

International PGR Voices: Lived Experiences of Completing a Doctorate at the University of Salford

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In collaboration with The Doctoral School



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2023

Background

New landscape of doctoral study

What factors indicate timely completion for international PGRs?

Research project funded by the School of SEE

In collaboration with The Doctoral School

University wide project with participants from all Schools



Passionate about Int PGRs!



Dr Maggie Hardman

Why me?

Project is an extension of my own PhD

IPA study of NNESDCs in completion of study

Teaching & supporting PGRs since 2006

I experienced a long, hard ride!

Aim of the Project

To explore the lived experiences of international PGRs at the University of Salford in order to understand the underlying factors that impact on progression and completion of study.



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Why is this so important?

The better we understand how international PGRs feel, the better able we will be to create an environment characterised by **belonging, resilience and wellbeing.**

Every single international PGR should feel **connected, included and supported.**



Work to Date

- Sorted the work arrangements & secured ethical approval
- Reviewed Literature
- Designed the research using IPA
- Conducted 13 interviews
- Produced indicative findings



Study Design: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

“a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences”

(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009)

Study Design: IPA

- Participants are experts on their own experience.
- Thoughts, commitments, feelings, reflections.
- Telling their own story – phenomenological claims and hermeneutic sense making.



Study Design: IPA

Focus on personal
experience

Phenomenology:
What is it like being
human?

3 key theoretical
foundations of
IPA

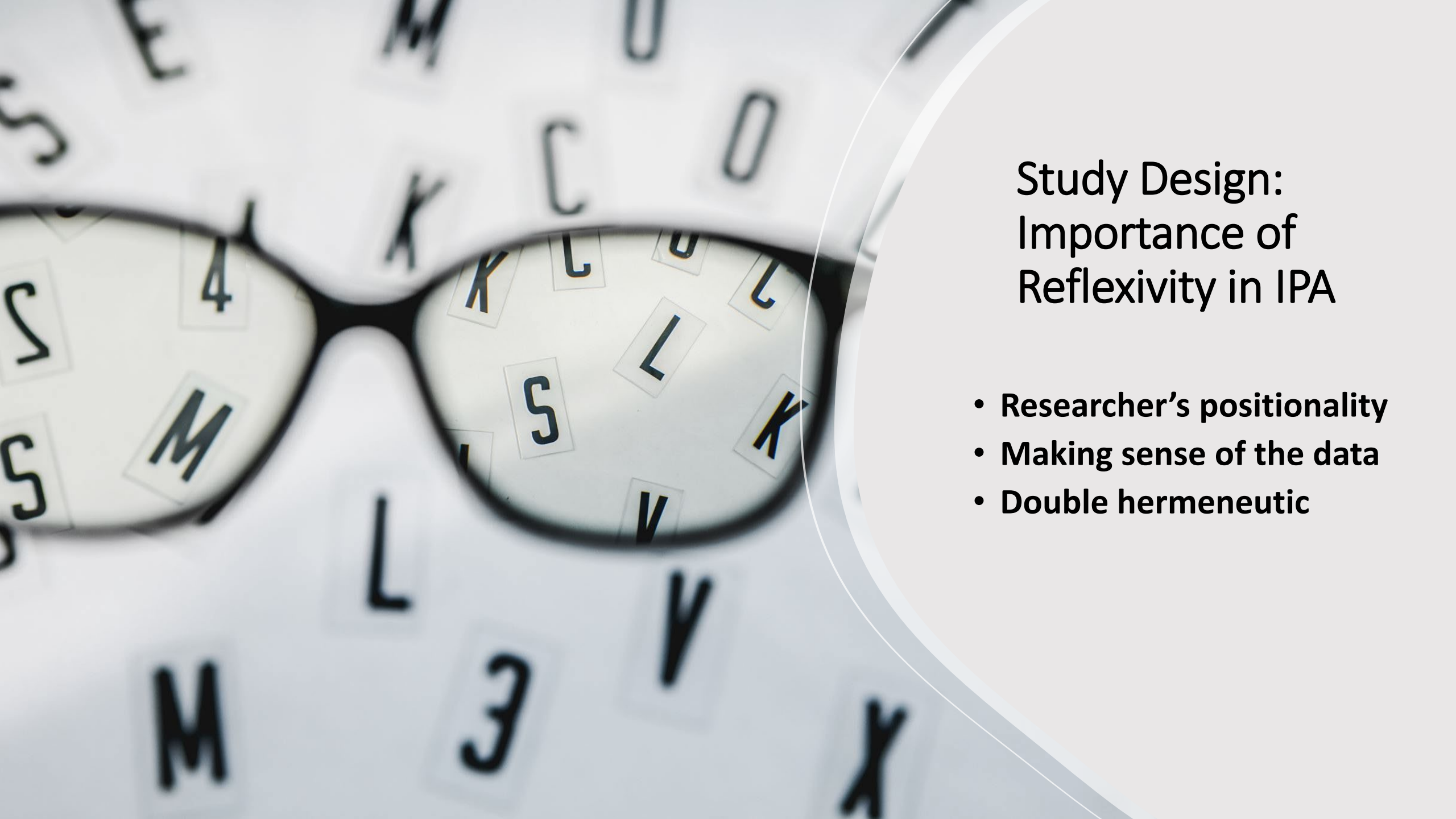
Making meaning
and sense

Hermeneutics:
Interpreting original
meaning from text

Idiography:
Concerned with the
particular

How the experience
is understood

(Hardman, 2020)



Study Design: Importance of Reflexivity in IPA

- **Researcher's positionality**
- **Making sense of the data**
- **Double hermeneutic**



Participants

13 International PGRs in their 2nd or subsequent year of study

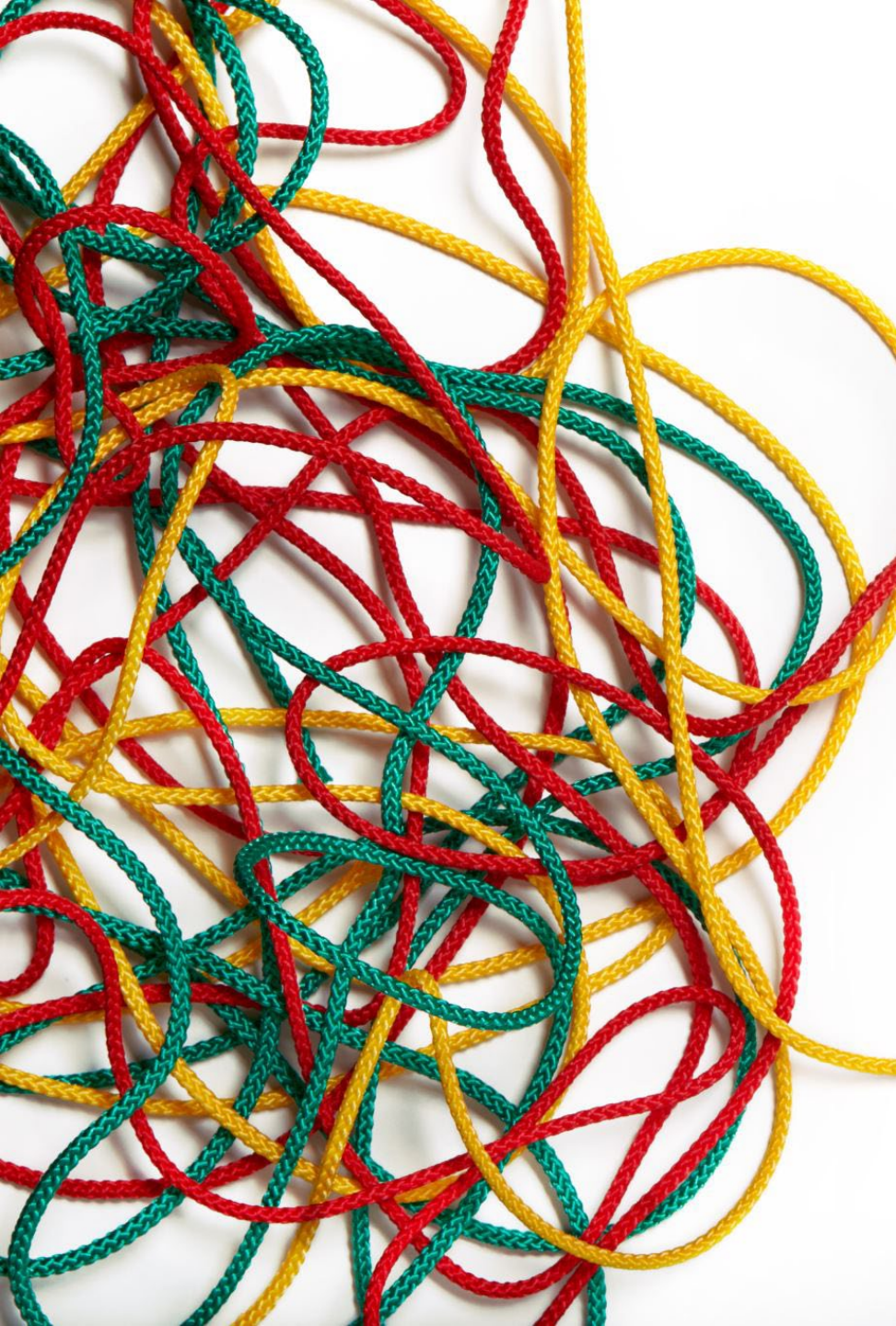
From all 4 Schools at the UoS

Willing to share their lived experience



Procedure

Semi structured interviews on MS Teams
Recorded & transcribed
IPA of the data set
Pseudonyms to protect anonymity



Steps to Analyse

1. Initial noting on transcripts
2. Diagrams for each person
3. Making sense of their story
4. Idiography – the key reasons for their progression rate
5. 2nd Order – cross case – common themes
6. Superordinate and Subordinate themes

Findings

2 Superordinate Themes: Sense of Being and Sense of Belonging, each with subordinate themes.

Being
'Me'



Being
'In'

Sense of Being

Language & Culture

Personal Drive

Self-Identity (multiple roles)

Health

Support Network





Sense of Belonging

Cooking on the same grill
(Knowledge of others)

Multi-disciplinary groups

Opportunities for collaboration

Close global networks



Palms & Fingerprints

Each individual participant is unique

Own lived experience

Each participant manifests the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes differently

Phenomenological Claims about Self-Identity

(Beatrice)

I have young ones and I also have a job and I have also some responsibilities in charge so balancing this is also not very easy but I try my best.

(Sue)

Sometimes I need to take a breath and I don't want to do anything in this whole life. I just need to sit with my daughter.

(Ian)

My wife is...well...not so happy with me... because I missed the birth of all my three children



Hermeneutic Sense Making

All three of these participants are struggling with multiple roles as part of their self-identity, they are parents, which for them should be the most important role. Feelings of guilt at not being 'present'.

Metaphors used to describe the PhD Journey

It's a marathon / sprint

It's a rollercoaster

It's like you are in a jungle and you are missing

I feel like a lone ranger

It's like having a new husband or a new baby

It's a service to God

It's a big picture and I need to look at just one piece

I feel like a butterfly





So What?

What can we do at institution level to improve sense of being and sense of belonging?

Ongoing Work at UoS

- Doctoral School Cohort training
- Language & Culture training (LEAP)
- Discipline group training
- Supervisory teams
- Pastoral support (Personal Tutors)
- EDI Work



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Summary

- International PGRs are incredible!
- Deeper understanding of lived experiences
- Complex set of (very personal) interrelated factors that impact on progression and completion
- These may be hidden from view





Where Next?

- Triangulate this project's findings with other ongoing research at the University of Salford
- Publish the findings
- Widen our networks 😊

A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a yellow sweater over a white collared shirt, is shown in a thoughtful pose with his hand on his chin and looking upwards and to the left. The image is framed by a thin black border.

Thank you!

Please feel free
to ask questions
now, or get in
touch

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Thanks especially to

- Prof Jason Underwood and the participants of this study
- Prof Ian Goodhead, Associate Dean for R&I in the School of SEE
- Dr Katherine Yates, Director of the Doctoral School
- Dr David Junior Gilbert, EDI Champion in the Doctoral School