



**THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION AGENDA IN
HIGHER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA:
THEORISING A MODEL OF SERVICE DELIVERY
FOR NON-ACADEMIC STUDENT SERVICES TO
SUPPORT UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM
LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS.**

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Abstract

Australian higher education has historically been influenced by a variety of government agendas seeking to increase the proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (LSES students). It is generally acknowledged that socioeconomic status makes a difference to who accesses, and subsequently completes, university studies. LSES students may have complex social, economic, and cultural influences that impact on their student experience. Improving access to university for LSES students without ensuring that adequate supports are facilitating their subsequent retention and success is counterproductive. Student Services are non-academic university departments that are designed to build the personal resources of students, thereby aiding their retention and their subsequent success in university. In Australia, while there is some existing research to suggest that non-academic support services make a significant contribution to the student experience, there is little research that analyses the relationship between LSES students and Student Services. This doctoral thesis reports institutional research that aimed to develop a theory that informs Student Services planning and service delivery to LSES students. Using Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach to grounded theory methodology, 17 LSES students and three staff members were interviewed at three campuses of an Australian regionally headquartered university. Insight was gained into LSES students' experiences of accessing Student Services. Consistent with the explicit purpose of grounded theory to generate substantive theory, this study developed the theory of trusting networks, which was informed by the construction of four categories: *needing support*; *complicating factors*; *trusting networks*; and *making success*. The emergent substantive theory evolved around what became a core, keystone category, *trusting networks*. The theory of trusting networks provides an understanding of the processes employed by LSES students to seek support and advice. This theory updates components of Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital and its applicability to the Australian 21st century context, particularly LSES students in Australian higher education. This study makes significant contributions to theoretical, practical, and methodological knowledge. The substantive theory that has emerged from this research is an important contribution to the development and enhancement of Student Services in Australia.

Certification of thesis

This thesis is entirely the work of **Christie White** except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

The student's and the supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University of Southern Queensland.

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Keywords

Australia; Bourdieu; cultural capital; Charmaz; socioeconomic status; connections; constructivism; determination; grounded theory method; habitus; higher education; low socioeconomic status; networks; non-academic support; qualitative research; relationships; social capital; student engagement; Student Services; student support; trust; universal design; university students; widening participation

Publications and presentations arising from the research

Peer-reviewed journal articles

White, C. (2014). Using principles of trust to engage support with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds: A practice report. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 5(2), 81-87.

Non-peer-reviewed journal articles

White, C. (2011). Access without support is not opportunity...but stop singling them out! *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 37 (April), 1-8.

White, C., McKenzie, J., & Playford, S. (in press). Student engagement in service delivery: A two way street. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*.

Conference presentations

White, C. (2013, December). *Supporting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds: A theoretical framework for student services*. Paper presented at the Australian & New Zealand Student Services Association Inc. Conference, Wellington, New Zealand.

White, C. (2014, May). *Re-interpreting the place of the literature review in Grounded Theory Method: Challenging the challengers*. Paper presented at the 13th Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher Group Research Symposium, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, QLD.

White, C. (2014, July). *Using principles of trust to engage support with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds*. Nuts and Bolts session presented at the 17th International First Year in Higher Education Conference, Darwin, NT.

White, C. (2015, August). *Working together to achieve outcomes for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds: Comparisons of Australia and beyond*. Presentation at the Heads of Student Administration and Directors of Student Services Australia and New Zealand Combined Conference, Adelaide, SA.

White, C. (2015, December). *Student Services: Through the eyes of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and the eyes of the institution*. Paper presented at the Australian & New Zealand Student Services Association Inc. Annual Conference, Hobart, TAS.

White, C. (2016, July). *LSES students and the theory of trusting networks: A whole of institution approach for Student Services*. Paper to be presented at the Students Transitions, Achievement, Retention & Success Annual Conference, Perth, WA.

Definitions and acronyms

Grounded theory methodology (GTM):

GTM is a qualitative research design that uses systematic guidelines simultaneously to collect, analyse, and conceptualise data to construct theory (Charmaz, 2003).

Low socioeconomic status (LSES) students:

LSES students in this research, and as defined by the Australian Government, are those individuals who have permanent home addresses in the lowest quartile of the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Education and Occupation Index (2006) depicted by the Australia Bureau of Statistics in combination with those who meet relevant income support payment criteria (Department of Education, 2010). Successive Federal Governments have long debated the operational definition of LSES.

On campus students:

Students studying on campus generally refers to students who, during their enrolment with the education provider, attended the university on a regular basis to participate in the teaching and learning environment.

Social inclusion agenda:

The previous Australian Federal Labor Government committed to a social inclusion agenda, which meant “building a nation in which all Australians have the opportunity and support they need to participate fully in the nation’s economic and community life, develop their own potential and be treated with dignity and respect” (Australian Government, 2009, p. 2). This agenda is no longer promoted by the current Coalition Federal Government at the time of writing.

Student Services:

Student Services in this context are those non-academic departments in higher education institutions that are primarily responsible for welfare and advisory services. Services often include counselling, disability support, health, careers and employment programs, financial aid, scholarships, and accommodation and housing advice. This researcher did not consider other student support services that are often prevalent within universities such as academic support, study skills, learning assistance programs, recreational programs, student unions or guilds, or library services.

Widening participation strategy:

A widening participation strategy for higher education was endorsed by the Australian Government following the release of the Bradley Review of Higher Education in Australia (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). It provided for the greater participation of people from under-represented populations in higher education, particularly people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and detailed targets with associated funding and incentives (Department of Education, 2010).

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Australian Federal Government policies at the time of this research study encouraged increased access to higher education through widening participation strategies, yet, “[a]ccess without support is not opportunity” (Tinto, 2008, p. 1). It is important to gain an understanding of what enhances the propensity for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (LSES students) to source support in order to increase their likelihood of achieving success at university. This study is about furthering our understanding of the provision of services to Australian LSES students in higher education in order to assist them to achieve self-defined success.

At the time of the study, universities in Australia were under pressure to increase enrolments by improving access for members of diverse communities, particularly people from LSES backgrounds (Gale, 2012). The International Association of Universities argued that widening participation “contributes significantly to the development of national human resources, promotes social justice and cohesion, enhances personal development, employability and, in general, facilitates sustainable development” (Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clarke, 2012, p. 1). Furthermore it is argued that “[i]ncreasing the diversity of higher education is of global interest” as higher education providers worldwide are understanding the value of diversifying the student body and the subsequent positive social outcomes (Benson, Heagney, Hewitt, Crosling, & Devos, 2013, p. xi). With so much attention being paid to access into higher education for disadvantaged communities in many western countries (Gale & Tranter, 2011; Moore, Sanders, & Higham, 2013; Tinto, 2008), higher education providers run the risk of setting students up for failure if they do not place as much effort into the provision of support services to transition students successfully into, and through, their studies as much as the effort placed on access and entry programs. Entry into university without adequate support structures can be counterproductive (Devlin & McKay, 2014). There is considerable research to demonstrate that LSES students in particular may face significant challenges when studying at university (Karimshah et al., 2013; Tinto, 2008; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). It is the support available from higher education institutions that is the focus of this thesis, which provides insight into how access to support services may be improved

for LSES students in an Australian university through the generation of a substantive theory. This body of work will contribute to three forms of knowledge – theory, practice, and methodology.

1.2 Purpose and structure of the chapter

The first chapter in this thesis outlines my research journey and notes the relevant Australian policy landscape and the systemic influences on the experiences of LSES students in higher education, particularly with regard to their interactions with non-academic support services. While not a full literature review, the chapter then provides the broader context and justifies the research. It highlights my experience as a Director of Student Services in a university and as the researcher in a way that legitimises the selection of the research topic. This is followed by an explanation of why a complete literature review was delayed until after the data analysis phase was completed. An outline of the thesis' structure is also provided.

1.3 History of LSES students in higher education

1.3.1 Background of government initiatives

Rapid growth in the Australian higher education system has created expanding opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to engage in tertiary study (Edwards & McMillan, 2015). Expansion of the Australian higher education system has resulted in more pathways and entry options for people from a range of educational backgrounds. Traditionally, higher education had long been viewed as a privileged post-compulsory education choice for Australian students (McMillan & Western, 2000) however, “[t]he Government has endeavoured to extend access to higher education beyond the elite of Australian society” (Carson, 2009, p. 5). One similarity across reviews of higher education in Australia, regardless of the governing party, is “how to expand access to quality higher education to ever greater numbers of students from ever more diverse social, economic and academic backgrounds” (Department of Education and Training, 2015, p. 28). The increasing diversity of students, including raising the rates of participation of LSES students, in higher education is not unique to Australia. Research in the United States and in Europe has reaffirmed the importance for universities and for society of a similarly diverse student population, including LSES students (Crosier, Purser, & Smidt, 2007; El-Khawas, 1996; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). An overview of the key

Australian Government reviews and initiatives to increase access to higher education follows.

1.3.2 Federal Government initiatives in Australia

Australia's Federal Government has "held a continuing commitment to equity and widening participation in higher education since the end of World War II" (Carson, 2009, p. 5). One of the earliest attempts by the Federal Government in Australia to increase access to higher education was in 1951 when the Menzies Liberal Government commenced the provision of annual scholarships (Carson, 2009, p. 6). These scholarships were open to all students and came in the form of a fee waiver and a means-tested living allowance in an attempt to encourage student enrolments.

One of the most significant steps to minimise barriers to education for financially disadvantaged people was the fee abolition for higher education in 1973 by the Whitlam Labor Government (Chapman, 2001). What emerged was a deliberate attempt on behalf of the Government to make higher education in Australia more accessible to LSES people that subsequently increased university participation rates. Fees were reintroduced in the late 1980s with a user-pays Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) resulting in deferred payments for students until such time as the students earned a certain income (Gale & Tranter, 2011). The HECS scheme with the deferred payment strategy was regarded as a student equity initiative as government funding was able to be redirected to offering more university places. In 1990, the landmark *A Fair Chance for All* report was released by the Hawke Labor Government, which defined the national equity objectives and set targets for higher education (Department of Employment, Education and Training [DEET], 1990). In 1994 under the Keating Labor Government, Martin (1994) furthered the equity agenda by providing definitions for target equity groups and identifying performance indicators. Ad hoc reviews continued around the policy framework and in 2003 the Howard Liberal Government introduced Commonwealth Learning Scholarships to minimise the financial burden of higher education and to attempt to increase the participation rates of individuals experiencing financial hardship. The Howard Government also introduced performance-based equity funding, the Higher Education Equity Support Program (HEESP), replacing the previous block grants. The prioritisation of the student equity framework continued

in Australia and equity became one of four principles underpinning the Howard Liberal Government's Backing Australia's Future reform package (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004).

In 2008 increasing unmet labour market demands resulted in the Federal Government considering changes to the higher education system (Bradley et al., 2008). A review of Australian higher education was undertaken, known as the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008). It invoked a social inclusion agenda by the Rudd Labor Government that included an aspiration of widening participation in universities (Bradley et al., 2008). A range of ambitious targets were identified that included 20% of all undergraduate enrolments would be from LSES backgrounds by the year 2020, and 40% of people between the ages of 25 and 34 would hold an undergraduate qualification by the year 2025 (Australian Government, 2009; Bradley et al., 2008).

Despite a history of Australian government agendas to increase access to higher education, much literature and empirical data have demonstrated that Australian government equity funding had done little, if anything, to improve the access and participation rates of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education since the 1990s (Bradley et al., 2008). Figure 1.1 depicts the trend in LSES participation rates in Australia between 1989 and 2006, demonstrating little to no improvement during this period. Given government activities during that time, this illustrates the complexity of factors affecting people's decisions about engaging with higher education. Measures to address university access alone, including financial disadvantage, in and of themselves, are not sufficient to increase participation rates in higher education.

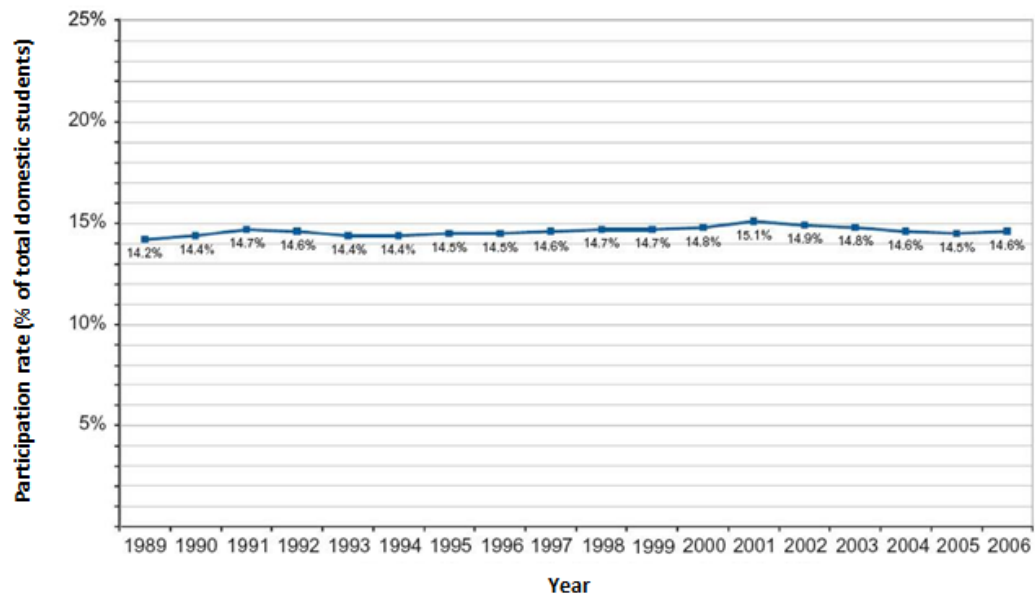


Figure 1.1: LSES participation rates in Australian higher education (%), 1989-2006 [Source: Australian Government (2008, p.29) as cited in Gale & Tranter (2011, p. 33)]

More recently, there has been preliminary evidence to suggest that the Federal Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) and continued effort into expanding the higher education system are beginning to have an impact (Australian Government, 2014; Koshy & Seymour, 2014). By 2011, for the very first time 17% of undergraduates in higher education were from LSES backgrounds and there was a 41% increase in LSES commencing students (Australian Government, 2014; Koshy & Seymour, 2014). An equal share of enrolments would see LSES students making up 25% of enrolments but unfortunately LSES enrolments have remained around 16.1 to 16.4% during the past 20 years (Koshy & Seymour, 2014). In 2013, LSES student enrolments were 17.6% (Koshy & Seymour, 2014). Table 1.1 shows the enrolment proportion of LSES students between 2007 and 2013. These data show that growth is occurring, albeit slowly (Koshy & Seymour, 2014).

Table 1.1: Student equity enrolment proportions in Australian higher education (%), 2007-2013 [Source: Adapted from Australian Government (2014) as cited in Koshy & Seymour (2014, p. 5)]

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
LSES	16.2%	16.3%	16.3%	16.7%	17.0%	17.3%	17.6%

In its 2014-2015 Federal Budget, the Abbott Coalition Government proposed to retain a Higher Education Participation Program (HEPP) (removing the “partnership” component from the title) focusing on students and potential students from LSES backgrounds (Australian Government, 2014). This was unprecedented given the uncertain higher education funding environment at the time and was considered favourably by higher education providers, given that the Government at the time faced overwhelming pressure to bring the federal budget back into surplus. The Abbott Government could have demonstrated its commitment to widening participation through other budget measures, such as its proposal to remove the caps on enrolments, rather than reinvesting in a form of HEPP. Of competing concern in this new higher education environment was the prospect of an increase in course fees and the proposed changes to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) fee structure that would impose an interest component on deferred student payments for course fees. The 2014-2015 budget proposals were unsuccessful. This political situation resulted in much uncertainty in universities, particularly the impact that such policy measures would have on the access and participation rates of students from LSES backgrounds.

1.3.3 LSES characteristics

Despite recent improvements in the proportion of LSES student enrolments, LSES student success rates (completion rates) remain lower than those of non-LSES students in Australia (Australian Government, 2014). In an Australian study of university completions, 69% of LSES students completed a degree compared with 78% for non-LSES students (Edwards & McMillan, 2015). In the same study, LSES students were found to be more likely to drop out of tertiary study in the first two years or were still enrolled after 9 years without completion. An Australian study carried out by Lim (2015) provided evidence that simply increasing LSES student

enrolments does not equate to LSES student success and outcomes. Lim (2015) further argued that “[i]n order to facilitate completions, support for low SES students needs to be provided during their studies, as well as providing greater access to university” (p. 6). Evidence from the United States demonstrated that even though there had been an overall reduction in gaps in access to higher education for various equity groups, universities had not been able to achieve the same reduction in the gap in completion rates between high and low-income students (Tinto, 2008, p. 1).

A range of reviews, Australian and international, have highlighted the complexity of issues specifically experienced by LSES students. Ferrier’s (2006) review of equity in higher education identified that LSES individuals are confronted with a range of cultural, social, educational, and financial factors that impact on their higher education experience. Another review into widening participation in higher education found that “[f]inance is just one of a number of complex factors which underpin higher education decisions” (Moore et al., 2013, p. v). Devlin and McKay (2014) identified that financial strain, time pressures, competing priorities, unclear expectations about university, low confidence, academic preparedness, family support, and aspirations all contributed to the experiences of LSES students. With so many factors potentially impacting on LSES students’ ability to succeed, there clearly is no simple solution to improving university completion rates for LSES students.

In 2008, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) explored the experiences of Australian youth over the previous 20 years. This research, and other studies (McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000), have shown that university students are increasingly more financially disadvantaged than cohorts before them, students are spending less time on campus, and they are involved in more paid work.

In a Universities Australia study in 2012, LSES students were found to be more likely than non-LSES students to study by distance or in a mixed mode and to be studying part-time (Bexley, Daroesman, Arkoudis, & James, 2013):

They were older, with an average age of 28.0 years compared to 25.8 years for the remainder of the undergraduate domestic population, were more likely to provide care for family members (26.5 per cent for low SES students, compared to 16.2 per cent of other domestic students), and

to be the sole financial support for dependents (18.1 per cent compared to 10.2 per cent). (p. 78)

Results of the 2012 study showed that more than 76% of students were worried about their financial situation, 12% more than for students in the year 2006 when the study was first conducted (Bexley et al., 2013). In addition, LSES students were less likely than non-LSES students to have family financial support (Bexley et al., 2013). LSES students were more likely to go without food and other necessities than other domestic students and to be in receipt of government benefits (Bexley et al., 2013). For some students, financial hardship affects their health and wellbeing which subsequently affects their engagement with their studies (Creedon, 2015).

The Australian University Experience Survey in 2013 found that the reasons commonly cited by LSES students for early departure from study were “financial difficulties, family responsibilities, health or stress, workload difficulties, need to do paid work, moving residence, study/life balance, academic support, [and] fee difficulties” (Edwards & McMillan, 2015, p. 32). This survey and the aforementioned research show that there are potentially a multitude of barriers for LSES students affecting their access to and their participation in higher education.

A further characteristic that needs to be considered for low participation and completion rates for LSES students, compared to non-LSES students, is their level of cultural capital. Cultural capital is a term defined by Bourdieu (1979, 1984) when he was trying to explain the experiences of French middle class people in the 1960s. He was interested in understanding how class status or privilege was manifested and reproduced. According to Bourdieu (1979, 1984), cultural capital constitutes the knowledge, skills, or abilities that serve as a form of currency and give status in particular settings, such as education. Acquired through one’s social origin (family specifically) and education, cultural capital is often regarded as something that is passed from generation to generation via parents to children and is considered to include those knowledges, languages, and behaviours necessary for success in higher education (Cardak, Bowden, & Bahtsevanoglou, 2015):

Bourdieu (1977) introduced the concept of cultural capital as the vehicle by which cultural traditions are transmitted to the next generation with the goal of maintaining the social patterns of the generation that preceded

it. If there is a hierarchy of social class, a disparity in gender equality, or an achievement gap, cultural capital is the means by which these existing conditions and order are usually maintained. (Madyun, 2008, p. 49)

According to Bourdieu (1979, 1984), to have poor cultural capital is to have limited fluency in operating within the bounds of an 'elite' societal culture. Higher education has long been viewed as the domain of the elite (McMillan & Western, 2000). LSES students are considered to have low levels of cultural capital which arguably contributes to their differential involvement and success in higher education (Karimshah et al., 2013; Stănescu, Iorga, Monteagudo, & Freda, 2015). LSES students today tend to come from families who have not previously considered or experienced higher education (these may be referred to as first in family learners who are the first generation in their family to attend university) (Talebi, Matheson, & Anisman, 2013). LSES students and families are less likely than their non-LSES student peers and families to view higher education as a post-compulsory schooling option (Frigo, Bryce, Anderson, & McKenzie, 2007). Given this, students who have had parents attend university have been regarded by some researchers as having advantages over first in family learners (Cardak et al., 2015). According to Lareau (1997), the family home has a significant bearing on the educational experiences of children:

Bourdieu...argues that schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of the society. For example, schools utilize particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula; children from higher social locations enter schools already familiar with these social arrangements. Bourdieu maintains that the cultural experiences in the home facilitate children's adjustment to school and academic achievement, thereby transforming cultural resources into what he calls cultural capital... (p. 704)

Given the widening participation agenda, it is timely for researchers to consider how to respond systemically to the needs of LSES students and to consider research outcomes for policy and practice. University can be a time of heightened anxiety and distress for many students, possibly exacerbated for LSES students, indicating that some level of support service is required (Bewick, Koutsopoulou,

Miles, Slaa, & Barkham, 2010). As Bolam and Dodgson (2003) suggested, “institutions within the sector in Australia may not be ready to respond en masse to ensuring the success of all students in the future, and...significant change in policy and practice is needed” (p. 9). This thesis explores the possibility of such a change in practice.

1.4 The role of Student Services in higher education

Student Services in Australian higher education in the context of this study are those non-academic departments in higher education that are primarily responsible for welfare and advisory services. Services often include counselling, disability support, health, careers and employment programs, financial aid, scholarships, and accommodation and housing advice. “The primary goals for student services are: 1) to assist students [to] make successful adjustment and transition to the university environment; and 2) to reduce enrolment attrition and enhance student retention” (Andrews, 2009, p. 182).

The role of Student Services in higher education has evolved over time. After World War II, the Australian Federal Liberal Government committed to increasing access to education for ex-servicemen and their children, resulting in an increase in students from diverse backgrounds (DEET, 1993). Historically, academic staff members had been the key personnel to provide support and guidance to students; however, this new student body brought such complex and diverse issues that many academics were either not qualified to deal with, or they did not have the time to support these students (DEET, 1993). Initially services were mostly funded by student organisations; however, institutions gradually took on the financial responsibility as they saw the increasing significance of such services. Student Services were generally recognised as discrete departments in Australian higher education by the 1970s, primarily consisting of counselling, health, accommodation information, and employment and career guidance (DEET, 1993). Today this offering of services extends to welfare, financial support, and other non-academic support services and is considered to assist students to “engage effectively with the university’s teaching and learning programs” (Gale, 2012, p. 249).

Student Services have evolved to a point where they are now major contributing partners to the student experience and to student success:

The mainstream activity of university life – the legitimization and dissemination of certain forms of knowledge – is taken as a given, as normative. It is students who must adjust to it in order to be successful. Support services provide the mechanisms for students to achieve this, if they do not come to university with the capacities and resources to achieve this on their own. (Gale, 2012, p. 249)

The International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS) “is an informal confederation of higher education student affairs/services professionals from around the world” (Ludeman, Osfield, Hidaglo, Oste, & Wang, 2009, p. iii). The Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association Inc. (ANZSSA) is a contributing member of IASAS. IASAS has prepared a manual to guide the development of Student Services globally that succinctly outlines the roles that Student Services have today:

...[E]fforts should be designed to enable and empower students to focus more intensely on their studies and on their personal growth and maturation, both cognitively and emotionally. They also should result in enhanced student learning outcomes. Another important rationale for these efforts is economic, because investments in students, and student affairs and services provide a healthy return to national economies as the investments help to assure students' success in higher education and their subsequent contributions to the national welfare...Another important role for Student Affairs and Services is to prepare students for a life of service to their society. (Ludeman et al., 2009, p. v)

Given the roles that Student Services have in higher education in Australia, they are well positioned to provide supports to LSES students that may aid in their retention and subsequent success.

1.5 Justification for the research

This research was conducted as a result of four core reasons. Firstly, if the targets from the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008) or any subsequent similar agenda are realised, Student Services need to ensure that their services are contributing to the successful completion of studies for LSES students. As stated by

Elliott and den Hollander (2010), “if we have been successful in raising application and participation rates from equity target groups, we rightly should be interested in their subsequent success” (p. 27). Secondly, given the Australian Government’s history of attempting to increase access to higher education for LSES students, it may be presumed that socioeconomic status matters and that further exploration and understanding of LSES student experiences are justified. Thirdly, there is a lack of research into evaluating and monitoring Student Services (Morgan, 2012; Thomas, Quinn, Slack, & Casey, 2003b), particularly with respect to how they support LSES students. Finally, the current study aims to contribute to institutional research to inform the practice of Student Services. All of these reasons to conduct the current study are addressed in turn.

1.5.1 Student Services supporting LSES students

This study draws on the already stated notion that “access without support is not opportunity” (Tinto, 2008, p. 1). Efforts to increase access to higher education for people from LSES backgrounds need to be complemented by a level of service delivery that increases their likelihood of success. Although research into, and effort directed at, increasing the participation of LSES individuals in higher education are intensifying, it appears that much of the research to date has centred around outreach initiatives (for examples see Elliott & den Hollander, 2010; Gale, 2012; Skene, 2010), academic transition programs such as access or preparatory programs (for examples see Adam, Hartigan, & Brown, 2010), learning and teaching initiatives (for a discussion on this see Gale, 2010), or first year experience programs (Kift, 2008; McInnis et al., 2000). Existing research does not tend to focus on the specific role that Student Services has in supporting LSES students in higher education. As some of this literature shows, personal adjustment to and social integration into university life are just as important as academic factors in enabling a student to persist and succeed in higher education (Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith, & McKay, 2012; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Personal adjustment to, and social integration into, university life are areas that Student Services can provide support to LSES students. The current study contributes significantly to filling this gap in knowledge.

Spencer and Romero (2008) use the term “invisible disabilities” to refer to students with disabilities such as learning disabilities and psychiatric disorders where the disability is not readily identifiable upon sight. The use of the term ‘invisible’

draws attention to the fact that services cannot make assumptions about which students may be in need of additional support. I suggest that LSES students are also an invisible cohort and are difficult to identify in order to target for support. LSES students are not visible and not readily recognisable. This is not to pathologise the characteristic of being from a LSES background in higher education; rather, it is to illuminate the idea that additional support may be required owing to the complex variables impacting on their experiences in higher education. Clearly, it is difficult for Student Services to offer such support if they do not know who the students are. This research responds to this issue.

1.5.2 Socioeconomic status matters

Given government agendas to widen participation in higher education and focus specifically on LSES individuals, there is an implicit understanding that socioeconomic status makes a difference to who accesses, and subsequently completes, university studies. There is an implicit and evidence-based assumption in such policies that social disadvantage may be described in terms of the intersections between socioeconomic status or class and educational attainment. Class is seen to matter (Archer, 2005). Data outlined in Sub-section 1.3.2 show that there is variation in higher education outcomes dependent upon socioeconomic status.

Bourdieu (1984) coined the term “habitus”. Habitus is referred to as character and a way of being; a form of structured disposition. Universities are a habitus in their own right – a form of institutional habitus understood to be aligned with middle class values (Stănescu et al., 2015). Universities are bounded by formal structures such as faculties and by academic norms, and are highly bureaucratic worlds. University has a culture that all students need to be introduced to (Barnett, 1990), but institutional habitus is more than the culture of the institution; it relates to embedded and subconscious issues and priorities (Thomas, 2002). Even the language is different:

I had no idea what a laboratory report was or how to write one! I believed that everyone else in the class understood the task but me. I felt lost and cried. Yet I forced myself to ask my peers how they were going and to my amazement they too were feeling uncertain... (Sharon Psychology Student). (Wilson & Lizzio, 2011, p. 14)

Institutional habitus assumes the habitus of the dominant group and treats all students as if they possess the same qualities and characteristics (Thomas, 2002). In higher education this is likely to be white, male, middle class, and able bodied (Thomas, 2002), which makes the habitus even more foreign for LSES students and other non-traditional students (Stănescu et al., 2015; Thomas, 2002). Transition to higher education is seen by some low-income groups as an uncertain process (Johnston, 2011). LSES students' experiences can be exacerbated by low levels of cultural capital. Given this institutional habitus, coupled with the idea that LSES students have low levels of cultural capital, socioeconomic status does impact on LSES students' experiences in higher education. The focus of the present study is on the under researched area of student support. The experiences of LSES students are important to investigate because socioeconomic status matters.

1.5.3 Evaluating Student Services

As discussed previously, the current study contributes to research into the support that Student Services provide to LSES students and is based on the recognition that socioeconomic status is an important part of research both in a political and social sense. A further justification for the current study is the intent to contribute to a formal evaluation of Student Services, with a particular emphasis on the involvement of LSES students. Evaluation is an important strategy to measure impact and success of programs and services; it builds a story of the important contribution that Student Services make to the student experience. Evaluation,

...underpins the evidence base for the contribution of student support services in [higher education]...it forms part of the continued development of professionalism in the student services community and the increasingly strategic approach to the management and delivery of student services [and] it leads to demonstrable and practical improvements in the delivery of student services... (Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, 2011, p. 1)

Evaluation is an "essential dimension" of Student Services practice (AMOSSHE The Student Services Organisation, 2010, p. 13), particularly at a time of decreasing resources in higher education, pressure for strategic alignment, and when questions about efficiencies are frequently asked (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). It

is timely to demonstrate the value of Student Services in higher education: “In this uncertain economic climate, it is reasonable for budget-holders to look for evidence of the value that all university and college departments and services, including counselling, contribute to the institution and its main stakeholders, students” (Wallace, 2012, p. 1). This statement reinforces the value of the current study and the significance of its contribution to practice. There is a body of work that aims to highlight the work of Student Services in higher education which will be discussed in this sub-section; first, however, an explanation is provided of the difficulties associated with the formal evaluation of Student Services.

1.5.3.1 Issues in evaluating Student Services

There are multiple issues when attempting to evaluate Student Services. The number of variables influencing student success makes it increasingly difficult for Student Services to assess or evaluate their unique contributions to supporting the success of LSES students. Many of these variables are outlined in Sub-section 1.3.3. In addition, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of Student Services adequately “because they are not solely responsible for the student experience or retention” (Morgan, 2012, p. 2). This chapter has already emphasised the significant roles Student Services play in supporting students in Section 1.4, which complements the intensity of effort towards access and transition programs, as well as learning and teaching initiatives.

The difficulties associated with evaluating Student Services have been reviewed in the United Kingdom and this review acknowledges that evaluation of Student Services has often been limited to process monitoring or user satisfaction surveys (AMOSSHE The Student Services Organisation, 2010). AMOSSHE noted the need for sophisticated evaluations of Student Services rather than mere assessments of satisfaction ratings and attendance rates as such strategies do not assess impact or value to the organisation. It also highlighted the lack of evidence-based assessment, including research, projects, metrics, or tools into Student Services globally, and further acknowledged that as much of the research stems from the United States its applicability and generalisability to other countries may be questionable. The review drew attention to the limited Australian literature in this area and as a result had to abandon efforts to benchmark with Australia as a comparator country. “The evidence that does exist remains ad hoc and anecdotal and

stems primarily from single institutional case studies” (AMOSSHE The Student Services Organisation, 2010, p. 4). The conclusions from the UK-based review noted that the current deficit in formal evaluations of Student Services stems from a lack of emphasis placed on systemic evaluation:

The shift from user satisfaction surveys to objective assessment is, itself, a learning cycle that may over time evolve into ‘a culture of evidence based enhancement of provision’ that is part of the ethos of student services and, perhaps, all institutional provision. (AMOSSHE The Student Services Organisation, 2010, p. 5)

In addition to the number of variables impacting on student outcomes, another reason for the difficulty in evaluating Student Services is that Student Services in Australia do not tend to employ academics or researchers. The emphasis is on practitioners who often fail to reflect on the impact of what they do, due to time, resources, or capability, and they have generally not developed the language to describe what they do (Keeling, 2004). Three barriers exist as to why Student Services practitioners tend not to conduct formal evaluations: (1) a lack of additional resources to undertake the assessment process; (2) staff members’ resistance owing to staff members being “people- and service-orientated” and their reluctance to sacrifice time to commit to evaluation; and, (3) the existence of functional silos within higher education that impair the ability to undertake collaborative assessment (AMOSSHE The Student Services Organisation, 2010, p. 23).

1.5.3.2 Existing evaluation into Student Services and their limitations

There is a breadth of literature that evaluates programs and services *within* Student Services but fails to evaluate Student Services more broadly or fails to consider the direct relationship between LSES students and the Service. A discussion of this literature follows.

The current research study addresses failures in previous research and evaluation to understand how LSES students, in particular, access student support. Researchers from the Institute for Access Studies at Staffordshire University in the UK have examined the ways Student Services can support diverse students to remain in higher education (Thomas, Quinn, Slack, & Casey, 2003a; Thomas et al., 2003b). This research outlines an offering of services that are likely to support students to

achieve academic success. While the research to date has yet to demonstrate a clear link between the mere existence, or uptake, of student support services on the one hand, and retention, progression, or success rates on the other, it has recognised the importance of Student Services departments and nominated criteria for their good practice.

Another issue with Student Services evaluation to date is that much of this research is too narrow in scope and evaluates services or programs within Student Services rather than more broadly. For instance, there is a range of literature and research that specifically targets counselling outcomes in Student Services. Such research has demonstrated that counselling is an important or significant factor in helping students to complete their studies (Wallace, 2012). One study found that over 58% of the 1,200 graduates in the UK who participated in the study identified university counselling services as having a significant impact on their success and as having improved their student experience (Wallace, 2012). Wallace's study showed that higher education counselling services tended to have a higher rate of improvement or recovery in clientele than that identified in non-university counselling services. Other research has demonstrated that students who accessed support services had higher rates of persistence and retention than those students who did not (Morgan, 2012; Turner & Berry, 2000; Wilson, Mason, & Ewing, 1997). There has also been a number of suggestions about how the general student experience or student wellbeing can be improved institutionally (Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013; Leece, 2009; Ludeman et al., 2009; Universities Australia, 2013), yet this research does not delineate LSES students and/or does not specifically identify the role of Student Services departments. These types of studies, while making a significant contribution to the area of study, are narrow in focus and do not measure the impact of Student Services broadly nor measure the accessibility of or uptake by LSES students, in particular, in relation to the service.

Universities and researchers in the United States and Europe have undertaken high profile explorations of the strategic and systematic contributions that Student Services can make more broadly to the experiences of LSES students (Crosier et al., 2007; El-Khawas, 1996; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). Universities in Europe, in cooperation with education ministries from numerous countries, undertook a

sweeping review and evaluation of higher education standards and quality assurance measures in 1999, known as the Bologna Process (Crosier et al., 2007). The Bologna Process aimed to evaluate and create (through international cooperation and exchange) a higher education framework that would facilitate the mobility of students, support student development, prepare students for their careers, and enhance the quality of higher education (Crosier et al., 2007). This evaluation involving 900 European higher education institutions demonstrated that since the implementation of the Bologna reforms Student Services are still not sufficiently developed to adapt to the growing diversity of the student body, but they nevertheless make a conscious and valuable contribution to individual students (Crosier et al., 2007; Sursock & Smidt, 2010).

In Australia, the most recent broad scale analysis of student support services was carried out over 20 years ago. An analysis of 159 organisational units in 34 higher education institutions was conducted to identify a performance evaluation framework for student support services in order to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness (DEET, 1993). That study identified that “few qualitative and quantitative indicators have been designed to enhance and promote quality service provision specific to the unique range of services available to Australian students” (DEET, 1993, p. 2). It concluded with a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) that could evaluate the effectiveness of Student Services on the basis of awareness of and access to services, user satisfaction, student demand, usage patterns, flexibility and responsiveness, and innovation (DEET, 1993). Since 1993, there has been no large scale determination of student support services in higher education in Australia nor has research assessed Student Services’ capacity to target LSES students specifically, and to achieve positive outcomes. The current study contributes substantially to addressing this gap in knowledge.

Approaching a Student Services department is a confronting experience for many students (Grubb et al., 2011) and that is only after they have accepted the notion that they may require help and are aware of the services on offer. Simply making services available may not be sufficient. There are competing demands on students’ time and there may be a general fear or stigma associated with accessing the service (Grubb et al., 2011). In the Universities Australia study, “[a]round 30-40 per cent of students received support through services offered by student

associations, university based services and student unions or guilds...[H]ealthcare services were most commonly used, followed by counselling” (Bexley et al., 2013, p. 24). University practitioners and administrators in Australia have made valuable contributions sharing good practice through conferences, journals, and membership of professional bodies such as the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association Inc. (ANZSSA). Even so, Australian Student Services would benefit from advancing the understanding of the relationship between their departments and the experiences of LSES students. This thesis makes a contribution to a deeper understanding of this relationship.

1.5.4 Institutional research that informs practice

The current study is ‘institutional research’. Institutional research is designed to inform practice and institutional goals, policy, and planning as well as decision making (Australasian Association for Institutional Research, 2010) and in this case is about the provision of services to LSES students in Australia. Australia has a growing body of research, funding, and resources allocated to learning and teaching, access and outreach programs, and financial assistance in order to increase the participation levels of students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education. The International Association of Universities (2008) has adopted the principle that “access without a reasonable chance of success is an empty promise” (p. 1), which highlights the need for universities to consider the support needs of LSES students, and not only their entry into the system. Universities need to focus on the success and achievement of LSES students, not just their access (Devlin, 2010; Karimshah et al., 2013). LSES students have arguably unique and complex social, economic, and cultural characteristics that will affect Student Services’ capacity to support them effectively (Gale, 2012; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). This institutional research is intended to provide an understanding of Student Services that can be considered across the Australian higher education sector for the provision of supports to LSES students for continuous improvement purposes. As Gale (2012) notes,

[M]ore research is required in this area of student support in order for the sector and government to be able to make informed judgements at a policy and system level about what forms of support are needed and

with what effect, for what kinds of students, and in which contexts. (p. 249)

1.6 Research questions and scope of study

The current study generates a substantive theory of how student support services in higher education in Australia can respond to an anticipated increase in LSES students. In this way, it contributes to knowledge and its objectives are aligned with the thinking of Fried and Lewis (2009):

The development of theories to guide the practice of student affairs requires research and assessment. It is essential that student affairs professionals across the globe engage in research so that they can develop theories that describe and explain their students and the higher education institutions with whom they work. (p. 14)

While Student Services departments are designed to build the personal resources of students, thereby aiding in their retention and subsequent success in higher education, LSES students are affected by complex social, economic, and cultural factors that may affect Student Services' capacity to support them effectively. It is important to build a service that is based on theoretical knowledge that brings additional insights and understandings (Corbin & Holt, 2005, p. 49). While the current study is intended to gain a greater understanding of how LSES students access support, there is no assumption that all LSES students will require support. LSES students are a heterogeneous group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds and skill sets.

This study used a grounded theory methodology (GTM). GTM is more broadly defined in Chapter 2; however, it is a qualitative research design that uses systematic guidelines to simultaneously collect, analyse, and conceptualise data to construct theory (Charmaz, 2003). The current study sought to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

What theory can inform the development of student support services in Australian higher education to respond effectively to the non-academic needs of LSES students?

- *What non-academic matters influence self-defined success for LSES students?*

- *What non-academic services or help do LSES students expect from their university whilst studying?*
- *What factors affect LSES students' uptake of non-academic services or help?*

The scope of the present study was to understand the experiences of LSES students with student support services, from LSES students' perspectives and a few selected staff members from a regional Australian university. I opted not to examine the success of LSES students and the impact of their experience with support services but rather focused on the students' own definition of success. LSES students in this study were defined as outlined in Sub-section 2.5.1. The student participants in the study were intentionally set as LSES students, studying on campus in Queensland, domestic students, over the age of 18 years, and at least in their second semester of study. Participants also included a small number of staff members. While students were asked to speak about student support broadly, I was interested in LSES student experiences with Student Services; a department located in most universities in Australia that are non-academic departments that are primarily responsible for welfare and advisory services. As grounded theory research, which will be further explained in Chapter 2, this study did not seek to analyse specific aspects of LSES student experiences. Instead the study evolved so that the participants generated the data that was to inform the ongoing evolution of the scope. As such, whether students felt that access, service quality, or service offerings were important factors to explore was not able to be determined at the commencement of the research. A discussion of limitations and delimitations of the study is contained in Section 6.5 as some of these only became clear, or warranted, as the study progressed and as such are better understood following a complete understanding of the research journey.

1.7 The field of study and the researcher

In understanding this research study, it is important to reflect on the field of study and myself as the researcher, both of which have had a significant impact on the selection of the research topic as well as various measures undertaken within the research design. Both the field of study and my personal circumstances are discussed in turn.

The research was undertaken at an Australian regionally-headquartered university where LSES students as well as staff members working in the university

were invited to participate in interviews with me as the researcher. The university in this study was influenced by a widening participation strategy driven by the 2010 Federal Labor Government's social inclusion agenda. The university selected provided an ideal setting because it exceeded the national average for participation rates of LSES students with 32% LSES students and a high volume of first in family learners and second chance learners (students undertaking higher education for the first time as adults after missing the opportunity to participate in study following secondary education as youths) (University of Alice Heights, 2014; name changed to retain confidentiality of the University).

My experiences and background in the university where the study took place had a considerable influence on the selection of the research topic. I have worked in higher education for over 12 years and in student support services for over 10 of those 12 years. At the time of the research, I held the position of Director of Student Services and Social Justice at this Australian regionally-headquartered university. In this position I had responsibility for the provision of non-academic student services, as described in Section 1.4, as well as assisting the Deputy Vice-Chancellor with the institution's social justice portfolio. The social justice component of my role gives me responsibility for allocating government equity funding for access, outreach, and retention programs as well as instigating improvements in governance with an underlying social justice philosophy. During my time in this role, I have found it difficult to source evaluation outcomes for Student Services that are not program or service specific. Similarly, I have not found research that explains how LSES students access services. This has largely been due to the areas identified in Sub-section 1.5.3.1, such as the multiple issues affecting student success and academic research not being a core role of Student Services staff members. I am in a unique position to have undertaken this research having practical and theoretical knowledge of the field of study.

1.8 Approach to the literature review

A distinguishing characteristic of GTM research is the delay of a full literature review until after the data analysis stage in order to ensure that the theory is grounded in the data without any preconceived notions or existing theories (Charmaz, 2004, 2006; Dunne, 2011). This method requires me to articulate the path

I followed and the processes I undertook to construct the findings. The approach has resulted in much debate in the literature as presented by Dunne (2011) and Bryant and Charmaz (2007). A brief overview of the argument to postpone the literature review follows, along with an acknowledgement of my existing knowledge in the field of this study, and how that was managed so as to minimise its impact on the findings.

The question in GTM is not ‘if’ to undertake a literature review but ‘when’ to do it. At one point in GTM’s history, a review of the literature was seen as counterproductive, potentially causing data to be forced into a preconceived framework (Charmaz, 1983). Researchers within GTM argued that they wanted the themes and theory to emerge naturally, “uninhibited by extant theoretical frameworks” (Dunne, 2011, p. 114). In an emergent study one cannot pre-empt what literature may be deemed important and there is much to be gained by accessing literature once it becomes relevant (Dick, 2005). Dunne (2011) has summarised and acknowledged the debate that has suggested that the literature review may stifle, side-track, impose pre-determined views, contaminate data collection, or import preconceived ideas. The research conducted for this thesis supports the approach to postpone the full literature review. Consistent with GTM advocates (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I was not confident of what literature would be deemed most relevant to the research undertaken in this study and, rather than undertaking an extensive review of published works prior to data analysis, this was delayed until the theory was generated.

Acknowledging that I cannot ignore my pre-existing knowledge and exposure to the field, the literature outlined in this introductory chapter is primarily aimed at revealing and contextualising a problem and describing and justifying the need for investigation in this area (Charmaz, 2006; Urquhart, 2013). As Urquhart (2013) notes, “[t]here is no reason why a researcher cannot be self-aware and be able to appreciate other theories without imposing them on the data” (p. 351). These are known in GTM as sensitising concepts; concepts that, through my experience in the substantive field, I have had previous exposure to, an understanding of, and an appreciation for. These concepts in fact led me to research in this field in the first place. Blumer (1969) originally described sensitising concepts when he described

symbolic interactionism, suggesting that sensitising concepts should be seen as a point of reference and used to guide further exploration. Sensitising concepts are often regarded as “interpretive devices” and a “starting point for qualitative study” (Bowen, 2006, p. 2) and in GTM,

[s]ensitizing concepts are seen as a starting point to grounded theory research through which the researcher generates initial ideas of interest, pays attention to guiding theoretical frameworks and becomes sensitized to asking particular types of questions, such as questions about identity or stigma. (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 136)

Consistent with Charmaz (2003), this research was undertaken as a result of my interests in, and my knowledge of, a set of general concepts and history related to Student Services departments and the experiences of LSES students in higher education. This included the knowledge that significant research in this area was yet to be undertaken, noting that the results would have substantial practical benefit for practitioners and administrators. As a result of my experiences working within the substantive field for over 12 years, I was exposed to literature, theory, and debate in that substantive field.

It is to be noted that the complete literature review based on the grounded data was conducted following the data analysis as per the appropriate sequencing of GTM research and consequently it is presented after the data analysis in this thesis. This decision was made carefully and thoughtfully after a detailed reading of published GTM literature and discussion with fellow GTM researchers within my scholarly network. This was found to be a useful path as new concepts emerged throughout the research that I had not previously considered relevant to this study.

1.9 Outline of the thesis

This thesis is composed of six chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the substantive field of Student Services in higher education and the experiences of LSES students in higher education. A justification for the current study is provided. The chapter also outlines the research questions, the field of study, and positions the researcher and the literature review.

Chapter 2 presents the methodology and the research paradigm for this study. GTM is explained and a thorough description of the research design is provided. The chapter confirms the academic rigour of the approach and articulates the ethical and political issues associated with the study.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the analysis. The chapter sets out the themes and patterns that emerged throughout the study.

Chapter 4 elaborates the study's generated substantive theory and specifically responds to the research questions. It comments on how the themes and patterns were interpreted to form the theory.

Chapter 5 presents the literature review. The chapter comments on a range of existing theories and research that are consistent with and support the substantive theory, and are in turn enhanced and strengthened by the substantive theory.

Chapter 6 addresses the study's contributions to knowledge and offers implications for practice. The chapter continues with a note on the delimitations and limitations of the existing research and areas for further research. Finally, the chapter provides a closing statement regarding the research and this thesis.

1.10 Summary

This chapter has provided an orientation to the substantive field of study and an understanding of the contextual landscape that led to this research. An acknowledgement and a justification have been shared to explain why a thorough literature review was not undertaken prior to data collection and analysis, noting that this will come later in Chapter 5.

This is a personally rewarding research journey that aims to make a significant and substantial contribution to the field of Student Services in Australian higher education. It aims to improve the experiences of LSES students, and their outcomes, through developing a model of service delivery that improves LSES students' access to support services. The significance of this study is that it is grounded in the experiences of LSES students themselves and therefore the findings are produced from a rich data source, thereby enhancing the understanding of LSES student experiences. The LSES student voices are revealing and insightful. The study's unique findings and the substantive theory are supported by existing research.

Additionally, the findings extend current theories and the understanding of some social processes while challenging others. The next chapter outlines the methodology used to undertake this study and so continues the narrative of this research journey.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Purpose and structure of the chapter

This chapter outlines the methodology that guided this study. It introduces constructivism as the theoretical paradigm underpinning this qualitative research study. The chapter introduces the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) as the chosen research design and explains how GTM was utilised in this instance. This component of the thesis explains how the research was undertaken and why it was conducted in a particular way, the data sources and the approach to their collection, as well as the process of data analysis. The chapter further outlines the academic rigour of this study and concludes with an exploration of the ethical and political considerations related to the research.

2.2 Research paradigm

Constructivism is a theoretical paradigm in qualitative research that assumes multiple realities and asserts that the data reflect each participant's and the researcher's constructions of the world and prior experiences (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). It presupposes that the researcher enters into, and is affected by, the participant's world leading to an interpretivist portrayal of the situation (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Constructivism operates with a range of assumptions: "The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). My research was designed and undertaken with a constructivist philosophy, a decision that informed the development of the study: "Without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design" (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 2). What follows is an appraisal of the relativist ontology in relation to my study, the process of construction of ideas, and a justification for why this study does not attempt to 'explain' realities.

The relativist ontology applied to constructivism sees multiple realities, multiple ways of interpreting the data, and multiple participant meanings, all of which are of value in my study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Dunne, 2011). The value of a qualitative constructivist approach in my study is that the generation of

theory is based solely on the participant's views. Constructivism respects the voice of the knower (the LSES student or staff member in the current study) who can enlighten us about the experiences that LSES students have with Student Services. Constructivists tend to investigate the human experience, understanding that any notion of reality is socially constructed and tending to rely upon multiple individual perceptions (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). LSES students are a heterogeneous group with varied backgrounds, skills, and experiences. Their truths are subjective, dynamic, and contextualised (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) and subsequently there will be multiple perspectives of the same data (Lincoln et al., 2011). Relativism respects the diversity amongst LSES students and within the participant group. It also respects the researcher's influence on the construction of data.

Consistent with relativism, this study has recognised the interaction between the researcher and the participants and noted that the findings or realities were co-constructed (Lincoln et al., 2011). Participants shared their experiences from their own perspective. Likewise, as the researcher, I interpreted these experiences from my own perspective and this was influenced by my background, prior knowledge, and assumptions. According to Charmaz (2004), "...the categories reflect the interaction between the observers and the observed. Certainly any observer's worldview, disciplinary assumptions, theoretical proclivities and research interests will influence his or her observations and emerging categories" (p. 32). The outcome from this study, the generated theory, is a construction rather than an explanation of realities (Corbin & Holt, 2005; Lincoln et al., 2011).

Contrary to my study, GTM has been described as a way to 'explain' realities by some grounded theorists. Glaser (1967), for instance, believes theory is embedded in the data and it is the job of the researcher to find out what it is. This thinking implies one truth and one reality, unlike the constructivist paradigm where, "[o]ntological and epistemological views...disallow the existence of an external objective reality independent of an individual from which knowledge may be collected or gained" (Costantino, 2008, p. 117). Constructivism allows a theory to be generated rather than discovered and/or tested and acknowledges that theory is an interpretation (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Tweed & Charmaz, 2012). It is accepted that another researcher may form another theory or assign codes differently as our perspectives differ given that "[c]onstructivist grounded theory views knowledge as

located in time, space, and situation and takes into account the researcher's construction of emergent concepts" (Charmaz, 2011, p. 365). It is noted that generalisations are conditional and contextual. I make no claims that the codes are 'correct' or 'fact'. The codes and subsequent theory are assigned to give voice to the student experiences that I have heard. They are fit for purpose and contextual in that they were generated to understand student support from the researcher's perspective.

2.3 Qualitative research

Qualitative researchers are interested in the participants' experiences of the studied environment (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), which is why a qualitative methodology was selected for this study. Qualitative research, contrary to quantitative methods, is generally an inductive approach (Gay & Airasian, 2003). In this research study, analysing the stories of LSES students and staff members is part of a qualitative method. This study used interviewing techniques to explore the experiences of LSES students.

Qualitatively studying or evaluating Student Services is necessary to explicate the impact and success of student support services and the take up, or engagement with, services by LSES students. Student support services in higher education continue to grapple with the challenge of evaluating their impact on student success. There is no one indicator that can define the success of a student support service nor has the definition of success itself for Student Services been identified. Success can be considered student satisfaction levels or the more students who access the service, the better the service. Alternatively, success can be considered from the standpoint that the fewer students who access the service, the more successful the service or by student retention rates. Success of Student Services is far more complex a construct than a quantifiable measure. These questions, and others, create multiple debates in the student services field, demonstrating that quantitative measures are insufficient to inform Student Services' success. A qualitative approach to understanding the experiences of LSES students may not necessarily resolve the matter of evaluation issues for Student Services but it could inform practice. Selecting a qualitative methodology in this study was a justified decision as it has the capability to inform the generation of theory based on an interpretation of LSES student experiences.

2.4 Grounded Theory Method

GTM was the qualitative research method selected for this study. It has systematic guidelines for “gathering, synthesizing, analysing, and conceptualizing qualitative data to construct theory” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 82). GTM functions so that the process of data analysis informs the ongoing data collection and it generates a substantive theory that is ‘grounded’ in the data (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A substantive theory is “a theoretical interpretation or explanation of a delimited problem in a particular area, such as, family relationships, formal organisations, or education” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 610). In this particular case, it was LSES students accessing Student Services in higher education in Australia. GTM seeks to “describe or explain some phenomenon” (Travers, 2001, p. 42). The researcher’s interaction with participants and repetitive interaction with the data, a process of constant comparison, establishes patterns and themes that inform theory (Charmaz, 2012).

The key aim of employing GTM in this study was to generate a theory that provides an understanding of the relationship between a LSES student’s success and his or her engagement with student support services. A critical success factor for this study was to ensure that the theory was generated from an intimate investigation of the data relating to participant experiences. GTM is used when the researcher wants to understand a process or the actions of people (Creswell, 2012) and in my case, the process of students accessing support. Strauss & Corbin (1998) describe the data as “grounded” because it is derived from the participants. The data are constructed by LSES students themselves, while recognising that the data is subsequently a construction by me as the researcher. The history of the development of GTM as a research method is outlined, which is then followed by Charmaz’s (2006, 2014) perspective of GTM and why this particular approach was selected for this study.

2.4.1 GTM history

GTM is an inductive approach that arose when qualitative research was viewed only as a preliminary tool prior to what was seen as the ‘real’ research, namely quantitative research (Xie, 2009). The approach has evolved considerably since this time and has gained considerable respect for its rigour and usefulness, when used in part or as a whole (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2012) argued that GTM had a

“profound influence on the development of qualitative methods” (p. 3), with many other qualitative researchers employing strategies that come from GTM. Coding, for instance, has become a popular choice for analysing qualitative data in a variety of methodological designs.

In any explanation of GTM it is important to highlight its history and origins to understand how it has evolved today, and continues to evolve, to justify the methodological decisions I have made during this research. GTM was developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s and was launched via their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). There has been much debate regarding the evolution of GTM since its arrival in Glaser and Strauss’ early work. A very public debate resulted in Glaser and Strauss parting ways and developing the methodology in different directions (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Glaser, 1992). Glaser’s view of theory was that it was generated from data; there was one truth and one reality with positivistic assumptions (Charmaz, 2006; Dunne, 2011; Gale, 2009). This is different from the views of Strauss, who partnered with Corbin, and together they sought a verification process and assumed multiple realities or multiple ways of interpreting data (Dunne, 2011). Researchers since that time have been urged to align themselves with a particular GTM approach given Glaser and Strauss’ public divide on the evolution of the approach. Variations of the methodology have continued to emerge (Charmaz, 2006; Urquhart, 2013). A discussion follows outlining how the history and the evolution of GTM informed my decision to align my research approach to GTM with that of Charmaz.

2.4.2 The Charmaz approach to GTM

I have selected Charmaz’s constructivist approach to GTM for my study. Charmaz has been using GTM since she was Glaser’s student at the University of California, San Francisco (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz’s evolution of the methodology embraced GTM from a constructivist point of view whereby she respected that data are a construction of reality as described by the participant, and that data are interpreted or co-constructed by the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). Her approach acknowledged that there are multiple realities. Consistent with Charmaz, I perceive that any studies of a particular population or participants’ views are their constructions of reality and that reality is then interpreted and subsequently co-constructed by me. This is by no means a limitation of the study, but rather an

acknowledgement that one truth does not exist and that multiple perspectives are of value and contribute to the development of society. I did not aim to ‘discover’ a theory for Student Services but rather ‘generate’ a theory that was grounded in the data.

Charmaz (2006, 2014) presented a flexible grounded theory methodology that does not consist of a set of prescriptive rules or a recipe that must be followed. This flexibility allowed the current study to be adapted as needed and to evolve naturally. As argued by Urquhart (2013), “there is no one way to do grounded theory” (p. 1). Charmaz (2006) argued that GTM should not be a confined set of rules by which to govern research but rather, there is a suite of strategies that can be employed and, when the researcher selects from this suite, they need to be mindful of what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what they are claiming (Charmaz, 2012). Being able to justify methodological adaptations is imperative: “It is to be noted that different researchers and critics of GTM may code differently but as long as they understand the analytic logic [of their decisions]” (Corbin & Holt, 2005, p. 51), it is methodologically sound. Charmaz (2011) went further to say that GTM of any nature affords a general approach to coding and theory development that guides one through the research process, which can be adopted and adapted as being appropriate for the particular situation. She also approached GTM as a “set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9), emphasising that the approach is flexible.

To summarise, Charmaz’s GTM is defined by a series of steps that enable raw data to generate theory. These steps generally employ a process of coding and thematic analysis of written data. Data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously and GTM shapes the raw data into refined categories. Interviews, coding, and categorising continue to occur until such time as saturation is achieved following a process of constant comparison. Saturation is a process whereby no new properties of the categories are found and theory generation is the end result. The entire process is aided by a technique called memoing that captures spontaneous reflections, ideas, and analytic thoughts. These memos are of significant benefit when understanding the evolving theory. This entire process is clearly outlined in diagrammatic format in Figure 2.1.

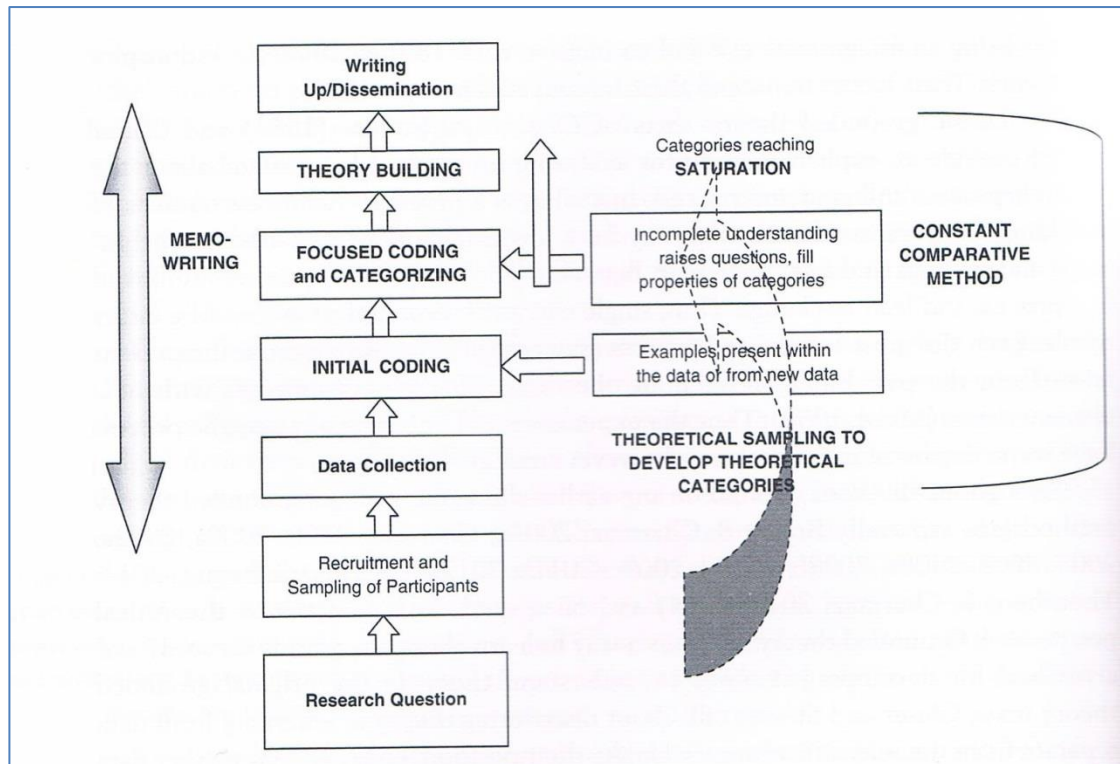


Figure 2.1: Visual representation of GTM (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 133)

A further justification for applying Charmaz’s approach in the current study resulted from Charmaz’s (2012) advocacy for the use of constructivist GTM for social justice research and using it in social policy areas. Charmaz (2011) defined social justice inquiry as studies that attend to various matters of inequities and equality, including barriers and access. Owing to its epistemological foundations, grounded theory “has frequently been used to analyse the accounts of those individuals and groups typically perceived as ‘marginalized’” (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 134). The current study investigated barriers and access to support services for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, primarily LSES students. The approach is fitting for the current study as “grounded theory logic can lead a researcher to make explicit interpretations of what is happening in the empirical world and to offer an analysis that depicts how and why it happens” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 361). As such, constructivist GTM was ideal for this research study to offer an understanding of how LSES students access support services. According to Charmaz (2011), GTM and the constructivist paradigm well serves research with social justice objectives:

The constructivist version is particularly useful in social justice inquiry because it (1) rejects claims of objectivity, (2) locates the researchers' generalizations, (3) considers researchers' and participants' relative positions and standpoints, (4) emphasizes reflexivity, (5) adopts sensitizing concepts such as power, privilege, equity, and oppression, and (6) remains alert to variation and difference. (p.360)

2.5 Methods in this research design

2.5.1 Data sources

This study explored data from 20 semi-structured interviews that I conducted personally. A total of 21 interviews were held, however, one participant withdrew owing to the interview inadvertently eliciting some recent grief and loss feelings. Upon cessation of the formal interview, I engaged in a short debrief, checking the welfare of the participant, and offered further assistance through the University's student counselling services. This offer was declined and the participant thanked me for ending the interview. The remaining 20 interviews available for data analysis included 17 students and three staff members engaged in student support roles from an Australian regionally-headquartered university known for its relatively high proportion of LSES students when compared to the rest of the sector. Staff members were included as participants to build the perspective of LSES student experiences. At the study university, staff members work with LSES students on a daily basis and their insights and experiences were considered valuable for this study.

A number of steps were undertaken to select the participants for the study, including: ethical clearance; determining participant eligibility criteria; sampling; and the engagement of a research assistant. These steps are outlined below as well as an overview of the demographics of the 20 participants whose interview data were used for analysis. Additionally, a review of potential bias of the participants interviewed is discussed as well as an appraisal of the number of participants involved in the research.

Ethical clearance was granted by the university where the study took place. This ethical clearance was provided on the provision that I received approval from the Executive Director of Human Resources and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for

students to access the staff members and students of the university to invite them as participants in the study. This was achieved.

To define the scope of the study and ensure that the generated theory was informed by knowers (those who can enlighten us about the experiences that LSES students have with Student Services), a discrete set of parameters were established for eligibility to participate in the study. Students eligible to participate in this study were:

- from a LSES background;
- domestic students;
- studying on campus in Australia;
- over the age of 18 years; and,
- at least in their second semester of study so that they could speak with authority on their experiences to date in higher education, understand some of the nuances of being a tertiary student, and be able to assess their experiences with support services to date.

LSES in this research, and as defined by the Australian Government at the time of the study, were those individuals who had home addresses in the lowest quartile of the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Education and Occupation Index (2006), as depicted by the Australia Bureau of Statistics, in combination with those who met relevant income support payment criteria (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010). The SEIFA Index assigns rankings to postcodes depending on relative socioeconomic indicators such as education attainment levels and areas of occupation retrieved from the Australian Census. Those students who resided in postcodes ranked in the lowest quartile, along with individuals who receive income support such as Austudy, Abstudy, the Pensioner Education Supplement, or Dependent Youth Allowance, were defined in this study as LSES students. The students who had characteristics consistent with the definition for LSES were contacted by email or phone, screened for eligibility, and invited to participate in an interview.

The staff members invited to participate in the study were employed in student support roles in the University at the time of the study, were closely connected with

the student body, and had experience and knowledge of student issues. I contacted them personally, briefed them on my research, and invited them to participate. All staff members approached accepted the invitation.

In addition to gaining ethical clearance and determining parameters for participant eligibility, I also considered the appropriate sampling method for selecting participants. Participants were drawn from a purposeful sample, rather than a random sample, to ensure data was accessed from a particular group of people with defining characteristics (Creswell, 2012). Data gathered from students from non-LSES backgrounds or staff members who have little experience working with LSES students would not have been fit for purpose for this study. Figure 2.2 below depicts the distinct differences between purposeful sampling and random sampling.

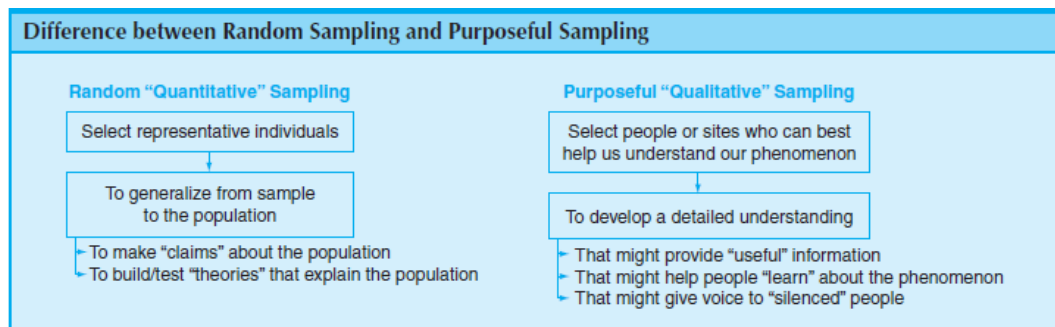


Figure 2.2: Differences between random sampling and purposeful sampling as illustrated by Creswell (2012, p. 206)

The sample used in my research was also a convenience sample, which is essentially an accessible, easily identifiable group of individuals who fit the criteria for the study (Morse, 2007). In this study, the sample was convenient owing to my administrative location in a student support service with access to the target populations. LSES students were identified via existing databases of student loan recipients and scholarship recipients. The students within these datasets were more likely to be of LSES backgrounds owing to the necessity of experiencing financial hardship to qualify for a scholarship or loan. Other participants were selected from an enrolment database. Staff members were individuals that I knew from collaborative relationships in the university. A research assistant was engaged as the study progressed to review various databases, contact candidates for interviews, and ensure each fulfilled the eligibility criteria to participate. The services of a research

assistant expedited the data gathering process and enabled me to focus on understanding and analysing the data. The research assistant was provided with access to appropriate databases and matched students with the eligibility criteria for the study. They were provided with my available interview times and coordinated those times with potential interviewees.

A summary of participants appears in Table 2.1 below. Students tended to be of a mature age, with 35% identifying as having a disability. Eleven had post-secondary educational experiences prior to commencing university study. All staff members interviewed had at least 12 months of experience working with students in student support roles at university to ensure the data drew on their knowledge and experiences in working in this setting, again an eligibility criterion for participation in the study.

Table 2.1: Summary of participants' demographic data

STUDENTS	
Number of male students	8
Number of female students	9
Average age	29
Age range	20-45
Number of students who identified as having a disability	7
Number of students who identified as having an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background	0
Number of students with a non-English speaking background	0
Average age commenced university	23
Age range commenced university	17-41
Number with post-school educational experience	11
STAFF MEMBERS	
Number of staff members with at least 12 months of working with students in student support roles in university	3

An obvious bias in the participant pool was that the participants were only those who volunteered to participate from the purposeful convenience sample. The study did not capture views of those students or staff members who declined to

participate or were not offered an invitation to participate and this is to be noted as a limitation. In addition, there was an absence of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander participants, or individuals from other diverse backgrounds (such as individuals from non-English speaking backgrounds), who may have contributed differing perspectives.

The number of participants for the study was not able to be pre-determined as GTM operates to gather data until saturation is achieved. Saturation occurs when no new information is gathered at subsequent interviews that contribute to the understanding of the categories. As argued by most GTM researchers, the amount of data sufficient to qualify for an appropriate research study and to develop theory comes down to the principle of saturation (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012). In addition, it has been suggested that for doctoral theses, “[t]here is no hard and fast rule for how many people you need to interview, since it will partly depend on the time available to collect, transcribe and analyse your data” (Travers, 2001, p. 3).

2.5.2 Data collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which were directed conversations with the participants using open-ended questions (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Smith, 1995). These interviews were digitally recorded. Transcriptions were conducted verbatim by an online professional transcription service and I subsequently coded and analysed the transcribed interview data. The following section provides justification for the use of interviews and outlines the interview process undertaken. It discusses the guiding questions selected for use in the interview and provides commentary in relation to participant reactions post-interview.

Interviews were an obvious choice to collect data for this constructivist grounded theory study. Interviews aided the free flow of ideas and conversation with the intent of drawing rich data from the participants, thus enabling a cross-section of perspectives to emerge. Interviews “...gain a detailed picture of a respondent’s beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic” (Smith, 1995, p. 9). Through the interviews I was able to gain insight into the experiences of LSES students from their perspective. Interviews are typical forms of data generation in constructivist qualitative research that enable the researcher to

“understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it” (Costantino, 2008, p. 123). The semi-structured approach provided flexibility and enabled me to follow up a line of thought or clarify without being restrained by a strict regime of pre-determined questions (Smith, 1995). As argued by Charmaz (2006), qualitative interviewing is flexible and allows ideas to emerge throughout the process. Interviewing is seen as useful for interpretivist inquiry and enables an in-depth analysis of the subject matter in GTM (Charmaz, 2006). GTM often uses interviews and transcripts to collect and review data (Jones, 2009; Tweed & Charmaz, 2012). Using interviews assumes that “...what a respondent says in the interview has some ongoing significance for him or her...” and the respondent is seen as the expert (Smith, 1995, p. 10). The use of interviews ensured participants had a platform to express their thoughts and ideas freely and consequently ensured the emerging theory was grounded in the data.

A number of measures were employed to ensure the interview process had a clear format that was conveyed to the participants. I conducted the interviews with the aid of a run sheet to remind me of key messages I wanted to cover with the participants. This included:

- introducing myself and my research;
- informed consent;
- consent to record the interview and process of recording;
- informing the participant of the ability to withdraw from the research at any point during the interview;
- matters pertaining to confidentiality; and,
- potential perceived issues of power and labelling.

At the completion of the interview, I returned to the run sheet and ensured there was opportunity for the participant to:

- engage in a debrief about the interview;
- learn about support services available from their enrolled university;
- discuss the need for support should the interview have elicited any issues for the participant; and,
- be thanked for contributing to my research.

The interviews were conducted one-to-one in a private office on campus. Interviews were scheduled to be conducted for 60 minutes, with the flexibility of increasing the time should it be warranted. In actuality, interview length varied between 30 and 55 minutes for the 20 interviews. The semi-structured interviews generally followed what is considered good practice by Smith (1995) whereby rapport was established with the participant, while the order of questions was less important. I was free to probe and the interviews followed the participant's interests and concerns. I employed Charmaz's (2006) strategy to probe throughout the interview by saying "that's interesting, tell me more about it" (p. 26) to elicit more detail from the participants on any particular points of interest. As Creswell (2012) suggested:

Use probes to obtain additional information. Probes are subquestions under each question that the researcher asks to elicit more information. Use them to clarify points or to have the interviewee expand on ideas. These probes vary from exploring the content in more depth (elaborating) to asking the interviewee to explain the answer in more detail (clarifying). (p. 221)

The interview questions adhered to three criteria:

- (1) they were neutral, not value-laden, or leading;
- (2) they avoided jargon; and,
- (3) they were open questions, not closed (Smith, 1995).

The consideration of the type and form of probing questions was decided prior to the interviews. The questions were merely guiding questions owing to the semi-structured format of the interviews. Questions were asked in relation to the student experience, needs in relation to student support, knowledge and awareness of current support initiatives, and potential gaps in service delivery. LSES students were asked specifically about their own experiences while staff members were asked generally about their impressions of LSES student experiences. An outline of initial probing questions potentially used with LSES students is provided in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Probing questions for semi-structured interviews with LSES students

Tell me about how you feel about studying at university.

How do you define success?

What helps you to manage studying at university?

What problems, if any, do you encounter?

Who has been the most helpful to you during your time at university?

Has any organisation been helpful? What did they help with?

What from your previous experience has really helped you to adjust to university?

What assets/strengths/attitudes do you bring to study that work well for you in this situation?

These questions were reframed for staff member's interviews, for example the question "*What helps you to manage studying at university?*" was reframed to become "*What do you think helps a student to manage studying at university?*"

As the interviewer, I gradually shifted the questioning and followed topics pertinent to my research and clarified particular areas as themes and patterns emerged and began to form categories. I dropped less compelling lines of interviewing and focused on emerging concepts that appeared to have greater significance. I later employed an alternate set of starter questions which is outlined in Table 2.3. Again, the list provided was targeted at the LSES student participants and was slightly modified for the staff member participants.

Table 2.3: Alternative set of starter questions for LSES student participants employed following the emergence of themes

<i>Tell me about how you feel about studying at university.</i>
<i>Who do you contact when you need support? Who has been the most helpful to you during your time at university?</i>
<i>Why them?</i>
<i>What differentiates them from others?</i>
<i>When might you access different supports to those you usually contact?</i>
<i>What problems, if any, do you encounter when talking to others?</i>
<i>What is trust? Connectedness? A network?</i>
<i>Who do you trust? Why?</i>
<i>Why is it important?</i>
<i>Determination/drive? What is it? Where does it come from? When does it start? When does it fail?</i>
<i>How do you define success? How do your networks/supports influence your success?</i>

The feedback received from participants post-interview was largely positive. Aside from the withdrawn participant, no other participant expressed any concerns with the interview process or with the content of the discussions. Many voiced their appreciation of the discussion and spoke in favour of the reflective process that it enabled. Most participants reported feeling validated during debriefing when I advised that many of their experiences were not dissimilar to those of their peers. All participants were thanked for their time and contribution to the study and were offered food and/or drink. Not all participants accepted the offer and of those that declined they reported saying they did not agree to participate in the interview to get something in return, but just wanted to help out a fellow student which was me as the researcher.

2.5.3 Data analysis

Interview transcripts were the data analysed in this study. Each of the stages in the process is explained and outlined in more detail.

- (1) I coded the transcribed interviews (the data) line-by-line whereby labels were applied to segments of data, providing a description of my

interpretation of what that line was about and thus informing me of areas to explore in future interviews;

- (2) As further data were collected, I conducted focused coding that enabled the codes to be elevated into categories that captured themes and patterns;
- (3) Theoretical sampling was utilised that enabled me to identify key participants who would assist in further understanding the properties of those categories;
- (4) Concurrently with other stages of the process, memoing was performed that enabled me to capture analytic thoughts, interpretations, and hunches with respect to the data that were being collected;
- (5) Interviewing continued until saturation had been reached whereby no new information regarding the categories was being sourced; and finally,
- (6) Theorising was undertaken whereby an analysis of the relationships among categories was performed that helped to answer the research question and sub-questions.

A distinguishing characteristic of GTM is that the collection of data and the analysis occur simultaneously as soon as the first data are collected. Early analysis of data shapes collection moving forward (Charmaz, 2003). GTM data analysis is a non-linear approach. GTM uses a constant comparative method, which is an analytical strategy to assist in the developing theory where all the data, codes, and categories are “constantly compared within and between each other” (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 132).

2.5.3.1 Initial coding

The first step of GTM in this study was to apply line-by-line coding to the transcribed interview data. Initial coding is line-by-line coding where a line of transcribed material is coded with a phrase or term that highlights the main premise from the statement, thereby “naming each line of data” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 37). Initial coding begins to build the analysis and helps the researcher to refrain from inputting motives, fears, or unresolved personal issues (Charmaz, 1995). It assists the researcher with directions to explore and to identify gaps (Tweed & Charmaz,

2012). Coding enabled me to “defin[e] what the data are about” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 93). This initiated the first stage of analysis of the data. Charmaz (2012) acknowledges that “grounded theorists may code line-by-line, paragraph-by-paragraph, incident-by-incident, or story-by-story” (p. 5); however she emphasises the need for line-by-line coding early on. Coding is literally creating codes from my interpretation of the data and initial coding influenced the shaping of future questions.

Codes were assigned to participants’ perspectives, meanings, and experiences as shared during the interview. There was initially a considerable amount of time spent attempting to get the ‘right’ codes for the data. It was helpful to realise that initial codes in GTM are provisional and remain open to other analytic possibilities as the research evolves (Charmaz, 2014). The codes were generated from my interpretation of the data, a constructivist perspective. Codes, in this thesis, are aligned to the codes listed in Appendix A by a reference starting with ‘C’ for code and a number which refers to its order in the table in the appendix, for example ‘C13’ is the reference for ‘needing financial assistance’. A small sample of codes showing how the coding numbering convention was applied in this study is represented in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Sample of line-by-line codes used in the study and the numbering convention applied to the codes

CODE	
C1	differing to others
C2	having parental influences
C3	working versus studying
C4	desiring to change
C5	needing to change

Codes as defined by some GTM researchers take the form of gerunds, which is the noun form of a verb (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978). I employed the use of gerunds in this study. For example, ‘describing’ versus ‘description’ and ‘stating’ versus ‘statement’ are variations in wording that enabled the analysis to consider the processes of participant experiences as opposed to a static state. Charmaz (2006) argues,

[a]dopting gerunds fosters theoretical sensitivity because these words nudge us out of static topics and into enacted processes. Gerunds prompt thinking about actions – large and small. If you can focus your coding on *actions* you have ready grist for seeing sequences and making connections. (p. 136)

It is to be noted that some codes may also be *in vivo* codes. This term is used in GTM to denote those codes which are taken from the natural language of the participants rather than a researcher’s interpretation to name the code or describe the code (Charmaz, 1983).

Line-by-line coding in my study was initially conducted following three interviews as, owing to my availability, these interviews were conducted in succession and consequently sent for transcription simultaneously. As themes began to emerge, each subsequent interview was coded one at a time to inform the development of the probing interview questions for the next interview.

Figure 2.3 provides an excerpt of initial coding that was undertaken with transcribed interview data from participant Charlie (noting interviewees are identified by a pseudonym, an artificial name to protect the identity of the participant). The second line of transcribed data resulted in an *in vivo* code as the participant had used the phrase “had enough” through their own words and I deemed it a suitable descriptor for what they were trying to say. All codes are my interpretation of what the participant was saying at that time.

Facilitator:	What’s an off day?	
Interviewee:	Just when you need a day to yourself. When	<i>self-caring</i>
	you’re just exhausted. Just had enough. Even	<i>having “had enough”</i>
	if I’m a little bit behind or it’s going to put me	<i>getting behind</i>
	behind I think to myself my mental health and	<i>self-caring</i>
	how I’m interacting with my children is more	<i>caring for children</i>
	important than what this grade’s going to be.	<i>prioritising over grades</i>
	I’m happy to take a lesser mark if it means I’ll	<i>settling for less</i>
	miss out on an extra day of work, as bad as	<i>not missing work</i>
	that sounds.	

Figure 2.3: An example of initial coding of transcribed data from an interview with Charlie

2.5.3.2 Focused coding

Following the process of initial coding and as data gathering proceeded (that is, as further interviews were conducted), focused coding was applied to the transcribed content that was more direct and selective. The focused coding undertaken in this study is described as coding of sentences or paragraphs and it highlighted what was important in the emerging analysis. I used focused coding to recode existing codes in early data, thereby enabling me to synthesise larger segments of data and capture the most useful initial codes (Charmaz, 2006). I began to draw commonalities or patterns amongst the coding. The data were then analysed using new and existing, more conceptual, focused codes that explored a particular theoretical path. I engaged in conceptual coding that used earlier codes to sift through large amounts of remaining data. The stage of focused coding is an important phase in GTM as it enables a more discrete analysis of the data. As Charmaz (2011) states, “[f]ocused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense and categorize your data most accurately and completely” (p. 97). Resulting from patterns emerging in the data, I wanted to advance the analytic process and theoretical direction. To do so I used constant comparative analysis to lift the codes to a higher level where initial codes were mapped and compared with one another. Focused codes were constantly reviewed for fit with the data as new information was conveyed. Focused coding is demonstrated in Figure 2.4.

Facilitator:	Why do you say that you trust lecturers?	
Interviewee:	I trust they have had experience to be able to teach us what we need to learn to become a teacher. I trust that they have the knowledge, they’ve been trained, they’ve got the qualifications to be able to know this is what a teacher in 2013 needs to know, yes.	<i>having experience</i> <i>having credibility</i> <i>having knowledge</i>

Figure 2.4: Example of focused coding from Erin’s interview data

2.5.3.3 Categorising

Once focused coding was occurring I was able to consider appropriate categories to apply to the data. The codes derived from the interviews formed

themes and patterns that culminated into categories. Categorising resulted from focused coding where codes were given properties and dimensions.

As you raise the code to a category, you begin (1) to explicate its properties, (2) to specify conditions under which it arises, is maintained and changes, (3) to describe its consequences and (4) to show how this category relates to other categories. (Charmaz, 2004, p. 41)

Categorising is an important component of the data analysis stage as it “explicate[s] ideas, events, or processes in your data...A category may subsume common themes and patterns in several codes” (Charmaz, 2011, p. 99). It was imperative that I did not force the data into preconceived categories (Glaser, 1992). Charmaz (1995) disagrees with Glaser and Strauss’ early work that implies that the categories in the data will leap out at the researcher: “[R]ather, the categories reflect the interaction between the observer and the observed. Certainly any observer’s worldview, disciplinary assumptions, theoretical proclivities and research interests will influence his or her observations and emerging categories” (p. 32).

Table 2.5 provides an example of one category that evolved from the focused coding, ‘needing support’. Further focused coding allowed the properties of the category to emerge.

Table 2.5: Example of a category emerging from themes and patterns in codes, and of establishing properties of the category

Category	Corresponding codes	Properties
NEEDING SUPPORT	C9,C12,C13,C16,C19,C39,C40,C42, C43,C44,C45,C46,C50,C79,C80, C81,C82,C91,C92,C99,C113,C116, C119,C123,C124,C137,C142,C150, C151,C188,C189,C227,C245,C249	having ‘just in time’ info; having flexibility; being accessible; compounding/ complicating factors; having stressors; having a support culture; having responsive advice

2.5.3.4 Theoretical sampling and saturation

In GTM, theorists employ theoretical sampling to gather data in order to refine tentative theoretical categories and, while the term ‘sampling’ is misleading owing to

traditional research design, it enables increasingly focused questions and puts ideas to an empirical test (Charmaz, 2012). Theoretical sampling is a progressive part of the analysis and is “sampling aimed toward the development of the emerging theory” (Charmaz, 1983, p. 124). Theoretical sampling was engaged in my research study until the point of saturation. This process is described in what follows.

Theoretical sampling was employed in my research to glean specific data to clarify information or emerging theories. In my study, theoretical sampling enabled me to capture voices not represented in the original sample or to gather data that were needed to explicate the emerging theory. As the data collection proceeded, as a researcher, I undertook theoretical sampling in order to target a more specific group of participants and, as identified by Tweed & Charmaz (2012), theoretical sampling draws on the question of “whose voices are not represented by my tentative category?” (p. 133). This enabled me to use a select group of participants to help understand the concepts and develop the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Holt, 2005).

Theoretical sampling was employed in my study to further explore an emerging trend in participant responses. As stated previously, initially, LSES student participants were identified from databases listing scholarship and student financial loan recipients. It is important to note that such programs were offered by the Student Services department at the university where the study took place. It was commonplace within that Student Services department that recipients of student loans and scholarships were connected with a variety of support services directly related to their reasons for applying for financial assistance. For example, a student arriving to seek a financial loan would often be linked with welfare support for budgeting assistance as well as perhaps other services, depending on their unique situation, in the spirit of providing a holistic support service to students and proactively assisting students during their studies. LSES students were connected, as were others, with a variety of individualised supports regardless of why they may have entered the service in the first instance. This group of participants appeared to have a sound understanding of Student Services. It was necessary, in order to understand the emerging theory, to hear the experiences of LSES students who may not have interacted with Student Services previously in order to establish if there were alternate explanations for existing themes and patterns. As a result, student

participants were drawn from the university's enrolment database instead, while still in keeping with the eligibility criteria to participate in the study. This was theoretical sampling.

Theoretical sampling was undertaken until saturation had occurred. Saturation is a state whereby additional data gathered contributes no new ideas or information about the properties of the categories. I paid little attention to the number of participants I had interviewed and focused more on explicating the categories, heeding the advice outlined below:

In this sampling strategy, the researcher does not seek 'generalizability' or 'representativeness' and therefore focuses less on sample size and more on sampling adequacy. Sample size is important only as it relates to judging the extent to which issues of saturation have been carefully considered. During the coding process, the size of the sample may be increased in order to collect additional data until there is redundancy of information. However, increasing the sample size is not always necessary. (Bowen, 2008, p. 140)

As categories were generated, they were tested against the data for fit and to understand their properties. This constant comparative process continued until I could achieve no further information about the categories, and no new information was being constructed. Saturation was becoming apparent around the 18th interview, and I then facilitated a further two interviews to enable testing of the categories against new data. The information appeared to resonate with the last couple of students and so I affirmed my position that saturation had been achieved.

2.5.4 Memoing

Consistent with GTM, memoing was maintained throughout the research journey. Memoing is a written record of reflections, interpretations, reactions, hunches, hypotheses, decision making, and evolution of concepts. Memos use informal, unofficial language, and are often spontaneous (Charmaz, 2006); an example from my study is provided in Figure 2.5.

Connections are chosen by the student and are aimless. No-one can prevent a connection; students will go where they feel comfortable or 'right'. Connections need to be informed. Students don't know what they don't know. Their head is not in the space to deal with it.

Figure 2.5: Example of a memo used in the present research study

Not unlike a research journal, memos can improve the capacity later to analyse the process and to assist interpretations and the outcomes achieved (Dunne, 2011). According to Charmaz (2009), it is a crucial step as it is a “written elaboration of ideas about the data and the coded categories” (p. 120) and it prepares the researcher well for the generation of theory. “Memo-writing speeds analytic momentum” (Charmaz, 2012, p. 9) whereby a history of commentary by the researcher is a quick reference point for understanding the researcher’s analytical thoughts. Memos enabled me to stop and analyse the codes and capture my thinking at that moment, which later informed my understanding of relationships between categories and the subsequent theory (Charmaz, 2006). Memos were often written whilst coding as ideas and interpretations were emerging. Multiple memos were produced throughout this research journey and many have been included in the presentation of this work. They also occurred spontaneously at times when exposure to an extant theory or sensitising concepts provided further assumptions about or interpretations of the data. Memos were recorded and dated as informal handwritten commentary in a journal designed exclusively for housing the memos. They were referred to frequently whilst theorising.

2.5.5 Theory building

Final theorising culminated in an integration of the categories. Associations between the data were developed whereby concepts were connected to form a theoretical framework to understand the substantive area (Corbin & Holt, 2005). I explored the relationships between the categories and analysed the properties of the categories to assess interconnectedness. Consistent with Charmaz’s (1983) approach to GTM, I shared the relationships between categories with the last few participants to see how the analysis fitted with their views and experiences. These participants reported that the emerging theory resonated with their experiences.

2.6 Academic rigour

Qualitative researchers have long been responding to enquiries from positivist researchers around the reliability and validity of their studies (Morse, 2007; Rolfe, 2006; Sandelowski, 1986). Qualitative researchers have sought to find terms that more appropriately define the academic rigour of their work. Most commonly in qualitative research, the concept of validity is compared to a study's credibility, trustworthiness, or authenticity (Corbin & Holt, 2005; Golafshani, 2003; Morse, 2007; Rolfe, 2006); or credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13). Qualitative researchers, as a minimum, must be able to demonstrate their work as credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As identified by many scholars, researchers often use strategies such as member checking and triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Sandelowski, 1993); however these types of processes are not consistent with the constructivist paradigm. In this research study it was recognised that reality was constructed by the participants in context and time and was interpreted by me as the researcher.

In the early work of GTM, Glaser (1978) identified the rigour of GTM research with concepts of fit (theoretical categories must be drawn from the data and must explain the data), work (the results represent a useful conceptual model that explains a situation), relevance (it provides for explanations of actual problems), and modifiability (it has the flexibility to account for environmental changes). Charmaz (2011) built on these criteria and advocated for the use of the following criteria to assess the rigour of GTM research:

- credibility;
- originality;
- resonance; and,
- usefulness.

She argued that these criteria more aptly evaluate GTM research and it is these criteria that I applied to my research as discussed in the following sub-sections. The discussion will show that my findings were credible, original, had resonance with key stakeholders, and are thus inherently useful.

2.6.1 Credibility

Credibility in Charmaz's (2006) view denotes that the researcher has intimate familiarity with a setting or topic, that sufficient data have been captured, that there are systematic comparisons, and strong logical links. In this study I had intimate familiarity with the substantive area and the findings are grounded in the data. I had been employed in student support in a range of roles for over 7 years when I commenced the study, which demonstrates exposure to the substantive area for a long period of time, thereby enhancing the validity of the subject matter in qualitative terms (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Length of exposure to the field is an important component of credibility: "Being in the field over time solidifies evidence because researchers can check out the data and their hunches and compare interview data with observational data" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). While GTM does not prescribe the amount of data to analyse but suggests that sufficient data are captured for credibility, the key is to achieve saturation. Saturation was achieved in this study and this was apparent around the 18th interview, as described in Sub-section 2.5.3.4. The analytical process has been transparent and the findings justified throughout this thesis. The categories and the subsequent theory have emerged logically and coherently. In this study, the feedback from critical friends showed the emerging theory resonating with colleagues and field experts in a range of settings, including conference presentations, and the input by my supervisors provided additional support for the study's credibility.

2.6.2 Originality

Originality, according to Charmaz (2006), dictates that the research gleans new insights and has social and theoretical significance. The findings of my study reflect a new understanding of LSES students' experiences in accessing support in higher education. This institutional research has significant social and theoretical significance. My research contributes to three types of knowledge – theoretical, practical, and methodological. Theories of trust, capital, and student engagement have all been reviewed in the context of LSES students and the research has made a contribution to present understandings of those constructs. Additionally, the results inform, on a practical level, the planning and service delivery within Student Services departments in higher education, the higher education sector's understanding and consideration of Australia's Federal Government widening

participation agenda, and the higher education sector's understandings of LSES student experiences. The research also contributes to methodological knowledge - GTM in particular, the application of Charmaz's approach, and its application to a social justice inquiry, as well as the management of ethical considerations in research when working with potentially vulnerable populations. All of these components suggest that my research has provided original contributions to the substantive field.

2.6.3 Resonance

Charmaz (2006) defines resonance as recognising that the research findings make sense to participants and those in similar circumstances. As categories were being formed and properties of those categories were being constructed, participants in later interviews were asked if the findings resonated with them. Participants expressed their agreement with the evolving patterns and themes. LSES students in particular voiced validation and appreciation of the findings, expressing their relief that their individual circumstances and experiences were consistent with their peers. In addition, informal conversations with peers in the university, and formal presentations including conferences in the substantive field, were undertaken, which elicited favour and support for a phenomenon that many described as previously anecdotal. These reactions to the findings demonstrated that my study had achieved resonance.

2.6.4 Usefulness

Finally, Charmaz (2006) suggested that research should be useful in that it should offer interpretations that can be used in everyday contexts, and contributes to various forms of knowledge as well as stimulating further research. The results of this institutional research will inform the day-to-day service delivery of Student Services departments in higher education. The various forms of knowledge that this study contributes to have already been stated, and should stimulate further research in the areas of student engagement, student support, and the experiences of LSES students in higher education. As an administrator of Student Services in higher education myself, I can personally vouch for the usefulness of these findings in shaping the Service's approach to support for LSES students.

2.7 Ethics and politics

Of great importance to the research process for this study was due consideration to ethical and political issues given the substantive field. In working with, and making interpretations about, LSES students as well as my colleagues or subordinate staff members as participants, both of whom are potentially vulnerable populations in the research context, I was meticulous about language and process. There are a number of ethical matters that will be outlined that were given attention early in, and throughout, this study: issues of power and labelling, my role as a researcher, and matters of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. All of these topics were addressed and presented to the ethics committee in the institution prior to commencing the research and the research proceeded with full institutional ethical approval.

2.7.1 The power of discourse and labelling

The power of discourse and the social construction of language (Rowan, 2004) were inherent issues to address in the research design, for instance descriptors like “low socioeconomic status” or “educationally disadvantaged” (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2010; Martin, 1994; McMillan & Western, 2000). The power of discourse has been recognised by the work of Danaher (2000) as he investigated the ‘naming’ conventions of itinerant people used by researchers. Danaher highlighted the disadvantages of labelling groups from the outside that classified people for a political purpose - for example, those seen as “disadvantaged”. There is a power differential in labelling. Appropriate terminology is necessary. It was important to be cognisant of the effects that labels have on groups of people, the anticipated data, and the actual data. Discourse in and of itself is a construct (Fairclough, 1992). I was ever mindful of the following lines of thought throughout my research:

...[W]e introduce the term 'classism' into the higher education debate in Australia. By 'classism' we mean the tendency to construct people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds as inherently deficient according to prevailing normative values. Using an analysis of the Bradley Review, we show that low SES students are constructed as inherently lacking in aspirations in current policy discourse and are regarded as 'needier' higher education students in comparison with their

higher SES peers. This construction, we argue, is an example of classism, and therefore we suggest that adding 'classism' to existing understandings of disadvantage will help to raise awareness of discrimination as well as formulate best practice in higher education. (Bletsas & Michell, 2014, p. 77)

The labelling of student participants as “LSES” or “disadvantaged” and the discourses of “othering” (Rowan, 2004) were managed sensitively in my study. At the commencement of each interview, a brief overview of the research study was provided to the participants whereby the concept of “low socioeconomic background” was introduced. This descriptor was defined and I acknowledged the diversity that exists within such a heterogeneous group and additionally advised that no assumption of deficit or impairment was implied but rather the identifier was for methodological convenience. A brief overview of the deficits of the definition was offered that detailed the difficulties associated with the widely contested definition. No participant expressed discontent with the label and many even acknowledged their place in the grouping, often referring to their own levels of financial disadvantage.

2.7.2 The researcher in the study

Another significant consideration in the ethics and politics of this research was the dual role that I had as researcher as well as a position of authority in the area of student support services at the university in which the data were being gathered. McNamee (2001) speaks of an “inescapable power dimension” (p. 309) that privileges the researcher over the participant and this was exacerbated by my title and position at the institution where the study was conducted. National guidelines for consent in human research posit that:

[N]o person should be subject to coercion or pressure in deciding whether to participate. Even where there is no overt coercion or pressure, consent might reflect deference to the researcher’s perceived position of power, or to someone else’s wishes. Here as always, a person should be included as a participant only if his or her consent is voluntary. (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2007, p. 20)

In addition, it has been stated that peer pressure can result from a situation where the researcher has authority (Piper & Simons, 2005). I recognised that rich data could be gathered from staff members who worked with me if they were willing to participate - however, it was imperative that these staff members had explicit freedom to choose their involvement in the study, "...free from coercion and undue influence" (Homan, 2001, p. 332).

A thorough informed consent process was critical to the ethical conduct of this study. Both written and verbal consent was sought following a thorough explanation of the research, its aims, the participants' roles, and their right to withdraw or not to participate at all. Given my dual role in this research journey, I took particular care in managing the consent of participants noting that,

[b]eing in a dependent or unequal relationship may influence a person's decision to participate in research. While this influence does not necessarily invalidate the decision, it always constitutes a reason to pay particular attention to the process through which consent is negotiated. (National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2007, p. 59)

All participants were advised of my dual roles and were informed that I was conducting the interview in my capacity as research student. It was strongly emphasised, particularly to invited participants who were staff members, that their participation or not in the study would not affect the relationship or the working environment. Again no staff member expressed concern during this discussion and there was no evidence to suggest that participants held concerns.

2.7.3 Informed consent

As just mentioned, the research design and various stakeholders of my study warranted that informed consent was managed comprehensively and sensitively. Informed consent "is the requirement that human subjects be informed of the nature and implications of research and that participation be voluntary" (Homan, 2001, p. 330).

Research subjects have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of experiments in which they are involved. Proper respect for human freedom generally includes two necessary conditions.

Subjects must agree voluntarily to participate – that is, without physical or psychological coercion. In addition, their agreement must be based on full and open information. (Christians, 2011, p. 65)

Respect for participants' rights was given high priority throughout the study. Participants were fully informed of their role and their rights, were given full details of the research being undertaken, and were able to participate voluntarily. This was managed by providing a "Participant Information Sheet" that outlined the aims of the study, the procedures, the participant's role and their rights in the study, and information regarding their voluntary participation (see Appendix B). Ongoing dialogue with the participants occurred, as a form of processual consent so that they knew the ongoing direction of the research and their options for changing their consent should they wish (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

Interviews provided the setting for intimate knowledge to be shared, memories to be unearthed, and emotions to be elicited throughout the discussion, which may have resulted in participants wanting to withdraw their data (Sandelowski, 1986, 1993). Participants were informed that they would be able to withdraw their data at any point during the research. To confirm consent for participation, all participants were asked to sign a "Consent Form" if they wished to proceed with the interview (see Appendix C). No student refused to participate at the point of introduction to the study; however, there was one participant who withdrew during the interview itself as discussed earlier (see Sub-section 2.5.1).

2.7.4 Anonymity and confidentiality

Anonymity and confidentiality were significant components of the informed consent process in this study and were another major component of appropriately managing the ethics and politics of the study. Confidentiality is a process that actively ensures that a participant's identity will not be disclosed without permission (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008). Confidentiality is a complex issue for qualitative research, particularly where someone's commentary used in findings may potentially, and inadvertently, be used to identify her or him by the nature of the comments themselves (Mills & Gale, 2004). Anonymity is to ensure that a researcher does not breach confidentiality (Wiles et al., 2008). In this research study, pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality in the delivery and

management of results or data (Jarzabkowski, 2004), and this practice in no way attempted to minimise or depersonalise the responses shared by participants. These pseudonyms are listed in Appendix D. Throughout the informed consent process, participants were advised as to how their data were to be used and stored, which was in a locked filing cabinet for hardcopy documentation or on a password protected computer for electronic data.

Considerable thought was given to ensuring the appropriate management of ethics and politics throughout this research. The aforementioned areas highlight the key considerations and demonstrate a transparent and diligent attempt to ensure that participants and the substantive field were well respected and valued.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined a methodological approach that was employed to generate theory in a substantive field via GTM. The chapter has acknowledged the constructivist paradigm used in the study and has justified the use of qualitative research methods, particularly Charmaz's (2006) approach to GTM. A thorough overview of the research methods was provided including details regarding the participants, data collection, and data analysis. An argument for the academic rigour of the study was shared and the chapter has navigated the ethics and politics involved in the research design and how these were managed. The next chapter details the results of the study and how the process of GTM has enabled the construction of the proposed theory.

CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

3.1 Purpose and structure of the chapter

This chapter outlines the findings of my research, and demonstrates the constant comparative process employed to make meaning of these findings. The initial coding and focused coding that was performed is shared and the analytical process behind the formation of categories is also discussed. The chapter explains key patterns in the data generated throughout the study that were informed by, and through, the memoing process. The generated theory is explained in Chapter 4.

The process of GTM used in this study was illustrated in Figure 2.1. Chapter 2 has outlined the study's research questions, the process of recruitment and sampling of participants, as well as the data collection process, which are the first three steps in GTM. The same figure is used throughout this chapter, guiding the remainder of the process.

3.2 Preliminary findings generated from initial coding

Initial coding is the next step in GTM, as is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

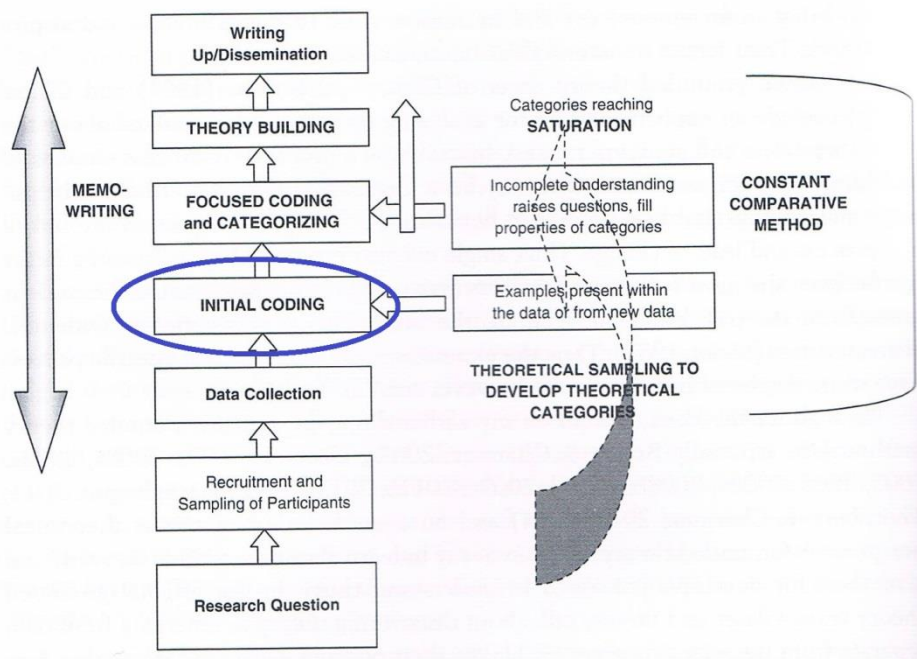


Figure 3.1: Visual representation of GTM highlighting the initial coding stage (Adapted from Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 133)

A number of early findings arose during initial coding. Line-by-line coding of the transcribed data yielded 262 unique codes including 21 *in vivo* codes; these are listed in Appendix A. As defined in Chapter 2, *in vivo* code names in GTM is derived from the natural language of the participants rather than a researcher's interpretation to describe the code (Charmaz, 1983). Initial coding elicited some common labels that were seen as recurrent patterns in the data and the 12 most frequent of these are listed in Table 3.1. Table 3.1 also includes sample quotations from participants to demonstrate my early thinking in assigning codes. These initial codes, as well as the others, informed the development of focused codes.

Table 3.1: The 12 most frequent initial codes during the analysis

Initial code	Sample quotation
having heightened determination (C88)	<i>"[study] makes me feel very – I guess happy, in that I know I'm doing something with my life and that it shows people that – because of me having a disability, I show them that I can make it into uni" [Casey]</i>
having trust (C95)	<i>"it comes back to the whole – the respect and the trust of the people who have – you've been able to approach and you're comfortable to approach" [Sam]</i>
not knowing what student services do (C57)	<i>"I think that you've got an idea that there's all these other things out there. You don't know what they do, whether you're entitled to it" [Pat]</i>
having experience (C169)	<i>"I think for me it's the experience that they've had, they have actually worked in the real world...and they have made mistakes and they have done things that they've learnt from." [Sam]</i>
having just in time information (C121)	<i>"I focus more on, okay, what's applicable to me." [Bailey]</i>
differing to others (C1)	<i>"I just think I'll be right, I'm alright, there's people that need [Student Services] more than I do and I don't want to worry them with my stuff when there's people that need it more than I do." [Ashley]</i>

having extra stress (C12)	<i>"I wasn't even getting out of bed at some point because I was just that stressed."</i> [Morgan]
needing financial assistance (C13)	<i>"...the financial side of it as well, there was lots of financial pressure and like books – there was one semester where I just couldn't afford my books."</i> [Pat]
having support from family (C49)	<i>"My mother. She's the most helpful..."</i> [Charlie]
being familiar (C115)	<i>"the first time you go and all be together in a dining hall situation, it's about looking for possibly people exactly the same age as you, I suppose. You kind of try and mix with people who possibly have just come from school, or are recently from school, so you've got some similarities there to talk to them first"</i> [Erin]
having peers as support (C134)	<i>"...I've made [relationships with] – some other people who I deal with regularly because they are doing the same major as me."</i> [Stevie]
complicating factors (C16)	<i>"then there was just thing after – stuff after stuff. My family, when I was diagnosed we got a dog and that dog – that week later, found out she had cancer, week after that, put her down. Then friends were getting cancer and aneurysms and all this crazy stuff."</i> [Morgan]

Coding at this stage of the study elicited a range of early patterns and topics. The level of awareness of Student Services as a functional support unit in the university yielded important information. Useful data were generated in relation to the type of assistance the LSES students' desired whilst studying at university. Initial coding also identified a range of complexities that appeared to impact on the experiences of the LSES students in higher education. The importance of relationships was apparent early on in the interviews with participants and the LSES students articulating a very strong desire to achieve success and describing what success means to them. Each of these concepts constructed during the initial coding process is now discussed in turn.

3.2.1 Level of awareness of Student Services by LSES students

Variation in the level of knowledge by the LSES students about Student Services was identified during the initial coding process. One student was quite clear in their apparent lack of awareness and put it quite simply:

“What are student services?” [Brady]

This was coded as ‘not knowing what Student Services does’ (C57). While another LSES student, as others did, was able to articulate an intimate knowledge of services available:

“Well, when I first arrived at uni, the disability service at [the university] helped me find a support worker...” [Casey]

In this case, it was coded as ‘needing disability support’ (C46). There was a trend in early interviews where LSES students, as well as staff members, were well versed in the offering of services available to students. These early interviewees tended to have already engaged with Student Services to some degree. An early memo, depicted in Figure 3.2, draws attention to my thinking at the time that questioned whether the LSES students had a strong willingness or capacity to engage services for support or whether there was an extraneous variable impacting on the data.

Students are tending to be well connected with support while studying at university. They are able to articulate that the service exists and they are outlining services they are engaged with – disability support, scholarships, financial loans, counselling, and careers support for instance. This take up and knowledge of services goes against expectation as theory suggests that LSES students have low cultural and social capital that impacts on their ability to succeed in education - that LSES students do not have the capacity to navigate elite systems well. Is it possible LSES are more adept at seeking solutions and this theory is no longer applicable to contemporary LSES rather than me thinking that I am only tapping into those that do?

Figure 3.2: Memo regarding LSES students’ capacity to seek support

In answering the question posed in the memo in Figure 3.2, theoretical sampling was employed as outlined in Sub-section 2.5.3.4. As it turned out, the

LSES student participants drawn from the general university enrolment database tended to have a lower level of awareness of Student Services compared to the LSES students sourced from scholarships and loans databases. This information was beneficial for developing the theoretical enquiry as it was important to examine how students who do not have an awareness of supports available, navigate their individual study experience.

Another early pattern during coding was the variance in knowledge of support services depending on the size of the campus. There was an apparent trend that the LSES students from the smaller campuses (<2,000 on campus students) had a greater awareness of services available than those on the larger campus (>4,000 on campus students). Interviewees attributed this to the idea that those LSES students on smaller campuses having greater familiarity with other people on the campuses owing to the smaller numbers of people and the closer geographical proximity to the physical location of Student Services itself.

3.2.2 Types of assistance desired by LSES students

Regardless of their awareness of services available, initial coding revealed further insights into the LSES students' experiences when they highlighted a wish list of services that they believed, or knew from personal experience, would support them to achieve success. The most frequent services mentioned are listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Initial codes relating to LSES students desire for support services and the number of times that they were identified

Initial code	Number
needing financial assistance	8
requiring time management	5
needing disability support	6
having work/life balance	6
developing a routine	3
needing childcare support	3

Other support services desired were: 'requiring stress management', 'needing transitional supports', 'needing welfare support', 'needing legal advice', 'needing

parental support’, ‘volunteering’, ‘mentoring’, ‘needing career support’, ‘needing employment’, ‘wanting health promotion’, ‘having organisational skills’, and ‘needing accommodation advice’. Here is an example of one of the LSES students that drew attention to their need for financial assistance.

“...can’t afford textbooks. Sometimes when you go up to the library and you want that textbook, they don’t have it there except for three hour loans. You really need to study at home sometimes, and you just can’t because you’ve got no textbooks.” [Taylor]

This list of services is not unfamiliar to a Student Services department and validates that the services offered by Student Services tend to be consistent with the expectations of LSES students.

3.2.3 Complexities impacting on LSES student experiences

The initial coding process further showed a pattern of circumstances that reportedly impacted on LSES students’ experiences, contributed to the challenge of undertaking tertiary studies, and their ability to achieve success. Codes such as ‘wearing multiple hats’ (C11), ‘having extra stress’ (C12), ‘having constant distractions’ (C17), ‘being overwhelmed’ (C19), ‘not knowing what Student Services does’ (C57), ‘stigma in accessing services’ (C58) and other such codes were common throughout all interviews. The complex situation experienced by the LSES students was highlighted by one particular student:

“We don’t know what we want or what we need.” [Sam]

This initial coding was giving an early indication that the LSES students experienced a multitude of extraneous circumstances that they believed would, or were, impacting on their learning journey and their opportunities for achieving success.

3.2.4 Importance of relationships for LSES students

One further pattern to mention that arose during initial coding was a strong emphasis on the importance of relationships whilst studying at university. There was a trend for students to report that relationship building and having relationships are critical to achieving success. Codes such as ‘having personable contact’ (C29), ‘getting to know the person’ (C30), ‘knowing by name’ (C31), ‘having connectedness’ (C35), and ‘having networks’ (C71) highlighted the importance of

relationships. Table 3.3 provides an example of line-by-line coding that illustrates the LSES students' connections with others and their relative importance.

Table 3.3: Line-by-line initial coding highlighting the importance of relationships for LSES students to achieve success [Drew]

Facilitator:	<i>So is that a positive, having [peers] around you?</i>	
Interviewee:	<i>The cohort that we have is extremely strong. We all</i>	being on the same team
	<i>get ourselves through this degree. It's not – I have a</i>	having all they know
	<i>mate who's studying psychology. It's – so he doesn't</i>	linking with peers
	<i>know half the people in his cohort. We – because the</i>	differing to others
	<i>arts is so – particularly the creative arts, particularly,</i>	
	<i>particularly, the performing arts, because it's so</i>	
	<i>interactive and personal, I know my colleagues like I</i>	having personable contact; knowing your peers
	<i>know myself. They become your best mates and your</i>	building the relationship
	<i>workmates at the same time. So yeah, definitely</i>	being comfortable with certain others
	<i>having them there, it's definitely positive. We all help</i>	being there
	<i>us graduate. It's not an individual thing at all, which is</i>	being on the same team
	<i>fantastic.</i>	

In considering these relationships, university academics were identified as 'integral' people to have a relationship with for the LSES students. They were seen as an authoritative source whereas Student Services was seen as an anonymous entity:

"It's quite daunting walking into a building and not knowing anybody."

[Drew]

This was an early indication as to why students go to lecturers before they seek support from Student Services. An interesting insight was provided by one student that highlighted a possible reason for this response:

“...we’ve all had at least 12 years of schooling that has programmed, you will go to your teacher if you have a problem. So you can’t just break that just because you’re at university.” [Jessie]

This concept warranted further exploration and was explored in later interviews. An early memo captured my thinking at the time, seen in Figure 3.3.

Early patterns during initial coding seem to suggest a need for financial support and a keen focus on relationships during the tertiary journey. One student commented that academics are seen as an authoritative source as you were always told to see your teacher in high school if you had a problem and that this thinking has carried into tertiary education. What is the importance of these relationships? How do they enable student success? Why are students opting to go to other staff, particularly their lecturing staff, instead of coming to Student Services?

Figure 3.3: Early memo on the importance of relationships in LSES students

3.2.5 Strong sense of drive and determination of LSES students

In addition to service awareness, service needs, the complexity of the LSES student experience, and the importance of relationships, it was emerging during initial coding that the LSES students were conveying a strong sense of drive toward achievement and success in their studies. While unable to compare the responses of the participants with responses from non-LSES students, the impression was that this drive was pronounced and, from my perspective as the interviewer, quite inspiring. There were some LSES students experiencing quite significant challenges, yet they had an overwhelming commitment to achieving success, for instance students with disability, terminal illness, complex caring responsibilities, and significant familial or financial constraints. Success was defined by the LSES students as ‘being a role model’ (C7), ‘fulfilling dreams’ (C96), ‘having accomplishments’ (C110), as well as ‘success is trying again and again’ (C118).

“...I’m doing something with my life and that it shows people that – because of me having a disability, shows them that even with me having a disability, I show them that I can make it into uni.” [Casey]

“...success for me is probably just making sure that I am always challenging myself and meeting challenges.” [Erin]

With a variety of patterns in the data already emerging in the initial coding process, I drafted a memo that captured a range of words and phrases that were coming to mind early in the initial coding process as depicted in Figure 3.4. The figure itself portrays these words in a similar fashion to how they were written in my memoing journal, demonstrating they were scattered thoughts. This page was part of my evidence-trail that influenced my later analysis and thinking about key themes.

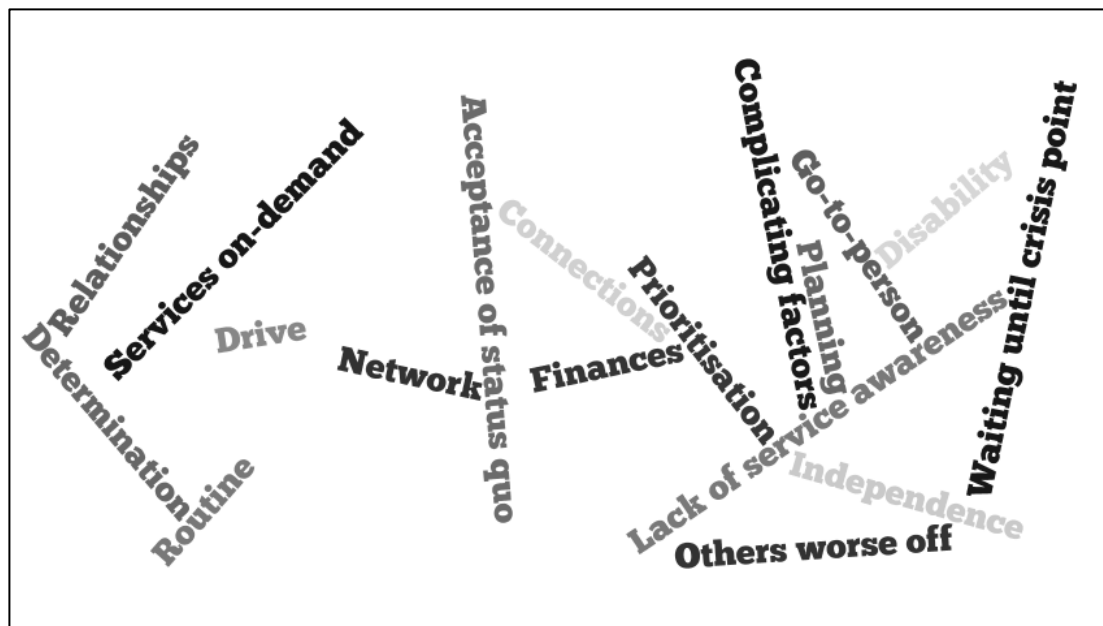


Figure 3.4: Memo illustrating a snapshot of concepts captured during the initial coding process

3.3 Conceptualising through focused coding

Following initial coding, and as repeated patterns and labels were emerging in the data, focused codes were applied to explore these patterns further. This stage of the GTM process is highlighted in Figure 3.5. The categorising component is explained in Section 3.4.

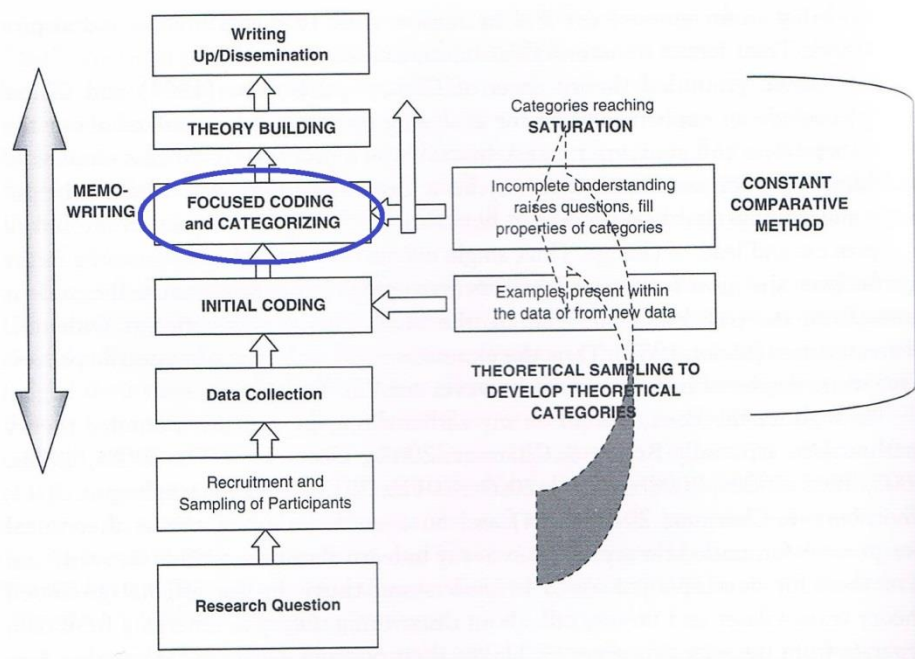


Figure 3.5: Visual representation of GTM highlighting the focused coding stage (Adapted from Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 133)

I selected five focused codes to outline in this section: student needs, the complexity of LSES student experiences, the importance of relationships, the emergence of ‘having trust’, and the LSES students’ meaning of success. These were considered to be the strongest patterns in the data that were generated from the initial codes owing to the number of initial codes drawn together as patterns to form the focused codes and the frequency they were generated. This section aims to provide a logical account of my analysis of the data, which will provide justification for the resulting theory.

3.3.1 Capturing student needs

As presented in Sub-section 3.2.2, participants identified an array of services that LSES students may, or actually do, find beneficial to their student experience. While initial coding resulted in a range of services desired by the LSES students, there was no theoretical benefit in itemising them in the further analysis. Focused coding brought the label to a higher level, a label that essentially summarised the numerous other codes, and as such the services were coded as ‘asserting service type’ as depicted in Figure 3.6. The focused code in this diagram, and in others that

follow, is coloured as orange while the initial codes that were combined to form this focused code are coloured blue.



Figure 3.6: The focused code ‘asserting service type’ and the associated initial codes that were combined to form the focused code

In addition to simply listing services, participants detailed their understanding of the expectations or desires for the LSES students in relation to student support services more generally. The LSES student participants in particular highlighted the importance of ‘wondering what is normal’ as they grappled with understanding whether their experiences of tertiary life is the same or similar to other students, or whether they are having some abnormal experiences. As presented in Sub-section 2.5.2, once the interview recording was turned off, students tended to ask whether or not their experience was consistent with other interviews and queried their normality, as if normal did in fact exist. This querying of normality was captured during the recorded interviews as well in relation to desiring, seeking, or accessing services, as

well as their intimate experiences of university life itself and its multiple complexities. One LSES student aptly articulated the importance of having others with similar experiences:

“Just to know that you’re not the only one going insane.” [Charlie]

Participants also indicated that the importance of ‘knowing services are there’ was pivotal in feeling they could rest assured that there was someone who could assist them in times of need; the point is conveyed by one LSES student participant:

“I think that that’s actually – just the presence of [Student Services] and knowing that it’s there is pretty important. I think that’s even one of the big mediums it’s worked, just seeing it everywhere, because it’s not making you feel different, I guess...I think again, that’s what the whole thing is, it’s all of the posters and things around, or just the little comments that are around our uni campus, it just makes it almost feel like it’s normal if you are going.” [Sam]

3.3.2 Discerning the complexity of the LSES student experience

Another emerging pattern during data analysis was the impression that the LSES students tended to experience an array of issues, both negative and positive, that impacted on their student experience. These issues included additional stressors to those imposed by higher education study itself, resilience, complicating factors, and the multiple reasons affecting their awareness and uptake of Student Services. This sub-section explains each of these topics.

Participants reported LSES students as ‘having extra stress’, meaning they seemed to have significant emotional hardship, in addition to the stressors of studying in higher education, as illustrated in Ashley’s reflections and Figure 3.7:

“Stressing about time. Stressing about what – how much time’s going to be taken away from my son and motherhood. How I’m going to get this completed in time. How I’m going to financially cope with all of this. How is everything going to work into a routine eventually.” [Ashley]



Figure 3.7: The focused code ‘having extra stress’ and the associated initial codes that were combined to form the focused code

In addition to ‘having extra stress’, resilience and strength were apparent among the LSES student experiences and I captured this through the focused code ‘bearing the burden’. This strength was an early indication of what may be deterring the LSES students from accessing support. ‘Bearing the burden’ was a phrase capturing the following sentiments raised by participants: ‘trivialising issues’ (C18), ‘accepting life the way it is’ (C22), ‘no luxury of failing’ (C14), ‘settling for less’ (C103), ‘dealing with it’ (C212), ‘minimising self-importance’ (C227), ‘just doing it’ (C228), and ‘not wanting to burden others’ (C230). The LSES students were reported to be denying themselves support or justifying their lack of engagement in support because of an internal desire to “just deal with it” [Ashley]. This resilience tended to have a high threshold for tolerance highlighted by the codes ‘having learned persistence’ (C20), ‘coping’ (C24), and ‘knowing I’ve got this’ (C139). The last of these was an *in vivo* code that was brought to my attention by a LSES student:

“So I think the reason why I didn’t seek the services of Student Services was because I am quite stubborn. I try to just shrug everything off. No, I’m fine, I’ve got this. I’ve got this. When really I know I don’t. Yeah, it’s weird. I’m a bit of an idiot in that sense.” [Drew]

‘Having extra stress’ and ‘bearing the burden’ were focused codes and as such participants were asked what this additional burden may be that was impacting, or would impact on the achievement of success. There were multiple components to this burden. ‘Complicating factors’ supplied a deeper, more incisive analytic handle on what I had coded originally. ‘Complicating factors’ was deemed an adequate phrase to capture and crystallise the stories I was hearing, as seen in Figure 3.8.

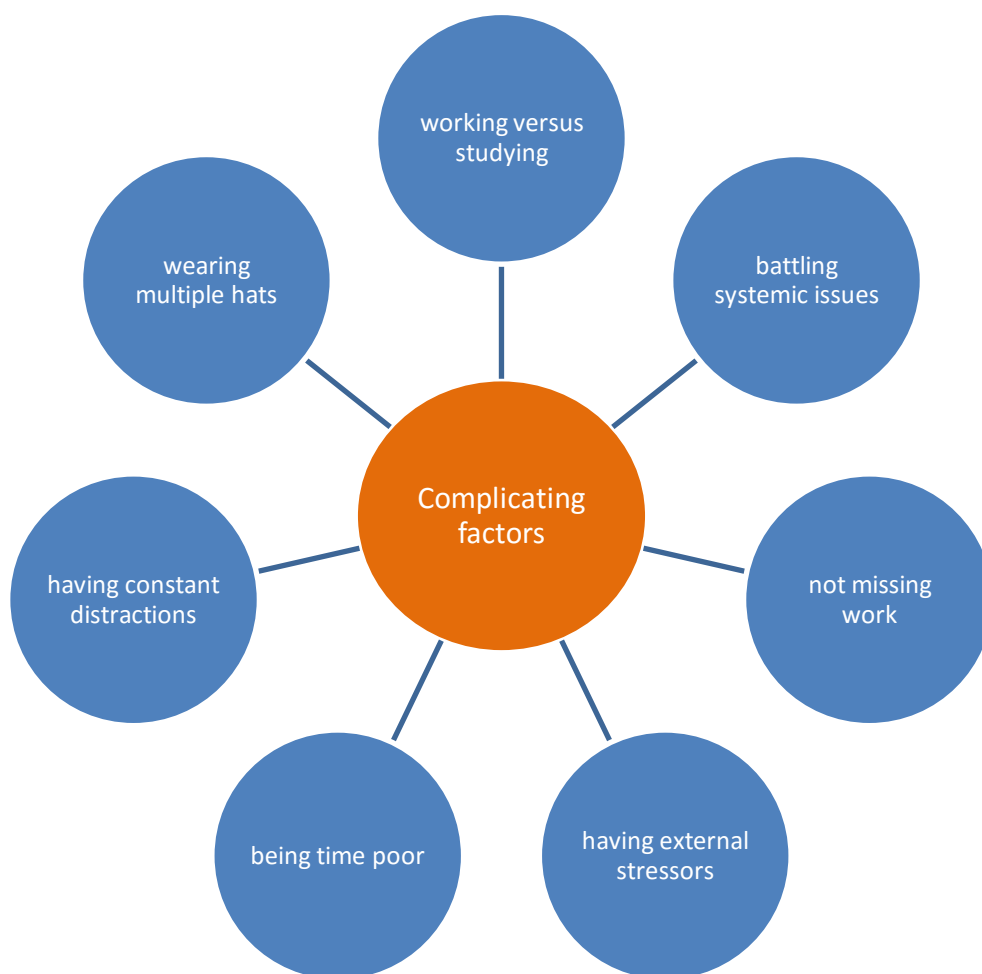


Figure 3.8: The focused code ‘complicating factors’ and the associated initial codes that were combined to form the focused code

Focused coding, in this instance, identified that there were some initial codes that were really saying the same thing but were coded differently, for example, the statement ‘accessing support when you hit the wall’ [Jordan]. This was a critical statement that illustrated the emotional impact of running into difficulties whilst studying at university and only deciding to seek any assistance when all else seems

impossible. It was not inconsistent with the sentiments of several LSES student participants' experiences, for example:

"...scholarships, I really didn't know anything about them, and only applied for them in I think it was the start of my third year, so towards the end of my degree. I actually did get a couple of book bursary ones, and that was essential. I kicked myself later, if I had have known that those sort of things were around, it would have been fantastic." [Jamie]

Given its emotive significance, 'accessing support when you hit the wall' [Jordan] was used as an *in vivo* focused code and the following initial codes explain this code in more detail: 'breaking point to access services' (C26), 'asking for help in hindsight' (C157), 'waiting too long to access support' (C179), and 'seeking help at peak of stress' (C229).

Adding to the complexity of issues impacting on the LSES students was explicit commentary on why students do not access Student Services. There were some helpful insights in the data about what was preventing students from accessing support. Initial codes along this line of thinking were – 'not knowing what Student Services does' (C57), 'stigma in accessing services' (C58), 'not thinking you need help' (C123), 'being not entitled to support' (C154), 'thinking what's wrong with me' (C198, *in vivo* code), 'having the fear of being judged by others' (C199) and 'not knowing what would help' (C233). To capture the essence of this data, 'not knowing what you don't know' was assigned as a focused code representing the uncertainties that the LSES students experience in relation to support services and accessing support.

3.3.3 Understanding the importance of relationships

Focused coding expanded the understanding and development of a range of concepts surrounding relationships and their involvement in the process of accessing support. When LSES students sought support, they tended to seek support in the first instance from people closest to them. 'Having supporters' was used to summarise statements that suggested 'having support from your family' (C49), 'linking with peers' (C87), 'having family who have been there' (C93), 'having peers as support' (C134), 'learning from peers' (C135), 'knowing your peers' (C138), 'using staff as support' (C167), 'staff holding my hand' (C168 *in vivo* code),

‘staff knowing me’ (C171), ‘seeing academics as most significant other’ (C190), ‘having informed academics’ (C191), ‘having sister as support’ (C206), and ‘asking tutors and lecturers for help’ (C208). An example of a LSES student speaking of their supporters is provided below:

“I think it was actually a phone call from my mother actually, saying, you know, you should actually look in and see if you can get a bit of support. I think by memory, that may have been what prompted me to actually look into it further, so yeah” [Jamie]

From this, I can construct the idea that the LSES students were surrounded by a network of supporters that they approached for assistance, or alternatively, will respond to advice from, as seen in Figure 3.9.

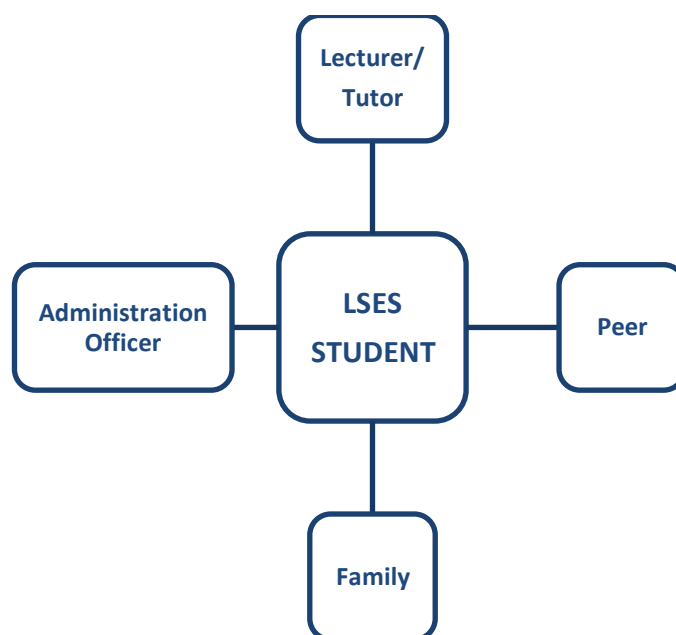


Figure 3.9: LSES students and their networks of supports

The LSES student participants spoke freely about their experiences of connectedness. ‘Having connectedness’ was seen as critical in their learning journey as described by a student studying to be a teacher:

“It’s good to know who – or the lecturer that is there with you, trying to teach you your profession, or whatever course you may be doing. They actually take the effort to reach you on a personal note. I think to have a relationship, whether it’s my students or anyone, I think that’s

fundamental of any good teacher really. That relationship word, so that's the backbone of it I believe." [Jamie]

'Having connectedness', or networks, was seen as long lasting and personal as seen by the initial codes making up the focused code in Figure 3.10. These networks were the mechanism by which the LSES students sought or received support.



Figure 3.10: The focused code 'having connectedness' and the associated initial codes that were combined to form the focused code

3.3.4 The emergence of 'having trust'

Three patterns in the data from this research in regards to focused coding have been discussed so far. I have provided commentary, explanation, and illustration to justify the construction of these patterns. The fourth pattern was the emergence of trust. This was a critical turning point in the conceptualisation process. What follows is a summary of how trust emerged in the interview process, followed by

how trust became a line of inquiry in the interview process, together indicating how meaning was made of the term trust.

Preliminary exploration of the concepts of connectedness and networks brought about the term “trust”. The term “trust” and the code ‘having trust’ (C95) emerged at the fourth interview:

Facilitator: *Why does that make the difference, if they said go see someone?*

Interviewee: *Because there's that level of trust. We trust that they're going to do everything that is right by us, and personally as well. So...*

Facilitator: *That's a really important point. Does that account for the reason that because you don't know Student Services staff, there's an element of trust not there?*

Interviewee: *Yeah definitely. It's quite daunting walking into a building and not knowing anybody. [Drew]*

The concept of trust arose again when interviewing a staff member about the experiences of LSES students. She reaffirmed the importance of trust in the ninth interview:

“The academic staff have, particularly in the faculty that I work with, they've drilled it into the students, go to Helen if you have a problem...[s]o it's sort of that thing, and I guess over a period of time they've learnt to trust that, okay yes I had the information - as much information as I know about to be able to tell them about it.” [Jessie]

‘Having trust’ was deemed an important facet of relationships and the code was rated at a high level of importance due to its impact in the interviews. As Charmaz (2014) identified in her GTM research, “[o]ccasionally, someone will say something that captures and crystallizes what other people indicated in earlier interviews” (p. 90), and Ashley was able to pinpoint what appeared to be a core issue:

"You wouldn't necessarily go and just ask for somebody just because, but if somebody that you know and trust told you to go and said, they'll probably be able to answer your question well, you'd go and talk to them." [Ashley]

As a result of it appearing to be an important construct, trust became a line of inquiry. In understanding 'having connectedness' and 'having trust', I asked participants about networks and connections. Understanding the meaning of 'having trust' was generated from this line of questioning. Although not yet elevated to a category, it was a concept I was exploring. Initial codes were used to capture the elements of 'having trust'. 'Being familiar' and knowing someone seemed important with several initial codes relating to this concept such as 'knowing names and faces' (C165), 'being on the same team' (C63, *in vivo* code), 'being comfortable with certain others' (C72), 'pre-existing relationships' (C213). The LSES students tended to find they were more comfortable with people with whom they were familiar as expressed by Cassidy:

"I think people that are close to you, they know what your best interests are, they understand what you're going through and that. Whereas if you talk someone like maybe to say [the university] for instance, they might not understand what you're going through during that time. They might not have any background information about you. I think when you're close to someone they know what you need, they know when you need it and what to say to you and what to do. I think that's just really helpful for like if you want to go forward. When you're down they understand, they just listen to you." [Cassidy]

Casey talked about who she would go to for support at university and explained why she was going to a particular staff member:

"Because I know her." [Casey]

In trying to understand networks and connections, and their interplay with trust, participants also placed emphasis on having support that was on demand - 'being there' where 'having available support' (C216), 'being open' (C116) and 'having responsive support' (C217) formed part of what was seen to be trust. 'Being

there' incorporated the following characteristics: 'having no question a stupid question' (C117, *in vivo* code), 'doing everything right by us' (C141), 'being unconditional' (C159), 'having friendly support' (C163), 'showing they care' (C240), 'welcoming' (C251), 'making the effort' (C261), 'willing to help' (C164), and 'knowing they're there' (C247 *in vivo* code). These characteristics presented in ways outlined by Ashley and Erin below:

"I guess somebody that's there, they answer questions or whatever when you need them and - yeah, I suppose just building on that relationship thing, that you've built a relationship and, I guess, just - I don't know, gets you a lot..." [Ashley]

"I trust them [lecturer] because I believe that they do want the best for students." [Erin]

In further exploration of the meaning of 'having trust', participants referred to 'having credibility' (94). They spoke about 'seeing positive reputation of services' (C189), 'having expertise' (C221), 'staff knowing more' (C223), 'having evidence-based confidence' (C112), 'having knowledge' (C193), and 'having integrity' (C140). 'Having credibility' includes 'knowing they know what you need' (C253), 'having experience' (C169), and 'being reliable' (C224). LSES students stated that they were only accessing the support that was tried and proven. This notion of 'having credibility' ignited questions for me as a researcher that informed the development of theory, as identified in Figure 3.11.

LSES students tend to describe the networks that they access for support as being made up of credible individuals. Credibility was an important component of who to approach for support, or who to receive advice from. Lecturers are seen as credible. Their peers or family who have been there, are seen as credible. Is it possible that students don't access Student Services because they don't trust its credibility? When Student Services are promoted and marketed, are we promoting its integrity and credibility? Would this make a difference?

Figure 3.11: Memo on 'having credibility'

‘Having trust’ was identified as a multi-faceted complex construct with significant importance to the research study. Key characteristics of ‘having trust’ were identified as ‘being familiar’, ‘being there’, and ‘having credibility’.

3.3.5 Understanding the meaning of success

The final pattern in the data to be discussed during the focused coding stage is the LSES students’ meaning of success. A few key patterns emerged when discussing success and what self-defined success was for LSES students. There was overwhelming consistency in responses referring to ‘desiring change’ and there was a strong sense that this change would make their success. Figure 3.12 refers to the focused codes that aligned with this desire for change.

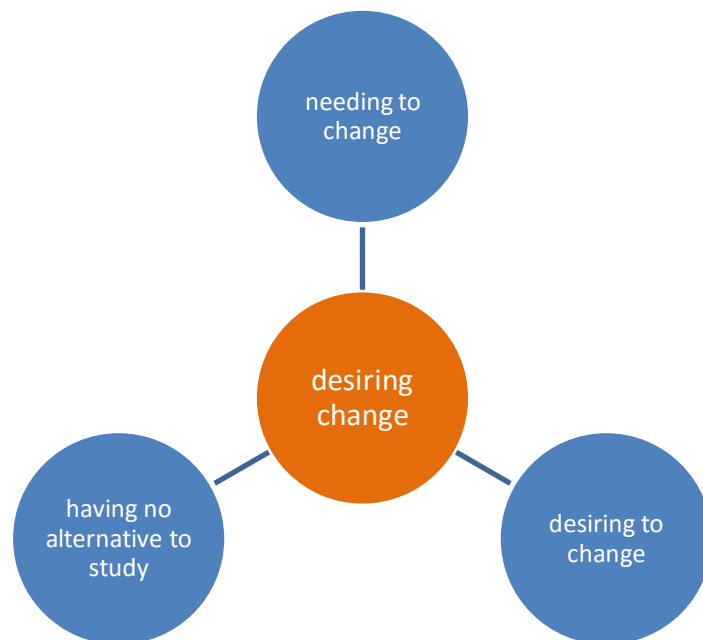


Figure 3.12: The focused code ‘desiring change’ and the initial codes that were combined to form the focused code

Success was not simply to get a degree and find a job, a common assumption about students accessing higher education. The LSES students interviewed saw success as ‘being a role model’ and ‘proving a point’ as illustrated by Casey and Erin below. These goals were far more personal than a transaction like attaining a degree. ‘Having persistence’ appeared to be an important part of *making success*.

“...it’s kind of success in yourself, because you know you’re going to end up somewhere better in the future.” [Drew]

“...study makes me feel very – I guess happy, in that I know I’m doing something with my life and that it shows people that – because of me having a disability, I show them that I can make it into uni.” [Casey]

Success was borne out of ‘having heightened determination’ that symbolised a strong sense of drive and passion for the end result, whatever that may have been. There appeared to be significant levels of commitment and intent in student responses about achieving success, some of which are captured in Figure 3.13, which outlines the formation of the focused code ‘having heightened determination’.

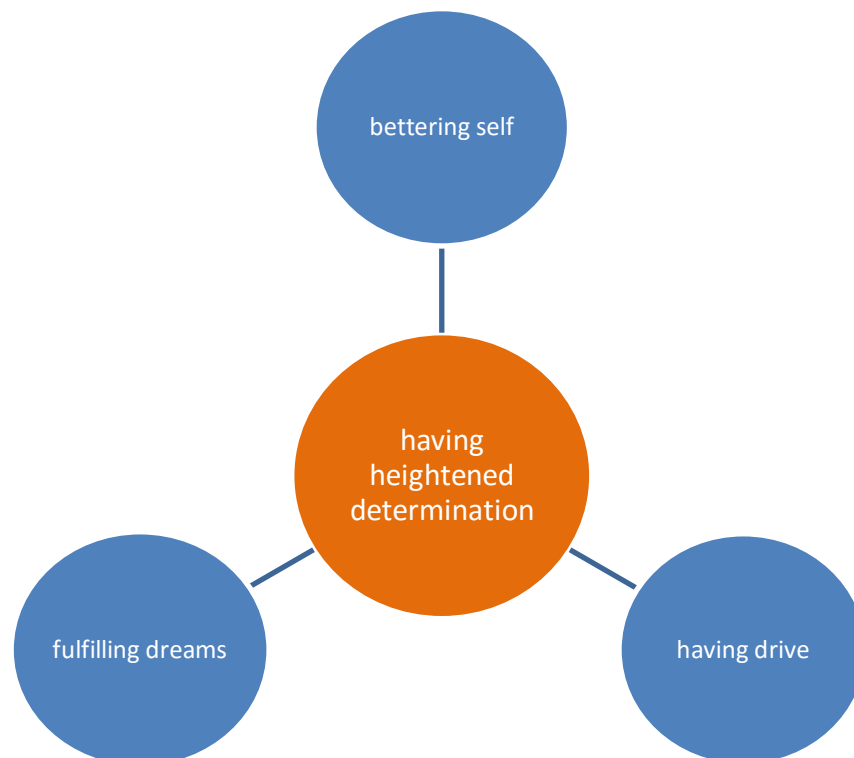


Figure 3.13: The focused code ‘having heightened determination’ and the initial codes that were combined to form the focused code

3.4 Generation of categories to form theory

So far, this chapter has provided a narrative on the analysis of participant commentary and how particular patterns in the data were emerging. This section outlines the logical process of decision making during the analysis of the data, further advancing my justification for the resulting theory. What follows is a discussion of patterns in the data that were elevated to categories and the reasoning behind these decisions. The intent of this particular section is highlighted in Figure

3.14, the categorising component, as well as the formation of properties of the categories. Properties serve to define the category.

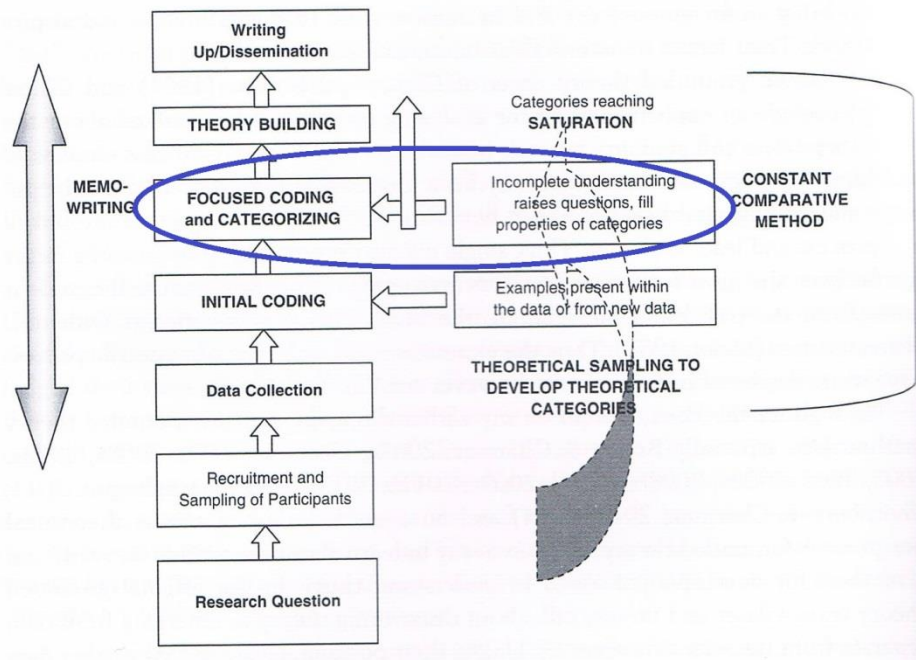


Figure 3.14: Visual representation of GTM highlighting the categorising stage (Adapted from Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 133)

The constant comparative process generated patterns in the data which resulted in four core categories to build the theory – *needing support*, *complicating factors*, *trusting networks*, and *making success*, as shown in Figure 3.15.

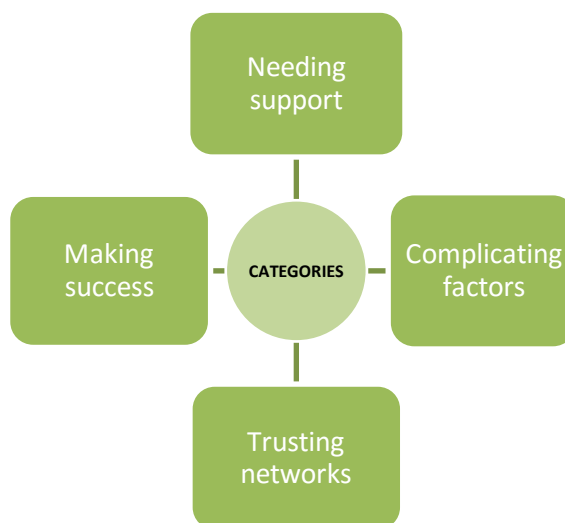


Figure 3.15: The four core categories generated in this study

Figure 3.16 provides the focused codes that informed the development of each of the categories. Thereafter, each category is explored in turn.

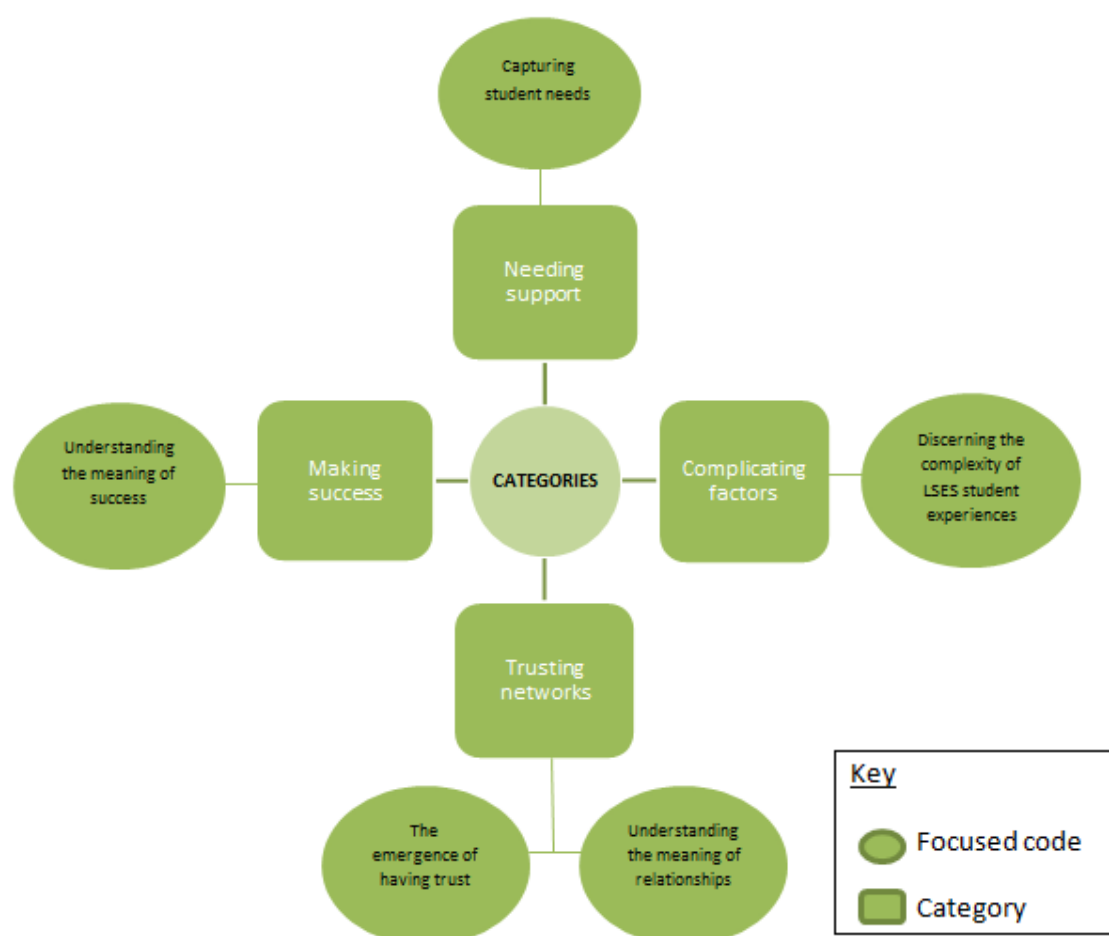


Figure 3.16: The development of core categories informed by emerging patterns in the data in focused codes

3.4.1 Needing support

Needing support was the first category formed as being integral to the emerging theory. Given that a theory was to be generated that would inform our understanding of LSES students accessing support services, and given my understanding of LSES student experiences generally, it was not surprising that the findings highlighted that the LSES students desired and sought support.

Needing support is a term that summarises the general testaments made by the LSES students about what would assist them to achieve success. *Needing support* captures LSES students' needs. During the interviews, participants identified a

range of services that they believed would assist them to achieve success, ‘asserting service type’ in their responses. *Needing support* encompasses the view that some LSES students did not know if they needed support as they could not determine if ‘they are normal’, while others were comforted by the notion that Student Services and other supports ‘are there’ for times of need. *Needing support* acknowledges that not all students were aware of support available and those who were aware of supports differed in the uptake of those services. I draw on a memo to reflect my thinking at this stage of analysis in Figure 3.17.

The information shared by LSES students to date demonstrates that the services they would like to see while studying at university mirror the services that are actually on offer in the university that they are studying with. This is validating evidence for Student Services departments. What continues to be a question in this research and what continues to be of great importance to Student Services in higher education is, firstly, how do we make LSES students aware that the services exist, and secondly, how do we engage students from LSES backgrounds with those services?

Figure 3.17: Memo regarding offering versus accessing services

The focus codes generated around capturing the needs of students such as ‘asserting service type’ and ‘wondering what is normal’ and ‘knowing services are there’ were important for informing this category and subsequently have been assigned as properties of the category, as outlined in Figure 3.18.

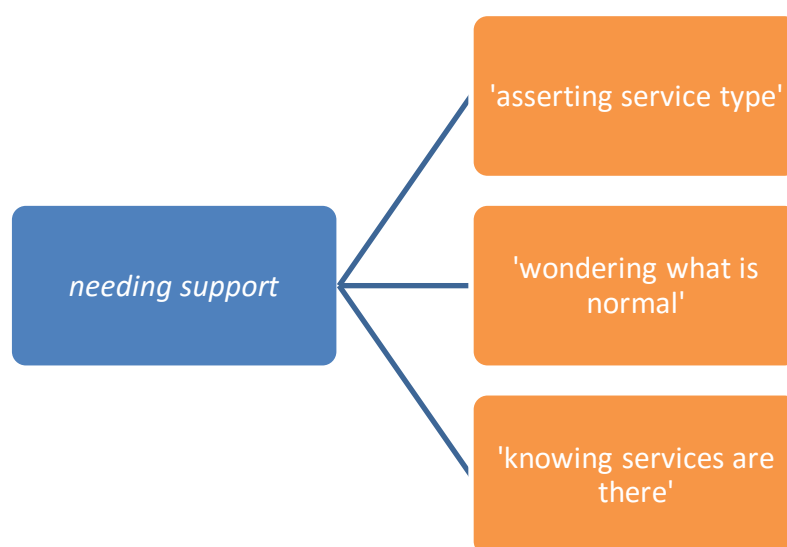


Figure 3.18: The category *needing support* and its associated properties

Needing support and its properties are illustrated by some participant quotes below, demonstrating that the LSES students studied were a diverse group with diverse views and experiences:

“I think that you’ve got an idea that there’s all these other things out there. You don’t know what they do, whether you’re entitled to it” [Pat]

“No [I don’t know what Student Services does]. I’ve seen the sign outside and read it and thought yeah, okay, all right, keep walking...I just think I’ll be right, I’m alright, there’s people that need [Student Services] more than I do and I don’t want to worry them with my stuff when there’s people that need it more than I do” [Ashley]

“I didn’t know that you could [seek support]. It’s probably all there in front of my face but I didn’t know that...” [Charlie]

3.4.2 Complicating factors

The second category generated to inform the emerging theory was *complicating factors*. The focused code ‘complicating factors’ was elevated to a category as it encompassed the complexities that LSES students experience and the multiple barriers they conveyed as challenging their ability to seek or access support. *Complicating factors* as a term was intended to recognise and appreciate the multifaceted circumstances that impact on LSES student experiences; illustrated with its properties in Figure 3.19.

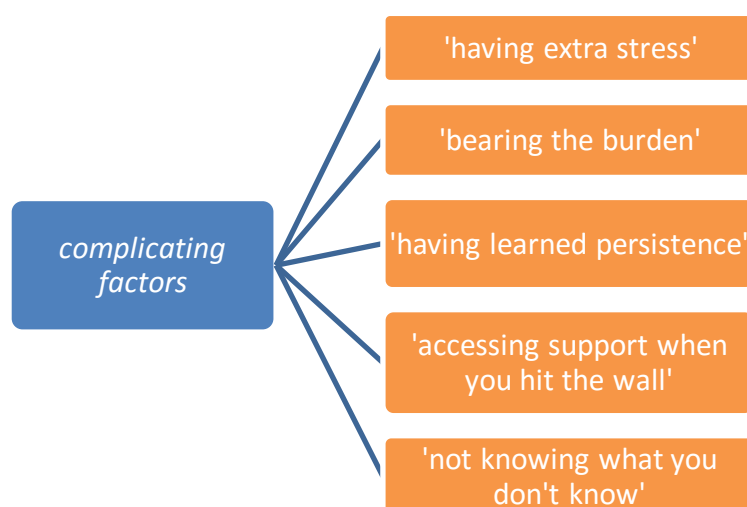


Figure 3.19: The category *complicating factors* and its associated properties

Complicating factors is best described by the voices of LSES student participants. After a LSES student participant raised the term ‘stress’, I used the opportunity to explore the construct further from her perspective:

Facilitator: *What’s stress to you?*

Interviewee: *Heightened, anxious. Just feeling anxious, feeling muddled, constantly your brain’s just go, go, go, go, go. What do I do now? What do I do now? Lack of sleep or poor sleep because you’re feeling anxious about what needs to be done. Tired, lethargic. What else? A range of things. Then you start losing your motivation because you get so run down. [Charlie]*

This same participant raised the difficulties of time management and the multiple responsibilities she needed to oversee in addition to her studies. Her response was useful in understanding the complex matrix of responsibilities that she has:

Facilitator: *What are you managing when you’re managing time?*

Interviewee: *Everything. Yards, cooking, shopping, bills, children, illness. My children have an uncanny knack of getting sick like days before I’ll have a major assignment due and I kid you not, it’s like clockwork. I think it’s probably the stress from me and there are definitely times where if I’m really busy for that week our meals aren’t probably as good as they should be. [Charlie]*

Complicating factors were raised by all participants. All had a complex array of challenges to share during the interview that, through their eyes, LSES students experience. All commented on the impact those challenges have on the ability of LSES students to succeed in their studies. Many participants identified these challenges as reasons for LSES students not being aware of Student Services or being reluctant to access Student Services.

3.4.3 Trusting networks

In addition to *needing support* and *complicating factors*, I identified *trusting networks* as a category to inform the emerging theory. *Trusting networks* is the term used to describe the connections that LSES students default to for support, or are more likely to receive and accept advice from. They are people with whom they have some connection and this connection is built on the principle of trust, that is, the networks are trusting. *Trusting networks* provided an understanding for the importance of relationships that appeared so critical to student experiences as outlined by participant, Sam:

Yeah well, it comes back to the whole – the respect and the trust of the people you have – you’ve been able to approach and you’re comfortable to approach. If they’re on a first name basis, they know [said person] and they know what she’s going to do a good job, then why would you not trust that if you’ve trusted every other advice they’ve given you for the year. [Sam]

I originally opted for ‘having trust’ and ‘having networks’ as two separate core categories but further analysis suggested that ‘having trust’ was a property of ‘having networks’ and ‘having connectedness’. The emergence of the phrase *trusting networks* arose due to the sheer importance placed upon having a circle of trust whilst studying in higher education. It was originally difficult to make a commitment to a core category. It was difficult to identify a code in its own right or to have one a property of the other; however, *trusting networks* aided the analytical theoretical meaning. It emerged that ‘trust’ and ‘networks’ together was a more meaningful concept.

Trusting networks is a category that works from the principle that the connections LSES students opted to engage with are founded on a suite of characteristics that are critical, and I call these the properties of *trusting networks*. These are shown in Figure 3.20, along with core phrases from LSES students that capture the essence of these characteristics. *Trusting networks* are founded on the idea of people ‘being there’, ‘being familiar’, and ‘having credibility’.

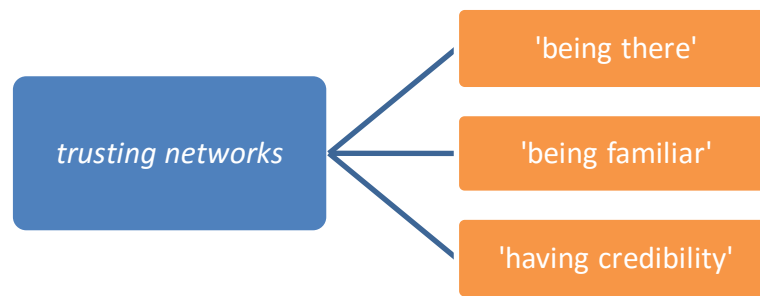


Figure 3.20: The category *trusting networks* and its associated properties

The three properties of *trusting networks* had been generated from coupling a range of characteristics raised by participants, as demonstrated in Figure 3.21.

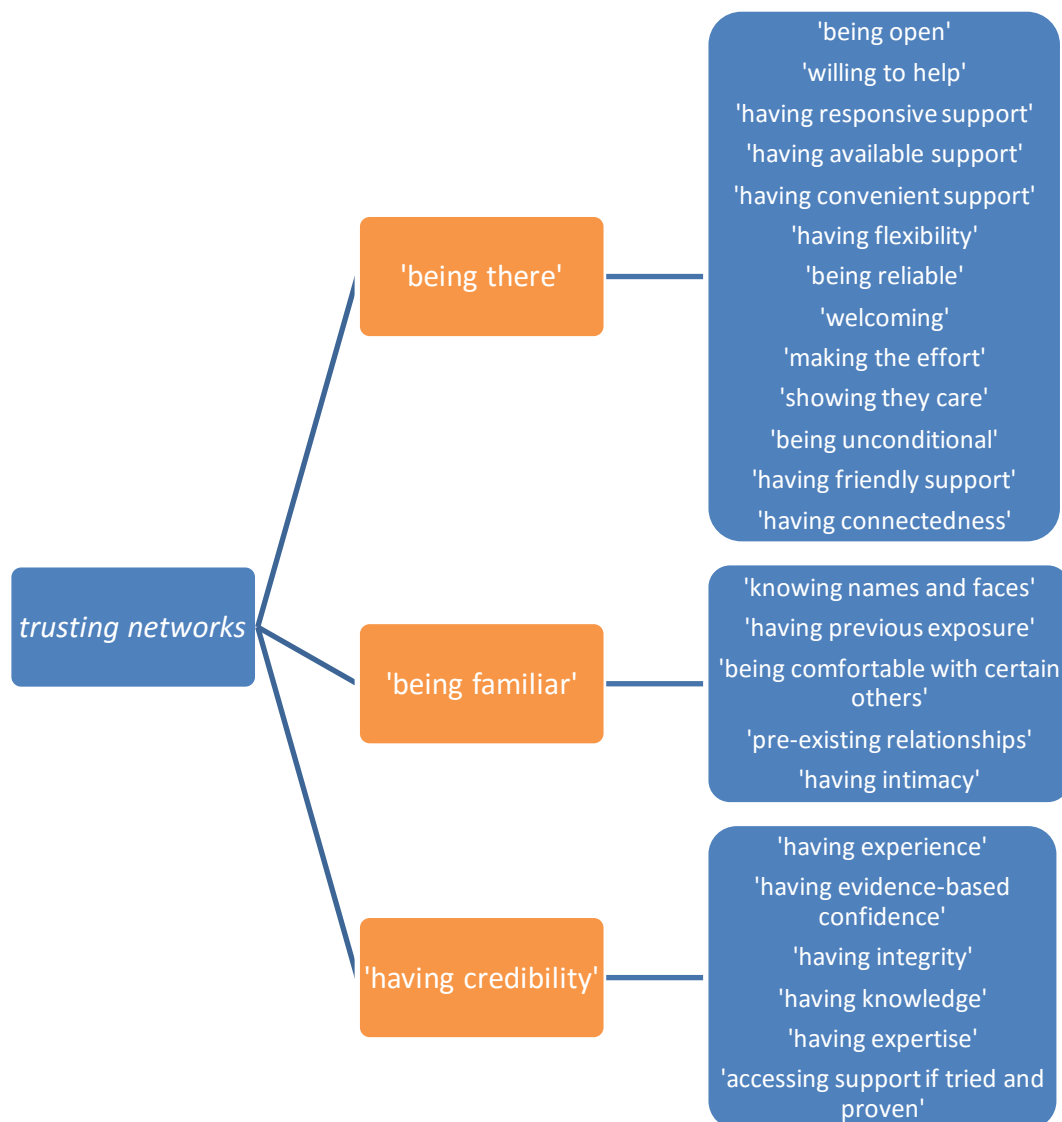


Figure 3.21: The development of properties for *trusting networks*

As a result of these characteristics, *trusting networks* were generally regarded as family, friends, institutional peers, lecturers and tutors, administration, and professional staff members (most commonly library staff members or enrolment support staff members). The networks that LSES students accessed for support were based on relationships and those relationships were built on trust.

3.4.4 Making success

Making success was generated as the fourth and final category to signify the intent that LSES students had about making their own success and the conviction they had in doing so. It not only represents what success means for LSES students but also the drive and determination they had in achieving this success as represented by the Erin:

“I always go back to how can I make myself proud and my family proud. I sort of look around sitting – sometimes I just sit back and go would certain people in my life be proud of where I am and proud of the person I am and the decisions I make.” [Erin]

A memo in Figure 3.22 captures the heart of what was interpreted from participants during the interviews.

LSES students have a great deal of determination – a will to succeed. It appears as though they think there are no alternatives to succeeding. There is no other scenario aside from achieving.

Figure 3.22: Memo on *making success*

Making success was identified as having a range of properties that are listed in Figure 3.23. It was informed by coding such as ‘having persistence’, ‘being a role model’, ‘making others proud’, and ‘proving a point’.

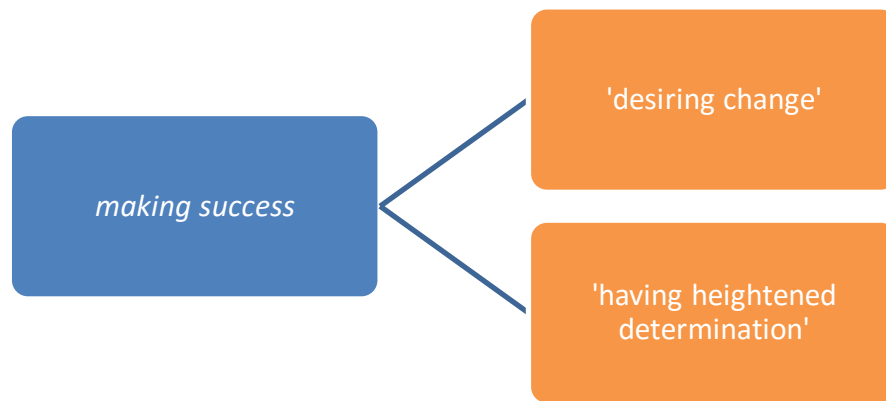


Figure 3.23: The category *making success* and its associated properties

3.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the process of data analysis and its associated findings. It has illustrated the codes that were generated, and the emerging patterns in the data and categories. The constructed codes and categories were justified by providing examples of participant commentary as well as excerpts of memos that demonstrated my analytical thinking at the time. The chapter has introduced the four core categories generated in this study – *needing support*, *complicating factors*, *trusting networks*, and *making success*. The next chapter addresses the research questions and shows the relationships between the core categories that were used to generate theory, the stage of theory building in GTM.

CHAPTER 4 THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

4.1 The purpose and structure of the chapter

The previous chapter presented the findings of this research in detail, including the coding and the formation of categories. For the remainder of this thesis, the categories are now referred to as key themes. This is for clarity and serves to remove methodological jargon from the explanation of the generated theory. This chapter describes the process of theory building and how the theory was informed by answers to the study's research sub-questions and by each key theme. A conceptual map illustrates the inter-relationships among the key themes that formulated the substantive theory: *needing support*; *complicating factors*; *trusting networks*; and *making success*. Along with answers to the research sub-questions, this chapter also provides an answer to the primary research question and presents the emergent theory, the theory of trusting networks. In doing so, while this chapter refers to "LSES students", it is important to note that I am not generalising these findings to all LSES students. When referring to "LSES students", the views presented here are constructions formed about the LSES student experiences that were articulated during the interviews in this research and specifically relate to the participants of this study.

4.2 Research questions

The study comprised one primary research question with three sub-questions, introduced in Section 1.6 and repeated here:

What theory can inform the development of student support services in Australian higher education to respond effectively to the non-academic needs of LSES students?

- *What non-academic matters influence self-defined success for LSES students?*
- *What non-academic services or help do LSES students expect from their university whilst studying?*
- *What factors affect LSES students' uptake of non-academic services or help?*

It was presumed that only in the process of answering the three sub-questions could an answer to the primary research question be articulated. The findings informing the answers to the sub-questions are provided below. Thereafter, answers to the sub-

questions are used for theory building and to answer the primary research question. The stage of GTM outlined in this chapter is highlighted in Figure 4.1.

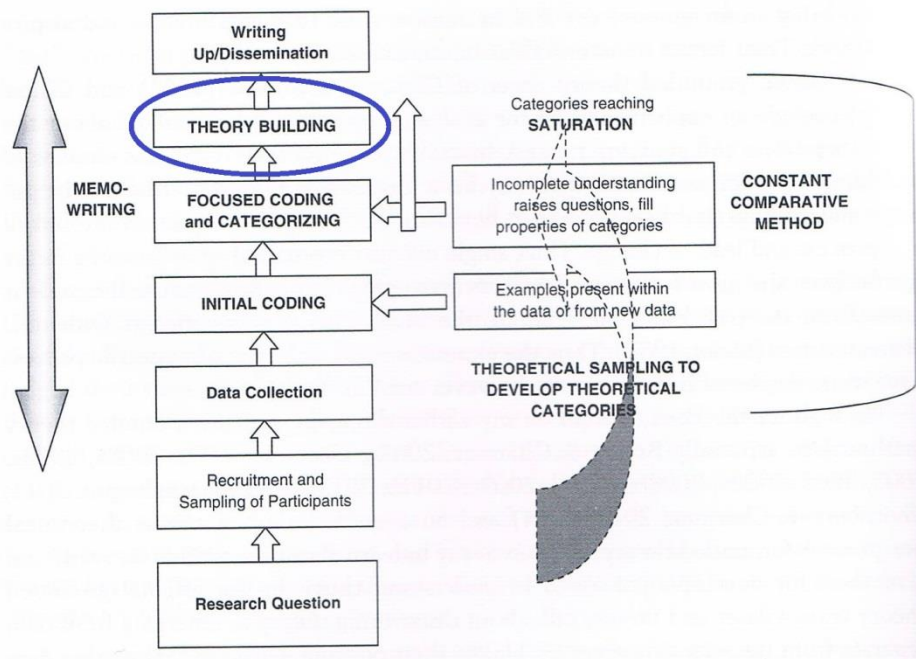


Figure 4.1: Visual representation of GTM highlighting the theory building stage (Adapted from Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p. 133)

4.3 What non-academic matters influence self-defined success for LSES students?

The sub-question “What non-academic matters influence self-defined success for LSES students?” was designed to gain an understanding of what circumstances enable a LSES student to achieve success in higher education. To establish answers to the question, it was necessary to develop an understanding of what LSES students define as success. This section draws on the participants’ definitions of success and also refers to the drive and determination that reportedly influenced LSES students to strive towards such success.

It could be presumed that for most people the primary objective of attending and achieving in higher education relates to graduating and securing employment in a preferred field. This reasoning was articulated by some participants. While employment-related prospects was certainly one element of self-defined success, LSES students also referred to success as more than completing a degree and gaining a job; indeed, their aspirations were largely non-vocational. As the researcher, I

deduced that LSES students' key objective was to achieve a change in state. They desired their circumstances to be different from what they presently were, rather than focusing on employment prospects alone. Higher education was a means to achieving this desired outcome. Typical responses included references to making others proud, being a role model to others, and proving a point to themselves and others. Some comments that referred to this thinking are below:

"For myself, to show that I can accomplish it..." [Taylor]

"I've got children. I've got a home. I want to be able to provide for them. Not just provide but I want to travel. I want to go around the world. I want to take them. There's things that I want now and having that degree I think will contribute to that." [Charlie]

"...making my parents proud." [Cassidy]

Success for LSES students was more meaningful and more personal than a transactional process. An example of this was provided by Alex:

"Well just bettering yourself." [Alex]

"...you're evolving who you are to be a better person..." [Brady]

Success was discussed passionately by students and could be achieved only by changes in their own behaviour, through personal direct action. Success was within their influence and in their control. Participants expressed a lot of personal intent and self-efficacy with a strong will to succeed. The end state, success, was not considered to be possible through being dependent on the actions of others, as was pointed out by Taylor:

"...it's on you to fail." [Taylor]

Striving towards success for LSES students could be described as desiring self-actualisation, a pursuit of knowledge, and realising one's full potential.

Influencing the ability of LSES students to strive towards success, *making success*, was a heightened state of determination. What made these personal endeavours even more impressive were the experiences and circumstances shared by many of the participants. These included: having a disability; having a terminal

illness; having relationship breakdowns; having carer responsibilities; lacking support from family and friends; having financial constraints; and having estranged families. It was revealing to understand that the LSES student participants had heightened drive and determination in spite of what was considerable adversity: *complicating factors*. I concluded that this determination was the non-academic influence on achieving their success.

4.4 What non-academic services or help do LSES students expect from their university whilst studying?

The intent of this sub-question was to understand the expectations that LSES students had of Student Services in higher education, as well as what assistance they desired. This section provides an overview of the typical services or supports that LSES students desired while studying in higher education. The section also refers to the LSES student participants' desire to know what is normal.

LSES students in this study identified a broad array of service types that were important to them. Typical services were: financial support; childcare; support for disabilities; careers and employment services; counselling; accommodation advice; and advice regarding balancing life with study. The support needs of LSES students tended to map well against service offerings made by Student Services departments in higher education at the time of the research. The LSES students expected this support to be visible and just in time. Visibility, in this instance, referred to the accessibility of services as well as knowing that supports are available. Supports or services that are just in time are those that become available, or have a heightened profile, when they are most likely to be needed. The LSES students were not supportive of marketing material and emails promoting services when they were not seen as relevant to them at that point in time. Two LSES student participants' views about general marketing material for Student Services are described here:

"I've read about them but I tend to go over things that aren't applicable to me. I focus more on, okay, what's applicable to me... Those other services, yeah, no I didn't think I needed them." [Bailey]

"I didn't know that you could [access services]. It's probably all there in front of my face but I didn't know..." [Charlie]

In addition to knowing about an array of services that are likely to assist in their student learning journeys, the LSES students yearned to know that they were ‘normal’ compared with their peers. The LSES students reported that the mere visibility of Student Services departments and the services that they offer provides feelings of normality for them. According to the LSES students, if the university was offering certain services, it must have meant that there were more students than just themselves who were experiencing what they may be experiencing.

4.5 What factors affect LSES students’ uptake of non-academic services or help?

The final sub-question aimed to understand what impacted on LSES students’ propensity to access Student Services, or support from other services or individuals. I concluded that a multitude of factors had influenced LSES students accessing, or not accessing, support. LSES students simply “don’t know what they don’t know” [Erin]. One of the most influential factors was the lack of knowledge around what services were on offer and how to access them. Traditional marketing approaches, such as posters and flyers or presentations during orientation programs, were not working to raise the profile of Student Services:

“I didn’t know they could [help with] budgets, because for the first three years, I was living off of \$258 a fortnight.” [Brady]

The LSES student participants in this study tended to be reluctant to attend Student Services directly through the front door, that is, access the service directly, even if they did have an awareness of the services available. Some students had an awareness of services but a range of misperceptions prevented them from accessing what was on offer. Students did not know if they were eligible to receive support or considered others ‘worse off’ than themselves and that services should be focused on those individuals. In addition, ‘bearing the burden’ indicated that they did not want to worry anyone with their problems. There appeared to be a disconnect between recognising a problem and equating that with seeking assistance. A few students reported “waiting until crisis point” because they were “too deep into it to look” for services:

“I understand that [Student Services] want to prevent [problems] before it happens, but sometimes that’s not going to happen because we don’t think that we need them until we are too far gone...” [Sam]

Networks, a form of social capital, appeared to be critical to students accessing support. LSES student participants were more likely to seek help, receive, and accept advice from their personal networks rather than proactively seek out an official support service such as Student Services. LSES students were more likely to uptake services when a referral was suggested by someone within that network, ameliorating any perceived deficit in social capital:

“...you don’t really want to just come in and ask the dumb questions kind of thing to a random person.” [Ashley]

To complicate matters, the LSES students were spending relatively little time on campus. They were intent on accessing campus for lectures, tutorials, and the library, but socialising and mingling in other university activities were less important. This transient approach to campus engagement impacted on the number of connections that students had with the university and the frequency of contact with those connections. *Trusting networks* was a significant factor affecting the uptake of non-academic services or help. Given the reduced engagement with the university, this significantly increased the importance of the networks that were formed.

4.6 The primary research question and the inter-relationships among the themes

This chapter so far has presented responses to each of the sub-questions for the research. The responses have been informed by the study’s findings, including the key themes generated from the data gathered during the interviews with LSES students and student support staff members in higher education. This section aims to explicate the inter-relationships among these key themes in order to generate the theory.

The primary research question was: *What theory can inform the development of student support services in Australian higher education to respond effectively to the non-academic needs of LSES students?* This chapter has articulated what non-

academic matters influence self-defined success for LSES students. Success for the LSES students was creating a change in state that served as a personal goal. The LSES students described an array of services that they expected whilst studying. This list was not dissimilar to the offering made by Student Services in higher education in Australia and is somewhat validating for those Services. The LSES students provided expected parameters for these services – being visible and just in time. An understanding of what affected LSES students' uptake of non-academic services or other assistance has been generated. There was a range of *complicating factors* that impeded students' interactions with support services, as well as perhaps a reluctance to engage with these services or a lack of awareness of these services. These understandings about LSES student experiences are inter-related, as described in the following four sub-sections that illustrate my theorising. Subsequently, the generated theory of trusting networks is outlined and explained.

4.6.1 *Needing support* as a foundational principle

Needing support was the baseline theme on which the emerging theory was based. *Needing support* whilst studying in higher education was common for the LSES students. All students conveyed areas of support that they felt would assist them to strive for success (please see Sub-section 3.3.1). *Needing support*, as depicted in Figure 4.2, is a foundational principle of the emerging theory, recognising that LSES students need support whilst studying in higher education, and it is a prerequisite of the emergent theory. It has specific inter-relationships with the other key themes constructed in this study.



Figure 4.2: *Needing support* as a foundational principle

4.6.2 *Complicating factors and its inter-relationship with the other key themes*

There were multiple *complicating factors* that affected the LSES students' experiences of higher education. These *complicating factors* not only included an array of multifaceted issues that were additional burdens to study, but they also impacted on the LSES students' awareness of support services, as well as their intentions of accessing such support (please see Sub-section 3.3.2). The LSES students were likely to need support resulting from a range of *complicating factors*. There was a bidirectional relationship between the two themes. Figure 4.3 illustrates the relationship between the two categories.

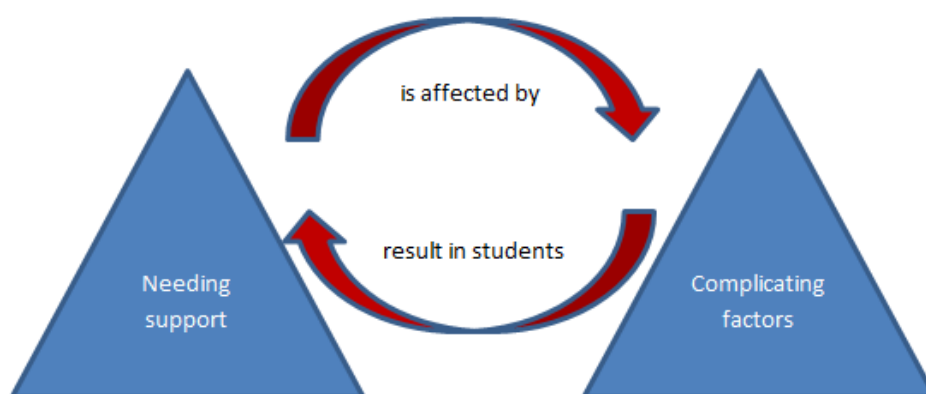


Figure 4.3: The bidirectional relationship between *needing support* and *complicating factors*

4.6.3 *Trusting networks and its inter-relationship with the other key themes*

Trusting networks emerged as a keystone principle for the emerging theory. *Trusting networks*, as a key theme, signified that the LSES students were more likely to receive or accept support or advice from those within their circle of trust than those from outside their circle of trust, as a form of social capital. This network was either an established connection prior to commencing study or was formed through their connections made whilst studying at university. All such connections were based on the principle of trust.

In the emerging theory, *needing support* was resolved via *trusting networks* and *complicating factors* were mitigated by *trusting networks*, as is depicted in Figure 4.4. In other words, *trusting networks* assisted students to access support and

assisted in resolving the multiple *complicating factors* that affected LSES student experiences.

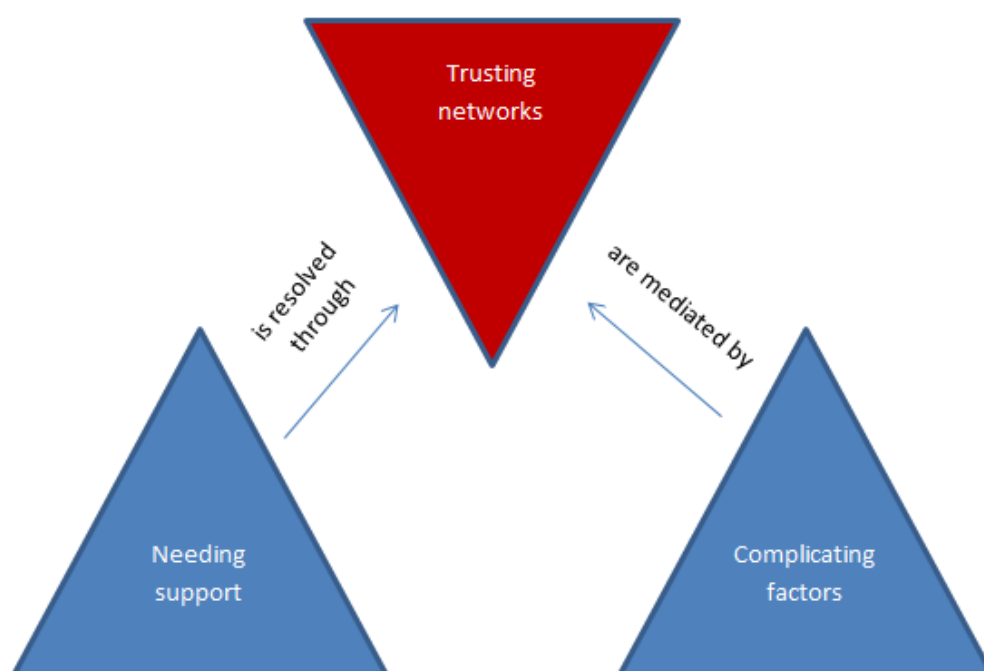


Figure 4.4: The inter-relationships among the themes of *needing support*, *complicating factors*, and *trusting networks*.

4.6.4 *Making success* and its inter-relationship with the other key themes

The fourth theme, *making success*, was the capstone principle in the emerging theory. *Making success* illustrated the ambition and determination that the LSES students had, which contributed to their desire to strive towards success, however they defined it. As *trusting networks* mitigated the impact of *needing support* and *complicating factors* on the student learning journey, it enabled the LSES students to strive towards making their own success, as is shown in Figure 4.5. *Making success* is a term that does not presume that a LSES student has made or achieved success, nor does it presume that *trusting networks* definitely result in LSES students' success. *Making success* is a process. LSES students were in the process of making their success as a result of accessing their *trusting networks*.

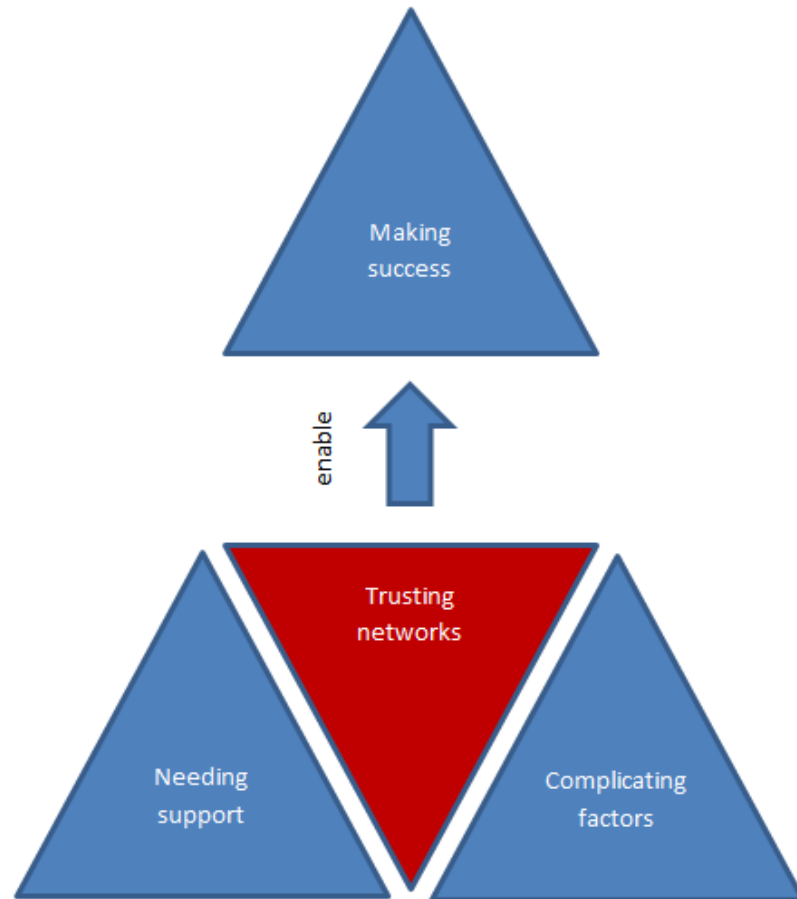


Figure 4.5: *Making success* as a keystone principle in the emerging theory

4.6.5 The theory of trusting networks

Following the process of theorising, including an analysis of the inter-relationships among the key themes, this sub-section outlines the emergent theory: the theory of trusting networks. The theory is now defined and an overview of the process of generating the theory is outlined. This sub-section provides further justification for the theory based on analytical thinking throughout the research journey.

The emergent theory aimed to address the primary research question, “*What theory can inform the development of student support services in Australian higher education to respond effectively to the non-academic needs of LSES students?*” The theory of trusting networks can be used to inform Student Services departments in supporting LSES students. The theory of trusting networks is illustrated in Figure 4.6 and is defined as a social concept:

The theory of trusting networks provides an understanding of the propensity for LSES students, who are needing support and who are affected by complicating factors, to seek out support and advice from those who are trusted from within their personal networks. This way of behaving increases the likelihood of LSES students' making success in higher education.

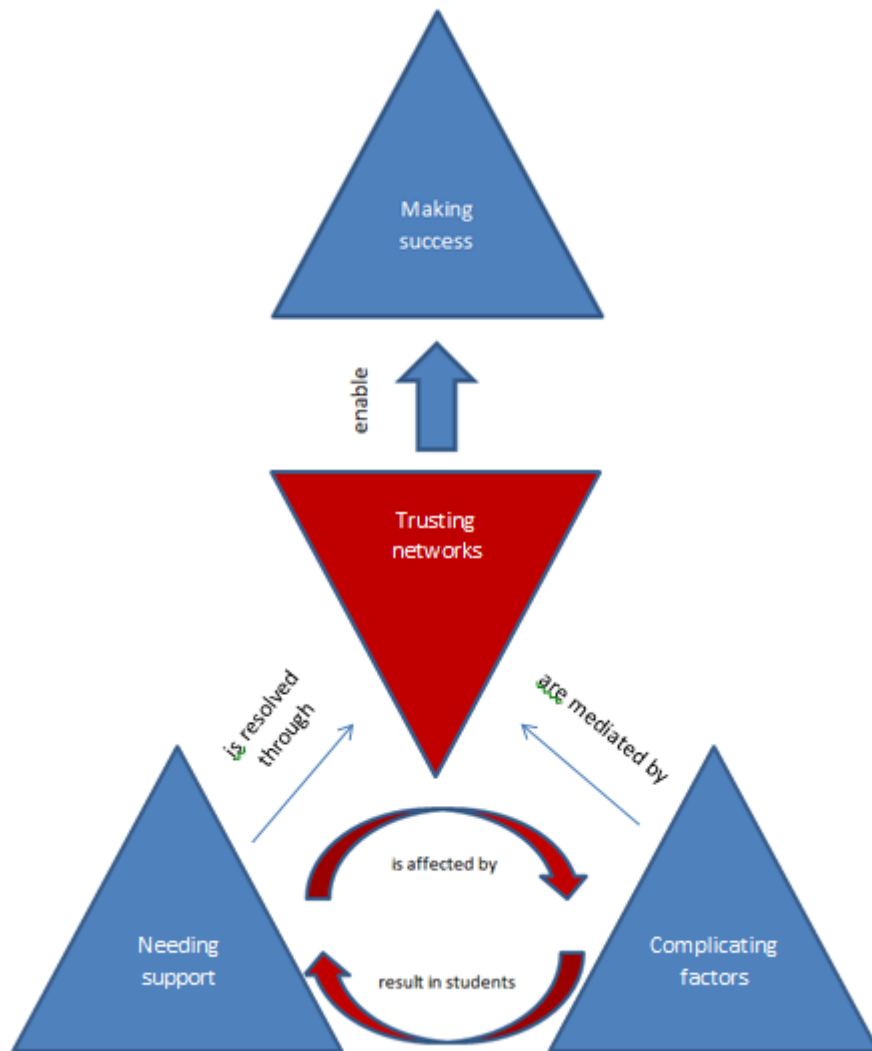


Figure 4.6: The theory of trusting networks

The theory was generated by taking account of multiple themes and the inter-relationship among those themes. The constructed theory evolved around a core, keystone theme. The case of having a key theme in generated theories is consistent with many grounded theories (Charmaz, 2006); in this case *trusting networks*. The significance of *trusting networks* as the core theme lies in its ability to link with all

other categories. This in turn has theoretical impact through its capacity to convey what the LSES students' experience in accessing support was really all about.

My reasoning behind the theory of trusting networks was based on the premise that trust between individuals generates a sense of connectedness, which in turn was the foundation of positive relationships. Further reasoning suggested that the LSES students gravitated to networks of positive relationships that they had formed. Such connectedness fostered a connection between LSES students and support. These networks were key to LSES students securing the support they desired and consequently enhanced their opportunities for *making success*. As the theory was emerging, an early memo reflects my thinking at the time, presented in Figure 4.7.

There is a variety of sources for how students find out how to access services, including university staff, studydesk, email, connections with friends and peers, and from academics. There is some perception that if staff are 'nice' they are 'helpful'. There is something about knowing the names and faces of people to get results – connections. They need a 'go-to-person'. Connections are services on demand.

Figure 4.7: Early memoing on the emerging theory

This memo demonstrated that early in the theorising process, common characteristics about supports were being articulated by LSES student participants. It was becoming apparent that connections with others were important in the process of accessing support. This was an early, yet critical, point in the theorising process that allowed me to make sense of later themes.

The theory of trusting networks does not seek to 'explain' the experiences of LSES students but rather seeks to 'understand' their experiences. This is a constructed theory that assumes multiple realities and, as a grounded theory as defined by Charmaz (2014), it assumes that social life is "processual" (p. 231).

4.6.6 The theory informing student support services

To complete my response to the primary research question, this sub-section explains how the theory of trusting networks can inform the development of student support services, particularly Student Services in Australia, to respond effectively to

the non-academic needs of LSES students. The theory of trusting networks is intended to be a valuable tool for planning and practice within Student Services in higher education. Generally, the theory implies that LSES students do not consider Student Services as part of their circle of trust by default. Student Services are generally not in LSES students' networks. Generating the theory has brought an understanding of why students were not aware of support services available, and, if they were aware of these services, why they may not have accessed such services. Further to this, LSES students were more likely to access Student Services if a trusting network member suggested that they do so. In practice, Student Services departments need to invest in two key relationships that are explained here.

The first key relationship for Student Services to develop is with LSES students' *trusting networks*. The theory of trusting networks informs Student Services that, regardless of LSES students' awareness of services, LSES students are more likely to uptake services if their trusted connections suggest they do so. Practically, this means that Student Services would benefit from engaging with the networks of LSES students – lecturers, tutors, administration, and other support staff members, as well as perhaps their peers and families – as is illustrated by Figure 4.8. LSES students have first level connections, their personal networks. Student Services need to engage with those first level connections and consequently would have a second level connection with LSES students.

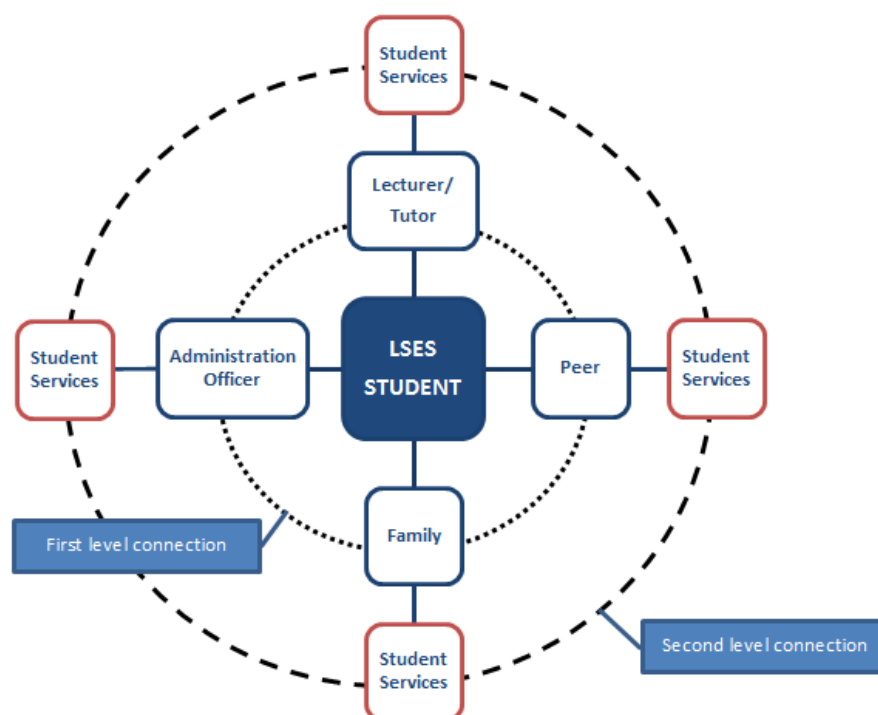


Figure 4.8: A diagrammatic illustration of Student Services engaging in LSES networks as second level connections

Engaging Student Services with the students' networks would include actively educating others about services and providing referral pathways. The students' networks need to be empowered to take a holistic perspective of the student and to consider the broader student experience in their interactions. Student Services need to take responsibility for ensuring that student networks are informed about the services available, eligibility for services and how to access them, and also to have a skill set to bring the student and Student Services together. A memo outlined in Figure 4.9 below reports my thinking about the application of the theory.

Student Services need to formulate the same network as students so that the network can bring Student Services into the students' network. Referrals increase likelihood of uptake of services – students and Student Services need to formulate the same network so that the network can bring Student Services into the students network.

Figure 4.9: Memo drawing attention to the idea of Student Services connecting with LSES students' networks

This memo was written at a time when I was thinking about the practical application of the theory of trusting networks, as illustrated by Figure 4.8. As earlier

described in Sub-section 2.5.5, memoing improves the capacity later to analyse the process and to assist in interpretations and the outcomes achieved.

Beyond building relationships with the LSES students' networks or circles of trust, Student Services would benefit from obtaining the trust of such connections as well. Why would connections encourage services if they did not have faith in the Service's ability to provide a high quality service to its students? This is achieved through the core properties of *trusting networks* – being familiar, being there, and having credibility.

The second key relationship in which Student Services departments need to invest, which arose in a memo outlined in Figure 4.10, is in the LSES students themselves. LSES students' experiences have demonstrated the importance of relationships in *making success*. Relationships are a critical success factor. Student Services would benefit from actively seeking opportunities to engage with LSES students to nurture relationships, and to demonstrate availability (being there), build familiarity (being familiar), and demonstrate their credibility (having credibility). This can be achieved by going to where the students, or their networks, are and participating in institutional activities that engage with them.

With relationships appearing to be an integral component in student support, it is important to realise that services should not be forced as a menu but rather relationships are to be built with students and instead have a conversation with them, listen to their needs and services should be guided from there.

Figure 4.10: Memo outlining the importance of Student Services building relationships with LSES students

There is merit in Student Services departments promoting their services via general marketing methods as they have done historically. LSES students have shared stories that the services being visible gives a sense of normality to students and even creates a superficial level of awareness for a proportion of LSES students that services do exist. The theory does not suggest doing away with traditional promotional and marketing methods of Student Services but the theory recognises that student awareness of services via such methods was not as critical, as students' networks created the necessary linkages for support.

The application of the theory of trusting networks requires a cross-institutional partnership between various departments across the university. It requires Student Services to be actively engaged in working with student networks and it requires that student networks take stock of the power and influence of their relationships with students in *making success*. Student Jamie summarised it well when he said:

“I think as a university and as a campus alike, I think everyone’s got to be – you have your different faculties obviously, but I think everyone’s got to be moving in the right direction as a team.” [Jamie]

4.7 Summary

This chapter has outlined the process of answering each of the research sub-questions in order to answer the overarching primary research question. The process of answering the research questions resulted in making theoretical sense of the relationships among the key themes generated from the LSES student participants’ perspectives. The chapter has outlined what non-academic matters influence self-defined success for LSES students, what non-academic services or help LSES students seek, and what factors affect LSES students’ uptake of non-academic services.

This chapter has explained the comprehensive decision making process regarding the findings that culminated in the theory of trusting networks. The theory of trusting networks is a unique finding that can inform the development of student support services in Australian higher education to enable them to respond effectively to the non-academic needs of LSES students.

The next chapter explores these findings against existing research and theory in the form of a literature review. As per GTM, the literature review will continue the constant comparative process. This literature review provides affirmation for the theory and extends existing research.

CHAPTER 5 LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 The purpose and structure of the chapter

In keeping with the GTM process, it is timely to review the findings of my research against the substantive field and to conduct what is generally called the “literature review”. This chapter continues the constant comparative process within GTM and compares the generated theory with existing theory as well as research in the field of study. In doing so, the chapter demonstrates how my findings depart from and/or affirm and strengthen the existing literature. Each component of the generated theory is explored in turn: *needing support*; *complicating factors*; *trusting networks*; and *making success*. The chapter closes with a cross comparative analysis of the theory of trusting networks with the student engagement literature. The literature review highlights that the theory of trusting networks, while consistent with other research, is unique in Student Services literature and therefore makes an original and significant contribution to the substantive field.

5.2 *Needing support*

The student experiences shared during the interviews in the current study highlighted that: (a) there were common themes in the types of support that students desired; and (b) they perceived that support would assist their success and/or minimise the impact of stressors on their learning experiences. This section reflects on these findings in the context of existing research by exploring the types of support desired, as well as drawing linkages with the existence and purpose of Student Services in higher education.

5.2.1 Types of support

The LSES students interviewed in my study described a range of supports that they believed did or would support their student learning journeys. These supports included, but were not limited to, counselling, accommodation advice, time management, financial assistance, and welfare advice. A more comprehensive list of services articulated by LSES students in this study was presented in Figure 3.6. These findings are consistent with previous research regarding the types of support that students, in general, believe will enable them to be successful in higher education (Bowles, Fisher, McPhail, Rosenstreich, & Dobson, 2014).

I have highlighted comparative findings earlier in Sub-sections 1.3.3, 1.4, and 1.5.1, which were known prior to the commencement of this research study. To reiterate the earlier commentary from the thesis's introduction, LSES students report financial strain (Bexley et al., 2013), time pressures, competing priorities, low confidence, issues with academic preparedness, and family support (Devlin & McKay, 2014), as well as a range of cultural, social, and educational factors that impact on their higher education experiences (Ferrier, 2006). Other research has highlighted that students identify their key enablers as being study assistance, time management and guidance, interactions with others, meeting staff members and being introduced to Student Services, feelings of belonging, and regular, visible, university-led, social events for friendships and networking, amongst others (Bowles et al., 2014). Previous research findings are consistent with the student experiences in my study.

A question early in my research journey was whether LSES students had differing support needs from those of non-LSES students. Whilst my study did not include a comparison between the two cohorts, the voices of the LSES students in my study shared similar support needs to those of non-LSES that have been articulated in previous literature. This is not a definitive response to the question. There are layers of complexity that may be added for LSES students and there is much diversity within LSES student groups, and this is discussed further in Section 5.3. This notion inspired me to undertake the research in the first instance and to explore whether Student Services can make a difference to the support needs of LSES students. I was aware, through my own experiences in Student Services and through my readings to date, of the difficulties that some LSES students faced in studying in higher education.

There has been much research to ascertain what the key influences on the retention and/or the success of LSES students in higher education are. While learning and teaching are common responses (McInnis, 2001; Tinto, 2002; Yorke & Thomas, 2003), the quality of relationships between academic staff and students (McGivney, 1996; National Audit Office, 2002; Thomas, 2002), and the process of establishing friendship networks (Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996; Thomas, 2002) were also seen as significant. It has been reported in previous research that students seek help and support from lecturers, support services, partners, children, their

parents and most importantly their fellow students (Moore et al., 2013; Stone, 2008). Furthermore, “[f]riends, family and peers have an important supporting role in the academic as well as the social domain. They can provide informal support and bolster a sense of belonging” (Moore et al., 2013, p. v).

The analysis of my findings suggested that Student Services are offering a suitable range of services that are aimed at addressing student support needs, such as financial assistance and counselling. At the same time, we need to consider whether, and how, students are accessing support. This discussion emerges in Sub-section 5.3.2.

5.2.2 The existence of Student Services

Along with comparing the common themes between the types of support that LSES students in this study noted and those identified by existing research, I want to link the very existence of Student Services with the notion that many students in higher education need support. There is a fundamental underlying principle in higher education that there are students, regardless of background, who require support to study at university as demonstrated by the breadth of literature globally on this topic (Crosier et al., 2007; Scott, 2005; Thomas et al., 2003b). The added benefits of enabling university students to be able to access support while undertaking their studies have long been demonstrated (Department of Employment, 1993; Ludeman & Strange, 2009; Thomas et al., 2003b). Some LSES students in this study shared the sentiment that additional support would be helpful to their studies. The very existence and evolution of Student Services departments in higher education in Australia highlight a response to the growing need for student support. Student Services arose as a discrete service to provide support to students that otherwise was being provided by academic staff members who were unable to commit the time, or did not have the necessary skill sets or resources, to support students effectively (Department of Employment, 1993). The mere fact that Student Services exist today and are in demand reinforces the concept that there are students who require and desire support at university. A study conducted in 2012 was designed to determine a student perspective on the effectiveness of Student Services (Neal, 2012). This was a qualitative study at a small regional college in the United States where Student Services were comparable to those in Australia. Results showed that students perceived Student Services as vital to their success, yet the

majority did not utilise the services. The current study and findings addresses this issue.

5.3 *Complicating factors*

The LSES students interviewed in this study shared a range of circumstances that demonstrated a complexity of factors impacting on their experiences in higher education - stressors in addition to the ordinary pressures of undertaking tertiary study. While there were diverse experiences shared by LSES student participants in this study, indicating that LSES students are a heterogeneous group, there was a common theme of complicating factors impacting on their student experiences. This finding suggests that LSES students may benefit from a range of support services provided by Student Services to mitigate most effectively some of the *complicating factors* that they experience. Firstly, my findings are consistent with existing literature about LSES student support needs; however, secondly, and of further significance, my findings can be considered to challenge a long standing understanding of LSES student capacity. I address each finding in what follows as well as turn attention to an incongruence that exists between LSES students and higher education institutions, which further contributes to *complicating factors*.

5.3.1 Issues affecting LSES students

Not only does existing literature demonstrate that LSES students may require support to succeed in higher education, but the majority of that literature also highlights the notion that LSES students may be more disadvantaged than non-LSES students owing to a range of *complicating factors* that they experience. Many students are reported to exhibit a raft of issues in studying at university, including financial difficulties, lack of time, difficulties with organising and prioritising, relationship issues, and work/study/life balance challenges (Dodgson & Bolam, 2002; Stone, 2008). My study showed that the LSES students who were interviewed expressed a complexity of factors that impacted on their studies, and most certainly they mentioned matters such as financial issues, time management, relationship issues, and general work/study/life balance challenges as just some of those factors.

5.3.2 LSES students' social capital

Where my findings depart from, and build significantly on, previous thought and literature is the second matter that I discuss in this sub-section. The LSES

students in my study shared stories that showed that, while they experienced *complicating factors* during their time at university, they had well-developed skills in seeking out support. I argue here that the LSES students in my study demonstrated high levels of social capital, which is in contrast to existing thought and which challenges preconceived assumptions about socioeconomic status and social class. It is this social capital on which Student Services should draw in order to link LSES students with appropriate forms of support. I proceed now to define social capital and describe existing views about LSES students' levels of social capital. I then argue that some of these existing views on social capital are outdated in this respect.

5.3.2.1 What is social capital?

In Sub-section 1.3.3, I introduced the concept of cultural capital as being the knowledge, skills, or abilities that serve as a form of currency and that give status in particular settings, such as education (Bourdieu, 1979, 1984). This is just one form of capital that exists in the literature, while another is that of social capital. The fragmented approaches to social capital in the literature can make it distracting, difficult, and confusing for researchers (Koniordos, 2008; Rogers & Jarema, 2015). There is no one agreed definition that all researchers use (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Koniordos, 2008). Social capital, “as it is today, has led to the generalisation of its use on the one hand and, relatedly, to conceptual vagueness and confusion over what it can explain, on the other” (Koniordos, 2008, p. 331).

The most cited and debated theories of social capital are those of Bourdieu (1997, 2011), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993, 1995), each of which display subtle differences (Rogers & Jarema, 2015). Their definitions of social capital are listed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Definitions of social capital as presented by Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam

<p>Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.</p>	<p>(Bourdieu, 1997, p. 51)</p>
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<p>[It] is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether personal or corporate actors – within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible.</p>	<p>(Coleman, 1988, p. 98)</p>
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<p>[F]eatures of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.</p>	<p>(Putnam, 1995, pp. 664-665)</p>
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Social capital theories have been grouped into different strands to aid in their understanding (Rogers & Jarema, 2015). Social capital is generally divided in the literature into two strands: bridging and bonding. “Bonding capital relates to ties which build greater community cohesion, while bridging social capital includes ties that “bridge” organizations and communities” (Rogers & Jarema, 2015, pp. 19-20). Bourdieu’s (1997) thinking about bridging social capital identified a durable network of relationships that is established through repeated social interactions and reinforced through obligations. It is focused on social stratification and how individuals benefit from establishing and maintaining social connections (Rogers & Jarema, 2015). On the other hand, Coleman defined bonding social capital by the function that social

relationships can provide and how that function benefits social groups and social outcomes (Rogers & Jarema, 2015). Putnam too focused on the benefits of bonding social capital to the community and society (Rogers & Jarema, 2015).

The concept of social capital that is interrogated here is Bourdieu's (1997, 2011) theory of social capital. Bourdieu was the first to define social capital in sociological terms (Koniordos, 2008). Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1997), consisted of the connections and social obligations that individuals develop. He argued that social capital can be transformed into other forms of capital such as economic capital. According to Bourdieu (1997), to have limited social capital was to be impaired by low parental expectations of, and low parental investment in, education, as well as by social norms and social networks that tend to discourage students from seeking postsecondary education. Bourdieu's (1997) view of social capital stated that it is used to produce inequality or to reproduce such inequality generationally (Sullivan, 2002). It is this type of thinking that I argue requires updating, as is discussed further in Sub-section 5.3.2.3.

5.3.2.2 How does low social capital reportedly affect LSES student success?

Bourdieu (1997) noted that the capital that LSES students bring to education was not only low levels of cultural capital, as referred to in Sub-section 1.3.3, but also low levels of social capital, which contributes to our understanding of the differential involvement of LSES students in higher education (Karimshah et al., 2013). The development of cultural and social capital was attributed to family background (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016) and as such informed the reproductive nature of inequality, according to Bourdieu (Sullivan, 2002), as further explained below:

Social capital refers to the attributes and qualities of the family, social and community networks that facilitate cooperation between individuals and communities. The quality of and extent to which individuals are engaged with these networks are likely to impact on the educational and social development of children and youth. It can be argued that network associations and influences can increase educational engagement, achievement and participation over and above the influences of family

background, school type and geographical location. (Semo & Karmel, 2011, p. 7)

There is a significant amount of research to suggest that high levels of social capital are correlated with, if not crucial for, positive educational outcomes (Lee & Oi-Yeung Lam, 2016; Madyun, 2008). Current theories suggest that low levels of social capital (social networks) result in poor academic performance, leading to declining student achievement (Coleman, 1988); affect the mentoring, modelling, and transfer of informal knowledge (Madyun, 2008); and, result in reduced cultural capital development (Madyun, 2008). In a meta-analysis of 34 studies of social capital and educational outcomes (Dika & Singh, 2002), social capital was found to: (1) be positively associated with educational attainment, including lower dropout rates and increasing enrolments; (2) affect academic achievement positively; and, (3) be positively linked with psychological factors that predict positive educational outcomes such as educational aspirations.

Social capital refers to the relationships with others that are developed as a result of a person's social networks and how those networks are developed and maintained (Cardak et al., 2015). This aids individuals to source information, resources, and support as well as to gain access to human and cultural capital (Cardak et al., 2015). "Social networks are basically the organization of social ties or the relationships that allow and lead to the development and transmission of cultural capital" (Madyun, 2008, p. 52). There is research to demonstrate that relationships between parents and children, teachers and students, and counsellors and students are the key determinants of social capital (Cardak et al., 2015). It is the level of social capital that provides students with access to the norms and social controls in order to succeed (Coleman, 1997).

Given that Bourdieu believed that society is structured around status, Bourdieu (1997) argued that social capital is founded in families, and is found exclusively among the socially powerful, for instance the upper middle class (Koniordos, 2008). "This happens because social class is defined by the possession or not of capital....[T]he subservient social strata do not possess capital, including [social capital]" (Koniordos, 2008, p. 320). As such, LSES students are regarded as having little or no social capital.

It is recognised that family-based social capital, peers, and “institutional agents” (from the education sector) influence social capital formation, and are catalysts for promoting academic success (Lee & Oi-Yeung Lam, 2016, p. 2). Peers are just as significant as family as important resources in social relationships (Lee & Oi-Yeung Lam, 2016). These connections in relation to LSES students are further explored in Section 5.4.

5.3.2.3 Bourdieu's theory of social capital

The findings of my study challenge components of Bourdieu's theory of social capital and its relevance in 21st century contexts in higher education, that contend that LSES students have differential levels of social capital compared to those of non-LSES students. More broadly, my findings update preconceived assumptions about socioeconomic status and higher education student experiences. As is further explained in Section 5.4, LSES students in my study demonstrated well-developed skills in seeking support. They had an abundance of social networks and connections that they used to seek assistance and advice. I argue that the interviewed LSES students had well developed levels of social capital.

I argue also that Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital requires updating. His theorising of French social stratification in the 1960s is not applicable to the Australian 21st century context, particularly Australian higher education and socioeconomic status. It is timely to reappraise the applicability of Bourdieu's conceptualisation of capital today, given the results of this research study. I am not the first to reconsider Bourdieu's thinking as Bourdieu's concepts have been criticised in the literature for a variety of reasons, including a lack of conceptual clarity (Sullivan, 2002).

The behaviours of LSES students in my study seeking support through the connections that they had in their families or within their university were not consistent with the proposition that LSES students have low social capital; in fact, quite the contrary. To seek advice and information through a personal connection demonstrates a level of social engagement with networks and resources that is not necessarily expected of someone without social capital. Arguably, through a variety of government policies and procedures, some LSES individuals have had to become accustomed to seeking assistance and to navigating complex corporate frameworks

in order to achieve the basic necessities of life. Some areas that come to mind for some LSES individuals are job seeking agencies, Centrelink, housing agencies, food voucher programs, and government subsidies and rebates, to name a few. These types of programs are often not simple to understand and navigate. LSES individuals and their families are high end users of such initiatives and for them to have food on the table and a roof over their heads they have had to become adept at sourcing assistance through a variety of channels. It is this self-agency that may result in a more adept community than what Bourdieu (1997) described when it comes to LSES communities. Self-agency is a personal commitment to, and a determination towards, achieving a particular outcome (Karimshah et al., 2013).

LSES students in my study did not have poor social capital of the kind that would have limited their capacity and willingness to seek help for matters that may have affected their retention and progression in higher education. They may have had low levels of cultural capital (knowledge, skills, or abilities that serve as a form of currency and that are acquired largely through one's family and education), but my study did not generate evidence of this characteristic. Given that social capital can build cultural capital owing to a LSES student's resourcefulness, LSES students' cultural capital may have developed as a result of their social capital. In a recent study, "[m]any staff found students from low SES backgrounds as more active in their learning and help seeking than high SES students who were more accustomed to having assistance and resources handed to them" (McKay & Devlin, 2015, p. 12). LSES students, as argued previously, are a heterogeneous group of individuals and they are likely to have multiple levels of social capital afforded by their different experiences and backgrounds. The diversity within this cohort suggests that blanket assumptions about their characteristics are unwarranted.

Communities and families have been seen as 'repositories' of social capital that are charged with fostering academic success (Coleman, 1988). Although the level of students' cultural and social capital is often attributed to family background factors, recent findings from other research have demonstrated that, for students who are more experienced in higher education, family background plays less of a role and it is the role of educational institutions to assist cultural and social capital acquisition (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). This research "propels away from prior

deficiency models that assume underrepresented students are lacking in their backgrounds” (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016, p. 198). For instance, academic staff members were able to transfer knowledge during interactions with students that will assist in building cultural capital (Román, 2015). Social capital, in essence, allowed the exchange of information (Sullivan, 2002). Some literature has reviewed the importance of networks, particularly those among parents, students, and schools, in determining educational outcomes for individuals, particularly people from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, and without such supports the chances of success decrease (Semo & Karmel, 2011). For the LSES students in my study, their resourcefulness and their social capital aided their ability to navigate the complex and challenging higher education environment.

5.3.3 Socio-cultural incongruence

To recapitulate, in this section so far I have identified in my research that there are *complicating factors* that impact on LSES students during their time at university and this is consistent with existing research. I have also provided an argument that is inconsistent with some current thinking, whereby LSES students, although they have *complicating factors*, also have high levels of social capital that aids their ability to seek appropriate support. In addition to these findings, there is emerging agreement about the need to avoid a deficit discourse when considering LSES students’ characteristics or circumstances such as levels of capital. Researchers, administrators, and practitioners alike instead need to draw attention to the institutions that LSES students attend, including the habitus of those institutions.

Earlier research had demonstrated that there is an academic culture with which students are unfamiliar – students simply do not know what they do not know and they need assistance to learn the academic discourse and culture to contribute to the institution and they must master this to succeed (Lawrence, 2005). LSES students are seen as the problem and there is a deficit conception at work (McKay & Devlin, 2015). Complex interactions among home, school, and university cultures are a challenge for LSES students, which causes a blaming of the ‘deficits’ in students, families, and communities, but there are also significant deficits in higher education and schooling systems that should be addressed (Whitty & Clement, 2015, p. 51). Higher education is viewed as being socially structured and as such those aligned

with the existing culture will be better prepared to succeed (Karimshah et al., 2013). Universities are seen as complex institutions to navigate, which was identified and highlighted as the institutional habitus in Sub-section 1.5.2. The diverse experiences of higher education have been discussed widely in the literature:

Underrepresented groups of students in higher education are more likely to feel that their social and life experiences are inadequate and do not allow them to fit in at university, and therefore these students feel like ‘a fish out of water’ (Thomas, 2002: 431). This contrasts with the socially advantaged students who, in Bourdieu’s words, are like ‘a fish in water’. (Carson, 2009, p. 13)

“Deficit theorising” is now seen as unhelpful and, rather than expecting LSES students to “fit” into the institutional mould, there is a strong case for universities to make changes to assist more effectively the needs of the increasingly diverse student body (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003). Devlin (2013) has argued that, owing to a socio-cultural incongruence between students and the institutions in which they study, higher education “...should avoid adopting either a deficit conception of students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds or a deficit conception of the institutions into which they will move” but rather a “joint venture” (p. 939) is required if students from LSES are to succeed. In exploring the move beyond the deficit model, researchers have voiced the need to create “moments of connection” (Bletsas & Michell, 2014, p. 93) among students, staff members and students, and across socioeconomic status. This is reportedly likely to have transformative benefits:

Moments of connection have the potential to transform the educational exchange from one that delivers individual benefits at a private cost to an exchange that pushes at the limits of the cultural logics which structure our lives. We believe that those moments are, therefore, worth exploring alongside instances where the *cultural devaluation* of low SES people makes them feel unwelcome on campus. (Bletsas & Michell, 2014, p. 93, italics in original)

The socio-cultural incongruence argument arose from an Australian national qualitative study conducted in 2011 and 2012 with LSES students who had

succeeded in their studies, with the aim of gaining valuable insights into what helped them to succeed (Devlin et al., 2012; Devlin & McKay, 2014). It has been argued that, for LSES students to succeed at university “demystifying academic culture and discourses for these students is a key step institutions and staff can take in assisting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to progress and succeed at university” (McKay & Devlin, 2014, p. 949). The onus is on the institution making the effort to explain the expectations and the language in a way that helps students to understand this “unfamiliar world” (McKay & Devlin, 2014, p. 950); in a way this also helps students to understand the *habitus* of the institution. McKay and Devlin’s (2014) study built on the discussion around socio-cultural incongruity, which “claims neither institutions nor students are in deficit; rather, there is an existing socio-cultural incongruity between middle-class [higher education institutions] and students from LSES backgrounds which needs to be bridged” (p. 951). A joint venture to bridge the socio-cultural incongruence and foster student success is required (Devlin et al., 2012). This line of thought supports my argument that institutions need to work collaboratively and in partnership with the student as discussed in the next section and in Chapter 6, which is consistent with an *in vivo* code identified during the analysis of the data, “*being on the same team*”.

The following section demonstrates a positive approach to LSES student experiences and attributes. It also demonstrates a collaborative approach to facilitating LSES students’ access to support. This section provides further evidence for updating Bourdieu’s (1997) theory of social capital with reference to LSES students. The accounts shared in the interviews in my study can be interpreted as students working with *trusting networks* and thereby aiding their social capital.

5.4 *Trusting networks*

So far in this chapter I have provided research consistent with my own generated findings, in particular with respect to *needing support* and *complicating factors*. This section continues the constant comparative process of understanding *trusting networks* against substantive theories and research.

The binding principle for the proposed theory is the theme *trusting networks*. This was generated from student experiences suggesting that they were more likely to seek support and assistance, and to take advice, from those people in their

personal networks whom they trusted. Antecedents of trust were reported to be *being there* (approachable, accessible), *being familiar* (known to them, pre-existing relationship), and *having credibility* (experience, confidence, integrity). These characteristics increased the likelihood that another person would be perceived as trustworthy. *Trusting networks* enabled students to make their own success and achieve success. The concept of trust has been well researched; however, researchers have failed to attribute this concept to student support service delivery in higher education. The following sub-sections outline LSES students' help-seeking behaviours that are consistent with the findings of my study. Trust as a construct is then explained, including how it is manifested in relationships and networks. This discussion then provides a link between trust and social capital. A discussion about the propensity of LSES students to trust Student Services is explored and leads to a consideration of institution-based trust.

5.4.1 LSES students' help-seeking behaviours in higher education

At university, students are expected to be independent learners and they are required to ask for help when they may need it (Devlin & McKay, 2014). One Australian study has shown that 45% of LSES students identified that asking for help was an important factor influencing their success (Devlin et al., 2012). Seeking help is not as simple as it may seem and it has been argued that, even if students suggest that they may need help and subsequently wish to seek it out, they need to determine the appropriate language for how to ask for help and the very thought of even asking for help may lead them to believe that they are not capable of succeeding at university (Lawrence, 2005). In the context of my research, LSES students tended to seek that help from trusted family members, peers, academic staff members, or other university personnel, who may or may not be equipped to provide the specialised advice or assistance that they may require.

In the north-east of England, a comprehensive review and evaluation of the retention, support, and success of non-traditional students in higher education was undertaken (Dodgson & Bolam, 2002). It was found that attrition rates in the universities involved was very low at 8.8%, demonstrating that their strategies were having a positive impact. Success was seen as resulting from those universities positioning retention as a strategic objective. There were a few common themes for successful strategies, two of which were proactive student support and

comprehensiveness. Proactive student support was simply that. The institutions were providing proactive assistance to students, thereby pre-empting issues, rather than simply reacting to presented concerns. Comprehensiveness included an approach whereby both academic and non-academic staff members as well as students were involved in the strategies themselves. For those institutions that applied such strategies, there had been a notable increase in the numbers of students contacting Student Services for support. This research illustrates the impact that collaborative action can have on students' accessing specialised support, a point that my theory emphasises. In their study, Dodgson and Bolam (2002) highlighted that national principles of good practice of student support are "holistic, integrated and pro-active" (p. 30) and are spread amongst both academic and professional staff members. Their research also demonstrated that students were more likely to seek advice from friends, family, or tutors, which is consistent with my findings. Only 6% of students sought advice from specialist support staff members. "Integrated approaches are favoured, as research shows that many students who would benefit from academic and other support services are reluctant to put themselves forward. A proactive or integrated approach overcomes this issue and helps to reach all students" (Dodgson & Bolam, 2002, p. 19).

The research in the north-east of England found that students were not likely to access specialised support compared to other supports (Dodgson & Bolam, 2002). The tendency for students to seek out support from friends, family, and tutors is consistent with the student experiences in my study. The proposed theoretical approach posited here supports Dodgson and Bolam's (2002) reported strategies for success - that is, to ensure an integrated model of support.

5.4.2 Understanding trust as a construct

In Chapter 3, I proposed that trust was a core feature of supportive relationships for LSES students. Historically, trust has been defined from multiple perspectives and explored from different angles (Sztompka, 2000). There have been studies that explored *types* of trust (Sako, 1992). There has also been debate about the definitions of, and the differentiation between, trust and trustworthiness depending on the underpinning theoretical framework in focus, whether that be psychological, sociological, economic, philosophical, or organisational (Hausman, 2004; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998;

Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). For the purposes of this analysis, trust has been explored from an interpersonal perspective, also known as relational trust (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). This form of trust was borne out of leadership and organisational management studies and is applicable to the institutional setting in this research. Although this was an early explanation of trust, the reason for drawing on this particular framework is that it is a seminal idea in the understanding of trust and it is closely aligned with my findings, which suggests that the applicability of interpersonal trust is relevant today and in multiple settings. Although trust research has intensified in the past two decades (Alarcon, Lyons, & Christensen, 2016), this perspective continues to be supported and utilised in more recent research (Alarcon et al., 2016; Gillespie, 2012; Heyns & Rothmann, 2015; McEvily, Perrone, & Zaheer, 2003). This sub-section provides a definition of trust, explains the antecedents of trust that are consistent with my findings, and then explains the links among the concepts of propensity, trust, and trustworthiness. This sub-section leads to an understanding of trust in relationships more specifically, and then further refine this understanding as it applies to LSES students.

5.4.2.1 Definition of trust

Trust is a concept that has been widely studied in various contexts, including marketing (Green, 2005), buyer-seller relationships (Bejou, Ennew, & Palmer, 1998), management (Schoorman et al., 2007), and a variety of other areas, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, and computer science (Schultz, 2006). Trust is based in relationships (Schoorman et al., 2007; Sztompka, 2000) and enables people to form meaningful personal relationships (Simpson, 2007). Trust is considered the most important of embedded ties (Uzzi, 1997).

A widely accepted integrated model of interpersonal trust (Heyns & Rothmann, 2015) is:

[T]he willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 172)

What is argued to be “the most widely accepted definition of trust” (Evans & Krueger, 2015; van der Werff & Buckley, 2014, p. 4), and perhaps drawn from the earlier definition, is that “[t]rust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395).

Similarly, trust is “an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon” (Rotter, 1967, p. 651). Trust is suggested as “a positive expectation that another won’t act opportunistically” (Robbins, Millett, & Waters-Marsh, 2004, p. 362). Trust implies knowledge of and familiarity with the other party that builds incrementally and accumulatively (Robbins et al., 2004).

The development of the notion of interpersonal trust was a turning point for trust research. It identified trust as a multidimensional concept that was context-specific (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007) as is depicted in Figure 5.1. Trust was seen as relational and was largely dependent on the characteristics of a trustor (person who trusts) and trustee (person to be trusted). Trust from this perspective varied in depth and strength over time. The interpersonal trust perspective explains why some people are trusted more than others and provides an understanding of the propensity to trust. This thinking supports the findings of the current study in understanding *trusting networks*.

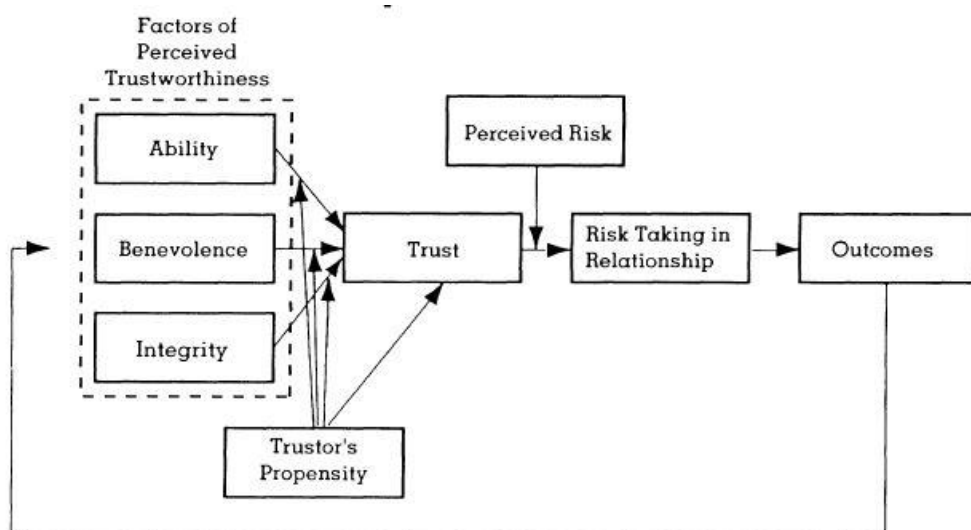


Figure 5.1: A seminal model of interpersonal trust (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 715)

My research affirms the concept of interpersonal trust whereby trust evolves over time when repeated interactions exist between persons. If those previous interactions lead one to believe that the other is reliable and dependable, there is more likelihood that trust will develop (Rousseau et al., 1998). This means a general willingness to be vulnerable to another party (Schoorman et al., 2007, p. 347). My findings do not suggest that students ‘distrust’ Student Services *per se* but that the trustworthiness of those within their networks is more acutely apparent and obvious. The opportunities for trusting relationships to develop are more likely amongst peers and amongst frequently encountered university staff members such as academic staff members.

5.4.2.2 Antecedents of trust

The literature on trust theory explores the antecedents to trust, which are at times referred to as the factors of trust or trustworthiness, or trust cues (Mayer et al., 1995). Others have argued that perceived trustworthiness is an antecedent to trust itself (Schultz, 2006). Regardless, a range of antecedents to trust or trust cues have been captured in the literature (van der Werff & Buckley, 2014) and they are not dissimilar to the generated antecedents from my research.

The most widely cited are ability, benevolence, and integrity, as was seen in Figure 5.1, or associated variants such as integrity, capacity, and goodwill (Heyns & Rothmann, 2015; Mayer et al., 1995). Ability is seen as the perceived skills and competence levels of the trustee (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). Benevolence is regarded as the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good and is closely associated with perceived loyalty, openness, caring, and supportiveness (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). Finally, integrity is the perception that the trustee adheres to a set of principles deemed acceptable and is quite often judged by a trustee’s reputation (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). I provided an understanding that *being there*, *being familiar*, and *having credibility* positively influenced the propensity to be trusted by LSES students. Those characteristics effectively increased the likelihood that another was considered as trustworthy. These can thus also be referred to as the characteristics of trustworthiness. The concept of trustworthiness allows us to consider that the characteristics and actions of the trustee will lead that person to be more or less trusted (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). It allows us to understand why

some parties are more trusted than others and, from the perspective of my research, to see why Student Services are perhaps less trusted, or alternatively, why personal networks are more trusted. There have been multiple perspectives on what antecedents exist for trust and these are summarised in Table 5.2. Although the research highlighted in Table 5.2 is somewhat dated, as is shown in the first column, the antecedent factors shown in the second column demonstrate a considerable semantic overlap with the antecedents found in my research: *being there*, *being familiar*, and *having credibility*. This overlap demonstrates the enduring nature of the constructs. A more recent comparative analysis of interpersonal trust antecedents could not be found in the literature.

Table 5.2: Review of trust antecedents (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 718)

Trust Antecedents	
Authors	Antecedent Factors
Boyle & Bonacich (1970)	Past interactions, index of caution based on prisoners' dilemma outcomes
Butler (1991)	Availability, competence, consistency, discretion, fairness, integrity, loyalty, openness, promise fulfillment, receptivity
Cook & Wall (1980)	Trustworthy intentions, ability
Dasgupta (1988)	Credible threat of punishment, credibility of promises
Deutsch (1960)	Ability, intention to produce
Farris, Senner, & Butterfield (1973)	Openness, ownership of feelings, experimentation with new behavior, group norms
Frost, Stimpson, & Maughan (1978)	Dependence on trustee, altruism
Gabarro (1978)	Openness, previous outcomes
Giffin (1967)	Expertness, reliability as information source, intentions, dynamism, personal attraction, reputation
Good (1988)	Ability, intention, trustees' claims about how (they) will behave
Hart, Capps, Cangemi, & Caillouet (1986)	Openness/congruity, shared values, autonomy/feedback
Hovland, Janis, & Kelley (1953)	Expertise, motivation to lie
Johnson-George & Swap (1982)	Reliability
Jones, James, & Bruni (1975)	Ability, behavior is relevant to the individual's needs and desires
Kee & Knox (1970)	Competence, motives
Larzelere & Huston (1980)	Benevolence, honesty
Lieberman (1981)	Competence, integrity
Mishra (In press)	Competence, openness, caring, reliability
Ring & Van de Ven (1992)	Moral integrity, goodwill
Rosen & Jerdee (1977)	Judgment or competence, group goals
Sitkin & Roth (1993)	Ability, value congruence
Solomon (1960)	Benevolence
Strickland (1958)	Benevolence

The examination of antecedents is informative for exploring how a service can improve its relationships with clients. Kayeser Fatima and Abdur Razzaque's (2014)

study explored the role of trust as an antecedent of rapport and satisfaction with services in the context of a developing country's banking industry. This research demonstrated the linkage that trust has with relationships, connections, and satisfaction with services globally; it is not a unique phenomenon.

The antecedents in my study - *being there*, *being familiar*, and *having credibility* – are not only consistent with other identified antecedents in trust theory but also supported by extant literature exploring the context of students in higher education. For instance, it has been found that students in higher education feel more accepted and valued by staff members within the university if those staff members know their names, show interest, and demonstrate signs of friendship (Thomas, 2002). This relationship in turn influences the likelihood of students seeking support. Additionally, if someone is perceived to be more familiar to a trustor then the propensity to trust increases (Alarcon et al., 2016). The trustor has more information to rely on when assessing the trustworthiness of the other. Conversely, a lack of familiarity leads to less perceived trustworthiness (Alarcon et al., 2016). “[P]eople act on beliefs, knowledge, memory and interpretation of past experiences” (Sztompka, 2000, p. 23) – a statement consistent with the LSES student experiences in the current study.

Supportive peer relations and meaningful interactions between staff members and students are among the key components supporting retention and success for students from diverse backgrounds, in effect building social capital, which is discussed further in Sub-section 5.4.4 (Moore et al., 2013). Most specifically, students who had individuals in their lives who provided strong support, and/or who had supportive families, were more likely to persist and to achieve academic success (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Students tended to see friends and peers as a “port of call” when they needed help (Kinnear, Boyce, Sparrow, Middleton, & Cullity, 2008, p. 51). In one study, there was a significant proportion of students who sought assistance from their university-based learning networks - that is, their peers and mentors. “Students seek help from staff and their immediate learning community with whom they have developed a working/positive relationship. The students need to feel confident in the helper's interest and ability to assist them” (Kinnear et al., 2008, p. 51). Friends or peers are often determined in research to be integral to

student success, and particularly during stressful times (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005), while others report academic staff members as being most valuable (Neal, 2012). The relationship between students and staff members had a significant impact on whether a student sought help from staff members (Kinnear et al., 2008). This research has shown that students rarely seek help from unfamiliar or unapproachable staff members. This is consistent with the antecedents generated in my research.

To increase the likelihood of students seeking assistance, staff members should demonstrate a willingness to help students and to be in fact capable of helping them (Kinnear et al., 2008). “Implied within this finding is the notion that students seek assistance from staff when they have developed a working relationship with them rather than an expert counsellor or adviser who they may or may not have met personally” (Kinnear et al., 2008, p. 51).

Let us briefly consider the idea of “student agency” which predisposes the student’s level of control and autonomy. To support student agency, a university and its community need to “know their students. This means knowing students' names, backgrounds, learning styles and preferences, needs, difficulties, strengths and/or weaknesses” (Devlin & McKay, 2014, p. 106). This has been demonstrated in the research here, whereby the existence of an interpersonal relationship enhanced the likelihood of students seeking help and subsequently accessing services. Not unlike my research, staff members have reported that knowing students assists those students’ success (Devlin & McKay, 2014). University staff members in an Australian university were interviewed as part of an Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded study. The OLT study was commissioned to explore effective teaching and support of LSES students. Eighty-five percent of staff members interviewed claimed that knowing one’s students to the point that they felt valued or important is critical to facilitating their success (Devlin & McKay, 2014).

In a recent Australian study, 82% of student respondents knew that student support services existed; however, the actual rate of accessing these services was quite low (Karimshah et al., 2013). One fifth of LSES student respondents rated the services as impersonal and these students were quickly referred elsewhere, mostly online, even though they were seeking face-to-face support. They also commented

on the service providers' lack of knowledge or lack of professionalism. Conversely, lecturers and tutors were reported to be available, approachable, empathetic, prompt, and thorough. Students tended to appreciate the checking in and rapport building that teachers afforded them, as well as their time and listening ears. Unfortunately, only 4% of LSES students reported that teachers recommended support services to them. "This finding suggests that the strongest influencing factors for retention of low SES students are social, rather than institutional (that is, related to the way the university functions as an institution)" (Karimshah et al., 2013, p. 12).

Trust theory was not a sensitising concept at the commencement of my research. As such it is validating to find that my generated findings are very much aligned with interpersonal trust theory. This reinforces the applicability of interpersonal trust theory in contemporary society and also in the context of LSES students in higher education.

5.4.2.3 The link among propensity, trust, and trustworthiness

So far this sub-section has outlined a definition of interpersonal trust, and its antecedents, that support the findings in my study. To further understand *trusting networks* it is important to understand the relationship among propensity to trust, trustworthiness, and trust itself. Propensity, trustworthiness, and trust are separate concepts yet they are largely inter-related (Heyns & Rothmann, 2015), as was depicted in Figure 5.1. Trust increases with perceptions of trustworthiness and increased trustworthiness mediates a relationship between propensity and trust (Heyns & Rothmann, 2015). "If [someone is] perceived as trustworthy, followers will be likely to respond by engaging in trusting behaviours towards them" (Heyns & Rothmann, 2015, p. 1). While these findings were drawn from research in leadership, they are applicable to my setting. These findings reinforce the idea that if students perceive others (lecturers, peers, Student Services) as trustworthy, they will be more likely to disclose and ask for help (trusting behaviours). The propensity to trust is even more applicable in novel situations and working with new people (Rotter, 1967), which is likely to occur when LSES students are interacting with Student Services: a somewhat unfamiliar, unknown entity to them.

There is a considerable amount of trust research, theories, and constructs in the literature (Schultz, 2006). These have not been addressed here but I have provided

an overview of the concept of trust from an interpersonal perspective and I have drawn comparisons with extant literature. The role that trust plays in relationships is addressed in the next sub-section.

5.4.3 Trust in relationships

Trust is a significant component of the formation of relationships and connections and “lies at the foundation of nearly all major theories of interpersonal relationships” (Simpson, 2007, p. 264). Networks, groups, and relationship development have often been correlated with trust (Bejou et al., 1998; Foddy, Platow, & Yamagishi, 2009; Platow, Foddy, Yamagishi, Lim, & Chow, 2012). Trust reportedly enhances group dynamics; for instance, “a group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish much more than a comparable group without that trustworthiness and trust” (Coleman, 1997, p. 83). Strong network relationships are founded on frequent communication, collaboration, and cooperation grounded in trust (Aldrich, 2014). “People rarely give their trust to institutions; really they trust the people” (Green, n.d., p. 1). It is this thinking that leads me to explore how trust impacts on relationships, as it is going to be difficult to establish trust between LSES students and Student Services directly. LSES students in the current study made a resounding point that relationships mattered to their success. LSES students spoke of how they use those relationships in their existing networks to seek out assistance and to ask for help.

There is research demonstrating that people were more likely to trust those who are from what they consider to be an in-group than from an out-group (Foddy et al., 2009). This means that people are more likely to trust people within their networks than outside their networks. “The role that shared group membership plays in decisions to trust others is now well established within social psychology” (Platow et al., 2012, p. 30). People grant trust to a stranger more readily if they are aware that that stranger belongs to a common social category, which is referred to as group-based trust (Platow et al., 2012). In-group favouring includes people expecting better treatment from others within their group. If individuals can personally identify with another individual, they are more likely to consider that person to be trustworthy (Tanis & Postmes, 2005). Group membership is an independent and strong predictor of trusting behaviour (Tanis & Postmes, 2005). Again, this is consistent with the experiences of LSES students in my study. They were more

likely to turn to their peers in their course, their family members, or staff members from within their faculty. Student Services as a department and Student Services staff members did not naturally fall into a common social network with LSES students, and as such the propensity to trust Student Services was less well-developed.

Research has shown that diverse support networks and the ability to seek help are critical to successful learning outcomes (Kinnear et al., 2008). Such research emphasises that students value peer networks and courses that do not structure this into their design may struggle to form effective support networks. Researchers place the responsibility for establishing these support networks with university staff members and argue that they should do so early during the student learning journey (Kinnear et al., 2008). Let us recall that help-seeking is not easy for students, and that they tend to be highly apprehensive, but when they did choose to seek help, they tended to seek it from those with whom they had developed positive relationships previously. They needed to feel confident that the helper was interested in assisting and was able to assist them. Research has shown that different cohorts of students seek support from different people. For example, international students seek support from physically distant family members and teaching staff members rather than from peers; students with disabilities may have less opportunity to engage with the learning environment in the same way as their peers; and younger students use parents and friends (Kinnear et al., 2008). How students seek and receive support correlates with their academic progression and for the best chances of success, this support is received from teaching staff members centred in the learning environment (Kinnear et al., 2008). Critical to the success of this help-seeking relationship are engaging, enthusiastic, and approachable staff members. These are characteristics of what I refer to as *trusting networks*.

The advocacy of learning communities to aid the retention and success of students, particularly LSES students, has demonstrated that social support and connected social groups contribute to student support functions (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). ‘It is not surprising, then, that the survey data revealed that students in the learning communities were more engaged in their studies, perceived themselves as

having more support, and were more successful than similar students not in such programs” (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008, p. 50).

The learning environment creates a sense of community and must have consistent interactions between members on both formal and informal levels; this reportedly promotes student persistence (Kinnear et al., 2008). For Student Services to have any chance to improve the levels of trust between LSES students and their staff members, they need to ensure that there are consistent interactions and that those connections are both formal and informal. Social connections are often linked to trust as the next sub-section explains.

5.4.4 Social capital and trust

In exploring the link between social capital and trust, first raised is Sub-section 5.3.2, it is important in this thesis to demonstrate that LSES students in my study had higher levels of social capital owing to their reliance on trust to seek support from their social networks. This is keeping in mind that social capital is the interaction of individuals, which results “from forming trust and reciprocity between individuals” (Rogers & Jarema, 2015, p. 19). Rogers and Jarema (2015) also noted that “[s]ocial networks reinforce the social norms and sense of trust and reciprocity that Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam regard as components of social capital” (p. 23).

Trust and social capital are related concepts in social research (Putnam, 1995) where trust is an outcome and a condition of social capital. “[T]rust and social capital are highly related concepts and sometimes are used as synonymous terms” (Cao, Zhao, Ren, & Zhao, 2015, p. 3). Interpersonal trust develops and raises social capital (Baykal, 2015). The more we connect with others, the more we trust them and vice versa (Putnam, 1995).

Putnam (1995) proposed three common components of social capital - social networks, trust, and social norms highlighting the importance of social networks in configuring the relationship between trust and social capital. “Social capital is commonly defined as shared trust among citizens in a community, active involvement with various types of social networks, and broadly shared norms of reciprocity” (Cao et al., 2015, p. 3). Trust has a significant influence on the development of social relationships:

For individuals to engage in social interactions, become members in groups and associations, and participate in collective action, a sense of trust is required as well as the acknowledgement that trust will be reciprocated. It is only after trust is developed and reciprocated that individuals will invest in social relationships to be used for either individual or collective gains. (Rogers & Jarema, 2015, p. 23)

When there is a cycle of social interaction and trust is established, there is a subsequent development of social networks and social norms (Rogers & Jarema, 2015). This facilitates information exchange and dictates the attitudes and expected behaviours of others:

For a variety of reasons, life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks of civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations, and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved. (Putnam, 1995, p. 67)

Putnam argued that to improve society's ability to achieve community goals, strong social networks were necessary (Rogers & Jarema, 2015). If the higher education community is seen as a society in and of itself, then Putnam's conclusion can be applied to the idea that if the institution were to create and enable social networks for LSES students, then the success of higher education and LSES students can be achieved.

Earlier in Figure 5.1, a diagrammatic model of interpersonal trust was provided that explained the seminal work in the development of trust theory. My research extends upon this model and places social capital within the context of using relationships for specific outcomes (see Figure 5.2). Social capital, from my research, is the sum total of antecedents of trust (or trustworthiness factors), the propensity to trust, and trust itself. It enables risk taking within relationships which results in specific outcomes. Positive outcomes thereby positively reinforce the level of social capital that a person holds, as people are more likely to trust others who have provided previously positive experiences or outcomes.

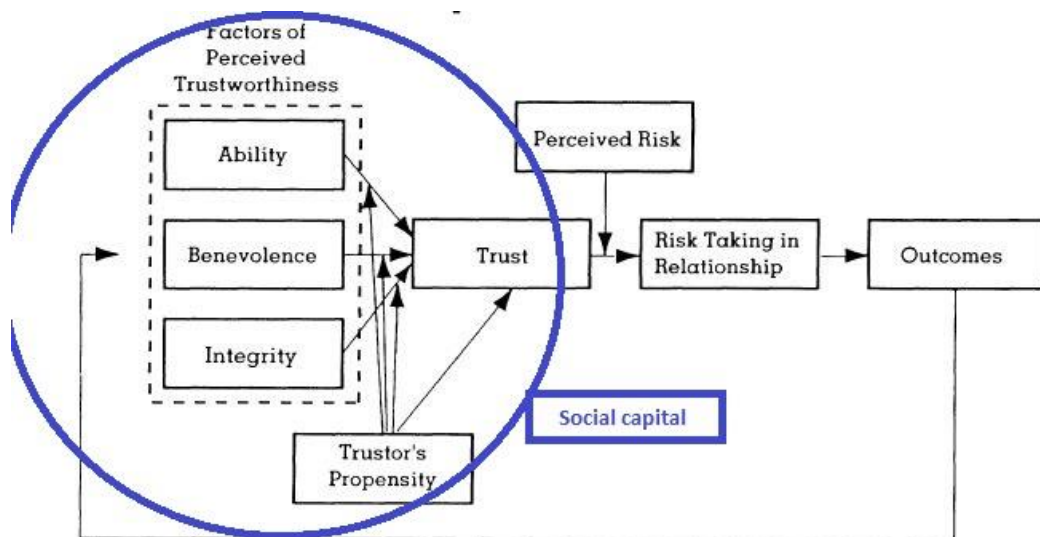


Figure 5.2: A modified model of interpersonal trust incorporating the role of social capital (adapted from Mayer et al., 1996, p. 715).

The next two sub-sections explore the propensity to trust Student Services in this context as well as the institution more broadly.

5.4.5 LSES students' propensity to trust Student Services

Following an understanding of trust and *trusting networks*, the role that they play in relationships, and the link between social capital and trust, I now draw a connection between these constructs and LSES students and Student Services in particular. In exploring the literature for accounts of Student Services and their relationship to building trust with LSES students, I unearthed very little. Of most prominence was an account detailing the need for student affairs professionals to build trust, which means having a skill set to develop relationships, have empathy, and exhibit accuracy, veracity, fidelity, and fairness (Fried & Lewis, 2009). While useful and validating, this did not detail how this then extends to the actual formation of *trusting networks* or relationships.

In a study of low socioeconomic immigrant adolescents in the United States, there was a positive association between academic achievement and the positive characteristics of social relationships with friends and teachers, which was quite different from non-LSES immigrant adolescents (Lee & Oi-Yeung Lam, 2016). Lee and Oi-Yeung Lam's (2016) findings demonstrate a link between interpersonal trust and educational outcomes. While based on youth and immigrant populations, their

research shows that the linkages among relationships, trust, and social capital can assist academic outcomes as per my study. They refer to immigrant youth as “independent agents capable of generating academically relevant social capital on their own outside their families and ethnic communities” (Lee & Oi-Yeung Lam, 2016, p. 1). The lack of existing research in the field of LSES students’ trust in Student Services, among all of their other *trusting networks* in higher education, draws my attention to an emerging field called institution-based trust and its applicability to the current context.

5.4.6 Institution-based trust

“There are two typical forms of trust in organisational settings – institution-based trust and interpersonal trust” (Yuan, Olfman, & Yi, 2016, p. 15) and it is a discussion of institution-based trust that follows. The LSES students in my study spoke often about their interpersonal trust with peers, family, academic staff members, and other key staff members within their higher education institution. They rarely spoke of their trust in the institution, or more specifically, in Student Services. It is acknowledged that there are difficulties in improving relationships between people and departments such as LSES students and Student Services. To enhance this, there can be improvements between people in different departments and different groups and trust is considered a core factor in influencing the success of these relationships (Yuan et al., 2016). Relationships between departments and people from different groups are called institution-based trust or institutional trust (Rousseau et al., 1998), “institution-based and interpersonal trust are significant predictor variables of interdepartmental knowledge sharing satisfaction and success” (Yuan et al., 2016, p. 30). There is a positive association between trust and collaboration (Zhang & Peng, 2015). For LSES students to be connected with Student Services, Student Services needs to build on institution-based trust, which is discussed further in Chapter 6 when addressing the practical implications of the theory of trusting networks.

5.5 Making success

Based on substantive research, the current chapter has provided supporting arguments for the various components of the theory of trusting networks: *needing support*, *complicating factors*, and, *trusting networks*. The final component of the theory of trusting networks is *making success*. *Making success* demonstrates LSES

students' intrinsic motivations and striking sense of self-determination during higher education study.

5.5.1 Intrinsic motivation

LSES students in the current study described very meaningful and personal reasons for studying in higher education. Their goals were ultimately to achieve a change in state, to create opportunity or betterment. They desired for their circumstances to be different from what they presently were, and they were not motivated by employment prospects alone. Higher education was a means to achieving the desired outcome. Typical responses included references to making others proud, being a role model to others, and proving a point to themselves and to others. This finding is consistent with existing research that suggested that there are some students who are goal-oriented for intrinsic reasons where they are seeking personal achievement: “[s]ome students may be more concerned with the intrinsic benefits of college (e.g., learning, affiliation, development, autonomy), while others are more concerned with the perceived extrinsic benefits of college (e.g., income, occupation, further education)” (Tinto, 2015, p. 3).

5.5.2 Sheer determination

In addition to intrinsic motivations being substantiated by existing research, the LSES students' demonstrating sheer determination to achieve success is also reflected in existing literature. It is acknowledged that success means different things to different students. It may mean successful achievement in their studies or for some it could mean a decision to terminate their studies in order to pursue some other achievement. For the LSES students interviewed in my study, it was certainly about achieving their academic and life goals. The determination witnessed in my study is not new to the experiences of university students.

“Students...do not seek to be retained. They seek to persist” (Tinto, 2015, p. 1) and sheer determination and persistence have been studied in a range of diverse student groups, and mature-age students are considered to have higher levels of pronounced determination than their younger counterparts (Kinnear et al., 2008; Stone, 2008).

Recent thinking has challenged the view that high levels of aspiration and determination are more likely in non-LSES populations (Devlin & McKay, 2014).

This revised way of thinking prescribes that the resilience of LSES students and determination enables LSES students to overcome barriers with which they are quite often confronted by which was consistent with my appraisal of my study's findings. An analysis of retention strategies in one study showed that almost 50% of LSES student respondents indicated a strong sense of self-agency (Karimshah et al., 2013). Self-agency, in this context, was defined as students' personal commitment to, and a determination towards, their studies.

An Australian study of 89 successful LSES students and 26 supporting staff has shown that LSES students have a high sense of determination (McKay & Devlin, 2015). Success for the students in that work was defined as those students who had "completed one year of university study and re-enrolled for another year" (Devlin & McKay, 2014, p. 4). It was noted by the researchers that, given "the challenges and obstacles that these students face in attending, progressing through and succeeding at university, [LSES students'] determination and persistence are remarkable" (McKay & Devlin, 2015, p. 8).

Students tend to rate their personal goals and career aspirations as very important and as underpinning their persistence and success (Kinnear et al., 2008). Their goals influence their approaches to learning and their levels of motivation and "[t]he setting of goals motivates students to persist with their studies and in many cases gives them the resilience to overcome barriers to academic success" (Kinnear et al., 2008, p. 56). Arguably, all students, regardless of their backgrounds, if they rate their goals as a high priority, are more likely to have persistence and to overcome barriers to achieving success and "[t]hese goals included career, learning, self-development, self-satisfaction, self-efficacy, and financial reasons. Students consistently named their personal goals as being responsible for their persistence" (Kinnear et al., 2008, p. 57). Personal goals tended to keep students motivated and established levels of resilience that enabled them to overcome difficulties, "[o]f paramount importance to them was the opportunity to achieve a long-held goal" (Kinnear et al., 2008, p. 60).

Similarly, other findings indicated that commencing students' sense of purpose was integral to their academic persistence and motivation at university and to their subsequent success (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010). Sense of purpose has been determined

to be a protective factor for persistence. A correlation exists whereby, if there is a strong sense of purpose, there is a higher likelihood of persistence in the face of adversity. Sense of purpose has also been coined as a ‘fuel’ for when things get tough (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010).

Another study found that “[a]mongst the working-class respondents there [was] a strong sense of personal determination” (Stuart, 2006, p. 171), not at all dissimilar to the findings that were generated in my research. “Personal determination is essential if students from working-class backgrounds are going to succeed. The working-class students have to rely on their own capabilities. They do not have the other resources that middle-class students have to fall back on” (Stuart, 2006, p. 172). LSES students have been regarded as “active agents” in shaping their destinies (Stuart, 2006, p. 173).

To close this section of the chapter, the following quotation brings a range of constructs from the theory of trusting networks together:

With working-class students friendships and personal determination are very significant in their lives and the role of friendship can be seen as a form of ‘bridging’ social capital – mitigates against the lack of other forms of power. Friendships provide the support and knowledge required to succeed in higher education.... The role of friendship has emerged as a significant factor in creating success for first generation students, particularly where students cannot access other forms of cultural or economic power. (Stuart, 2006, p. 181)

The premise behind the theory of trusting networks and each of its components is widely supported by substantive research.

5.6 Understanding the theory of trusting networks as student engagement in higher education

When I refer to networks and connections, I am really referring to engagement. This section will take the theory of trusting networks in its entirety and explore this against student engagement theory and literature. There is a considerable amount of student engagement literature (Kahu, 2013; Krause & Coates, 2008; Nelson, Clarke,

Stoodley, & Creagh, 2014; Tinto, 2010). Student engagement has been widely accepted in the literature as having an integral role in the retention and success of students in higher education (Kahu, 2013). Engagement has been referred to as a “two-way street” (Kuh, 2009, p. 697) where there are responsibilities placed upon both the university and the student to ensure that there are opportunities available and that conditions are suitable for engagement. Both students and staff members have seen diverse support networks as critical (Kinnear et al., 2008). It is this bi-directional relationship that is discussed here.

Students’ engagement with their studies, with the university culture and with one another, is critical to student success, and teaching strategies can be employed to foster this student engagement (Broughan & Hunt, 2012). Put simply, “[s]tudent engagement is critical to student learning success, progression and retention...” (Nelson et al., 2014, p. 4). An Australian national project to determine institutional practices to improve student engagement and retention strategies has produced the Student Engagement, Success and Retention Maturity Model (Nelson et al., 2014). In this model support is identified as needing to be people-rich, not unlike the theory of trusting networks. The integration of support into regular learning and teaching practices is key, “[a]dvice is provided to students locally and centrally, advocacy for students is provided locally and centrally, peer support for students is provided locally and centrally” (Nelson et al., 2014, p. 25). The findings in my study support this claim – it is a way to connect students with support regardless of where they are.

If engagement is the linchpin of student success and retention, then [higher education institutions] need to monitor and measure the extent of student engagement—particularly in the first year—and most importantly intervene with students exhibiting signs of disengaging from their studies. (Nelson et al., 2014, p. 94)

This demonstrates the need for an active role played by staff within institutions as “[t]ransition pedagogy is based on students’ engagement in learning, facilitated by academic-professional partnerships and shared understandings of cross-institutional processes, is institution-wide and has been rigorously evaluated and shown to have a positive impact on student success and retention” (Nelson et al., 2014, pp. 94-95).

A previous nationwide study in Australia defined seven dimensions of students' engagement with their university (Krause & Coates, 2008). The researchers broadly defined engagement so that it included both the academic and the non-academic, or social, dimensions of student experiences. They developed the "Peer Engagement Scale (PES)" (acknowledging that peers play a role in knowledge construction), the "Student-Staff Engagement Scale (SES)" (acknowledging the critical role that academic staff members have) and the "Beyond-Class Engagement Scale (BES)" (recognising the importance of students connecting with one another).

Suggesting that social connectedness supports students' success is not isolated thinking (Cruickshank, 2007). Tinto (1993), through his highly regarded and frequently cited student integration model, argued that social communities on campus decreased attrition. He emphasised that academic and social integration is critical for success.

Finally, but no less importantly, involvement or what is now called engagement is a condition for student success. Quite simply, the more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely are they to persist and graduate. This is especially true during the first year of university study when student membership is so tenuous yet so critical to subsequent learning and persistence. Involvement during that year serves as the foundation upon which subsequent affiliations and engagements are built. It is for these reasons that so much of the literature on institutional retention, student learning and development speaks of the importance of building educational communities that actively involve all, not just some, students in learning with others. (Tinto, 2008, p. 5)

Sociocultural influences on student engagement have identified psychosocial influences, such as relationships, as being key (Kahu, 2013). This conceptual framework, as seen in Figure 5.3, takes account of a range of student engagement perspectives from the literature: behavioural, psychological, socio-cultural, and holistic.

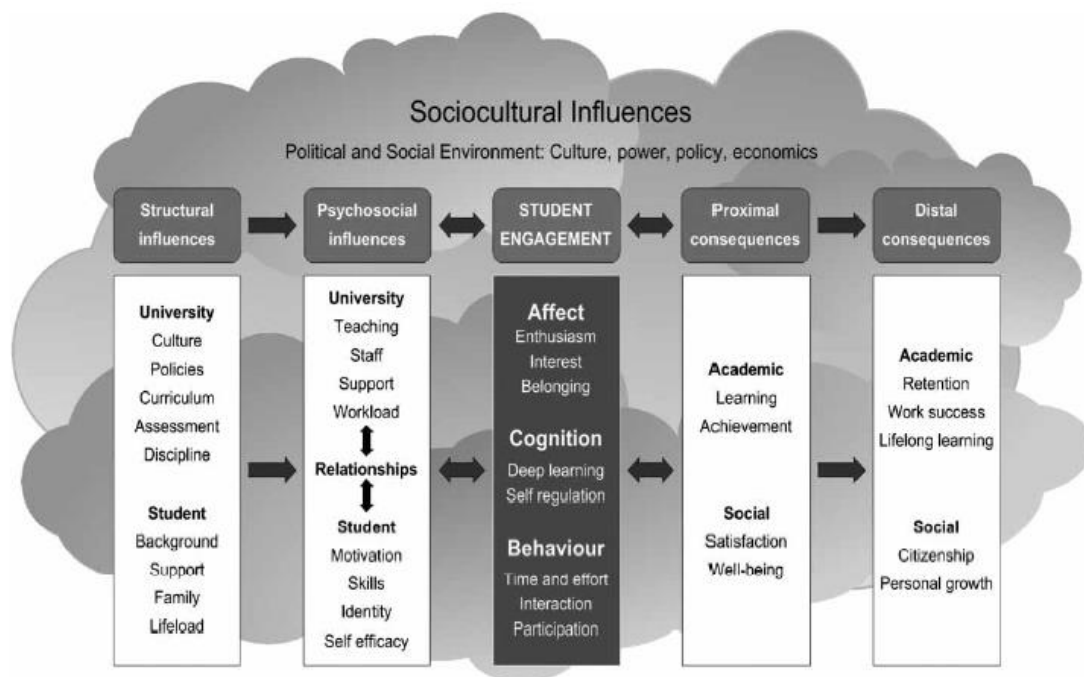


Figure 5.3: Conceptual framework of student engagement – antecedents and consequences (Kahu, 2013, p. 766)

This conceptual framework of a whole-of-institution approach supports existing research (Clarke, Stoodley, & Nelson, 2013; Kift, 2009; Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010; Nelson et al., 2014) whereby the co-curricular strategies (support services, orientation, peer programs, academic advising, social activities) are combined with a focus on curriculum. This theorising emphasises the need for a comprehensive, integrated, coordinated strategy that provides a seamless student experience through which the theory of trusting networks can bring Student Services into the picture. To be successful, buy-in is required from both academic and non-academic staff members; the strategies need to be people-rich and this is discussed further in Chapter 6 when discussing the implications of my theory for practice.

In response [to the Bradley Review], many [higher education institutions] are focusing effort on university-wide approaches to enhancing the student experience because such approaches will improve the engagement, success and retention of *all* students, and in so doing, will particularly benefit those students who are members of underrepresented groups. (Clarke et al., 2013, p. 1, italics in original)

I acknowledge that much of the student engagement literature focuses on the importance of the first year experience – this is essential for retention and identifying early mechanisms for support. Furthermore,

[f]irst year higher education students attract an inordinate amount of interest and attention from researchers, administrators and practitioners. As a consequence, an impressive body of research, practice, and policy designed to enhance the first year experience (FYE) of students has been generated, generally with the underlying aims of improving student success, retention and engagement. (Kift et al., 2010, p. 1)

The following sub-section will review this research.

5.6.1 The first year in higher education

The first year in higher education has had much focus and attention in recent times (for examples, see Yorke and Longden (2008), Kift et al. (2010)). It is said that the first year is critical to student retention and subsequent success. In student engagement literature, the first year is seen as pivotal to establishing the foundations of student engagement.

A UK study explored the reasons why students did not return for their second year at a range of institutions (Yorke & Longden, 2008). The results were compared with the results of a similar study conducted 10 years previously. Responses were quite similar in terms of that the major influencers were: poor choice of programme; lack of personal commitment to study; teaching quality; inadequate academic progress; finances; and most relevant to this study, lack of contact with academic staff members. Lack of contact with academic staff members was becoming more significant in Yorke and Longden's (2008) study, which showed that students demonstrated problems with social integration, and that this was more acute for individuals without prior experience of higher education. This evidence is critical in exploring *trusting networks*. It reinforces the need for proactive action on behalf of higher education institutions.

The transition pedagogy for first year education policy and practice is a model that describes key strategies to support student learning (Kift et al., 2010). This was developed from a decade of first year experience research as well as research

gathered during an Australian Learning & Teaching Council (ALTC) Senior Fellowship, which enables strategic, high-profile activities in areas of importance to higher education. Included in transition pedagogy is a direct reference to proactive and timely access to learning and life support, intentionally fostering a sense of belonging, as well as sustainable academic-professional partnerships. Transition pedagogy positions the first year experience as “everybody’s business” and is ideal for working with diverse student communities (Kift et al., 2010, p. 1). A brief overview of the premise of transition pedagogy is provided here:

Current research and practice related to the first year experience (FYE) of commencing higher education students are still mainly piecemeal rather than institution-wide with institutions struggling to achieve cross-institutional integration, coordination and coherence of FYE policy and practice...It is argued that, when first generation co-curricular and second generation curricular approaches are integrated and implemented through an intentionally designed curriculum by seamless partnerships of academic and professional staff in a whole-of-institution transformation, we have a third generation approach labelled here as transition pedagogy. (Kift et al., 2010, p. 1)

Another well-known transition model in Australian higher education is the five senses model of successful transition (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010). It incorporates a sense of capability, a sense of purpose, a sense of resourcefulness, and most importantly to my study, a sense of connectedness, founded on a sense of culture with clear values (see Figure 5.4 (Lizzio & Wilson 2010)). The sense of connectedness refers to student-staff relationships and student-student relationships.

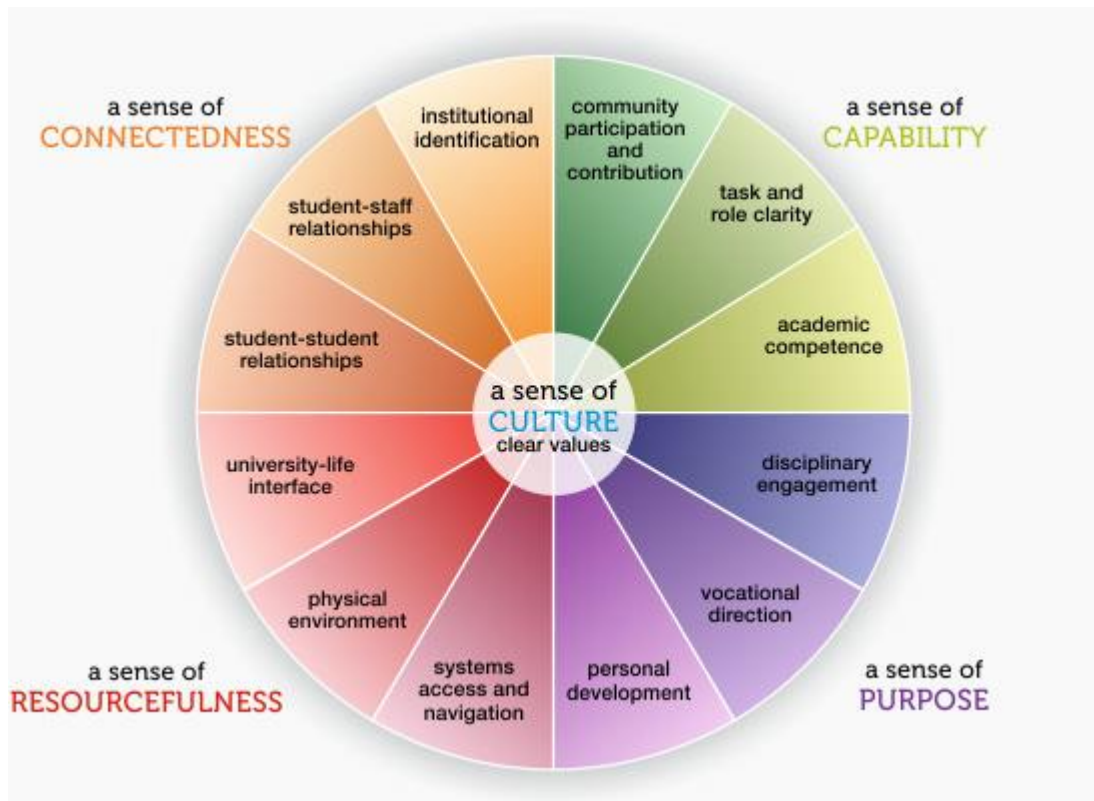


Figure 5.4: The student lifecycle model – the five senses of successful transition (RMIT University, 2013, p. 1)

The five senses of success have been described as follows (Lizzio, 2006):

1. Students' success at university depends on their sense of capability (about preparation for the role and tasks of university, how well they understand expectations, mastery of basic academic skills and commitment to and contribution to the learning community) – it is suggested that this can be developed by clarifying those expectations, providing development opportunities, and engaging students in the learning community.
2. Students' success at university depends on their sense of connectedness (those with stronger connections are more likely to be successful, quality of relationships with peers and staff, identification with their university) – this can provide opportunities to form relationships and connections.
3. Students' success at university depends on their sense of purpose (more likely to feel rewarded, more committed – consistent with findings outlined in Section 5.5).
4. Students' success at university depends on their sense of resourcefulness (proactively managing the challenges of their university experience,

navigating the discourse and system, seeking help) – we can help to clarify roles, be accessible, have clear procedures, and encourage help-seeking behaviours.

5. Students' success at university depends on their sense of academic culture (knowing how things are done, what is important, cultural competence).

A sense of connection means the quality of personal networks, working relationships with others, feeling a sense of membership with the student cohort, and encouraging peer support. The model also emphasises the importance of approachability, staff members as people, bringing the humanity into the experience, helping students to feel known and recognised, and helping students to feel a sense of belonging. Also important is procedural clarity, ease of access to information, role clarity of staff members across the institution, seeking timely assistance, referral connections/introductions to support staff members, and developing effective help-seeking skills and attitudes.

The first year experience research explored so far in this sub-section is consistent with the theory of trusting networks developed in this thesis. As is discussed in Chapter 6, the theory of trusting networks builds on, and adds to, existing literature in student engagement and the first year experience. The theory of trusting networks provides an understanding of LSES student experiences and brings Student Services directly into the approach. While student engagement and first year experience literature speaks broadly of engaging a whole-of-institution approach, the implications for Student Services are missing from the discussion. The theory of trusting networks provides an understanding of the difficulties for Student Services to contribute to student engagement and first year experience initiatives but also provides a solution, which is further described in Chapter 6.

5.6.2 Bringing Student Services into student engagement activity

There is considerable long-standing student experience research supporting the notion that for university students to be successful they must also engage with the institution outside the classroom (Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2009; McInnis & James, 1995; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). This research supports my findings that LSES student engagement with services is more likely to be successful through the use of student engagement with others as a conduit. Engagement and networks

are integral to student success. In 2005, a study of 150,000 qualitative feedback comments provided by Australian graduates about university study found that “learning remains a profoundly social experience” and social connectedness is vitally important (Scott, 2005, p. x). This is in line with the theory of trusting networks and this section provides further support for the linkages with student engagement literature.

A “Beyond-class Engagement Scale (BES)” has been developed for higher education institutions (Krause & Coates, 2008, p. 502). It includes items related to involvement outside the classroom to gauge student belonging and social connectedness. It builds on the thinking that students’ engagement with study should be based on nine qualities: “constructive teaching, supportive learning environments, teacher approachability, student and staff interaction, academic challenge, active learning, collaborative work, beyond-class collaboration, and complementary activities” (Coates, 2006, pp. 102-103). This research refers to the critical importance of students’ peer engagement with their fellow students.

A lack of social integration has been considered as one of the key factors in student attrition, along with preparation for study, institution and course match, academic experience, financial issues, and personal circumstances (Jones, 2008). “An integrated student experience whereby social interaction on campus adds value to academic outcomes will not occur by itself in an environment of negotiated engagement” (McInnis, 2002, p. 183). Research with first-in-family (first-generation) students in the United Kingdom found that friendship is a key determinant of creating student success (Stuart, 2006). This research demonstrated that friendship is a form of social capital that operates to mitigate some of the factors that impact on the success of students in higher education. While not a study of LSES students, it does provide some insights into the experiences of non-traditional students and is useful for consideration of other groups, and as aptly noted it “offers a contribution to ‘what works’ for students with no family history of [higher education]” (Stuart, 2006, p. 164).

A collaboration between the Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and the Canadian Mental Health Association (2013) has prepared guiding principles that underlie a systemic approach to managing mental health in

post-secondary studies. One of their key principles is the requirement to have a community approach to respond early to indications of student concerns. The guiding principles that were developed provided recognition that all students experience difficulties at some point during their student learning journey and for some this impacts on their student learning and health. The approach identifies and acknowledges that students have general interactions with others during the course of their day and those individuals are best placed to recognise the early signs of students needing support. This approach requires everyone to participate, particularly students and staff members, which supports the notion of making student health and wellbeing everyone's business. It is critical to build community members' capacity to reach out and connect LSES students to appropriate resources and support. The theory of trusting networks provides a framework for this and the implications for this are further discussed in the next chapter.

5.7 Summary

The four components of my theory – *needing support*, *complicating factors*, *trusting networks*, and *making success* – all have supporting literature and research. Many LSES students need support. LSES students have an array of *complicating factors* that are anticipated to impact on their student learning journeys – the findings in this research are not dissimilar to those of previous research or previous commentaries. However, the levels of LSES student social capital today, given their experiences of using networks and existing connections for support, is well-developed, thus raising questions about the applicability of Bourdieu's (1997) theory of social capital in this context. LSES students are more likely to seek support from those people within their networks with whom they have developed trusting relationships. This is consistent with existing research in various other fields but is a new finding when considering Student Services. The theory of trusting networks builds on student engagement literature and suggests bringing Student Services into students' networks, in partnership across the institution, with families, and with peers. Student Services are thus required to situate themselves in student networks.

The constant comparative process of comparing the generated theory with existing literature in this chapter has demonstrated that the theory of trusting networks has legitimacy. It complements an extensive amount of literature on trust,

student engagement, and student experiences in higher education. My findings extend existing interpersonal trust theory and provide connections into the areas of Student Services and LSES students.

The following chapter outlines the significant and unique contributions to theoretical, practical, and methodological knowledge that the current research provides. It also provides a description of the application of the theory in higher education. The chapter provides my personal reflections on the research journey and a closing statement to conclude this thesis.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Purpose and structure of the chapter

The purpose of this thesis was to theorise a model of service delivery for Student Services departments in Australian higher education that aims to provide appropriate support to LSES students. Thus, I have constructed a theory of trusting networks. Accepting that there are “multiple realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13) as to how one interprets the participants’ voices in my study, this research offers insights into the role of trust in enhancing LSES students’ engagement with Student Services. This final chapter in the thesis returns to the purpose of the study as well as its outcomes and details the distinctive contributions that this research has made to knowledge about theory, practice, and methodology. There is also an appraisal of considerations in implementing the theoretical model, as well as recognition of the delimitations and limitations of the research and recommendations for subsequent research. Finally, I also share my own learnings from the research and reflect on my research journey. The chapter ends with some closing comments.

6.2 The theory of trusting networks

I started this thesis highlighting that “[a]ccess without support is not opportunity” (Tinto, 2008, p. 1). This was an upfront argument to say that simply increasing the proportion of LSES students in higher education in Australia is insufficient to expect positive outcomes for LSES students and that support beyond access is required. To increase the outcomes for LSES students’ in higher education, institutions must provide appropriate support to increase the likelihood of their retention, progression, and subsequent success. The core purpose of this study was to develop a substantive theory. The research questions were:

What theory can inform the development of student support services in Australian higher education to respond effectively to the non-academic needs of LSES students?

- *What non-academic matters influence self-defined success for LSES students?*
- *What non-academic services or help do LSES students expect from their university whilst studying?*

- *What factors affect LSES students' uptake of non-academic services or help?*

Charmaz's (2006, 2014) approach to GTM was selected as the appropriate methodology to build theory. It provided a systematic yet flexible approach to understanding the experiences of LSES students.

The theory of trusting networks was generated from interviews held with LSES students and staff members in higher education in Australia. The theory of trusting networks is a way of understanding what influences LSES students to access support and advice. The substantive theory generated by this study is summarized below, and the diagrammatic representation of the theory introduced in Chapter 4 is repeated to aid clarity.

LSES students reported a need to access support and advice whilst studying in higher education and they also identified a range of issues, called *complicating factors*, which impacted on their student experiences. *Needing support* and *complicating factors* were identified as two foundational components of the theory of trusting networks, and these are illustrated in Figure 6.1. The arrows in the diagram represent the non-linear, mutually responsive influence that each has upon the other. LSES students *needing support* was affected by the fact that they had *complicating factors* which impacted on their student experiences. In turn, LSES students had *complicating factors* resulting in students *needing support*.

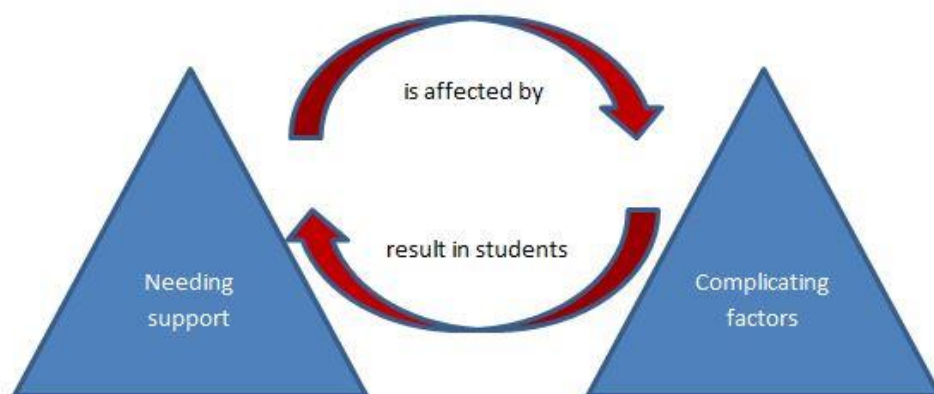


Figure 6.1: The bidirectional relationship among foundational components of the theory of trusting networks – *needing support* and *complicating factors*

In this study, LSES students had a tendency to seek out support and advice from those whom they trusted and who were in their personal networks. Those trusted were likely to be viewed as *being there*, *being familiar*, and *having credibility*, consistent with other research into the antecedents of interpersonal trust. The roles *trusting networks* had in the overarching theory are depicted in Figure 6.2. The need for support for LSES students was resolved through *trusting networks*, while *trusting networks* also mediated the impact of complicating factors.

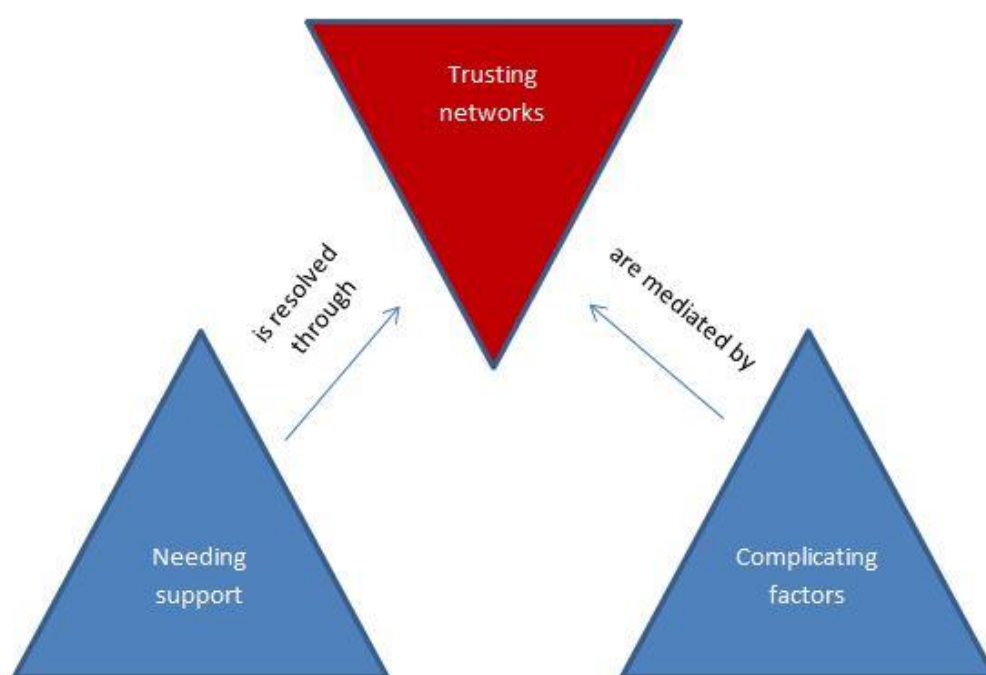


Figure 6.2: The role of *trusting networks* in relation to *needing support* and *complicating factors* in the theory of trusting networks

The involvement of *trusting networks* had a positive influence on the LSES students' experiences as is shown in Figure 6.3. Figure 6.3 summarises the elements of the theory of trusting networks, demonstrating how each component leads LSES students to *making success*. *Trusting networks* was an enabler for LSES students to make their own success. The figure also illustrates how the substantive theory was generated.

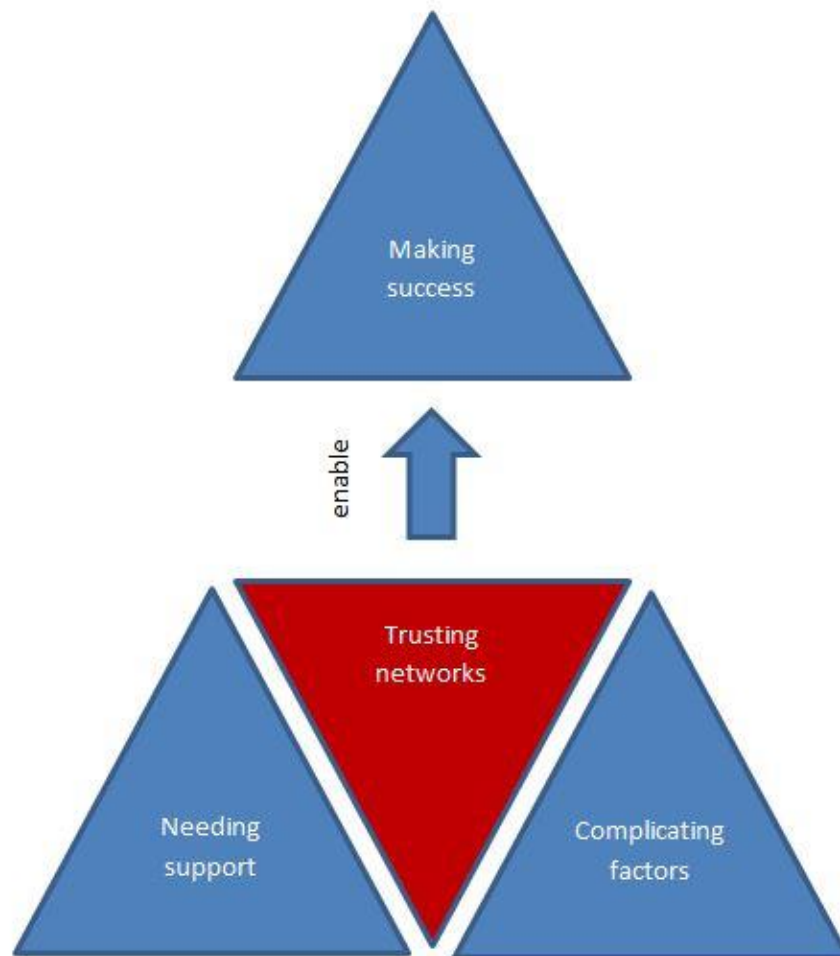


Figure 6.3: The role that *trusting networks* has in making success in the theory of trusting networks

Figure 6.4 graphically represents the substantive theory generated by this study about LSES students and their experiences with seeking support in higher education. *The theory of trusting networks provides an understanding of the propensity for LSES students who are needing support, and who are affected by complicating factors to seek out support and advice from those who are trusted from within their personal networks. This way of behaving increases the likelihood of LSES students' making success in higher education.*

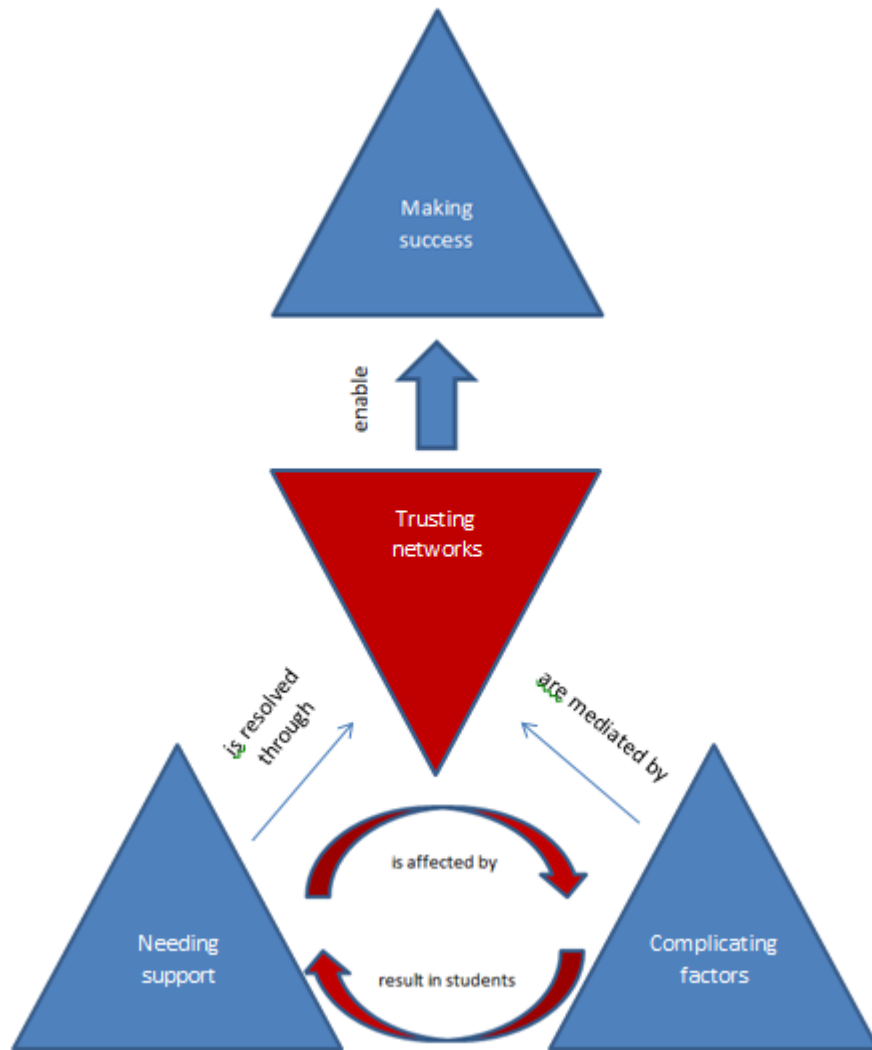


Figure 6.4: A visual representation of the theory of trusting networks

My research has generated a substantive theory that represents a theoretical, constructivist account of how LSES students seek support in higher education in Australia. It provides insights into the planning and service delivery for Student Services departments across the sector.

6.3 The significance of the research

My research has made significant contributions to three types of knowledge: theoretical, practical, and methodological. These contributions have been shared in several conference presentations as well as journal articles, which are identified at the beginning of this thesis. Each of the types of knowledge contributions that this research has made is outlined in turn.

6.3.1 Contributions to theoretical knowledge

This study has contributed to the understanding of a range of concepts including trust, social capital, as well as student engagement. It has also distinctly explained an intersection between the ideas of widening participation, socioeconomic status, social capital, and student engagement. The analysis of the research outcomes has enabled the review of these concepts in the context of LSES students in Australian higher education, and is intended to influence reflection on, and continuing analysis of, these theories. The theoretical contributions will be discussed in turn.

6.3.1.1 Trust

As identified previously, trust is a concept that has been widely studied in various contexts including marketing (Green, 2005), buyer-seller relationships (Bejou et al., 1998), organisations and management (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007), as well as a variety of other areas such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, and computer science (Schultz, 2006). Although studied widely, the concept or process of trust is still considered to be a fragmented or under-researched area (Heyns & Rothmann, 2015; van der Werff & Buckley, 2014). This study has made important contributions to understanding this complex construct from an interpersonal trust perspective. “Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). This widely accepted definition (Evans & Krueger, 2015) is reinforced and enhanced by understanding the experiences of LSES students in this study. My research affirms the applicability of interpersonal trust theory in contemporary society and also in the context of LSES students in higher education.

In the literature, trust has emerged as a multi-faceted phenomenon with key antecedents that, when combined, result in the propensity to trust or for someone to appear trustworthy. In interpersonal trust theory and literature, there have been multiple perspectives on the antecedents for trust. Most commonly known is Mayer et al.’s (1995) integrative model of trust which identifies three antecedents of trust that increase the propensity for one person to trust another – ability, benevolence, and integrity. These antecedents and others (Heyns & Rothmann, 2015) demonstrate comparative antecedents generated in my study – *being there*, *being familiar*, and,

having credibility. The semantics and intent between the constructs in Mayer et al.'s (1995) research and my study are very similar, if not the language used to describe them. As such, my research has served to affirm former antecedents of trust and interpersonal trust theory. My research extends Mayer et al.'s (1995) model of interpersonal trust as it applies to LSES students and incorporates the role of social capital as outlined in Sub-section 5.4.4. My findings provide an understanding as to why some parties are more trusted than others by LSES students and why Student Services are perhaps less trusted, or alternatively, why personal networks are more trusted.

My research goes further to extend the understanding of trust between individuals and trust of an institution: individual-trust and institutional-trust (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002). Comparatively, my study refers to LSES students trusting others within their networks (individual-trust) versus trusting a Student Services department within higher education (institutional-trust). My research affirms theories that promote that institutional-trust is more difficult to achieve, particularly in unstable and uncertain environments (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002). Given the instability and uncertainty of higher education institutions, particularly as perceived by LSES students, it is not difficult to realise that LSES students do not put trust in Student Services. This is further highlighted by the idea that “[p]eople rarely give their trust to institutions; really they trust the people” (Green, n.d., p. 1).

The current study further contributes to the understanding and theorising of trust by furthering the understanding of what influences a LSES student to access support. Emerging from the current research is the understanding that LSES students tend to seek help from trusted family members, peers, academic staff members, or other university personnel, who may or may not be equipped to provide the specialised advice or assistance they may require. Despite searching the literature for an account of Student Services, or student support more broadly, and its relationship to building trust with LSES students, I unearthed very little. My research uniquely creates a link between trust and the uptake of Student Services by LSES students in higher education, a connection I have not previously found in the literature.

6.3.1.2 Social capital and LSES students

In addition to theories of trust, this study has contributed important contemporary reflections on the theory of social capital, in particular that offered by Bourdieu (1997). Specifically, my research provides findings that suggest that the theory of social capital is outdated. Bourdieu's (1997) theorising of French social stratification in the 1960s is no longer applicable to the Australian 21st century context, particularly when it comes to LSES students in Australian higher education. LSES students in the current study tended to demonstrate high levels of social capital that assisted their ability to seek out support, a finding that refutes the idea that LSES students in education have little to no social capital. This is a unique finding of this study.

6.3.1.3 Student engagement

As well as theories of trust and social capital, the findings of my research contributed to and reinforced the understanding of student engagement theory. The current study complements and affirms research and theory about whole-of-institution approaches designed to facilitate and promote student success (Kift, 2009; Lizzio, 2006; Nelson et al., 2014; Tinto, 2012). My findings offer an understanding of what mediates LSES students making success, and reinforce existing commentary and theories that highlight that both academic and non-academic areas of the institution must work together to support student success. The theory of trusting networks places Student Services directly and specifically into student engagement frameworks. While these frameworks implicitly incorporate Student Services into their whole-of-institution approaches, this study explicitly outlines how Student Services mediates its role in such frameworks.

6.3.1.4 The intersection between socioeconomic status, social capital, trust, LSES students, student engagement, and widening participation

A distinctive contribution that my research has achieved is an appraisal of the interplay between concepts of socioeconomic status, social capital, trust, LSES student engagement, and widening participation. My research has informed the intersection between each of these concepts. The way I have understood these concepts brings an inter-connection between them that has yet to be identified in the literature and has important implications - "the ways in which 'social class' and 'higher education' are conceptualized will have important implications for how

research concerned with ‘widening participation’ is imagined and undertaken” (Archer, 2005, p. 6). My findings have demonstrated that the approaches taken by higher education, or indeed the Australian Federal Government, to widening participation cannot be explored in isolation from an understanding of LSES students’ social capital, their use of trust, and student engagement. Such an understanding will be necessary for governments to be successful in achieving positive LSES student outcomes. This extends current thinking around the student education lifecycle, as depicted in Figure 6.5.

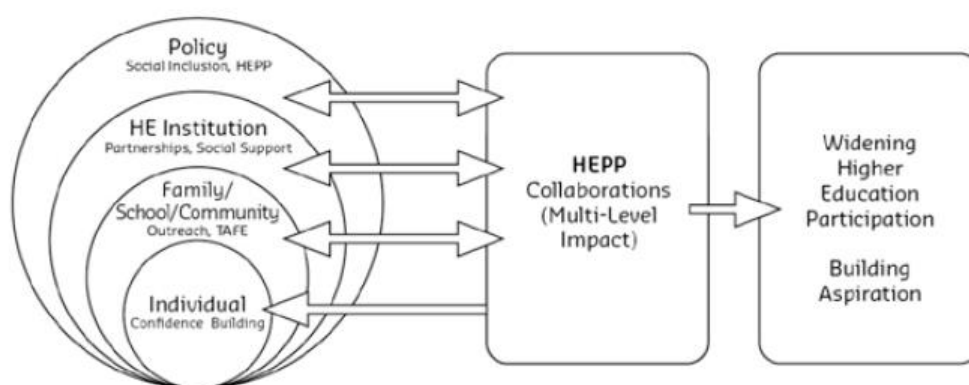


Figure 6.5: Critical stages in the student education lifecycle enabling progression into higher education [Source: NCSEHE (2015) as cited in Smith, Trinidad, & Larkin (2015, p. 19)]

This model “allows an appreciation of the array of social inclusion interventions that have been designed to target multi-level barriers facing educationally disadvantaged groups” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 18). It encompasses individual, community, institutional, and policy domains. My study takes this thinking into the student experience itself after LSES students have entered into the system. My findings indicate that a similar lifecycle exists post-enrolment where individual domains, as illustrated in Figure 6.5, should include a consideration of social capital and trust. Student Services should form a significant component of the institutional domain by partnering in whole-of-institution approaches.

6.3.2 Contributions to practical knowledge

In addition to contributing to theoretical knowledge, this research intended to provide a practical contribution to Student Services, the Federal Government’s widening participation agenda and policy, and LSES students. This research and its

findings contribute to a tradition of institutional research, which is designed to inform practice and institutional goals, policy and planning, as well as decision making (Australasian Association for Institutional Research, 2010). The research has broader implications, however, because it forms part of a range of studies about LSES student experiences and student learning journeys, which combine both academic and non-academic student support. A broad range of contributions was realised from my findings and these are detailed next.

6.3.2.1 Student Services

The research outcomes in the current study are an important achievement in terms of Student Services in higher education given that formal research about Student Services as an entity in Australia has historically been limited. This contribution to practice has been limited in Australia with the bulk of the work occurring in the United States and the United Kingdom. There has been no systematic review the role of Student Services in Australia since 1993 and specifically not in relation to how LSES students take up support services. In Australia, the most recent broad scale analysis of Student Services was held over 20 years ago (DEET, 1993). My research contributes to the understanding of how LSES students are likely to access these services. It contributes to the currently limited amount of Australian research into evaluating and monitoring Student Services (Morgan, 2012; Thomas et al., 2003b).

The findings in this study have validated not only the mere existence of Student Services in higher education but also the suite of service offerings that Student Services tend to make in Australia. The LSES students and staff members interviewed in this research reinforced the knowledge that we have about Student Services being responsible for providing support to students that would otherwise consume the resources of academic departments. LSES students and staff members interviewed in this study clearly articulated which services would be of most benefit. However, the distinctive contribution of this research was in demonstrating that the mere offering of services is insufficient to engage LSES students to take up such services. A role continues to be played by academic departments and others from within and external to the institution, to assist LSES students to navigate to such supports.

This study has interrogated how LSES students access Student Services and how Student Services departments can increase access to their services for LSES students. The research has provided theory for the sector to inform service delivery to LSES students. While there are various student engagement practices that have been documented in the literature, little has focused specifically on the role of Student Services departments. The intent of the research, amongst other reasons, was to ensure that Student Services are value-adding and are contributing to the success of LSES students.

My research offers an alternative explanation for how Student Services operate in the higher education sector. This explanation is ‘grounded’, given that it is taken from the voices of LSES students and staff members from within higher education. This thinking is consistent with student engagement literature more broadly but is a specific contribution to understanding how Student Services operationalise this student engagement. This research provides one example as to how non-academic student support services can adequately accommodate changes in the student cohort, via a theoretical model.

My findings have important implications for practitioners in Student Services. Results have informed my own practice as an administrator of student support services, as well as those in similar positions in the higher education sector, and they may have application in other post-secondary and schooling settings. In my own practice, I encourage Student Services staff members to engage with students informally and to build relationships with staff members across the institution. My theoretical framework informs the planning and delivery of services and will have an impact across the sector for managers and practitioners alike.

6.3.2.2 Widening participation agenda and policy

In addition to contributing to the development and understanding of Student Services departments in higher education in Australia, the research also contributed to the widening participation agenda, government policy and funding environment. This study has demonstrated that the LSES students in my study do seek support to stay in higher education and that investment in their success should come in the form of a whole-of-institution approach, which is consistent with student engagement findings to date. My study has contributed to the theoretical and conceptual

understanding of widening participation as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon where several elements (such as trust, capital, transition, and support) need to be aligned and integrated if widening participation is to be coherent as a theoretical framework. If the recommendations of the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008) is to be realised, then this research has shown that mere access to services and outreach to LSES students is insufficient to improve graduate outcomes.

This study's findings and the theory of trusting networks disrupts preconceived assumptions about LSES, and more broadly about socioeconomic status. My research has demonstrated that the LSES students interviewed were a highly diverse, heterogeneous group of students from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, each with their own discrete goals for success. The heterogeneity of LSES students found in this study reinforces the need to consider LSES students from multiple perspectives, and thus, "[i]n an era of rapidly changing demographics, it is impossible (and not particularly useful) to describe the 'typical' student" (Burgstahler, 2008a, p. 16). That being so, is socioeconomic status a useful social category for policy purposes? In Chapter 2, and specifically in Sub-section 2.7.1 when discussing the ethics and politics of my study, I stated that the term 'LSES students' was an identifier used for methodological convenience in my study. It has broader applicability as an indicator of potential disadvantage, used by the Australian Government. The definition of LSES students in higher education has been contested frequently. This, as well as the findings of my study, suggests that the use of the descriptor may no longer be useful for Australian Federal Government policy and that the definition of LSES needs further refinement to encapsulate the diversity within this identified socioeconomic group. This is a significant implication of my study.

6.3.2.3 LSES students

The final contribution to practical knowledge that I would like to make here is that the current research has contributed to the higher education sector's understanding of LSES students. The previous sub-section outlined the heterogeneity of LSES students, but more specifically, the point emphasised here is that my findings reinforce higher education's understanding of the complex circumstances that can impact on LSES students' participation and subsequent success in higher education. This research provides an understanding of what

influences LSES students' willingness to access Student Services and the critical role that relationships play in the development of their social and formal networks. Furthermore, insight was gained into the significant resilience and determination that LSES students in this study demonstrated when it came to participating and persisting in higher education study.

Further to making significant contributions to the understanding of LSES student experiences in higher education, the outcomes of this research highlight the impact that habitus can have on those experiences. The concept of habitus was introduced in Sub-section 1.5.2 and described as character and a way of being; a form of structured disposition (Bourdieu, 1979, 1984). Universities are a habitus in their own right – a form of institutional habitus understood to be aligned with middle class values (Stănescu et al., 2015). In universities there is a “clash of assumptions” between knowledges, experiences, and expertise between individuals and institutions (Brabazon, 2015, p. 112). My study's findings suggest that while this may be so, LSES students have sufficient social capital to navigate the complex and foreign environment of higher education and subsequently make their own success. This challenges the idea that all LSES students are deficient in their ability to transcend the university experience. In accepting that LSES students are a diverse group of individuals, the habitus of LSES students in my study were well-developed to align with university habitus. This is a significant and unique understanding of LSES student experiences in higher education.

6.3.3 Contributions to methodological knowledge

In addition to contributions to theory and practice, this research has made contributions to methodological knowledge, specifically the understanding and application of GTM as a qualitative research method and the ethical decisions required to work with vulnerable populations.

6.3.3.1 Affirming the Charmaz approach to GTM

As outlined in Sub-section 2.4.1, there has been much debate regarding the evolution of GTM since its arrival in Glaser and Strauss' early work (Charmaz, 2006). A very public debate resulted in Glaser and Strauss parting ways and evolving the methodology in different directions. This research is a strong example of working within Charmaz's approach to GTM, particularly from a constructivist

paradigm. It has reinforced that the use of interview techniques in GTM inquiry is an appropriate method for gleaning participants' stories and experiences, thus grounding the researcher in the data. The constructivist approach demonstrates an *understanding* of realities rather than an *explanation* of realities, a view held by some grounded theorists such as Glaser (1967). Glaser's view of theory was that it was generated from data; there was one truth and one reality with positivistic assumptions (Charmaz, 2006; Dunne, 2011; Gale, 2009). I have successfully generated a theory that duly acknowledges that there are multiple realities. To generate the theory from a positivist perspective in the context of this study would have failed to see the heterogeneity of LSES students as a group of individuals with varying experiences.

The current research has affirmed the use and applicability of Charmaz's (2014) approach to GTM. The study has added to the growing body of research that has applied Charmaz's approach to GTM specifically. It has demonstrated the successful use of initial coding and focused coding to assist in theorising. The study has also further demonstrated the use and benefits of memoing throughout the research journey. This research has shown that Charmaz's approach to GTM effectively enables the analysis of data to draw logical conclusions about a substantive theory. It has demonstrated that a prescriptive set of rules can be overly rigid for GTM researchers. I was able to engage the process of theoretical sampling and move from line-by-line coding to focused coding at times deemed appropriate and logical as the findings emerged. This subsequently allowed the study to adapt as needed and evolve naturally.

6.3.3.2 Applying GTM to social justice inquiry

Another significant contribution that this research has made to methodological knowledge was the direct application of GTM to social justice inquiry. As Charmaz (2014) has advocated, GTM is considered useful for social justice research and for use in social policy areas such as explorations of race, class, gender, age, and (dis)ability. Considering the needs of LSES students in higher education and how to support LSES students effectively is an important contribution to social justice in Australia. The research aimed to target the very inequities established by historically elite institutions as well as the economic and social needs of Australia and its workforce. The current study has enabled me to make interpretations of what is

happening in the world of LSES students, including barriers to their success. The constructivist approach was ideal for this analysis as it rejected any notion of objectivity, it contextualised the findings, and it respected multiple realities. From my examination of the literature, it became clear that GTM had never been applied to the examination of LSES students in the context of Australian higher education. My application of GTM has enabled the sensitivities of examining LSES populations to be considered explicitly and transparently as further described in the following sub-section.

6.3.3.3 Conducting ethically appropriate research

A final note on the contribution my research has made to methodological knowledge is the way I designed and enacted ethically appropriate research to potentially vulnerable participants. The most significant contribution was the management of the power of discourse and labelling throughout the research. Sensitising concepts around power, privilege, and equity were stated up front and I remained vigilant on these areas throughout the study. I engaged trust between participant and researcher in the process of assuring participants about their anonymity and confidentiality in the study. In establishing rapport, I was explicit, honest, and transparent about my role as the researcher, the research process, and the participants' rights and responsibilities in the study. This enabled a genuine desire by participants to contribute to the study and an honest appraisal of their experiences as evidenced by candid conversations held at the cessation of interviews once recording had ceased. Through such vigilance, I was able to ensure that I conducted a sensitive study that took account of the personal and lived experiences of LSES students. Clear definitions, explanations, and language were used to counteract any perceptions of 'disadvantage' in LSES students or imbalance of power with the researcher. In keeping with this vigilance around power and privilege was the recognition of my administrative role in Student Services and my role as a researcher. Explicit guidelines were developed that informed the planning and delivery of my role as researcher, keeping all participants informed of my agenda and their rights. Perhaps my training as a psychologist and commitment to social justice broadly automated my sensitive approach to working with participants. Regardless of motivation, my detailed approach to managing any perceived power or privilege, and the informed consent process, can be seen as an exemplar for future

researchers. The example of practices used in this study is a powerful contribution to methodology as it informs future researchers.

6.4 Implementation considerations

My research offers important insights into how Student Services can improve support to LSES students. From *needing support* to *complicating factors* to *trusting networks* to *making success*, the participant voices from this study have provided an understanding of what influences LSES students to access support. This information is not entirely new to Student Services' practitioners in higher education and practice reflects this understanding. The theory of trusting networks validates the existing views and experiences of practitioners in Student Services as well as other higher education staff members. There are several considerations in terms of implementation for Student Services from this research. Specifically, this research informs how LSES students use relationships to form connections and networks. These relationships impact on how Student Services departments need to be perceived and their consequent reputation. Student Services will benefit from an understanding of the changing student experience and a whole-of-institution approach is required to make an impact and to effect change for this student population. To effect change, consideration must be given to the application of universal design principles. Each of these practical considerations is discussed, as well as the feasibility of applying the theory of trusting networks.

6.4.1 Relationships, connections and networks

The findings of the current study suggest that meaningful relationships play a significant role in whether, and how, LSES students access support. Meaningful relationships should result in Student Services having a greater likelihood of connecting with LSES students and LSES students will have a greater likelihood of accessing specialised support services that may assist in them achieving success. These relationships are not only the responsibility of the student but Student Services should also develop relationships, networks and social connectedness across the higher education community; a form of institution-based trust.

If Student Services are to successfully form part of the LSES student network, it needs to develop a clear strategy for engagement in the institution by taking account of LSES student networks, otherwise known as student "influencers"

(Moore et al., 2013, p. xi). One of the key strategies in supporting a diverse student group, including LSES students, is to “[e]ngage a wider range of ‘influencers’” (Moore et al., 2013, p. xi). These networks are usually peers, families, academic support staff members, academics, and administration teams, to name a few. Such networks are the likely sources of support for LSES students, as described in this study and other studies, and they are considered an informal approach for providing information, advice, and guidance (Moore et al., 2013). Outreach campaigns need to be proactive and engagement initiatives need to involve both academic and professional staff members and LSES students, including their peers.

One of the key implications of this theory and its application is that Student Services are not in a LSES student’s circle of trust or personal network by default. Student Services can be seen as foreign (unfamiliar) by LSES students. As found in my study and others, LSES students are more likely to connect with those with whom they have pre-existing relationships. Student Services are not likely to be able to demonstrate the antecedents of trust to show trustworthiness. Critical to the success of the application of this theory will be Student Services’ ability to connect with those who are in LSES students’ networks. What this enables is that LSES students will seek out their trusted networks for support and those who are trusted will be informed influencers who are able to connect the LSES student with Student Services. LSES students are more likely to heed the advice of their trust networks. I call this ‘multiple entry points’ to the Services for LSES students to seek support.

Student Services can influence multiple entry points to the service, not just the LSES student accessing the service directly, but also allowing for opportunities for many individuals within LSES student networks to connect them with the Service. This requires many other people to understand who Student Services are, what contributions and specialised support they can offer LSES students, and how to access these Services. The community can respond to early indications of LSES student concerns through early alert systems (Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013). It is the responsibility of Student Services to build the capacity of institutional staff members, through training and education programs to recognise when a LSES student is in need of support and to connect LSES students with the right support (Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and Canadian

Mental Health Association, 2013, p. 15). They need to proactively monitor LSES students' engagement and to make timely interventions to normalise concerns, raise confidence, and promote help seeking behaviours. These networks and relationships need to be established and maintained before LSES students are likely to require the services. Embedded business as usual practices and the maintenance of relationships are important to consider given the turnover of staff members, the turnover of students, and institutional changes. It has already been argued that front line roles, academic advisors, peer advisors, and those whom the LSES students face predominantly are the ones to whom Student Services need to apply most effort (Canadian Association of College & University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013).

An implication of Student Services permeating the LSES students' networks is that consideration needs to be given to the trustworthiness of the Service to others within the institution. This study has shown that LSES students are likely to seek support from those whom they trust. There can be no presumption that those who are bringing LSES students to the Service actually see Student Services as trustworthy themselves. The relationships that Student Services forms with other departments, peers or others also need to be built on trust, and therefore we must be seen to be available, reliable, and responsive with training and skills to do what is required (the antecedents of trust *being there, being familiar, and having credibility*). Building the credibility and trustworthiness of the Service is important work across the institution.

While I have been referring broadly to the LSES student networks, it is important to acknowledge the critical role that peers play for LSES students and others. Throughout my study, peers have been identified as an important part of a LSES student's network. This creates a valuable opportunity for Student Services in the sector, which has already been acted upon by some universities; however, it is important for me to contextualise it here. Student Services can, and does, engage LSES students in the normal operations of its activities to improve service delivery. This activity includes mentoring programs, student clubs and societies, peer leader programs, and employing students in advisor or other support roles. This research also reinforces the benefits of engaging LSES students in the work of Student Services, as LSES students are more likely to turn to their peers for support.

Students present an opportunity to create a conduit to accessing specialised support services. These programs help to build relationships that might otherwise not occur. Perhaps an extension of this thinking is that students can influence which university-led initiatives exist instead of being passive recipients of what is offered (Bowles et al., 2014).

The way relationships are developed and utilised by LSES students in higher education must be considered in practical terms by Student Services. Such considerations have been outlined in this section so far. In a paper exploring the delivery of services to contemporary university students more generally, a communication perspective is undertaken with a focus upon relationships with students “as an essential means of increasing both the visibility and value of our work” and to assist students to achieve success as they navigate the higher education system (Paterno, 2015, p. 1). This then leads to a discussion on the practical implications for how Student Services are perceived.

6.4.2 Student Services reputation

An implication of my findings is Student Services’ trustworthiness and “[t]here are three bases on which we determine the primary trustworthiness of targets: reputation, performance, and appearance” (Sztompka, 2000, p. 71). This is an important consideration for institution-based trust; trust in Student Services departments. Trustworthiness can be informed by first-hand experience or second-hand information. In any strategy to build the profile of Student Services across the institution, there must be a stock take of existing Student Services reputations amongst different groups and a consideration of whether any of them are effective in building a connection between the Service and LSES students. As many students vocalised in the interviews in my study, Student Services are perceived as being established for students who are in dire need, or someone worse off than themselves. It is effectively considered a place to go when things are bad. There appears to be little understanding or realisation that the Service could play a proactive role in maintaining LSES student success or a place with which to become familiar in case times ahead may result in a need for specialised support services. Unfortunately the view of Student Services, or its reputation, has long been based on a deficit model. This reputation permeates the institution in terms of perceptions held by students and

staff members alike and as a result this image negatively affects students' proactive uptake of services.

For Student Services to be effective in reaching out to LSES students and becoming a contributing member of any institutional student engagement model, Student Services needs to flip the thinking and establish a reputation that demonstrates a proactive approach to LSES student development and student success, by being seen as accessible, engaging, and trustworthy. Marketing and promotional material is merely a visual cue and does not result in the development of relationships, nor does it achieve the required reputation that I have outlined for Student Services. Marketing and promotional material cannot prove the worth of Student Services in higher education. Establishing a trustworthy presence, a positive reputation, and an evaluation that informs evidence-based practice will aid in proving the worth of Student Services not only to LSES students but also to the institutional community more broadly.

Student Services can position itself to play a "change-agency role" (Hunt, 2006, p. 64). This is not unlike the community development model of change management of learning and teaching in higher education that proposes a multi-level approach and an educational leadership framework to effect change in learning and teaching centres (Hunt, 2006). It recognises that the process of change management is just as important as the end result. The process of developing and maintaining relationships, networks, and connections across the university community is just as important for Student Services as having achieved them. It is important for engagement of the key stakeholders and achieving their interest and buy-in for achieving outcomes. The process of developing and maintaining relationships should foster initiative and enable processes to be embedded into core business.

The community development model of change management stems from an organisational reorientation that requires a strong commitment by staff members of the university to effect the change. Effort needs to be placed where LSES students' networks exist. The community development model proposes that learning and teaching change occurs "where teaching actually happens", devolved to the university's departments, faculties and schools (Hunt, 2006, p. 65), a "top-down", 'bottom-up' and 'middle-out'" approach (Hunt, 2006, p. 67). This will be helpful for

sustainability and to have processes that enable networks to form and Student Services to be part of those networks.

As part of this community development model of change, there is a component where inter-sectoral collaboration occurs, thereby incorporating academic and non-academic areas of the institution (Hunt, 2006). Again, this is a whole-of-institution approach to engaging LSES students. “[T]his model starts from the perspective that a university is a community and that how something is done is as important as what is done” (Hunt, 2006, p. 75). Shared leadership is critical to cross-institutional collaboration as it is critical to the application of the theory of trusting networks. Applying the theory of trusting networks is effectively capacity-building across the institution.

In terms of organisational factors, Student Services are well placed to have a significant impact both in terms of the individual student and also the organisation. Organisationally, Student Services can seek to influence policy, practice and information flow to ensure that students find the institution relatively easy to navigate and understand. (Jardine, 2005, p. 27)

Embedding support into the student experience in a more systemic way is becoming increasingly popular in Student Services across the sector (Jardine, 2005):

Student Services have moved a long way from the old welfare approach to the provision of services which resulted in narrow reactive offerings, to a proactive, planned and often integrated approach. Many programs are collaborative efforts between the different areas of Student Services and between Students Services and academic areas. (Jardine, 2005, p. 29)

This sub-section has outlined the importance of managing how Student Services is perceived, and perhaps the reputation of Student Services, when working with LSES students and their networks. Re-adjusting the reputation of Student Services is a change management process that requires planning, effort, and sustainable outcomes.

6.4.3 The changing student experience

A further consideration for the implementation of the theory of trusting networks is the changing student experience. For Student Services to support LSES students effectively, it needs to retain an understanding of the student cohort and to remain flexible and adaptable to shifts in student trends and student thinking. The implication of my theory in a contemporary context is that Student Services needs to consider the mobility of LSES students and the flexibility of student learning. In addition, students are spending less time on campus and are increasingly online learners. A report on the experiences of first year students showed that, “in apparent contradiction” to students spending less time on campus, students reported a greater involvement with peers than previously, usually in relation to study purposes (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010, p. 1). What this suggests is that students may be becoming more strategic with their time and applying effort where they will get the best results. Unfortunately the findings suggest key staff-student interactions are reducing and “fewer students believe one of their teachers know their name” or show any interest in their progress (James et al., 2010, p. 1). James et al. (2010) speculated whether online technologies have played a part in this, as there is less need for direct contact with university staff members and when students can access notes or lectures online.

The research outlined above demonstrates that Student Services and the institution more broadly need to be more adept at engaging with LSES students. The increasingly digital or online student does not preclude the theory presented here. It does, however, direct us to the need to navigate a platform or a strategy for engaging with those students through sites such as residential schools, social media, video vignettes, and through working creatively with the curriculum. These findings further reinforce a whole-of-institution approach to LSES student support.

6.4.4 A whole-of-institution approach

Consistent with student engagement literature (Kift et al., 2010; Kuh, 2009; Nelson et al., 2014), for Student Services to be effective in supporting LSES students, they need to consider a whole-of-institution approach to LSES student support. Student health, wellbeing, and student success are everybody’s business. Supportive campuses support student engagement, which then results positively in academic success and mental health (Canadian Association of College & University

Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013). Student Services were established as separate entities in higher education to resource the support provided by academic staff members. Has the sector gone too far where Student Services have become a silo within higher education? The practical implications for the theory of trusting networks is to encourage those activities in higher education that advocate for a whole-of-institution approach to LSES student success. Some of these whole-of-institution approaches, in addition to student engagement approaches outlined in chapter 5, are discussed here.

A significant study of the student experience more broadly was the examination of students' qualitative responses to the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) (Scott, 2005). The study interrogated a database of 168,376 comments made by 94,835 graduates from a representative sample of 14 Australian universities between 2001 and 2004. The purpose of the study was to identify what engages students in productive learning in Australian higher education. This study concluded that the total experience was important: "[I]t is the combination of consistently capable staff, with appropriate learning designs and a support system that enables them to deliver what is intended that is critical" (Scott, 2005, p. 41, emphasis in original). Staff were deemed as important, and what students wanted were "capable, committed, accessible and responsive staff being in place to deliver and improve the design during implementation" (Scott, 2005, p. xiii). Student support mattered.

In an exploration of what institutions can do to enhance student retention and completion, Tinto (2010) notes that "[i]nstitutions should establish a cross-functional team of faculty, support staff, and administration whose task it is to oversee institutional planning and action for students success" (p. 120). It is argued that institutions need to move "beyond add-ons" (Tinto, 2012, p. 115) and establish conditions that are standard and embedded across the student experience - "[c]ollaborations and coordination, the underpinnings of alignment [across the institution], are critical to the success of institutional actions" (Tinto, 2012, p. 112).

The first implication of a whole-of-institution approach is the need to bridge the divide that presently exists between academic and non-academic staff members in higher education (Benson et al., 2013; Keeling, 2004). As has been aptly noted,

student success “requires both curricular and pedagogical changes and the willingness of faculty and staff to collaborate in ways that provide students a coherently linked set of activities and support that further student education” (Tinto, 2008, p. 6). A whole-of-institution approach should include students, all university staff members, and families. Multiple partnerships, both within and beyond academia, should be the basic principles of establishing Student Services (Ludeman & Strange, 2009):

Student affairs functions and services must be delivered in a manner that is seamless, meaningful and integrated with the academic mission of the institution. These practices and resulting policies must be built upon sound principles and research, and carried out by partnering with others throughout the campus community. (p. 6)

In order to bridge the divide between the academic and professional functions of the university, sharing knowledges and intelligence on student populations can assist to bridge any gap in social capital that may exist, and to bridge any deficiencies in trust that may exist. Strategies to bridge the academic and professional functions of the university have been explored previously (Keeling, 2004). Learning has been considered as a “comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity that integrates academic learning and student development processes that have often been considered separate, and even independent of each other” (Keeling, 2004, p. 4).

At a time of increasing workload for academic staff members (Steele, 2014), it is important that a shared approach to student success is established. It has been acknowledged that there is an increase in the numbers of students requiring greater support and academics are being asked to do more with less (Steele, 2014). The activities of students in this study suggest that they continue to access academics for support even though academics may not be adequately equipped to provide the required support.

Multiple examples exist of whole-of-institution practices to support student success. The Western Sydney University Learning and Teaching Standards Framework has detailed the importance of partnerships across the institution, among

academic and professional staff members, throughout the student learning journey for student success. The delivery standards stipulate accessibility, responsiveness, and skills (Krause, 2011).

In a climate of reduced funding, more students, increased competition and expansive changes in information technologies, it has been demonstrated from case study research that institutional change is required, where cross-institutional strategies will ensure integration and engagement across the entire student learning journey (Hunt & Peach, 2009). There is an importance placed on corporate and academic alignment to support the core business of higher education: teaching, learning, and research. This sustainable framework includes holistic planning, interconnections and, cross-organisational goals (Hunt & Peach, 2009). Hunt and Peach's (2009) case study draws attention to the reduction of silos through whole-of-organisation responsibility by senior managers. "Coordinated action" is an important directive (Hunt & Peach, 2009).

The key to successful interorganisational collaboration is an incentive to collaborate, a willingness to collaborate, ability to collaborate, and capacity to collaborate (Einbeinder, Robertson, Garcia, Vuckovic, & Patti, 2000). "Interorganisational" in this context are "separate organizations that develop relationships with each other in an effort to improve the quality of the services delivered and, thus, to more effectively meet client needs" (Einbeinder et al., 2000, p. 119). Trust is a key to these relationships which is enhanced by open communication. Key implications for this idea in the current context suggest that collaborators should be proactive and achieving goal congruence between different departments across the institution, joint problem solving, and a joint focus on improving outcomes.

The practical implications of the theory of trusting networks and the current section of this thesis can be summarised by the following view:

Efforts to improve the retention and success of students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds require substantial and thorough commitment on the part of institutions...The empirical research suggests that relationships and positions are at the heart of student success; institutions must be willing to examine their internal structures of power and

representation, including the spheres of governance, curricula and pedagogy. The responsibility for change is, therefore, laid squarely at the feet of the [higher education] sector and institutions in particular; it is not acceptable to continue to blame new student cohorts, because unless the institutional habitus is changed they will continue to be discriminated against. (Thomas, 2002, p. 440)

6.4.5 Universal design

The process of universal design is one approach to coordinated action. Universal design was first coined in the 1970s as an idea for designing products and environments in the fields of architecture and consumer product design so that they were available for people of all abilities (Burgstahler, 2008a). Universal design attempts to proactively address both equality and accessibility, and subsequently be more inclusive (Burgstahler, 2008a). The most commonly described example of applying the principles of universal design is the curb cut where people with strollers, those on roller blades, those on bicycles, as well as those with disability, such as wheelchair users benefit from having it (Goff & Higbee, 2008). Universal design “means that rather than designing your facility and services for the average user, you design them for people with a broad range of abilities, disabilities, ages, reading levels, learning styles, native languages, cultures, and other characteristics” (Burgstahler, 2015). The principles of universal design result in an environment, program, or service that will be more usable by everyone and minimise the need for special arrangements or special accommodations for particular cohorts as well as for those who are invisible and do not disclose their particular circumstance. It is suggested that universal design is a “paradigm for higher education that would simultaneously address issues of equality, accessibility, social integration, and community” (Burgstahler, 2008a). In Sub-section 1.5.1, I referred to LSES students as ‘invisible’. Without taking account of this invisibility, institutional discrimination can result where LSES students are not appropriately accommodated (Brabazon, 2015, p. 111).

I was intimately familiar with the principles of universal design prior to the commencement of this research; however, I did not declare this in the introduction as a sensitising concept. It is only after the analysis of data and subsequent theorising

that the principles of universal design were considered to be applicable to the current context.

When UD principles are applied in a postsecondary institution, educational products and environments meet the needs of potential students with a wide variety of characteristics. Disability is just one of many characteristics that a student might possess. For example, one student could be Hispanic, six feet tall, male, thirty years old, an excellent reader, primarily a visual learner, and deaf. UD requires consideration of all characteristics of potential users, including abilities and disabilities, when developing a course or service. (Burgstahler, 2013, p. 9)

6.4.5.1 Universal design of Student Services

A universal design approach to Student Services in higher education is a practical consideration of this research. Universal design principles in higher education have been applied to the learning and teaching context, information technology, and physical spaces to address the growing diversity of postsecondary student populations and to meet instructional challenges (Burgstahler, 2008a; Scott, McGuire, & Shaw, 2003); but more recently they are being applied to student support and services (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009). “[S]caffolding assistance” is being undertaken throughout the student learning journey (Brabazon, 2015, p. 112). Examples of applying universal design to residential life, counselling, careers services, and orientation programs have shown services that are welcoming and accessible (Anderson et al., 2008). This may involve the way staff members communicate, the physical environments, the accessibility of resources, and the inclusiveness of events and activities (Burgstahler, 2015) - “[u]niversal design is incredibly important and prescient for all layers of education” (Brabazon, 2015, p. 98). In the context of Student Services, universal design results in the Service having the pre-requisite knowledge of LSES student experiences and it pre-empts the issues that matter for LSES students.

The application of universal design principles to support LSES students is an extension of the paradigm. In the current context, a practical consideration for Student Services is to consider an approach to student support that complies with the

principles of universal design where if you make adjustments for a particular cohort then it will ultimately benefit all. The process of traversing the application of universal design is optimised by involving LSES students in all stages of development and implementation. Engaging students in the process and the adoption of guidelines and standards with sufficient and appropriate training of staff members and ongoing support are just some of the items detailed in pre-existing checklists for applying universal design in Student Services (Burgstahler, 2015). This proposed extension of universal design of Student Services for LSES students goes beyond physical environments of the departments themselves, beyond the ability of support staff members to communicate effectively with all students, beyond the accessibility of printed and electronic resources, and beyond the ability for all students to fully participate in events and other activities (Burgstahler, 2008b).

6.4.5.2 Universal design as a whole-of-institution approach

For universal design to be effective in the context of LSES students, the application of universal design must be a whole-of-institution approach. Many universal design principles focus on the classroom and more recently on student affairs and services, as discrete and specific units (Higbee, 2008). Universal design is yet to be widely embraced by higher education (Burgstahler, 2008c) but the application across the institution for the benefit of LSES students, and subsequently all students, should be considered. Researchers have argued that institutions that focus on equity and diversity strategically are more likely to promote universal design (Higbee, 2008) therefore it is not unreasonable to suggest that higher education institutions who aim to support LSES students may apply the principles of universal design if encouraged to do so.

The application of institutional universal design would vary slightly from the typical guiding checklists for Student Services. Institutional universal design is not only providing accessible physical environments and having inclusive and accessible visual and reading material, but ensure that staff members across the institution are aware of resources and procedures for providing support and that access to support is identified in a range of publications and resources across the institution (not just those supplied by the Student Services department) (Burgstahler, 2008a, p. 16). Institutional universal design promotes interaction among students, and between staff members and students (Higbee, 2008). Furthermore, “[t]hese interactions lead

to students feeling a sense of connection to the institution and foster the belief that someone cares about them” (Higbee, 2008, p. 197).

Universal design is “a process as well as a goal” (Burgstahler, 2008a, p. 12). It is a process of proactive ongoing activity. In institutional universal design, academics and non-academics have shared responsibility in creating “welcoming, accessible, and inclusive environments” (Burgstahler, 2008a, p. 15). To be effective, it is noted, that students should be engaged in the process as well (Burgstahler, 2008a).

Community colleges are struggling to educate the increased number of underprepared students entering the system. Now more than ever educators see the need to tear down the silos between student services (e.g., staff involved in orientation, advising, counseling, and admissions) and educational services (i.e., those who are teaching and developing programs and curriculum). Instead of each division of the college focusing only on specific prescription-type solutions for the multitude of student differences, educators see value in taking an intentionally universal approach. (Wagner, 2008, p. 451)

6.4.6 Feasibility

In considering the applicability of the generated theory, one final point that I would like to make is in relation to a feasibility argument that extends the community development model of change management (Hunt, 2006). For something to be feasible, it needs to be practicable and convenient. The theory of trusting networks presents a feasible approach to service delivery for Student Services departments.

Student Services departments are responsible for supporting the retention and the success of higher education students. They complement the learning and teaching experience of the student learning journey and, consistent with the theory, they work in a whole-of-institution approach. Communicating with each and every student within the institution to ensure she or he is aware of Student Services has proven to be difficult and unsuccessful. Knowledge of Student Services and what they do is limited amongst the student body. This is further complicated by the

notion that, even if students are aware of the Service, this does not necessarily translate in their use of the services.

A whole-of-institution approach requires that Student Services staff members work with all other areas of the institution. This approach has been widely published as successful and crucial to student success. I argue that the efforts of Student Services staff members are needed to prioritise meaningful relationships with key target cohorts and services that engage LSES students with others. The effort to traditionally promote and market Student Services directly to LSES students is an economy of scale issue. It is unrealistic to think that Student Services could adequately promote services and build relationships with the entire student body. At my institution, this would require Student Services to have touch points and relationships with in excess of 25,000 students and this institution is one of the smaller Australian universities. Economies of scale would suggest that more is to be gained from building relationships with and promoting services to the staff members who regularly interact with students and allow them to bring Student Services into the networks of students. In my institution, this would equate to working with around 1,500 staff members. There are multiple institutional and operational benefits of this approach, including cost, time, bottom line, and most importantly, breadth of impact.

Some research has highlighted the need for cohort monitoring to enhance the engagement and success of commencing students (Nelson et al., 2012). I believe that data mining to identify students as potentially disengaging is only one area of focus and is a single approach to facilitate student support. If networks are established and relationships formed, these data would not be required and would instead be picked up through consistent interactions and connections. This research suggests following up offers, monitoring academic progress and the submission of assignments, and enrolment monitoring. This process will need to be handled delicately and sensitively as it may impair LSES students' trust as such monitoring and the resulting action will not be based on established trusted relationships or connections.

The needs of LSES students are complex and diverse. A universal design approach to student support would ensure that, if LSES students are catered for, it is more likely that the services would be of value to everyone (Burgstahler, 2008a).

6.5 Delimitations and limitations of the research

While this research has contributed broadly and uniquely to theory, practice, and methodology, there were established delimitations of the study, as well as limitations resulting from the study, that must be noted.

6.5.1 Delimitations

Certain delimitations were established at the outset in order to have parameters of the study that were deliberately set in order to have a doctoral study that was achievable. It is important to recognise these delimitations.

- The participants in the study were intentionally set as LSES students, on campus and studying in Queensland, domestic students, over the age of 18 years, and at least in their second semester of study. While accepting that this group was still a heterogeneous group, this selection was a direct attempt to narrow the focus as much as possible. This resulted in the study not considering online learners. It did not consider the experiences of LSES students who were international students. Additionally, it did not explore the experiences of students in any form of headstart program (pre-18 years) or in the first semester of study.
- Off campus or online learners – there was a time in the research that I wanted to alter the target groups to include those studying off campus; however, the decision was made to stay focused and to maintain the current scope. It was recognised that an extension to include online learners would likely make it unwieldy.
- Owing to the heterogeneity in the group, I did not explore the nuances of the differences between school leavers and mature-age students.
- Similarly, I did not explore the differences between students with disabilities and those without such disabilities.
- While the students in this study were largely regional students owing to the regional nature of the university, the study did not attempt to explore the experiences of those in urban areas.
- Among the regional students, participants were drawn from campuses of varying sizes. There was no assessment of the effects on students' experiences or the differences between the sizes of campuses.

- Participants included only a small number of staff members and, owing to saturation, further exploration of staff members' voices was not attempted. The study did not explore the consistency of such voices with those of other staff members within the institution.

6.5.2 Limitations

In addition to the delimitations, there were some limitations of the research that I had not anticipated.

- The study did not attract LSES students from various cultural groups, such as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, South Sea Islanders, refugees, or other migrant populations. The study did not focus on people with English as a second language. It is recognised that, should the participant cohort had been more culturally diverse, I would have opted not to explore various nuances in order to remain within the scope of the study.
- Given my role in the institution outside of being a researcher, a lost opportunity in hindsight for research was to explore the pre- and post- effects of applying such a model and how it may increase access to services for LSES students.
- The study did not capture views of those students or staff members who declined to participate or were not offered an invitation to participate.
- The study did not seek to explore differences of LSES student experiences between regional universities and non-regional universities. The study university was not representative across all Australian universities.

6.6 Areas for further research

“Rather than seeing your perspectives as truth, try to see them as representing one view among many” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 38). With this in mind, while my findings are a construction of the reality that I perceived throughout the research, it does provide opportunities for further research and present challenges for the next researcher to enquire into. It would be valuable to consider other types of student cohorts and to compare their experiences with the findings of this study. Some potential research topics include:

- Are the LSES student experiences analysed in this study consistent with:

- Online learners;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- Students from other cultures or non-English speaking backgrounds;
- Students studying in metropolitan areas?
- Are there differences among LSES students depending on:
 - Whether they are mature-age or school leavers;
 - Which gender they identify as;
 - Whether they may have disabilities or not; or,
 - Their living arrangements (staying on campus, with or without family members)?
- The differences in completion rates between LSES students and non-LSES students and the factors influencing completion rates;
- Further exploration of LSES students' awareness of Student Services and its correlation with campus size.
- How can the resulting theory be applicable in online environments?
- Further explore LSES students levels of social capital today and compare the findings to Bourdieu's (1997) theory as well as other social capital theories.
- Further explore interpersonal trust and how it affects relationships for LSES students in higher education, and perhaps in other contexts.
- There are LSES students with low uptake of services, or even no knowledge of services, yet they still succeed at university – what are their critical success factors?
- The application of universal design to Student Services more broadly, not just in consideration of students with disabilities.
- The application of universal design in an institutional context.
- The role of self-efficacy (or sense of capability) in LSES students and how student experiences, academic and non-academic, shape self-efficacy.
- The impact of foundation years and peer mentors in the first year on the success and/or progression of LSES students.

These are just some areas of research that I considered throughout the duration of the study or were brought to my attention by critical readers. Whilst I contained the scope of this study, there were occasions where curiosity beckoned further research. Regardless of the opportunities that this research has opened for others, GTM itself

is not a verification process. GTM is an inductive process and so one further area for research may be to explore if the same theory applies to other contexts – other educational contexts, or other relationships and networks. Notwithstanding the opportunities for further research, the generated theory stands as a constructivist view of LSES student experiences in higher education and is of great importance to the ongoing development of Student Services.

6.7 The biographically situated researcher

In Section 1.7 I introduced myself as the researcher. I outlined that I have worked in higher education for over 12 years and in student support services for over ten of those 12 years. At the time of the research, I held the position of Director of Student Services and Social Justice at an Australian regionally-headquartered university. This research journey has had a profound impact on my own learnings and experiences as a practitioner and, now, researcher.

As a practitioner, I have a greater understanding of, and insight into, LSES student experiences in higher education and already I am seeking to implement change within my department that is informed by the findings of this research. More specifically, I am working on a cross-institutional engagement strategy that brings Student Services into the networks of LSES students and builds relationships with LSES students themselves. I now have conceptual knowledge of how whole-of-institution approaches and student engagement theories are applied to Student Services, as well as their associated challenges. This research has widened my perspective of Student Services in a way that my administration/practitioner role could not have done.

As a researcher, I have a greater understanding and appreciation for the application and benefits of GTM and researching vulnerable populations. I also have greater practical knowledge of the application and benefits of qualitative research more broadly. I have come to learn that GTM provides a useful and effective approach to understanding experiences of individuals and groups. I have also become more attuned to navigating deficit discourse and ensuring that vulnerable populations who are involved in research methods benefit from institutional research.

6.8 Closing statement

Given that my research is based on constructivism and a grounded theory approach, this theorising will be an ongoing activity (Charmaz, 2014). The theory of trusting networks is not attempting to ‘explain’ realities but rather to generate one perspective, my perspective, on what contributes to LSES students’ accessing of student support services. This knowledge reflects the participants’ and my own constructions and prior experiences and offers an interpretivist view of the world. While it is just one perspective on the voices heard in this study, the study has legitimacy owing to the significant contributions it has made to theory, practice, and methodology. It provides a unique understanding of the experiences of LSES students in Australian higher education and subsequently informs the development and planning of service delivery in Student Services.

Higher education in Australia is seeing an increase in the number of LSES students accessing tertiary study. While the Bradley Review (Bradley et al., 2008) was commissioned by a former Federal Government, the current government are continuing to talk about access to higher education and so supporting LSES students will continue to be a priority. With this in mind, the concept “access without support is not opportunity” (Tinto, 2007) will continue to be of priority to me personally and should be a national priority in my view. Higher education providers run the risk of setting LSES students up for failure if they do not concern themselves with the provision of support services to transition LSES students successfully into, and through, their studies. Indeed, entry into university without adequate support structures for LSES student success can be counterproductive (Devlin & McKay, 2014). LSES students may have the social capital required, as found in my study, to navigate a highly complex structure such as universities. Higher education is a different culture to what LSES students may be familiar with and there is much to be learned.

The factor that all these students have in common if they are to succeed in their studies is the need to adapt to an institutional climate, and meet institutional requirements, in a context that is not historically organised to meet diverse student needs, and which may be very unfamiliar to them. (Benson et al., 2013, p. xii)

In this changing environment in higher education, Student Services need to be adaptable and flexible in this changing environment. I echo the following sentiment:

Like Kift, I too argue that the most effective site to engage in changing higher education is from the centre. Student support services are important and essential but, as I argued earlier, they are largely peripheral to the mainstream of higher education. A student equity agenda for higher education must centre on the student learning environment and experience if it is to challenge the exclusion of certain bodies and what they embody. (Gale, 2009, p. 10)

The findings of the current study have been disseminated broadly among Student Services practitioners. The theory and findings have been presented at a range of conferences and to colleagues in the higher education sector. The substantive theory and the participants' voices have been socialised to members of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA). ANZSSA is an incorporated international association established to provide support and development to higher education staff members who aim to foster student engagement, participation, wellbeing and development. Many Student Services departments across higher education in Australia and New Zealand are members of this association. It is therefore the ideal audience for disseminating and discussing my findings. There has been widespread support for the findings. As an example, when shared in a presentation at a 2014 conference on the first year experience in higher education, the theory resonated with over 55 participants (White, 2014). A question and answer session resulted in many comments validating the findings and an appreciation that formal research has found what they had already come to know in practice. In my own departmental discussions, staff members have been able to appreciate that the research findings apply to them in their own practice by building relationships and connections across the university in order to create multiple entry points to the service. Conversations with colleagues across the sector have resulted in robust discussions about the practical considerations of applying such theory.

This research has been about how Student Services can improve support to LSES students. I have generated a theory that suggests that accessibility of the Service needs to be improved. Student Services are now working within an

environment where they are required to be increasingly adaptable to constant change, able to respond to diversity, move with technological shifts, operate in a fast-paced dynamic way, navigate uncertain funding environments, be multi-skilled, and understand the extraneous pressures upon LSES students. All of these factors contribute to Student Services staff members being increasingly time poor and therefore needing to work smarter not harder; and thus work more efficiently.

Change is complex and multidimensional (Hunt, 2006). A whole-of-institution approach to LSES student support is no different. Building trust with LSES students is not a marketing campaign; it takes time to develop and takes genuinely meaningful relationships. The theory of trusting networks has made unique and significant contributions broadly, and it is an important achievement in the history of Student Services in higher education in Australia.

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Appendix A: Line-by-line codes

	CODE		FREQUENCY
C1	differing to others		10
C2	having parental influences		1
C3	working versus studying		1
C4	desiring to change		2
C5	needing to change		1
C6	meaning to study		1
C7	being a role model	in vivo	1
C8	having pride		2
C9	having work/life balance		6
C10	worrying	in vivo	1
C11	wearing multiple hats		1
C12	having extra stress		8
C13	needing financial assistance		8
C14	no luxury of failing		1
C15	not wasting opportunities		4
C16	complicating factors		8
C17	having constant distractions		1
C18	trivialising issues		1
C19	being overwhelmed		5
C20	having learned persistence		2
C21	being adaptable		1
C22	accepting life the way it is		1
C23	having resilience		4
C24	coping		2
C25	having a higher threshold		1
C26	breaking point to access services		1
C27	understanding university as an education provider		1
C28	receiving word of mouth knowledge/referrals		5
C29	having personable contact		2
C30	getting to know the person		1
C31	knowing by name		5
C32	connecting through other pathways		1
C33	not using a poster		1
C34	someone telling me		1
C35	having connectedness		3
C36	being hard to inform		1
C37	difficulty in educating staff		1
C38	connecting services with staff		1
C39	requiring stress management		1
C40	counselling		6
C41	referring		7
C42	requiring time management		5

C43	needing transitional supports		1
C44	needing welfare support		2
C45	needing legal advice		1
C46	needing disability support		6
C47	needing parental support		2
C48	being first in family		2
C49	having support from family		8
C50	needing more services		1
C51	having community connectedness		1
C52	volunteering		1
C53	having student responsibility		2
C54	having a supportive environment	in vivo	1
C55	having a restorative space	in vivo	1
C56	long lasting supports are external		1
C57	not knowing what Student Services does		10
C58	stigma in accessing services		2
C59	building the relationship		1
C60	Student Services taking responsibility		2
C61	faculties knowing what Student Services do		3
C62	bearing the burden		1
C63	being on the same team	in vivo	3
C64	letting go		1
C65	getting a return on investment		1
C66	having flexibility		2
C67	coming to Student Services later		1
C68	accessing support when you hit the wall	in vivo	1
C69	having previous exposure		1
C70	making staff connections		4
C71	having networks		6
C72	being comfortable with certain others		4
C73	gaining stakeholder buy in		1
C74	promoting to staff		2
C75	putting face-to-name		2
C76	having awareness, appreciation, understanding		1
C77	understanding processes of counselling		1
C78	educating stakeholders		1
C79	mentoring		1
C80	needing career support		1
C81	needing employment		1
C82	wanting health promotion		1
C83	battling systemic issues		1
C84	having all they know	in vivo	2
C85	having diversity within		1
C86	difficulty making connections		2

C87	linking with peers		4
C88	having heightened determination		16
C89	having drive		7
C90	having persistence		1
C91	culture of accessing support		1
C92	having anxiety		2
C93	having family who have been there		2
C94	having credibility		6
C95	having trust		15
C96	fulfilling dreams		2
C97	self-caring		1
C98	having "had enough"	in vivo	1
C99	getting behind		1
C100	taking self-care		1
C101	caring for children		1
C102	prioritising over grades		1
C103	settling for less		1
C104	not missing work		1
C105	seeking opportunities		1
C106	getting relief from others		1
C107	having external stressors		3
C108	seeking assistance		1
C109	just helping me through	in vivo	1
C110	having accomplishments		1
C111	having surprised accomplishments		1
C112	having evidence-based confidence		1
C113	having no alternative to study		2
C114	building rapport with staff		2
C115	being familiar		8
C116	being open		2
C117	having no question a stupid question	in vivo	3
C118	success is trying again and again	in vivo	1
C119	acknowledging from others		1
C120	normalising		4
C121	having just in time information		9
C122	not expecting to fail		1
C123	not thinking you need help		1
C124	daunting		2
C125	liberating	in vivo	1
C126	being with the rhythm of university		1
C127	having organisational skills		2
C128	learning through mistakes		1
C129	others identifying slippage and stress		2
C130	others backing me up		1
C131	guiding		3

C132	motivating		2
C133	getting your stuff together	in vivo	1
C134	having peers as support		8
C135	learning from peers		1
C136	having a wake up call	in vivo	1
C137	having success in the journey		1
C138	knowing your peers		1
C139	knowing I've got this	in vivo	6
C140	having integrity		7
C141	doing everything right by us		1
C142	seeing Student Services as the anonymous		1
C143	building a sense of community		2
C144	having a circle of trust		1
C145	needing accommodation advice		2
C146	not knowing what you don't know		4
C147	seeing university as a challenge		1
C148	seeing travel as a barrier		1
C149	seeing computer knowledge as a barrier		1
C150	developing a routine		3
C151	finding a way to connect		1
C152	never needing to know about services		1
C153	working hard to get results		1
C154	being not entitled to support		2
C155	feeling hopelessness		1
C156	being in too deep into it, to get help	in vivo	2
C157	asking for help in hindsight		2
C158	needing childcare support		3
C159	being unconditional		1
C160	failing promises		1
C161	using connections		1
C162	getting to know the people		1
C163	having friendly support		2
C164	willing to help		6
C165	knowing names and faces		3
C166	being the "go to person"	in vivo	3
C167	using staff as support		1
C168	staff holding my hand	in vivo	1
C169	having experience		10
C170	understanding when to ask for help		2
C171	staff 'knowing' me		4
C172	having relationships with staff		3
C173	being ambivalent		1
C174	understanding where you are coming from		3
C175	frustrating by lack of interest		1

C176	having student referrals		2
C177	having confidence in the connections		2
C178	respecting the support		3
C179	waiting too long to access support		2
C180	seeing lecturer as source of authority		2
C181	staff working closely together		1
C182	building the relationship	in vivo	1
C183	maintaining the relationship		1
C184	knowing who to go to		2
C185	not asking for help		3
C186	having informal and incidental connections		1
C187	supports knowing what to do		2
C188	referring from someone who has experienced it		3
C189	seeing positive reputation of services		1
C190	seeing academics as most significant other		1
C191	having informed academics		1
C192	having meaningful supports		2
C193	having knowledge		3
C194	being grateful for supports		2
C195	taking advice		1
C196	having the need for quick advice		1
C197	getting short, sharp advice		1
C198	thinking what's wrong with me	in vivo	1
C199	having the fear of being judged by others		2
C200	staff as being 'nice'		1
C201	staff as being 'helpful'		1
C202	not knowing anyone		1
C203	knowing a network of convenience		1
C204	having a fly in fly out approach to studies		1
C205	intimidating environment		3
C206	having sister as support		1
C207	not knowing what to expect		2
C208	asking tutors and lecturers for help		4
C209	being there		2
C210	knowing them to seek support		1
C211	expanding networks		2
C212	dealing with it		5
C213	pre-existing relationships		5
C214	knowing them in another context		2
C215	having convenient support		1
C216	having available support		3
C217	having responsive support		2
C218	recognising lack of networks = diminished engagement		1
C219	proving a point		4

C220	having positive role models		2
C221	having expertise		1
C222	known sources referring		3
C223	staff knowing more		2
C224	being reliable		1
C225	having relationships with others		1
C226	never giving up		1
C227	minimising self-importance		3
C228	just doing it		1
C229	seeking help at peak of stress		1
C230	not wanting to burden others		4
C231	justifying self-needs		1
C232	feeling guilt		1
C233	not knowing what would help		1
C234	having social networks		1
C235	having a sense of belonging		2
C236	seeing student administration as support		4
C237	visibility of services giving sense of normality		1
C238	understanding the importance of knowing services are there		1
C239	confiding in others		1
C240	showing they care		1
C241	receiving support from friends		3
C242	offering support		1
C243	referrer knowing the system		1
C244	accessing support if tried and proven		1
C245	having professional source of support		1
C246	having intimacy		1
C247	knowing they're there	in vivo	1
C248	knowing they're part of the overall network		1
C249	having mutually beneficial relationships		2
C250	being honest		1
C251	welcoming		1
C252	being time poor		3
C253	knowing they know what you need		1
C254	being listeners		3
C255	having a peer network		2
C256	being out of comfort zone		2
C257	being not alone		2
C258	wondering what is normal		2
C259	wanting the best for students		1
C260	seeing they're there with you		1
C261	making the effort		1
C262	making others proud		2
C263	bettering self		1

Appendix B: Participant information sheet

University of Alice Heights

Participant Information Sheet

HREC Approval Number: H12REA137

Full Project Title: The widening participation agenda in higher education in Australia: theorising a model of service delivery for non-academic student services to support students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Principal Researcher: Ms Christie White

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project. This study aims to understand the experiences of students in accessing and utilising student support services whilst studying at university. We hope to understand in greater detail what is considered most helpful and how those services need to be delivered to assist students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to succeed in their studies.

1. Procedures

Participation in this project will involve:

- Participating in an interview with the researcher of approximately 60 minutes duration responding to questions in relation to student support
- A contribution to research and literature in relation to student support services in higher education

2. Voluntary Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. Any information already obtained from you will be destroyed. Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with the University of Alice Heights. Please notify the researcher if you decide to withdraw from this project.

Should you have any queries regarding the progress or conduct of this research, you can contact the principal researcher:

Ms Christie White
Faculty of Education
University of Alice Heights, Alice Heights
(12) 3456 7890

If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant please feel free to contact the University of Alice Heights Ethics Officer on the following details.

Ethics and Research Integrity Officer
University of Alice Heights
Ph: (12) 3456 7890 / Email: ethics@aliceheights.edu.au

Appendix C: Consent form

University of Alice Heights

Consent Form

HREC Approval Number: **H12REA137**

TO: Participant

Full Project Title: The widening participation agenda in higher education in Australia: theorising a model of service delivery for non-academic student services to support students from low socio-economic backgrounds

Principal Researcher: Ms Christie White

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that the recording will be retained in a locked filing cabinet or one a computer in a password protected area only accessible by the primary researcher
- I understand that I will be audio taped during the study.

Name of participant.....

Signed.....**Date**.....

If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant please feel free to contact the University of Alice Heights Ethics Officer on the following details.

Ethics and Research Integrity Officer
Office of Research and Higher Degrees
University of Alice Heights
Ph: (12) 3456 7890
Email: ethics@aliceheights.edu.au

Appendix D: List of pseudonyms used in the study

Interviewee #	Pseudonym
1	Reese
2	Jordan
3	Morgan
4	Drew
5	Bailey
6	Pat
7	Chris
8	Adrian
9	Jessie
10	Taylor
11	Ashley
12	Casey
13	Charlie
14	Sam
15	Alex
16	Brady
17	Cassidy
18	Stevie
19	Erin
20	Jamie