoire

Each of these chapters focuses on the discourse that formulates a distinct interpretative repertoire regarding the interview data. Whilst these repertoires are segregated into chapters it must be noted that there are numerous links between them and commonalities. For example, the core notion of categorisation plus stake management within Chapter 4 has a fundamental association with notions of the insider-outsider constructions discussed in Chapter 5. In many respects, the same discursive constructs and sociological forces influence both instances, yet thematically one deals with the practices of constructing individual identity and the strategies invoked to manage presentation of career (stake), and the other deals with the more macro issue of the generalised concept of the field and grouped cultural constructions (insider-outsiders). Due to this, in some cases, the same extract will be used twice to illustrate different aspects of discussion - as more than one repertoire can be interpreted to be in the same piece of discourse.

Subsequently, whilst the empirical section is divided into three different chapters it should be viewed as a complete interconnected framework - Chapter 7 will present an overall analysis that links all of the empirical themes, presented in the prior chapters, into a unified summary discussion.

## CHAPTER 4: CATEGORISATION & STAKE

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### 4.1 Introduction

This first empirical chapter will discuss the presence of categorisation actions within the researcher's discourse throughout the interviews. The theme of the chapter will focus predominantly on instances of categorisation and definitional work that occurred when the interviewed researchers were discussing elements pertaining to identity - whether it be constructing presentations of their own purported personal stake affiliations with the field of parapsychology or presenting the field's identity in general. Collectively these elements combine to construct an interpretative repertoire. The chapter will discuss these features of the interview data, analyse their implementation within the discourse and theorise their strategic communicative purpose.

The next section (4.2) will provide a general introduction to the concept of categorisation and will introduce the broader sociological framework of stake management and identity construction in discourse. The third section (4.3) will then provide an overview of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' - using an extract from the interviews - and will discuss the interviewer's use of categories as well as the respondents'. Examples of the interviewed researchers' use of these concepts will then be analysed, followed by an exploration of the repertoire in more depth - presenting extracts from across the interview responses. The 'categorisation and stake repertoire' will then be analysed in more depth looking at how it may be interpreted as a discursive strategy within the communicative context. A reflexive framing of the analysis will also be examined in Section 4.8 that further considers the role of the interviewer's discourse towards the identified interpretative repertoire. Finally, the last section (4.9) will provide an overall discussion and summary of the material presented throughout the chapter and how this relates to the overall themes of the thesis.

## 4.2 Categorisation Through Discourse

When presented with questions relating to purported associations with parapsychology the researchers used their responses to construct an association with the field. They appeared to build representations of roles and affiliations with the field through their replies - seemingly constructing a presentation of varying levels of distance between themselves and the core identity of "parapsychology" through their discourse. This discursive work appeared to be attempts at categorisation management and presentation.

Categorisation construction and identity work within talk has been a central point of analytical focus through research into discourse. Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 3) outline how within discourse "different descriptions may be produced in which some 'identities' are emphasised and others are ignored or down-played". They go on to emphasise the active role of discourse in relation to this: "...identity may be a matter of being 'subject' to, or taking up positions within discourse, but also an active process of discursive 'work' in relation to other speakers" (2006: 18). Discourse analysis looks towards the performance of identities and categories, they are multiple and variable in their construction, not fixed or singular. From an ethnomethodological stance "by asserting a plurality of realities, constructionist[s] divorce themselves from a (purportedly naïve) common-sense view that there is just one reality" (Hester and Francis, 1997: 96). In constructionism and discourse analysis the ontological status of a particular identity or category is not a goal within the analytical focus. The following quote from Widdicombe (1998b) succinctly outlines this interpretative position:

"Conversation [and discourse] analysts are keen to point out that they make no intentionalist assumption; they do not, in other words assume an underlying self who brings about the actions accomplished in interaction. Nevertheless, the emphasis on interaction would seem to have several advantages in relation to the problems of the ontological status of the self, and of how to produce a social vision of selfhood without denying human agency...conversation [and discourse] analysis provides in rich technical detail how identities are mobilised in actual instances of interaction. In this way, conversation [and discourse] analysis avoids the problem of 'how subjects are positioned' or come to be incumbents of particular identities without the need for a theory of self. That is, instead of worrying about what kind of concept of self we need to explain how people are able to do things, conversation [and discourse] analysis focuses on the things they do. Agency, in the sense of an action orientation is thus intrinsic to the analysis without locating it in self-

conscious intentionality, cognitive process, or in abstract discourses.”

(Widdicombe, 1998b: 202-3)

‘Social identity theory’ and the associated ‘self-categorisation theory’ suggests that an individual’s social identity is related to their identification with a particular social group (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This form of attachment and identification takes the form of social categorisation which serves social and psychological goals (for example Brown, 2000). Whilst this approach does not encompass the active role of discourse and has been criticised by sociologists (such as Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995) it highlights the importance of considering categorisation within any analysis of forms of presentation that may relate to identity.

Sacks (1992) proposed membership categorisation analysis and the membership categorisation device, focusing on the situated and reflexive use of categories in everyday interaction - talk as ‘culture-in-action’ (Hester and Eglin, 1997). Categories are indexical, their deployment in discourse “takes a good part of [their] colour from the local surroundings” (Antaki, 2003). Within speech categorisations that are used are selections from alternatives, there are always different category choices available to the person producing the discourse (Sacks, 1992). Beyond Sacks the importance of discussing the use of categories within speech has been highlighted by Schegloff (1991, 2002); Edwards (1991) and Edwards (1997). From the literature, focus in this area has focused in a wide range of discursive contexts, for example:

- Makitalo and Saljo (2000) - institutions and categories
- Edwards (1998) - relationship counselling
- Eglin and Hester (1999) - newspaper reports
- Stokoe (2003) - neighbour mediation
- Watson (1983 and Wowk (1984) - police interrogations
- Hall and Danby (2003) - meeting talk
- Fitzgerald and Housley (2002) - news interviews
- He (1995) - educational talk

As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) conclude, “it is clear that categories have a crucial part to play in any study of conversational identity” (2006: 67).

## 4.3 Categorisation In the Interviews

### 4.3.1 The Interviewer's Role: A Reflexive Framing

In Chapter 3 (section 3.8) it was highlighted that throughout the interviews the interviewer referred to the researchers as “parapsychologists”. This label was used throughout all contexts of the interviewer content, for example referencing their work in the field of parapsychology and questions relating to their involvement or relationships in the area. What this represents is the interviewer ascribing an identity and categorisation to the interviewed researchers.

As such this factor needs to be at the forefront of the entire empirical analysis - the respondents were not given a blank canvas in the interactional context from which they could construct any identity formulation. Their responses can be interpreted as a response to this ascribed identity by the interviewer.

Analysis of identities and categories in discourse have demonstrated their significance, for example Tracy (2002); Zimmerman (1998); Psathas, (1999); Antaki, (2003); Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (2005). Collectively such studies highlight how through discourse people can ascribe particular identities and categories to themselves and each other, as well as resist them. Therefore a reflexive framing of the interviews that form the empirical analysis of both this chapter and the entire thesis must be considered against any theoretical proposals. The researchers that were interviewed can be interpreted as reacting towards the interviewer's use of the categorised label “parapsychologist” to identify their identity and their careers. As discussed in Section 4.2, categorisation is an important consideration in any investigation into discursive constructions, a notion mirrored by Antaki and Widdicombe (1998):

“Membership of a category is ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored) in local places and at certain times, and it does these things as part of the interactional work that constitutes people's lives...[it's] not that people passively or latently have this or that identity which then causes feelings and actions, but that they work up and work to this or that identity, for themselves and others, there and then, either as an end in itself or towards some other end.”

(Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 2)



The chapter will now look at an example of categorisation work through discourse from the interviews.

### 4.3.2 Invoking the Categorisation Repertoire

Building on the categorisation discussions and reflexive framing from above, this sub-section will focus on an extract from the interviews.

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#### EXTRACT 4A

[Interviewer's last previous questions were "I would like ask what is your history in relation to parapsychology? And what drew you to the subject?" - below is an extract compiled from a longer response/ interaction with the Interviewer spawning directly from this.]

1 **R1:** ...So by training I'm a cognitive psychologist actually...so I'm not a parapsychologist  
2 at all by any stretch of the imagination...

3 **Interviewer:** From what you are saying do you still consider yourself a psychologist as such that  
4 happens to be dealing with this area or would you now say you consider yourself  
5 more a parapsychologist?

6 **R1:** I consider myself to be a cognitive psychologist...

7 **Interviewer:** A cognitive psychologist?

8 **R1:** Yeah I would say that I'm a cognitive psychologist but, I err, but, I'm actually  
9 interested in some of these phenomena...

10 **R1:** ...More recently myself and [researcher name] who works here we are (sort of)  
11 putting together, or I'm putting together studies that look at erm some studies that  
12 look at eyewitness memory and false memory and paranormal belief so because my  
13 sort of previous life I sort of my research interest was in working memory, visuo-

14 spacial memory, I'm pretty, you know well versed in all the memory literature and  
15 sort of quite interested in some of the, how people's recollections of these events  
16 sort of pan out and the factors that influence those. So I suppose in that sense I am  
17 a parapsychologist (laughs) but the way that I'm coming at it isn't from a  
18 parapsychological point of view.

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In Extract 4A the interviewer has asked the researcher about their relationship to the field of parapsychology and his background. What follows is R1 breaking down his career and depicting ties to the field. In general, a surface level reading of the extract suggests that it is a careful presentation from R1 of what may constitute parapsychology and his role within that sector. He creates an artful distinction between that of conventional cognitive psychological work and parapsychology as a topic. Further analysis indicates that R1 is using his discourse to construct category associations and formulate a presentation of a particular identity.

The interviewer, leading up to this extract has asked about R1's history in relation to parapsychology and also asked what drew him to the subject. Immediately the interviewer has ascribed an identity of "parapsychologist" to R1 and implied they do indeed have ties with the field. R1's response can be interpreted as a reaction to the categorisation suggested by the interviewer. At the start of the extract R1 rejects the label of "parapsychologist" and presents his own categorisation of "cognitive psychologist" (Lines 1-2). He emphasises this presentation using the phrasing "actually" and "by any stretch of the imagination" to seemingly highlight the fact that, in his words, he is not a parapsychologist. When faced with further questions by the interviewer in Lines 3-5 and Line 7 about what category he should be associated with R1 again reiterates himself to be a "cognitive psychologist".

Later in the extract R1 builds on this categorisation choice to outline that he is interested in parapsychological phenomena but lists multiple facets of cognitive research areas (Lines 12-16). This listing can be viewed as a tactic to continue the discursive management of his categorisation construction. Having admitted interest in parapsychological phenomena R1 asserts his categorisation choice as "cognitive psychologist" by listing key lines of research associated with the area. At the end of the extract in Lines 16-18 R1 jokes and laughs about possibly being a parapsychologist but that "the way [he is] coming at it isn't from a parapsychological point of

view". This part of the response and the use of laughter or humour can be interpreted in a number of different ways. An immediate view could be that R1 is reflecting on his response or the elements of his career that he is presenting and is amused at some of aspect of his own response/ construction. A further interpretation could suggest that R1 is using the laughter as a tool for self-categorisation - literally laughing at the notion of himself being viewed as a parapsychologist and using this as a presentation aid.

Overall, Extract 4A is suggestive that the interviewed researchers were using their discourse to fashion distinct categorisation presentations and by extension identity constructions. R1 is disputing the categorisation assigned to him by the interviewer, using his response as a platform to shift the categorisation away from "parapsychologist" towards "cognitive psychologist". In addition to using discourse as a tool for categorisation selection the response can also be portrayed as a facilitator of stake management.

#### **4.4 Stake Management**

The role of stake management can be seen to have synergies with categorisation within discourse analysis. Widdicombe (1998b: 196) notes that "there is always something at stake in affirming or rejecting group categorisations". Furthermore she notes that a "speakers' resistance to category affiliation is a way of addressing the inferential consequences that might follow accepting the categorical identity" (1998a: 59).

Stake was one of the central aspect of Potter's (1996b) approach towards discourse analysis, he presents the concept as follows:

"Stake is a participants' issue which may be constructed in many different ways. It may be treated as something to do with features of a specific individual, or as something to do with their broader group allegiances; it may be as 'trivial' as a concern not to look foolish, or as 'important' as a desire not to be identified as a murder."

(Potter, 1996b: 114)

Wetherell (2001) argues the importance of considering stake as a key concern in any discursive

construction because fundamentally “people treat each other as having vested interests, desires, motives and allegiances (as having a stake in some position or other)” (2001: 21). This is applicable on both an individual level and that of group membership (Edwards and Potter, 1992). A recent research example portraying the importance of stake was Walker et. al’s (2015) study of wind farm developers and their analysis of this group’s strategy for managing community perceptions. Walker et. al (2015) highlighted how discursive stake management by the developers allowed them to tackle detrimental perceptions, portraying potentially ‘vested interests’ and communicating benefits.

Stake management along with its production of associated attributes and group affiliations is an integral aspect of identity construction within discourse. Lee and Roth (2004) outline the importance of considering identity construction during the interview paradigm, where “both participants and researchers are active agents whose identities are constituted in the process... [interviews] are sites whereby identity and issues of self-presentation are accomplished”. A sentiment which is echoed by Billig’s broader consideration of opinion orientated discourse:

“Our belief’s and attitudes do not merely occur in our heads, but they too belong to wider social contexts of controversy...In indicating our attitudes, we do more than merely express our personal beliefs. We also locate ourselves within a public controversy.”

(Billig, 1991: 43)

For the current thesis, when considered in this context, the proposed ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ can be viewed as a device to manage both identity and affiliation. Through the use of category construction the respondent actively manages their stake and perceived interest towards ideological constructs - in this case parapsychology. Potter (1996b: 113) implicated that stake management is a significant aspect of discourse and that “descriptions are often used *precisely* because they manage issues of interest”. He presents stake as:

“At the strongest, these notions are used to suggest that the description’s speaker, or the institution responsible for the description, has something to gain or lose; that they are not disinterested. They have a stake in some course of actions which the description relates to, or there are personal, financial or power considerations that come into play. Descriptions may be broadly inspected in relation to a backdrop of competences, projects, allegiances, motives and values.”

(Potter, 1996b: 124)

Andersson (2010) depicts a detailed presentation regarding the mechanics of stake and interest within rhetoric:

“Stake is defined as a *strategy play*, the medium and process where there is something to gain or lose - the interest. Interest is the contested content, *the desirable sought-after content and preferable outcome* that is at and in risk. In short this means that...stake [is] a rhetorical resource making it possible to identify specific preferable world views and objectives - interests. Interest becomes a functional notion to move beyond the text and connect it to a broader societal context, to move beyond the place - making it possible to identify [ideology] in action...Stake can be used to discount the significance of a description or to rework its character. In this way the use of stake is an attempt to present a vision of the the world, that things are the way they are or should be, according to the speaker.”

(Andersson, 2010: 8)

Emerging from this significance of the role of stake within discourse, Edwards and Potter (1992) theorised the potential for a ‘dilemma of stake or interest’ (1992: 158), whereby the respondent needs to represent interests, representations or socio-cultural groups without overtly explicitly being observed to do so. The threat of which may lead to their accounts being discounted - for example through being accused of subjectivity and overt bias. Wetherell (2001) expands on this conceptual framework by specifying that:

“Questions of stake are key concerns of participants in an interaction. People treat each other as having vested interests, desire, motives and allegiances (as having a stake in some position or other) and this is a problem if one wants one’s version of events to be heard as authoritative and persuasive, factual, not interested or biased but the simple plain, unvarnished truth...”

(Wetherell, 2001: 21)

LeCouteur, Rapley and Augoustinos (2001) have investigated the roles of stake and interest within political contexts and outlined the highly strategic element surrounding these elements in discourse - limiting or ‘disavowing’ (2001) one’s stake towards particular issues may have beneficial consequences regarding the individual’s perceived identity. One such example would be ‘stake inoculation’ (Potter, 1996b) in which the respondent puts forward an account to disprove and counter-claim that the respondent possesses a stake in the issue being discussed.

Stake (and interest) can therefore be viewed as a fundamental rhetorical resource whereby it may be seen as advantageous or detrimental to align identity constructs against certain values and ideas, motivating people to express representations and specific types of descriptions - managing this through their discourse (Potter, 1996b; Andersson, 2010). One example of this is Wooffitt's (2000) investigation of psychic practitioners and their presentation of claimed paranormal phenomena. His study found that the psychics were demonstrating what Potter (1996b) defined as stake management: "...their utterances are designed to establish that they have no commitment to, or investment in, the information being proposed, nor that they have any interest in the sitter's acceptance of it" (Wooffitt, 2000: 466).

What this represents from Potter's (1996b) original presentation of stake management is that actors in a social interaction consider themselves and other actors as individuals who can benefit from, and thus have a stake in, their actions and constructions. Stemming from this are dilemmas of stake (Potter, 1996b) whereby the actor struggles to establish an account that can be interpreted as simultaneously factual and a stable representation of the world, whilst also managing the deconstruction of other (contradictory) accounts as the product of personal or group interests. Such concepts can readily be witnessed in politically oriented rhetoric, where presentations of stake or interest is a pervasive concern when a topic is addressed that is perceived as contentious and controversial by the speaker and/ or the audience (for example Augoustinos, LeCouteur and Soyland 2002). In summary, aligning oneself with certain concepts in discursive constructions can be advantageous or a disadvantage to the perception of the individual in the communicative context - as such it is potentially beneficial to co-ordinate such alignment.

In the context of the current thesis, when the historical progress and acceptance of parapsychology is considered - from its struggles to gain scientific legitimacy as a source of consistent criticism and scepticism (see Chapter 1) - the use of stake management could be considered highly pertinent. Within the interview setting, alignment or dissociation of stake towards parapsychological concepts, research etc. may be considered a distinct strategy for managing identity constructs within discursive utterances. To illustrate, when stake management is introduced as a concept the category work being conducted by R1 in Extract 4A adopts more significant meaning. Between the labels of "parapsychologist" and "cognitive psychologist", as well

as rejecting and constructing his own category membership he is also managing his levels of stake affiliation between the two.

Throughout the interviews instances of category and stake management tended to occur more noticeably when the researchers were discussing the topic of perceived ties with parapsychology. More specifically, the researchers when questioned about precise definitions of the field's identity, and their relationship to it, were observed to use discourse that indicated they were using their responses to construct category presentation actions. Subsequently, it can be proposed that the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' is a fundamental characteristic of the interview data.

The next section of the current chapter will continue to analyse the features of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' but will also discuss the possible use of this repertoire as a refined communication tactic along with the prospective benefits and motivation of utilising such a strategy.

#### **4.5 Categorisation and Stake Management In Action**

Throughout the interview data numerous forms of categorisation work and stake management were detectable as a possible discursive strategy - and subsequently an interpretative repertoire. The interviewed researchers tended to deploy this interpretative repertoire with high frequency when they were discussing the subject of their relationship with parapsychology. More specifically, this occurred within areas of the interview that focused on whether they would perceive themselves as parapsychologists or through aspects which dealt with definitions of what constitutes parapsychology (regarding subject matter and intellectual boundaries). Following on from the introduction of the concepts of categorisation and stake management, the current chapter will now look at detailed discourse examples from the interview data.

The analysis of Extract 4A as a piece of discourse (in sub-section 4.3.2) provided a good starting point to begin breaking down the key features of the categorisation and stake repertoire. A longer and more elaborate instance of the repertoire is evident in the following response from R5:

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## EXTRACT 4B

1 **Interviewer:** Do you think it's any easier now to follow a career in parapsychology? Or do you  
2 think the same sort of obstacles that you faced are present?

3 **R5:** I think it depends what we mean by parapsychology. I mean I don't want to wax too  
4 lyrical about the different definitions. But I think there has been a subtle shift over  
5 the past 5 or 10 years so that, and this I think wasn't isn't just a recent phenomena I  
6 think it was something actively pursued by Bob. He always said to me and to many  
7 people who went through the PhD process before me; "you need to have more than  
8 one string to your bow". And just being known as a parapsychologist, inverted  
9 commas, isn't enough – that you need to effectively have, err I hate this term, but  
10 'sellable qualities' that are beyond just parapsychology. So, I think that that's meant  
11 that to a certain extent, although parapsychology is definitely an identity, for me  
12 personally I don't just include myself as a parapsychologist - I tend to see myself as  
13 a psychologist, of which a strong aspect of what I do is parapsychology. Um, but I  
14 don't think it can be separated out from other things that I do that might not be  
15 regarded as parapsychology. So I think within that, I think if you were just trying to,  
16 then again I hate this phrase but it's the only thing that comes to mind, 'market  
17 yourself' as a parapsychologist alone, it would probably still be difficult to try and  
18 get work on that, if only because the H.E. sector doesn't need that many  
19 parapsychologists, but will need other types of psychologist and therefore its being  
20 able to show versatility and that you can, kind of, represent different aspects of  
21 psychology, one of which (hopefully) will be supported as parapsychology. And I'd  
22 like to hope that people don't have necessarily the negative view of parapsychology  
23 that it has had in the past. But again it depends how it's approached when you're  
24 applying for jobs.

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Extract 4B shares commonalities with Extract 4A. Fundamentally, across both extracts the researcher is constructing a presentation of their relationship and identity towards the concept of being a parapsychologist - behind which are discursive actions of category selection and



personalised stake management.

At the beginning of the extract, as with Extract 4A, the interviewer is portraying the interviewed researcher as being attached to parapsychology by asking them about the field and about career aspects of the field. R5's immediate response is one that questions the boundaries and definitions of 'parapsychology' (Lines 3-4). In particular, R5's use of the phrase "I think it depends what we mean by parapsychology" (Line 3), is used as a platform that allows R5 to diffuse the question posed by the interviewer and provides a platform for him to direct the interaction. It provides a foundation for R5 to freely construct their discourse in whatever (identity) direction they choose from this point.

Further into the extract R5 can be seen to be using categorisation construction and personal stake management. Between Lines 11-13 he portrays 'parapsychology' as an "identity" but then asserts that "personally I don't just include myself as a parapsychologist" and that he views himself as a "psychologist" which has a "strong aspect" of parapsychology. In this passage R5 is choosing the category of 'psychologist' to be associated with, as opposed to 'parapsychologist'. His statement around this could be read as an argument that he could be attached to either categorisation label - however he defines himself towards the psychology category. This in itself is also a forthright form of stake management - whereby through his response he is carefully managing his presentation of stake towards either of the concepts. He does not completely abandon the category of 'parapsychology' and still references "aspects" of attachment to the field such as his connection(s) to Bob Morris.

As a response to the interviewer, the extract can be interpreted as R5 reacting to the interviewer's portrayal of him as a parapsychologist. R5's reply could be viewed as an opportunity for him to build an identity presentation in response to category ascription. For example, his reference to "parapsychologist, inverted commas" (Lines 8-9) is an interesting turn of phrase - suggestive of R5 referencing possible interpretational issues that may surround definitions of parapsychology. This phrase could be directed at the interviewer's perspective of him as a parapsychologist or it could be a similar reasoning device as that used in Lines 3-4. By referencing the lack of a precise definition it creates a certain freedom within his discourse to construct the definitions, categories and stake associations that he wants to present through the response.

The first thing that is immediately noticeable in Extract 4B is the the length of discourse R5 takes before they actually begin to address the interviewer's question directly. A significant period of dialogue occurs before R5 addresses the core question asked by the interviewer. Immediately within the first line of his response the question(s) posed by the interviewer are countered and repositioned by R5; "I think it depends what we mean by parapsychology..." (Line 3). This immediately diffuses the question-answer structure of the interview format and creates the opportunity for R5 to control the discursive interaction – enabling him to direct his account and manage the direction of the subject matter, in this case his stake towards parapsychology. Ultimately, this opening within the first line of his response is a construction of flexible positioning - the researcher is presenting an open response where their categorisation selections can be interpreted in different ways in the context of the interview. It is an avoidance of providing a direct categorisation selection and demonstrates an awareness of counter positions or constructions. This action in itself provides a foundation for the respondent to freely construct their discourse in whatever (identity) direction they choose from this point. This flexible positioning presents an opportunity to construct an open identity within the discourse - one that affords different interpretations and perceptions of stake, thus potentially nullifying potential counter arguments or proposals.

Eventually, within the extract R5 moves the dialogue towards himself (Lines 11-12); "...although parapsychology is definitely an identity, for me personally I don't just include myself as a parapsychologist - I tend to see myself as a psychologist, of which a strong aspect of what I do is parapsychology. Um, but I don't think it can be separated out from other things that I do that might not be regarded as parapsychology" (Lines 11-13).

This section continues categorisation and stake management of the response through R5's positioning himself as a psychologist that has some element of parapsychology attached. He states that a "strong aspect" (Line 13) of what he does is parapsychological in nature but then attempts to move away from that attribution, citing his involvement with psychology based endeavours. In this passage R5 can be interpreted as promoting an identity that is attached more strongly to psychology than that of parapsychology.

Following the shifting synopsis of his career, R5 then provides some insight and possible reasoning for this approach in his discourse. Directly after his 'definition' of his career label(s) he discusses its

apparent impact on the academic job sector and the need to “market yourself” (Lines 16-17) - explaining that presenting oneself as a parapsychologist would have detrimental implications on attaining a job. R5 appears to be providing some justification for the categorisation and stake selections within his response. In this context, it can be interpreted as an attempt to amend for the potentially fragmented logic of the interaction - an interpretation of his own explanation that stems from his presentation of mixed psychological and parapsychological attributes within the interview. As such, this balancing action appears to be an attempt to qualify the implementation of the ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ whilst simultaneously preserving the legitimacy of the researcher’s account(s) along with their constructed identity.

Throughout the extract R5 seemingly verbalises a conflict regarding his stake and the consequences of aligning himself with one identity category versus another. At numerous points there are attempts to present justification of his labelling of being either a parapsychologist or a psychologist. Social pressures and perceptions of the field are intimated as being a primary cause for this unwillingness to commit himself fully to the description of “parapsychologist” - hence the need to “market yourself”. Subsequently, it supports the notion that the repertoire utilised within the discourse is a strategy centring on identity management.

To again revisit the opening phrase of “I think it depends what we mean by parapsychology...” (Line 3). The line can be interpreted as a prime example of the ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ which the researchers tended to employ when engaging in discourse that pertained to association with the field - and their identities in general. Deploying such discursive devices immediately provides an opening within the interaction to counter alternative positions (and repertoires). Such alternative perspectives may indicate more negative qualities associated with areas discussed the field - for example purported paranormal elements of the field. Thus, the categorisation construction strategy allows the respondent(s) to essentially dilute what they “mean by parapsychology” and choose a more open and less committed identity, stake relationship, to the field. This is especially pertinent when the consideration of the interviewer’s category attribution is considered within the analysis. The interviewer’s questions infer the researcher as a parapsychologist and have thus ascribed a category to them. In this sense the responding repertoire is essentially constructing an identity that is open to multiple interpretations as a response to this ascription - representing a moderated, managed, commitment to parapsychology and thereby insulating against alternative positions (such as

negative feedback or judgements). Subsequently, the repertoire the appears to address more broader globalised issues. Through using alignments to particular categorisation choices alternative stances and interpretations of parapsychology are seemingly accounted for. This linguistic device, therefore, presents the opportunity to counter such potential challenges within the interaction.

The following discourse from R6 is a further illustration of the themes discussed:

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#### EXTRACT 4C

1 **Interviewer:** So would you classify yourself now as still a psychologist or would you classify  
2 yourself as a parapsychologist?

3 **R6:** That's a really difficult question to answer because it all depends on how you define  
4 psychology and parapsychology. And then there's this other category 'anomalous  
5 psychology' somewhere between the two. Erm, I guess I would have to say I'm a  
6 parapsychologist but that would be taking a broad definition of the term  
7 'parapsychology'. So, some parapsychologists think that parapsychology is only  
8 about psi testing and on that definition then only a little part of me is a  
9 parapsychologist, because I don't do a huge amount of psi testing. But at Edinburgh,  
10 the Koestler Unit we've always taken a very broad definition so we included things  
11 like the psychology of belief in the paranormal, the psychology of deception, and the  
12 history of parapsychology and psychical research – all under the heading of  
13 'parapsychology'. So under that wider definition, yes I would describe myself as a  
14 parapsychologist...It really depends on how narrowly you want to divide it, to define  
15 it. And some researchers think that if it's not psi if it's not psi testing then that's  
16 anomalous psychology. But I actually think that parapsychology is broader than just  
17 the psi question anyway...

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The question posed by the interviewer is slightly different compared to the two previous extracts. In Extract 4C the question presented to the researcher presents two potentially ascribed

categorisations and is phrased more as a choice between ‘parapsychologist’ and ‘psychologist’. The researcher is being asked to claim allegiance to a specific categorisation and academic identity. In response, R6 reformulates the question into a complex problem of category definition, a strategy which is reminiscent of the strategy invoked by R5 in the previous example (Extract 4B).

In Extract 4C, Lines 3-5, the question is repackaged and reinterpreted towards the definition criteria of academic labels (“psychology” and “parapsychology”). This can be interpreted as distinct categorisation work within the discourse. R6 has moved his response towards an area that allows him to construct categorisations and what they represent. Also, by positioning his answer as a symptom of definitions of these areas he is using a form of globalisation, shifting the context of the discourse away from personalised elements and their association to him towards reference of external factors (definition of the field).

Between Lines 3-12 R6 attempts to present a definition and relationship between parapsychology and psychology. This passage of discourse can be interpreted in different ways. Either it is an attempt to move the interaction towards a more globalised frame of reference, as noted above - avoiding a direct, personal specific construction response to the interviewers question. Alternatively, it is potentially a careful construction of definition that allows the researcher to present categorisation boundaries and manage his stake towards those constructs in different ways. By creating this foundation of ‘definition’ it creates the opportunity for R6 to use his discourse towards presenting his categorisation definitions. This then allows for the building of an identity of either psychologist, parapsychologist or even anomalistic psychologist (Lines 4-5) within the response. [Please refer to Chapter 2 (section 1.3.2) for a definition of anomalistic psychology].

After these categorisation constructions as to what may constitute parapsychology (Lines 3-12), R6 states that “yes I would describe myself as a parapsychologist” (Line 13). At this point he is making a definitive statement of stake membership and category alignment. However, immediately following this he reverts back and re-iterates the supposed problems of definition and classification (Lines 14-17). In this instance, it is apparent that once the researcher has made a strong statement of affiliation with parapsychology he then chooses to present a more open membership of stake and realign his categorisation selection. This is achieved by highlighting the “definition” problems. In the context of the discursive interaction the presentation of such problems allow the researcher manoeuvrability in their response. In Extract 4C R6 has used his

discourse to enable an opportunity to present his identity and stake towards either category of 'psychology' or 'parapsychology'. In a similar vein to R5, R6 instantly demonstrates an awareness of alternative positions; providing himself room for category manoeuvrability within the communication. R6 by stating (from Line 3 onwards in the extract) that classification and thus labelling is dependent on how one defines 'parapsychology' he presents a counter-point for any oppositional negative sentiment or judgement towards his position - any disagreement or dissonance within the interaction can revert back to this and become countered by the already established problem of definition. This technique builds a foundation from which the following account(s) can then expand upon and promptly provides an instance where the researcher has addressed potential oppositional positions or repertoires - whilst simultaneously managing their level of stake towards a particular categorisation construct (in this case, parapsychology).

Another element that is also worth analysing is the categorisation work in Extract 4C towards proof-versus-process interpretations of parapsychology. In his response, R6 presents an interpretation of boundaries between different interpretations of what constitutes parapsychology. One view of this according to R6 is of parapsychology as just "psi testing" (Lines 7-8) - which can be read as focused mainly on the proof aspect. However, he aligns himself more with a broader view of the field that encompasses more inter-disciplinary subject matter, looking at the process behind parapsychology. He cites the "psychology of belief in the paranormal, the psychology of deception, and the history of parapsychology...all under the heading of 'parapsychology'" (Lines 11-13). This "wider definition" (Lines 13) is an interesting delineation from R6, as he appears to be defining his own interpretation of what constitutes the category and of being a parapsychologist. This constructive instance arguably may be in direct response to the interviewer's question that asks for classification of him as being either a psychologist or parapsychologist. Ultimately, his response to the question is that he can be interpreted as either category, but in his own words is dependent "on how narrowly you want to divide it, to define it" (Lines 14-15). His discourse has introduced a position where R6 now has flexible categorisation choices and within the space of his response he can be either. In stake terms he has presented a dualistic response that aligns his personal stake with both subject areas - ascription of stake to a particular category is now contingent on the definition and subjective interpretation of the labelled categories.

## **4.6 Categorisation and Stake Management as a Communicative Strategy**

The preceding sections have introduced the 'categorisation and stake repertoire', and demarcated the predominant aspects of this form of communication in relation to the interview data.

Following this establishment, the current section will now continue to explore the features present within the repertoire but will also direct the discussion towards a consideration of why utilising categorisation and stake management could be an effective communicative strategy.

### **4.6.1 Personal Identity Construction and Stake Management**

In the extracts discussed in the chapter so far, the use of categorisation and stake work can be interpreted as an attempt to present identity formulations through the interaction around areas that enable the individual to manage associations towards different concepts. Primarily, within these extracts this is occurring when the researcher is talking about the topic of association(s) with parapsychology. These instances can be viewed largely as a consequence of the interviewer ascribing this area through their questions towards the interviewed researcher. As noted within the current thesis, the field of parapsychology itself exists as a controversial academic discipline, polarising opinion and generating significant controversy. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the use of this repertoire may simply be a strategy by the researcher to shield themselves from the perception of such elements within the interview context - via management of their associations (stake) through their discourse and offering their own defined categorisations.

Management of this nature is achieved through the careful presentations of stake and category attachment - by building definitions and assertions of attachment - the repertoire allows the respondent to control the levels of metaphorical distance between themselves and the constructs they are being questioned about within the interview (in this case parapsychology). Ultimately, the repertoire enables them to direct definitions of both themselves and the field. Through this management the repertoire engineers the ability to re-negotiate the respondent's categorisation at any point in the future of the communicative context. Construction of their category allegiance remains a fluid proposition and is never directly cemented to a particular ideological position, as seen in the previous discourse example from the interview (Extract 4C). The respondents are able to associate closely with certain subjects or avoid a definite association of stake towards a particular subject or element. Based on this interpretation the discourse repertoire assumes a

deeper significance, becoming a cogent strategy for identity management. Invoking discursive categorisation work concerning stake enables the individual the communicative space to fashion a flexible identity through their accounts.

When considered in this context the 'categorisation and stake' repertoire can be viewed as a device to manage both identity and affiliation. Through the use of self-association and strategic alignment the respondent actively manages their stake towards ideological constructs - in this case, the researchers towards parapsychology. This has direct correlations with the literature discussed throughout the current chapter - for example Potter (1996b) and Andersson (2010). Relating this literature to the current research, it can be seen that the 'categorisation and stake' repertoire employed by the respondents acts as a sophisticated, constructionist form of stake management. By seeding specific alignments and associations within their accounts the repertoire allows the researcher to create a form of *stake inoculation*. Their stake, interest, and by extension, their attachment to concepts (like parapsychology) are constructed within the presented discourse - allowing them to imbue distance against their presented identity towards certain areas or definitions. As a tool the repertoire acts as a function to enable the researcher to asserting an attachment with a particular identity. Active categorisation alignment, definition construction and stake management against these identities are central aspects that allow the interviewed researchers to closely manage the presentation of association and interest towards specific elements or affiliations.

In terms of identity management, through the distinct features of the 'categorisation and stake' repertoire the respondent is able to manipulate and selectively display associations with socio-cultural aspects. In the case of the current data sample, the interviewed researchers are able to distance or align themselves from purported firm ties with areas or subjects, such as parapsychology, through their discourse. Consequently, their identities remain open and directed through their rhetoric. Solely in the context and confines of the interview discourse, on the basis of the accounts the researchers control and manage the attribution of labels to themselves as parapsychologists or non-parapsychologists through the repertoire. This in itself can be viewed as a means to insulate the respondent from potential attributions associated with the field (negative or otherwise) and to alternatively promote desired identity ascriptions.

Use of this repertoire can therefore be proposed as a tool to selectively construct a fluid identity



for the respondent - whereby it remains an open proposition to designate a label or categorisation to the individual within their discourse. In the discursive context of the current set of interviewees, maintaining an open identity can be interpreted as highly beneficial. Carefully managing ties to parapsychology and controlling definitions dilutes any negative association that may emerge from being linked with the controversial aspects of the field. In essence this embodies a form of flexible positioning, where the respondent creates a fluid identity that is controlled by their discourse, as witnessed in Extract 4B. Subsequently, this creates manoeuvrability in the interaction, presenting optional choices for the respondent to pursue depending on the directional flow of the communicative situation. For example, if the other member(s) of the interaction display overt hostility towards parapsychology then the researcher has created the option to dilute any perceived category association should they choose to do so. An example of this would be in Extract 4C where R6 has created a discursive context that allows him to control the issue of definition and his subsequent alignment with those definitions of criteria. This selective presentation can hypothetically also be deployed to challenge perceptions of the field itself, as well as guarding personal identity.

These aspects of identity management and its relationship to the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' will be discussed further in the next sub-section with specific reference to the interview data. The discussion will also be expanded to consider more further reaching implications for identity construction towards the field of parapsychology itself and boundary management.

#### **4.6.2 Macro Identity Management**

So far, the analysis of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' has largely focused on the researchers' use of the repertoire to construct their own personal identity, categorisation associations and management of their stake towards different interests through their discourse. This reflects an individualistic, micro, perspective of the repertoire and the theoretical use of this as a rhetorical strategy. The analysis will now shift towards a more macro analysis.

As well as managing personal categorisation formulations and stake affiliation the use of the repertoire could be interpreted as a tool to construct and manage boundaries of subjects/ areas, primarily relating to parapsychology. From this perspective, the use of discourse moves away from

formulating the researchers' categorisation ties and associations, and more towards positioning the field of parapsychology in different contexts. This consideration can be seen in the interview data. On a general level, by utilising the key features of the repertoire such as category alignment and definition work the researchers can be seen to be re-positioning parapsychology and actively re-constructing the field's identity in their accounts. Such discourse activity also relates directly to the categorisation choices in their responses and ultimately their presented identity. For example:

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#### **EXTRACT 4D**

[Extracted from the middle of a longer extract where R5 talks about different fields interacting with parapsychology.]

- 1 **R5:** ...you know its that diversification, that blurring of the identity of what is a  
2 parapsychologist...
- 

In this very short extract R5 can broadly be interpreted as seeding elements of categorisation construction. They are proposing an unspecific and open identity formulation - by simultaneously citing "diversification" (Line 1) and then not providing a definitive explanation of what may define being a parapsychologist in this utterance. Ultimately they are leaving an open context for categorisation without being forthright. Terms such as "diversification" and "blurring of the identity" are open statements that refrain from definitive references of what that actual identity may pertain to.

This can be viewed as an attempt by R5 to re-construct and manage the identity of parapsychology as a field - not just their personal identity in relation to this. By referring to "diversification and "blurring of the identity" R5 is achieving two things. Firstly he is laying the foundations for potentially building his own categorisation definitions, secondly he is managing the stake of the field. This can be interpreted as an attempt to construct the boundaries of the field in a more open context.

Ultimately, this is achieved through the repertoire in the same way that personal categorisation formulation and stake management was addressed (as discussed earlier in the chapter). In Extract

4D R5 does not clarify in any detail or delineate this portrayed “diversification” or what the identity of a parapsychologist may represent as a blurred entity. What occurs as a result is that parapsychologists - and by extension parapsychology as a field - are constructed as having a fluid identity. Subsequently, this open interpretation positions the field in an open context - where it can be easily re-positioned against any counter or critical positions that may emerge. So R5 is denoting this “blurring of the identity” in their discourse without any specificity - if any negativity is generated towards a particular perspective of this then the fluid construct they have created allows R5 to easily re-frame and re-categorise. This has close ties to the previous extracts presented in this chapter (Extracts 4A and 4B). The analysis of both of those extracts revealed the researchers generating a fluid identity that is open to different positioning classifications of categorisation association. Therefore, this particular repertoire is used in an attempt to manage and construct both the boundaries of the field and its category/ stake associations via discourse formulations, therefore parapsychology becomes re-framed through the constitutive nature of the discourse.

Within the interviews the researchers can be interpreted as “blurring” the construction of their (presented) personal identity. A concept which also extends towards the more global constructions of categorisations around practicing parapsychology - such as whether research is proof or process orientated. Within their discourse the respondents are doing categorisation work on this concept and creating a fluid, interchangeable construct of what parapsychology represents on different levels. Subsequently, it is not only their personal biographies that are being assembled, the boundaries of academic fields are also seemingly managed within their responses.

One such illustration of this is cited below in Extract 4E, where the researcher constructs the concept that anomalistic psychology is a re-representation of what can be interpreted as parapsychology:

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#### **EXTRACT 4E**

[R1 has just made a reference to anomalistic psychology]

- 1 **Interviewer:** I’ve noticed it’s on the A-Level syllabus, do they just refer to it as anomalistic
- 2 psychology?

3 **R1:** Anomalistic psychology. The psychology of anomalous experience...

4 **Interviewer:** *[In background, overlapping]* Really?

5 **R1:** Its not called parapsychology. Which also might make it more palatable. And again  
6 its all about using psychological theory to explain this sort of stuff - to explain  
7 certain types of perception or to explain certain types of experience. And again, it's  
8 not the dice rolling stuff...and that's used to set the historical context. But most of  
9 the stuff that gets...the important stuff is belief and personality.

---

Within this account R1 is utilising the key aspects of his discourse to promote certain formulated categorisations. He uses the interviewer's questions around anomalistic psychology to build the category. In Extract 4E "anomalistic psychology" (Line 3) is presented as potentially more "palatable" (Line 5) than parapsychology. R1 is building a categorisation through his response and detailing defining features of this category. He details "psychological theory" (Line 6) as a core approach for investigating or explaining phenomena. In Line 8 he is dismissive of prior parapsychological research paradigms by stating "it's not the dice rolling stuff" which is then reduced to just "historical context". He builds on this categorisation presentation by then saying that "the important stuff is belief and personality" (Line 9). This last line again promotes the "psychological theory" elements referenced earlier in the response and also acts to again construct this categorisation of 'anomalistic psychology' as not being attached to core parapsychological elements. As such, R1's discourse can be viewed as not only actively constructing a categorisation presentation but also managing the perceived boundaries of academic subjects. These definitions remain quite open and fluid within the account as R1 does not describe or elaborate his depiction of anomalistic psychology and its relationship to parapsychology further. Within this extract the description of anomalistic psychology and its relationship to parapsychology is absent in the discourse, R1 refrains from providing any clear definition of either term or elaborates fully how they may coincide or differ within academic circles (from his presented perspective). The amorphous phrase of "stuff" is used four times in quick succession - highlighting an absence of detailed construction of the category.

R1's response can be viewed as a position to create an alternative interpretation of

parapsychology, re-framing it towards a different perspective of the field. This position means that within the communicative context any negative propositions that are raised can be attributed by R1 to his constructed label of parapsychology, whilst more positive elements transgress towards his constructed label of 'anomalistic psychology'. Dualistically, this allows R1 to manage the presentation of both his personal stake and also the stake of the field of parapsychology itself within his discourse. Therefore if a negative attribution is communicated which is either respondent or field specific he has provided an immediate 'get-out-clause' - whereby that negativity could be associated with the construct of parapsychology, allowing R1 to construct an alternative presentation of his role (potentially towards the proposed 'anomalistic psychology').

The next sub-section will now look more closely at the concept of boundary management.

#### 4.6.3 Boundary Management

The interviewed researchers' use of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' can be considered as a sophisticated mechanism by which boundaries around concepts such as academic fields are constructed and managed. This boundary work, which was noticeable in Extract 4E can be witnessed further in the following two pieces of discourse:

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#### EXTRACT 4F

1 **Interviewer:** Do you think there is a kind of historical baggage associated with the subject?

2 **R1:** Um...I think so yeah...There's just the whole title of it, the fact that its called itself  
3 'PARApsychology' for so many years suggests that's it not real psychology. And I  
4 think there has been an attempt to move away from that with renaming it, getting it  
5 onto the A-Level syllabus, calling it the 'Psychology of Anomalous Experience' as  
6 opposed to 'Parapsychology', which tries to bring it into the mainstream as well...

7 **Interviewer:** It tries to make it a more acceptable subject?

8 **R1:** Yeah...indeed...'The Psychology of Anomalous Experience'...rather than being...its

9 psychology now, for just of strange experiences. Its not parapsychology which means  
10 its on the fringe – its within the fold, in the same way in which cognitive psychology  
11 is, and social psychology and health psychology.

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#### EXTRACT 4G

1 **Interviewer:** Do you think that that in that sense the label of parapsychology itself is a hinderance  
2 to the subject? Do you think if it became something, such as for example  
3 anomalistic psychology, it would help the subject or hinder it?

4 **R4:** Well we need to remember that anomalistic psychology is something completely  
5 different and it is trying to answer the same questions as parapsychology does but  
6 from a completely different point of view. Because what anomalistic psychology is  
7 trying to do is to provide a mainstream psychology explanation, mainly sceptic, a  
8 sceptic's point of view, kind of explanations, to what parapsychology might refer to  
9 as paranormal. Um, so you know anomalistic psychology is an example for  
10 something which doesn't really walk hand in hand and in many ways contradicts  
11 what parapsychology is trying to achieve.

---

In both Extracts 4F and 4G the researchers are using their discourse to manipulate the presentation of the boundaries by which categories around parapsychology are interpreted. R2 within Extract 4F can be seen to be establishing the notion that the core content of the re-framed 'Psychology of Anomalous Experience' is "within the fold" (Lines 8-10) and subsequently should be considered as part of the mainstream. Similarly, R4 in Extract 4G is attempting to delineate what anomalistic psychology may represent. This interpretation continues the construction of categories through discursive action - building representations of subject boundaries. R4 refers to anomalistic psychology as attempting to answer the "same questions as parapsychology but from a completely different point of view" (Lines 5-6). In the discourse that follows (Lines 7-9) he starts representing these concepts, for example, "...mainly sceptic, a sceptic's point of view, kind of explanations, to what parapsychology might refer to as paranormal...".

In Extract 4F R1 uses the interviewer's question about historical baggage as a prompt to present a discursive delineation between 'parapsychology' and 'the psychology of anomalous experience'. Through his response he positions 'parapsychology' as interpreted differently to 'the psychology of anomalous experience'. For example, the former is "on the fringe" (Line 10) whereas the latter is "into the mainstream" (Line 6). R1 also aligns this categorisation with established psychology areas including cognitive, social and health psychology (Lines 10-11). This construction is in direct contrast to R1's reflection of parapsychology's label positioning of "not real psychology" (Line 3). R1's category work also extends to the proof-versus-process theme that is present throughout this chapter. He is presenting a distinction that clearly differentiates between the two, with the 'psychology of anomalous experience' being strongly associated with the process approach in his account. R4 uses similar categorisation formulations in Extract 4G, positioning 'anomalous psychology' as a "mainstream psychology explanation" (Line 7) in contrast to the "paranormal" (Line 9) 'parapsychology' with R4 suggesting they "contradict" each other (Lines 10-11). Ultimately, both R1 and R4 are engaging in boundary work through their use of the categorisation elements of the repertoire.

Extracts 4F and 4G both represent a discursive management of categories and careful alignment of stake through their formulation of the boundaries surrounding parapsychology and mainstream academia. Interestingly, both of the researchers avoid communicating direct stake allegiance towards any of the constructs represented in these delineations. Thus, they negotiate away from presenting membership affirmations towards their constructed areas of criteria. What this allows is a further representation of fluid stake management - leaving an open and manoeuvrable identity that is free to be moulded towards their own defined category constructs in future communicative contexts (within the interview) that present the opportunity for constitutive discourse. The interviewer's line of questioning should also be considered in this interpretation. The questions that reference "baggage" (Extract 4F) and "hinderance" labelling (Extract 4G) may have potentially influenced the resulting responses from the researchers. The boundary constructions and guards against negative interpretations from those constructs may have been informed by the phrasing of the interviewer's questions.

The following two extracts illustrate further examples of how boundaries can be interpreted as being drawn when the interviewed researchers used the 'categorisation and stake repertoire':

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#### EXTRACT 4H

1 **R8:** ...and of course, again I need to make the distinction when we're talking here  
2 between parapsychology and anomalistic psychology - because I actually think that  
3 anomalistic psychology is on the 'up'. I think that evidence - there are more papers  
4 published. I mean, and again, I'm assuming you know but just to be clear I think its  
5 quite hard to come up with a definition that completely separates those two. But...

6 **Interviewer:** *[Interrupting]* I was going to say, to me they are kind of one and the same almost,  
7 just this semantic difference really.

8 **R8:** I think that's fair enough, but I think in practice, I mean the people who give  
9 themselves the different labels tend to have a different emphasis, and probably  
10 different pre-conceptions about the way the world is, and that drives obviously what  
11 the kind of research is that they think is worth doing. Um, so by and large  
12 anomalistic psychology tends to be taking a more sceptical approach and trying to  
13 come up with non-paranormal explanations for essentially paranormal experiences  
14 and to test them. And that's very important that the burden of proof applies on both  
15 sides. Um, and the parapsychologists again, gross oversimplification, but there is  
16 much more emphasis there on actually trying to produce evidence to show that  
17 these forces, paranormal forces, might actually exist. And, as I say, gross-  
18 oversimplification but useful shorthand. Um, and I think anomalistic psychology has,  
19 has actually kind of really become, you know that's had much more coverage - and  
20 kind of fits in with the whole, kind of, growth of the sceptical movement and, more  
21 widely, and various other trends in society. And possibly as a reaction to some of the  
22 kind of more extreme religious views that, the consequences they've had and so-on  
23 and so-forth - and the whole Richard Dawkins stuff. Okay we are talking now about  
24 religion now rather than parapsychology, but obviously all these things...

25 **Interviewer:** They all feed into each other at some point...



26 **R8:** They do. Um, so I think anomalistic psychology is kind of on the 'up'. I think  
27 parapsychology is feeling the squeeze a lot more. And, you know most people get  
28 parapsychology *[trails off]*...Having said that, going back to your earlier question, I  
29 do still feel that there is a certain degree of prejudice against even anomalistic  
30 psychology.

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#### EXTRACT 4I

1 **Interviewer:** Are there any other factors, apart from the sort of Bob Morris effect that have led to  
2 this progression of parapsychology in the UK?

3 **R11:** Um, yeah, yeah I think the other one which is key is this recasting of what  
4 parapsychology is and I think Sue Blackmore, more than anyone, is responsible for  
5 this but its been kind of um diffused through the community through Harvey Owen's  
6 textbooks as well.

7 **Interviewer:** How do you mean by recasting?

8 **R11:** Well, I think there was a time when parapsychology was purely about trying to  
9 demonstrate claimed phenomena - so to increasingly tighten the conditions and see  
10 if the effect(s) survive and I think what Sue Blackmore was instrumental in doing was  
11 saying well we need to redefine parapsychology as the psychology of anomalous  
12 experiences - and within that we're as interested in those normal explanations as  
13 the paranormal ones. And I think that's what's been adopted and it avoids then the  
14 field shrinking as it has done in the past - so we lost all the range of hypnotic  
15 phenomena which were originally, kind of, primarily the problems of the SPR in the  
16 1890s. But {their lost?} was near death experiences and out of body experiences,  
17 mainly investigated by the medical profession. Some of the healing work, well not  
18 many parapsychologists seem interested in exploring that directly, and its mainly  
19 medical people, is it the NIHR? Or whatever it is in America, funding that..

20 **Interviewer:** Think so.

21 **R11:** And what we keep finding is that our phenomena are being hived off. And I think its  
22 our own fault because in the past we haven't defined it properly – as being well "no"  
23 here's the experience and we're attempting to understand it. And as soon as you do  
24 that you don't find that your phenomenon is at issue because nobody can doubt  
25 that people have experiences that they don't understand, that they make  
26 attributions to – they obviously happen, that's not at issue. What is at issue is then is  
27 what's the best explanation for them, but whatever the explanation it is still  
28 parapsychology. And in making that kind of a twist I think it helps legitimise what we  
29 are doing and take the heat off a little bit, in terms of; here is somebody who is  
30 desperate to demonstrate an effect you know that this must happen in this way.

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The themes discussed already within this sub-section are again noticeable in the above discourse. Across Extracts 4H and 4I both researchers are again actively constructing the boundaries of the field of parapsychology. But both provide a slightly more direct and specific deconstruction of this. R8 provides a collective promotion of "anomalistic psychology" and reasoning as to why this field is "on the up" (Lines 3 and Line 26). R11 provides a different breakdown, providing a longer reflective piece of discourse that presents a notion regarding the potential hiving-effect that parapsychology is experiencing (Lines 21-30). Within Lines 21-30 R11 attempts to offer reasoning and understanding about parapsychology's borders, and it could even be proposed that such border work is analogous to categorisation construction and affiliation. Here the researchers can once again be interpreted as formulating categorisations through their discourse. Their responses return to the proof-versus-process orientations. R8 in Lines 11-17 of Extract 4H overtly references this dichotomy and presents it as evidence for the existence of "paranormal forces" (Lines 16-17) versus "non-paranormal explanations for essentially paranormal experiences" (Line 13). Similarly R11 portrays these same points of reference as "we're as interested in those normal explanations as the paranormal ones" (Extract 4I, Lines 12-13). However, R8 and R11 then illustrate a slight difference in their presentation of their drawn borders. R8 throughout Extract 4H presents his border constructions as separate categorisations, anomalistic psychology and parapsychology. This can be seen towards the end in Lines 26-27 when he outlines his perspective on the different fortunes for the two areas; "...I think anomalistic

psychology is kind of on the 'up'. I think parapsychology is feeling the squeeze a lot more.” Alternatively, R11 folds these separate category formulations into one label of ‘parapsychology’; “...but whatever the explanation it is still parapsychology” (Extract 4I, Lines 27-28). From this discursive category boundary work arises the opportunity for management of stake affiliation. R8 at no point in the extract uses his drawn categories or borders in reference to any presentation of personal stake. This is notable throughout the extract when he is referencing labels and definitions, the language remains externalised. For example, In Lines 8-11, he refers to “the people who give themselves different labels”. This in itself is stake work within his response, he has built his response to discuss and delineate certain categories and borders without declaring a direct affiliation against those categories within the communicative context. R11 in Extract 4I is the opposite to this and makes stake declarations throughout the extract through the use of possessive language, such as frequent references to “we” or “we’re” or “our phenomena” (Lines 21-23). Within this response R11 is presenting a definitive stake association with his drawn categorisation of ‘parapsychology’ and his own self-referenced attempts to “legitimise” this construction (Line 28).

Ultimately, both extracts can be construed as attempts by each researcher to frame categories around the concept of ‘parapsychology’ through their responses. As such this boundary work can be argued to be managing presentations of stake of the field itself as well as dualistic presentations of their own identity affiliations to the same constructs. Their discourse is actively presenting constructs over what parapsychology may be interpreted as and how this may align with different labels such as ‘anomalous psychology’. In addition, the stake of the constructed field towards research areas (such as proof or process) is also mapped within the discourse.

Collectively, the presented extracts support the concept of the ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ as being used as a discursive tool for forming intellectual boundaries between constructed categorisation elements such as parapsychology, anomalous psychology and the psychology of anomalous experience.

At points within their discourse the researchers can be seen to overtly reference or imply how they are establishing these formulations. For example, in Extract 4I R11 discusses that one of the problems parapsychology may face is one of criteria delineation and ownership (Lines 21-28). According to his response, parapsychology as a field has failed to adequately map out its

boundaries and content – a factor which has resulted in purported problems of definition surrounding the subject. Such problems according to R11, have enabled researchers who engage in parapsychological issues to label their work as something more widely acceptable, i.e. present their work in a more conventional psychological context. This extract provides an insight into the account itself, how it is being constructed and the potential constitutive strategies being employed by the researcher themselves - they are potentially referencing their own discursive categorisation and stake construction strategies - where they present a problem of potential ambiguity surrounding problems of definition relating to parapsychological criteria they then devise their own representations of these constructs, drawing their own borders. This sentiment is candidly expressed in the below discourse from R14:

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#### **EXTRACT 4J**

[Interviewer previously asked R14 if the label of parapsychology hinders perception of the field.]

- 1 **R14:** ...I think lots of people have cottoned on to the idea of not using  
2 'parapsychology' [as a term], using 'anomalous psychology' or 'anomalous  
3 experience' to kind of get away from some of the toxicity of labelling something  
4 that's 'parapsychology'.
- 

R14 presents a similar assertion as that communicated by R11 - that interpretations of vague and mixed representations of parapsychology allow for the subject to be constructed and presented in different contexts. Consequently, this emphasises the theme already discussed throughout this section - that the researchers are actively re-framing the intellectual boundaries of the field through their discourse, using their own categorisation propositions.

Presenting discursively constructed criteria and parameters surrounding interpretations of parapsychology, anomalistic psychology and any other label(s) creates a level of communicative flexibility for the individual. By manoeuvring the discourse towards their own delineations of parapsychology the researchers are able to re-position the field into different frames of reference. As already speculated, in simple terms, use of the 'categorisation of stake repertoire' is a method

through which the researcher can avoid potentially negative connotations that may arise from associations with parapsychology - creating their own landscape through their own constructed categorisation presented definitions that then can be re-negotiated in later discourse. As such, any "toxicity" (as referenced by R14 in Line 3) can be negotiated utilising this particular discursive approach.

Overall, the previous two sub-sections have mapped out the potential ways that the 'categorisation of stake repertoire' can be utilised as an effective communicative strategy for not only negotiating personal identity but also for constructing presentation of identity surrounding field identity in general - actively delineating the borders via discourse. The next sub-section will now look further at how the repertoire is a counter discursive strategy to oppositional positions.

#### **4.6.4 Countering Oppositional Positions**

From analysing the core features of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' one of the most notable generalised characteristics was the use of the repertoire to build categorisation classifications and associations. These formulated positions can be analysed as counters to oppositional discourses and competing perspectives. So far the current repertoire has been discussed as a communicative tool that permits the respondent to construct associations with categories that aligns them with particular cultural and social values - allowing them to maintain a relatively controlled formulated identity within the discursive context. A different perspective of the repertoire can also be proposed, that it is also an embodiment of the oppositional orientation of discourse.

Gill (1996: 143) stated that "much discourse is involved in establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions", subsequently all interaction at a fundamental level can be interpreted as being informed by argumentative character of everyday accounts. Billig (1985, 1987) elaborates on this and posits from a rhetorical psychology viewpoint that within discourse there is always an alternative position, thus discourse is inevitably argumentative where the process of expressing an opinion or attitude is necessary to acknowledge and implicitly counter alternative possible viewpoints:

"It could be suggested that we cannot understand the meaning of a piece of reasoned discourse, unless we

know what counter positions are being implicitly or explicitly rejected.”

(Billig, 1991: 44)

Transposing this to the current analysis and the accounts of the researchers relating to parapsychology - the features of the repertoire can be interpreted as an awareness of such counter positions. For example, on a more speculative note, it could be argued that the categorisation actions and stake management constructed by the respondents regarding their presented relationship and attachments to parapsychology are born out of an implicit awareness of the delicate position of the field within mainstream academia. The immediate counter position is that association with the certain categorisations tied with parapsychology may be perceived as detrimental and potentially negative to their discursively generated identities. Subsequently, they utilise the ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ in order to respond to these opposing positions and potential criticisms. The role of the interviewer and the pre-ascribed interpretation of the interviewed researchers as ‘parapsychologists’ can be interpreted as fuelling such oppositional positions. Within this view, the researchers are actively countering this ascription with their own discursive category establishments.

## **4.7 Relationship To Literature**

### **4.7.1 Relationship To Categorisation Literature**

The extracts discussed affirm the significance attributed to categories in the discourse analysis of identity (Benwell and Stoke, 2006) and that “categorisation is a function of talk” (Edwards, 1998: 32). The body of literature cited in Section 4.2 is largely supported - with the interviewed researchers displaying tendencies to use their discourse to actively categorise themselves and thus present identity configurations through their responses. The analysis within this chapter has displayed that within discourse, categories “may figure as resources...in producing accounts and descriptions” (Edwards, 1998: 20). Beyond the constitutive use of discourse to ascribe category choices the interviewed researchers in the current thesis displayed a more involved process of using their discourse to construct category definitions and draw boundaries around different subject areas. This has synergies with Sacks’ (1979, 1992) research that involved terminology focused on boundary management around individual and group identity. It also suggests the

importance of social identification as a function of talk and the tactical use of of categorisation within discourse as a social strategy (Widdicombe, 1993; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). For example, Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (2005: 152-3) propose that “in performing locally relevant conversational actions or activities, participants incorporate explicit relationship categories anticipating that recipients will draw on their understanding of the activities, motives, rights, responsibilities and/ or competencies associated with incumbents of the category.” Or as McKinlay and Dunnett (1998: 48) propose; “...in everyday circumstances, the process through which people make out, challenge or defend their sense of self for themselves (or for others) is often a complex matter of negotiation and active formulation in which identity can be seen to be discursively constructed.” As such, in referencing an individual’s social identity it also should be considered a simultaneous reference to their membership of a specific social category (Widdicombe, 1998a: 52-53). Extending from this concept is the notion that any one person can be “described under a multitude of categories...[and] identity displays are indexical in the sense that they mean different things at different times and places” (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 8).

From the analysis in this chapter the ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ has highlighted the ways that category work can be used within presentations of discourse. As demonstrated in the literature discussed and combined with the extracts analysed throughout the chapter this category work can take on different forms. This can range from straightforward declarations of category alignment to actively constructing the boundaries and definitions of these categories. Beyond these immediate category ascriptions and formulations is the notion of identity and how these discursive actions function as forms of identity presentation. By manipulating category concepts and subsequent association the respondent can be interpreted as using their talk to construct their situated identity within the interaction. Extending from this notion is the concept of stake. This chapter’s analysis will now be discussed in relation to the discourse stake management literature.

#### **4.7.2 Relationship To Stake Management Literature**

From the analysis of the discourse conducted in the current chapter it is evident that the interpretive repertoire discussed functions prominently as a device to manage the presentation of stake within the communicative context. As has already been presented, the ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ enables the respondent to construct affiliations and relationships with different

intellectual constructs, primarily categorisations. In the interview data this takes the form of constructing their ties and identity towards (or away from) categories around the field of parapsychology.

The literature denoted in section 4.4 of the current chapter can be seen to have a close relationship with this discourse repertoire. Lee and Roth's (2004) assertion of the communicative (interview) context as a situation where identity and issues of self-presentation are constituted is heavily supported by the discourse cited throughout this chapter. Similarly, Billig's (1991) claim that through such expression individuals essentially locate themselves within controversial areas. The interview respondents from the current research were actively constructing their identity and "locating" themselves through their discourse. Constructing their stake and position towards what they may perceive as controversial areas, namely parapsychology and phenomena associated with the field. In Potter's (1996b) framework they are managing "issues of interest" (1996: 113) and constructing "broader group allegiances" (1996b: 114). Within the current discourse extracts, this identity positioning is formulated around managed categorisation presentations and selections. For example, discussing certain research or labels as 'process' oriented research, as opposed to 'proof' oriented. In this particular example, the researchers can be seen to be discursively building identities that are closer to traditional psychology than an interpretation of parapsychology.

It is potentially Andersson's (2010) delineation of the mechanisms of stake and interest within rhetoric that tie closest with the analysis of the discourse in the current chapter. Andersson's (2010: 8) descriptive of stake as a "strategy play" is especially pertinent. This is an extension of Potter's (1996b: 114) proposal that "stake is both a potential problem for those wishing to establish the facticity of accounts and a resource for those wishing to undermine it". As discussed in Section 4.6, the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' can be interpreted as a highly sophisticated discourse tactic for constructing not only personal identity but also actioning boundary management on a macro level. The respondents when using the repertoire are constituting a "preferable outcome" (2010: 8) in their constructed world via their discourse. They are positioning their constructed selves and their presented career biographies in potentially favourable contexts along with attempts to re-interpret the presentation of parapsychology through different labelling descriptives, such as 'anomalous psychology'.

Subsequently, it could be argued this discourse repertoire is deployed to construct a more



favourable and beneficial identity. In LeCouteur, Rapley and Augoustinos' (2001) terms the respondents are "disavowing" associations with particular areas by managing both categorisation definitions and associations. In this way they are potentially trying to construct a distance around themselves from any potential negative attributes that may be interpreted or communicated against their perceived affiliations with certain ideological constructs - namely the phenomena associated with parapsychology. This is a prime example of Potter's (1996b) notion of 'stake inoculation'. Augoustinos, LeCouteur and Soyland (2002) define this as "a discursive practice that routinely heads off or minimises anticipated criticism" (2002: 115). Antaki and Wetherell, (1990: 20) present stake inoculation as "providing evidence to fend off the implication that the speaker has a stake in the matter" (see also Dickerson, 1997; Leudar and Antaki, 1998; LeCouteur, Rapley and Augoustinos, 2001). Stake management via categorisation work can be seen as an extension of these concepts. Instead of tactically inoculating stake attachments the researchers are creating a principle of controlled fluidity within their stake management through careful constructions in their communication. Subsequently, this embodies Andersson's (2010: 8) proposal that the "use of stake is an attempt to present a vision of the world, that things are the way they are or should be, according to the speaker". In the case of the researchers and their discursive constructions within the interviews, this "vision" is a portrayal of stake that is carefully controlled against categorisation work within the responses and remains directed by the speaker.

The psychological concept of face management (Goffman 1955, 1967; Tracy, 1990) could also be considered as applicable towards this repertoire. The concept of "face" can be defined as the positive social value that an individual constructs and presents according to themselves within a social interaction (Hopkins, 2015; Cupach and Metts, 2008; Dainton, 2010 Oetzel et. al, 2000 and 2001). Goffman (1955, 1967) proposed that within social interactions people will defend both their own face and also the face of others - of people who are perceived to hold the same cultural values and associations. For example, a politician when interviewed would defend the face of colleagues and other members of their party as well as their own individual face - what Goffman perceived as a shared collective face. In relation to the current chapter, the positive social values of face could arguably be interpreted as a function of the category management and stake presentation found within the repertoire. The researchers are maintaining their own definitions and associations of category affiliations and are thus managing their own "face" and that of the field's construct within their discourse.

From a more globalised perspective these discourse strategies also enable the researcher to create their own frames of reference for areas such as parapsychology - actively re-constructing definitions of the subject. Again, this can be seen as active management of not only their own individual identities as researchers but also the identity of parapsychology itself. Through “that blurring of the identity of what is a parapsychologist” (Extract 4D) the discourse of the researchers can be viewed as a functional device to project the delineated boundaries of parapsychology towards different criteria.

‘Blurring’ categorisations of the field with different elements presents a different image of parapsychology and actively transgresses the field away from the residual negativity associated with the controversial (paranormal elements). From this perspective, the researchers are implementing face management for the field as well as their own presented academic positioning:

“Discourse contributes to processes of cultural change, in which the social identities or ‘selves’ associated with specific domains and institutions are redefined and reconstituted.”

(Fairclough, 1992: 137)

“Particular discourse characteristics are shaped by the current interests, values, beliefs and practices of particular social groups, and so position the writers as participating in these interests, values, beliefs and practices. This means that, when a writer writes something in a particular way, by a particular choice of words and structures, they are aligning themselves with others who use such words and structures, and hence making a statement of identity about themselves.”

(Ivanic, 1998: 45)

In this context, the discourse can be construed as a means for the interviewed researchers to manage the boundaries of the field of parapsychology and also their own constructed personal biographies - redefining and reconstituting their social identities (Fairclough, 1992).

Utilisation of the ‘categorisation and stake repertoire’ can therefore be perceived on different levels, acting as a cogent tool to maintain flexible social positioning and to also negotiate perceived external viewpoints levelled towards concepts surrounding the field.

## **4.8 Reflexive Considerations**

Chapter 3 (Section 3.8) introduced the reflexive considerations that need to be incorporated throughout the discourse analysis contained within the thesis. In the current chapter this was revisited again - particularly in Section 4.3.1. The interviewer's role can be interpreted as being highly significant in the resulting discursive actions of the interviewed researchers. Their deployment of the identified 'categorisation and stake repertoire' can be viewed as a direct response to the interviewer's labelling of them as 'parapsychologists' and line of questioning that aligned them with parapsychology.

The researchers' categorisation and identity work seen throughout the repertoire can be read as a reaction to the interviewer's generalised use of the label 'parapsychologist'. When presented with the ascribed label the responding researchers' discourse unpacked this categorisation label, reinterpreted and constructed boundaries around its interpretation. Similarly, the stake work within the repertoire is intertwined in this consideration. When depicted against a categorisation/identity by the interviewer the resulting discourse acted to reconstruct the displayed ascription. In practice, this saw the researchers managing discursive presentations of stake association either towards or against the interviewers' proclamation of their purported ties to parapsychology. Ultimately, the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' can be interpreted as an active response repertoire of discursive action. The repertoire and the constructive work contained within it was potentially a counter formulation of the discourse used by the interviewer towards the researchers - in particular the ascription by the interviewer of perceived ties to parapsychology.

## **4.9 Summary**

The present chapter has illustrated the ways the interviewed researchers implemented particular strategies when discussing categorisations, definitions and their associations of stake with parapsychology. More specifically, their use of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' to generate controlled categorisation work within the discourse to create communicative instances that presented both their personal identities and that of the field itself in certain contexts.

On a surface reading, the features of the researchers' accounts from the interviews can be viewed

simply as a means of discussing categories and referencing stake affiliation(s). Yet, the analysis discussed in the present chapter presents an argument that the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' can be interpreted as a highly sophisticated communicative strategy that functions in different ways, ranging from the micro-personal considerations of the individual to more macro elements of re-contextualising the field of parapsychology itself. At its core, the repertoire's main purposes are categorisation construction and presentation of stake management alongside those constructs. The respondent deploys elements of the repertoire to build affiliations of stake with different categorisations.

Primarily, the repertoire is focused on identity construction whereby the category and stake management allows for the construction of a controlled presentation of identity by the researcher through their response. This can be interpreted as an action of positioning - formulating a constructed position through discourse to counter oppositional responses or interpretations. Furthermore, when the interviewer's discourse is included for consideration and their pre-defined association of the researchers with categories (such as parapsychology) then the repertoire becomes a tool for re-positioning. In this interpretation, the respondent takes the ascribed category and uses their discourse actively re-construct the delineated facets of the category along with declarations of stake.

On a broader level, empirically, this interpretative repertoire has revealed that the researchers were actively utilising their discourse as a tool for social agency in sophisticated ways. This will continue to be explored in the next chapter that looks at another distinct repertoire - the 'outsider repertoire'.

## CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY BORDERS

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### 5.1 Introduction

The focus of this second empirical chapter will now move onto looking at a different interpretive repertoire. Discussion will centre on the researchers' construction of identity borders around scientific communities. More specifically, within the interviews there was a general trend by the researchers to construct both parapsychology as a field, and parapsychologists who conducted research in this area, as outsiders. This created a portrayal of a minority element struggling against the mainstream to gain acceptance.

The repertoire discussed within this chapter will look at both presentation of personal identity and also the construction of the academic institutional identity of parapsychology within the researchers' responses. Throughout the interviews the dualistic constructions of personal and field identity were intertwined closely relating to this repertoire: the identity borders of the field informed the construction of the researchers' identity presentation. Some of the overarching themes from the analysis in this chapter have links and connections to the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' - these will be detailed at the end of the chapter with a view towards more extensive discussion in the final discussion chapter (Chapter 7).

This chapter will follow a similar format to the previous empirical chapter. An example of the discourse repertoire will be introduced in the next section, discussing its primary features. Building upon this, the chapter will then analyse this proposed discourse tool to see how it features within the researchers' responses, proposing theories on how this repertoire holds a strategic communicative purpose.

## 5.2 Constructing An Outsider Identity Through Discourse

Mead (1934) proposed the central notion of understanding the concept of identity as a means of exploring sociological notions such as 'self' within society. This has become a central tenet for a significant body of research into identity construction(s) and how such integrations formulate within social and cultural boundaries (more recent examples being, Corley et. al, 2006 or Coupland and Brown, 2004).

Identity construction by its very constitutive nature has been a primary focus of discourse analysis - where the action orientation of a person's interactional responses in talk (and text) can be interpreted as a fundamental tool for creating an identity within that particular communicative context. Broadly within discourse analysis the concept of identity is a continual process that is developed via social interaction and communication (Burman and Parker, 1993; du Gay, 1996). Hardy and Phillips (1999) showed that the social meaning of a person (or group's) existence is a function of discourse, as opposed to an inherent characteristic. As discourse is a fluid and ever-changing medium of communication that (potentially) changes from situation to situation this suggests the notion of identity as a non-static entity. Within the literature there is a substantial body of material that supports the perspective that discourse actively constructs social identity, and it achieves this through the presentation of group definitions and formulation of cultural boundaries and relationships (for example, van Dijk, 1997b; Wodak, 1996; Hardy, Lawrence and Grant, 2005; Lawrence, Phillips and Hardy, 1999). Van Dijk (1997b) has indicated that this functions beyond the individual and their personal identity constructs - social categories themselves can be built and displayed through discourse. Subsequently, social identity through discourse, functions on both an individual and macro level (in terms of social categories). Discourse analysis has also given significant focus towards racism and how this informs identities and group boundary interpretations - with particular interest being on racism in the media, the political arena and in everyday interaction (for example, Billig, 1987, 1991; Essed, 1991; McCreanor, 1993a, 1993b; Nairn and McCreanor, 1990, 1991; Van Dijk, 1987, 1993, Wetherell and Potter, 1992; Jakubowicz et al, 1994; Augostinos et al, 1999; Abel, 1996, 1997; Stratton, 1998).

In relation to this thesis the notion of group identity construction through discourse was apparent in the interview data. The respondents exhibited a tendency within their responses to present representations of themselves and their research associated with parapsychology as being on the

'outside'. In some respects this formulation presented them almost as a minority element when they referenced the wider academic community and cultural mainstream. One such example can be seen in Extract 5A:

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#### EXTRACT 5A

1 **Interviewer:** {interrupts} I was going to say, why do you think there is, as you say, an allergic  
2 reaction almost by some quarters?

3 **R6:** Um, well in my experience is that it's not necessarily well informed. So people have  
4 pre-conceptions about what parapsychology is but they haven't actually taken the  
5 time to familiarise themselves with the literature and with the methodology, and so  
6 it's a bit of a knee-jerk reaction. It's not necessarily an informed response, I think it's  
7 just prejudice basically.

---

Immediately in Lines 1-2 the interviewer is referencing a previous comment made by Researcher (R6) which suggested there were "allergic reaction(s)" to parapsychology and researchers in the field. A comment which in itself conjures a foundation in this communicative context that suggests there is bias against the field and is referential to potential forces working against parapsychology. Indeed, within Extract 5A R6 makes multiple inferences that could be deduced of parapsychology existing as an outsider minority and that perceptions can be interpreted as being weighted against the field.

R6 cites specific reasons for this outsider construction - primarily, purported negative reactions to the field. People are not "necessarily well informed" (Line 3) and that there is "prejudice" (Line 7). R6's language here conjures a composition of parapsychology being dismissed purely because of subjective discrimination. This construction is built upon further in the extract when R6 attempts to validate these propositions by stipulating the underlying reason for this in her opinion - "they haven't actually taken the time to familiarise themselves with the literature and with the methodology" (Lines 4-5). In the context of the response, Lines 4-5 serve two functions, the first being to create an identity of "they" - an identity in juxtaposition to parapsychology; "They" are

unwilling to engage with parapsychology, according to R6 due to pre-conceived, uninformed, notions of its content. With the formulation of “they” R6 has created two separate groups and delineated between them - on one side it is the parapsychologists who are presented as being unfairly perceived, on the other side are “they” who position the parapsychologists as outsiders. Secondly, Lines 4-5 also serve to validate the field itself by generating the suggestion that the literature and methodology is of such a (implied high) standard that it would serve to change these “pre-conceptions” (Line 4). The dialogue in Extract 5A builds the portrayal of parapsychology being unfairly treated, subjected to unfair “knee-jerk reaction[s]” (Line 6) that are a characteristic tendency of the constructed “they” who are presented as holding an almost dogmatic tendency to dismiss the field without sufficient grounding.

Extract 5A serves to illustrate the construction of an identity of parapsychology and its researchers as outsiders. R6 depicts parapsychologists as victims of prejudice and as a minority group that are positioned apart from the socio-cultural majority of “they”. In the extract R6 essentially attempts to delineate the existence of these purported negative opinions against the field with this composition and arguably attempts to generate sympathy for this suggested outsider position.

Within the current thesis’ data findings there were numerous instances of similar constructions within the responses provided by the researchers. Collectively, these can be proposed as a common characteristic of the interview data, an interpretive repertoire which from this point will be referred to as the ‘outsider repertoire’. This repertoire spans the construction of group, personal identity and also the identity of parapsychology as an academic field.

The concept of constructing an identity of being an ‘outsider’ has similarities with the notion of victim identities and victimhood. In Extract 5A R6 develops the concept of “prejudice” against her and the field she claims to represent in the interview. Noor, Brown and Prentice (2008) explored the concept of ‘competitive victimhood’ demonstrating that victim groups display elements of competitiveness relating to their perceived experiences. Thus, these people tend to focus on how their collective group has been victimised more than other comparable groups. Vollhardt (2009) proposed that victims can display multiple facets of belief about their victimhood, viewing their group as being exclusively victimised or as a part of an inclusive larger group that incorporates other groups as part of a collective in-group. Due to the collective nature of these perceptions the



individual will subsequently tend to act as a member of a group (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) aligning their perceptions and values accordingly - almost similar in nature to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Extending from this McNeill et. al (2011) suggested that victimhood “is something that people feel *their group* has as a result of perceived historical injustice against it” and that this notion needs to be incorporated in any analysis within the area. Whilst this research is mainly centred on acts of crime, violence and persecution against individuals/ groups (for example, McNeill et. al 2011, explore the discursive legitimisation of the Saville Inquiry regarding Bloody Sunday) it provides some insight into how purported marginalised groups can function in informing interpretations and subsequent formulations - such as through their accounts (see also Renwick and Qing, 1999). With an academic field such as parapsychology, that has consistently been perceived as ‘fringe’ (Collins and Pinch, 1979a; 1979b) there is a persistent notion of what McNeill et. al (2011) cite as “perceived historical injustice” (also see Beloff, 1993). In relation to the current thesis, the researchers can be perceived to all have presented (varying) ties to parapsychology from their interview responses and by extension constructed some relationship with this purported historical injustice.

As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter the researchers’ discourse can be interpreted as constructing and manipulating the borders of insider-outsider status. Subsequently, their responses within the interviews can be viewed as building the identity of a victim and dualistically as outsiders. In the communicative context of the interview(s), this frames both parapsychology and their research as being removed from insider status. It is from this generalised observation that the ‘outsider repertoire’ emerges - the presentation of the respondent and the field of parapsychology as an out-group that exists as a minority in relation to a constructed notion of the mainstream in-group. In the same ways that victims and minority groups construct an external identity of themselves and their collective as victims, researchers that construct an affiliation with parapsychology present similar elements in their communication.

A direct relationship between the cultural ideals espoused by parapsychologists and their presentation of themselves was explored by Hess (1993). In ‘Science In the New Age’ Hess analysed the discourse and ideologies of paranormal groups based in the United States - exploring how groups (such as parapsychologists) construct their boundaries, identities and overall “paraculture” (2003:15). Hess proposed that parapsychologists consistently present themselves as

underdogs:

“Thus, one commonality is the hero as self-righteous underdog. Parapsychologists and New Agers explicitly see themselves as marginal and heterodox defenders of a true knowledge that the various orthodoxies of science, religion, and the government deny...Like David before Goliath, they also face enormous odds in their drama of the battle against the tide of popular opinion and profiteering opinion-makers.”

(Hess, 1993: 89-90)

Through positioning themselves as “underdog crusaders” (1993: 90) parapsychologists are attempting to portray their knowledge claims and cultural boundaries as more virtuous than their polar opposites - the sceptics who oppose them. Hess explores how this journey outside of conventional society is a rite of passage, and an inevitable trajectory because of the para subject matter of their cultural composition. Whilst Hess generates a formula around these concepts from different cultures (parapsychologists, ‘New Agers’ and sceptics) his research strongly suggests that people who construct an identity around parapsychology also portray a minority based identity through communicative channels. What is absent from Hess’s analysis was an exploration of the discursive tools and repertoires that these different cultures utilised in their communication. It is this area in particular that the current chapter intends to explore in more detail.

### 5.3 Formulating An Outsider Identity

The chapter will now explore more data driven examples of the ‘outsider repertoire’ directly from the interviews and how the researchers used this in their responses.

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#### EXTRACT 5B

- 1 **R1:** There could be political reasons around how departmental funding works and the
- 2 implications of something like the REF and being able to publish the sort of work in
- 3 journals that have high impact factors.
  
- 4 **Interviewer:** Have you had any kind of experiences with those kind of social-political influences

5 on getting work published and getting submitted...that kind of thing?

6 **R1:** Only, only in the context of our own department, it hasn't been...parapsychology  
7 hasn't been fingered...as something...its not a reputable activity...but I think there is  
8 always an undercurrent...I think it's there, no-one would ever say it, but I think it's  
9 there.

---

In Extract 5B R1 constructs a portrayal of parapsychology existing in juxtaposition to more mainstream elements of academia. Essentially, creating insider-outsider borders between the field and other areas. R1 fundamentally achieves these boundary formulations through references to "political reasons" (Line 1); "not a refutable activity" (Line 7) and "undercurrent" (Line 8). In Lines 6-9 R1 is almost hesitant in his answer to the Interviewer's prior question. He outlines that "parapsychology hasn't been fingered" (Lines 6-7) but then immediately asserts that "it's not a reputable activity" in Line 7. When analysed these two aspects of the extract appear almost contradictory, in the first instance R1 presents the notion that parapsychology is not immediately discriminated against and then this is modified with the assertion that the field holds little reputation. R1 then follows this apparent contradiction with an affirmation of the latter concept, explaining that "there is always an undercurrent" (Lines 7-8).

This sequence suggests that in this piece of dialogue R1 is attempting to repair the contradiction. After the first statement that "parapsychology hasn't been fingered" R1 has provided a response that refutes his earlier construction that the field may be marginalised and thus holds outsider status (hinted at in Lines 1-3). But the following parts of Extract 5B suggest that R1 is keen to implement the 'outsider repertoire' to reinforce the construct that parapsychology remains not a "reputable activity". This reintroduces the 'insider-outsider' differentiation within the discourse. He then supports this by referencing an unspoken "undercurrent" that supposedly exists against the field. The double use of "I think it's there" in quick succession (Lines 8-9) implies that even though it is defined by his subjective belief(s) he still wants it to be considered a plausible and real possibility by his audience - emphasising the expressed sentiment.

R1 frames the notion of apparent hostility in the presentation of his experience in his own department. This construction of personalised reference can be interpreted as giving the account

more robustness - he is presenting this as if from his own personal experiences, relative to him, which immediately makes the account harder to challenge or contradict. Furthermore, the account lacks specific points of reference - it is highly generalised with no detail about the "undercurrent". This creates the impression of a general hostile attitude that, due to the lack of specific detail, can be interpreted as being a normalised attitude towards parapsychology - emphasising the outsider construction.

Ultimately, R1 in Extract 5B builds the proposition that parapsychology maintains its purported historical baggage - a notion that R1 attempts to reinforce in his response. By framing parapsychology as a minority outsider and potential victim, in very general terms, it potentially portrays an 'us-against-them' construct - whereby parapsychology is considered to be a group that exists beyond more, what R1 would potentially construe as, accepted mainstream boundaries.

In Extract 5C R2 uses similar themes and presentation:

---

#### EXTRACT 5C

1 **Interviewer:** ...do you think that there is a greater acceptance, academically, of the ideas  
2 espoused by ...?

3 **R2:** [interrupts] I think there's more of an acceptance, or people actually saying "oh wow  
4 that's interesting". But I still think there'd be a reluctance to...for those people to  
5 actually get themselves involved.

6 **Interviewer:** Still a degree of hesitancy?

7 **R2:** Oh yeah...yeah...I mean I think, they're probably thinking "oh it's great that  
8 somebody's doing it, so long as I don't have to".

---

In the above extract R2 frames parapsychology as a topic of focus that may be of genuine interest to "people" (Lines 3-5). The identity of "people" is never elaborated or specified and it is left to be

implied whether this relates to the “greater acceptance” referred to by the interviewer in Line 1 and by extension the wider academic community or society in general. This general use of “people” can be interpreted as a positioning mechanism - constructing a boundary between parapsychologists and the larger (implied mainstream) of “people”. This is similar to R1’s concept of the “undercurrent” (Extract 5B) and the lack of description attributed to that construction. Parapsychologists are again cast as a group on the periphery of acceptance. R2 asserts in Line 4 that there is a barrier of “reluctance” that prevents people engaging with the subject matter of parapsychology. Again, because R2 refrains from elaborating on what this “reluctance” is or what motivates it, the researcher has created an open statement that can be interpreted in different ways. The interviewer is unable to ascertain if the reluctance stems from political, practical, academic or social considerations. It can be implied from the nature and context of the interview and R2’s responses that the reluctance is a function of the insider-outsider dichotomy and the fringe elements associated with parapsychology and anyone engaged within the field. This interpretation is supported in Lines 7-8 when R2 expounds and suggests that “...they’re probably thinking ‘oh it’s great that somebody’s doing it, so long as I don’t have to’”. This is a largely open statement, in the sense that there is no real clarification as to what R2 is precisely referring to or what motivates such an observation (or indeed the suggested behaviour). Within the communicative setting the interviewer is almost invited to ‘read-between-the-lines’ and leave with the impression that parapsychology is an activity that is generally negatively perceived. Irrespective of interpretation, this declaration in Lines 7-8 is R2 actively constructing identity borders and utilising the ‘outsider repertoire’. The suggestive notion and attempted insight into what people are ‘really’ thinking immediately positions parapsychology on the fringe (outside).

This sentiment and construction is repeated by R2 in Extract 5D:

---

#### EXTRACT 5D

- 1 **Interviewer:** Would you now, do you label yourself as a parapsychologist or a psychologist now?
- 2 **R2:** I would say nowadays as a psychologist.
- 3 **Interviewer:** As a psychologist? And you find that’s easier in numerous areas of your career?

4 **R2:** Yep...yeah. Oh definitely, in – well in every aspect of my life...(One thing) as soon as  
5 you say “parapsychologist”, of course, people just think “oh some crackpot that’s  
6 willing to believe in anything”. [Its] what I’ve experienced...

---

In the extract, between the interviewer’s questions and R2’s responses identity borders are constructed of psychologists as insiders versus the notion of parapsychologists as outsiders. In Line 2 R2 declares that he would now choose the label of ‘psychologist’ over the label of ‘parapsychologist’. When prompted by the interviewer, in Line 3, R2 then elaborates on this choice in Lines 4-6; R2 says It makes “every aspect” of his life easier - citing the main motivation as socially governed perception, whereby he pronounces that labelling oneself as a ‘parapsychologist’ invites the interpretation of being considered a “crackpot”. Here R2 is clearly positioning the label of ‘parapsychologist’ as being juxtaposed to general social acceptance and subsequent insider-status. There is direct reference to himself with more personalised language, such as the phrases “my life” (Line 4) and “I’ve experienced” (Line 5), this is in contrast to the more generalised presentations of speculation displayed in Extract 5C.

Presentations of personalised phrasing and references were a key feature of the researchers’ use of the outsider repertoire with their construction of borders delineating parapsychology and more (alleged) accepted mainstream elements. Formulated reference to specific, purported, anecdotal incidents within their discourse allowed the researchers to present examples of how the field is considered as being on the outside. Within these purported anecdotal instances the researcher tended to outline occurrences where they have allegedly personally experienced implications of bias against them or where they perceive parapsychology has been unfairly treated. For example:

---

#### **EXTRACT 5E**

1 **Interviewer:** How easy was it for you to actually to pursue that interest? I mean, it sounds [like  
2 you had] quite a fluid progression but was it that easy in real terms?

3 **R15:** Err, I think that when I first had that conversation [inaudible] - Let's go back a bit,

4                   when I first did my conversion course I was still interested in, as an amateur and I  
5                   went to Sussex which is a very very high-grade experimental department and some  
6                   of the comments were that it was all bollocks basically.

---

In the above extract (5E) R15 utilises a construct of a personal anecdote of when he was an amateur at Sussex. He constructs an insider-outsider delineation within the extract by first establishing Sussex as a reputable and respectable institution in Line 5 - "a very very high-grade experimental department". This profile is then contrasted with their perceptions of parapsychology in Line 6 - "it was all bollocks basically". These contrasting elements and subsequent succinct dismissal of parapsychology vividly construct the boundary within the discourse of the acceptable insider institution (Sussex) versus the outsider subject (parapsychology).

A similar dichotomy construction can be seen in Extract 5F below:

---

#### **EXTRACT 5F**

1   **Interviewer:** [extending from negative media perceptions/ presentations of the field]...do you  
2                   think that also impinges on the academic perception, from people outside of  
3                   parapsychology?

4   **R2:**            Yeah...Um, for example, a few years ago when I told, it was a Professor down at, um,  
5                   Cardiff University, he was quite high up, I think he was close to retirement. And he  
6                   said, "Oh everybody knows..." ...I told him I was doing research in ESP...and he goes,  
7                   "Oh everybody knows that's absolute nonsense, that was all abandoned in the 60s".  
8                   And I just thought; how come you've got as far as you've got being so ignorant. And I  
9                   really started to lose my temper with him, because he just knew absolutely nothing  
10                  about parapsychology, or the research, or the progress – but he was quite willing to  
11                  have an opinion on it.

12 **Interviewer:** ...have you found that, a lot, with other colleagues outside of parapsychology...

13 **R2:** Yes. Yes. I've been working at [names university] for 11 years now and there are still some  
14 colleagues who have no idea what I do...Or the evidence for it...

---

In Extract 5F R2 can be seen to mirror R15's use of the 'outsider repertoire' in the previous extract. R2 constructs an insider-outsider boundary by first building the character and credentials of the insider that eventually goes on to dismiss parapsychology. Characteristics including "Professor", "Cardiff University", "quite high up" and "close to retirement" (Lines 4-5) all combine to construct the portrayal of someone who should be considered as significantly established within academia. As in Extract 5E this establishment is then contrasted with the figure's dismissal of parapsychology as "absolute nonsense" (Line 7). R2 builds this anecdote to highlight the nature of the subsequent dismissal of parapsychology - that someone of such stature within academia could be so dismissive of parapsychological research. The discourse positions parapsychology as being on the outside. The "Professor" is constructed as being an established insider (within academia) - with his disregard therefore casting parapsychology as being outside this sphere, on the outside. R2 then continues to highlight this positioning by venting his frustration at the "Professor's" perspective (Lines 8-11), thus continuing to construct parapsychology as a minority element struggling to gain acceptance. Extract 5F is built to position parapsychology in a particular way and highlight the cognitive discrepancy between R2's purported beliefs and that of the "Professor's". Following the Interviewer's next question in Line 12 R2 then continues to emphasise this positioning and construction of parapsychology being marginalised by depicting how "colleagues" are ignorant of his field and research focus. Again, on a smaller scale, R2 deploys particular presented 'facts' to highlight the unfairness he is attempting to convey - "[names university]" and "11 years" versus the lack of acceptance within this (Lines 13-14).

The above extracts in this section have illustrated how the researchers utilised the 'outsider repertoire' to construct both an identity for parapsychology and to position the subject as an outsider field. These themes are prominent in the below example:



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## EXTRACT 5G

1 **Interviewer:** ...You said earlier you've had colleagues or certain areas within the H.E. community,  
2 um, "take the mick" as it were, I just wondered if you could sort of elaborate on that  
3 a bit more? Just describe a few instances.

4 **R5:** Um, I've had people look at me quite affronted when they found out that I do  
5 research in parapsychology. Urrr, I think probably one of the more concrete  
6 examples is I...part of my PhD research involves the use of brain activity scanning  
7 methods and I showed a specialist some of my data from another institution who  
8 didn't know much about the paradigm that I was actually working in, and I just  
9 showed them some data and I said um, "just tell me what you think about this and  
10 then I will tell you what its actually testing". And they said "I think you've got  
11 something there". And then I explained that it was actually testing a paranormal  
12 phenomenon and they started laughing, and they said to me "now I doubt you". And  
13 they were laughing because they were laughing at themselves, that they didn't think  
14 that they were so narrow minded or critical, um, and that they were really surprised  
15 at how a minute ago the data was perfectly valid but as soon as I said that it was to  
16 do with a paranormal phenomenon they started to doubt the data.

---

Through the phrase "quite affronted" (Line 4) R5 immediately begins to construct the portrayal of parapsychology and its researchers as a minority identity, that is almost victimised. Extending from this R5 then begins to recount a more specific incident that he claims to have occurred in his biography. Similarly to the previous extracts he establishes a reputable character - "a specialist" (Line 7) - and then utilises this establishment to position the subsequent outlined perspective/ attitude towards parapsychology to create an outsider identity for the field. R5's account is of a scenario whereby the "specialist" changes their opinion of the data only when he learns of its parapsychological origin. The researcher's depiction of this incident is almost as if they are accounting an experiment they have conducted on perception. In R5's account he presents the data to the subject ("specialist") concealing its origin, lets him express an opinion and reveals its origin - challenging the subject's perception. R5 then attempts to undermine the "specialist's"

perspective through the phrasing “laughing at themselves” (Line 13) and “narrow minded” (Line 14). Ultimately, this structured account can be interpreted to function on a number of levels. Firstly, it serves to portray parapsychology as being unfairly judged beyond objective analysis - building the victim/ minority proposition. Secondly, R5’s depiction of the “specialist’s” self-referential insight undermines the legitimacy of the insider’s judgement of the outside subject matter (parapsychology). The field is subsequently framed as existing as an out-group through the purported biased perceptions inherent within R5’s narrative.

#### **5.4 Formulation Of The Opposing Insider Identity**

The previous section of the chapter has outlined how the interviewees formulated an outsider identity for parapsychology and researchers associated with the field. Through the use of this ‘outsider repertoire’ numerous constructions were achieved within the discourse. Parapsychology was framed as being marginalised, formulating the portrayal of a victim representation. In contrast to this a feature of the ‘outsider repertoire’ was the researchers’ discourse that depicted the non-parapsychological orientated ‘insiders’ and this identification composition of the opposing social/ academic group(s).

This section will now analyse examples of how the researchers forged accounts of groups and individuals who purportedly lie in juxtaposition to proponents of their presentation of parapsychology as a field. The section will show how the construction of opposing groups within the discourse aided the fashioning of identity borders within the context of the interviews and ultimately aided the portrayal of parapsychologists as being outsiders.

##### **5.4.1 Establishing The Insider Identity**

Within the interviews the researchers frequently referenced oppositional in-groups, citing how external forces (primarily in academia) act against parapsychology - positioning the field as an out-group that was constantly unfairly treated or portrayed negatively. For example:

---

## EXTRACT 5H

1 **Interviewer:** Would you say its any easier, today, to what it was when you were starting out to  
2 develop an interest in the area and to pursue a career in it?

3 **R2:** I think its getting more and more difficult...

4 **Interviewer:** More and more difficult?

5 **R2:** Yep...I think so. Erm...I know there seems to be a few more opportunities for people  
6 to do PhDs in this area. But the big problem is, erm, nowadays all the universities  
7 are interested in is, erm, research that can be applied – and research that attracts  
8 funding. And of course parapsychology struggles to get that...so, um...really, even if  
9 you're interested in doing research in parapsychology, there is a pressure on you  
10 from your workplace to do research in other areas as well as, and really just to use  
11 parapsychology as a bit of a hobby really.

---

In Extract 5H R2 formulates and refers more to external groups and the effect(s) they have on parapsychology. This is structured slightly differently in comparison to the previous extracts cited in this chapter which have tended to focus more on presentations of personalised accounts and alleged direct experiences. R2 constructs the discourse to represent parapsychology as an out-group. The reference to “all the universities” (Line 6) achieves a foundational demarcation between parapsychology (outsider) and the rest of academia (insider) within the extract. Insider criteria is presented as being research that “can be applied” and “attracts funding” (Lines 7-8). R2 states that parapsychology fails to fulfil this criteria, this builds the notion that the (academic) in-group will never accept the field’s research. Furthermore, R2’s use of the word “struggles” (Line 8) and the phrase “more and more difficult” (Line 3) can be interpreted as portraying parapsychology as a victimised underdog. This imagery is continued in Lines 9-11 with the phrasing of the “pressure” to conduct research away from parapsychology and the almost derisory indication that work in the area should just be considered by the portrayed in-group as “a bit of a hobby really”. What is notable about R2’s language is that it contains numerous propositions without explicitly

providing identifiers for the exact negative external forces. He never directly states the precise origins such as which universities or personnel may espouse these views - instead the wording is formed around generalisations such as “all the universities” (Line 6) and “your workplace” (Line 10). Such referential language constructs a perception from the discourse that the phenomena portrayed is universal and acts as a magnifying effect.

Extract 5I, also originating from R2, is more direct in comparison:

---

### EXTRACT 5I

- 1 **Interviewer:** Do you think the media has any role in influencing the development of  
2 parapsychology? In terms of the proliferation of cable, satellite channels and sort of  
3 Web 2.0 technologies like youtube – that kind of thing.
- 4 **R2:** I think it has. Um...it’s certainly brought it to the public’s attention...and I think really  
5 kicking off with the X-Files started it and then the things like ‘Most Haunted’, and the  
6 like. But, um, course its also had its problems in that everybody assumes that’s what  
7 parapsychologists do. Um, which again is not good. For example, a few years ago  
8 when we launched the Msc in ‘Exceptional Human Experiences’ we had somebody  
9 from the Metro come in and interview us. And, um, they wanted to take some  
10 pictures, and they met me and they said, “Well you don’t look like a doctor and do  
11 you have glasses?”. Erm, and I said, “Yeah I can put those on if it makes me look  
12 intelligent”. Sort of instantly increase my IQ. And then they said, “Oh can you wear a  
13 lab coat”, and I said, “No”. And they said, “Ok, could you sort of like sit down, pose  
14 reading a book and we’ll put this behind you”, and it was, erm, a rubber Slimier from  
15 Ghostbusters. And I just said, “Take the lot and go – I’m not interested in it”. And so  
16 the following day its just like ‘University offers UK’s first ghost-busting degree’. Um  
17 so, they weren’t interested in anything we had to say about the course, they didn’t  
18 know anything about the course content, or the fees incidentally. All they wanted to  
19 say is we would show people how to look for ghosts and how to speak to the dead.  
20 And of course we got so much, um, stick from that from, from local employers as  
21 well – saying “if this university is offering nonsense parapsychology and ghostbusting

22                   why should we offer your graduates a job”...

23                   ...So I just find the media and their take on it is incredibly harmful. That’s not the  
24                   only instance, um, like a few weeks ago when suddenly they announce that there  
25                   has to be cut-backs, when the government sort of said “look we have to cut back on  
26                   all of these things, courses will definitely go”. And, the newspapers had a field day  
27                   on that, you know, ‘The world’s 20 most ridiculous courses’ or ‘Odd courses’ and  
28                   again our course was in there, listed as one of them. Because they had got the  
29                   details completely wrong, yet again, because they hadn’t researched the facts. But  
30                   calling yourself a parapsychologist, or offering a parapsychology degree – you’re an  
31                   easy target, and you can’t defend yourself. (Going through) the media, they know  
32                   the public is interested. But I just don’t think that these people have the time or  
33                   inclination to actually find out the facts.

---

In the above extract R2 presents two purported instances where the media have negatively portrayed his identity as a parapsychologist. From Lines 9-15 R2 describes an instance where a journalist from the Metro attempts to portray R2 in stereotypical imagery which he ultimately rejects. R2 begins this description by framing himself as open and accommodating to the journalist (Lines 9-12) - prepared to wear glasses to represent the symbolism of intelligence. The ensuing demands of the journalist which R2 structures in Extract 5I as being increasingly unreasonable; from wearing glasses to wearing a lab coat, to posing next to a ‘Slimer’. Following the subsequent rejection of the journalist R2 then continues this framing dichotomy by depicting how the journalist’s published article had then misrepresented the parapsychology course due to a lack of knowledge - “they weren’t interested in anything” (Line 17) and “they didn’t know anything” (Lines 17-18). Extending from this R2 then extends the incident to depict the general effect that the article had on perception: “we got so much, um stick from that” (Line 20).

R2’s presentation of this escalation of (in his view) stereotypical imagery frames himself as the victim and the Metro journalist as being the negative antagonist. What R2 achieves in this reconstruction and portrayal of the protagonists is the presentation of both himself and parapsychology as being unfairly treated within the mainstream media. The structure of the first half of Extract 5I is tailored in such a way to create an identity where both R2 and parapsychology

are unfairly treated, marginalised as victims by the media. Within R2's narrative thread the ignorant journalist, working in stereotypes, publishes an article based on assumption and without working knowledge or detail which then invokes condemnation towards R2 and parapsychology.

The second half of Extract 5I continues to broaden the themes presented in the first half. R2 now extends his focus away from reciting singular incidents to encompass more generalised criteria, namely the media in general. Phrasing such as "the media and their take on it is incredibly harmful" (Line 23) and "I just don't think these people have the time or inclination to actually find out the facts" (Lines 32-33) formulate the identity of the media as insiders that position parapsychology as an out-group unjustifiably. R2 emphasises this representation of the demarcation between these two boundaries by citing another particular incident. This time he refers to "newspapers" (Line 26) rather than a precise reference as in his previous story involving the Metro (Line 9), subtly transitioning his construction to a more extensive scope. He references that they "had a field day" (Line 26) which builds the identity of the media as being almost predatory against the portrayed victim of parapsychology. R2 links back to the first half of Extract 5I where he again points out that "they hadn't researched the facts" (Line 29) and subsequently represented the parapsychology course as "ridiculous" and "odd" (Line 27).

In Lines 29-33 R2 provides an overview of his constructed representations from his discourse. Parapsychologists are depicted as "targets" (Lines 30-31) who are unable to "defend" themselves against "these people" (Line 31) and the media (Line 32). This provides a neat summation of the constructs forged by R2 throughout Extract 5I. Parapsychologists are represented as victims and thus outsiders in comparison to the insider group of the media who function to debase them. Subsequently, this extract when viewed alongside the previous Extract 5H formulates the identity of parapsychology as a minority out-group that exists in juxtaposition to external forces such as the mass media. What these two pieces of discourse also achieve is the composition of these opposing external forces - characterising the insider groups and their motivations, such as funding within academia and media coverage.

#### **5.4.2 Building On The Insider Presentation**

As demonstrated within Extract 5I the researchers' use of the 'outsider repertoire' extended beyond boundary demarcation and presentation of parapsychology as a marginalised identity - it

was also used to attack the constructed oppositional in-group. From the above analysis it was evident that R2 was using his discourse to condemn the representational figures of the media he was depicting. The composition of his response is an attempt to elicit a negative perception of this suggested in-group and evoke sympathy with his experiences along with the rest of his out-group (Lines 30-31).

In Extract 5J R10 can be seen to establish an even more direct condemnation of what he constructs as the oppositional in-group using the 'outsider repertoire':

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#### EXTRACT 5J

[R10 has just talked about parapsychology not being an advantage to peoples' careers.]

1 **Interviewer:** Why do you think that is? Do you think that's just because of the historical baggage  
2 associated with the subject or do you think there's other sort of more implicit  
3 reasons?

4 **R10:** Most of it is blind prejudice. Which could be described as the historical baggage,  
5 that tends to be the elite scientists - the ones in academics, the ones that would be  
6 kind of controlling the posts at the elite institutions, tend to be more strongly  
7 prejudice against parapsychology, based on ignorance. They simply don't know the  
8 evidence. They rely on the usual second-hand filters that come through psi-cop[?]  
9 and just the general, kind of, the critics who, you know, any one of them could be  
10 shown to be relatively uninformed and, um the criticisms frequently are not valid  
11 but that doesn't count. They're not going to read the original literature, they will rely  
12 on people that they, quote, "trust", unquote. And so they will have these prejudices.  
13 But it's simply, I think, the higher one is in academia - and I think there are some  
14 studies that have shown this - the higher one is in academia the more conservative  
15 you're likely to be in terms of allowing, what might be described as, marginal areas  
16 of science into the academic orbit.

---

R10 quickly delineates the boundaries of between the 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in his account. The 'outsiders' are implied as being parapsychologists (as an extension from the recent discussion prior to this extract regarding careers within the field). In contrast the oppositional 'insiders' are clearly defined as "elite scientists - the ones in academics, the ones that would be kind of controlling the posts at elite institutions" (Line 5). As in previous examples of the 'outsider repertoire' R10 uses specific identifiers in his language to establish prestige for this identity construct - namely the use of the word "elite" twice in quick succession along with their alleged reach of control. R10 then proceeds to undermine and attack this constructed 'insider' group using highly negative attribute phrasing such as "blind prejudice" (Line 1), "strongly prejudice" (Lines 6-7), "relatively uninformed" (Line 10) and "the criticisms are frequently are not valid but that doesn't count" (Lines 10-11). This extract achieves multiple things, firstly R10 has established a differentiation between the "elite" group and parapsychology. Secondly, R10 has formulated an identity and motivation construct for the in-group of "elites". Finally, R10 has created a victimised portrayal of parapsychology as a marginalised out-group, extending the underdog imagery depicted earlier in this chapter (also Hess, 1993).

Regarding these observations, R10 uses multiple points in his discourse to emphasise the conveyed perception that his constructed in-versus-out group demarcation is cemented and will not change. His follow up to his construed observation in Line 10 that the criticisms are invalid with the phrase "but that doesn't count" (Line 11) implies a highly subjective perspective and almost bias. Similarly, the next wording supports this; "they're not going to read the original literature" (Line 11). Finally, R10 attempts to imbue his observations in a more globalised context with proposed evidence, between Lines 14-16. He theorises that the higher someone has gravitated within the academic infrastructure then the more probable they are to exclude fringe scientific content. An attempt at evidence of this is provided with the preliminary declaration that "I think there are some studies that have shown this" (Lines 13-14). Collectively, R10's discourse in Lines 14-16 can be seen as an attempt to add weight to the constructs he has presented throughout Extract 5J.

A further continuation of these themes, utilising the 'outsider repertoire' to negatively construct the oppositional in-group is evident in the responses from R17. Extract 5K is composed of multiple points from R17's interview that all share thematic and content similarities. R17's interview was



perhaps the most interesting of all of the researchers encountered in the data collection. The interviewer only asked one question (relating to his research background) and then R17 commenced a very long monologued response. This extended response (exemplified by the examples in Extract 5K) heavily utilised the 'outsider repertoire' throughout:

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#### EXTRACT 5K

1 **R17:** I realised that working in this field, it's not just a matter of doing experiments and  
2 doing them the best you can, publishing the data in journals. It's a sort of political,  
3 there's a political scenario there where the media are stacked against you in the kind  
4 of, erm serious media – the scientific media. Erm, that journals, most journals much  
5 prefer to publish papers by sceptics saying it's impossible...

6 ...So we're dealing not with science, not with reasoned debate. We're dealing with  
7 dogmatism of the deepest kind, the most extreme form...

8 ...The thing is that some materialists, particularly militant atheists, for them it's the  
9 basis of their whole world view. It's a kind of, like a religious belief. It's a  
10 fundamentalist belief system. And, you know, they're just as closed to evidence as  
11 creationists are to evidence for evolution. You would never persuade a creationist  
12 with, you know, fossils, that sort of thing...

13 ...One's dealing with the hardcore dogmatists, who claim to speak for the science  
14 community. And dealing with a narrow minded dogmatic belief system, which is  
15 very closed and they see the opposition – it's basically enlightenment rationalism  
16 that's got fossilised. They think that if you don't denounce these things, if you allow  
17 these beliefs to persist you'll have religion and superstition taking over. Whereas  
18 science and reason are against religion and superstition. So it's part of a kind of  
19 crusade. It's a kind of crusading mentality, where they see themselves as kind of  
20 purifying society of religion and superstition. Stamping out irrational beliefs and  
21 conquering and opposing the enemies of reason...

22                    *[Regarding Richard Dawkins and Richard Wiseman]...We're dealing here with*  
23                    fundamentalists who, I think, are deeply harmful to science, those kinds of attitudes.

---

In the same manner as R10 in Extract 5J R17 establishes an oppositional construct and then proceeds to vilify it. Simultaneously, R17 presents parapsychological researchers as the discriminated outsiders who are ideologically oppressed. His underlying formulation is established early in the interview (Lines 1-2) suggesting that the expected process of research, experimentation and publication is compromised by “a political scenario” (Line 3) espoused by the “serious...scientific media” (Line 4). This construction is again similar in tone to Extract 5J where R10 demarcates between the in and out groups and then proceeds to suggest reasons for this being a normalised state that is subjected to barriers preventing transition between these boundaries. R17 later repeats similar sentiments suggesting the status-quo is not “science” or “reasoned debate” (Line 6) but “dogmatism”. This vivid language portrays his constructed in-group (the scientific media) as unreasonable and invalid.

R17 constructs a delineation between parapsychologists and the antithetical scientific media that he formulates as a dichotomy between ‘good versus evil’. This is evidenced in his use of repetition of imagery and descriptives such as “militant atheists” (Line 8), “fundamentalist belief system” (Line 10), “narrow minded dogmatic belief system” (Line 14) and “crusading mentality” (Line 19). It appears that R17 is framing these constructs and boundaries in religious terms and frames of reference.

The vilification and denouncement of the scientific media functions to position the marginalised out-group (parapsychology researchers) as the complete opposite, without direct reference. Subsequently, if those that are against the field are narrow minded fundamentalists it implies that parapsychologists are the opposite of such propositions within the account.

In the final extract of this sub-section the researcher (R11) actually refers directly to the concept of ‘insiders’:

---

## EXTRACT 5L

1 **Interviewer:** There seems to be a perception that transpersonal psychology is being sort of more  
2 accepted as such - even though it deals with similar issues of parapsychology. Why  
3 do you think that is?

4 **R10:** Erm, I don't know. I wonder if it's because it has been suggested or broached by  
5 insiders - so these are people who were psychologists first. Also, they have  
6 something they can offer pragmatically, erm, more quickly than we can offer. There's  
7 a whole programme of transpersonal types of therapies, approaches to well-being, that  
8 we don't kind of get involved with and frankly some of that is a mistake. So we have  
9 just started a project on healing and one of the reasons for that is because if you  
10 want to hook the mainstream then you have to do one of two things. Either give  
11 some kind of theoretical framework that helps you understand what's going on. Or  
12 offer some dividend - why should we care? Because it offers this health benefit, or it  
13 can be used in this particular practice. You know, so if you can tick one of those two  
14 boxes, suddenly you will get the attention of people and you may get some of their  
15 money as well to do the next phase.

---

The direct reference to “insiders” (Line 5) is an interesting deviation within the context of the ‘outsider repertoire’. In previous examples discussed throughout this chapter the researchers have never directly delineated between parapsychologists and external groups using such terminology. In most cases, the in-groups are implied only as ‘insiders’ with parapsychology itself being more directly referenced as ‘outsiders’. R10 within the extract provides a formulation of insight and a potential strategy for how these borders are constructed (in terms of content) and how out-groups may infiltrate the in-group to be accepted in the mainstream: “if you want to hook the mainstream” (Lines 9-10) and “if you can tick one of those two boxes, suddenly you will get the attention of people” (Lines 13-14). Within this extract R10 is not only constructing an outsider identity but is also offering potential signifiers to transgress this identity. Therefore in his delineation, if a researcher or group possesses a “theoretical framework” (Line 11) and/ or “some dividend” (Line 12) then they can be considered for in-group status.

Collectively, the extracts across these sub-sections (5.4.1 and 5.4.2) build a narrative notion of advantaged 'insiders' and disadvantaged 'outsiders'. Within the sociological literature there are many cited examples of proposed inequality within scientific practice and academia. Cole (1992) suggested the importance of cumulative advantage, whilst Crane (1965, 1967) proposed the "halo effect" of the advantage offered by a superior institutional location. Similarly, Merton (1973) proposed the 'Matthew Effect' - "consist[ing] of accruing greater increments for particular scientific contributions to scientists of considerable reputation and the withholding of such recognition from scientists who have not yet made their mark" (1973: 46). Collins' (1999) study found different levels within scientific communities with a defined 'core-group' - see also Amick's (1974) index of scientific elitism and stratification derived from gatekeepers and Pinch's (1981b) discussion of core-sets in controversies. Mulkay (1976b) confirmed this stratification with the observation that:

"the academic community scientific research community generates its own well defined elite...this elite, having been created primarily by social processes occurring inside the research community, remains strongly committed to objectives regarded as central within that community."

(Mulkay, 1976b: 446)

The discourse analysis so far in this chapter supports these stratification elements from the literature. Through the use of the 'outsider repertoire' the researchers are able to draw on these sentiments and ideas to implement a stratification process that constructs delineated boundaries between both themselves and their (as perceived) fellow outsiders in contrast to the oppositional core-group, elite, insiders. The repertoire allows them to simultaneously build both identities through their accounts and this narrative of inequality.

The next section will discuss one of the key features of the interpretative repertoire - the concept of luck. An important discursive device that allowed the researchers to continue to present the concept of the outsider whilst also accounting for success, a potentially contradictory formulation in the context of the outsider construction.

## 5.5 Use of “Luck”: Accounting For Success

One of the most notable and prevalent aspects of the established ‘outsider repertoire’ was the use of the concept of luck in the researchers’ accounts. Throughout the interviews responses frequently referred to elements of luck. This tended to occur when the researcher was constructing a narrative of proposed personal experiences and career progression:

---

### EXTRACT 5M

- 1 **Interviewer:** Do you feel it's had any negative effect on your career, being associated with  
2 parapsychology?
- 3 **R1:** No, not at all...I think I've been quite fortunate in the places that I have worked have  
4 always been a little bit errr left-of centre...They have always been quite willing to  
5 explore those things – to have those sort of courses...And the bosses that I've had  
6 have been *[trails off]*...
- 7 ...So, no I haven't [experienced a negative effect]. But I think that's accident...  
8 absolutely luck *[laughs]*.
- 

Overall R1's account of his progression in Extract 5M is positive, citing that in his career the places he has been employed “have always been quite willing to explore” areas such as parapsychology (Lines 4-5). Without further analysis this would seemingly contradict the underlying ethos of the ‘outsider repertoire’, i.e. generating an account of a supportive network and inclusive group identity. However, R1's references to “being quite fortunate” (Line 3) and “accident...absolutely luck” (Lines 7-8) prevents this contradiction. On a deeper level it can be proposed that R1 wishes to retain the construct of researchers in the field as being outsiders. The role of the interviewer's question should also be considered here, with potentially leading terminology such as “negative effect” (Line 1). Such language may have led R1 to further present justification for his choice to present his “fortunate” experience.

Another example is provided by R3:

---

## EXTRACT 5N

1 **Interviewer:** Would you say it was any easier to pursue a career or conduct research in  
2 parapsychology now then when you first started?

3 **R3:** I don't know really, I've not had much experience of that. I would imagine that it's  
4 much harder now, now that Bob Morris has gone, and, err, the Koestler unit has  
5 been (you know) shrunk to what it is now. Err, I imagine it's actually more difficult. I  
6 mean I was lucky, when I was reading these books, you know, I couldn't believe my  
7 luck at the point that I realised; oh the biggest department in the world is just across  
8 the motorway. And then when I met Bob Morris, you know, he was enthusiastic and  
9 I was extremely lucky to have parents that were willing to fund it as well – because  
10 that seems to be what holds a lot of people back, is being able to fund a 3 or 4  
11 year PhD in parapsychology to get them started. So, it just, I was lucky in a lot of  
12 respects, that I could just manage to slide into it without really having any problems.  
13 Bob was keen that if you show enough enthusiasm and you had the money to pay  
14 for it, you know, he wasn't going to cause any extra obstacles in your way. So, Bob  
15 was good that way. Err, so yeah I had it lucky. Now - I really don't know. I haven't  
16 really been involved in it for a few years so I don't know what the state of play is at  
17 the moment.

---

Within Extract 5N R3 uses the term “lucky” five times (Lines 6, 7, 9, 11 and 15) in his depiction of his progress in parapsychology. All of these instances are used directly after R3 has just depicted an unproblematic transition or establishment into the field. R3's persistent use of reference to “luck” can be interpreted as an attempt to explain his presented career progression in light of the ‘outsider repertoire’. For example, the generalised use of this interpretative repertoire delineates between parapsychology as ‘outsiders’ and mainstream ‘insiders’. Discourse where the ‘outsider repertoire’ was present constructed representations of research struggles and marginalisation of careers due to association with the field. R3's representation of more positivity in his account ultimately lies in juxtaposition to this (generalised) construct. As such, phrased language such as “I

was lucky in a lot of respects, that I could just manage to slide into it without really having any problems” (Lines 11-12) can be seen as an attempt to maintain the constructs generated by the ‘outsider repertoire’.

More weight is added to this interpretation when the beginning and end of Extract 5N is analysed. R3’s response to the interviewer’s question is book-ended with similarly constructed discourse. He begins by stating unawareness and a lack of “experience” pertaining to the question’s subject matter (Line 3). This is then immediately followed by a declaration that he “imagines” it may be “harder” and “more difficult” now (Lines 3-5). Within these two lines he also cites two possible reasons for these suggestions, Bob Morris’ death and the shrinking of the Koestler unit. At the end of the response in Lines 15-17 R3 mirrors the beginning of the answer by using the disclaimer “Now - I really don’t know” followed by the assertion that he is no longer involved. These formulations are preceded by the non-specified reference of the presence of “extra obstacles” in Line 14. Together, these two points of R3’s response achieve two things. Firstly, they border the middle part of the response, where his more positive progression and luck is established. This serves to dilute these constructions in their applicability. Secondly, it creates intellectual distance between R3 and his account, via his presented claims of lack of knowledge. Repeated terms such as “I imagine” are not definitive and can be seen as an attempt by R3 to distance himself from his response. Collectively, this can be seen as an alternative facet of the ‘outsider repertoire’, an attempt to manage elements that may appear contrary to prior established constructs (such as insider-versus-outsider status).

A more extensive representation of these themes and ideas is observable in the much lengthier response to a similar question from R5 in Extract 5O:

---

#### EXTRACT 5O

1 **Interviewer:** ...how easy was it for you in real terms to pursue that interest in sort of academic  
2 research in parapsychology?

3 **R5:** Erm, I think...it’s hard to say, it depends how you look at it. I’ve been very lucky. And  
4 I think it’s been an easier path then some have had. I was very fortunate to get

5 opportunities early on to get quite well integrated into the field, so, I presented at  
6 my first SPR conference when I was 18 and I was very well supported at Coventry in  
7 my interest. And then that meant that, obviously I had some initial contacts with  
8 Bob, but being able to get to the KPU was relatively easy because people knew who I  
9 was, and I was somewhat precocious. Um, I was self-funded, I was very, again very  
10 lucky, to have funding from my family. My parents were always very supportive,  
11 even if they did kind of for a little while wonder if there was really a career path in  
12 this for me. But then I was also lucky enough to get SPR funding and Bial funding,  
13 which enabled me to do my PhD. After the PhD, particularly with Bob dying and the  
14 KPU definitely going through a contraction point at that time, it was difficult for me  
15 to stay in Edinburgh – there was no real concrete view of any work there necessarily,  
16 certainly not in parapsychology, there may have been options in other areas. But  
17 during the write-up process I moved back home to my parents’ place, which is in  
18 Derbyshire, and just happened [upon] a conference on brain scanning, which is an  
19 aspect of my work, happened to meet somebody who was starting work at Derby,  
20 and then I was lucky enough to kind of come along here to do some departmental  
21 research seminars and then just started to, you know, they knew I was in the area so  
22 when they had some extra associate work going they were kind enough to give me  
23 that. And then I applied for a full-time job and got that, so. Whilst also at the same  
24 time I was also applying for other jobs as well, which I wasn’t obviously as successful  
25 with. So I think there is a bit of revisionist history going on in my head. It was more  
26 difficult than I’m necessarily portraying, but I think I was definitely, I’ve definitely  
27 been luckier than many in my path, I just happened to have found the right places  
28 along the way. And also to be able to come here, where parapsychology wasn’t –  
29 was not only not viewed as a negative thing, but actually a positive thing and  
30 nobody else in the field seemed to be particularly aware that Derby was supportive  
31 of it, I was very fortunate in that.

---

Extract 5O shares many similarities with the two prior extracts discussed in this section. As in previous examples (Extracts 5M and 5N) there are multiple references to luck and good fortune in Lines 3, 4, 9-10, 12, 19, 26-27, 27-28 and 31. The majority of these examples are granted extra emphasis with R5’s use of the word ‘very’, for example, “I was very, again very lucky” (Lines 9-10).



R5 also introduces a slightly different formulation of luck when he depicts accidental fortune. In Line 18 he says he “just happened [upon] a conference” and then in Line 19 “happened to meet somebody”. Further along in Line 27 he then declares “I just happened to have found the right places”. Rather than an overt direct reference to luck these are more subtle implications of suggested good fortune and chance circumstance that favours the researcher (and their career progression).

R5’s response also promptly starts with a disclaimer in Line 3, “it depends how you look at it”. This can be viewed as similar to R3’s declaration of lack of knowledge in Extract 5N - it establishes a foundation of potentially invoked distance for the constructs R5 may fashion via his discourse. This is supported by his declarations of being “lucky” and having an “easier path” in Lines 3-4. The established disclaimer at the beginning of the response now appears as a device that attempts to explain any contradictions that may emerge that could contrast with the ‘outsider repertoire’ (or indeed any other constructs).

A further interesting, and in the context of the discourse, self-referential disclaimer is notable between Lines 25-27. R5 says that, “I think there is a bit of revisionist history going on in my head”, followed by a declaration that it “was more difficult than I’m necessarily portraying”, and then a further reference to having been “luckier”. As in the previous disclaimer instances, R5’s use of this appears to be excusing or creating the opportunity for a different interpretation of his constructed experience(s). Subsequently, this accounting for success is nullified by this terminology.

“Revisionist history” is a dissection by R5 of his own projected constructs and fundamentally questions the verisimilitude of his response as an account. Extending beyond this, when looking at the content and themes contained in the discourse itself, this again can be seen as an attempted reaffirmation of the ‘outsider repertoire’. His approximation of success and smooth transitions may be a function of ‘just’ luck and may be different entirely from his portrayal (“revisionist history”). Subsequently, these implied contradictions to the core identities advocated by the ‘outsider repertoire’ are potentially repudiated within the confines of the account.

Citations of luck and fortune can be seen as an attempt to position constructed personal biography as an exceptional instance. Without this introduction of the concept of luck as accounting for success the constructed boundaries from the ‘outsider repertoire’ begin to break down. When luck is used to describe success or progress then this re-affirms those boundaries.

The researcher or field remains formulated as an outsider with their constructed positive experiences existing as contradictions to their own established norm.

Branching from this interpretation is the consideration that citing luck as a determining variable augments the constructed identity of the marginalised outsider, akin to Hess' 'underdog' concept (Hess, 1993). The repeated references of luck as an influencing factor can be seen as an attempt to position their constructed personal biography as an exceptional instance. An attempt to communicate that whilst their presented trajectory has been (relatively) straight-forward this is not the case for others. Whilst the researchers are describing their own good fortune they are dualistically composing a difficult and obstacle littered career path portrayal that others have to circumnavigate. By communicating an experience as 'luck' it presents an alternate, more negative scenario that is suggestive of the norm in this context. Overall, through references to luck, a picture is constructed of obstacles and difficulty in cementing a career in parapsychology that can only be overcome through good fortune. Due to this displayed presentation of an opposite, the portrayal of parapsychology as a outsider identity is discursively affirmed.

## **5.6 Outsider Repertoire as a Discursive Strategy**

The preceding sections of this chapter have introduced the concept of the 'outsider repertoire', using numerous examples from the interview data to outline the key features and constructs. Following this establishment, this section will continue to explore the repertoire but will begin to discuss considerations of why utilising it may be an effective discursive strategy for the researchers in the interview sample.

### **5.6.1 Identity Positioning**

The primary purpose of the 'outsider repertoire' can be interpreted as establishing a fundamental distinction between an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. In more specific terms an 'insider' can be defined as an established individual or group that has been accepted by the social and cultural majority (for example, the construct of what could be considered "the mainstream"). In contrast an 'outsider' remains an outlier from this and removed from generalised acceptance (for example, the construct of what could be considered as "on the fringe"). Extending from these simplistic

boundary demarcations the 'outsider repertoire' acts a mechanism for building and presenting forms of identity within these classifications. The researchers in the interviews used their discourse to selectively frame identity constructions of fringe elements. As previously alluded to throughout the chapter, this took the form of references that portrayed aspects in the context of what could be considered a minority or even a victim. Ultimately, their discourse presented parapsychology and researchers associated with the field as being in opposition to the (mainstream) majority. This in itself forms a collective identity that was perpetuated throughout the discourse across the researchers. There were even points within the interviews where the researchers were self-referential about this construction process:

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#### **EXTRACT 5P**

[End of a long response where the interviewer originally asked, "Where would you like to see the subject heading?"]

- 1 **R5:** ...I think that there can be an identity amongst certain – some parapsychologists,  
2 and I've been guilty of this as well, and I think I sometimes am now - of this idea of  
3 individuality, of being special somehow. Of investigating, and being interested in this  
4 kind of weird and wacky stuff that nobody else seems to be interested in and is  
5 actively dismissive of, and that can encourage a kind of self-identity being somehow  
6 more special or something. And I think that can be a bit of a lie.

---

In Extract 5P R5 discusses the concept of identity directly, referencing both a personal level in himself and the more globalised concept of parapsychologists in general. He outlines the concept of "individuality" and "being special somehow" (Line 3). This is followed by formulations of parapsychological content, depicting it as "weird and wacky stuff that nobody else is interested in" (Line 4). R5 is displaying an inherent awareness of identity construction and what composes, in his terms, the identity of being a parapsychologist. He dualistically uses his discourse to be self-referential about this constructed identity but also uses it to propagate and extend such concepts. So whilst his discourse presents how he purportedly believes people perceive the subject ("weird and wacky") this also serves to extend this identity. Similar themes are present in another

example below:

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### EXTRACT 5Q

- 1 **Interviewer:** So [parapsychology] is always going to be fringe by definition of its [content]?
- 2 **R16:** Yeah I rather enjoyed that. That's what I used to like to see themselves/ ourselves as  
3 mavericks sort of working against the powerful institutions of academia and being  
4 picked on by them. You know it's all sort of classic, sort of lone-wolf stuff isn't it.
- 5 **Interviewer:** So it creates an identity in itself?
- 6 **R16:** Yeah and we all get together, say how terrible it is that you know that mainstream  
7 psychology is ignoring us and so you get that sort of - as you do with all kind of  
8 fringe groups. I'm heavily involved in the magic community and you get very very  
9 similar, erm sort of sense of identity of you know - we all meet up and just talk  
10 about our niche interests.

---

Extract 5Q has comparable content to that of the previous extract. R16 also shows a marked degree of self-awareness and the demarcation between both his identity and that of parapsychology's - openly referencing their constructed subjective perspective orientations. He makes numerous references to the construct of researchers in parapsychology; "mavericks" (Line 3), "lone-wolf stuff" (Line 4), "fringe groups" (Line 8) and "niche interests" (Line 10). The main component of the 'outsider repertoire' is present with an established differentiation between these and the opposing group (the insiders), with referencing them as "the powerful institutions of academia" (Line 3) and "mainstream psychology" (Lines 6-7). The imagery and thematic representation of underdog and victim status is present with the assertion that parapsychologists have to "[work] against" (Line 3) these insider groups who are accused of "ignoring [them]" (Line 7).

Extracts 5P and 5Q prove an interesting implementation of the 'outsider repertoire', where the

response constructs its own strategic intentions (demarcation) whilst also building the delineation of parapsychology as an outsider entity. The researchers show an appreciation of the identity work they (and others in their cultural group) are doing when they construct these characteristics and status assessments. But coupled with this aspect, their discourse also serves to solidify and maintain these constructs - primarily the fundamental distinction of parapsychology as an 'outside' concept. Ultimately, the repertoire emerged in the interviews as a sophisticated discursive strategy by which the researchers constructed and managed a range of outsider identities, ranging from personal to the field of parapsychology itself. These themes tie with Hess' (1993) proposal of the parapsychologists creating their own "paraculture" (1993: 15), whereby he interpreted the constructed outside status as embodying a rite of passage for the individual, serving as a means to formulate a particular identity and cultural association:

"As underdogs, these heroes are located 'beyond' or 'alongside' society: they are paraheroes. In their struggle for the lofty goal of a better knowledge and society, they sometimes violate the very rules of the knowledge and society they seek to preserve...Therefore members of [these] communities are caught in a paradox: in order to redeem society, they must leave it and in some sense become marginal figures...By making a journey outside of society, the heroes undergo a trajectory that begins to look like a rite of passage...

...The passage 'outside' of society is...restricted; the hero in fact remains in society but must take a passage outside of the corrupt high society of the topdogs. The economic and social power that [parapsychologists] believe shores up their Others can be seen as a signifier of the corrupt and powerful forces that they challenge as underdog crusaders."

(Hess, 1993: 90-91)

In the context of the researchers from the interviews - their construction of these outsider identities can be interpreted as an attempt to also construct this "parahero" status and entering Hess' proposed rite of passage trajectory.

### **5.6.2 Ideological Positioning**

Extending from the above analysis it could also be argued that the 'outsider repertoire' used by the researchers also represents a more ideological based communicative strategy. As well as a tool to manipulate and present forms of identity, the repertoire can also be viewed as a mechanism to

both validate ideological positioning and question potential critics against them. Subsequently, the researchers' accounts can be viewed as counter-positioning opposing perspectives towards theoretical frameworks (such as parapsychology).

The demarcation aspects of the 'outsider repertoire' also function to launch defensive positions against potential critical perspectives to their current discursive construction(s). It can be interpreted as a way to undermine oppositional elements that exist in juxtaposition to the identity they are constructing in the communicative context. Primarily this is achieved through the repertoire's enforcement of the outsider identity, where the individual frames themselves and their cultural affiliation group in the context of a minority or even victim. This serves to frame the opposition, insider group, in negative connotations. In Section 5.4 of the current chapter, the analysis looked at the discourse formulations of the insider group and how this was represented by the purported outsiders. Researchers cited examples of alleged unfair treatment and notions of bias against their individual research and the field in general. Whilst this achieves the insider-outsider dichotomy it also navigates the respondent towards a role of the aggrieved.

When Extract 5K is reviewed again, R17's response can be interpreted as utilising his discourse to such ideological positioning using the 'outsider repertoire'. As discussed, he depicts the "political scenario" (Line 3), the "media are stacked against you" (Line 3), "dogmatism" (Line 7), "militant atheists" (Line 8) and "crusading mentality" (Line 19) amongst more extensive viewpoints of his critics. Fundamentally, through the boundary work from the repertoire R17 is able to use his discourse as a platform to construct an attack into his perceived oppositional group. He builds a dialectical establishment and then utilises this to deconstruct the identity and arguments of his demarcated insiders. His position is framed as agreeable, whilst the antithesis of this is presented as corrupt. A further example from R8 is below:

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#### **EXTRACT 5R**

[End of a long response where the interviewer had originally ask R8 about what factors had made him change to a more softened position towards parapsychology - away from a more sceptical/ critical stance.]

- 1 **R8:** ...but realising that some of the accusations that were levelled against  
2 parapsychology were just so totally wrong that they just weren't fair, you know, and  
3 there are some kind of outspoken critics of parapsychology who because they've got

4 big names (often in other areas of science) come out with some really really ill-  
5 informed opinions. Erm, you know I think it's perfectly legitimate to say that you're  
6 convinced by the evidence, and that's a perfectly defensible position. But to say that  
7 there isn't any evidence, well that's not - that's nonsense. There is evidence, it's the  
8 quality of the evidence that we're talking about.

---

The main features of the 'outsider repertoire' are once again on display here. R8 demarcates a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders; the "outspoken critics" (Line 3) "big names" (Line 4) versus parapsychologists (Line 2). His language (such as "accusations" in Line 1) portrays an embattled, minority identity of research and researchers attached to the field. However, in addition to these constructs R8 can also be interpreted as using his repertoire to achieve more subtle goals. Essentially, whilst portraying parapsychology as victim he is also using his response to defend the field. It is designed to attack opposition, through his use of terminology and descriptives such as "accusations" (Line 1), "ill-informed opinions" (Lines 4-5) and "nonsense" (Line 7). So whilst parapsychology is presented as an outsider upon initial consideration, a deeper analysis suggests R8 is attempting to reframe the field away from this interpreted perception and to also counter any oppositional groups. By undermining the intellectual position of purported critics ("nonsense", Line 7) R8 has utilised his response to reinterpret the construction of parapsychology as an outsider and present a different perspective; "there is evidence" (Line 7). Subsequently, this can be seen as a form of boundary management and ideological repositioning - R8 constructs parapsychology as a valid field that is prevented insider status due to "accusations" that are "just so totally wrong" and unfair (Lines 1-2).

The extracts discussed from R8 and R17 reinforce Hess' (1993) concept of the 'underdog':

"...[Parapsychologists] construct the negative Other as both materialistic and religious. A paradox rather than a contradiction, the underlying similarity is a sense that the Other is dogmatic...[Parapsychologists believe] that theirs is the open-minded, rational system that is grounded in some notion of 'factuality'... [Parapsychologists] believe that theirs is the discourse of reason, whereas that of the Other is irrational and dogmatic."

(Hess, 1993: 68)

In their discourse the researchers portray the demarcated opposing group (in this case the insider

group) as a “negative other”. For example, R17’s descriptives of them as “militant atheists” and even using a reference to dogmatism. Hess’ (1993) theories provide more of a contextual perspective by which to view the construction work being done by the researchers in their responses. They forge a demarcation between themselves as rational outsiders and the irrational dogmatic insiders. A demarcation that then broadens the identity construct of the researcher towards one of a minority ‘underdog’. Beyond this the simple framing of perceived ‘right versus wrong’ is an attempt to undermine the opposing insider group.

As noted towards the beginning of this chapter Hess’ analysis lacked an exploration of the discursive tools and repertoires that these different cultures utilised in their communication. The ‘outsider repertoire’ has extended Hess’ (1993) fundamental concept to incorporate such an analysis. Hess’ work presented members of the ‘paraculture’ as not only underdogs but as moral heroes that existed against a hostile oppositional group. This concept is reflected in the ‘outsider repertoire’. The analysis throughout the chapter has not only illustrated the researchers to be constructing accounts that present themselves as outsiders but has also shown within those accounts there are descriptions of unfair treatment and bias; features which position them as almost morally superior against the oppositional insider formulation. A more recent discourse analysis by Whittle and Mueller (2011a) extends these themes and has connections with the analysis of this chapter. Whittle and Mueller (2011a) examined the role of storytelling in the process of making sense of the financial crisis: “the way in which stories work to construct the morality of the characters involved...used to build emplotments of the ‘story’ of the financial crisis and paint a picture of the key characters, for example as ‘villains’ or ‘victims’” (2011a: 112). The study’s central finding was the importance of building a moral landscape and the delineation between concepts such as ‘villain’ and ‘victim’:

“The plot and characters of a story...only start to form a meaningful story when these devices build up a moral landscape within which the events unfold. For example, stories often revolve around the creation of ‘villains’, ‘heroes’, ‘victims’, ‘bystanders’ (guilty and innocent) and so on. These characters are far from ‘fixed’ and ‘stable’ within the ongoing narration of conversations: protagonists may move from hero to villain to hero again.”

(Whittle and Mueller, 2011b: 131-132)

Hess’ (1993) original theorisation on moral heroes and underdogs ‘paraculture’ when combined



with Whittle and Mueller's (2011b) proposals have significant connections with the current chapter's analysis. The 'outsider repertoire' extends these concepts, looking more closely at the discursive actions within the accounts of the researchers. What has been shown in this chapter's analysis is that the repertoire is an active discursive tool for creating these formulations of the outsider - which encompasses varying presentations of 'victim', 'underdog' or 'moral hero'. In contrast, the formulations of the insider are created as negative others (the 'villain').

Overall, this ideological positioning and repositioning of identity constructs can be considered as a distinct discursive strategy within the 'outsider repertoire'. It evolves the discourse away from merely formulating insider-outsider distinctions towards boundary management, counter-arguments to critical positions and attempted re-interpretation towards the (interpreted) validity of subject matter (in this context, the field of parapsychology). From the analysis in this subsection it can be seen as a tactic to de-stabilise the position of critics and opposing ideological orientations.

## **5.7 Reflexive Considerations**

The 'outsider repertoire' and the subsequent analysis of the repertoire should be considered in the context of the interview setting and in particular the role of the interviewer's discourse. As previously discussed within the thesis, the interviewer's questions ascribed an assumed identity and attachment of the researcher towards parapsychology. Subsequently, the questions did not create a blank canvas for the respondents' discourse. In the previous chapter the categorisation and stake work by the researcher was interpreted as a positioning response to the interviewer's questions. The repertoire in this chapter can also be considered as an extension of this.

Formulations of an insider-outsider dichotomy elaborates on categorisation and stake foundations presented in their discourse. The interviewer's questions (delineated in Chapter 3) presented discourse itself that positioned parapsychology as not accepted. For example, questions regarding experiences of bias or obstacles introduce the notion of the area as being an outsider. Therefore the interpretation that the interviewed researchers were continuing this positional presentation within their discourse constructions must be considered. The 'outsider repertoire' has been unpacked as a tool for identity and ideological positioning from a defensive standpoint in the

communicative context of the interview. This defence may have been a direct response to the interviewer's questions that ascribed both ties to them towards parapsychology and also questioned its acceptance as a field.

The 'outsider repertoire' becomes an augmentation of the 'categorisation and stake repertoire' from the previous chapter. By re-constructing and presenting interpretations around categories and the emerging identities from those category constructions, the researchers create a discursive platform to then embellish those identities with drawn boundaries of group membership. In broad terms within the interview this meant presenting a definition of what a particular category was, presenting their stake towards that concept and then depicting its position in terms of an outsider versus insider.

Regarding the role of the interviewer, one interpretation may be that the researchers' responses merely extended the concepts introduced by the interviewer. Construction of parapsychology and elements of their purported experiences of obstacles may have been due to the identity ascription assigned to them through the line of questioning. Whilst the role of the interviewer's discourse cannot be extrapolated from this analysis, as it informs the communicative context, its sole influence on inspiring the 'outsider repertoire' is debatable. There is one interview that potentially repudiates this reflexive notion - that of R17. As previously outlined, R17's interview did not follow the same flow as that of the other interviews. The interviewer said little over the course of the telephone call and was not presented with the opportunity to ask questions or engage in dialogue - with R17 immediately launching into a long monologue that presented discursive constructs of alleged experiences and his research. R17's discourse contained many elements of the presented 'outsider repertoire' and stands as an account where the influence of the interviewer was low due to their diminished role within the communicative context.

## **5.8 Summary**

This second empirical chapter has presented the case for the existence of a second interpretative discourse repertoire: the 'outsider repertoire'. The discussions above have shown the core function of the repertoire is to demarcate between constructions of insider and outsider groups. Stemming from this consideration, further dissection of the researchers' discourse has shown the

repertoire to be a discursive tool to build on these delineations and construct identities. These constructs range beyond formulations of the outsider as a minority or victim, towards representations of the opposing insider group(s). The chapter has revealed how the 'outsider repertoire' was used as a tool to repair a fundamental contradiction to the outsider construct - accounts of success and progression - through integration of the concept of luck and fortune.

Beyond this foundational analysis the repertoire has shown to be a discursive method through which the constructed outsider can conduct both identity and ideological positioning within the communicative context. As such it has been shown that not only the presentation of the individual is being conducted but also boundary management for more global concepts (such as representations of the field of parapsychology itself). Furthermore, the repertoire acts as a platform through which the respondent, as the constructed outsider, can undermine and attack the opposing group's ideological position and purported critiques.

The 'outsider repertoire' extends some of the key concepts identified within the 'categorisation and stake repertoire'. One of the main conclusions around the previous repertoire was its significance towards stake management around identity presentation. The 'outsider repertoire' builds upon this concept of identity construction within the discourse. Here the discourse is more concerned with building and delineating between group formulations of 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. This creates a more evolved layer to the discursive actions of the researchers - they have moved categorisation selection and stake declarations towards establishing and refining group boundaries. This highlights that the researchers are using different discursive strategies (and repertoires) throughout their accounts. As with the 'categorisation and stake repertoire', the repertoire detailed in this chapter on a fundamental level is also one of positioning - in this case, positioning constructs as "outsiders" and using discourse to formulate concepts around these boundaries. Boundary formation also allows the researcher to frame the oppositional group detrimentally, for example presenting them as unfair. Such connections between the repertoires begins to realise one of the key research objectives of the current thesis: to provide theoretical connections between the emerging repertoires. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7.

The next chapter will now extend the empirical analysis to focus on a different interpretative repertoire that was noticeable in the researchers' responses; the 'reflection of contingency repertoire'.

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS OF CONTINGENCY

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### 6.1 Introduction

The previous empirical chapters have identified two interpretative repertoires from the interviewed researchers' discourse. Whilst both repertoires have distinct features, they contain connecting elements such as identity positioning. The focus of this third and final empirical chapter will now move on to looking at a further interpretive repertoire. Discussion will centre on the researchers' use of informal discourse and how they utilised a contingent-focused repertoire to construct purported insights and reflections. More specifically, within the interviews there was a general trend by the researchers to construct reflective accounts of both their careers and the process of conducting science through their discourse.

In the interviews the researchers frequently presented discourse of their experiences and opinions relating to career progression, potential political machinations in academia, and their views of parapsychology as a field. Collectively, within these instances the researchers tended to display more informal language, constructing accounts that appeared to have the intention of giving the interviewer an insight into the respondent's perspective, opinions and presented experiences.

This tendency is an interesting characteristic of the discourse that emerged from the interviews. Throughout, and evident in the extracts that will be discussed within this chapter, the researchers were actively constructing reflections of what was presented as their biographies and of the core functioning processes of academia as a culture. What emerged is an interpretative repertoire that will form the basis of this chapter's analysis; the 'reflection of contingency repertoire'.

This chapter will follow a similar format to the previous empirical chapters. The next section of the chapter will provide an overview of prior discourse analysis literature that has looked at contingent forms of communication. Within this section an example of the discourse repertoire will be introduced (in 6.2.3), discussing its primary features. Building upon this, the chapter will

then analyse this proposed discourse tool to see how it features within the researchers' responses, proposing theories on how this repertoire holds a strategic communicative purpose.

## **6.2 Constructing Insight Through Contingency**

This section will look at the discourse analysis literature that has focused on elements of contingency - primarily looking at the work of Gilbert and Mulkey (1984). The last sub-section (6.2.3) will then begin to discuss how the researchers in the current thesis' interviews used elements of contingency to construct formulations of supposed insight.

### **6.2.1 Gilbert and Mulkey's 'Contingent Repertoire'**

Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) seminal study, 'Opening Pandora's Box', indicated the presence of two distinct linguistic repertoires utilised by the observed scientists in their discourse. Fundamentally, this was a demarcation between formal and informal representations of the scientific process. They identified the 'empiricist' repertoire, a formal presentation of the objective values of science as a culture and as a research endeavour. Work conducted was governed and reviewed under strict rules of empiricism and cemented knowledge/ facts. In contrast, the 'contingent' repertoire was a more informal construction and "described a shifting world where things could have been otherwise and where facts were humanly constructed" (Antaki, 1994). In these discursive formulations the inner machinations of science were governed under more "contingent" elements such as social influence, political process or personal motivation of the scientist. Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) proposed that collectively these repertoires were deployed to uphold the concept of science itself. Subsequently, the empirical repertoire was used to describe successful studies and when research went smoothly. Conversely, the contingent repertoire was used to describe instances where things were not optimal and when the notion of science was threatened. In simplistic terms, error was a consequence of things such as human error (contingent) and successful research was virtue of correct implementation of scientific methodology (empirical).

Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) findings show the potential polarisation in scientists' discourse and their use of formal and informal modes of dialogue - that different forms of these are used in different communicative contexts and that these may form the basis of sophisticated discursive

strategies. The discovery of the 'contingent repertoire' proved highly significant as it demonstrated that scientists did not just talk about science in objective and formalised accounts. Informal constructs that referenced competing elements of culture, political influence and contextual motivations were presented - potentially with the aim of constructing a less guarded and more intricately designed presentation of 'insight' into their functioning world. Ultimately, these less formal and guarded accounts can be interpreted as building a presentation of "what is really going on" in day-to-day science. A careful crafting of scientific practice and academic processes through discourse - a considered display of constructed 'insight'. This in itself immediately suggests that such discourse and its repertoires exert a powerful influence in constructing interpretations and perception of the implementation of science.

The relativist literature reviewed in Chapter 2 contains many thematic similarities with the findings of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984). For example, the studies conducted by Collins (1985; 1981) into gravity waves, whilst holding a different interpretational focus away from discourse analysis, was built upon a similar methodological philosophy. This work also involved interviewing scientists about their work in an area of contested knowledge - and also revealed scientists to invoke informal responses in constructed accounts of communication and interactional issues with colleagues. Collins' interview data revealed crafted accounts that were intended to give the interviewer a 'true insight' into the personal and political machinations behind the search for gravity waves. One such illustration in these accounts was the apparent vendetta enacted by the scientist 'Quest', whereby informal descriptives such as his "holy crusade", "vindictive" nature and "self delusion" were paramount in research motivated by personal motives (Collins, 1981: 46-47). As such these accounts, if examined through a discourse analytical perspective, would fall under Gilbert and Mulkay's contingent repertoire.

Ultimately, these accounts are all reflective reconstructions of the scientists' interpretations of their personal biographies, experiences and perspectives. One of the failings of Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) study is that the 'contingent repertoire' was not explored fully or unpacked to view the potential discursive strategies of the repertoire beyond preserving the concept of scientific practice (and accounting for juxtaposing elements to that concept). It remains a primary intention of the current chapter to unpack this repertoire more thoroughly and provide an anatomy of contingency.

### 6.2.2 Research Beyond Gilbert and Mulkey

Extending from Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) research there are other examples within the literature relating to the reference and presentation of contingency within scientific practice (for example Mauranen, 1999, 2001). Collins and Pinch (1979b) originally noted the significance of this element, stating that:

"In saying that the constitution of scientific knowledge can be looked at as a product of contingent actions, we are endorsing a relativistic thesis within which consideration of the 'actual existence' of a phenomenon is redundant. It is, we believe, only through this perspective that the full richness of the social processes involved in the construction of scientific knowledge can be revealed."

(Collins and Pinch, 1979: 262)

A study conducted by Burchell (2007) mirrored the findings of Gilbert and Mulkey (1984). The study looked at the performative function of the discourse of scientists working in the controversial area of crop genetics. Burchell found that:

"...when talking about the beliefs and actions of four key 'others', most of the scientists relied upon a contrasting contingent repertoire, in which beliefs and actions are seen to derive from personal shortcomings, inclinations and self interest, and to be in contradiction of an ethical framework. It is suggested that the extent to which the discourse of these crop geneticists followed this pattern may be related to the conditions of controversy within which they were working at the time of the interviews."

(Burchell, 2007: 145)

The contingent repertoire in Burchell's (2007) study revolved around citing social factors for explaining public resistance against concepts. Fellow scientists and their failures within the controversial field were explained as a function of contingent elements such as poor training or increased pressure. In contrast, Waterton et al. (2001) noted that such use of the contingent repertoire was more prevalent in researchers working in non-controversial areas. The scientists in the sample from Sampson and Atkinson's (2011) study constructed discourse pertaining to scientific discovery alongside presenting contingent narratives of personal relationships, personality and a process shaped by factors such as luck (a factor which was noted within this

thesis' findings for the 'outsider repertoire' - see Chapter 5). They emphasise the importance of revealing the framing of contingent factors in scientific narratives:

"In overlooking analysis of scientists' accounts and narratives scholars of STS are in danger of reproducing, rather than challenging, some taken-for-granted aspects of science, eliding the biographical framing of scientific work, of narratives of justification and legitimation, and of appeals to contingent factors...Scientists' autobiographical accounts of scientific work and discovery are as conventional as their published accounts in scientific journals but they enact different conventions that frame different versions of scientific discovery. "

(Sampson and Atkinson, 2011: 91)

Contingent and biographical aspects that form part of scientists' reflections on their work has been highlighted within the literature (Shapin, 2008; Ross, 2010; Sigl, 2012; Atkinson et. al, 1997, 1998; Rabinow and Dan-Cohen, 2006; Bartlett, 2008; Edwards, 1999). For example, Jedlowski (2001) proposed how biographies, in general, are enacted through narrative reconstructions together with other forms of memorialisation.

Collectively this research builds upon Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) emphasis of highlighting contingency within discursive formulations of (biographical) reflections. This chapter will now focus on the analysis of the interviewed researchers' discourse and how this, relating to the literature cited above, formed the 'reflection of contingency repertoire'.

### **6.2.3 Researcher Examples of Contingency**

In the current study, throughout the interviews the researchers presented accounts where they utilised a contingent focused repertoire to construct reflections into the working process of academia, research and their experiences:

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#### **EXTRACT 6A**

- 1 **Interviewer:** Do you think it's any easier now to follow a career in parapsychology? Or do you
- 2 think the same sort of obstacles that you faced are present?



3 **R5:** I think it depends what we mean by parapsychology. I mean I don't want to wax too  
4 lyrical about the different definitions. But I think there has been a subtle shift over  
5 the past 5 or 10 years so that, and this I think wasn't isn't just a recent phenomena I  
6 think it was something actively pursued by Bob. He always said to me and to many  
7 people who went through the PhD process before me, "You need to have more than  
8 one string to your bow". And just being known as a parapsychologist, inverted  
9 commas, isn't enough – that you need to effectively have, err I hate this term, but  
10 'sellable qualities' that are beyond just parapsychology. So, I think that that's meant  
11 that to a certain extent, although parapsychology is definitely an identity, for me  
12 personally I don't just include myself as a parapsychologist - I tend to see myself as  
13 a psychologist, of which a strong aspect of what I do is parapsychology. Um, but I  
14 don't think it can be separated out from other things that I do that might not be  
15 regarded as parapsychology. So I think within that, I think if you were just trying to,  
16 then again I hate this phrase but it's the only thing that comes to mind, 'market  
17 yourself' as a parapsychologist alone, it would probably still be difficult to try and  
18 get work on that, if only because the H.E. sector doesn't need that many  
19 parapsychologists, but will need other types of psychologist and therefore it's being  
20 able to show versatility and that you can, kind of, represent different aspects of  
21 psychology, one of which (hopefully) will be supported as parapsychology. And I'd  
22 like to hope that people don't have necessarily the negative view of parapsychology  
23 that it has had in the past. But again it depends how it's approached when you're  
24 applying for jobs.

---

In Extract 6A R5 is formulating a reflection on navigating a career within parapsychology. According to R5 as a parapsychologist researcher one needs to "have more than one string to your bow" (Lines 7-8); "sellable qualities" (Line 10); and to "market yourself" (Lines 16-17). R5 cites the need to utilise such strategies due to the demands of the H.E. sector (Line 18) and to avoid any potential overt negativity that might be present towards parapsychology if applying for jobs in a certain way (Lines 21-24).

He immediately declares a function of contingency in his response through the declaration that “it depends what we mean by parapsychology” (Line 3). This invoked contingent variable acts almost as a disclaimer for the remaining account, any oppositional perspectives can be countered on this contingency. Extending from this contingency is an inflection of suggested hesitancy. R5 appears careful to buffer his presented account as perhaps being a subjective frame of reference in nature. There are frequent uses of the term “I think” (8 in total within Extract 6A) along with the term “I tend to...” (Line 12). A level of hesitancy is introduced through these terms. The researcher can be seen to be refraining from making unconditional statements - the caveats of language such as “I think” provides a certain level of intellectual manoeuvrability. Subsequently, both the content and the presentation of the construction are subjected to varying levels of contingency.

Beyond the content, the presentation of the language is highly informal and conversational in tone. The structure of the response appears to originate in the researcher’s ‘stream of consciousness’ as he moves (seemingly) randomly around the subject matter of the topic being discussed. Phrasing such as “wax too lyrical” (Lines 3-4) and “for me personally” (Lines 11-12) is more of a relaxed conversational exchange, non-formalised discourse, as opposed to a formal interview discussing scientific research. Also, “I hate this phrase but it’s the only thing that comes to mind” (Line 16) and the similar reference “I hate this term” (Line 9) are indicative of a more intimate communicative exchange. Such terminology constructs are presentations of suggested honesty and insight on the part of the respondent towards the issues being discussed.

The extract is constructed as a reflection that highlights contingent elements that exist for someone wanting to navigate a career in parapsychology. R6 builds the account so that it could be perceived as some rare insight into the field provided only by himself. There is a high frequency of references to “I” or “me”, totalling nineteen instances between Lines 1-17. This frequency emphasises that R5 is constructing this account to be seen as his perspective of his purported experiences. In Lines 18-24 he shifts emphasis to more external references, the H.E. sector and the perception of parapsychology, with only one instance of direct personal reference (“I’d” in Line 21). When combined this could be argued as being an account of both personal and field based contingency - he positions his own progression and that of the field’s as being contingent on external, non-academic and non-scientific factors, such as perception and marketable skill-sets.

This dualistic representation of different elements was not consigned to just R5. One of the primary features of the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' was for the researchers to utilise the repertoire when constructing accounts about both their personal careers and also academic research in general, relating each to parapsychology. As such the repertoire itself can be analysed on two fundamental levels; personal or biographical representation and also external structures. The personal aspect revolves around the researchers discussing supposed anecdotal experiences from what they presented as their personalised biographies; whilst the externalised structure elements displayed discourse that focused on more globalised elements such as bureaucracy in the academic sector or possible future directions for the field of parapsychology. In most instances, as evidenced in Extract 6A, the researcher can be seen to be addressing both aspects within the same account. The present chapter will analyse each of these features separately.

### **6.3 Personal (Biographical) Strands of Reflective Contingency**

Extending from the above discussion, one of the key aspects of the researchers' use of the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' emerged when talking about their personal experiences and career biographies. Constructing personalised accounts reflecting on research based on contingent factors was a key aspect of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) work, depicted above. More recently Sampson and Atkinson (2011) investigated the narratives of genetic scientists. Their analysis highlighted the autobiographical work conducted in the accounts and the way the scientists recounted discoveries:

"The scientists constructed narratives of motivation, turning points, relationships, gender, personality and the personal meaning of gene discovery. In doing so they spoke of how a group of individuals became a team through the exploration of a scientific hypothesis. This process of discovery was described as having been shaped by technology, luck, and hard work. The narratives recounted chronicles of competition and collaboration with other groups of scientists. Emotions of ambivalence and regret were narrated alongside pride in contributing to the scientific canon, and the importance of relationships within the scientific world was reconstructed through accounts of the personal meaning of the discovery.

Our analysis is framed by paradox. General histories, biographies and autobiographies of science and scientists are replete with descriptions of interpersonal relations and personal emotions. They are developed through accounts of disappointment and success, rivalry and collaboration, isolation and

colleagueship. They stand in stark contrast to the impersonal reports in published papers, in which personhood is all but eliminated through the conventional formats of scientific texts.”

(Sampson and Atkinson, 2011: 89)

Ultimately, in the above quote Sampson and Atkinson (2011) are highlighting the same issues of contingency promoted by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984). Researchers’ accounts are filled with personalised references that emphasise elements of contingency in scientific and academic practice, as opposed to impersonal, purely objective, presentations of facts and process.

In terms of the current thesis the self-referential nature of the researchers’ discourse can be seen below:

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#### EXTRACT 6B

1 **Interviewer:** ...from what you are saying it seems almost like like social forces dictate the evolving  
2 nature of parapsychology...

3 **R2:** *{faintly in background}* Yeah...yeah...

4 **Interviewer:** ...rather than the research itself. Is that correct?

5 **R2:** No...I, I...I think that the forces are dictating the way that your career goes and, well,  
6 the future of parapsychology. For example, um, I started off wanting to teach  
7 parapsychology and do research in that area. And I’m just finding it a lot, lot easier  
8 to do research in clinical psychology and work [from] that department now - and do  
9 research that is relevant to clinical psychology, but still parapsychological research.  
10 And I’m just finding that people are much more accepting of my research because of  
11 that.

---

R2 presents a reflective construction discussing his career strategies and providing an outline of the logic employed for decisions to pursue a predominantly clinical psychology based role. The

researcher is utilising the repertoire to compose an account that explains potential career choices that they claim to have been made.

Use and reference to contingent elements are paramount in the reference to “the forces” in Line 5. R2 does not specify or unpack what he means or interprets as these influential forces but cites their existence as dictating career and field direction (Lines 5-6). It can be interpreted that the primary purpose of this constructed account is to explain the personalised decisions that he is presenting. In Lines 7-11 R2 depicts how he is participating in more clinical psychology based research, in comparison to parapsychological work. The account implies that this is due to “the forces” already cited, and that consequently it is a “lot, lot easier” (Line 7) to pursue one research path over another - due to the acceptance associated with that path (Lines 10-11). What R2 is doing here is constructing his response around contingent elements to build an account that attempts to validate (or indeed provide ‘insight’) into choices he claims to have made. Consequently, this is a use of the repertoire on a smaller, personal-level of interpretation. The discourse is produced more to build certain perceptions or interpretations around more biographical based subject matter and contingent factors - relevant to the projected persona of the researcher - rather than more globalised concepts such as scientific practice or field direction.

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#### EXTRACT 6C

1 **Interviewer:** Would you now, do you label yourself as a parapsychologist or a psychologist now?

2 **R2:** I would say nowadays as a psychologist.

3 **Interviewer:** As a psychologist? And you find that’s easier in numerous areas of your career?

4 **R2:** Yep...yeah. Oh definitely, in – well in every aspect of my life...(One thing) as soon as

5 you say “parapsychologist”, of course, people just think “oh some crackpot that’s

6 willing to believe in anything”. [It’s] what I’ve experienced...

---

In Extract 6C R2 again utilises similar forms of the repertoire to reason his presented career label

preference. He references “people” (Line 5) and their inclination to view parapsychologists as “crackpot[s]” (Line 5) as a determining factor for preferring to be referenced as a psychologist. This shares parallels with Extract 6B - whereby there is another general reference to influencing external contingent elements. The identity of “people” is never elaborated to include who those people may be. Similarly, his reference to “what I’ve experienced” (Line 6) is never expounded upon to identify precisely the inspiration behind this construct. Ultimately, the presented predilection towards the identity of ‘parapsychologist’ is a function of contingent factors that are established through the presented discourse. The below extract from R3 is very similar in tone and content:

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#### EXTRACT 6D

[R3 has just spoken about how there can be negative perceptions against parapsychologists and how he has largely avoided such negativity.]

1 **Interviewer:** ..It sounds like you’re almost the exception to the rule almost?

2 **R3:** I’m wary sort of by nature. So, I try to pre-empt any negativity by overemphasising,  
3 probably, my, err – well I don’t know what you would call it – sceptical neutrality.  
4 But, you know, whenever I say I’m a parapsychologist I always preface that with  
5 some kind of, you know, “but I’m not a looney” type thing, you know? *{laughs}*

6 **Interviewer:** So you still the need to sort of validate yourself? Balance it out?

7 **R3:** Err, yeah. I mean, probably less so now that I haven’t really done parapsychology for  
8 a while. But certainly when I was, yeah when I was in academic circles, with people  
9 that I didn’t really know very well, I wouldn’t just say I was a parapsychologist and  
10 leave it at that, I would always try and, you know, soften the blow. *{laughs}*

---

R3 also uses references to contingent elements to build an account that attempts to provide an insight into his reasoning and outlook. Within Extract 6D he makes similar references as those

portrayed by R2, citing potential “negativity” (Line 2) from “academic circles” (Line 8) and how he adjusts to those perceptions; “preface” (Line 4) and “soften the blow” (Line 10). Again, these are instances where the researcher is building their account to display reasoning for their own purported constructions. These reflections on their own biographies are fuelled through the inclusion of contingent factors such as cultural bias or personal opinions.

The researchers throughout these extracts are fashioning their discourse in an attempt to provide an appreciation into how they believe they are perceived externally and how any associations with parapsychology influences such perceptions and career choices. Their accounts feature content that is presented as highly subjective that generates a fabricated ‘insight’ into how their cited experiences and concocted frames of reference are influenced by the culture of scientific research (in a suggested area of contested knowledge).

Extracts 6E and 6F (below) are two instances from R14’s interview that both share thematic and content similarities. However, between the two extracts there are subtle differences in the approach and references used by the researcher. In Extract 6E he is reflecting more on his personal position and career biography - the personalised element of this repertoire’s analysis. However, in Extract 6F he begins to expand this reflective focus towards broader themes - the external (more globalised) elements. This transition will be reflected in the structure of the analysis, looking at Extract 6E first and then Extract 6F in the next section of the chapter.

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## EXTRACT 6E

1 **Interviewer:** ...How do you believe your association with parapsychology is perceived within the  
2 broader academic community?

3 **R14:** [Its] got to the point now that when I would construct my CV I think I would now  
4 start to leave out particular things that I’ve actually done and particular publications.  
5 So, to take out the publications in the ‘Journal of Parapsychology’ or the ‘European  
6 Journal of Parapsychology’ and just leave them. Because I’m getting to the point  
7 now where I’ve got a long enough list of other publications not to think that I need  
8 those in order to kind of to make it look longer, erm, but actually it would be better

9 for it to be a little bit shorter in my list of publications. And rather than to have those  
10 included – given that the negative impact that they actually produce, I think, in  
11 terms of any applications for jobs or research funding or anything else that I want to  
12 do.

13 **Interviewer:** So just leave those out purely because of the negative correlation...

14 **R14:** Yeah, if I was applying for another job now I would not have them in my list of  
15 publications. I would not have ones that have particular journals in. So I would still  
16 have work where that I've published in the mainstream, that have been on for  
17 example out-of-body experiences. So I've published for example in the 'British  
18 Journal of Psychology' – I would include that paper. But I wouldn't include a paper  
19 which is on the same topic in the 'Journal of Parapsychology' or 'Journal of Psychical  
20 Research' or the 'European Journal of Parapsychology' – I would just leave those off  
21 now.

22 **Interviewer:** If there wasn't such a negative baggage associated with it, would you still keep those  
23 on your CV?

24 **R14:** Oh yeah! The only reason I wouldn't keep them on now was because I'm well aware  
25 of the kind of – they have a toxic status.

---

Throughout Extract 6E R14 formulates reflections on building his CV and establishes contingent elements that he uses to explain certain choices and perspectives. He describes how he would tactically “construct” his CV (Line 3) to incorporate some publications and references and omit others. At the end of the extract, when prompted by the interviewer, R14 cites the main reason for this approach is the “toxic status” (Line 25) associated with some of this work. Throughout this extract R14 is mirroring elements that have previously been observed within the ‘reflection of contingency repertoire’. He is establishing a formulated representation of purported anecdotal reference(s) to his career biography. Through discussion of certain options available to him he frames these aspects with elements of contingency.

Dualistically, the account is presented as another potential insight into his personal biography



whilst also establishing a display of justification. Forming elements of contingency within the discourse provides an act of reasoning within the confines of the account. In the context of Extract 6E this is represented as CV choices, for why he would include one journal and not another for similar subject matter (Lines 17-21). R14 imbues this logic with the contingent variable of negative perception (perceived toxicity) and career amenability. The 'reflection of contingency' repertoire allows him to present his cited decisions as strategically aware options that are necessitated by his own declared contingent elements.

In Extract 6F the content is established as being relative to R14's purported personal career biography. As will be discussed in the next section this use of the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' also extends beyond this facet towards referencing more external, globalised based frames of reference.

#### **6.4 External (Globalised) Strands of Reflective Contingency**

Extract 6F builds upon Extract 6E, with R14 continuing to talk about the potential negative effect parapsychology has had on his career. The extract marks a progression in scope of reference - while there are still vestiges of personal attribution, the account expands to incorporate more external globalised considerations, such as identity in general within the field of parapsychology:

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##### **EXTRACT 6F**

[R14 has continued the discussion with the interviewer regarding the negative effect parapsychology has had on his career. The interviewer has just re-iterated what R14 has just said regarding the insular environment of parapsychology.]

- 1 **R14:** I think it's very hard if you have it as part of your identity. If you have it as part of  
2 your identity, I think it chips away at the other things that you do. Erm, so I think it  
3 can de-value the other work that you do. I think (I don't know who you have spoken  
4 to) maybe some of the people you have spoken to have it much more as their  
5 identity, that everything that they do is parapsychology and that everything that

6 they do is swimming against the tide. Erm, and I think that's fine if you go for it full-  
7 hog in that way, it only leaves particular options there for you – and they are quite  
8 limited. I think the options for people who want to do parapsychology, erm, and be  
9 identified as parapsychologists tend to be that they work in institutions which are  
10 much more teaching focused than research focused, and so they get to do what  
11 they want to do, but they don't get as much support; in terms of time to do those  
12 things. Or you have one or two people who are at highly valued places, erm, but I  
13 still think their colleagues would see what they are doing as odd. And I think it  
14 would still limit their, erm, life chances in terms of moving on to other things. And I  
15 think, probably, actually a third area are people who make their careers out of being  
16 sceptics. So ostensibly they are doing parapsychology research, but it's always from  
17 the vantage point of 'I'm going to show you why this isn't parapsychology, I'm going  
18 to show you why this isn't anomalous' and want to explain it. And then they make  
19 their careers from doing research in interesting topics, but they are always  
20 recognised as someone who is bashing the area, rather than someone who is trying  
21 to promote any kind of acceptance of parapsychology or psi hypotheses.

---

R14 in Extract 14 constructs an attempt at conveying insight into parapsychologists and their relationship to careers within academia utilising the 'reflection of contingency repertoire'. The scope of reference is different from previous examples, it expands to encompass wider subject matter, as opposed to highly personalised biography references. This is evidenced when R14 discusses institutional teaching and research focus (Lines 9-10) or is delineating the career paths of sceptics (Lines 14-21). The move away from the personal towards more globalised focus is reflected in the language used when Extract 6F is contrasted with Extract 6E.

Throughout Extract 6E there is a consistent theme of personalisation in presentation of the language. Personified through the frequent use of direct references to the first-person; such as "I", "I'm" or "my". In contrast within 6F the language moves more to the third-person through more frequent application of phrasing such as "your" and "they".

Between Extract 6E and 6F R14 has progressed his deployment of the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' to expand from personalised constructions towards presenting more open opinions on

the field and academia in general. At its core, the repertoire is still focused on actions of reflection and declarations of contingency. R14 continues to explore presenting the contingent factors surrounding his area of research along with the institutions and fellow researchers around him (for example, Lines 8-13).

These themes are also present in the next extract, where Extract 6G is compiled from a much longer response by R3. In the interview the interviewer had posed the question “in an ideal world where would you like to see the subject heading?”, which prompted an extensive reply that has been shortened for the purpose of analysis:

*[Please refer to Chapter 1 - Section 1.4.2 for an overview of the Ganzfeld paradigm and its significance within parapsychology.]*

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#### **EXTRACT 6G**

[Interviewer has previously asked R3 for an ideal world scenario where he would want to see the field heading - below are selected extracts compiled from a longer response/ interaction with Interviewer spawning from this.]

1 **R3:** ...It's never going to happen because nobody is going to invest in that type of  
2 research. It's also, never going to happen because I don't think the mainstream, (oh  
3 sorry not the mainstream) I meant the (kind of) main psi researchers actually want  
4 there to be a definitive answer after ten years – especially the ones that have been  
5 in the field for 30 years...

6 ...And, err, now to me the obvious thing to do in that situation, when you have got  
7 something, you've got a way of doing a study; which is the Ganzfeld. Then you have  
8 got a debate about the effect(s) and the way that the conditions in which the effect  
9 of that [exists?] and the way you should conduct the perfect Ganzfeld. The obvious  
10 thing to do, in my eyes, would be to agree what the best paradigm is, what the best  
11 way of doing a Ganzfeld is to find the effect. And then do it, for ten years if you need

12 to. And then at the end of it you look at yourselves and go; “ok, you know, was that  
13 significant? Was that not significant? What does that tell us?” And a lot of people  
14 were resistant to that, because that was one of the key topics of the debate. And a  
15 lot of people were resistant, and they were resistant I think because they were just  
16 too frightened of what maybe they might find at the end of those ten years. Now  
17 that’s sort of me reading into it, but the argument was that, err, the argument was  
18 that they did not need to waste any time or money doing proof-oriented research,  
19 because they, as far as they were concerned they already had the proof and what  
20 they needed to do was process research – which is try and understand how the  
21 effect worked, and under what conditions it worked. And a 10 year, you know, study  
22 like the one I’ve just described, would be purely proof-oriented. You would look at it  
23 at the end and go, you know, “is there evidence of psi or is there not?” And at the  
24 end of it, you would sort of – if you all agreed in the first place that this was the best  
25 way of actually looking for it – then you would have an answer after 10 years. And it  
26 seemed to me as if a lot of people who’d spent 30, 20 years in the field were a bit  
27 nervous about what might happen 10 years down the line if the answer was ‘No’...

29 ...If they did find something they would be happy, but I think they were a little bit  
30 nervous if it came out null, then basically it says that – now this wouldn’t have  
31 happened either – it would have suggested that they had wasted 20 or 30 years of  
32 their life chasing after something that was, you know, that wasn’t there. Well what  
33 would have actually happened would be they would have found some post-hoc  
34 reasons as to why this null effect had happened and why, you know, the study was  
35 conducted wrongly....

36 ...That’s what I read into it. Now if you asked any of these other parapsychologists  
37 who were resistant to doing it, they wouldn’t say that was why. They would say that  
38 it was because, you know, that was a waste of time. You might even find them  
39 talking about, you know, “psi is elusive and it doesn’t work like that”, and you know  
40 “of course you wouldn’t find anything after 10 years it doesn’t, you know...” Err, but  
41 they would never ever admit that there was any kind of fear – but I mean that was  
42 me reading into it, and I’m pretty sure there was you know...

Throughout Extract 6G R3 displays multiple instances of reflection surrounding constructions of external areas of contingency. At the start of the extract (Lines 1-5) he is discussing the “mainstream” or “main psi researchers” and presenting speculations that these people may not want a definitive answer to certain research questions. This narrative is constructed as a significant theory, with R3 essentially wrapping all parapsychological research under a banner of contingency: personal preference dictating research direction.

R3 then builds upon this proposal throughout the next part of his response (Lines 6-28). He formulates reflections on the Ganzfeld paradigm and the “obvious thing to do” (Line 10) for a research direction. Following this assertion of the ideal of an investigative paradigm, he furthers this with suggested reasoning as to why this idealism has not been implemented; “Resistant” attitudes (said three times across Lines 14-15) born out of being “too frightened of what maybe they might find at the end” (Line 16). R3 asserts this is his own “reading” of the situation in Line 17 but then attempts to re-assert the apparent verisimilitude of his proposal by constructing further reasoning and logic behind his proposal (Lines 18-28).

From Lines 29-35 R3 continues to discuss the “nervous” (Line 30) approach researchers may have had towards his concept of a definitive study. He presents the notion that this nervousness is born out of a fear of generating findings that would imply they had “wasted 20 or 30 years of their life” (Lines 31-32). R3 then theorises that even if that did occur they would perhaps find reasons to suggest “the study was conducted wrongly” (Lines 34-35).

The final part of the account sees R3 softening the suggested contingent reality he is presenting by again suggesting this is his personal interpretation - his own “reading” of the situation (Line 36 and Lines 41-42). Despite this attempt at putting distance between his claims R3 continues to present his own internal logic to his perception. Subsequently, between Lines 37 and 41 he offers that researchers would never admit why they would be either resistant to a definitive study or that there was an inherent fear underlying this motivation.

Collectively, R3 is building a discursive construction that is presented as a highly insightful portrayal of motivations behind research directions. The suggested lack of progression within parapsychology is defined as a function of pure contingency - of researchers’ personal motivation

towards a particular paradigm and ultimately a reluctance to lose face within academia should their interests be shown to be invalid (and null).

R3's account portrays researchers actively avoiding a research program that would yield definitive findings relating to the existence of psi phenomenon. This constructed argument is couched in reflective discourse that reviews prior research initiatives (the Ganzfeld) and imbues his own "reading" of the situation behind these reflections. Despite assertions that this is his own subjective view, R3 still presents this account as factual - typified by the language in the last section of the extract: "they would say that it was" (Lines 37-38); "you might even find them" (Line 38); and "they would never ever admit" (Line 41). Extract 6G thus has elements of contrasting presentation, R3 declares the construction to be his personal "reading" but his interpretation through his formulated language suggests he wants this to be interpreted as 'truth'.

Overall, Extract 6G is an example where the researchers used the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' to construct suggested insight into the culture behind academia and the motivations behind research implementation. The extract is constructed without direct reference to the researcher's own (career) biography or personal experiences. R3 is forging a perspective on the external elements of parapsychology and its associated researchers. The content and focus deviates from the personal and biographical strands previously defined within the chapter, addressing more globalised trends and observations relating to the field. Pronounced within this are R3's constructed views and critical opinions for future directions of the field amalgamated with presentations of judgemental observations where he believes it has failed.

The next extract 6H is interesting as R16 addresses almost identical themes and concepts in his account and presents these in a similar fashion through the 'reflection of contingency repertoire':

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#### **EXTRACT 6H**

[Interviewer has referenced cycle of interest within parapsychology around key studies such as the Ganzfeld and Daryl Bem's research - below are selected extracts compiled from a longer response/ interaction spawning from this.]

1 **R16:** ... So I think having lived through those Ganzfeld years, and they were [databased]  
2 reasonably well, I think that was a much more exciting time. And also a time when  
3 parapsychologists, had they got their act together could have nailed it. I actually  
4 think that was the only moment where if they had done some systematic research  
5 they really could have nailed it and they didn't. And I think that, [*inaudible*] my  
6 personal view - I have no evidence of this - my personal view is that there are a few  
7 people in the field who are very canny and know that, you know, if you do  
8 systematic research and it doesn't work out - that's the end of that. So you kind of  
9 always keep the ambiguity kind of going...

10 ...That could have been it. But it didn't happen - everyone did their own  
11 thing, analysed it differently under all different conditions. So you get a very  
12 ambiguous database, erm, which is kind of tricky to interpret. So if you're sceptical  
13 you see it one way, if you're a believer you can see it another. But either way it's not  
14 kind of compelling "that's it we've finally got it". And I think what's interesting about  
15 that is the field's reluctance to do that. I don't think, and you know personal opinion  
16 no evidence, I don't think that's unintentional. I think there are a few people that  
17 have been around long enough to know there'd be so dangerous to come out with a  
18 conclusive answer - just in case it was 'no'.

19 ...They are quite canny - they have been around the block a few times and they  
20 know that if you nail everything down and you 'this is it' and if its a 'no' it gives you a  
21 problem. And so, you know, it could be all the people that would do the systematic  
22 research or want to do it aren't in the field anymore - because the field sort of keeps  
23 them out, to keep that ambiguity. Um, I think there is some truth to that. That it's  
24 sort of structured in a way to never ever reach any kind of conclusion.

25 ...There is always enough to keep you going, never enough to conclude one way or  
26 the other. And I think that the sort of people in control, in charge of the board, and I  
27 don't mean this in a kind of conspiratorial kind of way, um, I think they know that  
28 and so they act in a way to propagate that. I don't sort of mean they consciously...

29 ...That if somebody came in and suggested, you know, we do ten Ganzfeld all

30 systematic and so on - that would get pushed to the bottom of the pile, um because  
31 they know it's a very dangerous strategy...

---

R16 mirrors R3's constructed sentiments from Extract 6H - he builds reflective observations that are fundamentally based on contingency. In Lines 1-9 R16 is also referencing the Ganzfeld research paradigm as one of importance, presenting it as an opportunity where researchers "could have nailed it" (Line 3). He also references the same notion that the same researchers had personal motivation to avoid such research to "always keep the ambiguity kind of going" (Line 9). R16 also uses the disclaimer of distance, highlighting these presented observations as originating from his own personal opinions (Lines 5-6 and Lines 15-16). Yet despite this, the tone and language display by R16 is suggestive that this should be interpreted as more factual than speculation. For example, phrasing used in Lines 19-24 is more definitive than hesitant: "They are quite canny"; "they have been"; "they know".

R16's account is structured to emphasise the alleged contingent factors that govern research into parapsychology. Personal motivation is cited as reason for individuals avoiding definitive research paradigms espoused by "people that have been around long enough to know there'd be so dangerous to come out with a conclusive answer" (Lines 16-18). R16 is proposing that research is structured to perpetuate ambiguity and extend the life cycle of unknown elements within parapsychology. This proposal is succinctly summarised in the last lines of the compiled extract, suggesting that some research proposals would "get pushed to the bottom of the pile" because the researchers feel it would be "dangerous" (Lines 30-31).

This relatively controversial proposal is presented by R16 in a factual manner and, as witnessed with previous examples, is portrayed as providing an insight to the audience of the reality behind research. The construction is built as non-reflective of R16's personal affiliation or biography but is presented as an observation of the field on an external, globalised scale.

The previous two sections have analysed the researchers' use of the repertoire in either this self-referential capacity or on a more external global scale, relevant to their personal biography constructions. The next section will look at instances where these were combined into a single account.



## 6.5 Combining Personal and External Strands of Reflective Contingency

Sections 6.3 and 6.4 both displayed different referential aspects utilised by the researchers when using the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' - personal (biographical) versus external (globalised) strands. Both aspects showed commonalities between them, such as the use of informal language in the discourse presentation. However, there were also numerous responses that combined both personal and external strands into a single account. One such example is below:

---

### EXTRACT 6I

- 1 **Interviewer:** ...Were there any other factors that made you move away from  
2 parapsychology?...Were there any other factors; funding, or personal or career wise  
3 that...you thought "yeah I would like to move away from this"...
- 4 **R3:** Er...It was mainly, mainly academic really. I knew what I was getting into in terms of  
5 career and funding when I got into it. I remember telling my father, my parents  
6 funded the PhD more-or-less, I got some money from the SPR and some money  
7 from Bial but for all intents and purposes my parents funded it. And, er, my parents  
8 don't really, they don't really know about academia, so they thought they were  
9 funding {starts laughing} thought they were funding me to, you know, have a  
10 glittering career. And I had to point out to them quite early on that err the type of  
11 PhD that I was about to undertake was probably going to be a, you know, was going  
12 to work against me in the academic field and within my career. So I kind of knew  
13 what I was getting into, I knew it really wasn't going to, you know, be a massive  
14 career booster and I knew about the funding situation, which you know isn't great.  
15 So it wasn't any of those things – I had my eyes open when I went in, so I wasn't  
16 really surprised with any of those experiences. The reason that really I started  
17 moving away from parapsychology was because having spent the best part of 10  
18 years in the field I just felt I hadn't seen any progress in the field – it hadn't really

19 advanced in the way that you might expect a field to advance in 10 years. (In terms,  
20 and I started to see the field sort of repeat itself a little bit. What generally  
21 happened would be that you would see, and this happened, I suppose this was one  
22 or two cycles of this when I was in the field. They would find an effect, there would  
23 be an effect, there would be a lot of excitement about this and this was heralded as,  
24 you know, as the new paradigm that was going to demonstrate effects, and then  
25 they investigated that for a few years and then it sort of went away, you know. As  
26 more people got involved, as more people started testing it in different ways, then  
27 the effect(s) would gradually dissipate and then, and then the sort of post-hoc  
28 explanations would get carted out. And eventually I just became less satisfied with  
29 that type of, that type of thing. Especially some of the post-hoc explanations, when  
30 the effects went away and when people didn't find effects you find all sorts of really  
31 contrived post-hoc reasons as what might be going on and why the effect is still  
32 really there, but you know, there's all sorts of strange things; that its experimenters,  
33 it's the elusive nature of psi and all these kind of explanations. And I always used to  
34 cringe at these explanations, and eventually I just thought "right ok well, enough's  
35 enough."

---

In the above extract R3 addresses different perspectives within his response. He navigates through references to his purported personal biography towards considerations about the field in a more general capacity - collectively presenting contingent frames of reference on these reflections. In Lines 1-16 R3 provides a descriptive account of getting into the field of parapsychology and what he "was getting into" (Line 4) in terms of "career and funding" (Line 5). He then references in a sarcastic presentational style "a glittering career" (Line 10), followed up with the assertion that a PhD in the area "was going to work against [him] in the academic field" (Lines 11-12). These aspects combine to construct a reflective presentation of parapsychology's status as a function of contingency - suggesting involvement in the field is governed or perceived by external forces in a detrimental fashion - R3 is framing his own experiences against this construction.

In the second half of the extract, between Lines 16-35, R3 moves the focus more away from his background towards observation of the field itself. He refers to "cycles" (Line 22) of interest where interest was highly fluctuating and "post-hoc explanations would get carted out" (Line 28) that

were “contrived” (Line 31) in nature. He still refers to his personal viewpoint, such as “I just became less satisfied” (Line 28) but overall the focus of the account shifts towards more external, globalised, considerations of the field itself.

Whilst this mixes personal and external aspects, the core features of the repertoire are present. The informal, conversational language and tone is apparent throughout (for example “carted out” Line 28). This conveys a portrayal of a relaxed and casual discussion of the subject matter - where ultimately the language used is an alleged “honest” insight from the researcher. This, combined with the supposed anecdotal material, diverts the focus of the account away from more formalised formulations. R3 like the other researchers frame this content as an enhanced mechanism for proposing explanations for discussed actions (such as research paths) - maintaining the internal logic within the account. Arguably, this is used to emphasise key points and mould the communicated image that the researcher is attempting to construct about their presented identity (and subsequent career/ research identity) within the discourse.

A further point that Extract 6I also encapsulates is the story-like framing of the reflections and presented insight. R3 recounts progression through his career, navigating contingent elements. This experience is framed as a journey of understanding, increasing awareness and self-discovery. In R3’s account this starts as naivety entering the field and ending with a more ingrained understanding of academic culture.

## **6.6 Reflective Contingency as a Communicative Strategy**

The accounts generated by the correspondents within the current thesis have provided the opportunity to observe highly informal constructive reflections on elements of purported contingency. This section of the chapter will now continue to analyse the features of this repertoire but will also expand the focus to include discussion around the possible use of this repertoire as a refined communication tactic when constructing accounts - looking at the prospective benefits and social functions that may underly utilising such a strategy.

### 6.6.1 Constructing 'Insight'

As has been discussed previously, the informal type of discourse evidenced throughout the current chapter can be interpreted as an attempt by the researchers to construct and portray 'insight'. This insight primarily revolves around building an account that can be implied as an attempt to build a certain presentation that gives the audience the impression of a glimpse into more personal or restricted criteria that only members of the culture would usually see - in this case academic researchers. What this represents are accounts that attempt to convey the impression of communicating more intimate and informal viewpoints around aspects such as careers, decisions, research choices and actions. Ultimately, the researcher constructs an account that appears to be an insider perspective on issues that may not be apparent to individuals not attached to this particular culture. They are representing a display of a concealed "truth" through informal discourse. Within the direct context of the interview data the researchers used the repertoire to purportedly "reveal" the contingent machinations that may function (in their accounts) within academia - forces that allegedly govern and direct their careers. For example:

---

#### EXTRACT 6J

- 1 **Interviewer:** Would you say it's any easier, today, to what it was when you were starting out to  
2 develop an interest in the area and to pursue a career in it?
- 3 **R2:** I think it's getting more and more difficult...
- 4 **Interviewer:** *[speaking over the top R2]* More and more difficult?
- 5 **R2:** Yep...I think so. Erm...I know there seems to be a few more opportunities for people  
6 to do PhDs in this area. But the big problem is, erm, nowadays all the universities  
7 are interested in is, erm, research that can be applied – and research that attracts  
8 funding. And of course parapsychology struggles to get that...so, um...really, even if  
9 you're interested in doing research in parapsychology, there is a pressure on you  
10 from your workplace to do research in other areas as well as, and really just to use  
11 parapsychology as a bit of a hobby really.

---

In the above extract R2 is presenting a constructed insight into what dictates research choices. He specifies that “universities” are only interested in applicable research and that which “attracts funding” (Lines 6-8). Stemming from this he cites a “pressure” (Line 9) for research to be conducted in other areas away from parapsychology and to view the field as a hobbyist pursuit only. R2 is portraying research choices as governed by contingency - subjective perceptions pertaining to parapsychology as an academic pursuit. Subsequently, he is suggesting that due to a perceived lack of application, parapsychology does not hold high values within academia. Ultimately, R2 is presenting the notion that universities select and choose fields of interest based on aspects other than the content of the research or its worth (in a scientific context). Extract 6K displays comparable formulated discourse concerning similar subject matter:

---

#### **EXTRACT 6K**

[Interviewer has spoken about research publication trends and parapsychology being published in more mainstream journals - below is an extract from a longer response by R7.]

- 1 **R7:** ...Because there's a strong emphasis now on everybody publishing in high-profile,  
2 high-impact, journals. And the fact of the matter is that practically any other  
3 psychology journals is going to be more high impact than the niche parapsychology  
4 journals. No dis-respect to them - I actually think the assessment of impact is  
5 improper. I think if you're a cognitive psychologist then you're greatest impact is  
6 probably publishing in a cognitive psychology journal and if you're a  
7 parapsychologist you're greatest actual impact is publishing in the most respected  
8 parapsychology journal...  
9 ...But the actual high impact is judged in terms of "if I can get something published  
10 in the 'Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology' then my university loves me".

---

Extract 6K is presented in a similar manner to that of R2's account in Extract 6J, R7 is constructing an account that attempts to portray an insight within his response. He also alludes to forces

guiding publications towards “high impact” non “niche” (Line 3) journals. R7 then goes onto delineate intellectual differences in publication targets from his perspective and what he judges as the “greatest impact” (Lines 5-8). He then changes the tone of his account further towards the ‘reflection of contingency repertoire’ from Line 9 - especially utilising more informal language. The “actual” (Line 9) impact is different from his previous delineation and is based on approval by academic institutions - “my university loves me” (Line 10).

The examples from R2 and R7 both attempt to utilise the repertoire to formulate the conveyance of candid and revealing insights into the contingent nature of academic practice. Both Extracts 6J and 6K formulate the impression that universities’ primary focus is funding and not developments within certain knowledge areas. They are using their discourse to construct a presentation of insight, generating an awareness towards issues that may not be immediately obvious to the interviewer. The tone and presentation of the subject matter is communicated as both informal and informative, creating the impression of exclusivity - that such knowledge may not be readily available from another source. These accounts, along with the examples cited previously in the chapter, are all constructed to present the impression that the researcher(s) are drawing on their own personal experiences, using the repertoire to build the façade that this is a window into ‘their’ world and a glimpse of ‘what is really happening’.

On a more speculative note, these constructions of purported ‘insight’ can also be interpreted as an expansion of the outsider constructions depicted in Chapter 5. R2 and R7 in the extracts above are both depicting accounts of contingent forces that exercise direct control over career directions and choices. Subsequently, this embellishes the formulation of the outsider identity. Through their discourse they generate accounts of themselves as maligned and positioned unfairly within this supposed academic state of affairs - citing alleged anecdotal observations. Using the reflections of contingency repertoire provides more depth and detail for the researchers to continue the representation and internal logic of why they (and parapsychology) should be perceived as outsiders.

### **6.6.2 Constructing Justification**

One of the consistent aspects of all of the instances where researchers used the repertoire was around reflective accounts of their own personal career biography and progress. As an immediate

extension of this, it raises the potential that the repertoire is a cogent communication mechanism for framing and justifying aspects of this. Such an example would be providing constructed context behind presented career choices - "individual narratives are situated within particular interactions and within specific social, cultural and institutional discourses" (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 62). The two extracts below illustrate this:

---

#### EXTRACT 6L

1 **Interviewer:** ...from what you are saying it seems almost like like social forces dictate the evolving  
2 nature of parapsychology...

3 **R2:** *[faintly in background]* Yeah...yeah...

4 **Interviewer:** ...rather than the research itself. Is that correct?

5 **R2:** No...I, I...I think that the forces are dictating the way that your career goes and, well,  
6 the future of parapsychology. For example, um, I started off wanting to teach  
7 parapsychology and do research in that area. And I'm just finding it a lot, lot easier  
8 to do research in clinical psychology and work [from] that department now - and do  
9 research that is relevant to clinical psychology, but still parapsychological research.  
10 And I'm just finding that people are much more accepting of my research because of  
11 that.

---

#### EXTRACT 6M

[R14 has just been discussing problems of funding within parapsychology and that being one of the reasons for moving away from the field.]

1 **R14:** I know someone who is the same, roughly the same age as me, been in academia  
2 the same amount of time as I am, erm but is active in parapsychology and probably

3                    earns half of my salary. Because they take jobs which pay low money - because thats  
4                    how parapsychology is funded.

5 **Interviewer:** So you have to sacrifice so much to sort of pursue this interest?

6 **R14:**            Yeah, you reduce your income by 50% or more just to carry on doing work in  
7                    parapsychology.

---

*[Please note that Extract 6L has previously been analysed in the chapter - Extract 6B in section 6.3]*

Extracts 6L and 6M both show the same aspect of the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' - using it to provide justification and internal context for the career choices they have presented in their accounts. By utilising this they can attempt to frame cited lack of progression within the field or for leaving the field entirely. R2 and R14 demonstrate this above - showing this capability to use the repertoire as a justification mechanism. The researchers frame actions, decisions and choices in the context they choose - providing purported reasoning behind this. In Extract 6L this is shown through R2's depiction of "forces are dictating" (Line 5) the direction of parapsychology. He accounts for his decision to move away from the field more towards clinical psychology as it is "a lot, lot easier" (Line 7), and due to this "people are much more accepting of [his] research" (Line 10). R14 uses a similarly structured account, based on justification. However, the content of Extract 6M is more detailed and specific - with R14 referencing direct income and financial comparisons. In both extracts the researcher frames the decision to not pursue parapsychology as a logical choice based on acceptance of research (R2) or financial remuneration (R14).

When assessing potential motivations behind such discourse the repertoire can be interpreted as a tool for selective presentation of the researcher's choices, attempting to frame them in a positive light. As a contextual justification tool - within the confines of the account - they can explain any lack of progress or abandonment of the field as being a function of contingent factors beyond their control, such as the "forces" alluded to by R2. This proves an interesting framing strategy that situates the researcher in a position less open to judgement - any particular failings can be referenced as functions of contingent elements beyond individual control. In their own constructed logic presentation, it is not the researcher's fault it is the contingent factors around



the field that are to blame. This functions as a justification get-out-clause for their internal biographical accounts constructed in the interview setting.

In the extracts above (and elsewhere in the chapter) the researchers construct descriptions of elements that allegedly restrict their own research and career progression - such as lack of funding. In the responses the descriptives are tied between the field as an identity and the identity of the researcher. However, the use of the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' creates interpretative distance between the researcher and the viewpoints expressed - a distance is created between themselves and the constructed identity of 'the field'. They become almost separated from this notion, becoming outsiders looking in. This less personalised perspective creates the notion that the researchers themselves are not contributing factors to the detrimental issues that are presented in their accounts as systemic within parapsychology - through their discourse they are justified as victims of the field's contingent constrictive elements.

One further consideration relating to the use of the repertoire as a form of justification is the notion that it could be implemented as a form of accounting for error within depictions of the researcher's own research - or similar aspects such as presenting lack of career success. This is similar thematically to the findings from Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) whose research suggested that their sample of scientists managed their discourse to account for error and to ultimately preserve the status of science as an entity and belief system. They did this primarily though invoking references and constructions of contingency. The researchers in the current study arguably present a different interpretation of this consideration - where it could be argued that their main focus is preserving face and their own presented identity rather than that of science itself. As such the repertoire can also be viewed as a form of power presentation.

### **6.6.3 Power Presentation**

Whilst the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' has been discussed as a perpetuation of the identity construction of outsider or victim, it can also be analysed in the opposite sense. The repertoire can be interpreted as a distinct strategy for asserting power via discourse - through which the researchers can be seen to assert their position. This could be considered as a contrast, and possible direct reaction, to the construction of outsider identities (as featured in Chapter 5). As such, by also using their accounts to present elements of power in their identity the repertoire

acts as a balancing tool to the outsider constructions.

Through their reflections of the contingent factors and subsequent 'insight' formulations the researchers present an awareness of such contingency that purportedly exist within their careers and academia. In some of their responses the researchers present themselves as not helpless against these elements. Thus the repertoire acts as a demonstration of power, that despite presenting themselves as outsiders and the existence of contingency, the researcher indicates elements of control within their careers through their accounts.

---

#### EXTRACT 6N

1 **Interviewer:** *[Reiterating R2's previous sentiments regarding sceptics and calculated career*  
2 *moves]...it feels very much that parapsychology is constrained by, erm, it's a career*  
3 *driven climate...and that there is no room for parapsychology within that...*

4 **R2:** I, yes I think so. Erm, and the other thing of course is much of the research  
5 nowadays has to be seen to be coming from, from a university rather than from an  
6 individual who just happens to have written in. You need that kind of clout behind  
7 you. And again, if you are going to work in a university, you've got to, kind of, work  
8 by their rules. So, a lot of people, like I say, aren't doing parapsychological research  
9 as their main area. [They] are carrying on with it, but not probably doing as much as  
10 they would like to be able to get on with. But, again, I think its just – you've got to be  
11 tactical about how you actually manage your career. If you intend to be in  
12 parapsychology for the long-haul.

13 **Interviewer:** Yes...I suppose you have to adapt, or face extinction really...

14 **R2:** ...That's what I'm thinking – align myself more to clinical research. Um, I can still  
15 carry on with the parapsychology that way. It's just going to be a lot slower. I think I'd  
16 rather that than nothing at all. Because I'm still committed to doing research in the  
17 area.

---

In Extract 6N R2 uses the main elements of the repertoire to construct an account that presents him as being aware of the contingent elements surrounding research in parapsychology. Within this awareness he utilises the account to present a position of power from this understanding. R2 communicates that you “need that kind of clout behind you” (Lines 6-7) from a university, and that in order to pursue parapsychology “you’ve got to be tactical about how you actually manage your career” (Lines 10-11). In Lines 14-17 he then cites his personal strategy of aligning himself with clinical research in order to continue with parapsychology for the “long haul” (Line 12).

In this extract R2 achieves primarily formulating biographical reflections of contingency and framing parapsychology as an outsider identity. However, within this he imbues the account with tactical awareness against these elements and re-frames his position into one with some power - namely that you can achieve success if you “work by their rules” (Lines 7-8). R2 presents an account where they are not helpless against such cultural rules and notes how he tactically aligns himself with certain elements (more mainstream research areas) in order to achieve his goals (continuation in parapsychology).

Extract 6O from R1 is similar thematically:

---

#### EXTRACT 6O

1 **Interviewer:** It’s that catch-22, on the one hand we are discussing its merging and becoming  
2 more of a mainstream thing in the sense that it’s changing its nature and then the  
3 other as a purely parapsychologist - that doesn't seem to exist anymore...

4 **R1:** *[Interrupts]* I think it’s difficult to call yourself that. [parapsychologist] But I think  
5 what you can do as a psychologist is use these phenomena as a vehicle to test  
6 psychological theories. And then you aren’t necessarily a parapsychologist, are you?  
7 – you’re a psychologist. You’re sort of using these, sort of, as models of certain  
8 behaviours, or you are trying to use psychological theory to explain these  
9 perceptions, these information processing...*[Trails off]*

---

Like in the preceding extract R1 uses his response to display not only suggested forms of contingency surrounding academic research but to also present his active tactical awareness in circumnavigating these. R1's cited strategy is also reminiscent of R2's - aligning himself with psychology in order to test parapsychology (Lines 4-7). Subsequently, he frames himself as not a passive observer of these forms of contingency - but an active participant that has insight and awareness of such machinations and how to navigate them.

Both R1 and R2 are presenting an identity that incorporates a career minded tactical appreciation of the cultural parameters necessary for success in their preferred career orientation. Moreover, this use of the repertoire is indicative that the researchers are aware of how parapsychology may be perceived and how they are able to manipulate this in their presentation of their career choices. Essentially, the repertoire becomes a vehicle to present an identity of themselves as individuals who have the ability to play the alleged political (contingent) game surrounding them. Linking back to the themes of Chapter 5 - their discourse is used to selectively construct outsider identities or to empower them and present their power in the position(s) they claim to find themselves.

#### **6.6.4 Reframing Field Identity**

Another interpretation of the repertoire as a communicative strategy may be to view the way such reflections of contingency are used by the researchers to frame parapsychology's identity and use their discourse to promote the field. This mirrors Atkinson's (1998: 261) assertion that scientists are "characterized by movement and changing boundaries that are defined and redefined". For example:

---

#### **EXTRACT 6P**

[Interviewer has questioned where R1 would like to see parapsychology develop in the future, ideal scenario. In response R1 has just discussed how he would like to see parapsychology become a valid (more mainstream sub-area) itself, like cognitive psychology.]

1 **Interviewer:** Rather than being on the fringes of science in general?

2 **R1:** Yeah, exactly...I mean, the fact that...It's quite interesting when you actually get  
3 down to this, and there are the people that are, the people that do take this stuff  
4 seriously, when you read some of the papers in our own journal and in other  
5 parapsychology journals, (some) of the stuff that gets published in there you have  
6 got papers from mathematicians, and from physicists, sociologists and philosophers.  
7 The whole range of people that are using their methods to explain these  
8 phenomena...some real hard science stuff in there as well as the philosophical stuff. I  
9 think it's fascinating, this sort of collision of disciplines that are coming together to  
10 try and explain some of these experiences that people have... And once these things  
11 become accepted it stops being 'para' and becomes science. It becomes mainstream  
12 – I think that's ultimately what will happen.

---

In Extract 6P R1's response contains many of the aspects that have been analysed as compromising the repertoire. Elements of contingency are subtly referenced in Lines 10-12; changes in perception via association are required to become "science" and not "para". Within this there are vestiges of aligning power to attributes - collectively bracketing parapsychological research with other disciplines in Line 6, and the assertion that there is "some real hard science stuff" (Line 8) occurring within the field. The use of these aspects of the repertoire can also be interpreted as an attempt to present the field in a positive light through the account. This proclivity towards promotion is also present in Extract 6Q:

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#### **EXTRACT 6Q**

[Interviewer has questioned about factors that may have led to solidification of parapsychology as a field. R5 has just spoken about Bob Morris' influence.]

1 **R5:** ...I mean [Bob Morris], by his method, by the way he handled the delicate politics of  
2 the University of Edinburgh and the field and psychology as a whole. He had a very  
3 soft deft touch that enabled him to get through an enormous number of and

4 supervise an enormous number of PhD students, many of whom have on to get jobs  
5 at (myself included) at academic institutions throughout the UK, in particular, where  
6 we have then gone on and introduced parapsychology as part of under-graduate  
7 degrees and we're doing as much research as we possibly can alongside our other  
8 activities and duties. Um, and I think you know by having that core of people who  
9 have as much job security as possible in today's troubled times, that there is that  
10 core identity. I think the research output isn't going to be as strong as many areas  
11 for the simple fact that you are very rarely going to get dedicated researchers. But I  
12 do think there is that strong core. And then of course there's the next generation of  
13 people who are coming through...

---

R5 uses the reflective aspects of the repertoire to construct an account that can be interpreted as presentation of insight into the field. He references Bob Morris using idolisation language ("soft deft touch" - Line 3) as an instrumental positive figure that seeded core foundations for parapsychology. R5 hints at outsider status in Lines 7-8 - indicating that parapsychology is interpreted as an accompaniment to academic work rather than a primary focus. However, he then uses his account to re-frame this consideration and promote positive aspects of the field: "core of people" (Line 8); "core identity" (Line 10); "strong core" (Line 12) and "next generation of people" (Line 13).

These instances across Extracts 6P and 6Q highlight the potential of the researchers to use the repertoire to construct their accounts as promotional tools for re-framing perceived interpretations of parapsychology. The next section will consider the presence of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) 'empiricist repertoire' within the researchers' accounts.

## **6.7 The 'Empiricist Repertoire'**

The current chapter has focused solely on the strands of contingency within the interviewed researchers' responses. This analysis has been informed from the 'contingent repertoire' that was central within Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) study. Their research also highlighted a second distinct repertoire, the 'empiricist repertoire'. Subsequently, any analysis that uses their contingent frames

of reference as a basis should also incorporate a consideration of this second repertoire. Therefore this section will be devoted to a focus on whether the 'empiricist repertoire' was present in the current thesis' interview accounts that have been discussed in this chapter.

Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) proposed that as well as the 'contingent repertoire' scientists deployed the use of what they termed the 'empiricist repertoire' within their discourse. This was characterised by formal language that upheld conventional perspectives of scientific culture and work, whereby the scientist remains personally detached from the outcomes of the research and objectivity is paramount.

In the discourse analysed by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) the empiricist repertoire isolated the scientist away from the process of science and the experimental process, whereas the contingent repertoire placed them at the centre of these endeavours as a social being informed by personal motivations and beliefs. Gilbert and Mulkay proposed that the scientists used the empiricist repertoire to support their own stance and scientific beliefs, implementing objective scientific terminology to validate their own position. Opposing theories and counter research was presented using the contingent repertoire - whereby such elements were depicted as being weighted with social elements and personal agendas. Subsequently, counter-ideologies were presented as distorted and highly subjective in contrast to the scientist's own objective and "pure" scientific endeavours. In this manner the participants were able to use the two repertoires as discursive resources to validate their own position(s) and dualistically undermine opposing scientists (and research).

As has already been analysed within the current chapter, the researchers that were interviewed as part of the current thesis frequently used forms of contingency within their responses as part of what has been proposed the 'reflections of contingency repertoire'. However, it is also evident that notions of Gilbert and Mulkay's 'empiricist repertoire' are also present in their accounts. This is most noticeable in instances where the researchers were discussing ideal practices of science and what parapsychology should be doing as a discipline. An example of this is Extract 6G, whilst this presented multiple elements of the contingent repertoire, such as discussing alleged social and personal influences of scientific practice couched in informal presentation, there are also elements of the empiricist repertoire within the response. R3 can be interpreted as upholding the notions of an idealised scientific practice and prescribing what parapsychology should be doing. In

Lines 6-18 he mixes elements of empirical alongside contingent, promoting the Ganzfeld paradigm and a 'proof' focused perspective. He even declares that such an approach would be the "obvious thing to do" (Line 10). The account in Extract 6G is framed as advocating proof-orientated research (empiricist) and that elements beyond scientific reasoning, such as the "nervous" view of finding a definitive answer (Lines 27-28), were behind not pursuing such research.

R16 in Extract 6H incorporates a similar approach by advocating the importance of parapsychology missing "systematic research" (Line 4) around the Ganzfeld paradigm - with such scientific practice he proposes the field "could have nailed it" (Line 3). He then continues his account with more contingent elements, reflecting that there may have been people that viewed such as systematic research as "dangerous to come out with a conclusive answer - just in case it was 'no'" (Lines 17-18).

In Extract 6G from Lines 21-35 R3 can be viewed as again using aspects of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) empirical repertoire to uphold the virtues of proper science - criticising the research cycle in parapsychology and particularly the "contrived post-hoc reasons" (Line 31). R3 presents these post-hoc explanations as unscientific without overtly referencing them in this way. He references some such as "the elusive nature of psi" (Line 33) and then immediately in the next sentence describes his response as "to cringe" (Line 34) and that this led him to have a view of parapsychology as "enough's enough" (Lines 34-35).

Throughout these extracts the elements of contingency that have already been delineated extensively in this chapter are joined by aspects of the empiricist repertoire. The notion of what science and approaches parapsychology should be doing are presented in accounts used to criticise elements of the field. Subsequently, these empirical aspects can be interpreted as being deployed to function as definitional and positioning work within the accounts, whereby the empirical notion of 'idealised science' is used as a contrasting comparative frame of reference. The responses are structured presentations to highlight what parapsychology should be doing as a scientific field versus what it is actually doing. This is then emphasised further by the contingent reflections within the accounts where the researchers reflect on their purported personal experiences and highlight instances where social and political motivations allegedly influence the implementation of parapsychology.



The empiricist repertoire elements noted above can be interpreted as complimenting the 'reflections of contingency repertoire' relating to the discursive actions around definitional, positioning work and identity construction. By constructing notions of 'idealised science' and presenting this alongside parapsychology's implementation it adds to the communicative strategies discussed in Section 6.6 of the current chapter. In their accounts, the contrasting aspects of empirical ("idealised" practice) versus contingent ("actual" practice) is another layer of constructed insight into various representations. For example, in Extract 6G R3 establishes a component of insight in his account by using the empirical repertoire to project parapsychology as a flawed research cycle component alongside his construction of personal, contingent focused, discourse that details such flaws. This is also used as a form of justification presentation, when R3 details in his account that he has left parapsychology as a field of study. His formulation of insight through deploying elements of the empirical repertoire also serves to work as presentation of justification. In the account, he justifies his cited abandonment of parapsychology due to it not conforming to idealised scientific practice.

These empiricist elements function as framing and definitional actions that delineate the presentation of parapsychology within the communicative context. The discursive formulations of how parapsychology functions in contrast to the presented concept of idealised scientific practice serves to analyse the subject and frame its academic validity. Ultimately, these accounts are actively defining the field and benchmarking its progress as a field. Such concepts are then wrapped in the wider elements of contingency and constructions of personalised perspective that form the 'reflections of contingency repertoire'. Beyond this, positioning and identity work should also be considered in the analysis. The researchers, as they are discussing what they present as deficits of parapsychology as a subject, whilst simultaneously maintaining the concept of a code of science, are also positioning their identity using such references. By presenting their insights into parapsychology and its flaws as a science it acts as a form of identity management - discursively positioning them away from such flaws as the formulated role of the critic.

Extending from Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) findings this chapter has predominantly focused on the contingent repertoire elements of their work. This section has illustrated that the empiricist repertoire is also present alongside some instances of the identified 'reflections of contingency repertoire' within the interview responses. This leads to empiricist elements wrapped within contingent presentations that are used to highlight deficits within constructs and to also be used

as a definitional point of reference. In the interviews, this manifested as the researchers critiquing aspects of parapsychology against ideals of scientific practice and building on this to construct definitions of the field's status as an academic discipline. Developing from this discussion, use of empiricist frames of reference can be interpreted as identity devices, enabling the respondent to position their own identity in relation to their discursive formulations. For example, in their accounts where the empiricist repertoire is deployed within the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' their constructions of personal insights around alleged experiences with parapsychology serve to create distance between their presented identity and that of the field. Their presented observations around the perceived failings of the field build an identity that is aligned with the notions of idealised scientific practice due to their critical position. Ultimately, this can be interpreted as a positioning device - a notion which will be developed in the next chapter.

## **6.8 Reflexive Considerations**

Prior empirical chapters have all included reflexive considerations of the interview data - focusing on the role of the interviewer's questions and how this discourse may have affected the interviewed researchers' responses. The 'reflections of contingency repertoire' should also be considered in this analytical context.

As previously outlined throughout the thesis, the interviewer's questions ascribed an identity of association with parapsychology towards the researchers. Furthermore, the posed questions tended to position parapsychology in certain contexts. For example, questions pertaining to experiences with bias, background in the field and obstacles encountered all can be perceived to frame parapsychology as an area that is difficult to work in. Such questions also invite the respondent to discuss reflective biographical instances. When this is considered, the 'reflections of contingency repertoire' can also be seen as a direct response to the interviewer's line of questioning and prior assumptions.

The researchers' responses can be interpreted as using the interviewer's questions to explore those opportunities for reflective constructions. Effectively, the interviewer asks for insight and the researchers use this opportunity to build accounts that present a formulation of "insight" into

purported biographical accounts and areas around the field. These constructed accounts are wrapped in elements of contingency that embellish the constitutive formulations being presented. Aspects of the empirical are also present and can be viewed as a contrasting mechanism within these accounts. It could also be argued that the interviewer introduces aspects of contingency within the communicative context through certain aspects of their questioning. References to elements such as “bias” could be considered presenting a contingency-focused platform for the researchers to build their responses around such themes.

Subsequently, this repertoire (along with the two previously explored) is also a product of the full interview context. The responses from the researchers cannot be viewed in isolation without also including a consideration of the role of the interviewer’s discourse.

## **6.9 Summary**

From analysis of the responses provided by the researchers throughout the interviews the current chapter has aimed to outline the existence of a distinct interpretative discourse repertoire: the ‘reflection of contingency repertoire’.

The discussions presented have shown the core function of the repertoire is to formulate reflections of personal biographies (career choices, anecdotes etc.) alongside constructed presentations of contingency within scientific and academic practice. As a discursive tool this serves many functions, ranging from personalised, biographical, considerations towards more external, globalised, perspectives. Stemming from this are different interpretations of the repertoire as a communicative strategy, ranging from imbuing accounts with constructions of suggested insight or justification towards presentations of power reframing perception mechanisms.

The analysis within this chapter has validated Gilbert and Mulkey’s (1984) conceptualisation of a contingent repertoire. It has expanded their original analysis and has explored more deeply the key features of contingent elements of discourse along with the potential social functions of using such an interpretative repertoire. The final section of this chapter has also highlighted the presence of Gilbert and Mulkey’s (1984) empiricist repertoire within the analysed discourse.

Whilst the predominant discursive representations are around the contingent - within certain extracts the empiricist repertoire is also present and can be interpreted as contributing to the definitional and positional work of the discourse.

Within the context of this thesis the repertoire also exists alongside the two previously presented repertoires and extends the connections between the three as a whole. Again, the commonality of field boundary construction work, as well as personal identity formulation, is seeded throughout the repertoire. These elements are present across all three repertoires. Furthermore, the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' can also be interpreted as a discursive positioning function. This builds upon upon the 'outsider repertoire' - to create more (purported) personalised presentations of contingency and suggested 'insight'. This aspect serves to discursively reinforce the other repertoires' stake affiliations and border constructions. From this provisional analysis it suggests there are overarching connections and themes between the three identified repertoires. This will be explored in the next and final chapter of the thesis. The last chapter will align all of the themes and empirical considerations that have been discussed across the previous three chapters. In addition, the thesis' overall findings will be summarised alongside a review of the research objectives.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND THESIS CONCLUSIONS

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### 7.1 Introduction

The focus of this final chapter will present an overall summary and discussion of the discursive themes that have emerged from the empirical analysis in the preceding chapters. This will extend to an investigation of how the three interpretative repertoires identified within the thesis tie together and ultimately how these findings (and the thesis as a whole) is positioned within the discourse analysis and SSK literature framework.

One of the key aims of the thesis was to not only identify interpretative repertoires but to also look for how these repertoires may connect together as a discursive function. Prior discourse analysis work has tended to reveal discrete, self-containing repertoires that has never extended to showing how such repertoires may be related to provide a coherent overarching and complementing set of resources. This analytical deficit can be seen from the early work of Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) through to more recent literature that centres on the discourse analysis of interpretative repertoires, such as Lawes (1999); Rouse and Finlay (2016); Golden and Pomerantz (2015); Whittle and Mueller (2016); Hsu (2016); Huzzard (2015); Jackson and Hall (2016). All of this work follows the same pattern of presenting multiple repertoires related to a particular area of discursive interaction (for example, terrorism in the case of Jackson and Hall, 2016) - but then no further analysis builds on this that looks at how these repertoires may complement, link or engage with each other to form a larger discursive function. This final chapter's main purpose is to address this deficit and attempt to provide an overarching theoretical connection between the three interpretative repertoires that have emerged from the empirical analysis.

The structure of the chapter will begin with a section that will summarise the three interpretative repertoires that have been identified. Building on this, an analysis will then assess how these repertoires interact and what these findings of the thesis mean collectively as a whole in terms of discursive performative actions and an overarching theory for the thesis. An extension of this

discussion will look at the potential purpose of such discursive tools and why the interviewed researchers would utilise them in the communicative context of their interviews. The chapter will then address issues of reflexivity within the research. Following this, the thesis will be summarised in context of the sociological literature and what future research directives may stem from this work. Finally, there will be a repeat presentation of the core aims of the thesis and a response to these aims - detailing whether or not the thesis has succeeded in achieving these objectives and to what degree.

## **7.2 Thesis Findings Summary**

An overview of the findings of the thesis will now be presented - summarising the key aspects of the three interpretative repertoires in isolation of the literature.

### **7.2.1 Categorisation and Stake Repertoire**

The 'categorisation and stake repertoire's' central discursive feature was found to be one of category management and also stake allocation towards these constructs. This leads to the individual managing classifications and categorisation allocations within the communicative context. Primarily, the repertoire centres on identity construction whereby the categorisation and stake work within the repertoire allows the speaker to formulate their own stake associations with categories and implement identity work through their speech. As such, utilising the repertoire enables the speaker to manage their presented affiliation and subsequent identity within their discourse - insulating against potentially negative interpretations or anticipated perceptions. On a more global level the categorisation and stake repertoire can be seen to be a tool with a much broader focus. Beyond personal identity, the repertoire allows for the manipulation of the presentation of what categories may be interpreted as, whereby the control of boundary management and positioning of categories, groups and subject matter can be constructed through the repertoire. Ultimately, the repertoire's aims can be understood as building a flexible identity that is formulated via discursive work on category definitions and which allocates the individual's stake towards those constructs. An example of this repertoire's function was through the interviewed researchers' use of their discourse to delineate between proof-versus-process interpretations of parapsychological criteria and how they discussed this against presentations of

their own careers and research. Through this they were seen to construct the categorisation criteria boundaries as well as their own identity attachments to these concepts through their responses.

### **7.2.2 Outsider Repertoire**

The 'outsider repertoire' extends some of the key concepts identified within the 'categorisation and stake repertoire'. The concept of identity construction was featured more predominantly at a group level, in terms of formulating and delineating between the group concepts of 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. Stemming from this, the repertoire was used to present portrayals of perceived victimisation and purported prejudice. This developed the construction of oppositional group identities and membership of those groups, demarcating the group boundaries and the social identity characteristics of those collectives. Again, building on the categorisation and stake concepts, the repertoire was used to counter-position against opposing perspectives and group affiliation(s). In summary, the outsider repertoire established a defensive discursive position and can be interpreted as a sophisticated discursive tool for boundary management between binary group constructs.

### **7.2.3 Reflection of Contingency Repertoire**

The 'reflection of contingency repertoire' was used to develop presentations of insight and personal reflection, whereby the main features were biographically framed accounts that were couched in informal language displays. The repertoire's main function was to deploy the formulation of notions of contingency, also as a counter oppositional tool for alternative perspectives. The personal constructions within this repertoire were built to generate the perception of 'what's really happening' and thematically to provide the audience with a 'behind the scenes' insight. Essentially this functioned as a formulated proposition of what can be interpreted as 'truth' - acting as justification devices for the personalised biographical presentations offered by the speaker. These operated at both the personal and global level - either intimate portrayals of purported career events as managed intimacy or accounts pertaining to cultural infrastructure concepts (such as how academia operates). The reflection of contingency repertoire can be interpreted as a discursive framing device that attributes everything as a function of contingent aspects such as social or political subjectivity. The presence of contingency

acts as a direct support of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) work, specifically synergies with their 'contingent repertoire'. Whilst the core focus was contingency in Chapter 6 of the current thesis, the analysis also revealed the presence of their 'empiricist repertoire' and how such empiricist elements complimented the 'reflection of contingency repertoire's' discursive actions.

### **7.3 Collective Functions of the Repertoires**

Building on the above summary, the chapter will now discuss how there are connections and interplays between the three repertoires and their overall discursive function(s). Whilst each of the repertoires centre on a separate aspect (categorisation and stake, insider-outsider boundary construction or reflective contingency) the functions and discursive formulations behind each have broad connections and common themes in terms of what the repertoires are actually doing through the researchers' responses.

#### **7.3.1 Field Boundary Work**

Each of the repertoires has been demonstrated to function on both a personal level and also that of a more global position. In the interview data this ranged to discussing the field of parapsychology and its association towards integrated concepts and re-framing the controversial field as a mainstream consideration - for example, through the inflection of contingent elements or through the demarcation of the field as an unfairly treated "outsider". As such, throughout each of the repertoires a consistent discursive performative function of boundary work is present.

The concept of boundary work has deep ties with the SSK literature presented in Chapter 2. For example, Hess (1997: 57) proposed that "Mertonian norms might be reinterpreted as a description of the legitimating ideology of science...to which scientists may turn as a rhetorical resource in cases of controversy or boundary work" - see also Mulkey's (1976a; 1976b) conceptualisation of 'occupational ideology'. Gieryn (1983) was one of the first sociologists to introduce the concept of "boundary work" which can be defined as the ways in which scientists establish and police the boundaries of their field. He indicated that there were four types of boundary work (Gieryn, 1995: 429-34):

- monopolisation



- expansion
- expulsion
- protection

The discursive actions of the repertoires used by the researchers in the interviews can be interpreted as manifestations of these concepts. For example, attempts to legitimise parapsychology and reframing the field is a form of expansion - attempting to move the boundaries towards a more acceptable form of interpretation via discourse. Gieryn (1995) perceived controversies as boundary disputes and that “science is a kind of spatial ‘marker’ for cognitive authority, empty until its insides get filled and its borders drawn amidst context-bound negotiations over who and what is ‘scientific’” (1995: 405). Similarly, Merton (1973) introduced the concept of ‘gatekeeping’, and Star and Griesemer (1989) referred to ‘boundary objects’. Freidson (1970) alluded to similar concepts when discussing the social structure of medical care; “...the thrust of professional activity is to seek to build barriers that keep the profession and its clientele safe from those beyond the pale while at the same time seeking jurisdiction over all that cannot be excluded” (1970: 154-155).

More recently Grant and Hardy (2004: 7) have outlined the importance of understanding “how actors engaged in the negotiation of a discourse deploy rhetorical devices as they try to construct and bring to bear meanings that are in line with their views and interests”. Whittle and Mueller (2011b) expand on this to outline that “by viewing interests as the driving power behind the discursive construction of reality, interests are presented as an external force that lies outside the boundary of discourse analysis” (2011b: 417). Also, Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004: 637) suggest that individuals in their discourse “work towards discursive change that privileges their interests and goals” and as Marshak et. al (2000: 245) propose, these interests within the discourse are from the “inner world...from which discourse springs”. Whilst these proposals are more rooted in discursive psychology they indicate the capacity for the individual to actively construct and engage in boundary work through their discursive responses.

Fundamentally, in terms of boundary work and how this relates to scientists, Atkinson (1998: 261) summarises this succinctly with the assertion that scientists are “characterised by movement and changing boundaries that are defined and redefined”. In addition, Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 62)

propose that “individual narratives are situated within particular interactions and within specific social, cultural and institutional discourses”.

Through the three repertoires proposed in this thesis, they each can be interpreted as discursive mechanisms for managing the boundaries of fields. Within their responses the boundary work ranged from re-constructing categorisation definitions along with presentations of personal stake, managing the borders of parapsychology as an “outside” field and framing the field as a function of contingent elements. In addition, the borders of criteria acceptance were also discursively managed, in terms of what could be considered subject matter, around categorisation constructs within the proof-versus-process elements that surrounded different interpretations of parapsychology. Collectively, the researchers could be viewed as attempting to control and manage the perceived boundaries of the field.

### **7.3.2 Group Border Identity Construction**

Each of the noted repertoires in the current thesis also function as a tool to delineate between different group border identities, as opposed to a more global ‘field’ identity. Whilst this was most notable in the ‘outsider repertoire’ - that constructs the two group identities of insiders versus outsiders - it is also established within the use of stake categorisation and biographical contingency. Stake categorisation manages category constructs and allows for a fluid presentation of membership around group identities. The researcher can construct a discursive representation that allows them the potential to actively select between different groups (such as being an “insider” or an “outsider”) and to manage those category associations, along with their stake, around them. Alternatively, the use of biographical contingency establishes group borders as a function of contingency factors such as perceived social prejudice or political motivation(s).

These concepts have links to the core sociological literature - whereby sociologists have consistently found that identity formative discourse emphasises the beliefs of the in-group and simultaneously undermines the beliefs of the out-group (Judd et. al, 1995; Billig, 1987; Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984). Blau (1976) highlighted the stratification of the scientific community and potential ‘inequalities’ that contribute to perception. On a broader level beyond science, these findings affirm the social constructionist belief that the processes of identification and categorisation that are foundational to social identity are historically and socially specific. For example, Wetherell’s

(1982 and 1996) research has demonstrated that group construction, identification and competition is a function of the interpretation of group relations underpinned by the cultural frameworks of understanding. As Jorgenson and Phillips (2002: 102) summarise: “it is this culturally relative process of interpretation that determines whether group identification leads to ‘in-group favouritism’ and ‘out-group discrimination’ or has another outcome altogether”. As Billig (1991) outlines, individuals are not passive subjects of ideology but are creatively engaged with transforming collective representations (also Therborn, 1982).

The researchers interviewed in the current thesis can be seen to be managing both field boundaries (pertaining to parapsychology) and also that of group border identities (primarily insider-versus-outsider constructions). This is supportive of previous literature within the area that has investigated the notion that discourse constructs social identity through the active presentation of defining groups alongside their cultural boundaries and relationships (for example, McNeill et. al, 2011; Wodak, 1996; van Dijk, 1997b; Lawrence et. al, 1999; Hardy et. al, 2005). Such management in the current thesis was observed to be constructed through the regulation of stake, formulation of an outsider status and the use of biographical forms of contingent elements as reference points. In action, this translated to the researchers using their discourse to manage interpretations of academic fields, categorisation interpretations and alignments within those formulations. Negotiations around what constituted ‘parapsychology’ as a field relating to proof-versus-process definitions of research-focus demonstrated these aspects.

### **7.3.3 Personal Identity Construction**

The discussion of the three repertoires throughout the previous chapters have all highlighted aspects of personal identity construction as a constitutive aspect of the observed discourse. Through categorisation and stake management the interviewed researchers could selectively construct a manoeuvrable identity that was presented and defined by their own discourse within the communicative context of the interview setting. The ‘outsider repertoire’ allows the formation of a victim portrayal and the oppositional establishment of an identity that is at odds with what becomes defined as an “insider”. Finally, the ‘reflections of contingency repertoire’ allows more of a constructed biographical representation of the individual’s identity, utilising presentations of contingency to establish career reflections and decisions.

Collectively the identified repertoires enable the construction and navigation of a highly fluid identity throughout the communicative context. Gee (2001) described identity as:

“...the kind of person one is recognised as being, at a given time and place...it can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and of course, can be ambiguous or unstable.”

(Gee, 2001: 99)

This in many ways perfectly describes the constructive identity work that was noticeable in the researchers' discourse. They were formulating and presenting identity through their responses and were actively constructing presentations of personal identity (for examples within the literature see Burman and Parker, 1993; du Gay, 1996; Hardy and Phillips, 1999). Bucholtz (2011: 2) proposed that identity “operates as a repertoire of styles, or ways of doing things that are associated with culturally recognised social types”. The current thesis' observations are consistent with prior discourse analysis literature (for example, Brown, 2006; Gumperz, 1982; Blommaert, 2005; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). It is also suggestive of the absence of cultural and political neutrality in the discourse, instead potentially reflecting personal and political intent (Cameron, 1997; Lee and Roth 2004; Lee 2007; McNeill et. al, 2011; Hsu and Roth, 2012), or as Wetherell (2008) noted:

“Psycho-discursive practices are recognisable, conventional, collective and social procedures through which character, self, identity, the psychological, the emotional, motives, intentions and beliefs are performed, formulated and constituted.”

(Wetherell, 2008: 79)

Within the interviews the researchers utilised all of the three identified repertoires to construct and present personal identities relating to their presented levels of involvement or purported work with parapsychology. They were able to generate different levels of association and career identity through invoking mechanisms of categorisation selection, stake management, group identity formulation and alleged biographical reference points - all of which were combined with elements of presented contingency.

The preceding three sub-sections have each provided a brief overview of the collective functions of the three repertoires that built on the summaries outlined earlier in the chapter (Section 7.2). The next section will look towards unifying these repertoires' functions into a collective theory of discursive action.

## 7.4 Introducing the Concept of the 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD)

Emerging from the brief overview of the repertoires and the revision of the collective functions of these repertoires, the thesis will now expand on this and propose a consolidated concept that incorporates all aspects of the thesis' discursive observations.

Generally, each of the three repertoires can be interpreted as having a primary function: positioning. This ranges from positioning of the respondent's personal identity and the social representation of that identity, positioning of perception, group and also field identity positioning. As such, the repertoires discussed in the current thesis can collectively be grouped together as a single discursive mechanism which can be labelled as the 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD).

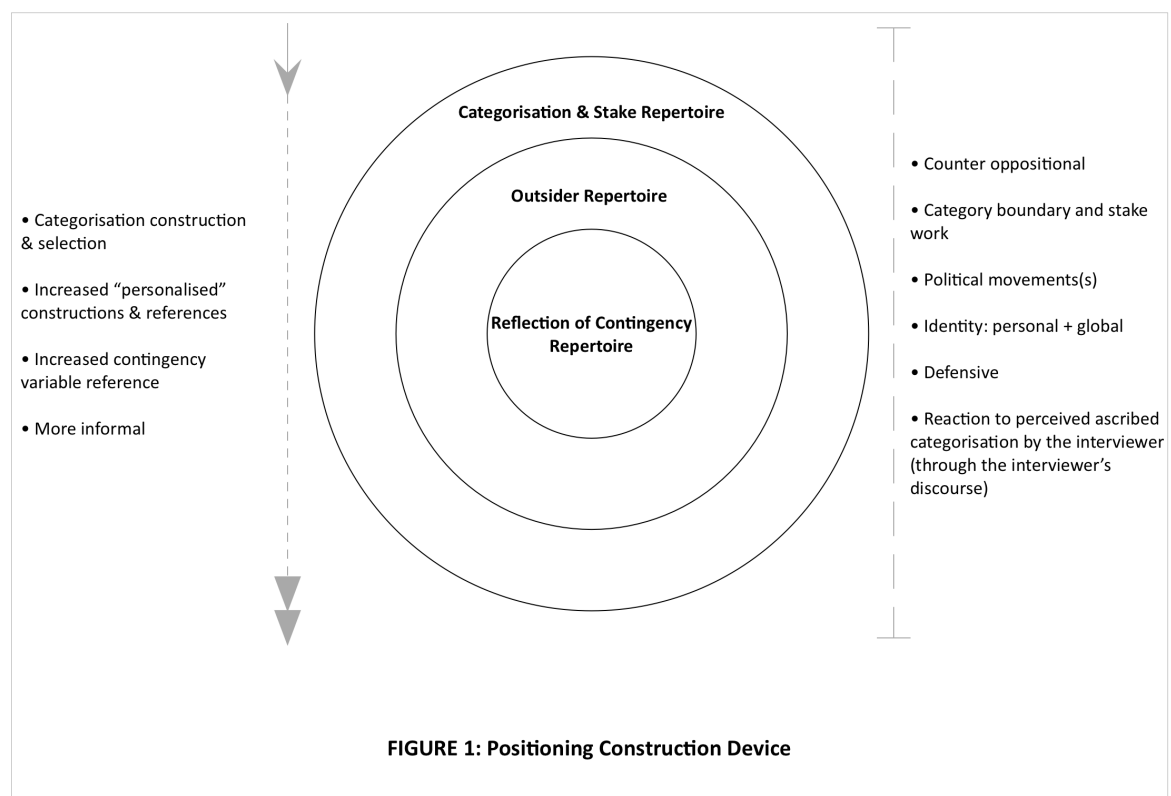


Figure 1 is an illustration of what comprises the PCD and how the three repertoires act as different conceptual 'layers' within the discursive content. The chapter will now focus on discussing the PCD and its relationship to the researchers' discourse.

#### **7.4.1 Layers of the Positioning Construction Device**

As shown in Figure 1, the 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD) can be viewed as being composed of three layers - with each layer representing one of the three repertoires that have emerged from the empirical discussions within the thesis.

At the outer level is the 'categorisation and stake repertoire', which in the model's context, is used to establish a categorisation foundation that intrinsically allows the respondent to operate within a fluid identity construction, enabling them to establish both category constructions and stake associations towards certain identities. In the case of the interviewed researchers this meant delineating between what constituted classifications of categories around the concept of "parapsychology" and presenting ties to those formulations. Through their responses they controlled direct stake references to these concepts and maintained their own frames of reference. The interviewer's discourse should also be considered from a reflexive perspective. Ascription of certain categorisations within the questioning is a focal point which may influence the response from the interviewed researcher - inviting them to unpack that ascription and reconstruct both the category and identity association. Overall, within the PCD model this layer can be interpreted as the foundation of their identity positioning, the point from which the respondent begins to choose a categorisation ascription to discursively build an identity within the communicative context.

The next layer of the PCD is the 'outsider repertoire', which now begins to establish group boundaries within the discourse between what is constructed as being either an "insider" or an "outsider". This builds on the categorisation and stake formulations that are used in the previous layer of the PCD model. The respondent having positioned their stake towards a particular categorisation now frames their position as the opposed and unfairly treated party, using victim terminology and frames of reference. What is established is a more general globalised boundary that also informs the construction of the respondent's presented identity further. Regarding the

interviewed researchers, this related to constructing parapsychology and their purported ties with the field as being outside of the mainstream and as unfairly judged.

The final layer of the PCD is the 'reflection of contingency repertoire' which builds upon the previous layers and formulates suggested 'biographical' reflections that are couched in presentations of contingency. The construct of the outsider is extended to incorporate more references that are represented as 'personalised' representations of presented 'insight' and reasoning - in the form of contingent aspects (such as social or political motivations). For the interviewed researchers this manifested in presented reflections of career choices around parapsychology and construction of 'behind-the-scenes' accounts of what happens within academia.

Progression through the different layers demonstrates increasing levels of both categorisation and identity arrangement. There are increased specific 'personal' references to their own purported biographies and experiences combined with an increased tendency to invoke frames of reference to contingency. Also, movement towards the third level shows an increased level of informality, after breaking down levels of categorisation and identity/ group formulation there is an increased use of informal language.

#### **7.4.2 Purpose of the Positioning Construction Device**

The core purpose of the 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD) can be proposed as one of positioning. This positioning is, fundamentally, in relation to oppositional positions that may exist against the constructs being formulated within the individual's discourse. Subsequently, the PCD is a defensive discursive mechanism. The initial layer of categorisation work is an assertive stance to control the ascription of categories or identities, enabling the respondent to control the frames of reference associated with them in the exchange. The outsider formulation is then a response to potential critics and sceptics of the adopted position, for example by invoking an element of unfair treatment and hostile treatment. This is embellished by references to contingent elements that have impacted (implied) biographical aspects pertaining to the individual's constructed presentation. The positioning from this evolves to become a positioning justification tool - whereby any formulated construction that has been introduced (or referenced) within the communicative context can be explained or unpacked through outsider or contingent frames of

reference. Behind this is the layer of managed stake that allows for a fluid and controlled identity presentation. As discussed earlier in the chapter, this identity construction encapsulates both personal and more global portrayals, ranging from the researcher (respondent) themselves to the field in general.

The above delineation remains as a summary of what the purpose of the theorised PCD may be interpreted as. From the analysis conducted throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the application of the above proposals can be seen as the following discursive positioning:

- Researcher manages classification and categorisation boundaries with the field of parapsychology or associated phenomena.
- Parapsychology as a field, and any constructs tying the researcher to the field are represented in terms of being an 'outsider'. Opposing critics and sceptics are portrayed as 'insiders' who purportedly unfairly treat the field and strive to maintain its position as a fringe discipline. These boundaries are maintained by both those constructing direct alignments with parapsychology and also those constructing a more critical position.
- Personal reflection constructions on their career and research are framed within functions of contingency by the researcher. Representations around concepts such as lack of success or progression are presented as being proponents of social and political considerations that have impacted the researcher and the field.

In the context of the thesis' interview data the potential motivation and logic for such managed defensive positioning will be now discussed in the next sub-section.

### **7.4.3 Motivation for the Positioning Construction Device Within the Interviews**

The discussion above has centred on unpacking what has been labelled the 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD) which serves as an umbrella label for the three repertoires identified within the current thesis. This discussion has looked at how these interpretative repertoires interact and the formative discursive actions achieved when the interviewed researchers used such tools. However, this discussion has omitted an analysis of why they would construct their discourse in this way - what is their motivation for doing so? In order to assess this, the analytical methodological stance has to briefly step away from direct discourse analysis and look beyond the communicative context in which the interviews were conducted.



With this caveat and on a more speculative note, it can be proposed that the controversial status of parapsychology and the subsequent conflict surrounding the field may inform the use of the PCD and the associated interpretative repertoires. The background of parapsychology presented in Chapter 1 and the SSK analysis of the area demonstrates that there is a high level of critical negativity towards parapsychology. Stemming from this, the defensive positioning, that is one of the core attributes of the PCD, may be a direct response to this expected negativity from being associated with the field and its phenomena. This guarded approach would logically account for the discourse moving to control stake ties toward the field - as the individual would potentially be hesitant at defining their career as centred on such controversy to potential detriment in future opportunities. Such status of the field also leads to the border outline presentation of the field as an outsider, that is held in opposition to the perceived mainstream and general acceptance. Finally, the contingency invoked towards biographical reflections may act as a justification mechanism to attempt to provide insight into the social and political machinations that surround parapsychology. The interviewer's ascription of association with parapsychology to the interviewed researchers also supports the above proposition. Being immediately aligned with the potentially perceived controversial label of "parapsychologist" may have set the foundations for the interviewed researchers to build defensive lines of discursive presentation.

Beyond this speculation of intent and motivation, the PCD can be suggested as a device to manage discourse within areas of conflict. Blisset (1972) proposed that scientists' discourse in scientific work is a form of political activity as it involves manoeuvring, influence and forms of manipulation. In retrospect this sentiment echoes throughout this thesis' empirical analysis. The researchers that took part in the interviews can all be seen to be engaging in almost political management of the constructions surrounding categorisation demarcation, their career biographies and academic history. Alongside this is a deeper management of their stake (and one could argue, face) which ultimately drives the presentation of the groups and cultures they are associated with and the borders they draw around these. Using the interpretative repertoires contained within the PCD enables them to achieve such constructions via their discourse.

#### 7.4.4 The Positioning Construction Device in Action

This section (7.4) of the chapter has so far been used to introduce and establish the concept of the 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD) - bringing together the three repertoires that have been identified within the thesis' discourse analysis. Now this sub-section will look at the PCD in action and bring together all of the analysis and propositions put forward so far - focusing on one single researcher's discourse, Researcher 3 (R3). The three discourse extracts previously presented from this researcher in the empirical analysis will be revisited along with an additional extract. Collectively, looking at these extracts from a single source will begin to show how the PCD can be displayed throughout multiple aspects of a respondent's discourse.

The first piece of discourse from Research 3 that will be covered is Extract 6D:

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#### EXTRACT 6D

[R3 has just spoken about how there can be negative perceptions against parapsychologists and how he has largely avoided such negativity.]

1 **Interviewer:** ...It sounds like you're almost the exception to the rule almost?

2 **R3:** I'm wary sort of by nature. So, I try to pre-empt any negativity by overemphasising,  
3 probably, my, err – well I don't know what you would call it – sceptical neutrality.  
4 But, you know, whenever I say I'm a parapsychologist I always preface that with  
5 some kind of, you know, "but I'm not a looney" type thing, you know? *{laughs}*

6 **Interviewer:** So you still the need to sort of validate yourself? Balance it out?

7 **R3:** Err, yeah. I mean, probably less so now that I haven't really done parapsychology for  
8 a while. But certainly when I was, yeah when I was in academic circles, with people  
9 that I didn't really know very well, I wouldn't just say I was a parapsychologist and  
10 leave it at that, I would always try and, you know, soften the blow. *{laughs}*

---

From a positioning perspective, R3 displays multiple aspects of the PCD within Extract 6D. When first analysed in Chapter 6 the focus of the discussion was on the use of contingency and the presentation of autobiographical reflections of experience to display a construction of contingent elements that govern academic/ scientific practice. For example, in Line 8 his reference to “academic circles” and the need to “soften the blow”. However, beyond the use of the ‘reflection of contingency repertoire’, all three repertoires can be seen to be utilised in this piece of discourse as a collective example of positioning construction via the PCD.

There are notable elements of category stake management. When the interviewer reflects that he appears to be an “exception” (Line 1), in relation to their previous discussion surrounding negativity towards the field and his avoidance of such negativity, R3 admits to an awareness of stake management. An admission that he attempts to “pre-empt any negativity” (Line 2) mirrors this and is potentially a use of reflection to convey insight into this construction. R3 then goes on to perform stake control within the next passage of communication. He refers to “whenever I say I’m a parapsychologist” in Line 4 which is then contrasted and made more fluid later. The interviewer prompts for confirmation in Line 6 of R3’s need to validate himself - confirmation of R3’s previous declarations in Lines 2-5. R3 responds to this by stating “probably less so now that I haven’t really done parapsychology for a while” (Lines 7-8). In isolation this line is a logical display of constructing the presentation of someone who has moved away from the field - however this contrasts to the discursive presentation of Line 4. In Line 4 the use of “whenever” implies current tense - R3 does not state “when I was I used to say”. Subsequently, this invokes a more open and fluid presentation of identity within the extract as a whole. R3’s construction of stake towards parapsychology in this response avoids being cemented, allowing for future manoeuvring. From the perspective of the PCD, this is a defensive positioning mechanism. He is being guarded in this exchange - supported by his actual presentation of being “wary...by nature” (Line 2). The construction is positioned to counter oppositional discursive presentations, for example a critique of parapsychology or an accusation of being categorised as a “looney”.

In addition to the stake and contingency elements that have been noted, Extract 6D also utilises the ‘outsider repertoire’. R3’s construction throughout builds the identity presentation of the parapsychologist as an outsider versus the oppositional (academic) mainstream. Notions that are reinforced by the language used: “but I’m not a looney” (Line 5); and “soften the blow” (Line 10).

R3 builds the display of parapsychology elements being judged negatively in “academic circles” (Line 8) and the need to be guarded (Lines 2-5). R3 is drawing boundaries between elements of the field and the purported mainstream - reinforcing the outsider against the oppositional-insider dichotomy.

When all of these elements are taken together Extract 6D begins to exemplify the core features of the PCD that have been presented in this section. The next piece of discourse, Extract 5N continues these themes:

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### EXTRACT 5N

1 **Interviewer:** Would you say it was any easier to pursue a career or conduct research in  
2 parapsychology now then when you first started?

3 **R3:** I don't know really, I've not had much experience of that. I would imagine that it's  
4 much harder now, now that Bob Morris has gone, and, err, the Koestler unit has  
5 been (you know) shrunk to what it is now. Err, I imagine it's actually more difficult. I  
6 mean I was lucky, when I was reading these books, you know, I couldn't believe my  
7 luck at the point that I realised; oh the biggest department in the world is just across  
8 the motorway. And then when I met Bob Morris, you know, he was enthusiastic and  
9 I was extremely lucky to have parents that were willing to fund it as well – because  
10 that's seems to be what holds a lot of people back, is being able to fund a 3 or 4  
11 year PhD in parapsychology to get them started. So, it just, I was lucky in a lot of  
12 respects, that I could just manage to slide into it without really having any problems.  
13 Bob was keen that if you show enough enthusiasm and you had the money to pay  
14 for it, you know, he wasn't going to cause any extra obstacles in your way. So, Bob  
15 was good that way. Err, so yeah I had it lucky. Now - I really don't know. I haven't  
16 really been involved in it for a few years so I don't know what the state of play is at  
17 the moment.

---

Originally this extract was analysed in Chapter 5, with the focus being on R3's use of the 'outsider repertoire'. The predominant aspect of Extract 5N is R3's construction of the outsider identity that is attached to the presentation of pursuing a career in parapsychology. He balances his formulated career progression with deployment of "luck" descriptives as the main reason (Lines 11 and 15 for example). This balance and affirming of the (struggling) outsider portrayal is also achieved through the references of inferred difficulty that he was not exposed to: "I would imagine that it's much harder now" (Line 4) and "I imagine it's more difficult now" (Line 5).

Beyond this outsider construction, and reasoning for his presented biography, the extract also incorporates other elements from the PCD. Management of stake and categorisation ascription is less prevalent but is still present at the beginning and end of the extract - where disclaimers of attachment are deployed to manage R3's formulated stake towards the concepts discussed. R3 begins the response with the declaration "I don't know really, I've not had much experience of that" (Line 3). Despite this assertion he then continues to discuss the issue in detail. Lines 15-17 mirror the sentiment expressed in Line 3, presenting that he does not know and has distance of involvement towards the topic. Distance is invoked here due to the contrast of the concepts discussed by R3 between Lines 3-15 and the disclaimers that bookend this passage of talk.

Reflection of contingency is seeded throughout the discursive turn, as R3 uses autobiographical constructions to build formulations of contingency as presented insight. The concept of 'luck' here - and through the PCD in general - serves a dual purpose. Luck is used to affirm the outsider portrayal of 'underdog', as discussed in Chapter 5, but to also exist as a contingent variable within the functioning of science and academia. R3's presented progression is not proposed as being achieved through objective results, work and the scientific process, but through the function of contingent aspects such as luck (and the referral to money in Line 13).

Beyond these considerations - as an example of the PCD - Extract 5N extends the discursive positioning work established in Extract 6D. R3 continues to be guarded and noncommittal towards his current presented attachments to the field of parapsychology with it remaining an exercise of building stake and footing associations that are couched in suggested biographical contingent elements. These themes are on display in Extract 6G:

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## EXTRACT 6G

[Interviewer has previously asked R3 for an ideal world scenario where he would want to see the field heading - below are selected extracts compiled from a longer response/ interaction spawning from this.]

1 **R3:** ...It's never going to happen because nobody is going to invest in that type of  
2 research. It's also, never going to happen because I don't think the mainstream, (oh  
3 sorry not the mainstream) I meant the (kind of) main psi researchers actually want  
4 there to be a definitive answer after ten years – especially the ones that have been  
5 in the field for 30 years...

6 ...And, err, now to me the obvious thing to do in that situation, when you have got  
7 something, you've got a way of doing a study; which is the Ganzfeld. Then you have  
8 got a debate about the effect(s) and the way that the conditions in which the effect  
9 of that [exists?] and the way you should conduct the perfect Ganzfeld. The obvious  
10 thing to do, in my eyes, would be to agree what the best paradigm is, what the best  
11 way of doing a Ganzfeld is to find the effect. And then do it, for ten years if you need  
12 to. And then at the end of it you look at yourselves and go; "ok, you know, was that  
13 significant? Was that not significant? What does that tell us?" And a lot of people  
14 were resistant to that, because that was one of the key topics of the debate. And a  
15 lot of people were resistant, and they were resistant I think because they were just  
16 too frightened of what maybe they might find at the end of those ten years. Now  
17 that's sort of me reading into it, but the argument was that, err, the argument was  
18 that they did not need to waste any time or money doing proof-oriented research,  
19 because they, as far as they were concerned they already had the proof and what  
20 they needed to do was process research – which is try and understand how the  
21 effect worked, and under what conditions it worked. And a 10 year, you know, study  
22 like the one I've just described, would be purely proof-oriented. You would look at it  
23 at the end and go, you know, "is there evidence of psi or is there not?" And at the  
24 end of it, you would sort of – if you all agreed in the first place that this was the best  
25 way of actually looking for it – then you would have an answer after 10 years. And it  
26 seemed to me as if a lot of people who'd spent 30, 20 years in the field were a bit  
27

28 nervous about what might happen 10 years down the line if the answer was ‘No’...

29 ...If they did find something they would be happy, but I think they were a little bit  
30 nervous if it came out null, then basically it says that – now this wouldn’t have  
31 happened either – it would have suggested that they had wasted 20 or 30 years of  
32 their life chasing after something that was, you know, that wasn’t there. Well what  
33 would have actually happened would be they would have found some post-hoc  
34 reasons as to why this null effect had happened and why, you know, the study was  
35 conducted wrongly....

36 ...That’s what I read into it. Now if you asked any of these other parapsychologists  
37 who were resistant to doing it, they wouldn’t say that was why. They would say that  
38 it was because, you know, that was a waste of time. You might even find them  
39 talking about, you know, “psi is elusive and it doesn’t work like that”, and you know  
40 “of course you wouldn’t find anything after 10 years it doesn’t, you know...” Err, but  
41 they would never ever admit that there was any kind of fear – but I mean that was  
42 me reading into it, and I’m pretty sure there was you know...

---

Extract 6G presents a different aspect of discourse from R3: it is more direct in terms of reference (for example the references to the Ganzfeld paradigm in Lines 6-28); constructed more personally (for example, the references to personal view in Lines 36 and 41-42) and more directly opinionated (for example, the opinions expressed in Lines 36-42). There is less stake management presented towards R3’s associations or ties towards parapsychology on display. R3 continues to use key features of the PCD to construct numerous aspects through this discursive formulation. The outsider identity is re-affirmed in Lines 2-3 where R3 accidentally refers to category of the “mainstream” and then corrects himself, stating that he meant “main psi researchers”. This turn can be interpreted as a delineation of R3 suggesting parapsychology as being outside of the mainstream - his implied error of deploying the descriptive “mainstream” and subsequent correction is potentially presented ‘evidence’ R3 would never present the two categories simultaneously. The entire extract presents parapsychologists as an enclosed culture - with no reference to ties or associations with other fields.

The main aspect of the extract are the reflections of contingency that were discussed within Chapter 6. However, beyond those, the extract also represents further aspects of the PCD, as it is more steeped in these increased contingent presentations it follows the model outlined in sub section 7.4.1. As noted above, there is categorisation and stake work, which is combined with an increase in both personalised specific reference and contingency variable reference. Furthermore, the presentation is more informal, as evidenced by the content of the discourse, typified through Lines 36-42.

The next and final extract which has not been presented or discussed previously in the thesis holds similarities to Extract 6G:

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#### EXTRACT 7A

[At this point in the interview the phone line dropped. Prior to the phone call cutting out, the Interviewer and R3 had been discussing the interesting approach R3 had suggested regarding parapsychology not wanting to find a definitive answer - R3 had begun to describe how parapsychology represents science in general - the phone call then cut out.]

*{phone call resumes}*

1 **R3:** ...Yeah, I was saying, I think in many ways parapsychology is the perfect example of  
2 science. Everything seems to be exaggerated in parapsychology. Because you do get  
3 these, sort of, debates in other sciences – you know there’s no effect and then  
4 people argue about it; people argue about whether it’s a real effect or not a real  
5 effect or whether its been interpreted in this way, interpreted in that way and what  
6 it actually means, and all that. In parapsychology that is magnified, because the  
7 effect that you are talking about isn’t a trivial effect in the sense that, you know, if it  
8 really existed it does require almost an overhaul in our physical understanding of the  
9 world. It’s such a massive – there’s so much at stake, in terms of whether this effect  
10 is real, for our understanding of the world. So you get that and, err, and the debates  
11 that happen that surround that tend to be, again, magnified. And, yes, I mean, there  
12 is this – I don’t know if it’s intentional or not but there is this sort of thing where  
13 there is a back and forward between whether or not it exists, whether or not it



14 doesn't exist and whether or not people...would they know what to do with it if they  
15 had a definitive answer. And I think the field has been defined by the controversy for  
16 so long. And I think if they did find a definitive answer, what would then have to  
17 happen would be that the people who had been involved with parapsychology for  
18 so long, and again this is an ideal world – this would never happen - I think the  
19 people who had been involved in parapsychology for so long would have to step to  
20 one side and then let people, let other people in. Other types of scientists who  
21 could then progress the field theoretically, you would probably need to let [in the]  
22 physicists – if there is a definitive answer and psi was shown to be, you know a  
23 robust effect, that was demonstrated with beyond a reasonable doubt, then I don't  
24 think the parapsychologists in the field have got the tools to actually take it forward,  
25 theoretically. I think, you would then have to get the kind of theoretical physicists  
26 involved in explaining these things and taking it forward. So, in a sense, I suppose  
27 what I'm saying is that there is no effect, it's actually probably more beneficial to  
28 parapsychologists, because they can continue doing what they are doing. And  
29 maybe they will occasionally find something, they occasionally won't. And that sort  
30 of suits them, because that perpetuates their, you know it validates their existence  
31 - they can continue doing this 'till the cows come home. You know, occasionally  
32 finding effects, occasionally not finding effects and then arguing about why. If there  
33 was a definitive answer either way – if there was a definitive 'No' answer then  
34 everyone goes home with their tails between their legs, you know, wasted 30 years.  
35 If there was a definitive 'Yes' answer, then in come the physicists and take over. Or,  
36 you know – probably the physicists. So, in either way...and it's the first time I've ever  
37 thought of this actually, but it's probably in parapsychologists' interest that the  
38 status quo is maintained.

---

Throughout Extract 7A R3 presents a perspective towards parapsychology's functioning as a field, and also the scientific process. This resembles his discourse within Extract 6G - both are constructed as opinionated and observations of purported insight into what is apparently 'really happening'. Extract 7A takes an interesting position, throughout R3 presents himself as a passive observer - there are no direct references to him being, or not being, attached to the concepts he is discussing.

Throughout both extracts R3 is combining both the 'outsider' and the 'reflection of contingency' repertoires to present certain constructs and draw boundaries around the identity of parapsychology. He combines reflections from his (presented) experience with elements of contingent functioning and the portrayal of outsider status. In Extract 7A he states "I think the field has been defined by the controversy for so long" (Lines 15-16), later in the extract he then talks about eventually parapsychology having to let "other people in" (Line 20) to progress the field. Towards the end of the extract (Lines 26-38) R3 then suggests that parapsychologists may not actually want to progress the field or find an effect. The content of this discourse is interesting and can be interpreted on multiple different levels in relation to the themes discussed within this chapter and the overall thesis. Here he is continuing to build the theme of parapsychology as an outsider identity that remains different from the rest of science/ academia. This ties together with the field boundary work and group border (categorisation) identity construction functions that were notable throughout all three of the interpretative repertoires.

The overall tone in Extract 7A is a judgemental and somewhat detrimental presentation of parapsychology, yet this may be a sophisticated form of stake management and ultimately positioning. As noted, he constructs the discourse as if he were beyond and completely independent of the content being discussed. There are no formulated references to his involvement or if he has any ties with the field and how this may relate to the content being discussed. As such this can be viewed as a form of personal identity positioning by R3.

Alongside the elements of contingency, facets of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) empiricist forms of discourse are also prevalent within Extract 7A. As discussed in Chapter 6 (Section 6.7) the 'empirical repertoire' can be traced through some of the discourse analysed within this thesis - particularly alongside the 'reflections of contingency repertoire'. This is particularly evident in Extract 7A which clearly moves between empirical and contingent frames of discursive reference, providing a further insight into the broader categorical identity work behind the PDC. In the extract R3 begins by discussing scientific practice and specifically how debates work around areas such as parapsychology (Lines 1-15). This can be interpreted as representative of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) 'empiricist repertoire' as it "it portrays scientists' actions and beliefs as following unproblematically and inescapably from the empirical characteristics of an impersonal natural world" (1984: 56). From Line 15 onwards R3 begins to discuss other contingent elements that may

influence scientific practice, such as "controversy" (Line 15) and how certain findings may suit parapsychologists' own persona; interests by maintaining the "status quo" (Lines 36-38). In Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) terms, "scientists' actions are no longer depicted as generic responses to the realities of the natural world, but as the activities and judgements of specific individuals acting on the basis of their personal inclinations and particular social positions" (1984: 57). This mixing of the 'empirical' and 'contingent' can be interpreted as another facet of positioning within the researchers' discourse, as both present categorisation positions (such as parapsychology) in particular frames of reference. In Extract 7A, the differences of the empirical and contingent, which are emphasised by R3's discursive movement between the two in the same response, serves to draw identity borders around the concept of "parapsychology". In this instance, it is presented as being subject to more contingent influence than empirical and tied to the career motivations of the practitioners of the field. Subsequently, moving from the empirical to the contingent elements in the same passage of talk acts as a discursive contrasting device - emphasising the contingent aspects against the previously outlined idealised empirical elements. This constructs a particular identity of parapsychology as being removed from objective, unpersonalised scientific empiricism. R3 presents how the debates around parapsychology are normal scientific areas for discussion within science (empirical) but then follows with the presentation of parapsychologists actively avoiding certain research paths to maintain their existence (contingent). This formulation presents parapsychological research as being flawed and can thus be interpreted as discursive identity positioning work. In terms of personal identity construction, as noted in previous extracts, R3's own categorisation affiliation is removed from any stake association within Extract 7A - his discourse is presented in an observational frame of reference which is evidenced through terminology such as the repeated use of "they". Again, this demonstrates the interplay of different elements of the repertoires identified within the thesis working towards a singular focusing of identity positioning.

When all of R3's four extracts are analysed together an overall theme becomes apparent around his discourse. All three interpretative repertoires can be seen to be threaded throughout, with ranging emphasis - from categorisation formulation, stake management, outsider construction or presentation of insight via reflections of contingency. Ultimately, R3 can be perceived to be using the proposed PCD throughout all of these extracts - utilising his discourse to construct complex forms of positioning. The general location of this is a defensive position; formulating a guarded position that is a stance towards counter, potentially critical, oppositional perspectives.

The next sections will now provide overall summaries of the thesis and provide a general review of the work in relation to where it sits within the wider literature. An appraisal of the thesis' original aims will also be conducted.

## **7.5 Thesis Review: Finding Self-Criticism In The Discourse**

There is one discursive phenomenon within the interviews that is worth exploring alongside the analysis of the interpretative repertoires - the presence of self-criticism. Within the interviews there were multiple instances where the researchers' responses to the interviewer contained elements of self-criticism, ranging from a presentation of direct judgement of themselves or negative comments about the category they were aligning their identity with via their response.

The presence of self-criticism across all of the repertoires is a relatively novel finding. For example, from the perspective of Gilbert and Mulkey's (1984) research the concept of self-criticism does not integrate with the empiricist or contingent repertoires from their findings. Similarly, searching through both discourse analysis and SSK literature does not highlight self-criticism as a notable feature. Below are some excerpts that are examples of self-critical discourse removed from extracts previously discussed within the thesis (the original full extracts are available in Chapters 4-6):

"And what we keep finding is that our phenomena are being hived off. And I think its our own fault because in the past we haven't defined it properly – as being well "no" here's the experience and we're attempting to understand it."

**[Extract 4I - R11 - Lines 21-23]**

"...It's not a reputable activity..."

**[Extract 5B - R1 - Line 7]**

"Oh yeah...yeah...I mean I think, they're probably thinking "oh it's great that somebody's doing it, so long as I don't have to". "

**[Extract 5C - R2 - Lines 7-8]**

“Yep...yeah. Oh definitely, in – well in every aspect of my life...(One thing) as soon as you say ‘parapsychologist’, of course, people just think “oh some crackpot that’s willing to believe in anything”. [Its] what I’ve experienced...”

**[Extract 5D - R2 - Lines 4-6]**

“But calling yourself a parapsychologist, or offering a parapsychology degree – you’re an easy target, and you can’t defend yourself.”

**[Extract 5I - R2 - Lines 29-31]**

“...I think that there can be an identity amongst certain – some parapsychologists, and I’ve been guilty of this as well, and I think I sometimes am now - of this idea of individuality, of being special somehow. Of investigating, and being interested in this kind of weird and wacky stuff that nobody else seems to be interested in and is actively dismissive of, and that can encourage a kind of self-identity being somehow more special or something. And I think that can be a bit of a lie.”

**[Extract 5P - R5 - Lines 1-6]**

“Yeah I rather enjoyed that. That’s what I used to like to see themselves/ ourselves as mavericks sort of working against the powerful institutions of academia and being picked on by them. You know it's all sort of classic, sort of lone-wolf stuff isn't it.”

**[Extract 5Q - R16 - Lines 6-10]**

“But, you know, whenever I say I’m a parapsychologist I always preface that with some kind of, you know, “but I’m not a looney” type thing, you know? {laughs}”

**[Extract 6D - R3 - Lines 9-10]**

“...It’s never going to happen because nobody is going to invest in that type of research. It’s also, never going to happen because I don’t think the mainstream, (oh sorry not the mainstream) I meant the (kind of) main psi researchers actually want there to be a definitive answer after ten years – especially the ones that have been in the field for 30 years... “

**[Extract 6G - R3 - Lines 1-5]**

“I remember telling my father, my parents funded the PhD more-or-less, I got some money from the SPR and some money from Bial but for all intents and purposes my parents funded it. And, er, my parents don’t

really, they don't really know about academia, so they thought they were funding {starts laughing} thought they were funding me to, you know, have a glittering career. And I had to point out to them quite early on that err the type of PhD that I was about to undertake was probably going to be a, you know, was going to work against me in the academic field and within my career. So I kind of knew what I was getting into, I knew it really wasn't going to, you know, be a massive career booster and I knew about the funding situation, which you know isn't great. So it wasn't any of those things – I had my eyes open when I went in, so I wasn't really surprised with any of those experiences. The reason that really I started moving away from parapsychology was because having spent the best part of 10 years in the field I just felt I hadn't seen any progress in the field – it hadn't really advanced in the way that you might expect a field to advance in 10 years. (In terms,) and I started to see the field sort of repeat itself a little bit. What generally happened would be that you would see, and this happened, I suppose this was one or two cycles of this when I was in the field.“

**[Extract 6I - R3 - Lines 9-22]**

These excerpts demonstrate different forms of constructed reflective criticism within the discourse. In a similar vein to previous analysis (seen in Chapters 4-6) this functions across both a micro (personal) and macro (wider field) form of discursive presentation. Self-criticism in the form of self-depreciation is evident from R5 (in Extract 5P) and also R3 (in Extract 6D). Here the respondents can be seen to be constructing criticism of themselves through their response, such as in R5's depiction of the "lie" around being perceived as "special". Similarly, R3 presents a categorisation selection of 'parapsychologist' whilst also suggesting this may lead to an interpretation of him as being a "looney". These are discursive formulations around their presented identity, signified through their specific uses of "I" and "me" for example. Beyond this, the examples above also illustrate reflective criticism of the field of parapsychology. This finding has been discussed elsewhere in the thesis but can also be interpreted as a form of self-criticism, depending on whether the respondent has constructed a categorisation alignment (i.e. towards parapsychology). Examples of this are R11 in Extract 4I and R3 in Extract 6G. In both instances the researcher has constructed categorisation and identity presentations of themselves as parapsychologists (or in the case of R3, having just left the field). R11 criticises the field's lack of definition and presents himself in that bracket "what we keep finding". R3's reflective criticism is more detached and explored from a 'they' perspective - presented as a perspective that parapsychology researchers avoid finding definitive results.

Relating the above findings to Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) highlights the unique nature of self-criticism within these discursive performances. In their work the empiricist repertoire was used principally to represent the construction of an individual's perspective and knowledge claims - the intended objective framework of idealised scientific practice. Alternatively, the contingent repertoire was used to explain the position of others who existed in opposition to the individual's beliefs and knowledge claims - the subjective framework of contingent elements such as self-interest or biased thinking. Self-criticism provides an interesting phenomena when viewed against Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) two repertoires. Firstly, it contradicts the empiricist presentation of idealised scientific practice. Constructions of self-criticism, whether it be directly personal or more generalised (such as towards a field of study) create a formulation that their scientific practice and experiences are flawed in some aspects. Secondly, and more significantly, in some of the examples cited above there can be an interpretation of contingent elements being used to depict the shaping of their own knowledge claims and research. For example:

"I think it's very hard if you have it as part of your identity. If you have it as part of your identity, I think it chips away at the other things that you do. Erm, so I think it can de-value the other work that you do. I think (I don't know who you have spoken to) maybe some of the people you have spoken to have it much more as their identity, that everything that they do is parapsychology and that everything that they do is swimming against the tide. Erm, and I think that's fine if you go for it full-hog in that way, it only leaves particular options there for you – and they are quite limited."

**[Extract 6F - R14 - Lines 1-8]**

In this sample of discourse (originally presented as part of Extract 6F in Chapter 6) R14 is presenting an identity of himself as someone who has moved away from parapsychology and how being involved with the field affects research and standing in the academic community. Subsequently, in his discourse he is depicting contingent elements (such as "the tide") shaping his approach to research and the subject matter he investigates. Prior SSK studies into fringe areas (such as the literature discussed within Chapter 2) have tended to find researchers in this field depicting contingent forces influencing progress - for example Collins' (2002: 239) notion of "extra scientific factors". However, the extent of self-reflective criticism such as that seen by R3 in the examples above is more notable in the current thesis' observations than potentially in previous studies. As a discursive communication strategy the use of reflective self-criticism has potential for different social and interactional functions. Primarily the reflective nature and reference of

contingent elements within the discourse suggests a close alignment with the 'reflections of contingency repertoire'. As such, many of the potential strategies of that interpretative repertoire hold synergies with the use of self-criticism - such as the constructed presentation of 'insight' alongside justification mechanisms towards the biography they have chosen to represent. Self-criticism therefore may be a function that allows the researcher to enhance their discursive representations and justify their presented categorisation or identity constructions.

The nature of the interview context and the discourse of the interviewer should also be considered in this analysis. As previously discussed, the interviewer through some of the questions ascribed categorisations, positioning the interviewed researchers as parapsychologists. Similarly, the questions included references to the marginalised nature of the field, referencing the stigma attached and the criticism levelled towards the subject matter. When this is factored into consideration the use of self-criticism can be interpreted as being a part of the 'Positioning Construction Device'. Earlier analysis within the thesis towards the interviewer's role concluded that the nature of the questions posed by the interviewer effectively presented a direct platform for the interviewed researcher to deploy positional work in their response. Either they could directly align themselves with the ascribed category of parapsychology or reject and establish a new construction. From this perspective the use of self-criticism is a way of accounting for continued alignment with parapsychology within the interview (or their construction of prior involvement). More simply, it may be a way to explain why research in the field remains ongoing despite apparent social or academic exclusion and the negative influence on careers - elements that were referenced in the communicative context of the interview by the interviewer. Therefore it is a positional way of accepting the inference of criticism raised by the interviewer by acknowledging that construction and presenting their own discursive formulation in response.

Subsequently, the finding of self-criticism within the discourse of the researchers' responses in the interviews provides an interesting point of analysis that would benefit from further investigation. As such, it provides a foundation for future research into similar scientific discourse - opening up avenues for exploring the role of self-critical constructions as positioning devices and identity framing mechanisms.



## 7.6 Thesis Review: A Reflexive Framing

An important area that has been discussed throughout the thesis and that should inform any analysis or interpretation of the thesis' findings is the role of the interviewer's discourse in the interview sessions. A reflexive perspective is integral to the discursive work and repertoires that have been introduced. In Chapter 3, Section 3.8, the reflexive framing of the analysis was noted - specifically the interviewer's discourse and the way questions were phrased towards the interviewees. The majority of the questions and discourse produced by the interviewer ascribed the interviewed researchers the category of 'parapsychologist' - and all discussion by the interviewer referenced them in the context of being associated with the field. Section 3.8 outlined the reasoning behind this in context of the thesis' methodology.

Widdicombe (1998b: 203-4) has highlighted such problems, for example the notion that "analysts' categories always stand as the framework within which activities, values, or other phenomenon are interpreted". By assuming particular identity frameworks either a priori or as part of the analysis itself may compromise the constructivist element of the research. Kulick (1999: 6) also highlights this scenario whereby researchers "start out 'knowing' the identities whose very constitution ought to be precisely the issue under investigation". Furthermore, Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 57), in reference to performativity studies, highlight the reliance on the analyst's categories, as opposed to the participants' categorisation work, throughout the research process. Reference to such literature does not de-value the discourse analysis and empirical considerations of the current thesis - however the reflexive themes promoted through them have to be considered throughout the work.

The category work and identity ascription by the interviewer needs to be considered throughout all of the empirical discourse analysis within the thesis. The interviewed researchers were not presented with an open blank discursive canvas from which they could formulate and construct discursive identity presentations. They were confronted with the identity of being considered a parapsychological researcher. Subsequently, any discourse that stems from that ascribed category (and subsequent identity) is a response to that positioning by the interviewer.

When this reflexive consideration is brought into the analysis the proposal that the three interpretative repertoires combine to form a positioning device remains highly significant. Each of

the repertoires can be viewed as repertoires that function to construct both identity and positioning. Through management and formulation of categories and their definitions the respondents were able to manage their stake alignment against the invoked association with parapsychology. Similarly, through the 'outsider repertoire' and use of contingency they were able to draw their own borders and construct perspectives to either further the association with the concept of 'parapsychology' or create distance. Collectively, when a reflexive interpretation is considered, the 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD) could be viewed as a direct response to the ascribed connections with parapsychology. The interviewed researchers throughout the analysis can be seen to use their discourse to manage the position that has been presented to them. They use their discourse to manage and re-negotiate that position, drawing their own borders around both their personal identity and that of the field's. A high level example would be the researchers' use of their discourse to propose definitions of parapsychology and what constitutes proof-versus-process aspects of the field alongside their own presented position. Ultimately, when confronted with an ascribed category they actively seek to control the ascription and use their discourse to re-mould the interpretation to the position they have chosen to represent in their response.

Once a reflexive framing has been applied to the interpretation of the empirical content of the thesis - the PCD can be thought of as a reactionary discursive mechanism. It is invoked as direct interpretation and then re-interpretation of the interviewer's discursively ascribed label. The discourse that forms the interviews can therefore be perceived as a negotiation context: the interviewer presents an interpretation of the interviewed researcher, who then uses their response to re-negotiate and re-package that interpretation.

An interesting extension from this thesis would be to perform a discourse analysis on similar interview data: where the interviewer does not ascribe categories within their questions. Such an analysis, using a comparative sample of interviewed researchers, would potentially highlight whether the positioning focused repertoires uncovered in the present thesis are a direct product of the labels attributed to them by the interviewer.

## 7.7 Thesis Review: Position of the Thesis

The content and findings of the current thesis have close ties with the research reviewed within Chapter 2. At its root, the interpretative repertoires and the proposal of the more universal 'Positioning Construction Device' (PCD) sits as a contemporary extension of much of the discourse analysis literature that has been presented and incorporated into the analysis throughout the thesis.

The thesis has introduced refinements and extensions of key concepts that have been seeded throughout prior research. It exists as a confirmation of such findings but also a reinterpretation as well. Broadly, the original concept of stake management (Potter, 1996a) has been reframed to include considerations of categorisation building and active selection. Constructions of 'outsider' group status and personal identity have been identified that elaborate on prior work in this area, including the discursive practice of victims and also Hess' (1993) concept of the 'underdog'. Finally, the original proposal of a 'contingent repertoire' by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) has been refined within the current analysis.

Beyond discourse analysis the content of the current project holds potential significance for SSK. Research of this nature can possess numerous functions; principally it updates the discourse analysis literature within this area but also the SSK literature. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a plethora of sociological research that analysed fringe sciences and controversial knowledge claims (see Chapter 2). Yet the level of research in this area has seemingly decreased in recent years. Subsequently, the core data of the interviews could be used beyond discourse analysis considerations. A different sociological analytical framework could provide a more contemporary reflection on the status of parapsychology as a subject of academic interest – detailing how it has progressed in the UK and the strategies used by parapsychologists to cement their developing positions - beyond their discursive practices.

Furthermore, in a broader sociological context the interviews that have emerged from the project may offer an insight as to why parapsychology has developed in the UK – in juxtaposition with other countries, notably the US where it has appeared to stall. As a direct consequence, this may serve to stimulate additional research into the area and also SSK research into parapsychology in a more generalised way.

## 7.8 Thesis Review: Objectives

As outlined in Chapter 1 the core aims for the thesis were as follows:

- Analyse the discourse of researchers associated with a field that has blurred boundaries (in terms of whether it was considered 'fringe' or 'mainstream') and what could be considered a scientific controversy.
- Replicate the methodology of Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) for how they conducted interviews and analysed the resulting discourse.
- Investigate the performative and constructive aspects of the interview data - identifying possible interpretative repertoires.
- Attempt to provide a theoretical connection between the emerging repertoires - identifying how they interact, connect and complement each other as a set of discursive resources.
- Fulfil the deficit within the literature that was highlighted by Sampson and Atkinson (2011) - that "there is a lack of analytic focus on the narrative accounts of scientists themselves and an absence of a sustained research tradition building on the work of Gilbert and Mulkay" (2011: 90).

In summary, the thesis has achieved all of the above intentions successfully. Researchers associated with the field of parapsychology were interviewed utilising the same methodological and analytical approach used by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) for their interview data collection plus interpretation. As outlined in Chapter 1, the field of UK parapsychology is a highly useful focal point as it can be interpreted to exist within the label of 'scientific controversy' yet has been progressively seeded within mainstream UK academic institutions. Therefore the boundaries, attachments and core identities of researchers associated with this subject proved to be an interesting discursive area - the emerging interview data was significantly constructive and performative in nature and rich for analysis. Ultimately, this led to the identification of three

distinct, yet connected, interpretative repertoires which formed the analysis in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This analysis and the discussions stemming from the current chapter have built on the research tradition of Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) and progressed numerous theoretical concepts in a direction that could hold potential for further analysis and research initiatives.

More significantly, the thesis has provided a unique analytical attempt at presenting theoretical connections between the identified repertoires. The presentation of the PCD as an overarching theory from this thesis is a fulfilment of a deficit within previous discourse analyses throughout the literature. By extending the analysis beyond just identifying distinct repertoires this thesis has presented a unique approach to viewing repertoires - analysing how they may interact and complement each other as a more globalised discursive resource, in this case, 'positioning'.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

This thesis has revealed the complexities behind the discursive presentations of researchers who have been purportedly associated with parapsychology at key points within their career. From the empirical analysis the constructive aspect of their discourse has been highlighted. These constructions range from personal formulations of identity towards more global delineations of field boundaries. Collectively, the interview responses of the researchers have been interpreted as performing one key function: positioning. The PCD as a discursive tool highlights the tactical and defensive nature of their rhetoric.

The discourse practices of the researchers indicate that working within or being associated with areas of controversy, such as parapsychology, is almost a political process. Careful, defensive positioning and presentation suggest the key actors in these controversies are aware of external perception and its impact. These insights reveal how researchers manage this presentation through their discourse. It may also reveal potential strategies for fields such as parapsychology to progress towards greater acceptance - through careful management of their identities and boundaries via strategic positioning constructs.

Beyond extending pre-existing discourse analysis frameworks set out by Gilbert and Mulkey (1984) this thesis is a foundation for future research. The concept promoted in this thesis, of looking at

connections between interpretative repertoires, should be explored in subsequent discourse analysis frameworks. The discussions from this thesis have illustrated the virtue of not stopping the analysis at the point of identifying repertoires, but of analysing how these repertoires link together. The three repertoires that have been presented along with the 'Positioning Construction Device' concept should be analysed against scientific controversies beyond parapsychology to see the range of applicability of this thesis' findings. From such a foundation, controversies in different sectors other than science could be included for analysis.

This thesis stands as a culmination of multiple strands of sociological focus: SSK; discourse analysis; and scientific controversies. These strands have been unified to illustrate the complex discursive actions present in the discourse of researchers with purported ties to parapsychology. It is hoped the findings from the analysis will serve as a platform for not only further discourse analysis of scientific controversies, but also stimulate new research into the field of parapsychology and how researchers navigate this complex space.

## APPENDICES

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### **APPENDIX 1: General Email of Introduction to all Potential Research Participants**

A general email of introduction was sent to everyone on the list of potential research participants - explaining the research, its aims, format and asking whether or not they would be inclined to participate. This email is presented below:

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*Subject: Parapsychology PhD Research Help*

*Dear .....,*

*My name is Isaac Hughes, and I'm a part-time PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of York, working under the supervision of Robin Wooffitt. I am examining the recent history and development of parapsychology as an academic discipline within the UK, and hope to identify the broader social processes that have shaped its trajectory in higher education in the past two decades. My research draws on the sociology of scientific knowledge, especially in relation to the production and reception of controversial or marginalised areas of scientific research.*

*The primary data for the research will be parapsychologists' own opinions and perspectives on the field and its recent history, and therefore I am I'm writing to you to request an interview, at your convenience. Whilst I'm still in the preliminary stages of planning the interviews, broadly they will cover your experiences as a parapsychologist and your opinions of the status of the subject in its current state and with regards to the future. If you could assist me in my research, and did not object, I would like to tape record the interview; all ethical and issues of confidentiality will be addressed prior to the interview.*

*If you need any more information about the project then please feel free to contact me. I would greatly*

*appreciate if you could reply - either confirming or declining my request.*

*My contact details -*

*Email: xxxxxx@york.ac.uk*

*Mobile: xxxxx xxxxxx*

*Thank you for your time.*

*Yours sincerely*

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## **APPENDIX 2: General Follow Up Email to Researchers Agreeing to Participate**

After agreeing to participate, and once the interview format had been finalised, a second email generalised email was sent to all people willing to take part in order to cement the details and arrange the interviews themselves. This email is presented below:

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*Subject: RE: Parapsychology PhD Research Help*

*Dear .....,*

*I'm just emailing you to follow up my PhD research request from September. I have now finished the preliminary planning of the interviews. Subsequently, I was hoping we could arrange a time that would be convenient to you whereby I could conduct the interview.*

*The interviews themselves will be (recorded) over the phone. Currently, I'm a part-time self funded student, whilst also working full-time - therefore the practicalities of traveling to all the interviewees and doing the interviews face-to-face would prove problematic. Hence my decision to conduct the majority of them over the phone.*

*The interview itself will be unstructured and will approach three key areas: your experiences in relation to parapsychology (getting work published, perception etc.); the current state of parapsychology in the UK and its future; parapsychology as a scientific subject. With its unstructured nature its hard to give a definitive length for the interview but it should last approximately an hour.*

*The shift-pattern for my current job dictates that the times I'm available are Tuesdays + Wednesdays (all day) and then Thursdays + Fridays (from about 12.00 - 16.00). If these days or times are inconvenient for you then I should be able to work something out.*

*If you need any more details regarding the interviews, or anything else, then please feel free to contact me:*

*Email: xxxxxx@york.ac.uk*

*Mobile: xxxxx xxxxxx*

*I look forward to your reply, and thank you for your time.*

*All the best*

*Isaac*

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