THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Part-time Study, Full-time Lives:

Stories of Success from

Part-time Undergraduate Students

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of PhD

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by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with part-time undergraduate students within the higher education system in England. In particular it focusses on the strategies this group of students employ to complete their degrees successfully. I place the experience of successful part-time students at the heart of the thesis because I think that it is vital in the twenty-first century to further our understanding of this heterogeneous group in order to have an accessible higher education system that does not by design discriminate against those who choose a particular mode of study. By doing this I create a collective narrative for part-time students. A small qualitative sample of completed part-time undergraduate students was interviewed to produce the data used herein.

I introduce this topic by showing how hidden part-time study is within the higher education (HE) sector at the beginning of the 21st century. This lack of visibility is problematic as it reduces the available narratives for non-traditional adult students to enter and successfully negotiate their way through an undergraduate degree to completion. In chapter 1 I discuss the range of studying and working practices used by this group of students in order to make visible the ways they 'did student' over the period of up to six years that they studied, this chapter shows that there are many ways to 'do student' successfully.

In chapter 2 I look at the consequences of part-time study on the family and vice-versa. I use the concept of 'ripples of education' to describe how part-time study affects significant others in the lives of the students. Chapter 3 follows with an investigation of others who are important to the students along their learning journeys. In chapter 4 I report on the resources that the students draw upon in undertaking their degrees and is divided into two sections. Section one includes resources such as space, finances, time and employer support. Section two looks at resources such as the students' attitudes towards their studies and being a student, including their discourses of luck, self-belief, motivation and enjoyment.

Chapter 5 uses the framework of institutional habitus and shows how part-time study can be seen as 'stapled onto the margins' of HE provision and looks at how the sector and individual institutions can improve provision to the prospective part-time students of the future. I conclude by making some recommendations as to how institutions need to adapt radically to enable more part-time undergraduates to be successful in their endeavours to obtain a degree. By looking for and making visible a new collective story for part-time students this thesis aims to be part of a move towards a new educational order, one in which part-time study is not seen as subordinate to full-time study, one in which part-time study as an adult is regarded as a normal part of life course development across all sections of society, and one in which the structure of the society and the HE sector supports the endeavour of the individual (and groups) in this.

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with part-time undergraduate students within the higher education system in England. In particular it focusses on the strategies this group of students employ to complete their degrees successfully. I place the experience of part-time students at the heart of the thesis because I think that it is vital in the twenty-first century to further our understanding of this heterogeneous group in order to have an accessible higher education system that does not by design discriminate against those who choose a particular mode of study.

I am passionate about this topic because of my own history. As Diane Reay states: 'All research is in one way or another autobiographical or the avoidance of autobiography' (1998: 2), and 'many feminists choose research topics that are deeply personal' (Reinharz and Chase, 2003: 79). My educational history has a similar story to that of some of the students within this investigation and indeed to many adult returners to education (see, for example, Edwards, 1993; Schuller *et al,* 1999; Tett, 2000; Blaxter and Tight, 1993; Bowl, 2001; Crossan *et al,* 2003; Burke, 2002; Hughes, 2000 and McGivney, 2001) and aspects of my own auto/biography will be written into the thesis following the work of writers such as Sue Jackson (2004) and Penny Burke (2002).

Part-time students are defined as 'those recorded as studying part-time or studying full-time on courses lasting less than 24 weeks on block release or studying during the evenings only' (HESA, 2006). Thus, as Susan Boorman *et al* (2006: 14) inform: 'Essentially part-time study is anything that falls outside the definition of full-time study'. The HESA definition of full-time students is:

> Full-time students are those normally required to attend an institution for
> periods amounting to at least 24 weeks within the year of the programme

of study, on thick or thin sandwich courses, and those on [a] study-related year out of their institution. During that time students are normally expected to undertake periods of study, tuition or work experience which amount to an average of at least 21 hours per week (HESA, 2006).

These definitions are important because they divide the student population into two distinct and unequal categories via which the UK funding mechanism operates, yet these distinctions disguise a range of models of study and nebulous boundaries. There is currently debate regarding this divide and whether it is helpful to students and the higher education institutions (HEIs) to retain this somewhat artificial distinction (for example, Callender, 2007a, Latchman, 2007, King, 2008). Countries such as the USA and New Zealand have different funding mechanisms where students are categorised as students regardless of their mode of study. Nonetheless, the funding mechanism in the UK, and thus HEIs, does distinguish students by mode of study and it is under this framework that this thesis focusses upon those studying at undergraduate level within the part-time mode.

The distinct category of part-time student, however, hides heterogeneity in arrangements of study and locations in which they are catered for within particular HEIs across the sector. Students studying for part-time degrees are taught within departments entitled adult education, continuing education, lifelong learning or part-time education and other varying nomenclatures. They may also be taught in departments in which part-time degrees are just one mode of study of the academic discipline offered. In some institutions part-time students are taught in varying combinations of these structures. For example there may be a Centre for Lifelong Learning which teaches part-time degrees across a range of subject areas; a Business School with a business degree that is run exclusively for students

registered part-time; and other departments which allow part-time students to infill into full-time degree courses[1]. This diversity is part of the strength of part-time provision. The fact that it has not been homogenised means that institutions are able to react to local markets and build up provision where and when needed, and in some ways has managed to resist the 'McDonaldization' of higher education (Ritzer, 1993). However, this spread and diversity across the sector also acts to conceal much of this provision. The invisibility of much part-time provision is a theme that will run throughout this thesis.

Defining Success

Throughout this thesis I define my interviewees as successful students. In terms of higher education institutions and the related funding bodies a successful student is one who completes the required programme of study at the expected time and conversely those who do not complete are defined as unsuccessful[2]. "Successful student", however, was not a label my interviewees used about themselves[3]. I, however, do label these students successful, as indeed they are; they have successfully completed a part-time degree programme[4]. Yet the participants' understandings of success had little to do with their academic achievements and in most cases were focussed on their family situation. Success can mean many things and is subjective,[5] and in this thesis I use it to signify more than completion. It is

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[1] As is the case at the University of Hull.

[2] With related funding penalties. Yet King (2008: 1) is now calling for 'changes in how student success is measured and how resources are allocated'.

[3] Indeed, some were not sure about labelling themselves 'student' (Merrill, 1999: 175) and will be further discussed later.

[4] See the 'Literature Review' below re Quinn *et al* (2005) for a discussion of problematizing the completion/ success versus non-completion/failure paradigm. Also see King (2008) for discussion on how the success/completion equation needs to change in relation to funding.

[5] The meaning of success can also be gendered (Gilligan, 1982: 14).

completion of a part-time degree, which whilst the students may or may not find the degree subject itself difficult, the negotiations, self-motivation and persistence required to complete a programme of study over up to seven years are an achievement that I choose to celebrate as a success. By using success I am also indicating that the students should be seen as more than mere survivors of the part-time higher education (HE) system[6]. Guy Claxton states that 'what you believe about learning profoundly influences how you think about success and failure' (1999: 26). For me learning is a lifelong process that does not end with completion or otherwise of a particular course, even though the education system is set up in such a way as to lead us to believe it is. Therefore I do not see those who do not complete as failures. I see them as not completing this attempt at this time for a variety of reasons; in many ways they are successful for having tried. However, this thesis is not about those students or those reasons; it focusses on those who have successfully completed a part-time undergraduate degree.

My research centres on a small-scale qualitative study of part-time adult students studying at undergraduate level from the end of the 1990s to 2004. It builds on and is a continuation of my previous research: my undergraduate dissertation was concerned with the subject choices full- and part-time mature students make on entering higher education. This led to a Masters in Gender Studies where my thesis, drawing on feminist theories and methodology, investigated the issue of 'missing men' from part-time education within the University of Hull (Medhurst, 2003). The findings of that research have informed my current thesis. Two particular findings from my Masters dissertation are worthy of note; firstly, that class and gender are equally important as a lens of analysis in researching adult students. Secondly,

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[6] With thanks to Brian Findsen (2007) at the University of Glasgow for discussion on this issue.

masculinity, in particular the 'breadwinner ideology' (Marks, 2000) can be a barrier to HE participation, particularly in the part-time sector which in itself can be seen as feminised.

I shall argue that the current higher education system marginalises part-time students with its focus on traditional full-time students[7] despite the rhetoric of widening participation and the lifelong learning agenda of the current government, the fact that approximately 40% of those on first-degree programmes are part-time students (Ramsden, 2006a: 81), and adult students make up the 'invisible majority' of students (McNair, 1998). This marginalisation can make the learning career (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Crossan *et al*, 2003) of these students a more difficult process than that of their full-time peers and the students can at times seem almost invisible within the higher education system.

Part-time students are by definition busy people. On the whole that is why they study on a part-time basis and not full-time (Bourner and Race, 1995; Kember, 1999). They choose this mode of study so that they can integrate study into already busy lives and still manage to work towards their goal of gaining a degree (Kember, 1999). As Boorman *et al* show:

> Part-time undergraduate study cannot, however, simply be seen as an
> adjunct to full-time study or as an alternative. For many part-time
> students the alternative would not be full-time study but not studying at all
> (2006: 5).

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[7] The Open University and Birkbeck College are exceptions as their main focus is on courses offered on a part-time basis at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Research design and methods

The methods used for this thesis encompass a range of techniques which produced some quantitative data but the main focus was on semi-structured interviews to produce rich qualitative data. I started the research by doing a website analysis to see how HEIs addressed prospective part-time students; this was followed with a questionnaire aimed at gathering potential respondents for the qualitative interviews.

Website Analysis

A website analysis of 30 HEIs was undertaken in order to get an overview of how part-time students are addressed by HEIs in general. I wanted to find out whether particular HEIs had taken this body of students into consideration when writing their electronic/online publicity, how the HEIs 'imagine' a part-time student, and what references to part-time study were on their general websites. The reason for this is that increasingly websites are the first port of call for prospective students (Medhurst, 2003: 81). In order to investigate HEIs' address to part-time students, I decided to sample websites which covered a spread of geographical areas and types of institution[8] and undertake a content analysis of each website selected. The front page was investigated to see if there was any immediate reference to part-time study. If there was a direct link this link was followed to see what type of information was available to a potential part-time student, and also how this information was presented. If there was no direct link to part-time study then a search was done on the website if a search engine was available[9] with the words 'part-time' or 'part time'.

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[8] HEIs from across the UK were sampled, pre- and post-1992 universities and further education providers with HE provision.

[9] There was one website within the 30 selected that had no search engine. This was a further education college with higher education provision. A thorough search through the website revealed that they did have part-time higher education provision. This information however was well hidden in text within pages about full-time provision. A prospective student might well have given up the search before they found this information. It is highly unlikely that this

A website is not the institution, of course, and how part-time students are addressed within that medium may not be indicative of how they are treated by the institution as a whole/in general/ in practice[10].

When initially investigating the websites I had envisioned writing up the website analysis as part of my data. However the decision was made not to include this but to concentrate on the data produced by the interviews, as I increasingly realised the need to privilege the students' story not that of the institutions. However, the time spent enabled me to see how a variety of institutions 'imagined' and addressed (or did not address) the part-time student market. This analysis was carried out at the beginning of my research and nearing completion I spent some time revisiting the same websites to see if anything had changed. In two institutions a link to 'part-time study' was newly accessible from the front page, therefore making the mode of study more visible and information easier for prospective students to access. On the other hand, in the majority the search engine was still required to find any part-time provision, and in some cases this was not found at all. There thus remains a potential area of research to be undertaken, as well as work for those institutions that want to augment their part-time provision.

Questionnaire

Following the website analysis I designed and distributed a questionnaire (Appendix I). The questionnaire was drafted, checked, redrafted and adapted several times and then piloted with a group of students on a part-time Foundation Degree run by the

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course would attract many part-time students, at least through this medium. On phoning the institution posing as a potential part-time student I was told part-time study was an option and they would send me details. They never arrived.

[10] With thanks to Shirley Bennett (2004) at the University of Hull for a discussion on this issue.

University of Hull. This group of students was selected as I had personal contacts with both the programme director and the administrator, but also because the students were regular users of 'Merlin™', the University of Hull's virtual learning environment (VLE) and electronic distribution was chosen for ease and speed at the pilot stage. This also enabled distribution to the students without access to any names or contact details being needed to ensure that data protection rules were followed. Once permission for distribution had been sought and granted by the programme director, an electronic copy was forwarded to the programme administrator for circulation. This was sent out to 22 students and I received eight hard-copy returns from this group[11]. This represented a return rate of 36% from the pilot group. As Merlin™ had been used to distribute the questionnaire the administrator was able to issue a reminder to the group.

Following analysis of the pilot returns several minor alterations to both the content and structure of the questionnaire were made. For example, on question 2.6 emphasis was added to the word *now* to show students that the question was asking why they had chosen to start the course at this time, rather than why they had started the course generally. It was clear from some of the pilot returns that this question had not always been understood in that way. A question was also added regarding how the student felt their institution treat part-time students. Adjustments were also made to the structure, so that individual sections were more clearly defined, and more space was allowed for the open-ended questions as some of the pilot returns showed that this was needed.

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[11] The students were asked to print out and return the questionnaire to me in hard copy, using the University's Freepost address.

Once the questionnaire had been finalised academics and administrators across

sixteen higher education institutions in England[12] were contacted through whom I

intended to access potential research respondents. Part of this selection process

included consideration of geography, and rural/urban locations. The range of

institutions were chosen to include pre- and post-1992 universities, a college of

higher education, and universities focussed on part-time students as well as those

with a main focus on full-time students with some part-time provision. This was to

enable my sample to be drawn from a range of institutions to investigate if the

students had different narratives of being a part-time student, dependent on their

place of study, and the institutional habitus of the institution. As I wanted to research

a wide sample of students I needed the help of others in this task. Most of those

contacted were personal contacts of my supervisor or myself. This enabled the initial

request to go to a known person, thus increasing the chances of obtaining a positive

response. In this way seventeen institutions were initially contacted and a total of

180 questionnaires distributed during the academic year 2004/05[13]. Some of those

contacted responded that they were not able to assist because they had no students

of the type I was looking for, that is to say part-time undergraduate students in their

final year of study, or who had recently completed. Those who were able to assist

informed me how many part-time undergraduate students they had so I could send

relevant numbers of questionnaires for distribution. At this point it was requested that

where possible these questionnaires should be distributed in class to increase the

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[12] University of Hull, University of York, University of Lincoln, University of Leeds, Leeds
Metropolitan University, Birkbeck College, Open University, Kingston University, University of
Portsmouth, Worcester College of Higher Education, University College, Northampton,
University of Sussex, University of West of England, University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam,
Manchester Metropolitan University.

[13] 180 questionnaires were sent out to academics or administrators dealing with part-time
students. However, it appears that not all were distributed. One student personally known to
me was in a class in which I was told the questionnaires were to be distributed. She did not
receive one, neither did her class mates. Returns were received from seven institutions.

chances of a reasonable return rate. If no questionnaires were received by the return date, I contacted the academic or administrator concerned to ask if they could remind the students about the questionnaire. A total of 180 questionnaires were circulated and 72 returns received. This represents a return rate of 40%.

The questionnaires were used as a sample-gathering mechanism for the students I hoped to interview and subsequently the data produced by them has not been presented herewith. However, I have enclosed a presentation of some of this data in Appendix IV. Throughout the thesis I have focussed on the data gathered in the interviews. However, the questionnaire data produced an understanding of the student before the interview, and this enabled the interview to begin with the narrative of being a part-time student , the limited interview time was thus more productively spent exploring the journey through part-time studies. I intend to further analyse the questionnaire data to present at a later date.

Interviews

During the time of the distribution of the questionnaire I devised an interview schedule for working with the students who agreed to be interviewed (Appendix II). This was a semi-structured interview schedule to enable the flow of conversation to follow the student's story. The schedule was an attempt to make the interview 'a conversation with a purpose' (Kahn and Cannell, 1957:149 cited in Marshall and Rossman, 1999: 108). When students returned the questionnaire those who were willing to be interviewed also completed a contact sheet giving me their personal details and permission to contact them in the near future to organise the interview. The students who agreed to be interviewed were all contacted by email or letter to arrange a mutually convenient time and location for the interview to take place. The

sample was thus self-selecting[14]. The ones who were not interviewed were late respondents, beyond the end of the interviewing period, or who withdrew due to other commitments before the interview date was finalised. All students were sent a letter or email confirming the time and location of the interview. Only one student who had agreed to be interviewed failed to turn up for the interview and did not respond to the telephone messages I subsequently left for her. All others were interviewed as planned. This was fortunate for me because, as Jackson (2004:85) comments, 'Time after time interviewees do not turn up'. She cites Ann Phoenix who also described 'multiple unapologetic broken appointments' (1994, cited in Jackson, 2004: 85) thus reflecting the busy lives and multiple commitments of the samples in the research process. Jackson continues 'Feminist research is located in the lived realities of women's lives, the researchers as well as the researched' (2004: 85). In the end, a total of 27 part-time students were interviewed for this study, of which 20 were women and seven were men. The demographics of this sample are described following the discussion of the interview process.

Interview location

The interviews took place in a variety of locations chosen because they suited the interviewee. Four interviews were held in my office at the University of Hull, four took place at the student's study venue, two were held at their workplace, four were held in coffee shops or public houses and thirteen were held in the student's home. Obviously the place of interview has an impact on both the interviewer and interviewee. The interviews that took place in my office occurred in a more formal context, because of the very fact that it was an office in a university building. Also, it was my office with my name on the door, giving me status within that organisation,

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[14] See Jackson (2004: 84) for a discussion of the pros and cons of this.

and arguably more power in these interviews (Presser, 2005). How could I then 'attempt to create a non-hierarchical atmosphere between the researcher and the research'? (Coate-Bignell, 1996: 322 cited in Jackson, 2004: 83). The interviews held in the homes of the students could be considered more comfortable for them as I was going into their space, rather than them coming into mine. It was also the case that in an interviewee's home I had to compete with the respondent being distracted by phone calls, the television, house evaluations, partners and children. In all the homes I was welcomed as a visitor and offered hospitality in the form of a drink (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984). There was also the issue of safety at attending a stranger's home; where I went to interviewees' houses I would always inform a member of my family or my colleague about where I was going to be, and rang them before and after the interview had finished to let them know I was safe. Having had strict guidelines whilst working in the Centre for Lifelong Learning[15] about safety I was concerned about interviews in strangers' homes and felt that I had in some ways compromised myself and my personal safety in order to carry out this research (Grenz, 2005; Taylor and Rupp, 2005; Scott, 1984).

The interviews that were held at the student's place of study produced two very different experiences. At one university I was given permission to use a room within the Continuing Education department where these students had studied. Thus I could let the students know exactly which building and which room I would be in and at what time they should arrive for the interview. At another university however, when trying to organise a space for interviewing I was informed that the only room I could occupy would cost £100 to hire for the day, and that I could only occupy the

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[15] At the Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Hull we had strict guidelines about tutors entering the homes of students. This was to ensure we did not put ourselves in danger, but also so we could not be accused of putting the student in a position of perceived danger. There are obvious gender issues here.

room until 5pm. This situation was unacceptable to me because of both the cost and the timing. In this instance I contacted the respondents and explained that I would meet them in the foyer of the university and we would then go together to a suitable location[16] for the interview. However, I was less comfortable here as it was a much less definite arrangement. I felt far less in control in these circumstances, not least because I could not prepare the physical space of the interview in advance, and I also felt less professional by not being able to offer a definite space. Nonetheless, these arrangements did work in that the resultant interviews provided useful data, and the interviewees did not appear to be unduly concerned about the arrangements themselves.

The interviews that were held in coffee shops were situated thus because a home or university interview was not convenient for the students. In these cases a meeting place would be suggested by the student, we would meet and then go to a local coffee shop. I also met one respondent in a public house. These were trying times for me, as again these were less definite arrangements. I would tell the interviewees a little about my appearance[17] on the phone or in a letter so they would know whom to look out for, and I would also carry a folder with their name on it to aid their recognition. I was apprehensive that these less formal arrangements would mean that the participants would not arrive; however, this was the case with only one interviewee. With the others, all arrived as arranged, although my field diary reflects that I was more anxious in the lead up to these interviews.

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[16] Prior to the first interview I was not familiar with the university, so was unsure where we might be able to hold the interview. Fortunately there was a coffee shop on campus that was open during the times I needed to carry out these interviews.

[17] 'Five-five, fair hair and 40', is my description. While making arrangements on the telephone one man commented that it was like organizing a blind date. This made me slightly nervous about our meeting prior to it, since it suggested a different meaning of the meeting from the intended one.

Background noise could also have been a problem in these public places[18]. As I had anticipated that this might be problematic the recording equipment now used (a digital recorder) was attached to the respondent rather than just using the general microphone. In this way their voices were perfectly clear, even in the public house during a busy lunch session.

The interviews that took place in the students' workplace worked well. The two respondents who had invited me into their workplace were comfortable in their space and I was treated by both as a business visitor. I was cautious of taking too much time within a work environment but time had obviously been scheduled in for the interviews and in neither were we disturbed. One interview was held in a meeting room booked for the purpose and the other was in the staff canteen. Both of these interviews lasted well over an hour[19]. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour, with the shortest being 55 minutes and the longest being 95 minutes long.

Prior to commencement of the interview the rationale for the research was discussed[20], and all participants were asked to sign a consent form [21] and informed that they could withdraw from the process at any time, and were free to leave

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[18] During my research for my Masters degree, I held a focus group at a Police Social Club. This was the most convenient location for the men participating in the study. A handheld tape recorder in the middle of the group picked up their voices, but it also recorded the football being shown on the television in the corner and a group of men playing dominoes on the adjacent table. With more modern digital equipment background noise can now be reduced.

[19] There is a class issue here. Both the women I interviewed were in positions where they could determine their own schedules and were allowed to invite visitors to their workplace for something that was not a work purpose. Women in working-class jobs would arguably have had less opportunity to invite me into their workplace and thus take place in their own time rather than work time.

[20] I disclosed that I too had been a mature student (see Finch, 1984: 79), but did not make an issue of it as I did not want to put pressure on the interviewee to adopt a particular point of view (see Reinharz and Chase, 2003: 80).

[21] But see Fine *et a*l (2000: 113 – 15) re issues of consent, particularly how the consent form 'effectively releases the institution or funding agency from any liability and gives control of the research process to the researcher'.

unanswered any questions that they felt uncomfortable with and that I would guarantee anonymity. With the principles of the research process duly explained the interviews started[22]. All interviews were recorded by digital recorder, after ensuring that the interviewee was comfortable with this[23]. I also made detailed field notes in a reflexive diary before and following the interviews to remind myself of the situation, my thoughts and feelings about the interviews and anything particular of note. For example, following one interview in a coffee shop I made the comment that 'I enjoyed the interview and the cakes equally but am now skint – we went to Betty's!' and later that '[this student] has given me inspiration to sort out problems with my family re negotiations around computer use'.

Following each interview I transcribed them fully[24], and as an ongoing process the transcriptions were investigated thoroughly to look for themes and issues arising from them as a whole, using ideas and techniques from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in that I closely examined and coded the data and wrote memos to assist in this process. I had intended to use the ATLAS.ti programme to interrogate the data. However, having no prior knowledge of computer-aided analysis programmes made this problematic. It was exciting trying to get to grips with the new programme but I soon realised that I was spending far more time working out how

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[22] I did not have to put the proposal for this research through an ethics committee as the departmental procedures did not require it. However, my home department require this of any research done with people. I thus followed the same procedures as I would have done had the research had to go to an ethics committee for consideration.

[23] None of the interviewees questioned the use of a recorder, which may reflect the familiarity with technology today. The subject was also not controversial and they were guaranteed anonymity.

[24] Recommended as good practice (Fielding and Thomas: 2001: 136). My supervisor at Masters Level recommended a 'notes and quotes' practice which I followed at that stage, however I felt I gained much more by having the full transcriptions to hand when analysing the data.

the programme worked than actually analysing the data[25]. Thus I used the computer package initially but then worked physically through the various codes and themes I had decided upon, on a paper-based highlighting system. I can, however, certainly see the benefits of working with such a package with a larger data set, especially with an experienced user to guide one through the initial learning curve.

Reflection on the research interviews

Before I detail the interview sample and report on the literature that informed this thesis I reflect on the process of the interviews and how I situate myself in relation to the participants in this research. As a feminist researcher it was important to me to attempt not to exploit those on/with whom I did research. I am reluctant to suggest that I did the research *with* the participants as this gives the impression that there was some shared agenda. This was not the case. Feminist research[26], methods, methodology and techniques have informed my practices since my undergraduate degree, yet I do not feel that I achieved a 'non-exploitative, non-hierarchical meeting of equals' (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994: 126). The research agenda was mine and I was conducting it for my own, personal purpose, that of writing this thesis. O'Connell Davidson and Layder state:

> virtually all social research is intrusive and exploitative to some degree, because though researchers may truly believe that their work is in the *interests* of their human subjects, it is seldom undertaken at the *behest* of these subjects and rarely, if ever, is it undertaken without a view to the

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[25] See Lewins (2001) for discussion on the practical usage of CAQDAS software.

[26] Jackson (2004: 85) cites Acker's (1994) six 'core assumptions of feminist research': That the personal is political; awareness of women's injustices; to improve women's lives; to highlight the centrality of women; to replace existing knowledges; and to consider the position of the researcher and the researched. I aim to follow these principles in my research.

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professional advancement of the researcher (1994: 215, original
emphases).

Nonetheless I hope that my participants did not feel exploited. I answered any
questions from the interviewees honestly and offered any information that I thought
relevant during the interviews (such as the help and information a careers' service
could offer, or the process of graduation, or about continuing study to postgraduate
level), and I gave feedback on the project I was undertaking[27]. However, there was a
hierarchy in the interviews; there is a power dynamic in any interview. I was
undoubtedly the director of the research process (Shakespeare, 1993) and set the
agenda for the research relationship (Glucksmann, 1994). Although I directed the
research process I conducted the interviews in such a way that they followed the
interviewee's responses and thoughts in ways which were meaningful to the
interviewee rather than following a set interview schedule (Mason, 2002: 231). My
questions were open-ended and in most cases the schedule was used more as an
aide-mémoire[28]. In some cases though the respondent was reluctant to build on their
thoughts and very much waited for me to ask the next question. Interestingly this
was more so with the students who had studied business than those who had studied
social sciences or humanities, almost as if they expected it to be more of a business
transaction/interview than an opportunity for them to think about their progress
through the degree. In these cases it felt as if I was doing 'research on', and gaining
all the benefit from these interviews rather than it being a two-way process. In these

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[27] I have continued to do this occasionally through the research, in the form of emails and
Christmas cards. I have had responses from many of the participants informing me on their
progress (study and life in general) to date along with requests to keep them informed as to
my progress. I hope not to have crossed the boundaries by doing this to be considered
'condescending and maternalistic' (Reinharz, 1993 cited in Reinharz and Chase, 2003: 81).

[28] Mason advises: 'it is not possible to conduct a structure-free interview not least because the
agendas and assumptions of both interviewer and interviewee will inevitably impose
frameworks for meaningful interaction' (2002: 231).

interviews I was attempting and had to 'excavate the information' from the interviewee (Mason: 2002: 226). In others, Tia and Tom being excellent examples, I believe they gained as much as I did from the interview. They both stated that they had responded to my request and joined the research as they loved academic stimulation. They had both completed their degrees by the time of the interview and were missing this in their lives. In their interviews it felt like 'a site of knowledge construction [with] the interviewee and the interviewer as co-participants in the process' (Mason, 2002: 227). However, 'how a researcher deals with issues of interview structure and sequence is always a part of their theoretical project, whether or not they acknowledge it' (Mason, 2002: 233). By acknowledging this process and exposing it for the reader I show that the situation even though set up to be a similar experience can be very different from interview to interview.

One approach I considered for conducting this research was to have done life history interviews (see Malcolm, 2006) but owing to issues of time (my own PhD schedule and respondents volunteering to attend longer life history interviews) I decided early on to investigate how these students 'narrate student', how they talk about their everyday practices of 'being a student' rather than asking them to tell their educational or life biography/history. In contrast to the ideas of grounded theory Mason asserts that 'there is always some sense in which researchers know what they are looking for, ontologically speaking' (2002: 234). I was looking for ways of how students went about their everyday tasks in order to fit their studies in and around busy lives, how this impacted upon family life, and how the institutions in which the students studied aided or hindered this process. Although I knew what I was looking for I did not know what I would find. A whole range of practices were revealed and not just the usual 'good practices' discussed by the study skills books.

With some interviewees I shared certain characteristics, gender, class, age, and 'race'. With all I shared the identity of mature student so in some ways I was an

'insider'. I had studied as a part-time student, I was still studying as a student with many other demands on my time, I have worked for many years with part-time students in a full-time focussed university so 'part-time student' was very much my understanding of 'student'. In other ways though I was an 'outsider': my part-time study was as a post-graduate; I was 'employed in the university'; and as a PhD student was further along the study path and as such could be seen as different from them. I also think that the very fact that I was doing the research made me an outsider as I had the authority in the writing-up and interpretation of the information given. However, as Reinharz and Chase (2003) state:

> What feminist researchers share, regardless of their status as insider or outsider in relation to interviewees, is a commitment to reflecting on the complexities of their own and participants' social locations and subjectivities (2003: 84).

I am committed to do this, both by exposing my own educational history and my process through this thesis, but also by detailing the complexities of the responses from the participants, in that I will show that there were many ways to be a successful part-time student and that these were not straightforwardly classified.

Interview Sample

In this section I describe the demographics of the interviewees and for comparison purposes have used the reports by Ramsden (2006a)[29] and Callender *et al* (2006)[30]. The biographies of the research participants are shown in Appendix III.

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[29] Figures from 2003/04 HESA data.

[30] The Callender data are also a sample of the part-time student population.

Gender

For this thesis I interviewed 20 women and 7 men. In part-time higher education female students predominate at all levels except among postgraduate research students. At first degree level 60% of part-time students are female and across all qualification levels 62% are female. This compares with 54% of females among full-time students (Ramsden, 2006a: 41). In the breakdown of gender and detailed qualification aim the figures for first-degree female students rises to 87%[31][32]. This is shown in Table 1 below.

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[31] Reflecting the female body of part-time students. Any policy that affects part-time students potentially has a greater effect on female students.

[32] See Quinn (2003) for discussion on the greater numbers of female students in today's HE.

Table 1 Part-time students by gender and detailed qualification aim

Level	Qualification aim	Female	Male	Total	Percentage female
First Degree	First degree leading towards obtaining eligibility to register to practice with a Health or Social Care of Veterinary statutory regulatory body.	8965	1285	10150	87%
	First degree with Qualified Teacher Status/registration with General Teaching Council.	200	50	250	80%
	First degree.	104590	73765	178355	59%
	Enhanced first degree.	230	440	670	34%
	First degree and diploma (to be obtained concurrently).	1000	250	1250	80%

Source: Adapted from Ramsden (2006a), Annex 7: 102.

As can be seen above, the majority of part-time students studying at first degree level are female. In my sample 74% of the participants were female, reflecting this overall trend in part-time education.

Age

The average age of the female students in my sample was 39 on entry to their programme of study. This ranged from age 26 to 64 on entry. The male students were slightly older with 42 being the average age on entry. Their ages ranged from 34 to 57.

Table 2 Age on entry to degree programme by gender

Female age on entry	Number of students	Male age on entry	Number of students	Total
20 – 29	4	20 – 29	0	4
30 – 39	8	30 – 39	4	12
40 – 49	5	40 – 49	1	6
50 – 59	2	50 – 59	2	4
60+	1	60+	0	1
Total	20		7	27

Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Questionnaire data, 2004/05.

Comparison with the national figures (which also record age at entry to the programme of study) shows that the age profile of female students is younger than that of their male counterparts on entry although noting that there was a slight rise in the proportion in the 40 - 49 age range. The highest proportion of students, 33% of female students and 32% of male students on first degrees, commence study between the ages of 30 and 39. (Ramsden, 2006a: 42). Ramsden also indicates the different age profile of OU students, showing that the Open University has a younger population of female students than the sector as a whole, whilst male OU students are older than the sector as a whole (2006a: 43). Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, the age range for first degrees shows that nationally there were over 6,000 new students in the 18 – 21 age group, suggesting that part-time study is an option for some students for whom the expected route might be full-time study (Ramsden, 2006a: 42). With 40% female and 57% males in the 30 – 39 age range this group is slightly over-represented in my sample, but the range of ages mirrors that of the national profile. Another issue regarding age is that the 2000 policy goal

to achieve 50% participation in HE by 2010 was only concerned with 18 – 30 year olds. This means that the majority of my sample and that of the part-time students[33] reported by Ramsden (2006a: 42) would not be within the government's target age-range. However, these younger students are now no longer the main focus of government targets (Callender, 2008; Fuller and Heath, 2008).

Family Status

In my sample 16 of the 20 women were married or cohabited with male partners. Four female students were single; this included two women who were divorced prior to their study. Five men were married or cohabited with female partners and two men were single and had never been married. No single-sex couples were represented within my sample. Interestingly Ramsden does not report on marital status[34]; however Callender *et al* (2006: 14) do. In their sample 34% of students were single with no children when they undertook part-time study, 6% of part-time students were lone parents, 29% of students were part of a couple with no children whilst 31% were part of a couple with children. These figures are not disaggregated by gender. In Table 3 I break my figures down by gender and show how many students have children (including adult children) at home whilst they are studying. As I shall discuss in chapter 2, family structure and dynamics are central factors in these students' lives so it is important to understand the full details of their home situations.

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[33] First degrees age of entry: Female 38% aged between18 – 29, 62% aged 30+. Male 42% aged between 18 – 29, 57% aged 30+ (Ramsden, 2006a: 42).

[34] Marital status is not collected by HESA in England (but is collected in Northern Ireland). This may be indicative of the assumption that HE entrants are single (Peplow, 2007). Students' care-giving status is not collected either (Alsop *et al*, forthcoming).

Table 3 Part-time students by gender and family status

	Female	Male
Single - no children	2	2
Single parent - children at home	2	0
Couple – no children or children left home	7	2
Couple - children at home (-16)	6	3
Couple – older/adult children at home (16+)	3	0
Total	20	7

Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Questionnaire data, 2004/05.

As can be seen in Table 3, in my sample there are gender differences regarding family status. There were no male lone parents in my sample[35] and no males who studied with older children still in the family home. There is a smaller proportion of single students in my sample in comparison with the Callender *et al* figures and a greater proportion of those studying with a partner with children in the family home. The *Student Income and Expenditure Survey* (Finch *et al*, 2006) study showed 38% of part-time students were single, 8% were lone parents, 22% were married or in a couple with no children and 31% of part-time students were in a two-parent family. In comparison my sample had 15% single students, less than the national sample, but a greater proportion of couples and two-parent families. The family status also reflects the ages of the participants and the family lifecourse.

Social class

Social class is a not easily definable issue, and one which will be discussed further in the literature review as well as throughout the thesis. When previously researching men in part-time higher education (Medhurst, 2003) I found men's education

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[35] As the figures are not gendered in the Callender sample it is not possible to tell if there were any single fathers studying.

narratives profoundly classed as well as gendered. Here I report on my sample's

self-classification. On the questionnaire the two questions asked regarding social

class were Q1.4, How would you identify yourself? and Q1.5, How would you identify

your upbringing? with the available responses: working class, middle class and upper

class but with space available for comment also. It was important to me to allow the

respondents to self-classify (albeit within a range of definitions) even though I agree

with Jackson that class 'definitions are problematic, especially for women, including

the gendered ways in which social class is acquired' (2004: xv). The results of these

self-classifications are shown in Table 4 below. The totals do not add up to 27

because not all interviewees answered these questions. Comments that were

added, which show the problematic nature of (reporting one's) class ranged from:

working class ie I have to work for a living; not important to me but I think it was more

so for my parents; working middle class - what is middle class these days?; this is not

a question, it is an essay assignment!; perhaps I have a personal hang-up with class

stratification; economically working class, but some middle-class values. The

majority of the students identified their current class status as the same as that of

their upbringing, but two women suggested their class had changed, one from

working-class to middle-class and one from middle-class to working-class[36] (see for

example Reay, 1997b, for a discussion of class movement in relation to education).

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[36] The women reporting moving class only completed the questionnaire, they were not part of
the interview sample.

Table 4 Social class: self-classification, current status and upbringing by gender

		Female	Male
1.4 How would you identify yourself?	Working class	10	4
	Middle class	9	3
1.5 How would you identify your upbringing?	Working class	10	3
	Middle class	9	3

Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Questionnaire data, 2004/05.

As shown above the respondents for the interviews represented an even balance of self-reported working- and middle-class students. The classification used in Callender *et al* (2006) is the National Statistics Socio-economic classification (NS-SEC), which defines classes as: managerial and professional; intermediate; and routine and manual and unemployed[37]. 66% of their research sample came from the managerial and professional category, 16% from the intermediate and 13% from the routine and manual and unemployed group. Socio-economic classification is indicative of a person's background. However, Quinn *et al*, discussed below, use the definition of first-generation learner as more appropriate than social class as it is 'more indicative of educational disadvantage than parental occupation or income' (2005: 1). Therefore entry qualifications of the sample are described below. In the national sample 66% come from the managerial and professional occupations, yet in the *Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2004/05* only 54% of part-time students

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[37] Managerial and professional includes large employers and higher managerial occupations; higher professional occupations; and lower managerial and professional occupation. Intermediate includes intermediate occupations; small employers and own account workers. Routine and manual includes lower supervisory and technical jobs; semi-routine jobs; routine jobs; and never worked and long-term unemployed.
These social class categories should not be seen as strictly hierarchically ordered, nor should they be seen as reflecting mutual exclusivity in terms of bands of income or other criteria (Callender *et al*, 2006: 14)

came from the managerial and professional occupational group and 28% from the routine and manual group. In my sample 44% self-identify as middle-class, so both of the above reports encompass a greater proportion from the managerial and professional group, but this reflects both the different classifications used in addition to the self-classification of my sample. For example, Liz self-classifies as working-class, yet as a teacher would be classified in the managerial and professional section on the NS-SEC scale. The self-classifications are used however to problematize some of the issues of class in relation to the education of part-time students, and class upbringing was an issue that was addressed within the interviews. Social class and first-generation learners issues were brought sharply into focus within the higher education environment with the publication of the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills' request (Denham, 2007a) on Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQs) funding which, with the exception of certain exempt subjects, [38] students already with a higher education qualification would not be eligible for further HEFCE funding. This will have a huge impact on part-time educational opportunities and I will return to this subject further in the thesis.

Entry qualifications

Four students within my research sample were already graduates on entry to their part-time degrees; these were Jean, Liz, Rachel and Keith. According to Ramsden 7% of part-time first degree students already possess a first degree and 2% possess a higher degree on entry to first degrees (2006a: 101). Hence at 14% graduates are slightly over-represented in this sample. Ramsden reports that the part-time degree programmes thus serve a number of purposes including 're-training and learning for personal development, as well as the provision of an opportunity to gain graduate

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[38] Students studying on Foundation Degrees, Nursing, Social Work, Youth and Community Work, Theology and Initial Teacher Training

status' (2006a: 56). Jean, a retired lecturer, was studying part-time out of interest, Liz was taking a part-time psychology degree in order to retrain as an educational psychologist, Rachel, disillusioned with the business world, was moving towards a more person-centred career by also taking a psychology degree, and Keith was studying for the Diploma in Social Work as he wished to progress within his current employment and could not do so without the vocational qualification. With the exception of Keith[39] these students would no longer be eligible for funding following the ELQ requirements.

Of the other students, sixteen had A level equivalent or HNC[40] qualifications on entry with six students having qualifications at or below GCSE level on entry to their degree course. Some HEIs, the main example being the OU, have open entry qualifications, which means that part-time students do not have to have the 'gold standard' of A levels to enter degree courses. Other institutions have entry qualification requirements; some accept non-standard qualifications and life experience as entry to part-time degree courses. As these students are all successful students, those with low qualifications may have been expected to struggle and be less likely to complete, or alternatively they could be seen as those with the most to gain from entering and completing higher education successfully (Woodley, 2007).

In my sample at least 18 were first-generation participants in HE[41]. This is a high proportion of the sample and in relation to general entry to HE and an important area

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[39] Social Work being in the list of exempt subjects.

[40] Three of the participants recorded HNC as their highest qualification on entry. The qualification they were studying for was a first degree which is a recognised progression route from an HNC programme.

[41] This information is not known for 7 respondents.

of study[42] and links back to issues of social class and related issues of human and social capital. With no background in higher education within the family most of these students did not have the opportunity to study for a degree at the age of 18, yet as adults had chosen and been able to enter the HE system as part-time students and had done so successfully. The influence of study on family and conversely of family on study will be addressed in detail in chapter 2. It must be pointed out however, that with adult students, the classification of first-generation learner is more complex; some of these students followed their children through HE. Chronologically therefore their children were first-generation learners, yet the participants were able to draw on the knowledge of their children rather than the expected drawing on the cultural capital of parents. Some of the participants had partners who had higher education qualifications either taken at the age of 18 or as an adult student, so these students were able to draw on their partner's higher education experience. This suggests that the category of first-generation learner is more complex than traditionally assumed and needs to be problematized accordingly.

Ethnicity

Over 90% of all part-time students are white, with only 1% or 2% from other ethnic groups. This compares with 83% of the full-time student body (Ramsden, 2006a: 52). At first degree level 88% of part-time students are white. In my sample all students were from this group: the majority were from the UK and all were from Europe. My questionnaire returns show similar ranges, with 85% self-classifying as white, British, English or Caucasian. Other ethnicities reported were 7% white Europeans and just one return each from Black African Caribbean, White New Zealander, Jewish, White South African and Iranian. It is not known why fewer

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[42] This issue was headline news when UCAS raised the issue of asking applicants for their parents' educational levels (Meikle, 2007).

students from Black and ethnic minority groups choose to study part-time when they are over-represented in the full-time figures[43] though a concern about study costs and debt is reported as a key barrier (Pollard *et al*, 2008: 66) and it is an area which requires further research. However, it is known that different reasons for study are reported by Black and ethnic minority groups, with Black and ethnic minority students more likely to be influenced by employment considerations or economic outcomes than personal reasons (Robson, 2007). Black part-time students also report a greater range of benefits from their study than their white peers (Sabates, 2007) [44].

Disability

Disability was not an issue that I specifically enquired about in this research. One male interviewee reported that he had a disability and this had meant redeployment in his work to a clerical post from his original manual status with the local council. One female had multiple disabilities (dyslexia and mobility problems) for which she had received disabled students' allowance (DSA) and equipment to aid her with her studies. There were no other disabilities reported. This corresponds to the 92% of part-time students on first degrees who report no disability. Where disabilities are reported, dyslexia (1.4%), multiple disabilities (2%) and 'unseen' disabilities (0.8%) are the most prevalent (Ramsden, 2006a: 53). Apart from the two students mentioned above, the remainder of those interviewed were thus likely to be from the 92% with no reported disabilities, although I cannot be certain of this. Disabilities such as dyslexia and other unseen disabilities may well be part of their lives but they were not mentioned within the interview. In many ways part-time study can be an accessible option for students with disabilities as less intensive study may allow a

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[43] In comparison to the total population.

[44] All these classifications include a great amount of heterogeneity, including white, which increasingly includes students from Eastern Europe.

route through higher education, where certain disabilities may prevent full-time study because of its intensity (Harrison, 2007).

Having detailed the interview sample, I move onto describing my own educational history and reflect on how this impacts on the writing of this thesis.

My personal history

As Jackson (2004), Norum (2000) and Burke (2001, 2002) among others show, placing oneself within one's work is important in highlighting our biases, backgrounds, trajectory through theories and theorists, our social location and motivations for our research. Here I offer my educational journey reflecting on my biases and trajectory into and through the HE system as a mature student and how this led to the thesis being framed in this particular way.

Growing up in a white lower middle-class family[45] in a deprived northern seaside town gave me a somewhat ambivalent relationship to education. On the one hand education was valued and was one way to improve one's chances in life (which was what my parents wanted for me). On the other hand, my friends, whose opinions I valued, disregarded education (like many teenagers, my peers were more influential to my everyday actions than my parents' opinions). Why bother with education when the only jobs we were likely to get in that town we were already doing?[46] Jobs that were, for the majority, seasonal, low-paid and in the catering or leisure industry. Despite this ambivalence I did take and pass eight O'levels; this was under 'threat' that if I did not I would have to stay on at school until I did. As staying on at school was relatively unusual and considered only to be for the 'swots' with whom I certainly

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[45] My father's definition of our class status during discussion of this section of the thesis.

[46] I started work at the age of 12, alongside many of my peers, in a variety of traditional weekend and holiday seaside jobs.

did not identify, this held enough sway to ensure I worked for a few weeks prior to the examination period. I left with the then familiar 'could do better' on my report card.

Fast forward five years finds me getting married and leaving my hotel reception job upon the birth of my daughter[47] and 20 months later a son. I was a stay-at-home mum for some time, working occasionally and part-time when I could procure childcare from relations.[48] Through the mother and toddler group I attended I found out that my local adult education centre ran courses which were free to those on low incomes and that they also offered a free crèche. I wasted no time in signing up for courses which included, amongst other things, yoga, soft-furnishings, office skills and confidence building. Whilst taking these courses information was circulated about an open day at the college in town; I attended to see what they had on offer. The open-day was chaotic,[49] and it was by chance that I found myself talking to a tutor from the Access[50] course. That September sees me signing on for the course, and completing it successfully in the allotted year. Using this qualification I entered the local university as a full-time student to study law.[51] Whereas at college we had all

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[47] This was the expected 'decision' for a woman at that time if it could possibly be afforded. There is obviously a class issue here.

[48] The jobs were never well-paid, structured or secure enough to organise official, paid-for childcare, especially for two children.

[49] There was no apparent organisation, prospective students of all ages arrived at the front entrance and had to find their own way to whichever department they were interesting in visiting. As I had no idea what I was looking for it was by chance that I was spotted by a tutor who asked me if I was a mature student (two toddlers in tow may have been a clue), and if I would be interested in looking at the AHEAD course information. Feeling rescued I agreed I would be.

[50] The particular Access course was named AHEAD – Access to Higher Education for Adults - though I am sure that I did not know what 'Access' was or that it was access to higher education. The subjects sounded interesting and I felt they could occupy my mind until my children were older when I planned to go back to work.

[51] During the Access course the application process for polytechnics and universities was explained and we were encouraged to apply for a higher education course. At this point I considered studying for a part-time degree (there were three available locally) but the cost was prohibitive and I would have had to pay my own fees, whereas as a full-time student I

been mature students, dealing with the same issues of family and education, time-management and lack of confidence in our ability, supportive tutors and small groups in which it felt safe to struggle and explore, university was completely different. All the other students on my course were 18, all highly academic,[52] supremely confident[53] and there were hundreds of them. The lectures were in the biggest lecture theatre on campus and it was full, there was no discussion, no interaction, even in tutorials nobody spoke. It was a total culture shock or learning shock (Griffiths *et al*: 2004: 1). I managed eight weeks before, feeling totally out of place and out of my depth; I dropped out (Bufton, 2006). Despite walking away, and feeling a failure in myself for doing so, I told others that I wanted another attempt,[54] and two years later when my son started school I returned to the same university, this time to a joint degree in Gender Studies, Sociology and Anthropology. The experience was very different again. This time mature students were in the majority, there were other students who were parents, supportive tutors, relevant reading and discussions of how to fit education in with family life (at least in the Gender Studies side of the degree[55]). Despite this, I struggled with the work, both from an academic

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was entitled to a grant. At the time this grant was equivalent to the part-time wage I was bringing into the household.

[52] At the time I was certain they all had at least 3 A grade A levels whereas I 'only' had my Access qualification, which, I was very aware, was a 'different qualification'.

[53] Or they appeared to be.

[54] I had enjoyed having a 'student identity', even though I did not particularly enjoy the experience. I blamed external factors, including the culture shock of the law degree, two small children, support of a widowed grandfather, yet the internal lack of confidence in my academic ability was paramount in my decision to leave at that stage. The short encounter had, however, left me saying I wanted more of the experience of higher education. This reporting that I wanted to return was also to mask the sense of failure I felt from the outside world.

[55] In many ways the pedagogy of the Gender Studies Department was similar to that of the part-time department I now work in, and includes accepting and valuing what the student brings with them to their studies.

perspective and a time-management one. The interdisciplinarity[56] and the student-centred-ness[57] of Gender Studies teaching left me excited but floundering. I needed some structure in which to frame my developing understanding and to prevent me from drowning in this ever-expanding new-found knowledge.

As with all adult students (and arguably all students) education was not the only consideration in my life. During my degree two close friends died, both tragically, unexpectedly and within weeks of each other. This together with my lack of confidence in my academic writing ability created a crisis point, at which I had to take some time out to recover mentally. This I did, and completed my degree the following semester. I was thrilled to have completed (albeit beyond the allocated time-scale) and achieved a 2:1, to my amazement. The struggle, both mentally and physically, had left me scarred and I was heard to say, 'I'm never going to write another essay!' Yet within 18 months I had signed up for a part-time masters degree.[58] This was taken alongside full-time work at the university, and was funded by my department as part of staff development. It seemed like a good opportunity to work towards a higher qualification, which if I intended to stay in academia was

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[56] The subjects covered included sociology, anthropology, social policy, psychology, philosophy, politics, history, health studies, educational studies, literature, management and linguistics and yet the interdisciplinary nature of the programme was implicit, it was assumed that we knew where these very different epistemologies came from and how to make sense of them, even if our prior experience of education was either limited or very 'disciplined'. And how is it possible to understand inter-discipline when prior knowledge of discipline was 'self-discipline' something that you had (or did not) or 'discipline' which somebody else does to you?

[57] The main teaching method was seminars for which reading had to be done prior to the session, discussion in the seminar and then summing up of the main points. However, many of the discussions would be long and heated and whilst interesting and stimulating the summing up frequently did not happen, leaving me to feel I had never quite grasped the relevant point/s. My notes from these sessions were a mess, with no coherence and certainly not adequate to write essays or revise from. This shows one of two view points: either I was involved greatly in the discussion and so did not have time to write anything other than a few words, or, that I had not understood the discussion and so had little idea as to what to make notes on.

[58] Horseford (2000) writes: 'the physical pain of the experience had to fade to some degree' before she could contemplate undertaking further part-time study (cited in Gatrell, 2006: 137).

increasingly expected. I love learning; I am a self-confessed course junky even when I find those classes and the related work hard, I love the interaction of the classroom. But again, life got in the way, I had a growing family, I was working full-time, and I was teaching over and above my full-time contract and so consequently there was never enough time. Though I was permitted three hours out of work to attend class this did not leave any time for the written work, which again was completed outside of the expected time-frame and under pressure.[59] Yet I passed the coursework and received good marks and feedback for my dissertation (Medhurst, 2003). During this time, however, the combined pressures had become more or less unbearable and I took the view that 'If I ever say I'm going to write a PhD, please shoot me!'

I still did not (and do not) see myself as 'academic' (see Jackson, 2004: 60 for an analysis of 'being academic'). I did my undergraduate degree to prove to myself that I could do it, and because I had become increasingly frustrated at the level of job I could apply for/get without a degree. I did my masters for pragmatic reasons; to understand why there were not more men on the part-time courses we ran, to see if there was anything we as a department could do about it, and to help those that did study manage to complete the journey and the degree they had undertaken. And yet here is a completed, submitted PhD, written whilst working as a research assistant with extra teaching duties and completed along full-time work as well as still being a mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend and fulfilling many other roles. How has this happened? How and why did this resistant adult learner (Hughes, 2000) get to this place? And why have I explained my own learning journey when I am writing a thesis about part-time learners? In discussing students' narrative of their entry into HE Webb and Green (1997: 131) state: 'Accounts then, are a product of the sense-

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[59] In common with many part-time students my dissertation was written-up during my annual leave.

making and stock-taking process by which students construct their own identities'. I am attempting to make sense of my story, my identity and how it relates to my thesis and these students. As Krieger (1991 cited in Norum, 2000: 337) states: 'research is a process that affects the researcher most of all'. In the process of writing this thesis as I attempt to understand more about the part-time student body, I also finally started to understand myself, my own motives, my own processes and my own narrative.

Caroline Gatrell begins: 'Had I not been a part-time student this book would never have been written' (2006: Acknowledgements). This is also true of this thesis; despite working with part-time students for many years had I not studied for my masters degree on a part-time basis, I would never have considered writing a thesis looking at the experiences of part-time study. The themes throughout this thesis, including success and drop-out, managing self and support from others, motivation and resilience are important to me, because of my history. Gender Studies inculcated me to include my own story to show where I come from. My history of rejecting education as a teenager, of being a returner to learning as a mature/adult student,[60] of struggling with academic material make it important to me to show that students like me, who do not consider themselves to be particularly academic, who do not always follow 'best practice' of studying/writing regularly and often, of being last minute and having to write under pressure, of not believing in oneself as a successful student[61] or as a completer[62] all led in various ways to this thesis.

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[60] Students tend to be named 'adult students' in the part-time and CE literature yet 'mature students' when they are in full-time education.

[61] I did not see myself as successful because I had 'failed' to finish [my undergraduate and Masters degrees] within the expected structural timeframe and I had struggled along the way. It has only been whilst writing this thesis that I recognised that the educational structures are built from an understanding of 'student' meaning one who is full-time with no outside responsibilities. This echoes the commitment needed of the 18-year-old 'bachelor boy student' of Robinson, 1980 (cited in Edwards, 1993: 63). I think this is as true at postgraduate

However, I am aware that by being this open I make myself vulnerable. Karen Norum (2000) suggests that placing oneself in one's research is 'both sociological good sense and an ethical obligation to disclose our biases' (320) yet whilst 'the researched' have the protection of anonymity within our research, because we have our names on our writing we do not have this protection; this in turn makes us vulnerable. She asks: 'How much of ourselves bleeds through our research – not just in our writing it but also in conceptualizing and conducting it? How much of our own experience dictates what we "hear" and do not hear when we are interviewing others?' (320). I have exposed some of my educational history to show how my background influences how I may have 'heard' certain stories through the interviews; I will have picked up some clues that were relevant to me and missed those that were not. I identified closely with those participants with whom I shared some characteristics, particularly the women who negotiated being wives and mothers and workers and students, yet it was with renewed interest that I listened to the men's stories, because they were different from mine and I wondered if they had a different story to tell. I have felt particularly vulnerable writing this educational history, since I feel that this exposure possibly does nothing to enhance my academic career, to which a PhD is seen as an entry ticket (Skeggs, 1994 cited in Jackson, 2004: 83). But it was important to me to include it, not only as good feminist practice, it may help those who follow,[63] but mostly I wanted to include it because it motivated my writing the thesis. My main reason for writing this thesis has been to understand the journey

level as it is at undergraduate level   Going through the process of applying for extensions in order to submit and complete beyond the fixed deadlines made me feel that I had failed in my attempts, not that I had succeeded despite my 'bag and baggage' which did not quite fit into the HE system (Edwards, 1993: 9).

[62] Even though I completed my previous degrees I did not recognise this in myself until I started hearing it from my interviewees.

[63] Whilst writing this PhD I attended a writing class in which we were told that we were writing our PhDs not for our supervisor or our external examiner, but for those who follow us through the HE/PhD system.

that part-time undergraduate students undertake in their attempts to enter, study and successfully complete a degree. With this understanding I hope to be able to use this knowledge to help future students along their journey. If revealing my experience can help one person to see themselves as a potential successful student it has been worth it.

Norum states that 'researchers are biased. This is not good or bad. It simply is' (2000: 337). I am biased because I want to be a successful student and I want others to be successful in their own studies. Since embarking upon my own learning journey I have encouraged others to embark upon theirs, yet when I do I am aware that these journeys are not always straightforward and linear. The journey can be messy and cause dissent; it can be hard work and cause hardship. Yet it is still one that I would recommend albeit with an associated health warning, because I believe in the power of education to both change and enhance lives. This research affected me more than I would have believed. In looking for the success narratives of my interviewees I finally saw one in my own narrative and that despite the considerable strain it has taken me in getting to this stage it is a journey I am fortunate to have embarked upon and am pleased to have undertaken.

As the author of this thesis and this educational story, I have the privilege to choose which parts to reveal and which parts to conceal. I have for example, not spoken much about my marriage to a working-class man whose family holds little respect for education, or that during my undergraduate degree his sister followed me to the local college and studied for an Access qualification and then completed a full-time degree in English and History. I have not discussed much about my early education in the local comprehensive school, how being the second child following a bright and studious sister through school impacted upon my sense of self as not 'being academic' as I was constantly told I was not as clever as my sister, my limited gendered choices, and how being a teacher's daughter made me more visible in

school than I ever wanted to be. I have not divulged how my educational journey has impacted upon our children's education, their educational choices[64] and our educational choices for them. I have not revealed my peers' attitudes to my study or delved deeply into the emotional roller-coaster I have ridden along my journey. These things were omitted not because I am attempting to hide them from the reader but because some parts of the story became more relevant than others. Stories are only ever partial re-presentations of the whole. This partial re-presentation of my educational journey indicates which parts I felt were dominant in bringing me to this place at this time and writing this thesis in this way. As Plummer succinctly tells us: 'the power to tell the story, or indeed not to tell a story, under conditions of one's own choosing is part of the political process' (Plummer, 1995 in Webb, 2004: 140).

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[64] Whilst writing this my daughter, now 20 and away at university, told me that she knew from the age of seven that she would go to university. She recalled vividly visiting the campus at Hull with me and thinking that she wanted to go to university like Mummy. Her path since then had been in working towards that aim. I did not know this until now.

Literature Review

The focus of this thesis is part-time students and their strategies for successfully completing an undergraduate degree. On beginning my research in 2004, I found that there was very little literature specifically about part-time undergraduate students, and indeed the situation is similar on completion in 2008 as 'relatively little research has been conducted on part-time students in contrast to the wealth of data collected on full-time students' (Callender *et al*, 2006: 10). However, as already discussed, part-time undergraduates fall within many categories including those of continuing education, lifelong learning, lifelong education, adult education,[65] mature and returning students, community education and widening participation and thus I was able to draw on literature from across these diverse education traditions. As Boorman *et al* (2006) state: 'Part-time higher education is more complex and more diverse than full-time provision [and] the complexity and diversity of part-time higher education is not well understood' (2006: 14). My aim in reviewing the literature that was influential in my thinking is to show some of that complexity and diversity in relation to my study.

Until the reports commissioned by Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE were published in 2006 there was great difficulty not only in finding literature on, but in gathering accurate data pertaining to, part-time students; the reports were published too late to inform my research design. However, the reports by Ramsden (2006a),

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[65] For a discussion of the development of these terms see Jarvis (2004) (3rd ed) *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Theory and Practice*, particularly chapter 2 'From adult education to lifelong learning: A conceptual framework'; Ryley (2002) 'From extra-mural to lifelong learning: UK universities and the new lifelong learning agenda'; and Tennant (2005) 'Adult and continuing education: continuities and discontinuities'.

For an overview of the relevant policies in relation to higher education, continuing education and lifelong learning see Tight (1998) 'Education, education, education! The vision of lifelong learning in the Kennedy, Dearing and Fryer reports'.

Boorman *et al* (2006) and Callender *et al* (2006)[66] proved to be invaluable in the writing-up of this thesis, providing some up-to-date statistical background to my qualitative data, and supporting some of the recommendations by the students discussed in chapter 5, particularly in relation to the institutional provision of part-time study. The group of reports gives a comprehensive quantitative overview of the position of part-time provision in the UK in the early 21st century. It includes *A Quantitative Data Analysis of 2003/04 HESA Data* (Ramsden, 2006a), *A Survey of Issues facing Institutions* (Boorman *et al*, 2006) and *A Survey of Students' Attitudes and Experiences of Part-time Study and its Costs 2005/06* (Callender *et al*, 2006). The main strength of this research is the fact that it stresses that for most part-time students full-time study is not an option. Without the option of part-time study many, and arguably most, of this group of approximately half a million people would not be studying. This strongly resonates with my own belief in the importance of this mode of provision, particularly within the widening participation/lifelong learning agenda.

Boorman *et al* (2006) report: 'The inherent complexity of part-time undergraduate study and institutions' motivation for engagement in it mean that a single "part-time undergraduate higher education policy" would make no sense' (Boorman *et a*l, 2006: 6) and that: 'We consider that this complexity and diversity are in danger of being lost sight of when Government, the funding councils and institutions themselves consider the planning and funding of part-time provision together with full-time provision' (Boorman *et al*, 2006: 14). This warning, that part-time programme provision should be considered separately because of its diverse cohorts, aims and objectives, its different target markets and differing structures and diverse institutional motivation for provision is vital to my argument that part-time provision should be

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[66] See Brown (2006) and Ramsden (2006b) for related reports about London HEIs produced by London Higher.

made more visible within individual HEIs and the higher education sector in general, and not just be subsumed by a full-time (if changing) norm. The other major finding reported by Callender is that the vast majority of part-time students work and also have family ties, and as such are both 'constrained and influenced' by these commitments (Callender *et al*, 2006: 5). This is well known in the part-time sector[67]; however, it has been difficult to argue strongly on behalf of part-time students and their differing needs (whilst being careful not to set the part-time student up as problematic[68]) as there has not been an up-to-date large-scale coherent body of evidence to back up what has often been individual, anecdotal or local knowledge.[69]

Prior to the 2006 reports Schuller *et al* (1999) was a major text regarding part-time higher education in the UK although it was based on research on part-time study in Scotland. Earlier texts by Tight (1991a) and Bourner *et al* (1991) and Smith and Saunders (1991) have become less pertinent because of their publication date (and obviously the statistical information is out-of-date) but perhaps one of the main claims that Tight (1991a) makes is that 'part-time higher education is in general more valuable than full-time higher education' (119) because part-time students can combine employment, study and family commitments. Yet Schuller *et a*l were still able to state: 'It is worth simply noting the relative lack of impact which such a cluster of publications had – in spite of a government which continually stressed the need for cost-effectiveness and for closer links between study and work, both features which

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[67] And becoming acknowledged in the full-time sector (see Alsop *et al*, forthcoming).

[68] I am wary of continually stressing difference, as Lennon warns in relation to gender difference: 'The danger here is of making a fetish of such otherness. Insisting on difference keeps this opposition intact, dividing the world along predetermined fault-lines' (1995: 136). The 'pre-determined fault-lines' of part-time / full-time study will be discussed later.

[69] Ramsden (2006a: 135) acknowledges this; for example, no time series comparisons are included in his report as these would be misleading because of HESA and institutional changes in data collection and definitions.

part-time higher education might reasonably claim' (1999: 23). The case for the cost-benefits of part-time study is still being made and is currently (Rammell, 2007) showing signs of taking greater hold in the consciousness of policy makers and the higher education sector in general. Nevertheless, it is important to consider why part-time provision is currently being billed as important in the latest government agenda. According to Callender (2007a), a part-time student costs the treasury much less per full-time equivalent (FTE), as the HEFCE grant for a part-time student is only 1/3 of that of a full-time one. However, this in turn makes the student less desirable for the university on a cost basis. This indicates the importance of the economic argument in considering part-time students for the HE sector (also see King, 2008). The use of the financial argument as the main driver for part-time study is not one I endorse and the financial implication of provision of part-time study for HEIs is not the focus here though I agree with Coffield and Williamson who in 1997 were calling for, among other things, 'support [for] part-time students on an equal basis with full-time students' (1997: 128).[70] There is to be a Governmental review of student funding in 2009 and which will hopefully at least address this issue, which had been ignored in the 2003 White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003). Funding issues will be further considered in chapter 5.

Schuller *et al* (1999) used the example of shifts in employment patterns to define the field of part-time education and to show how there are similar conceptual issues to those involved in part-time employment. They state: 'The binary division between full-time and part-time is deeply embedded in our thinking' (1999: 40). Yet this belies the diversity that is really 'a continuum rather than a dichotomy with working hours ranging from 2 to more than 60' (41). They continue: 'For all the rhetoric concerning

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[70] Dearing (1997) also called for 'making choices between full- and part-time and between continuous and dis-continuous study financially neutral' (cited by Callender, 2007a).

equal opportunity, the excitement about the office of the future and the evidence about the work commitment of part-timers, it is still the case that those who work part-time are mostly marginalised in the organisation' (43). To compare this to the part-time provision of undergraduate higher education they conclude:

> It has been marginal in terms of numbers and public visibility. It has been marginal in terms of its location within the system, concentrated at sub-degree level and in the post-1992 universities and the Cinderella sector of further education. Above all, it has been marginal in public debates and in a series of official reports up to and including Dearing and Garrick [and since]. Many of the recent and projected changes in higher education affect part-time provision but they have nearly all been driven by the agendas of full-time higher education (Schuller *et al*, 1999: 37).

Today HE still operates the binary divide of full-time/part-time which is driven by the funding model, even though the divide is to a certain degree arbitrary and patterns of diversity among part-time students are similar to those shown of part-time work by Schuller *et al*. Despite the rhetoric of increasing flexibility, the agenda, including the funding one, is still being driven by that of full-time higher education, and thus privileges full-time students accordingly[71].

What the texts discussed up to this point have in common, is that they indicate both the broad range of types of part-time students and their marginalization within higher education. They also show that work and family commitments impact on part-time students. For my purposes in the latter context, I draw upon Edwards' (1993) *Mature*

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[71] Full-time students are entitled to Government loans (not means-tested) and further support including a Childcare Grant, Parents' Learning Allowance and an Adult Dependents' Grant. They do not have to pay for courses at point of delivery. Part-time students are only entitled to fee-payment support on a means-tested basis. They have to pay for their courses at point of delivery.

Women Students: Separating or Connecting Family and Education in relation to family and education. Here Edwards investigates how 31 full-time mature students, all mothers in long-term relationships when starting their studies, negotiated their studies alongside their partners and families. She examines how the process of their educational journey separated or connected them with their families. She suggests a continuum of three linked strands, the first moving from connection of education and family to separation of education and family, the second moving from valuing, through coping, and back to valuing, and the third, showing a series of strategies in relation to the women's own identity from having an integrated student and mother/partner identity, through to the women showing or feeling distinct student and mother/partner identities, almost as if they were different people within education and within the family (1993: 131). She suggests that over time the women move along this continuum as they enter, travel along and complete their educational journey. As Edwards states: 'The ways of being a student in full-time higher education and a female partner and mother, are socially constructed' (1993: 136). Being a part-time student is equally socially constructed but I would argue the social construction of a part-time student is less defined, more flexible and also in many cases less visible than being/becoming a full-time student. This then impacts differently on the associated family and the family dynamics over time.

Although I will argue later that having some aspect of student identity is an important factor for success among part-time students, the fact that it is part-time study occupies a smaller part of a person's identity, and is just one of many competing identifiers. Within my sample student identity was not 'claimed' as a major part of the interviewees' identity. This is not to deny, however, that the different components of identity were not 'competing'. Edwards suggests that with full-time students the student identity may have to become a separate identity from that of mother/partner as a way for the student to cope with both the 'greedy institutions' of family and

higher education. For this sample of part-time students a separate student identity did not appear to be evident as part of their coping strategies, and in some cases, a denial of being 'a student' was evident. I shall return to this issue in chapter 1.

Of importance for my study is Edwards' finding that women do not consider they are 'adopting strategies' in order to negotiate their study and family commitments:

> The idea of adopting a strategy (other than attempting to be organized) was not something the majority of women would even have recognized as appropriate in describing how they moved between family and education (1993: 138).

Edwards explains that only retrospectively did she herself see the separating or connecting strategies. The women themselves saw them as 'unintended outcomes rather than goals they worked towards' (139). In a similar way, even though I suggest my participants may be 'adopting strategies' of particular working practices, when asked the question about what strategies they had adopted in order to be successful my interviewees found this question difficult: 'Oh gosh, strategies' (Diane), and 'I don't think it's that deep' (Tom). They saw themselves (in a similar way to Edwards' participants) attempting to be organized:

> Planning and preservation and just sort of sheer thinking - I can't give this up (Lucy);
> I have found it hard, fitting things in with, I work full-time, husband, two kids, I really had to prioritise (Shirley);
> Juggling, it's just a case of juggling (Sue).

Edwards, together with Jane Ribbens (1991), argued that strategy is a masculine term based on masculine practices, and they searched for another way to analyse how women's lives might be conceptualized. Edwards and Ribbens suggest the use

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of strategy 'attributed to the women some sense of dignity and control over their lives' (1991: 481) whilst acknowledging that the women did not use the term themselves. Nevertheless, Edwards and Ribbens admit that they found the concept attractive and other terms difficult to find/use to describe the women's lives. The phrases they arrived at, after searching 'in vain for an accepted and acceptable term (to the academic world and to [them]selves)' (486) are 'different approaches', 'ways of coping', 'means of dealing with'. However, they declare:

> This may not give the discussion the same flavour of grandeur and
> rational purpose as the term 'strategy', but by using this particular
> 'approach' we have been concerned to express the significance of
> women's lives without using a malestream conceptual filter (486).

'Strategy' is a word regularly used across the disciplines and higher education in general now. It seems 'strategy' and 'strategic plans' are everywhere in today's educational world,[72] though maybe not adopted by the students themselves. Many of my research participants did not consider themselves to be strategic or adopting strategies; they were just 'being organised' and 'coping' (with conflicting demands), and the way they negotiated family and study was for them a 'way of being', a 'concern with processes rather than goals' (485). As Edwards and Ribbens point out: 'the concept [strategy] originates in military activities, and thus includes connotations of hierarchy and views of people as resources' (1991: 484) and significantly, the only person among my interviewees to mention strategies of his own volition was Carlos, who was in the RAF whilst studying for his degree. His initial answer, when asked how he felt about being a student, was: 'You learn about yourself, you learn what your own life strategies are, and it helps put things in perspective', and part of his

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[72] See Coffield and Williamson (1997: 2) for a discussion regarding the rejection of the industrialization of educational language.

strategy was to study for a degree in order to be able to leave the military and move forward in a civilian career.

This debate about the use of the concept 'strategy' made me reflect upon how I framed my questions, my language and where my personal terms of reference for the concept came from. I have been told in the past that I am strategic, and at the time I considered it almost an insult,[73] not a positive trait to have in oneself, and one which I was surprised that someone would define me and my actions by. I did consider it a masculine concept and also a business concept rather than a personal one. Yet since that comment, some seven years ago, and because of it, I have reconsidered my actions and my decisions in these terms. This comment made me re-consider, re-value and appropriate the notion of 'strategy' to describe my own way of being. Because of involvement in self-development and coaching work, strategy to me is now re-framed in terms of working towards goals: I consider and name my goals, and think about how to work towards them. I have goals which are personal, familial and professional, and like my participants, often experience conflict and have to negotiate family responsibilities with the pursuit of my personal goals. Yet I do now concern myself with goals rather than processes and as I am working towards particular goals I am more aware of the choices I make and the chances I take, and make those with my particular goals in mind. Thus, I see this as the strategy I have adopted.

It could, for example, be considered quite a strategic move to undertake a PhD. Have I then acquiesced to the dominant masculine discourse? I am considerably more 'goal orientated' than previously, but this could just be a result of a family growing up and my having more personal space to pursue my own career and interests rather than just going through the motions of trying to cope with being a

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[73] Most likely because of whom the comment came from.

mother/wife/worker/student and getting through to the end of each day still in one piece. I was previously 'rooted in the process of combining motherhood and full-time work, rather than with long-term career goals' (Moss, 1991 cited in Edwards, 1993: 139). One issue that emerges here is my own shift in position, from an emphasis on the combination of family, work and education to one of education[74] as work, and family as a separate and equally important but less consuming part of my life and self-identity. Due to factors such as the family lifecourse of which I am a part and which include, *inter alia*, the growing up of my children but also shifts that have occurred as a function of my educational development, this rebalancing of family, education and work is inevitable. I also consider that I have to a certain extent assimilated the dominant discourse in order to be accepted into the academic order, even if personally I would prefer to reject the 'industrialization of the language' (Coffield and Williamson, 1997: 2). Being too 'differently academic' (Jackson, 2004) at this stage in my career is a risky strategy.

In consequence, I have decided to use strategy in this thesis, but have considered carefully how I am using the term. Edwards states: 'The fact that the women themselves did not use, or would not necessarily recognize, the term "strategy" as applicable is not a reason for abandoning it' (1993:139). I am also conscious that 'By imputing "strategic" intent to certain groups of people, researchers may set themselves up as "experts" who speak on behalf of such groups to those in power – thereby giving powerful institutions an additional means of social control' (Edwards and Ribbens, 1991: 479). I do not wish 'powerful institutions', in this case higher educations institutions, to get the impression from my work that if only part-time students would follow a 'particular strategy for success', the institutions need do

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[74] Though as a perpetual learner I cannot foresee a time when I shall not be studying.

nothing other than to impart the knowledge of that strategy. The strategies identified here are a diverse mix and need addressing by the higher education sector in general, individual HEIs and individual students.

As raised earlier one strategy that I use within this thesis is to name my interviewees successful students. In their book *How to Win as a Part-time Student* (1995) Bourner and Race show many strategies and ways of being and becoming a successful part-time student. Importantly they start by stating that they want the learner to enjoy their studies, and this was a recurrent theme from the students' narratives and one that will be returned to in chapters 1 and 4. If you study a subject you enjoy, are engaged by rather than just going through the motions, and the process of study is enjoyable you are much more likely to stick with it and be/come a successful student. The title of the book is important. They did not call it *How to Be a Part-time Student*, or *How to Study for a Part-time Degree* or *Surviving a Part-time Degree* (the latter with its inherent negative connotations) or other similar permutations, but *How to Win as a Part-time Student.* Here, as always, language is important: 'language does not exist in a (social) vacuum' (Gibbon, 1999: 21). Rather the language used frames how we think (Gibbon, 1999: 35; Spender, 1998) and 'encapsulates our values, it conditions our thinking and so predisposes us to act differently' (Coffield and Williamson, 1997).[75] For example, if we think of 'winning' and of 'success' rather than of 'failing', then we frame our mind to expect success and winning (or at least bring it into our mental picture).[76] Hughes substantiates this from a post-structuralist background when she raises the issue of how language and discourse affect everyday life: 'While

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[75] This issue in the context of naming students as non-traditional or non-standard students will be returned to in chapter 5.

[76] 'Even if we cannot show that changing language changes social reality, the research on language and perception is consistent and conclusive: using *he or she* rather than *he* does bring women into the mental picture of speaker-hearers' (Gibbon, 1999: 150 original emphasis).

there are many positions within feminist post-structuralism, central to it are the relations between discourse, power and subjectivity' (Hughes, 2000: 54).

Along similar lines, but more recently published is Caroline Gatrell's (2006) *Managing Part-time Study: A Guide for Undergraduates and Postgraduates*. The title here is telling: it is a process which can be 'managed' in many meanings of the word, 'to conduct the running of (eg a business)', 'to control or supervise', 'to be able to fit in' or 'to be able to cope with a difficult situation', and 'to succeed in handling or accomplishing (something cumbersome or difficult)' (Allen, 2001: 536). The book covers many similar areas to Bourner and Race, and privileges the students' experience in their own words.

A strength of the Bourner and Race (1995) text is that they get the reader to 'do the book', not just read it,[77] by the use of self-analysis questions (SAQs). In this way they address many of the issues about motivations for learning, resources for learning, how to get the best from one's study and those around the student. The final chapter entitled 'Staying the course' is one that I find particularly useful and relevant. It is about attitudes to study. Bourner and Race suggest that a person with the attitude of staying the course, who understands that there may be challenges ahead to be faced and overcome, is more likely to persist, and thus successfully complete the course, than the person who only looks at/for the problems that part-time study may present. Emotions and attitudes to study are addressed in chapters 1 and 4.

The corresponding chapter in Gatrell (2006) is entitled 'The mid-term blues: getting stuck, and staying on course'. This chapter focusses on the problems for the first 15

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[77] Whether students actually read or 'do' the book is of course down to the individual reader.

pages; then there is a small section of getting back on course which is then followed by how difficult it is to write. There are hints and tips of how to get back on course and getting (re)started on writing, but the main theme that comes through is one of struggle and problems and non-completion. The chapter then finishes on 'what to do when things go wrong'. Maybe because it was a difficult time for me when I was reading this text (family issues, deadlines, write-up isolation) one almost had the impression that the author was giving the struggling student permission to 'give up' when circumstances became too difficult. Understanding the reality of part-time education and the rates of non-completion this may be the more 'realistic' approach to take. However, it was not one that encouraged me to 'stay on course' and I much preferred the 'I've started so I'll finish' tag line and attitude from Bourner and Race.

The notion of how particular issues are framed is important and it is for this reason that Josie Quinn encourages us to rethink the notion of 'drop-out' (Quinn *et al*, 2005). The focus of this report is full-time working-class students who choose to leave the higher education courses they joined before their expected completion date. According to the report 'drop out' is a 'policy priority across the UK. Redressing "drop out" is seen as having a role in economic growth, employment, stability and social equality' (2005: 2). Quinn's team used 'jury days' and individual interviews to generate a 'wealth of challenging data' and by doing so were able to tell not only the stories of those who had 'dropped out' of higher education but also 'the stories in currency about others, giving a sense of the cumulative and layering effect of the cultural narrative of "drop out"' (2005: 10). A main aim of the report, part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 'Ladders out of Poverty' programme, was to use the 'research findings to write the story [of "drop out"] in a more productive way' (2005: 17), in other words to rewrite the cultural narrative. They show that although 'drop out' is 'increasingly complex and multifaceted' (15) it does have an element of self-fulfilling prophecy about it, 'This narrative creates an expectation that, in this area

and in these institutions, many students will "drop out". Actions then model those expectations' (15). In chapter three they conclude that although 'drop out' can be seen externally as failure, for an individual, dropping out may be a learning experience, one which leaves them better equipped, and prepared to return to HE in the future, and may help them not to become a serial 'failure' (2005: 36). They conclude the report by suggesting that working-class 'drop outs' are actually 'the real lifelong learners, frustrated by an outmoded system' (67) and that 'the emphasis at policy and institutional level should be on creating more responsive and flexible systems' (67). If policy makers and institutions take their recommendations and work to create a more responsive and flexible system, it would not only help this group of working-class students but also part-time students, who in many cases fit a similar profile to those in Quinn *et al's* research, i.e. first-generation participants in HE.

This report was important for my thesis not only because it made me problematize my use of the term success (Quinn *et al*, 2005: 37) in relation to my research participants, it also sensitized me to the strength of narratives within education discourses and assisted me to see how this tool could be used within my research. As mentioned above I chose to use 'success' to identify my participants because they are successful students, since they have successfully completed a degree course and should rightly be proud of that achievement. However, I am aware that by equating success with completion the reverse could be assumed, that I equate non-completion with failure or being unsuccessful. This is absolutely not the case. In many instances, and as Quinn *et al* suggest, when students withdraw from university this is in their very best interest and does not mean that they have failed the course that they chose to do; often their withdrawal is, and can be seen as, a positive choice for them. However, the course they chose to do, or the institution they chose to study at, may well have failed them by not allowing them the flexibility to fit part-time

study into their life or by rigidly applying full-time norms and rules to diverse experiences.

The reframing of the concept of 'drop out' from HE through the use of a positive narrative was one that reverberated in my mind. Could I use this idea and use it to transform the dominant discourse of part-time education? My experience of working and studying in full-time focussed HEIs had introduced me to a negative narrative of part-time education; certainly within the full-time focussed HE sector part-time education is seen as subordinate to full-time education. The construction of a 'success narrative of part-time study' was appealing and gave me a way to frame my thinking. With that in mind I explored the notion of narrative, even though the students did not necessarily tell me 'narratives'. I wanted to construct a 'collective narrative' (Richardson, 1990) for this group of students.

The cultural meta-narrative about students is that they are 18, free agents living away from home, able to move into this 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961). This leaves my students as 'other', as 'hidden subjects' but also does not give them a narrative of their own to help them construct their self, that of a successful part-time student. As Steph Lawler stresses: 'I see narrative as *social product* produced by people within a context of specific, social, historical and cultural locations' (Lawler, 2002: 242, original emphasis). She continues that narratives

> are interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves,
> both to themselves and to others. Further, narratives do not originate
> with the individual; rather they circulate culturally to provide a repertoire
> (though not an infinite one) from which people can produce their own
> stories (2002: 242).

In this thesis I attempt to write 'a success narrative of part-time students'. In attempting this task I hope to be able to provide a way in which the part-time student

or prospective part-time student can see themselves as successfully negotiating the competing aspects of their lives alongside the completion of a part-time degree. For part-time students the *Educating Rita* (Russell, 1980) discourse is a common one, suggesting that the route is hard, there are many who will drop out, and that relationships will collapse along the way. By aiming to produce a collective story of part-time students I am not suggesting that there is only one way to be a part-time student or one way to be a successful part-time student, just that there is a story which prospective students can look towards, and utilize to compare their own story with, in a similar way that reading autobiographies[78] of others can help us to see how lives beyond our experiences are lived. Richardson argues that although some collective stories come from groups that are organized such as the civil rights movements and tell an alternative story from the dominant cultural story, others such as her example of the 'new other woman' collective story, come from groups who are not organised or connected in any way, but where the individual on hearing the collective story would say: 'That's *my* story, I am not alone' (Richardson, 1990: 26, original emphasis).

By looking for and making visible a new collective story for part-time students this thesis aims to be part of a move towards a new educational order, one in which part-time study is visible and not seen as subordinate to full-time study, one in which part-time study as an adult is regarded as a normal part of life course development across all sections of society, and one in which the structure of the society, and the education sector as a whole, supports the endeavour of the individual (and groups) in this. Richardson, aware of how the collective story can make a transformation both for the individual and the society, states:

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[78] Steedman (1986) claims that autobiography can 'question cultural narratives and provide disruption and counterpoint' (cited in Weiner, 1999: 37).

Most significant are the transformation possibilities of the collective story. At the individual level, people make sense of their lives through the stories that are available to them, and they attempt to fit their lives into the available stories. People live by stories. If the available narrative is limiting, destructive, or at odds with their actual life, peoples' lives end up being limited and textually disenfranchised. Collective stories that deviate from standard cultural plots provide new narratives; hearing them legitimates replotting one's own life. New narratives offer the patterns for new lives. The story of the transformed life, then, becomes a part of the cultural heritage affecting future stories, future lives (Richardson, 1990: 26).

As a new narrative emerges, and is given exposure it become part of the cultural heritage affecting future stories and future lives.

As the government is now urging universities to embrace and extend the possibilities of part-time study, it is likely that more people are going to study on a part-time basis (see for example Pollard *et al*, 2008). As Richardson tells us, 'people live by stories'. It is imperative that a positive narrative is available to part-time students so that their options do not end up being limited or disenfranchised.

One article that uses narratives on entry to HE was that by Carolyn Britton and Arthur Baxter (1999) in which they look at four (gendered and classed) narratives into which their group of research respondents, all mature students, fit. They suggest that these narratives are: struggling against the odds; unfulfilled potential; credentialism; and self-transformation (1999: 180). Both women and men used the unfulfilled potential narrative; it was the most common narrative and it is a 'recognisable cultural narrative of our time' (185). It reflects on both 'opportunity denied and opportunity refused'. The struggling against the odds narrative was used by working-class

women. This group with the least cultural capital are 'the classic women returners' (185). Thirdly, the credentialism narrative is a middle-class female narrative, a narrative of those who had the opportunity to go further with education at the 'traditional' time but who did not. Finally, the self- transformation narrative was reported as a male narrative. Britton and Baxter state that

> men and women tell different stories about their lives because they are grounded in the material reality of different life experiences … they have gender-specific forms and … men and women draw on different discourses to represent their experiences and construct a sense of self (1999: 188).

The narratives produced by the students show that there are many ways of narrating their entrance into and the journey through higher education and these will differ depending on gender and class as well as other background factors (not least previous educational experience). Although gendering the narratives, Britton and Baxter do state:

> there does not appear to be a specifically female or male orientation to education, rather women and men simultaneously hold instrumental and self orientated attitudes (1999:191).

Britton and Baxter report that 'in narrating their lives, people are not merely describing them but actively constructing their identities' (1999: 181). It is this 'construction of identities' in which I am interested. I shall attempt to show throughout the chapters how different learning and working practices, people and resources are used and reported on in the learning journey of this group of part-time students.

The typologies by Baxter and Britton, and those used by Osborne *et al* (2004) relate to the beginning of the students' learning career and are as such part of the entry narrative into higher education, whereas my sample are at the completion stage of their undergraduate careers, and as Brec'hed Piette (2002) shows, narratives change with the passage of time and the incorporating of 'student' into one's identity.

I want to move on here to a further concept that has been influential in my thinking: that of 'habitus'. This concept has been used within the literature of lifelong learning and as Beverley Skeggs has argued, 'Bourdieu has been particularly useful for enabling feminists to put the issue of class back on the feminist agenda' (2004: 20). Atkin (2000) uses Bourdieu's notion of habitus as a 'vehicle for analysis' (253), particularly in relation to the 'education for adults rather than the education of adults' (ibid). 'Habitus refers to the dispositions that human agents acquire, through life-long process of learning and socialisation, that give them competence to respond in certain ways to given social situations' (Edgar and Sedgewick, 2002: 30). Thus it is argued that because higher education has not been part of their collective habitus, working-class students may not have acquired the capital that gives them the competence to enter and successfully complete higher education, either at the traditional age of 18 or later in life. But Bourdieu proposes that habitus can change over time and through different associations and experiences. Sue Clegg and Katie McNulty show: 'The advantage of thinking in terms of habitus is that it problematizes practices rather than taking them for granted' (2002: 582) and in this way exposes the fact that the 'association of cultural and social capital with education, which policy makers assume, is not universal' (572).

Louise Archer (2000) advises that for many working-class non-participants 'the possibility of going to university was a "non-choice", it had never entered into their choice/decision-making horizon' (5) and that having personal contact with somebody who had been through the process of university to demystify it, brought going to

university within the 'horizon of choice' (5). This could inaugurate change over time.

In a similar way Quinn *et al* (2005) found that although a student may have

withdrawn from university, having attended a university had demystified the process

not only for the student but also for others around them. Reay (1997b: 23)

recommends that: 'The solution to class inequalities does not lie in making the

working classes more middle class, but in dismantling and sharing out the economic,

social and cultural capital which goes with middle class status'.

The issue of class is relevant within this thesis; half of the participants self-identified

as working class and, as above, the possibility of university at the age of 18 was also

a 'non-choice'. When the choice had been made to enter university at a later age the

decision was almost always one for the 'local' institution. For part-time students, in

many areas of the country, this often means little or no choice in relation to the

institution at which they can study. It is therefore important to consider not only the

role of individual habitus but that of institutional habitus (Reay, David and Ball, 2001;

Reay, 2003 and Thomas, 2002). Reay (2003) concludes:

> In a contemporary culture of individualisation and privatised risk, all the
>
> change and transformation is seen to be the responsibility of the
>
> individual, yet, in the era of mass higher education, it seems highly likely
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> that universities will need to change both structures and policies if they
>
> are to provide positive experiences for non-traditional students (2003:
>
> 315).

Here she clearly indicates that institutions have a role to play in making themselves

accessible to non-traditional students. Reay *et al* (2001) develop the notion of

institutional habitus at 'both conceptual and empirical levels' (2001: Abstract). The

institutional habituses of both universities and schools are examined in relation to

school pupils' decision-making processes of whether to go to university or not, or, if

they have chosen to go to university, the decision-making process of which universities they would attend. They show very clearly that 'Institutional habitus has a significant impact which permeates the choice making processes, … making some choices virtually unthinkable, others possible and yet others routine' (Bourdieu, 1984 cited in Reay *et al*, 2001: para 5.4). As choices made by part-time students are frequently limited to the local university the institutional habitus of an institution will determine, in some cases, whether or not a prospective student will even apply. If a university is known as being elite, or in some cases as being a pre-1992 university, the perception of those applying can be that the institution will not be welcoming and will 'not [be] for the likes of us' (Bourdieu, 1990; Marks *et al*, 2003).

Liz Thomas (2002) argues that institutional habitus is an important notion to investigate for student retention in higher education, and whilst the focus of my thesis goes beyond the issue of retention, the use of the term habitus 'provide[s] a conceptual and empirical understanding of the ways in which the values and practices of a HE institution impact on student retention' (Thomas, 2002: 423) and I would add, student experience whilst studying. It reminds us that it is essential to look at (this group of) students not only from their perspective (which is the focus of much of this thesis) but also in terms of the institutions which they attend. Thomas (following Reay *et al*, 2001) suggests: 'the habitus of some institutions is less likely to be in tension with the familial habitus of "non-traditional" students than others' and that

> More elite institutions are perceived to have a habitus that is alien to students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, and in which these students will be made to feel that their habitus is not 'correct' as it is not the dominant habitus (Thomas, 2002: 438-9).

As the institutional habitus 'determines the practices of the university' (Thomas, 2002: 439) this in turn determines who will consider applying to that institution and what impact the institutional habitus will have on their journey through university. The institution that 'require[s] them to radically deviate from their habitus' (439) is less likely to attract and maintain non-traditional students. In contrast, the institution that develops a 'strategic or holistic approach to widening participation … [with WP] integrated throughout the institution's activities' (Thomas, 2002: 440) goes some way in acknowledging that students' diverse backgrounds must be recognised and addressed by the institution in order to allow the non-traditional student to access and succeed in HE.

> 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 HE sector and institutions in particular (Thomas, 2002: 440).

Many institutions, it seems, so far have been unwilling to do this; the attitude is one of 'we are here, they (part-time students, non-traditional students) can come if they want' whilst making little or no effort to address how accessible or not their institution and courses actually are, the risk here being placed squarely at the feet of the individual.

Risk is an issue examined by Lyn Tett (2004) as it relates to studying at an elite HEI whilst coming from a working-class background. She also uses Bourdieu's notion of habitus to examine 'the role which … educational institutions play in both changing and reproducing social and cultural inequalities' (257). Although the HE sector has changed from an elite to a mass system, 'students entering the old "elite" universities were twice as likely to come from middle or upper class families as those starting in the post-1992 sector' (HESA, 1999 cited in Tett, 2004: 253). As she points out there

is copious research that shows how working-class students 'choose' HE institutions in which they are most likely to encounter people similar to themselves, in terms of class, 'race' and gender. Tett's study is of particular interest here as part of her cohort studied on a part-time basis for a degree in community education. The narratives of the working-class students within this study show that they were aware of their position as 'other' to the norm of a student, but also how the university positioned them as 'other'.

> Timetables, library opening hours and university services are all based on the assumption that its students are full time, live on or near the campus, do not need to work during term time, have no responsibilities for dependants and will not need study support or advice. These assumptions operate to exclude those that are different (Tett, 2004: 260).

Tett continues by showing:

> The field of HE has its own orthodoxy, its own way of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs, which give it legitimacy. These principles are only ever half-articulated and many of the orthodoxies of thinking and acting are implicit and tacit (2004: 260).

When these principles are 'implicit and tacit' it makes the experience of the working-class student harder and a more difficult negotiation as they are not privy to these in advance of entering the institution. Their capital does not extend to the orthodoxies, nor are they likely to feel at ease once inside the institution. In addition I would suggest that for students accessing part-time courses which are frequently on the margins of the main provision by an institution it is also difficult to find out and negotiate what those half-articulated principles may be. Tett's students call for more flexibility within the system to allow them to succeed and Tett concludes by stating: 'Ultimately it means creating a system that challenges, rather than reinforces,

classed, raced and gendered inequalities' (2004: 262). Despite the rhetoric the HE sector in general and the lifelong learning agenda is a long way from that position at the current time.

Class as well as gender are the central themes in Jackson's work (2003, 2004) and in *Working-class Women and Lifelong (L)earning* she critiques current policies of lifelong learning that are based on 'instrumentalism and individualism' (365). She shows how working-class women are less able to 'take responsibility for [their] own learning' because of structural inequalities, whilst being told to do so to help 'make ours a civilized society' (Blunkett for the DfEE, 1998: 7 cited in Jackson, 2003: 366). She suggests (following Morley, 2002) that 'A learning society that is "grafted on" can only continue and replicate the structural inequalities of gender, class and other differences, where only certain types of knowledge, skills and work are valued' (367), and to this list I would also add mode of study in many instances. 'Grafting on' a new learning society to an old elite system of HE without challenging the inequalities within the system particularly disadvantages working-class women who cannot yet break through the 'class ceiling' (Brine, 1999: 2). They are 'likely to find themselves structurally located in their work, with little opportunity to enhance learning' (Jackson, 2003: 369). Jackson's findings are confirmed by Callender *et al's* (2006) figures that those most likely to get funding for part-time study are men in full-time work, those least likely are women in part-time work. Layer also questions this issue about the changing role of HE 'One model is very much focussed on students fitting in to an existing model of HE, the other about the extent to which HE needs to change' (2005: 2).

A strong point of Jackson's work, and of relevance to this thesis, is her stress that locality/geography makes a difference. Much of the work for this thesis was carried out in Hull, a city with poor educational attainment, with just 11% of the adult population qualified to degree-level compared with an average of one in five (Alsop

and Gonzalez-Arnal, 2006: 2). The rural/urban divide was also of particular importance: one of my interviewees, for example, lived in a rural area; her part-time degree course was moved from a local community centre to the university. The study time was also changed from day time to evening. The local community centre was within walking distance of her house, the university over an hour's drive away. Maggie did have a car, but for those without access to a car this move of programme would most likely have meant the end of their studies, as it would have entailed a two-bus, two-hour journey each way, and as Jackson points out, 'there is a (perceived) risk of personal danger that prevents women from travelling after dark – in winter, from as early as 3.00 or 4.00 pm' (2003: 373). Jackson claims in this article that policies and debates on lifelong learning need to shift from individualism and only then will the structural barriers be overcome.

Jo Armstrong (2006) investigates how class and gender are experienced in combining employment and motherhood, using a feminist-Bourdieuian approach. She argues that within the discourse of 'work-life' balance, popular at the beginning of the 21st century, 'questions concerning class and gender inequalities are increasingly sidelined' (2006: para 1.2). Echoing many of the themes of the discourse of lifelong learning she asks the questions: 'Why does it continue to be *women* who juggle?' (para 1.2, original emphasis), and 'How are experiences of employment and motherhood classed and gendered?' (para 1.3). She notes that 'working class women in the UK have been "flexible" for many years in combining employment with motherhood [and this] is disregarded in recent debates which tend to construct "flexibility" and "balance" as new challenges' (2006: para 1.2). This links back to Jackson who states that working-class women need to 'develop the confidence *not* to make themselves available to others' (2003: 374, my emphasis). Within my thesis, juggling is a constant refrain heard throughout the narratives of many of the students, mainly, but not only, the women. However, the men who did

raise the issue of juggling were working-class men. This confirms that gender and class both need careful analysis in terms of how they impact upon educational chances and choices. In a similar way to how Schuller *et al* (1999) associate the experiences of part-time study with part-time work, I have been able to use Armstrong's work to relate the issues of 'juggling' and 'flexibility' around employment and motherhood and expand this to include part-time study. As Armstrong points out the dominant discourse is one of aiming for a work-life balance. It could be argued that students undertaking a part-time degree alongside working and motherhood have little chance of attaining this, and yet many of my participants did achieve some semblance of a work-study-life balance. Her question 'How are experiences of employment and motherhood classed and gendered?' (para 1.3) can thus be expanded for my thesis so I ask the question throughout, 'how are experiences of part-time students (who are often both in employment and parents) classed and gendered?'. Armstrong's (2006) paper indicates:

> The significance of examining how different patterns of combining employment and motherhood are experienced by women. [The paper] shows the importance of exploring how various working patterns arise through studying biographies and through engaging with the ways women value and understand different practices… and the complexity of the interactions and the contradictions between classed and gendered processes (para 9.3).

The importance of looking for and how the different patterns of employment, parenthood and study were experienced by my participants and their classed and gendered dimensions will be discussed particularly in chapters 1 and 2.

Older, but still relevant texts for my research are those which investigate gender and part-time study with a focus on OU students by Patricia Lunneborg. She considered

the stories of *OU Women: Undoing Educational Obstacles* (1994) and *OU Men: Work through Lifelong Learning* (1997) separately. In many ways she wrote a 'success narrative' for OU students. The preface of her first book begins:

> This is a story about fourteen determined women. As you read through their lives, perhaps you'll respond: 'Right! My sister is a lot like Val who turned her life around. I bet if Sis read this, she might have a go at the Open University'. Or, 'It's not too late for my Mum! If Gertrude started at age 45, against all those odds, why couldn't Mum?' Or, 'What happened to Kushalta in school is just like what happened to me. I'll bet I can hold down my job and work on a degree, too, even if I haven't got any A-levels.' (1994: Preface).

By virtue of writing these books separately, by gender, Lunneborg investigates how the OU impacts differently on women and men. In *OU Women* (1994) she focusses on how the fourteen women interviewed 'undid the educational obstacles' in order to succeed. As she states:

> What I had expected in the way of answers was lack of money, unhelpful husbands and no room of their own. What I got instead were memories. Unhappy memories of education many years ago. Unsupportive parents, brothers being favoured, failed exams, schools lacking expectations of their students (1994: 2).

But she focussed on 'forward-looking, upbeat, moving ahead from one challenge to another, and succeeding' (2) rather than on the barriers, in order to produce a success narrative for other potential OU women students. When starting to write the second book about men who had been through the OU, she was searching for how the OU had impacted upon men's 'emotional life, recreational life, interests, values, and needs'. However, what they wanted to talk about was 'their careers … and most

importantly, how continued adult learning keeps a man in work' (1997: Preface).

Here we can see the gendered differences of the study in relation to the rest-of-life. In *OU Women* the chapters on particular women are interspersed with issues, including early educational failure, low self-confidence, male bias, lack of emotional support, lack of financial support, university life's lack of fit and the homemaker role. In *OU Men* the focus is on work and how employment and study work together. That said there are still similarities. Lunneborg does not argue that the experiences are totally different for women and men, just that the way they are reported and framed, the narratives women and men offer, come from a different focus. For both women and men one of the major barriers that needed overcoming was that of self dis-belief. 'But my biggest achievement was overcoming my own attitudes and expectations of life. My biggest obstacles were entirely within myself' (Misha in Lunneborg, 1994: 54) and 'The main obstacles to surmount are mental. Am I clever enough? Do I have the determination?' (Peter in Lunneborg, 1997: 65).

Lunneborg's decision to organise the material as success narratives for these OU students, with a focus on the positive rather than the negative, is commendable. She weaves the issues around the stories so that the problems are not ignored but written in to show that despite the obstacles, which can be considerable, and may be different for women and men, success is possible. The OU, however, is a particular institution, and one that teaches in a particular format, that of distance learning. This, as reported by many of the students in her books, is one of its strengths, and although the OU has the largest share of the part-time market (with 41% of the UK undergraduate market as at 2003/04, Ramsden, 2006a: 77), it by no means is the only way to access a part-time degree. Whilst the Open University might be the right way to study for some students, others may want (or need) a more contact-based, face-to-face teaching style. This then is achieved by attending other HE institutions with appropriate provision. Both students studying face-to-face and via distance

learning participate in this study producing, as I shall discuss further, particularly in chapter 1, slightly different 'learner identities'.

The notions of 'learner identity' and 'learning career' are increasingly familiar in the literature of lifelong learning (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Crossan *et al*, 2003; Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Gallacher *et al*, 2002; Webb, 2004). They are addressed here because the idea of identifying as a learner, as a student, is, I believe, important in the process of becoming a successful learner. As already discussed Edwards' (1993) participants were divided between those who had separate identities; one a student and one a mother/partner, and those that integrated these identities into one self. Clegg and McNulty (2002) argue that it is important to allow beginning learners to develop learner identities from within their habitus (572). Gallacher *et al* (2002) use the concept of learning career to show that an individual's pathway may be 'an uneven process which can be fragmented and broken, not linear and "upwards" as in most conventional usages of career' (2002: 507). Work by Adshead (2007) also shows these non-linear patterns[79].

Sue Webb (2004) investigates issues of identity and learning careers. She reports on longitudinal research which followed students from entry into HE to four years after graduation. This research shows how the students' narratives change over time, from entry to and exit from HE and beyond and is of interest because she asks questions of who responds to the follow-up research, and why. More women than men responded to the graduates' research and so the questions posed are: 'Are women more willing to tell their stories; or are women less mobile and so easier to track down than men?' (2004: 140). Her replies are that in general women are less mobile and so contact was easier to re-establish, but also that women appear to be

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[79] Though with the advent of non-funding for ELQs this will become more problematic.

more eager to tell their stories. Webb suggests that women are more likely to want to continue to tell their stories as they were more likely to report that they had been denied access to further and higher educational opportunities earlier in life or that they had 'untapped potential'. Thus the stories they had to tell were ones of 'naming their history or shaping their identity' (following hooks, 1989) whereas for men, the stories they told were more likely to be ones of taking up their 'rightful place in higher education', albeit with a delayed start.

One way in which these stories were gendered was that women were more likely to tell of their educational career as being one that would benefit their family and community, not just themselves (see also Archer, 2006:10). This was a theme that was also reported in many of the interviews in my sample. Part of talking about their learning careers also included encouraging others into learning and becoming more socially and politically aware of the power of education (Webb, 2004: 142). Although aware that women may be more willing to tell their stories in the follow-up research Webb agrees with Britton and Baxter (1999: 191) that there are not specifically male and female orientations to education and in her study found age was more relevant than gender in the different attitudes towards learning.

The final section of this literature review covers texts that have a particular focus on part-time undergraduate students, namely Pat Davies (1999), Brec'hed Piette (2002) and Ella Westland (2004). In 1999 Davies asked for a 'serious policy debate' on part-time students (1999: 154) which she considered was then overdue. This debate has still not happened though is beginning to emerge post-Leitch[80]. As Callender *et al* (2006) report: 'Issues about part-time students were largely overlooked in recent debates about student funding including the 2003 White Paper The Future of Higher

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[80] King (2008) was commissioned by John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills as contribution to the review of the future of the HE sector.

Education (DfES, 2003) and the subsequent legislation' (2006: 8). Part-time students were also absent from *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (DfES, 2003b) and are not under the remit of the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) (Callender *et al*, 2006: 8). Although Callender has delivered her report to the appropriate select committees, what will happen to the information is 'anybody's guess' (Callender, 2007b). Despite Davies's attempt to look at part-time higher education as half full rather than half empty, this failed to impact as shown by the more recent exclusion of part-time students from the reports above. However, her call for 'improvement in our knowledge about part-time students' (153) has been somewhat answered by the recent publications by Ramsden (2006), Callender *et al* (2006) and Boorman *et al* (2006). Yet these later reports are still quantitative in nature and whilst they show us in detail who, why and where people are studying there is little in-depth information about 'the complex relationships between the different domains of their lives [and] the contribution they make to higher education and the impact it has on them' (Davies, 1999: 153). This lacuna is addressed by my research. In reviewing Schuller *et al's* text (1999) Yorke (2000: 246) considers that their research becomes more vibrant when addressing student experience and states: 'accounts of real-life experience … can only be captured through qualitative research'. This point was reiterated at a conference held at Birkbeck College in March 2007. The papers presented (included research by Universities UK, the OU, Birkbeck, and The Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning) were all of a quantitative nature. Only in the final paper of the day (Adshead, 2007) did we hear any of the stories or voices from part-time learners, even though earlier papers had reported that qualitative information had been collected as part of the research projects. It was this paper that was most favourably received, and had the greatest and most animated discussion, despite being allocated the graveyard shift.

Two further articles that report on qualitative research and focus on the student experience of part-time students are those by Piette (2002) and Westland (2004). Piette's focus is on successful students and their move from 'fitting the studying in' to the 'altered states' by the time they are in their fourth or fifth year of study. She draws on the concept of 'learning career' and cites Bloomer and Hodkinson's (2000) definition of learning career as 'the development of dispositions to learning over time'. In her study she shows that students move from the early stages of their study from a preoccupation with how to fit study into their (usually already) busy lives to an 'altered state' within their values, identity and aspirations. Many of the students in my study also reached this 'altered state', wondering just what they would find to replace studying once they had finished. Piette, in a similar way to Jackson (2003, 2004) (above), considers that learning is 'too often characterised in individual terms' (4) and that individualism comes from a masculine perspective. Following Roseanne Benn (1997) however, Piette suggests that for women particularly the social connections of learning were important, possibly because they replaced other social opportunities that were displaced by studying. Her suggestion that institutions should help foster these social relationships is one that I return to in chapters 3 and 5. Her conclusion, that institutions should not forget the social dimensions of learning whilst striving for added flexibility, is one which I endorse (see also Thomas, 2006).

Although earlier I stressed my belief in the importance of the success narrative, Piette's observation that the first year of study is particularly hard is a useful conversation to have with students. By this I mean that passing on the knowledge that it is understood (by the institution, tutors and other, previously successful, students) that fitting study into an already busy life is a difficult transition period, but that this period will pass and fitting study in will get easier and more 'normal', is a

powerful discourse. Knowing that the 'fitting it in' is difficult for a short period[81] but that it does not stay as difficult may be the information needed to allow the student to keep juggling those various balls for just a little while longer. Piette notes that although less reported, it is important for students

> to make psychological space for studying in busy lives. It is important
> that students feel that their course is an integral part of their lives, and
> that its significance is on a par with other major aspects such as work and
> family, rather than a temporary activity that can be dropped if time is short
> or something more interesting comes up (2002: 2).

This is a theme that will be followed up particularly in relation to the learning and working practices of the students in chapter 1.

Westland's (2004) focus is on the learning journeys of students who studied for a part-time degree in humanities and claims that the motif of the journey is ubiquitous in the lifelong learning literature. Indeed it is one that I use throughout this thesis and have used many times in relation to my own and my students' study processes without necessarily questioning its place in the lifelong learning discourse. Throughout she uses the framework of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and just as Alice falls down the rabbit hole she describes the students as having a 'period of free fall and bewilderment [after which] they began to get their balance and take their bearings' (285). Thus they move, like Piette's students, from 'fitting the study in' to 'altered states' (2002).

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[81] A year may not seem like a short period to a student who is struggling, but in relation to the length of a part-time degree, it is. 'I can't believe how fast it's gone' is a common refrain even after a six-year part-time degree.

Westland describes the learners' joy of the learning process yet still acknowledges that the students had problems. These problems did not become insurmountable or force them to give up their studies. Her sample was mainly white, all women and the majority were middle-class and in this way similar to some of my participants, such as Maggie and Diane. One finding of her research was that the students were proud of and loyal to their programme of study and wanted it to be available to others as they had enjoyed the experience immensely. Another finding, which echoes Diane's story in my research, is that some of the women found the course almost by accident, they 'just happened' upon the information (2004: 284), and following the *Alice in Wonderland* theme, they were bored and probably looking for a rabbit hole through which to fall. Many of Westland's sample worked, and yet they felt they had reached a plateau at work. Home-based women wanted to 'use their brains' and older students wanted to prevent deterioration in retirement (285). In some ways this echoes the middle-class 'problem with no name' from Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Westland describes this as 'an inchoate inner need, unfocused but somehow fundamental' (2004: 285). The pleasure and wonder they described in their learning journey is encouraging, their 'wow' and 'buzzing' and being 'on a high' from their learning speaks volumes for the engagement of adults in learning a subject they enjoy and is a theme continued in chapter 4. They speak not of fitting study in, but of altered states. Their altered states included study keeping them sane and giving them something to keep going, with one student reporting 'I might not have survived the last six years' (287) without the challenges of the course. This focus on study as an important and positive factor in their lives is one that is rarely heard among the struggling and juggling narratives and although in this sample the students were middle-class women, this narrative comes across in my research from both women and men, both working- and middle-class. Westland also reports on the building, and the importance, of friendships within these classes and this will be

followed up in chapter 3, yet for part-time students new friendships are seen as a lesser reason for studying than for full-time students (Callender, 2007b).

Obviously any literature review is partial and selective. I have shown here an overview of some of the academic texts that have been influential in the thinking and writing of this thesis. Others have been omitted at this stage for clarity and comprehension but further texts are incorporated throughout the thesis. Other texts that have influenced my thinking have come from self-development literature and these include Jeffers (1991, 2003), Lively (1999), McKenna (2004), Wallin (2002) Summers and Watson (2004, 2006) on confidence, success and luck. These books have done more than offer me ways of thinking about the thesis; they have encouraged me to see my own success narrative which in turn has contributed to the successful completion of this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

This introduction has set the scene for the thesis; it has indicated how hidden part-time students have been within the HE sector and in general, and some of the literature that addresses part-time study. I have shown that the focus is on students who successfully complete part-time undergraduate study and the thesis will go on to illustrate how this diverse group of students experienced being a student along with the rest of their very busy lives. Chapter 1 details the learning and working practices that this sample undertook in order to negotiate study time alongside working, parenting and socialising. In it the notion of learner identity (Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Crossan *et al*, 2003; Schuller *et al*, 2002) and learning career (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Crossan *et al*, 2003) are examined as are the emotional aspects of studying as a part-time student. In chapter 2 the impact of the family on the part-time student and conversely of part-time study on the family are discussed in detail as Schuller *et al* (1999) recognise this as one area of study that is under-researched. In

chapter 2 I raise the idea of 'ripples of education' as an image of how study impacts on the immediate and wider family circumstances. The impacts on the family of part-time study can be both positive and negative, yet the narrative of *Educating Rita* (1980) does not feature strongly within this sample.

Chapter 2 focusses on the family so chapter 3 broadens the social dimension of part-time study to include 'others' who impact on the part-time learners' journey both intra- and extra-institutional. Those inside the HEIs include students and tutors, and those outside involve work colleagues, neighbours and friends. Chapter 4 looks at the issue of the resources that the students draw upon in their learning journey. These resources include space and time, their own skills, the support of others, and finances. The discourse of luck was often heard throughout the interviews and a discussion of this is incorporated into this chapter. Students felt lucky that they were in a particular family situation or that they had a supportive workplace. These 'lucky' situations are investigated to illustrate how issues of agency and personal choice are narrated. Enjoyment of study as a resource for motivation and compulsion is also raised as a theme in this chapter.

In chapter 5 the institutional provision of part-time undergraduate courses is scrutinised. The notion of institutional habitus (Reay *et al*, 2001: Thomas, 2002) is used to establish a) how HE institutions understand the issue of part-time study and b) whether or not part-time students feel that their needs, wants and concerns are taken into account by these institutions. The chapter finishes by asking whether these students would recommend the experience of studying for a part-time degree to others.

Part-time study and part-time students are increasingly coming under scrutiny. The change in demographics, the numbers of 18 – 20-year olds coming into the system projected to fall sharply by 2009/10 (Lutzier, 2007; Universities UK, 2008) and the

Leitch Report (2006) mean that part-time study will have a higher profile within the HE sector. Although we now know the statistics (Ramsden, 2006a, Boorman *et al*, 2006 and Callender *et al*, 2006) of who studies and how they study, who gets financial support from employers and who does not, where they study and which institutions provide the opportunities for part-time study, and the destinations[82] of those who complete part-time study, we still have very little qualitative research informing institutions and practitioners, as well as prospective students on how to be a successful part-time undergraduate. This thesis aims to fill this gap.

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[82] Although Woodley (2007) questions the relevance of the 'first destination' statistic for part-time students, he suggests that the question is more relevant to full-time undergraduates who finish their studies and move from being a student to a worker.

Chapter 1

Studying and Working Practices: 'I'd sooner be a student than watch *EastEnders*'

Practitioners working with adult students in Higher Education, Continuing Education and Further Education will be familiar with many of the patterns presented here. I discuss the range of practices used by this group of students in order to show that there are many ways to become a successful part-time student. Too often the discourse of part-time higher education is one of failure, struggle and drop-out. By close examination of the day-to-day study practices of this group of successful part-time students in a variety of higher education settings my aim is to illustrate that there is not just one way to build a 'learner identity' (Clegg and McNulty, 2002; Crossan et al, 2003; Schuller et al, 2002) and more than one way to incorporate the 'learning career' (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Crossan *et al*, 2003) into a part-time students' life.

To do this, this chapter will introduce how the students carried out their studying and working practices during their degrees. I shall also discuss the work/study/life balance these students articulated, but first I shall discuss aspects of the emotional side[83] of studying, from frustration to graduation! The latter was not addressed in all the interviews by all students but for some the process of learning had been an emotional roller coaster. The first respondent to raise this issue was Carlos. He suggested that

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[83] For a discussion on 'emotional capital' see Reay (2004) and for the 'visceral and emotional dimensions' of adult learning see Brookfield (2003).

The experience you have as a part-time student on an emotional level,

you maybe don't get many men talking about their emotions, 'cos they

tend to be fairly objective in their views, but it can take you from one

extreme to another, and not necessarily be the massive things that pull

your emotions, it can be the smallest thing.

He then went on to discuss a range of emotions including the frustration of not understanding a text book:

You get so frustrated, you get so cross and so angry, you feel physically

violent, you want to punch the screen, or chew the book in anger, and

then you go away in disgust, with both the coursework and yourself for

feeling like that, and have a chat with the missus or have a drink and then

you go back and then it will click, and you think, oh, of course, and it's

just that moment, and everything comes into focus and you understand

completely what they are on about (Carlos).

Carlos was the only person in this study to comment so strongly, and ostensibly aggressively on the frustration he felt whilst studying. His reaction to the process of studying covered the range of emotions from violence as shown above to pride. He went on to explain how overwhelmed he had felt by the experience of graduation day. He had met the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Open University and those receiving honorary degrees, and his family were there to experience the day with him, just as they had supported him with their 'buy-in' throughout his studies.

It's that minutiae, that frustration about that one word, to that ceremony

that gives that range of emotions. So yeah, that is something that is

perhaps the untold experience of the part-time student (Carlos).

Gina also expressed how frustrating she found the process of education, particularly trying to study alongside keeping a family happy 'you end up trying to please everyone and end up pleasing nobody, it is so frustrating!' However, she had moved to an 'altered state' (Piette, 2002) at some point during the process as she reports that in her later years (her degree took 6 years) she had learnt to trust her instincts in how much she had to do in order to achieve a good mark whilst still being able to fulfil her roles as mother and wife. She acknowledged though that this still left her frustrated because she tended to be a perfectionist and always 'wanted to do more'. Despite these frustrations, at the time of the interview she was getting excited (as was the rest of her family – four generations of them) about going to the graduation ceremony and on seeing her at graduation she reported that apart from having her children it was the best day of her life!

Other comments on the emotional impact of learning ranged from Weronika being happy that her family was a 'strong family base' which then allowed her the space to study, to Jean being frustrated as she did not feel she did herself justice in examinations as although she felt she could analyse much more effectively than when younger she could not 'scribble as fast as [she] used to'.

Focussing on the learning and working practices adopted by these part-time students this chapter will present some of those 'untold experiences' (Carlos).

Study as an integral part of life

Piette (2002) describes the students in her study as moving from 'fitting the study in' to 'altered states'. As these students had completed their degrees, or were very close to doing so when they were interviewed, despite initial reservations about their academic abilities and the ability to negotiate the time, the physical and the emotional space to study, they had integrated study into their lives for up to six years. They had moved to the 'altered state' of a successful student.

Steve had found being a student 'Daunting at first, but erm, after a while I got used to it and really enjoyed it' (Steve) and when Bridget first joined the university she

> came along and started, thought (.) don't know how far I can go, I might
> not make it to the end of the course, but I'll just put in place in my mind
> the fact that I will do the first year, and see if I get through that and then
> proceeded onto the next year (Bridget).

Comments such as these were fairly common. For many study became an integral part of their lives, they had in effect incorporated the learner/student into their identity. The overall sense from this group of students at the time of the interviews was that study was now something they did; it had become a (sometimes) small but significant part of their identity. Their study habits had become so embedded that the thought of life without studying had become unimaginable, so many intended to continue at some level in the future.

Moving on to position themselves as a graduate, a completed student, left some with a sense of loss or emptiness. They questioned how they were going to leave behind their student identity on completion:

> It gave me my space. That was the Tia thing, as is coming out to do the
> interview with you, um, I've lost that now, I've lost an anchor, I feel that
> very strongly (Tia).

> Quite what I'm going to do now it's finished I don't know really, … but you
> know, I'll just have to find something (Maggie).

Diane discussed the feelings of her whole group:

I think as a group we would have been happy to keep going to lectures
until we dropped dead, because that was the enjoyment and the sense of
achievement when you did an essay, when you got a decent mark for it,
you just learnt such a lot (Diane).

Gina had plans for a multitude of other things she wanted to study:

GINA   Well, I'm going to do a cookery course. That is the next thing I
will sign up for!

PM   Is that before or after the French?

GINA   During. And I'm going to learn to play the piano as well. In my
dreams, that is you know. I would love to do all this. Then I think, 'what
are you doing?' But I think well, you can do a degree, you can do
anything!

Shirley was also already searching for her next course: 'I have just finished, but I am
already thinking about what I can do? Maybe an MBA, do they do them here?' Colin
was planning to return to university to do further study, probably at undergraduate
level again:

I'm just idly thinking I may come back here and do a certificate again but
in Marine History, about the shipping in this area, that would interest me,
having the nautical background. Somebody did suggest I try to go for a
masters or something like that, that was the guy in the Spanish class, but
I don't think that my brain would. I'm getting on and my memory is not so
good as it was, so I don't think that I shall be going any higher. Perhaps

if I'd have been ten years younger I might have done, but I might do the

Marine History (Colin).[84]

When the envelope with the interview arrangements arrived at Glen's house with a university postmark on it, it had caused raised eyebrows from his wife and the question 'What's this?' His reply was, 'I'm not signed up for another course, yet.' With the 'yet' he acknowledged that he 'was not being entirely playful' (Glen) and then talked of the possibility of doing either a Masters or a PhD, because he thought that after seven years of study at the OU he was not yet finished. Any further study would again be taken on a part-time basis because of his work and family commitments.

Pete was considering following his BA (Hons) in Business Management with a masters degree, although the cost was probably going to be prohibitive. However if that was not to be, he would still continue with some form of further study:

> PETE I suppose what I would be aiming to do if I'm not doing the masters, is er, (…) do some more courses, less intense maybe.
> PM   What, some lifelong learning, adult education type courses?
> PETE Yeah, maybe like a camcorder course, that type of thing, just something like that, … something like that, but not *EastEnders*, not that type of thing.

This engagement with learning, the integration of learning within the lives of these participants was shown by both women and men, across all ages and backgrounds. It suggests that for this group of successful students learning had become integral in

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[84] With the ELQ funding Colin would not be fundable to do another part-time undergraduate degree or lower level qualifications, so if he was completing now and wishing to study again it would have to be a post-graduate level.

their lives, they had incorporated learning as a part of their identity, and one that would be missed on completion of their degree. They had, in Piette's terms, certainly attained an 'altered state'. Their learning career did not feel complete. In this research most of the students did not appear to have employment-orientated reasons for wanting to continue studying, they enjoyed structured learning *per se*. This does not coincide with government policy on studying which stresses employability, but not personal development or enjoyment. Whatever their motivation however, this normalisation of study into their everyday lives was important to their success. The habituation from being non-student to a student had been accomplished across the sample through both regular and irregular study practices, though a key factor for all students was that they had all diligently worked for many hours, they had all sustained the effort of their study across the time of their degree.

Regular and irregular habits

It could be expected that successful students are those with regular study habits, where regular hours of study might be part of a formula to produce successful students. However, not all the students in this study lived up to this expectation even though many said that it was expected of them by others to be regular in their study habits. Judy discussed her working patterns and admitted that despite advice to work to a timetable this was not her way:

> No, I didn't follow any of [the programme leader's] good advice, do yourself a timetable, give yourself a time, and set some time aside for yourself. … I end up doing it at the last minute, I have to cram it in (Judy).

Part of her decision not to follow the advice, of not sticking to a regular timetable and therefore ending up having to cram, was based on the fact that she would sometimes choose to go out with her partner for the evening when she had planned to study.

Although this meant that it left Judy with a more pressured deadline she acknowledged that balancing study and family time was a 'constant negotiation with herself' as to which took priority. She reported that there were times when she said no to going out but that was 'because it's critical, it's critical time, I've got to do it then. I tend to sort of say, I've got to do this now', but her hesitancy in her speech patterns showed that she was not necessarily comfortable having to make study her priority over her partner's wish to spend the evening out. This issue of juggling and negotiating study time with family time will be returned to in chapter 2.

Tia had what could be called irregular-regular habits, in that she did not study daily or weekly, but one weekend a month. Overall, this meant that she was studying, on average, approximately 5 – 6 hours per week.

> I actually found that every four weeks, I took out one weekend and I did two days' work, and that was when I was actually doing the assignments (Tia).

This pattern would not work for everybody, but it certainly worked for Tia. Her pattern, although not conventionally recommended, fitted with her family commitments. Any other study that she did, for example during revision time, was done at 5.30 in the morning or very late at night. As part of her strategy to be successful, she described doing 'a lot of research into learning methods, such as mind mapping, speed reading' (Tia). This was very effective and enabled her to get a first class degree with considerably fewer study hours than the OU recommends. Tia admitted that she is 'a to-the-edge person' and part of her habit is to leave things because 'it does give me a little thrill to think how close can I take it?' (Tia). The excitement showed in her eyes when she discussed this. She enjoyed the thrill of the challenge and of testing herself in this way.

Bridget explained how she started haphazardly at the beginning of her degree but then found that she had to be more regular:

> Initially, it would have been in fits and spurts, it would have been like nothing for five days and then go mad for two or three nights, then go into hysterical frenzy for four or five nights and then do nothing for two nights. I think it is just a case of getting into a pattern and a routine of how to study and also as I said, 'cos now time is optimum, I now work full-time, whereas before I was working part-time and then three-quarter time if you like, and now I work full-time. I know that I can't, in order to cover enough hours; I have to do some every night. That would have to be minimum two hours. (Bridget)

Berni, in contrast, had started by being more structured and then had lapsed over time as she came to know how much (or how little) was required:

> I know that I don't have to be studying every night and every weekend, so I think that in my first year I did myself like a little timetable which was really useful so that on a Monday it was like I need to do 2 hours studying, Tuesday maybe have free 'cos I'd been at university studying that day anyway, Wednesday I'd do so-and-so, and then I would get in about 10 hours studying a week, by using that so I could see what I had to do and also what I had done. That worked quite well, I was fairly structured at first and it obviously lapsed a little bit as you are going along, and then it was sometimes like 10 hours, well I'd better squeeze it into one day [LAUGHING] or at the weekend. (Berni)

At the point of the interview Berni had had to ask for her first extension, so perhaps her more structured approach at the beginning of her study was actually the more effective strategy for her.

Regular habits did not necessarily mean working consistently and constantly throughout the whole term. Academic structures and requirements produced their own rhythms. For Liz regular study time mainly meant attending lectures. When assignments were due she would work the necessary hours over her four-day break from work.

> I'd attend all the lectures so that would be two hours, six hours a week just attending the lectures. I wouldn't do a great deal of work unless I had a set coursework, if I had a piece of coursework to do I'd just put in whatever time was required, it's hard for me to estimate how much time I did, but then I'd work like absolute. … So like I don't work on a Thursday or Friday so I get a four-day run, so if I had a piece of course work to submit on the Monday, chances are, say if it was like 3,000 words I would probably leave it until those four days and I'd just work ten hours a day if I had to and get those 3,000 words done. If I had an 8,000 word assignment to do then I'd spend a lot longer on it (Liz).

Carlos and Glen, both OU students, were very regular in their habits over the time of their study.

> The OU are very good, they give you quite detailed schedules, and the timings are pretty good actually, so I spent between 14 and 16 hours a week for the nine months of the term, which is February through to October, … and that was based over sometimes, Sunday night, through to Thursday night, never the weekend, cardinal rule was, no studying during the weekend, because that was time that I spent with the family (Carlos).

Glen studied a daily 'minimum two hours, absolute minimum. … Yes, every day, it was at least two hours every day, so it would be roughly between 15 and 20 hours a

week.' His usual routine was to do this in the evening, but sometimes that was not possible and then,

> What I'd have to do, I would to have to rearrange my time, which I've done before instead of doing two hours at night, I've done an hour at night and an hour in the morning, sometimes do two hours in the morning even, you have to have that bit of flexibility, but you do have to have that set amount of time, it's got to be regular. That's what worked for me anyway. (Glen)

As shown not all the students were as regular and as regimented as Glen and Carlos, but all were successful students. What emerges from the data is that although the working patterns vary, with the interviewees spacing study time differently depending on circumstances and disposition, the actual amount of study done by the students was considerable and overall similar in amount. Glen and Carlos's regular daily habits reflect their ability to have this regular time within the family structure. The women in general were less able to work in this way. The gendered structuring of working patterns around the family will be detailed further in chapter 2.

One of the regular habits mentioned by the students who had face-to-face delivery was that of attending classes. Liz had managed to attend most of the lectures:

> I went to nearly all of my lectures this time which I didn't the first time around. I was notorious [then] for never making a 9 o'clock lecture! Yeah, I attended far more lectures this time (Liz)[85].

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[85] Liz had graduated from a full-time programme at the 'traditional age'.

Similarly, Tom was 'so proud of the fact that in the five years I didn't miss a seminar, I didn't miss a lecture, not once' (Tom). Jean believed that this was one of the factors of success: 'Some people were absolutely regular, never missed a lecture, probably I didn't. … The people who really did well were the ones who normally were never missing' (Jean).

Rachel had one year when she struggled to attend many lectures:

> that was when I said to my work that this is no longer going to work. …
> pressures of work [meant] that I just couldn't make it anymore, just
> because there was no point for me trying to walk up here at 7 or 7.30
> when the class finishes at 8, 8.30, I might as well not go.

As attending lectures for her degree was of paramount importance to her it was at this point that she renegotiated her working hours and shortly afterwards changed jobs in order to sustain her degree. Here then, the advice to future students and part of the success narrative is to attend as many lectures, face-to-face classes and seminars as possible. My sample regarded this as an important factor for their successful study. There were tales of others, those who did not complete: 'some people came in and out and missed the odd one and you can see them beginning to slip a little bit' (Jean). The regularity of contact, attending class and engagement with the academy and the other students was, for this group of students, necessary to their success, is a strategy that they recommended to others hoping to follow them down the successful study path (see for example, Schuller *et al*, 1999; Claxton, 2001). It is here that difference in learner identities show. Face-to-face taught students required regular attendance at class, obviously with distance learning this is not a requirement, however, many of the distant learners were keen to stress that regular 'engagement' with the required work, was an important part of their working strategy.

Hours of study

As full-time study (120 credits per year) is theoretically equivalent to 40 hours per week, for this group of students (who were mostly doing 60 credits per year) an average of approximately 20 hours per week would have been expected. When the question is asked of part-time students (or those working with them) how many study hours are required to be a successful student at this level it is often answered by a seemingly flippant 'how long is a piece of string?' or 'depends which week it is' or 'how close to the deadline are we talking?' Some students found this a very difficult question to answer, not because they were trying to avoid answering but because they genuinely did not know how many hours they had spent working on their degrees. Rough calculations were given by some, although Carlos (see above) and others cited, with military precision, exactly how many hours they worked during the weeks they studied. Their very regimented and precise knowledge of their working practices are however, quite unusual, as Julia O'Connell Davidson and Derek Layder declare 'people's knowledge of their work life or daily routine rarely takes a very precise or exact form' (1994: 219). Many of the students' views of the hours studied also changed during the time of their degrees. As Sue described it:

> When I first did it, over the first two years anyway, I was really into it, I was at the library most nights, Saturdays and Sundays (.) looking at something, but then that got too much so I slowed down on that, I started going to the library maybe once or twice erm (.) picking up what I could, going in when I can without any set times, just when the time was available to me or I felt up to doing it.

Sue acknowledged that her study pattern was not as regular as some of her peers:

> I know some people on my course are very organised, they can come in on a night and sit down and do it. I can't do that, I can only work (.) when

I feel I can work, do you know what I mean? I can't give myself a set schedule.

Yet despite the change in her study patterns and a move to working when she felt like it, she enjoyed her course and even though she did not feel that she had set herself a timetable or worked every evening in an organised or routinised way like some of her peers she acknowledged that 'you get into a routine without realising it, you have it in-built into your life, without it being an extra part, it's just part of it then'. This 'becoming' part of life was evident throughout the narratives of this sample.

The questionnaire responses of my sample indicated the number of hours studied as shown below in charts 1 and 2. The lowest number of hours was 6 hours per week by a woman taking an OU degree; the highest number was 28 hours, by a woman taking a Business Management degree with face-to-face teaching. Open University students have less face-to-face contact. (There is some tutorial time. However, two of the students said that they chose not to make use of this.) Fewer face-to-face hours did not mean fewer overall hours of study. With the exception of the above, the other OU students studied between 10 and 25 hours per week. In this sample the women studied on average 16.6 hours per week whilst the men studied an average of 20 hours per week as shown in charts 1 and 2.

Chart 1 – Number of hours studied per week by women
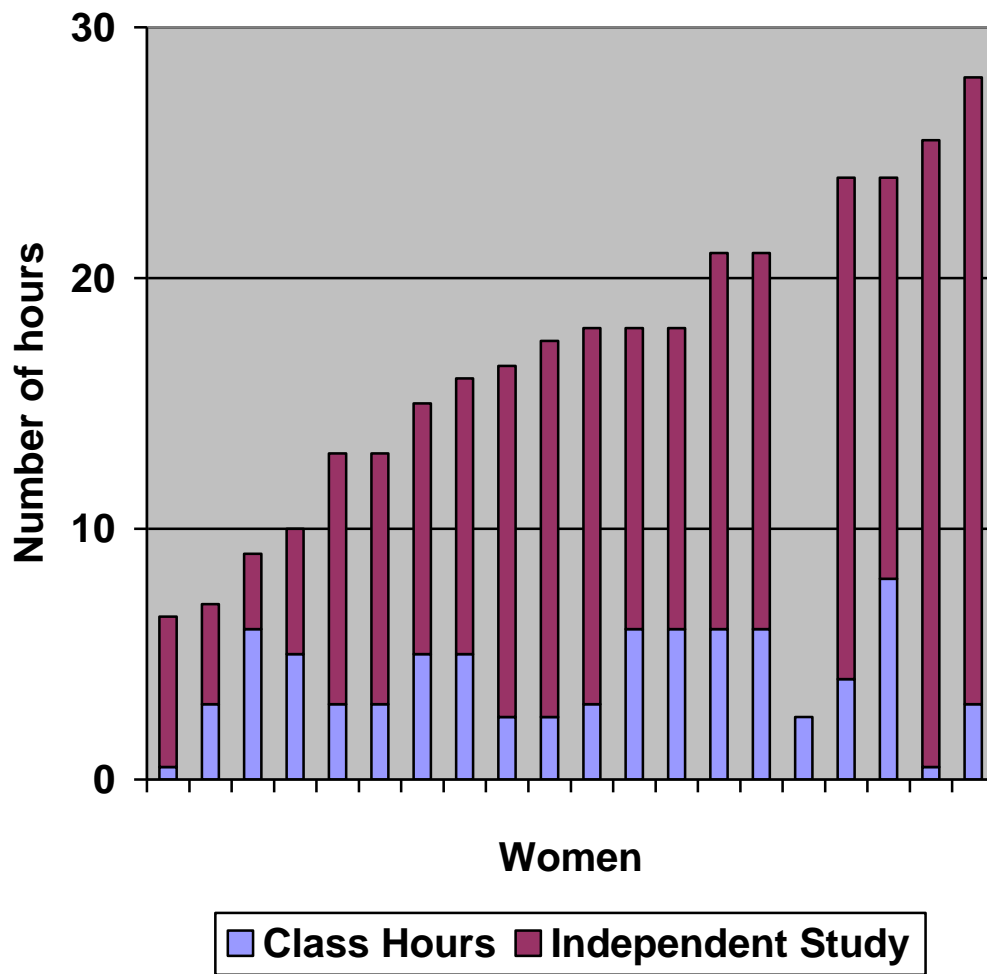
Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Questionnaire data, 2004/05.

Chart 2 – Number of hours studied per week by men
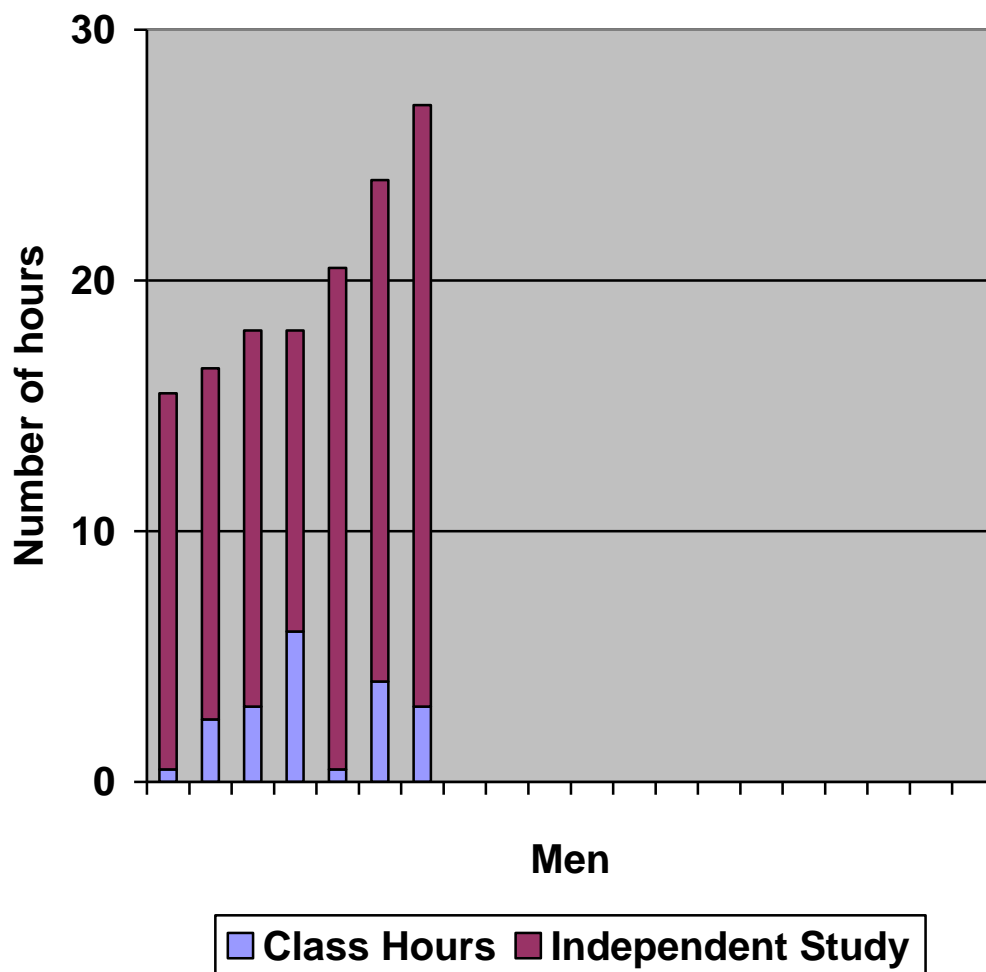
Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Questionnaire data, 2004/05.

All figures shown are as maximum values. For example, if a student answered with a '10 to 15 hours' response, this was plotted at 15 hours. The woman with only 2.5 hours showing never gave a total for weekly hours as she said it varied too much. She did however say that

> When there was an assignment coming up, a lot more, I honestly have
> not got any idea, if I (…) it depends what you are researching too I think, I
> do quite enjoy local history and that sort of thing, and I can really put a lot
> of work into that, a lot of hours, going to the records office or the national

archives, so you end up doing more than you need to sometimes

(Maggie).

This left her actual hours of study unclear. From her responses, however, it is obvious that she did a great deal of independent work which is why I placed her on the right side of the graph. Shirley felt that she had to work many hours in order to make the grade:

I felt I put a lot more time in than all the other students, because, erm, my

husband would look at me and go, Shirley, the amount of time you put in,

and I would say to him, well, I think I have to put more time in, 'cos I don't

think I'd ever thought, I still don't think that I was as intelligent as the other

28 people, 'cos you don't, do you?[86]

There appears to be little difference in this sample in hours of study between those who were first-time students and those who were already graduates. Those who studied for the first time at degree level ranged from studying 6 hours to 25 hours per week, with the majority clustering between 15 and 20 hours. Those who came into this study experienced as graduates[87] worked on average 18 hours per week although one graduate only studied an average of 9 hours. This shows that to be a

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[86] See Thorpe *et al* (2007: 3) for a discussion of 'false uniqueness' .They found that 'students drawn from lower social class backgrounds consistently underestimated their abilities vis-à-vis the overall cohort'. This finding, based on traditional age entrants to HE, they suggest is also applicable to mature students and here would particularly be of interest to the mature part-time body of students. They conclude by asking whether 'false uniqueness' about one's (lack of) ability dissipates over the length of a course or whether it could contribute to the larger numbers of students from lower social class backgrounds withdrawing without finishing their studies.   Shirley was just one of many of the students who questioned their ability when compared to other students. It also resonates with Jackson's fear of not quite belonging, not being academic enough and of being found out (2004: 128).

[87] With the Denham proposals (2007a) for funding those with equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs) a graduate would no longer be able to attend a further first degree even with the aim of a career change or retraining, unless like Keith studying an exempt subject, in his case Social Work.

successful part-time student at undergraduate level (0.5 full-time equivalent), even with prior HE study experience, there is the need to study for a considerable number of hours over the length of the programme, on average approximately 15 hours per week. In this sample over 70% of the women studied more than 15 hours per week, with 100% of the men similarly studying over 15 hours per week. This suggests that to be a successful student, no matter what the patterns and habits of study, there is a requirement for a considerable commitment to length of study time per week, which for the majority of these students is in addition to other responsibilities of both work and family. The men in this sample studied on average slightly longer hours than the women per week, suggesting that women had less time to dedicate to study, not that they chose to study for fewer hours (Haywood *et al*, 1990: 129). This point will be returned to later in the chapter and discussed further in chapter 2.

Owls or larks

Hours of work related interestingly to body clocks. Pat Whaley (1998) describes her experience of body clocks as follows:

> My paid work has always had to be fitted in and around my domestic
> responsibilities as wife, mother, daughter and sister. When I used to
> teach students 'how to study' and we looked at books which suggested
> identifying yourself as an owl or a lark in order to maximise learning, I
> used to wistfully wonder if I would ever find out my own ornithological
> identity, since my time, energy and output seemed always to be
> controlled by something/one else. (1998: 94)

However, some of the students did know, or had found out what suited them: 'I am an evening person. (…) So I didn't mind to study at night' (Weronika). This realisation of how she worked best had also translated into the practice of leaving the

family home in order to revise for the examinations she took as part of her Open University degree.

> I found that absolutely necessary. Mum came and looked after the
> children, and you know it gave me that space, if you are at home it is still,
> mum where's this? or, come and see this. That is my way of doing
> things, and I do things at night, in the evenings, in the morning I sleep
> late and then I start again, and at home I couldn't do that, as I would have
> had to be up early with the children, so that works. And they say always,
> you should never do it in this way, but it works for me [LAUGHING].
> (Weronika)

Colin also wrote at night, but considered himself 'some sort of psychological oddity' in doing this as he said:

> I always found that it was easier to be creative in an evening when I'm
> tired. I'm the sort of person whose brain tends to work quicker than my
> fingers and my tongue, so when I'm tired and slow down I find it's easier
> for my brain and my hands to communicate.

Others were aware of their body clock but this was seen as a restriction as it prevented them from doing more work.

> Many nights I've spent going upstairs to do some reading, fatal isn't it,
> reading on your bed? And I've gone up to do two or three hours' reading
> and like I say with the best will in the world [LAUGHING] falling asleep.
> (Gina)

For others, responsibilities controlled their practices, similar to Whaley's description above, so even if the students were aware of their own particular 'best time' to study, childcare (or other) responsibilities took precedence.

And it's like on Wednesday night we go swimming so by the time I get

home, it's maybe only quarter to eight when we get home, but by the time

stories and get the boys to bed I just haven't got it in me. So I'll maybe

just sort through a few notes, or something, but no real work.[88] (Jane)

Many of these narratives of study practices reveal the imbrication of those practices in relationships. In Weronika's comments above, we hear about her mother coming over from Poland to stay for a week so that she could leave the family home which enabled her to study in a pattern that suited her personal working practices. Without this support she too would, like Whaley and Jane, have been drawn by the responsibility for others to working when one could, when study fits around others' needs, rather than what suited her best.

As Jane described, her childcare responsibilities, left her tired by the end of the day. With the exception of Colin the men did not mention tiredness, but it was raised in the narratives of many of the women (Widerberg, 2006). Bridget started by saying 'exhausted most of the time!' when asked how she felt about being a student. However, this was not an overwhelming theme, more of an acceptance that something had to give in order to fit in study, and one of those things might be sleep. As Tia joked: 'we'd look at the deadlines and think, well, you didn't want to sleep anyway!' (Tia) Rachel talked of how others[89] would expect her to be tired because of going to classes three nights a week and so not getting home until after 10pm, but she stated that when people would ask her:

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[88] Bourner and Race (1995, 72 – 5) discuss the difference between work (low learning payoff) and WORK (high learning payoff). Jane here describes work which has low level payoff, done in the evening, because she is too tired to do WORK.

[89] Not involved in studying.

> Are you not knackered when you go to lectures? And it was like, well yes
> sometimes I am, but because you are interested, because you are really
> there through your own choice, yes it's fun. (Rachel)

Although tiredness was raised as a problem and body clocks could be seen as restrictive, enough study hours were completed to enable the success of this group of students. It would be an interesting comparison to see if there are differences in the reporting of tiredness and restriction of study hours between this group of students and those who do not complete their courses. As a personal tutor for many part-time students I know that tiredness or exhaustion from the many competing demands on their time is one reason that is given repeatedly by those students when they ask for extensions and intercalations, which then can, even for the most determined student, turn into non-completion. As can be seen here for some students, particularly the women, it is the case that it is the relations with and responsibility for others that prevents study at their optimum time. By the same token it is also support from others (for example as in Weronika's case) that allows study to fit into particular bodily rhythms.

I'd sooner be a student than watch *EastEnders*

A number of the students mentioned watching television as something that they did not do, or no longer did. Comments such as 'I would sooner be a student than watch *EastEnders*, I'd sooner choose something than like watch everyday TV, things like that' (Pete) were not unusual. Marilyn expected that

> People of my age[90] like crocheting, knitting, watching the telly, *Coronation
> Street*, looking after the grandkids you know what I mean, so I suppose

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[90] Marilyn was 57 when she embarked on her six-year part-time degree.

(.) erm (.) they're quite surprised that I would want to do it [study]. …
They're all into watching the telly (…) they do things like, er, line dancing,
pottery, art (Marilyn).

These were in fact the type of activities she reported having done in the past. Both
Gina and Jane agreed that although sometimes the television was a welcome
distraction, they reported that 'I'm not really a television person anyway, so when I do
get the chance and it comes I'll be like, well, I don't really want to watch television'
(Gina). Jane agreed: 'I'm not a telly person really either, so I will miss it [study]'. And
Shirley corroborated this when she stated: 'I'm not one for sitting watching TV'. Lucy
had been a television watcher, particularly of soap operas, but now she stressed that

I don't watch telly in the evenings any more, so I'm weaned off everything
apart from occasionally I watch *Home and Away* with the kids. I don't
know what is happening out there, if anybody talks about them [soaps] I
haven't a clue (Lucy).

And when Sue's daughter was encouraging her to apply for a degree her question to
Sue was: 'Well are you just going to sit in and watch *Coronation Street* then?'
Indeed, both Bernie and Colin admitted to being distracted from their studies when
others put the television on: 'it's when [husband] puts the telly on and I'm like, oh no,
turn it off, I was alright until I knew that was on' (Bernie). When Colin was working,
without the immediate pressure of a deadline looming, he would find that he

was wandering around, I'd get up, do half an hour, get up, eat a packet of
crisps or find a biscuit or something like that and then you'd pass by the
television and there'd be something interesting on, but once I realised
that I'd got a deadline then I just used to go in and shut the door and that
was the end of the matter then (Colin).

Tom actually watched and analysed four episodes of *East Enders* as part of his Cultural Studies course*.* This was a new experience for him.

> I have never, I would never, throughout the history of *Coronation Street,* I
>
> have never seen it, 40 years? I was offended by the idea and have been,
>
> it has just been a thing with me, same with the other one, *East Enders*.
>
> But part of the course we had to watch four episodes of *East Enders*
>
> which I did. I was appalled, I could not believe it, just the acting, it was, is
>
> it done on purpose do you think, you could write reams, couldn't you?
>
> (Tom)

He acknowledged that in Cultural Studies a discussion of the soaps could have been interesting but suggested that the discussion that did occur was less than academic:

> Because then they'd all go and talk about *Coronation Street* or whatever,
>
> I'm being bitter again, and that's not strictly true, and that fascinated me,
>
> there was so much discussion about soaps, but not academic discussion,
>
> just what is happening. We are supposed to be criticising (Tom).

Perhaps one of the questions that should be asked of potential part-time students is whether or not they are prepared to give up or at least limit the habit of watching television. Research into academic study and television viewing seems to concentrate on the academic achievement of children in comparison to the length of their TV viewing habits (see Thompson and Austin, 2003 for a comprehensive review of this research literature). However, for the purpose of my research the viewing habits of adults in relation to their studies is more relevant. Traditional-age full-time students are stereotypically expected to watch volumes of day-time television, yet for mature, part-time students television is, as here, oft cited as one of the things that can be reduced or eliminated from their daily or weekly schedules in an effort to complete all necessary tasks within a busy schedule. A television-watching habit,

with a substantial number of hours per week spent undertaking that activity will reduce the number of hours available to study, yet this is one activity that can be reduced without too great an impact on others.[91] Some students however, were reluctant to admit to the number of hours that they watch television during their week. Having taught study skills to students for many years, this is one area that I stress can be an important time-management tool, yet many are hesitant to reflect on or indeed attempt to change their often-entrenched habits. When closely examined[92], students are surprised by the number of hours that they do watch television, and as shown above, they can easily be distracted by the television if it is switched on by another member of the household (or in some cases, by themselves). The fact that television viewing is something that can be supplanted by study time suggests that the majority of these students regarded their study as taking place in 'leisure time'. Leisure time itself can be construed as time 'left over' from work and other duties and obligations, or as activities (Haywood *et al*, 1990: 1). Here I am using leisure time as time left over from work (both outside paid work and work done in the home). This is a difference between part-time and full-time students. For the latter study is regarded as their main occupation and thus any work (paid or voluntary) they do in effect takes time out of their leisure time. Leisure time in itself is a gendered concept, with Haywood *et al* (1990: 129-30) stating that 'gender is a crucial determinant of leisure choice and opportunity'. More fundamentally, gender is also a crucial determinant of how much 'leisure' one can claim from the myriad of other roles and responsibilities

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[91] However, Sue reported that even when she was upstairs working and her husband was downstairs watching television (and there was little interaction) he would say 'you're never here and you're always upstairs' which would then lead to her questioning whether her studies were worth 'the hassle'.

[92] One exercise I used to get the students to work on was a time-allocation diary. In class they worked backwards using the previous week as an example of how many hours were spent watching television. When asked to estimate the number of hours spent prior to the exercise every student underestimated their viewing habits.

that encompass the average day. Haywood *et al* go on to state that 'the definition of leisure as time free from the obligations of work has some credibility when work has definite boundaries both in time and space. But for many women such boundaries cannot be easily drawn' (1989: 131). They suggest that the concept of free time is a male-oriented notion and one that would be unrecognisable to many women. Free time, that is, time when an individual decides what to do as a priority is thus limited by roles and responsibilities. As the majority of students in this sample were both parents and workers prioritising study time over family and household commitments was something the men seemed more able to do. This is also evident in the hours studied by women and men in this study – the former had fewer hours to commit to their studies. When students did get the opportunity to commit time to their studies they reported different patterns and work practices in relation to continuous assessment and examinations.

Examinations, revision and preparation

Not all the students in my study had examinations as part of their degree programmes but many did. They talked of examinations and exam preparation in quite a different way from how they talked about course work and assignments. In some aspects there were definite opinions about memorising facts and figures (and subsequent forgetting) rather than full understanding in relation to examinations.

Some students were 'incurable question spotters' (Liz) and both Liz and Rachel discussed how they struggled in particular examinations due to this practice and not revising more widely[93]. It is important to recognise here that even though examinations were failed and setbacks occurred, these obstacles were not strong

[93] Question spotting was the practice of looking at previous examination papers and clues from the teaching sessions as to which topics were deemed to be important, and revising fewer topics accordingly.

enough to deter the students, or in other words, the student was strong enough not to lose sight of the overall goal because of a setback in one module.

At one university a change in policy meant that some students started a course without any examinations but then had to take them during the course of the degree:

> When we took it on, we didn't know about exams, the one reason I wouldn't have done it I think, was if we realised we had exams. … Initially, because it was a new course, they thought we might not have an exam at all or just one at the end, but I think the powers that be insisted, … they should have the same as the rest of the students, so suddenly one was shoved in.

Here central university policy had overridden departmental ethos and insisted on examinations during the part-time degree.

Lucy explained for her it had been difficult, as she had an examination at the same time as she was completing her dissertation, but the following year, reacting to student feedback, the timing had been changed to allow the students to concentrate solely on their dissertation. The department had managed to negotiate the timing so that ultimately in the final year the students had space to concentrate on writing a dissertation.

Maggie said that she would not have started the course if she had known there were examinations. She laughed when talking about the exams:

> [LAUGHING] Don't, it's dreadful! … More or less, and this one, you know, one question will be on research methods and the other one is on, well, (…) various things that you can use, but there is always a map question, so you know, I like maps, so I'll be doing that question (Maggie).

She acknowledged though, that whilst she found examinations difficult and was stressed by the thought of taking exams at 'her time of life'[94] the department had been supportive in the examination preparation. The department 'didn't exactly spell it out' but the highly structured paper, following a similar structure to previous years, let students be quite certain as to the type of question that was going to be asked and thus allowed focus on just one or two areas of the syllabus to be addressed and revised for.

Rachel talked of strategically looking for examination questions, by checking what had come up in previous years but also of making sure that she attended the revision lecture:

> Well, I think that I was very strategic, we would look at previous exams and look at what kind of questions come up and of course go to the revision lecture, and hopefully there will be some hints as to which direction you should be looking at, … see what kind or hints is he or she giving us (Rachel).

She would also look for clues in the lecture structure: 'it was kind of like, ok, so many lectures, she did two on this one particular topic, oh, important, so that was the way I would look at things' (Rachel).

Krystal who was studying for a Social Work qualification had different strategies for exams compared to writing assignments. With assignments the timing was more flexible: 'an assignment, I know that I can do four hours, have a bath, come back to it, erm, so, there is that bit more flexibility in the assignment to the exam' (Krystal). As Krystal had to know various Acts of Parliament in relation to her Social Work

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[94] Maggie was 52 when she started her degree programme.

qualification her strategy to learn these which had worked well for her in previous years, was what she built on:

> I use a different strategy when it comes to exams, 'cos I tend to write them out, erm, because I've got to know certain sections of certain Acts, and I'll obviously, erm, (…) read books to find out what sections, and then I'll write them down and then I'll have sheets of paper pinned up all over here, or I will probably do one Act at a time, there are about five that we need to know, and the certain sections, and I'll probably focus on one Act at a time. Erm, I would write it out several times as well (Krystal).

Liz acknowledged that her examination preparation was probably not as good as it should have been. She was a teacher and knew the theory and best practice of how to study. She explained this as being part of how she was:

> It would have been less stress with the exams if I'd actually done a bit on a regular basis, just reading, not making loads of detailed notes, not copying up my notes or anything like that, just reading around the subject and keeping up on my part. I regret, I kind of regret that a bit, but I think that is just my character, I'd never do it, even if they said I could go back and do it all again I probably wouldn't do it any different (Liz).

She acknowledged that she could be an 'indolent individual' and had been 'really dilettante about the whole thing'. Although Liz describes her practices as being integral to her sense of self, a part of who she is, there are other ways of being, other choices and changes to her practices she could have made, ones which might have supported her to a successful conclusion with perhaps less stress. The idea that the way one studies is 'just part of my character' as an explanation allows no room for growth and change, though it does allow justification of (sometimes non-productive and possibly destructive) activity and practices. As Habeshaw *et al* (1989: 11) state:

'students do not casually abandon their existing learning methods, which are often deep-rooted habits'. However, this idea of self as a static concept, a particular way of being, and thinking of oneself in a particular way, could also be productive. In chapter 4 I shall explore how Liz, and others, used this idea of ontology to support their desire for completion and success.

Liz was planning to study for a further year to become an educational psychologist and had already investigated not only where courses were offered but also which did not have final examinations as she was hoping to prevent the same examination stresses happening in the future, rather than trying to change how she behaved in relation to her study practices.

 For Liz the exam pressure in the final year was greater than in previous years. This was less to do with the level of work, and more with the fact that her studying was public knowledge and therefore any failure of examinations at this point would also be public knowledge:

> I think it was more the thought of the shame of telling people that I'd
>
> failed. [LAUGHING] So many people know that I'm doing this and the
>
> thought of turning up and saying, well actually I did crap. … They would
>
> all ask me, 'how did you do?' You can't lie, can you? So that was the
>
> motivation, it hit me in the face that I would actually have to tell people
>
> how well I'd done or not.

Despite reporting being dilettante and cavalier in previous years her working practices for examination preparation, in her final year caused her a great amount of stress to the point of being in 'a right state' and 'turning up to the exam hall feeling

sick'[95] as she realised that if she did not pass, or did badly in the examinations there would be no chance of correcting this without others knowing. In previous years she had had the attitude that she could 'do it better next year' because of the opportunity to resit any examinations she had failed. In the final year, however, her previous, casual approach to studying was in danger of becoming visible as was her becoming 'unstuck' by her practices.

Colin was quite passionate when he discussed the process of assessment. His course was assessed by assignments rather than examinations. He thought that examinations should be a part of the process:

> The only thing, the only thing that annoys me about it is the fact that
> when I was a child, when you went to university, it was always based on
> exams, … what you did was you went and sat an exam at the end and
> I'm a great respecter of exams. Despite the fact that there is a lot of
> unfairness attached to them, they do prove whether a person can operate
> under pressure and in this world today in so many situations you have to
> be able to operate under pressure. If you can't operate under pressure
> then you might as well pack up and go home, for most things anyhow
> (Colin).

As Colin acknowledged however there is 'a lot of unfairness' in a final examination as the major assessment method. However a deep-rooted belief in examinations as the gold standard of achievement negated and degraded his sense of his own and his peers' achievements on the part-time degree programme.

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[95] In examinations this is a feeling common for many, but for Liz it was previously unknown.

Overall, the practices for examinations was to put in the time and effort just before the examination, with repetition of 'facts and acts' (Krystal) necessary and reading of notes, some group revision sessions and writing of mock essays as the major preparation techniques. Reports of support from the tutors in most institutions in respect of examinations was encouraging in that students generally felt well prepared by their tutors with revision sessions which included guidance of subject areas likely to be on the examination paper. Any lack of preparation was on the part of students, where they had tried to be too strategic or had been 'question spotting' in an effort to reduce the breadth of revision that was necessary.[96] This led to problems for some students when they had not covered enough subjects to answer the exam questions in particular papers. Examinations were accepted by most students as a necessary (evil) part of their studies, though the majority of the students in this sample preferred essay or report writing to taking examinations and felt that they learnt more through the process of essay writing and working towards giving presentations, than whilst revising for examinations. Keith, however, reported that he preferred exams to essay writing as he tended to achieve higher marks for examinations than for assignments. He considered this was because he had a good visual, retentive memory that supported examination techniques, particularly on multiple-choice papers but lacked the writing skills that would enable him to gain higher marks in written assignments. On the other hand, most of the students saw essays and other written assignments as a better way to consolidate learning but there were various ways reported of how they attempted these.

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[96] This reduction of breadth was reported as necessary because it was felt to be impossible to revise all the topics covered in any one module. In some institutions guidance was given to the students by the tutors on the topics that would be likely to appear on the exam paper. This was particularly so for Maggie. When her group embarked on their studies examinations were not part of the assessment strategy, but changes in institutional policies had required them to be added to the programme structure.

Essay and assignment writing

With exam preparation, revision just before the examination was the most usual practice described. However, when discussing essay and assignment writing the students fell into two opposing categories. There were students who liked to start work on assignments immediately they started the module (and some before the module started), whilst others were last-minute students, who waited until most of the teaching had been completed before they started to address the assignment. This of course reflects both personality types and preferred learning styles. However, there were others who tried to, and would have preferred to be in the first category, who found that because of circumstances (their own, or others' impacting on them) moved toward the latter category, with the related stress that comes from not being able to work to one's own preferred style.[97] There was a great deal of acknowledgement and speculation of others' practices, in the form of 'I do it this way, but I could not work as X does'.

Gina and Jane were both students who fell into the first category and liked to do preparation for work as soon as it came in: 'You hear of people burning the midnight oil and writing essays til 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, but I can't'. (Gina) Jane agreed that she liked to be organised and in control:

> Try to be organised, I am an organised person anyway, I like to know
> what is happening, like with [husband's] job it makes things difficult …
> and I know that (.) where we are coming or where we are going from, and
> I can fit in hopefully what I've got to do around the limitations of that time.
> I've just got to sit down and do it; it doesn't always work like that as I've

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[97] This was one factor where the students reported that being a full-time student would be preferable as they felt that with the focus fully on studying they would have the ability to manage their workloads more in tune with their preferred learning styles.

said before. But I think trying and not leaving things til the last minute, I can't do that.

Gina found the thought of not being in control, or not being organised difficult to deal with and her views of how others work filled her with horror.

There are people in the class who do leave it til the last minute, aren't there, but I can't, you just think, arrghh! But I can't do that, I'm not like that … I don't know how they do it. I have to be in control.

Maggie would also work early on and not get close to the deadline: 'I try not to let it get too near the deadline'. She worked out her own deadlines to fit in with her family circumstances. For example, when her family was arriving from overseas with her new grandchild the week her dissertation was officially due for submission, she had given herself an earlier deadline and

I started reasonably early, and got the things organised, and then thought, right I'm going to make this cut off, it's going to be finished by the 30th April, so I tried not to, so I suppose I've done that all the way along, I don't like working under pressure, my little brain needs time to think about things, I don't want it suddenly pounced on me.

As Maggie did not work outside the home during her studies, she had time for these without having to be under too much pressure. By working in that way throughout, she managed to get her work done, but still prioritized her family commitments including large family gatherings over each Christmas period.

Glen was another student who liked to be organised, and even get ahead in his work. In contrast to Maggie, he worked full-time. He found that the OU's structure into units helped with this practice:

Yes, you know where you are going, you know what you've got to do, and
the material is all there, well it's pretty much all there from the second
level upwards, even half way through the first level upwards … that's the
way of these things, … a lot of these courses are split up into 13 units,
you can get two or three ahead, and that's great, you've given yourself a
safety net, so that if something does crop up, if you get ill, or you have to
shoot up to Liverpool.

Many spoke with pride of the fact that they had not asked for any extensions and had
always handed in assignments on time, or before the deadline. This was possible
because of their working practices. Tom handed his dissertation in: 'I can't be doing
with it, bringing it in at five on the last day, the 16th was the deadline for the
dissertation, I think I put mine in on the 10th' and Marilyn told me: 'I've never been late
with one yet and I always try and get it in a week before or a couple of weeks before,
always' and continued to explain that

I don't like to be put under pressure, they always give you plenty of time,
usually within a week or two you know what your project is going to be
and when it's got to be in by, and I don't see any point in leaving it till the
very last couple of weeks, rushing.

One way in which success was narrated then was in relation to deadlines and as can
be seen from these comments many students aimed to submit work on or before the
given deadlines.

In a similar way Shirley also reported that she was never late with her work. She had
very strong views on deadlines and requesting extensions:

I was never late, there was always people who were asking for
extensions, and I was always pretty pleased actually, because even

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though I would meet that deadline, it was a bit of a relax for me, …
[Course tutor] allowed the whole group, a bit of a sigh of relief, oh, I've
got another two weeks, but I would have hit the original. (Shirley)

She was annoyed by those who repeatedly requested deadlines, without what she
considered a 'good excuse':

But I always found the reason I didn't ask for extensions, because I think
if you get a deadline, you should work to that and hand it in, because if
you are in business, and they say I want this presentation doing, you've
got to do it. You can't renegotiate that time. I had a set-to with one of the
girls, because I put that point forward and she didn't like it, but this is how
I felt.

This group of students who liked to work towards early completion, whose working
practices allowed them to submit their work not only on time, but frequently ahead of
the university-agreed deadlines, were sometimes sympathetic but more usually
highly critical of others who worked to the last minute and then had to ask for
extensions if (or frequently when) problems occurred.

Flexibility of deadlines is an emotive issue within higher education, particularly with
regard to mature students. I have been in meetings across different departments
when this issue was raised and it is always one that can get even usually calm
members of staff raising their voices in disagreement. There are commonly two
opposing views, one being that flexibility is important to be supportive of mature
students and their other pressures in their lives, the other as Shirley stressed, that
giving extra time is giving time to improve a mark and that in the 'real world'
extensions cannot be given, deadlines are deadlines. Shirley was particularly
emotional at this point in her interview. She was angry that others had requested
more time, instead of sticking to the given deadlines. Her anger had forced her to

raise this issue with another student despite the fact that she had little interaction with others in her class. This took a great deal of courage on her part, but she felt that it was an important issue and one which some of the others in her group were not taking as seriously as she did. This caused a reaction from her that was 'not usually like her', showing how highly emotive studying can be, but also how she and others responded to externally set boundaries with which she clearly identified but others felt less respectful towards.

The overwhelming impression from my data is that most of the students were on the whole highly organised and respected the rules and regulations, which includes attendance requirements and deadlines, set by their institutions. Again an interesting comparison could be undertaken between those who complete and those who do not, with the hypothesis to be tested as to whether there is a difference in the amount of times that extension deadlines are requested by non-completers and completing students. This returns to the comment from Jean that once students start slipping, it is difficult for them to get back, whether this is in terms of attendance or deadlines.

Group work

As part of my sample's working and learning practices group work, both prescribed by tutors and self-regulated and organised, was commented upon and there appeared to be three different types of groups, these being a) groups working on joint tasks b) social groupings and c) general support groups helping each other with individual tasks, peer support or study buddies. One recommendation from Quinn *et al* is that a pedagogy is developed which supports integration including group work and peer support (2005: 70). Brookfield, despite portraying 'the dark underside of the inspirational rhetoric of adult learning' which includes impostorship, cultural suicide and lost innocence (2003: 97– 98), does describe how the process of adult learning can produce a sense of community with groups reported as being 'my partners in

crime' and 'the only ones who understand what I'm going through' (99). Much of the literature on adult learning focusses on group work as joint tasks (Thomas, 2006) whereas my sample talked of groups more in terms of social groupings and peer support (either in groups or by individuals). However, some groups fell short of the ideal of the support network. As Shirley describes below, the groups that had formed were 'all the same cliques'.

> I felt there was a lot of discussing, and I felt a bit out of it like that, and that was probably me as well, as I wasn't one to jump in and go, right, I didn't intrude, I'm not that type of person.

As she described this, she looked aggrieved and she obviously would have liked to have had the opportunity to participate more in that group learning, but she stated at the end that she was 'not that type of person'. Although her words suggest that she was not sure whether or not she wanted to work with others, she was very definite on her work being all her own.[98] She continued by saying:

> Yes, if I'd have found some work-groups or something, or after class little groups, social groups or, you know, just to chat to somebody, and get some bit of feedback, if you know what I mean. I don't know, I don't know whether, 'cos I used to look at them and think, should you do that? Should you show people this piece of work, do you know what I mean? I don't think I'd have done that anyway, but it would have been nice to, just to bounce ideas around a bit, just to have that chat, definitely. (Shirley)

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[98] Here I thought that she suffered from what Brookfield (2003: 96) describes as impostorship. When she applied, not only did she question whether she should have been accepted into the programme because of her lack of prior qualifications, but so did her manager. She denied ownership of 'being a student' and did not publicise the fact that she was taking a degree. Although Brookfield suggests that the feeling decreases over time he states that 'it rarely disappears completely' (97). I think Shirley's insistence that her work was all her own reflects these feelings of insecurity about her place in academia, if she had done group work she might have felt less secure about it being 'all her own work' and her right to the qualification.

Shirley thought that one reason why this did not happen was that she had come into the programme via a different route from the majority of the students, and as there were four students from one firm and another five students from the local council they had ready formed groups. She felt that she did not fit in. She described just going in, doing the work and then going home again.

Carlos explained how, as an OU student, there was little opportunity for group work but on one course he did work closely with two other students:

> Well, I suppose the only time I really had was just on one course, which was a course I did really well on, which is an interesting point, I'd not thought of that before. There were three of us, we worked in the same, well there was two of us, predominantly, one guy who worked in [the] operations-side and I was on the technical side, and we could discuss things, and we did a bit of revision together and that was useful, but generally otherwise, no. I think the course material is so good, with the OU resources, on the web, and stuff like that, you don't need it that much. (Carlos)

But as shown in the first sentence, Carlos did well on this particular course and reflecting on this he thought that perhaps more of the same type of discussion and joint revision sessions might have resulted in a higher overall mark.

Weronika had a similar experience, and although she talked of having one friend with whom she was in contact during the degree programme (mainly by email) another student whom she met in an exam, who was behind her in terms of credits, was offered help and support by both Weronika and her friend.

> [This other student] often phoned with the questions, and [friend] and I were on a similar level but he was always struggling a bit and we could

help, but in doing this, it helped us to think through what we were telling him. … you have to be clear about it, and I know I helped him a lot of times, because he sometimes missed some points, and one time he completely misinterpreted. So that was good.

Not only was this considered good for the student getting the support, Weronika found it supportive of her working practices as well, as she explained the various legal concepts to her friend in turn this boosted her confidence in her own ability.

Studying with the OU was a good arrangement for these already independent students as not too much group work was expected or required. Others, particularly face-to-face students, often wanted more interaction. Tom said he chose to do a face-to-face taught degree rather than an OU degree because 'I love the interaction, that's why I didn't go into the Open University because I wanted to talk to people' (Tom).

Bridget (face-to-face student) did not think that there was effective group working and would have preferred more of it 'built in to' the programme. She suggested that it was particularly problematic because of drop-out from the programme in the early stages.

> I was in one class with 46 people, there is only myself and [classmate] left on our course from those 46. The other class was, I can't remember the exact numbers, and they had about 20-something and 20-something in two different groups. … So it was quite hard in a sense that in the first few years, because there was such a drop off all the time, you couldn't consolidate small working groups, because, you know, you might do that this week and next week and then two of the people in your group had gone, so you had to suddenly form up with other people.

She would have preferred more opportunity for group work as she felt that it was an important part of the learning process. But even though for some students there had been occasions when group work was undertaken, it was not a regular occurrence and was not experienced as particularly effective. When it had happened it was more on an *ad hoc* basis, than a planned study group as such. The reason for this given by Bridget related to students being mature with many other responsibilities in their lives. Steve discussed how the group would work together, but mainly on computer-orientated modules when some students were struggling.

> The odd time, we didn't do a lot, but we did it the odd time, they'd come round here the odd night, or we'd go somewhere else, or we'd see each other in the library. … I'd say it was mainly like, computer side of things, and the software, if you were a bit unsure of using it, a lot of the packages we'd never actually used before. Some people had, some people hadn't and I think that was a good idea, that was when we mainly got together. But (…) try and figure it out together, but if we were struggling, somebody would usually come down and help each other out, definitely.

Marilyn thought that the group were 'study buddies' and although there was little group work (the group were all working on individual dissertations when interviewed) she felt that they were all able to contact one another and ask for support on particular aspects of work:

> I think the group we have at the moment, they are basically, what you'd call like study buddies I think and things like that and if I need any help (.) er or if I've got any problems then I know that any of them if I rang them I could say 'look I'm not sure how to do this, how have you done yours?' … I think everybody knows each other and I think er you know the ones in

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the class who are really clever and you pick their brains as much as
possible.

This last comment about picking the brains of the 'clever' students also linked to Tia
and Weronika, (two OU students who both achieved first class degrees) being used
as a resource by others. Sue talked of working with one other student, particularly at
the start of the degree programme:

Yeah, I guess that was mainly in the first couple of years, and there is
one [student's name] who I worked with a lot. Quite a lot, but we've
worked quite a lot on my own, well with her on my own [LAUGHING] you
know what I mean.

PM   And how would that work?

SUE   Well mainly if I was stuck, I would ring her and she would say,
oh come down, and she's always been helpful, she's been more than
helpful, she'd do anything she can.

So what Sue calls group working, was in effect student support by one student of
another. And while it may not be all one-sided, it seemed as if Sue had needed help
and support from someone in her studies, and the person that she chose to use was
a fellow student from her group. Somewhat differently, Krystal described how the
group she was in used each other as a support system, for a general moan and
stress relief but that she would have appreciated being able to do more group work.
This was limited however because of the geographical locations of her particular
cohort. They were spread over more than 100 miles as many travelled into the
university to do this particular course.

Julia described how three of her group worked together and all brought different skills to the group. They worked so well together that when one of the group wanted to end his studies after the HNC she persuaded him to continue to degree level.

> One of the guys on the course, he was the real academic, there was three of us, all the way through it, we had different skills, and totally different qualities, and he was very academic, and I think he put an awful lot of time and effort in it, he would get the books before the module started, and read up on it, he'd finished the HNC and he said, I'm not going any further, I mean, we probably bullied him into doing the degree, you know, we'll get through it, we'll support each other. And he's just finished as well, his degree, so he went ahead and carried on. But he made up our little team, so that was really encouraging.

Maggie described herself as 'not really a people person' but her group had stuck together and they would occasionally meet.

> Occasionally, occasionally, not (…) erm, yes, occasionally, not that often really though. [Student] and I have got together and maybe with a couple of the others, when we've got an exam coming up, you know, how to tackle the exam question lunches. [LAUGHING] Then it would revert to a glass of wine and we didn't maybe discuss that much to do with the exam, but it was quite pleasant in its way, or a walk, [student] and I would meet up somewhere and go for a walk and talk about where we were with things.

Here showing a mix of group types; social support and study buddies. Jean described how, in a similar way to Maggie, she had not developed friendships but would probably keep in touch with some of those from her course. For others however,

They became a threesome and they were very, very attached to each other, very supportive of each other and there is no doubt about that to the point where I think none of them would go and do a module that the others weren't doing, they negotiated it, whereas I did my own thing if you like (Jean).

Conclusion

Brookfield (2003: 99) comments on 'the importance of their [adult learners] belonging to an emotionally sustaining peer learning community' do not hold true for all of the students in this sample. Many were truly independent learners who shared little discussion, support or emotional connection with others on their course. These students though acknowledged that 'social interaction would have been nice' (Tia). Interaction though was also reported as a bind, a time commitment that they were not prepared to expend on relationships and support of others at the expense of their own studies, even if they would possibly have benefited from some support themselves. On the other hand, however, there were students who wanted more group working practices and felt that this was something that was missing from part-time studies which could be developed and encouraged more by the teaching practices. This would possibly address the needs of those who wanted more group work as joint tasks rather than those who wanted more of a social grouping or study buddy / peer support although teaching practices can indeed foster these relationships.

The students in this sample were all successful students and had completed degree-level study on a part-time basis for up to seven years. Different working and learning practices emerged in their comments, including learning and the psychological space needed for this, time management in relation to study practices and how this fits (or not) with personal preferences, and how relationality affects (both positively and

negatively) study practices. The integration of a learner identity had been successful for many of these students and meant that completion left them feeling a lack or a space in their lives that many intended to fill with further study.[99] The majority of this sample fell into the category of learner who attempt to get on with their work from the beginning of the module, to be organised and to get ahead where possible, so that they were able to submit work on time, and to hit (and beat) deadlines. There were few reports of being last minute[100] or of needing extensions for work. Where these had been required and requested this was usually because of family pressures preventing the students from giving their studies the time needed rather than last-minute working practices.

On the whole the students knew what practices worked for them. They had learnt these practices, changed and adapted them to suit their circumstances as they worked through the programmes, and determinedly held on to their studies and their learner identity as a part of who they were and what they did through many years. Gina stated:

> I think they just need to stress, I think a lot of people might have gone into
> it just thinking well I'd like a degree but not wanting to knuckle down, and
> I think you should stress that you really need to, you must really want to
> do this and put the time in.

By being determined and 'knuckling down', whether through regular or irregular study practices, early mornings, every evening, each weekend or an occasional weekend

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[99] Again with the Denham (2007a and b) proposals on ELQs, some of these further studies will no longer be possible as some of the students were not planning to study at a higher level.

[100] Although some, for example Tia, acknowledged that she was a 'to the edge person' and used the deadlines to push herself to that edge whilst never falling over it. She was very proud of the fact that although she worked in that way and may have ended working through the night she had never missed a deadline or requested an extension.

and then working right through the weekend with no outside distractions, the students reported working hard. They realised the implications of what they had taken on and that they had to do more than just think 'well I'd like a degree'. In some cases as shown it was the relations with others that allowed them to study, but in others their roles and responsibilities prevented them from working at their optimum. Nevertheless, they were still able to claim enough time within the weeks, terms and years to complete the required work. The issue of relationailty and study practices will be further examined in both chapters 2 and 3, with chapter 2 focussing on family relationships and chapter 3 focussing on relationships with others and how these relationships affect the part-time students in their attempts to gain a degree.

Chapter 2

Part-time study and the family: Allies or otherwise?

Acknowledging the consequences of part-time study on family life as 'an area where further in-depth investigation would be helpful' (Schuller *et al* 1999: 199) Tom Schuller recognizes that the impact on family life is a hidden factor in part-time students' learning journey. Pamela Cotterill and Ruth Waterhouse (1998) (in the poignantly named *Surviving the Academy)* draw attention to that fact many adult women students' 'primary identification is with the private world and often domestic responsibilities are prioritized' (1998:12) and that 'education, like paid work, is constructed as secondary to women's domestic responsibilities' (1998: 10). Rosalind Edwards reminds us that 'it is easier to stop doing than being: women may *do* housework but they *are* mothers or wives' (1993: 63 original emphases) and when the question was asked of Dale 'What was most important in your life before the OU and after?' she replied 'Family, it's still family but less so. … I think my family's wider needs are now met by me being a more fulfilled person' (Lunneborg, 1994: 10). Stephen Whitehead stresses that 'both women and men are, in the main, committed to "family life" and continue to define themselves, socially and ontologically, as members of a family' (2002: 152). Marion Bowl reports that her research process was 'informed by the belief that mature students' family lives and concerns are not merely the background against which their educational careers develop, but are integral to their experience of higher education study' (2001: 143). I agree with Bowl's standpoint. Family then is of paramount importance to many studying as part-time undergraduates, and in this chapter I aim to show how part-time study is fitted into, negotiated around and can cause conflict within the family, often all three within the same family unit.

Despite the rhetoric of widening participation and the move towards an increasingly diverse student body[101], Cotterill and Waterhouse argue that 'diversity is valued only as far as students' lived experiences outside the university do not impact on their lives as students within the university in problematic ways' (1998: 10-11). This is substantiated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) which does not collect and collate information from the student body on their marital status or their status as parents (Peplow, 2007), thus the 'bag and baggage' (Edwards, 1993: 9) of family life that many part-time and adult students bring with them to higher education is concealed and subsequently ignored as an issue. Schuller *et al* stress that

> the pattern of any student's life is a function of the interaction between
> classroom and personal study, employment and domestic responsibilities.
> In the case of part-timers, the latter two were more likely to play a
> significant part (1999: 59).

This chapter investigates how part-time students negotiate their desire to study for a degree alongside family roles and responsibilities, and thus highlights the different ways in which not only the students but also their families live out this experience. Jessie Yum *et al's* (2005) and David Kember's (1999) three related strategies/themes of support, negotiation and sacrifice are used to detail the narratives of the students in this sample and will show that a narrative of the integration of part-time study and family is important to enable current and potential students to map onto a positive narrative to make their journey through part-time study to successful completion more likely. In addition to these themes I shall discus four types of main support offered or required, as reported by the students: emotional, financial, practical and academic.

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[101] See chapter 5 for further discussion on the diverse population of HE.

Although now dated, the *Educating Rita* (1980/1983) discourse of women starting to study followed by the breakdown of the family unit is still regularly heard in HE. Yet this is not always the case and in my sample the family was portrayed as a major support to the student rather than just problematic. An example of the negative discourse around family life and education was provided by Lucy. She started her studies with a friend at a local community centre by taking a course entitled 'Return to Study for Women'. In the first session the class were told 'you will all be divorced by the end of this year'; this was presented as a fact. Consequently, her friend refused to return to the class yet Lucy persevered and was keen to point out that this negative discourse around family and part-time study did not apply to her. This was by no means the only example of this negative discourse portrayed by practitioners in HE and indeed it is one which I have been responsible of depicting in the past. However, the students' discussions in my sample of their families required me to closely examine this issue, particularly in relation to part-time students and their families.[102]

The impact of part-time study on family life can be both positive and negative. It is this impact, both positive and negative, that I name the 'family ripples of education'. The 'ripples of education' that I employ refer to the fact that although it is an individual who is studying this impacts on the immediate (and often wider) family unit. This idea of ripples came from a discussion with Tia two years after her initial interview when she explained how studying for her degree had impacted on her family. As a very visual learner she drew the impact on the family and this, we

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[102] Literature around family and HE study has tended to focus on full-time students and family relationships, for example Edwards, 1993, though see Raddon (2007) for discussion of distance part-time learners and family.

decided, looked like the ripples on a large pond. During the discussion we initially called the impact 'shockwaves', but decided this was both too strong and too negative a metaphor for her family. [103] Tia's degree impacted on her family in positive ways, and gently and over time had changed the family habitus towards education. As Tia described it one positive effect of study had been that: 'it gave me my space. That was the Tia thing' (Tia) which in turn made her happier in herself. The adult student can also act as a role model for her children (and/or grandchildren[104]).

Negatively, study at this level takes the student away from the family, both mentally and physically, which may pose or become a problem for the family. Study may have to become a priority (at least for some of the time) for the individual which others in the family (and indeed the student) may be unused to and sometimes unable to accept. Deciding to do a part-time degree is not a decision to be undertaken lightly. Within the family negotiations will need to take place and some sacrifices will need to be made (with a student needing an average of 15 hours of study time taken from the time budget at some point within the week) and as Sellers stresses: 'it is women who continue to bear the brunt of care' (2007: 215). These sacrifices may be made by both the student and the wider family, but as I will show there were gendered dimensions to the support offered and given as well as the negotiations needed and sacrifices made.

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[103] However, we reflected that if the pond was small (minded) or too tightly bound in its static identity, or already in choppy waters, these ripples might indeed turn into shockwaves.

[104] In this study three students were grandparents.

Both the current family situation and the student's family of origin are considered within this chapter. Although the demographics of this sample have been detailed in the introduction (see particularly Tables 3 and 4), my sample's family educational situation are described below to further illustrate the diverse circumstances under which these students studied.

Family educational situation

In this sample six students were single (four women, two men). Of the others, twelve women and one man had partners who were graduates. As will be shown later having a partner who is already a graduate affected the type of support received by the student.

Table 5 Part-time students' partner educational level

	Partnered	Partner graduate 'traditional' age	Partner mature graduate	Partner non-graduate
Women	16	7	5	4
Men	5	0	1	4

Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Interview data, 2004/05.

Following Becker (1973, 1981) Gustafsson and Worku (2005) assert that in the most successful long-term relationships partners share the same educational level (also see Dobson, 2005). Keith's partner had recently completed her degree, also as a mature student: 'my other half has just finished her degree last year, so it's actually part of the household make-up really' (Keith). The other men's partners had not studied to degree level although both Glen and Carlos felt they would be more than capable of achieving this, and Carlos thought that his wife might well follow his

example.[105] Glen had tried to persuade his wife to study but this idea had not been

well received: 'No, she was sort of into it, but it has sort of faded away now, she

thinks she hasn't got the time' which when he raised the question:

What happens if we've got a parent-teachers thing?

PM And what did happen?

Quite often she would go and I wouldn't.

Researchers at the Open University have questioned their students about the

educational status of their partners and found that many students started a degree as

their partners had already done or were doing one, a case of 'if you can't beat them,

join them' (Woodley, 2006). As mentioned above, childcare issues fell to the non-

studying partner, so in a family with children where both parents studied at the same

time further negotiation would have to occur to ensure both partners had time to

study as well as family time. Among students I have taught I have sometimes found

that the strains of such a situation could become too much for a family, something

had to 'give'. In these cases it was the woman who put her studies on hold, the

man's studies taking priority. This was reported in terms of gendered expectations

where the caring role belongs to the woman. It also went together with the

assumption that the man had greater earning potential by finishing his degree. The

women in these cases usually intended to return to studies when their partner had

completed theirs, but it was often the case that this did not happen.[106]

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[105] See Gatrell (2006: 56) re patterns of study, whereby partners 'take turns' to study.

[106] I work on one out-reach programme on which a husband and wife embarked on the
degree programme together. He graduated in the summer of 2007, and although the wife
wished to continue her studies when he had completed, changes to the programme and a cut
in funding of out-reach programmes meant there was no programme for her to continue onto.

In this sample, the women were more likely to have partners with higher education qualifications than the men, which to a certain extent reflects the age of the cohort. Five of the women had supported their partners during their part-time studies as mature students; two of these were at the Open University. Weronika, who strongly believed in the power of education, had been insistent that her husband complete his studies even though he had dropped out of university on his first attempt, prior to their meeting:

> But when I met [husband] you see he also studied at university in
> Edinburgh, but he stopped after about three years, he never had much
> support from anywhere, he came from a very working-class family, and
> they always thought, 'why is he doing this, why is he doing this?' … So
> he stopped and he finished through [the] Open University. I told him he
> was mad to stop, I told him, 'you have to finish your degree'. So he did,
> he then went on and did his Masters through [the] Open University also.
> (Weronika)

Maggie had also supported her husband through an Open University degree: 'he did his the difficult way as well' (Maggie), here meaning that he took it on a part-time basis early in their married life rather than as a full-time student at the age of 18. An investigation of gender breakdown of qualification levels shows that nationally men are more highly qualified than women in each age group apart from those aged 16 – 24[107] (Aston *et al*, 2004: 70) and this would include both partners and parents of this

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The nearest place she could rejoin the programme was 35 miles from her home, in the evening, with no public transport available after classes.

[107] Using A level and higher qualifications. The older the age range the greater percentage of higher qualifications are held by men. In the age range 25 – 34 there is a 9% difference (9%

sample. This inequality in qualification levels will change and level out over time as the population ages as girls and women are now becoming more highly qualified than men of the same age.

In my sample at least 18 interviewees were first-generation participants in higher education, referring to traditional usage, they did not have parents who attended or attained higher education level qualifications.

Table 6 Part-time students' parental educational level

Parents' Educational Level	Graduate	Non-graduate	Education status unknown
Women	2[108]	13	5
Men	0	5	2

Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Interview data, 2004/05.

Being the first in the family to attend university was reported as a matter of pride not only for the student but also for their family. 'First-generation participant' is usually understood to mean the first person in the family entering higher education, which in the case of 'traditional' students would mean that the parents had not attended higher education. However, with mature students, many of whom are already married or cohabiting when entering HE, partners and/or children may have experienced the higher education sector. In my sample thirteen participants had partners who had studied at higher education level and three participants followed their children into

more men than women hold A levels and higher qualifications). Whereas in both the 45 -54 and 55 – 64 age ranges there is a 26% difference between men and women with A level and higher qualifications. This disparity will of course reduce as the population ages, now that girls and young women are achieving more and higher qualifications.

[108] Lucy's father was a mature part-time student when Lucy was a child.

higher education; Sharon's daughter, Chris's sons and Maggie's children had all studied prior to their parents. Both Jen and Diane had children who were at university or close to making the decision to go to university. Their children had originally believed that they would be the first in the family to complete a degree, but Jen and Diane had beaten them to this achievement. 'I think he thought he could get to university as the first one in the family, but I'm like no that's me, and he was, oh mum!' [LAUGHING] (Jen). This was similar to Diane whose daughter was studying:

> my daughter was a bit disappointed because I graduated before her and
> she was thinking she might have been the first female in the family to
> have a degree, because that's what it is, there is nobody else in our direct
> line that has actually got a degree.

Tom's time at university had encouraged his daughter to follow in his footsteps, first to the Access course and then into full-time higher education when her daughter started full-time school. The change in the habitus of one member of the family entering higher education here caused further 'family ripples'. 'First-generation participant' then is a complex term, particularly for use with adult students. This complexity, however, shows the diversity of those accessing part-time HE. Although some adult students come with no HE knowledge, some will have a familial knowledge from their partners or children.

Family of origin was also an important factor in the interviewees' narratives. There were comments from many students that they had thought higher education was 'for other people' (Tett, 2000; Marks *et al*, 2003). This came from both women and men and was more usually a working-class narrative. Education was for the 'ear oles' (Willis, 1977), and for many it was not about choosing to do something else at the end of compulsory schooling, but about having no choice in what followed: 'I don't

think that we were aware enough to have made that decision, it was almost made for you at that time, that social structure, that class' (Tom) (Archer, 2000: 5).

Bridget's eldest daughter had decided not to go to university on completion of her secondary education. This had been discussed at length within the family and she had considered it as an option. However, she felt it was not right for her at this time in her life, yet was aware, mainly because of her mother's example, that if she decided to undertake higher education at a later point in her life this was available to her through either part or full-time modes of study.

As shown here, there were many new entrants to HE, that is students with no or very little familial knowledge and experience of higher education (Fuller, 2007). Only three students had parents who were graduates, 18 had parents who were not, and less than half of the students had partners who were graduates. This familial lack of knowledge of HE, this lack of family habitus and educational capital, puts non-traditional students at a disadvantage as they do not have the same sort of understanding of the HE processes and expectations as those who have been through the system. As Bowl reports: 'However well-motivated, non-traditional students seemed to be disadvantaged in advice and support at home' (2001: 153).

Sue Webb (1997) suggests that use of non-traditional/traditional or non-standard/standard as polarized classifications hides other similarities and differences such as 'race', gender, age, social class and entry qualifications.

Gender, age and ethnicity are examined in detail in the Ramsden report (2006a: 40 – 55) of part-time students, yet there is no detail of the socio-economic status of students. In Callender *et al's* report (2006: 14 – 15), 66% of the students surveyed belong to the managerial and professional group, and 29% to the intermediate or

routine and manual and unemployed.[109] There is, however, no further detail of how these classifications are used, whether these classifications are based on the student, spouses or even parental occupation and income. Further details of income show that 46% of part-time students earn less than £20,000 pa. But again there is no further detail to inform whether this is personal or family income. According to Alison Fuller (2007: 5) 'Mature undergraduates are more likely to: come from lower socio-economic backgrounds; have left school earlier; [and] have fewer academic qualifications on entry'. She continues that there has been

> little fine grained quantitative or qualitative analysis of intra-cohort participation, for example, of the social class, ethnic and educational backgrounds of part-time students aged 30 plus.

Consequently, I have detailed here the educational backgrounds and lifestage of the students' family in order, as Fuller suggests, to 'help to identify emerging trends which, due to the smallish numbers involved, compared with the overall population otherwise remain obscured' (2007: 22).

Impact of the family on study time

Of the 20 participants in this sample with children, 12 students' children were too young to be in higher education at the time of the interviews, although as will be shown in later, some were already considering this.

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[109] 6% of the data was missing.

Table 7 Part-time students' children's age and educational level

Children's Educational Level	Graduate/studying	Non-graduate/not studying	Young children
Women	4	3	8
Men	2[110]	0	3

Source: Data based on sample for this thesis. Interview data, 2004/05.

The majority of my interviewees had children. Depending on the age of the children this can impact differently on the time available to study. Most of the participants with children thought that their children were at the right age to allow them space to study. This came from parents with very young children, as well as from parents with teenagers and grown-up children. It was reflected upon more by the women in the sample than the men.

Gatrell (2006) gives little space to the impact of children and family on study time and vice versa. There is no reference to children in the index and in the whole of the text family is mentioned only on 10 pages. Instead she prioritizes a busy job as the first thing that a part-time student may have to negotiate and hobbies are discussed as being dropped or squeezed. Most part-time students have no opportunity to 'drop' family responsibility however, nor would they want to. In my study it was the female students who made the majority of the sacrifices and attempted to fit study into already established family patterns and 'family practices' (Morgan, 1996). Gatrell does acknowledge that part-time study 'might adversely affect others in your household/social circle' (2006: 54) and suggests that as study is the students' choice

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[110] This figure includes Colin and Tom. Colin had two sons, one had graduated, the other had left without graduating as 'he was too interested in the opposite sex to be quite frank'. Tom's daughter had followed him to university as a mature student.

they should not moan to those around them in the household as family members may feel that they have more cause for complaint than the student. She suggests that sacrifices may have to be made not only by the student but also by those around her. She encourages the would-be student to learn how to prioritize self and studies. Within families, particularly with children, this is not always as simple as it sounds.

Jane had the youngest children in this sample and considered this a good lifestage for studying. Carlos and Glen had young children but both had wives who took on the main responsibility for childcare during weekday evenings to allow them time to study. Lucy had four young children. These prevented her from doing much work as she had the main responsibility for them during the evenings since her partner was out many evenings with both work and community responsibilities. Her eldest child attended cadets but whilst at home would help look after her other siblings. Lucy was strict on bedtime routines with the younger children and the older ones understood that she had to study in the evenings and would try hard not to disturb her. Friday was spent at the university, and her husband collected the children from school so her study day did not have to end at 3pm. She explained that during the week she

> tried to do things when they've not been around, that's why I don't do
> anything when I pick them up from school until about 8 o'clock, you know,
> I wouldn't … I would pick them up from school and finish everything off,
> apart from that, that was their time, I wouldn't do anything. (Lucy)

This, however, limits the time available for study, but Lucy felt it was important to be there for her children and referred to this more than once in the interview. As Edwards stressed in relation to such women she could not stop 'being a mother' (1993: 63). Lucy's father had also studied on a part-time basis when she was a child and she recollected 'his head buried in books, never had time to play with us, my

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mum moaning about it and that kind of thing so I didn't want my kids to have that memory'.[111] The limit on time to study meant that Friday as her study day was a valued time.

Bridget's children were slightly older (14 and 17 at the time of the interview) but they were in a routine of going to their bedroom at 7pm in the evening. This routine had started when they were younger and Bridget was strict about maintaining it. Even though the children would come down during the evening for drinks and supper this arrangement allowed Bridget to study for the whole evening. For Bridget, study was her priority after 7pm at night.

None of the partnered women with young children had the luxury of removing themselves totally from parental responsibility to enable them full focus in such structured time chunks. However, Bridget and Katie, both single parents, structured their time in a similar way. Interestingly, single mothers acted more like the men in this study, in that they chose how to structure their time, and gave their study the priority in a way that those with partners were not able to manage.

Katie's daughter was nine when Katie finished her degree and had grown up knowing nothing other than her mum studying. On the evening Katie attended class her daughter would stay with her grandparents. As her daughter was still relatively young Katie was able to study most other evenings at home since her daughter would be in bed. Sunday evenings however were reserved for Katie and her daughter to spend time together:

> Sunday night was always my night off, and it didn't matter at what stage I
> was at with any of my work, Sunday night was mine and my daughter's.

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[111] This may well be a memory that Carlos and Glen are creating for their children.

To sit on the couch, and eat crisps and stuff ourselves with really sickly

sweets and sugary drinks and crap for the evening, and that was mine

and her time out, and I'd go and get her in the bath, and get her in her

'jamas, and same for me, and down on the couch and that was it for the

night. But that was our night.

Spending that time together and making it special for them had been important to Katie, and had helped her get through the other nights when she had to study. She knew that by the Sunday she would be having a nice evening with her daughter, no matter what deadlines were looming. As Katie's ex-partner had responsibility for her daughter every other weekend, this also allowed Katie time to work.

Diane's children were older and studying themselves. She felt that as they were grown they should be less hassle but 'even though they are teenagers, they were teenagers for most of the time, still demanding, still coming in and out and they still want things washing and ironing you know' but on the whole Diane could work and not be disturbed. When there was a houseful however, she would remove herself from the family space and go and work upstairs in her bedroom.

 Shirley's children were also older teenagers who still lived at home. They mostly kept themselves to themselves, 'they were doing their own thing anyway' and did not stop her working. As for her husband, he had been very supportive, absolutely marvellous, but she explained:

I'm not the type of person to neglect him, he's been well looked after, he's

been fed, I've always made sure, you can, sort of, hit a happy medium, I

think I've always managed to do that over the five years. (Shirley)

Hitting the happy medium that Shirley talked about was mainly about her managing her workload so as not to impact on the family, particularly her husband. She would

'get all the housework done on a Saturday morning, whiz round like a mad woman' and then spend the rest of the time studying. Again this can be seen as Shirley fitting the study into her own timeframe and workload by making personal adjustments rather than the family making adjustments to accommodate her study. She was in effect attempting to keep her study from creating shockwaves.

Keith had a teenage step-son who was studying at GCSE level. As study was part of the household makeup, Keith's partner having just completed a degree, the main negotiations around study time were about computer use, with study taking priority over gaming and eBay/MSN usage.

Both Tom and Colin's children were grown and had left the family home. The person who had been most interested in Colin's study was his daughter-in-law: 'his wife is a doctor. She's, I don't mean a medical doctor, I mean an academic doctor, she was quite helpful I must confess, she didn't think it was funny or anything like that'. Other than that there had been little connection between family and his education.

Tom on the other hand had connected his family and education. Tom discussed the content and process of studying with his daughter; she had followed him to university, choosing to study sociology on a full-time basis. Once she had started on the study route, she would also read through his essays for him, and challenge him on certain issues. He liked this very much. He had enjoyed discussions with her before she started studying but admitted that he could 'flannel a bit' but now was no longer able to get away with flannel.

Family type, lifestage, age and educational background of the students in this sample has been detailed to show the 'fine-grained detail' of this cohort (Fuller, 2007). There were many different family types and lifestage and no one stage/type stands out as contributing most to the success of the individual student, although those with older

children advised against those with very young children attempting to follow this route.

One issue raised by many students was that they felt lucky in choosing their particular family or life stage to attempt their degree as it had been a successful time for them to do so. This comment came from different family types - cohabiting, divorced, single with no children, single parents, and families with young children, teenage children, and adult children who had left the family home. All considered that they were at the 'right stage' to study and complete their degree, and many suggested that another life or family stage would have made studying more difficult. For Jean, the thought of studying with a family around her was difficult to imagine: 'I couldn't work surrounded by people doing other things, in a middle of a family, no way I think I could do that' (Jean). Jane[112], who had the youngest children among my sample, felt that it was a good time for her to study because her sons were so young:

> If the boys were any older now I would find it hard. You know if they were
> teenagers or whatever and they were up, or I was having to take them
> different places or whatever. At least now it is seven o'clock and they are
> up to bed and I can get on … I've found that actually easier than if they
> were a little bit older. (Jane)

However, Liz was quite definite that the high drop-out rate on her course was due to the fact that so many of the students had children and worked, many full-time: 'a large number of the women still had quite small children, and it just sort of buckled'. One of the other students in Liz's group was studying in the same circumstances as Jane: 'I just felt there were times when she was clearly under a lot more pressure

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[112] Her youngest child was born during the time of her studies.

than I was feeling, 'cos she was still having to be mum to two little boys'. Liz described how this student was 'always wanting to be out of the door and rushing home because the children were still up and she was hoping to get back and put them to bed, she's rushing off'. Indeed, this was the more usually reported experience of those with young families. Because of this perception Berni had made the decision to finish her studies before trying to conceive.[113]

Marilyn acknowledged that for her, as a semi-retired person, studying was a 'piece of cake'. She no longer had family responsibilities and her husband (fully retired) did the cooking and cleaning. Unlike many on her course she did not have 'kids to get to bed, they've got washing to do and ironing, they've got jobs, they've got to sort out before they can even get their heads down'. They had it much harder than she did and she felt they had 'tenacity to be able to do this. You know I've got every admiration for them'. Marilyn had great respect for them and thought that particularly for women with young children fitting studying in must be harder than it was for her. Yet, many in this sample did fit that category. They had work, children and partners to negotiate with and around their study requirements.

Some of the students, including Carlos, Gina, Jane, Tom and Tia reported that they were quite immature at the age of 16/18 and that university for them, had it been available as an option, would have been problematic because of their immaturity. Diane also reported that she was immature at the age of 18. She had attempted Art College in London but hated it and had gone home within a month. She considered starting again the following year closer to home, but in the meantime met and married her husband, so further studies were not an option at the time. Rachel had attended university at the traditional age of 18 and had thoroughly enjoyed the

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[113] She acknowledged that had she not been studying she would probably have considered having a baby by this stage in her life/relationship.

experience, but admitted that her subject choice was less than satisfactory: 'when you are 17, God knows what you want to do when you grow up'. The reflection on their levels of maturity is obviously in hindsight and again congruent with the choices they made at the time[114]. However, this lack of maturity as discussed, the uncertainty of leaving home and being immersed in the total institution that full-time university can be, was a decision that with the benefit of hindsight they realised would not been a productive and viable option. This is not an issue with a good deal of currency in the HE debate. Full-time study at 18 continues to be publicised as the best (only) option, again denying the part-time option either at 18 or in later life.

Some of the students reported that they did not have the choice at 18 because of their working-class background. There is more choice and more awareness of university as an option with the massification of HE now, though this is still limited by class and financial considerations (Cotterill *et al*, 2007; Archer *et al* 2003).

In my sample a number of students attributed their success to their family life stage. For these students the 'ideal time' for them was their current time. Of course, reflecting on the best time for study for this group of students was congruent with their success[115]. Had they not completed they could have regarded this attempt as not successful because they were not at the best lifestage for study. This notion of best fit, however, goes beyond personal preference. It shows that there are different family and lifestages that can create a successful frame for study. Fuller, (2007: 6) also wishing to 'foreground a more positive image' of mature students' return to HE, uses a 'multi-level explanation' of the decisions adults make in their mid-life

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[114] Interestingly, one of Westland's participants report that they were 'growing up with the learning', despite being 'mature students' (2004).

[115] Similarly, it is part of my personal narrative.

transitions into the system. The 'choice biographies' that adult returners narrate, contrast with the 'normal biographies' (2007: 7) of their earlier lives. She shows that they choose to enter HE at particular life-stages, because there is a cultural narrative that indicates that this is achievable and feasible, as well as an infrastructure that makes it possible. This is, Fuller explains, in contrast to their earlier lives and those of earlier generations for whom HE was not attainable. There was previously no choice to be made. In order to improve the availability of part-time study and its accessibility there needs to be a cultural narrative that indicates this is a possibility.

Relationships - Partners

Many of the participants in this study were in long-term relationships and attributed much of their success to this fact. This was true for both female and male students. These partners were in many cases and in multiple ways 'underrated mentors' (Tia). As Arwen Raddon (2007: 174) reports, and will be further examined here, support by the family was gendered, with men in her study more likely to cite the family as their major source of support (43%) than women (34%).[116] Strength and longevity of relationships was articulated as a contributing success factor by many of the students, and in my sample no relationships ended during the period under investigation. This does not mean, however, that no problems were reported. Part of the meta-narrative of educational returners is that HE is destructive and damaging to 'family life', though Schuller *et al* (1999: 180) report that 84% of students state that their partners are supportive, 12% indifferent and less than 1% being actively opposed their partner's study efforts. Edwards (1993) argues:

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[116] Raddon's study was undertaken with post-graduate students on distance learning programmes.

> Even three women who acknowledge the potential [for conflict], but did
> not feel their partners were threatened by them becoming more
> knowledgeable about things tended to make jokes around this issue,
> which may have indicated some underlying discomfort (1993: 115).

In a similar way humour was reported in my research in acknowledgement of the possible problems around the subject of relationships and education. Shirley said her husband joked that she was having an affair because of the time she spent in the library: 'cos I was constantly in the library, [LAUGHING] he'd be, 'are you sure it closes at nine?' When I asked if it was a problem she was adamant that 'no, he was fine really, just his joke' (Shirley).

Glen also used humour in discussing his relationship with his wife. He admitted that there were problems at the start of his degree, mainly because of the number of hours he spent studying, but asserted that he had support from everyone:

> Everyone, yes, nobody's been, nobody was ever particularly negative
> about it, it was always, yes you are doing the right thing, good for you
> doing that (Glen).

He suggested that the amount of time he spent studying, and particularly his attendance at the OU summer school were problematic for his family, 'it is putting up with it, yes, it's not doing them any good, it does nothing for their well-being, or anything else' but stressed with a wry smile that 'it's not *Educating Rita'*, here referring to the film in which Rita leaves her husband after starting a university course. Over time, Glen's family had become accustomed to him studying and also being away from the family home due to his job.[117] This, and the fact that their son

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[117] One of Glen's strategies was to attempt course work when his job meant he had to stay away from home. He reported sitting in hotel bedrooms working on his module assignments.

was six years older than during the first summer school, meant that the summer school in his final year was less problematic for them as a family. The process of study was also at that point close to completion. In an attempt to negotiate favourable family relationships Glen had however, mostly chosen courses that did not require attendance at the summer school. He would have preferred to do one each year as he felt he learnt a great deal and enjoyed the first summer school so much, but he sacrificed the opportunity to do so again. As he said: 'I wouldn't have got away with that, that would have caused a lot [RAISED EYEBROWS] of trouble' (Glen). Glen acknowledged that his time commitment to study had caused problems, but the difficulties had been resolved through negotiation, some sacrifice and adjustments to the family dynamics over time. Although his wife had struggled with the amount of hours Glen had spent on his degree, she had supported his decision to do the OU programme and had grown used to and accepted the different family rhythms and responsibilities it meant for her within the family.

Although Tom's discussions with his wife may sound negative, the way in which they were reported in the interview was anything but. He had often spoken with his wife about the things which he was studying: 'almost *ad nauseum* she'd probably say! [LAUGHING]'. He discussed the books he was reading and they liked to watch *University Challenge* together. His wife particularly enjoyed it when Tom got the answers wrong! But he was laughing and joking throughout this discussion and he said that his wife 'knew him' and had given him his space to be able to study. She had also taken over responsibility from him whenever a deadline was close for cooking – when he was not busy and working to a deadline he was the family cook.

There were many differences in the type of support that the students received from their partners. Some felt they had emotional support but little practical or domestic support, whereas others felt they had financial or practical support but little emotional support. These impacted in quite different ways and even students who did not feel

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they had full support, implied that they had felt supported for the most part. The next sections include individual student vignettes to show the different aspects of the ways in which my interviewees felt that family members did or did not support their studies.

Berni

Berni said she had had practical support but would have liked further understanding of the situation, including emotional support from her husband. She started by telling me how proud her husband was of her: 'my husband is quite proud as well, as he's always telling people that I'm studying at university', and continued:

> He was really good when I started, made me a desk area, and bookshelf
> to put my things on and a pin-board to put my timetable and my study
> stuff on and that, so that is my little area.

Her husband had then 'decided to put his tools up there, so I did have an area [LAUGHING] but we are sharing at the moment'. She then talked about time negotiation within the relationship:

> Well, he's alright, I mean sometimes, erm, I don't think he, I can say this
> now he's gone out, I don't think he realises, I think he knows it is
> important and that, and he is always, 'oh my wife's studying' and it's all
> great, but I, erm, I don't think that sometimes he realises that I do have to
> sit and read a book, I'll be sitting with a book there and I just need some
> time to do this, I mean I don't have to say it very often, … but I will have
> to say, I do need to do that.

During the evening her husband would sit 'in front of the tv and stay there for a couple of hours', then he would say, 'oh can I have you back now? Have you finished? You're studying all the time.' Despite this, she ended by stating, 'he's quite happy with it really'. Her hesitant speech pattern and the fact that she felt she could

only say the words once he had left the house show some underlying tension around this issue in this relationship. Berni's husband created a study space which he then encroached upon. He found it difficult to give his wife the time she needed to work. He appears to construct her studying as an encroachment on his territory, his access to her, and cannot reconcile his feelings and needs and anxieties with the requirements of what studying entails. This created conflict, and highlights both the ambivalence partners may feel towards their spouses' degree work and their reluctance to accept change.

Berni's husband's pride was obvious and when we chatted at the end of the interview he referred to Berni as 'a very clever woman'. He believed that she would succeed in her chosen profession of social work. Nevertheless, the comments about wanting her back from studying and taking back part of the purposely-created study space showed both a lack of understanding of the commitment needed to study part-time at degree level alongside a full-time job, and also a certain amount of contradiction between his words and his deeds. Despite saying he wanted her to do well and displaying pride in her achievements to others, his actual day-to-day practices were not always fully supportive of her efforts. Their time together was sacrificed and although this had been previously negotiated he appeared to find it problematic. They were, after all, a young married couple. Berni was aware of this and tried to make time for him as well as the extended family. She agreed that life interfered with studying: 'It does, it really does sometimes [LAUGHING] you can't miss these things, you can't help it; you can't put others' lives on hold for an essay deadline'.

Berni put her partner's and her family's needs before her own study needs which had meant she had to request an extension to finish her work. As the first member of her family to attend university and despite the family being very vocal in their support

there was little practical understanding of the time commitment required over and above her attendance at university[118]. Many mature students will recognise the contradictory position they are placed in whilst trying to be a good student as well as a good wife and mother (Raddon, 2007: 177).

Liz

Liz said that she was getting emotional and some financial support from her partner both of which were important to her. However, there was little domestic or practical support:

> in terms of the home front, (…) well they [partner and daughter] could have been a bit nicer in some terms, in that they could have done a bit of cooking, but they felt they were being really supportive by not demanding dinner, I didn't have to go and cook every evening, but then I didn't necessarily walk in and it be there.

Attending university in London three nights a week meant that Liz regularly did not get home until after 9pm. Yet both her partner and daughter felt they were being supportive simply by not 'demanding dinner'. They did not take on the responsibility for this task within the household, so there was little practical support. Yet for Liz this was not a particular issue as she valued the emotional support more highly.

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[118] One day per week.

With regards to emotional support, Liz considered she got more emotional support once her daughter left home[119] and was going through the university experience herself:

> it's been quite good fun because we've been going through exams at exactly the same time … and recently it was great, she was texting me, good luck in this exam, and I'd send her a text back, it was a very, very bonding experience this last year, particularly for her, because up until then I'd always been giving her a lot of support and this time she really made the effort to be supportive to me, not just receptive to my support.

As her daughter now had a better understanding of the university study experience this enabled her to be more emotionally supportive of the process Liz was going through. This was important to Liz and she recognized it as such. It contrasts with Berni's experience and highlights the role of identification in providing support. Liz's daughter was supportive because she had a similar experience as Liz, creating empathy and bonding.

Liz had also received a great deal of emotional support from her partner during her degree. He encouraged her to keep focussed on her goal to change her career from teacher to educational psychologist. During her final year of the part-time degree Liz had considered completing that degree and not applying for the educational psychology course which had been her goal at the outset of study. It was her partner who reminded her how far she had come and of her reasons for making the commitment to the part-time degree in the first place. So even though there was some lack of practical support, the emotional support was paramount throughout her

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[119] Liz's daughter's home leaving probably also freed up further time for Liz to study by her not being a 'hands-on' parent daily (See Green, 2007 for further discussion of women's experiences of their adult children's home leaving).

degree. She had reduced her working hours and thus sacrificed some of her income to allow her study. The reduced hours meant time negotiation was less of an issue as she had more time and energy than when working full-time. This enabled her to complete the required domestic tasks. With regards to finance, the requirement for Liz was that her partner understood what she wanted to do and why she wanted to do it. This was discussed with her partner who supported her decision, but she said that 'I probably would have done it even if he had gone, nah, nah, I'd have still done it, I wanted to do it, I felt compelled to do something'.

Going part-time from a full-time job entailed a reduced salary but for Liz this was not too much of a problem as she was still able to cover her major financial outlay of the mortgage payments:

> in terms of money we are very fortunate in that we don't have a big
> mortgage, so it wasn't financially, in fact I could do what I wanted to do
> and I could still cover the mortgage. It meant my partner had to fork out a
> lot more for any luxuries, so he would bear the brunt of any holidays, but
> we've always worked it like that, if we've got the money we do it.

Once she had made the decision to study she managed her sundry expenses by not buying many clothes to enable her to buy her course books. Laughing she said: 'I just didn't buy as many clothes, I knew it was only going to be four years, it wasn't going to be forever'. Overall the impression is that Liz had to make more adjustments to her life than her partner in order to pursue her degree. She was after all the one undertaking the study. There was little practical accommodation on his side.

Having shown how some students received mixed support from their partners I now focus on those who benefited from full support and '100% commitment' (Carlos) from their long-term partners. Edwards reports that partners' lack of interest, and their

lack of willingness to share the women's educational experiences with them, was linked in these women's minds with their partners not really caring about them. In my study, the reports of the interest in and the support for their studies were reported in terms of strength and commitment of the partner and the relationship. This was particularly shown in the narratives of those in long-term relationships.

Full support

Students who had full support from their partners were very vocal in their praise of this. This echoes Raddon's findings; she notes that contrary to other studies, 'the women in particular write very positively about their partner's support' (2007: 175). The ways in which both male and female partners in this research showed support were many and varied, and ranged from regular childcare, domestic task responsibility, essay checking, presentation preparation and listening, suggestion giving and resource supply, to emotional support, financial support and general encouragement. Tia, Julia, Weronika, Maggie, Lucy, Diane, Jen and Carlos all stated that their partners were their main support. All had been in long-term relationships with their partners. Tia, Weronika, Jen and Carlos particularly stressed this point during their interviews. 'I married him at 18 and we went off, just living really. … Still married, now, how is that, statistically?' (Tia, 41); 'We are still married after nearly 20 years, three wonderful kids, live in our own home, more importantly, we are all happy' (Carlos); and 'we have been partners since we met, we never looked back, and we are 18 years married now, which is good going, isn't it?' (Weronika). It is possible that the very long-term nature of their relationships meant that partners felt more comfortable about their educational moves, and were thus able to support them without undue concern that change through education would mean change beyond that which the relationship could cope with (or survive?).

Weronika

Weronika, talking about her husband, stated: 'I would never have finished without him. It's the bottom line. I would never have done it without him'. Yet she acknowledged that prior to commencement, 'he was slightly concerned that I start again'. As she explained, this was because 'when I did the technology and the other courses earlier on, with Open University, I never liked it so much, and I would drop out because I was pregnant or whatever, and I hadn't found what I wanted to do'. When raising the subject of returning to study her husband had told her:

> 'I would love you to study, but I'm only concerned that you start and you
> will withdraw again'. I'd done a literature course and that. So I said,
> 'well, can we see? I'll try it for two months and then if I don't get on with it
> that will be it', after he noticed the first six months I really loved it, I was
> really into it.

Once her husband saw that she 'really loved it' he was 'very, very supportive'. For Weronika this study attempt was more successful than the previous ones because she was passionate about the subject.[120] Her husband's hesitancy was due to seeing her become frustrated by her previous unsuccessful study attempts. His support was wide-ranging, involving practical support through childcare, academic support through working with her on her essays, financial support towards the costs of the course and related study costs:

> At the beginning [husband] always read and corrected my essays, if they
> needed the English[121] correcting, or if something wasn't there, you know.

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[120] Law had previously been unavailable at the Open University.

[121] English was her second language.

Not the contents of it, but the English, but in time, in the beginning his

marks were all over, you know, here, here, here [GESTURING OVER

THE PAPER] later on, there was just nothing, so I knew I was getting

better [LAUGHING].

Weronika's husband appears here to be the more competent and dominant partner, through the way he is set up as arbiter of her academic work. He is one of the male partners who was a graduate[122], and English was his first language. Weronika acknowledged that her written English was not at undergraduate standard on entrance to the degree programme, but as she shows above, this improved rapidly. He did act, in the first years, as an additional tutor for Weronika. However, prior to beginning the degree Weronika was already producing the accounts for the family firm, and early in her degree took on the legal work in relation to the company. In this way, they were very much working together for the family by supporting each other in her endeavour to qualify as a lawyer.

Other support was more practical. Her husband would take the children out during the weekends when he was home to enable Weronika to study:

When [husband] came home on Friday evening or Saturday morning he

took the children away, so I haven't seen them during the study time, until

the Sunday, he was away with the kids. Sometimes we would have

Sunday together, go for family walks and things, but then I was studying

at night.

On completion of her law degree, Weronika was accepted on a legal practise course and started again the following September. This meant a change in family dynamics

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[122] He also had post-graduate qualifications.

as the new course required full-time study and attendance of classes. Weronika was determined that her family would be affected as little as possible by her studying and had taken out a career development loan to cover the tuition costs and the cost of a nanny from Poland to live with the family whilst she studied for the final year. Her husband had offered the finances to cover her final year of study but Weronika was resolute that she should pay for this course as her husband had paid her undergraduate degree costs. The cost of the loan and the short repayment period Weronika felt would give her 'that push to find that contract'. She was aware that as a mature student, with a limited travel-to-work area, a contract might be more difficult to find. Part of her strategy for studying had been to ensure that her studying would not impact too heavily on the family. She affirmed that mother and wife were her main identity, her student identity coming secondary to this. Flexibility in order to fulfil her many family commitments was one reason that she chose to study at the OU. Weronika considered that the continued and extensive support from her husband was vital to her success as a student and would also contribute in the future to her becoming a practising lawyer.

Tia

Throughout her interview Tia referred to the various types of support she had had from her partner: 'I used to talk a lot through with him, about it. I suppose he was a study buddy in a way'. She discussed both process and content with her husband, frequently bouncing ideas around with him and thanked him as we talked about a contribution he had made that she had quoted in an exam. She also thanked him for supporting her financially to do the degree as she did not work outside the home during the degree: 'well, fortunately my husband's got a fairly well paid job, so he's, well, we've sponsored it out of our family pot'. As her husband worked away from home during the week the majority of the domestic responsibility fell on Tia. During her study weekend her husband would take the children away to allow her to

concentrate fully on her work. 'I have got a really supportive husband and children, so they understood that I had to continually communicate what my needs were … it wasn't a case of negotiation'. She went on to say that the family would have given her more time if she had requested it as they knew how important it was to her.

Tia was a good example of the family being connected through her education. Although Tia's husband 'did not actually put a lot of store by degrees' (and at Tia's graduation ceremony a cluster of graduates had failed to work the car park ticket machine, at which point he joked about there being no practical use in having a degree) the 'ripples of education' on the family created a desire in him to study too, and in later communication Tia reported that he too had started an OU degree.

The support that Tia received from her partner throughout the seven years of her degree was practical, emotional, academic and financial. She felt the need to do something for herself and undergraduate study was the path she chose. However, she accepted that her study was negotiated around her family responsibilities and put her family before her study needs. She wished she had more time to study but 'reality hit' and through she constantly communicated what her needs were in relation to her study her family's needs took priority. Her family roles of mother and wife (and daughter[123]) are shown here as being dominant over her student identity.

Indeed, many of the interviewees were keen to stress family and family dynamics in relation to their studies, rather than what the study meant to them solely as individuals. Parts of the individuals' strategies for coping with their studies were so intertwined and enmeshed with their familial identity it was difficult for them to separate the two. This was particularly so for the women. Part of the narrative from

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[123] Although not discussed here Tia was also the main carer for her elderly father.

the women was that they did not want their studies to impact too much or too negatively on the family. And this led to various non-impacting ways of negotiating study time from their personal time, which I shall return to later in the chapter.

Maggie

Maggie's husband had undertaken a degree at the Open University during the early part of their marriage and later a Masters qualification through part-time study at the local university. Maggie had supported him through this process and he supported her when she 'drifted into study'. His help and support proved invaluable not only to Maggie but also to many in her class. He was the chair of the local history group and thus had many academic resources that he was happy to share with Maggie and the other students. For Maggie he had 'done his red pen job' all over her essays and encouraged her to rewrite in a more coherent way. He helped her become more confident in her writing ability to the stage that when she had been asked to write an article for the local magazine on an old brick factory they were studying she did so without his help:

> I just wrote it and sent it off on the internet, on email, and didn't even
> think about it. And he said you would never have thought of doing that
> and I suppose, yeah, that's the difference.

Her husband even acted as dissertation supervisor:

> my tutor hasn't been very good really … I didn't have any reading or
> anything suggested, the only ones I got actually came from another
> student, from her tutor, and that was the most helpful, … it has all been a
> bit, a bit airy-fairy.

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Maggie joked that she might have had trouble with her husband if she had given up as he had helped her, particularly with the writing process. Her husband is a project manager and used to writing:

> I mean he won't do it for me, but he was always, (…) if I start panicking he's then, why don't you try this, or that, or he'll always read it through, even when I was doing the field biology and he didn't really understand it, he said you don't always have to understand the subject to know whether it's written properly.

Maggie's husband had also taught Maggie how to use a computer, allowed her to 'kick him off his computer quite often' and was 'never grumpy' when Maggie wanted to study. Having studied on a part-time basis in the past he was used to 'the highs and lows' and had encouraged Maggie to keep working through the low points when she felt like giving up. Maggie's husband here is shown to be resource-rich and more academically qualified. Maggie had also supported him during his degrees in the early part of their marriage, but this support was practical and emotional support, rather than the academic support that he was able to offer her. Both Maggie and Weronika thus benefited from their partners' knowledge and academic ability.

Within these narratives from the women there is either an articulated or implied notion that it is their responsibility and negotiation of their time and their roles that need sacrificing to enable them to study rather than their partner needing to make greater adjustment. On her husband's retirement Maggie changed her study patterns; Weronika attempted to study in such a way as not to impact too much on the family and her change to full-time student status was viewed as impacting greatly so a nanny was employed to cover the household and childcare responsibilities she would no longer have time for. There was a different narrative from the men with

less emphasis on the impact of the study on the family and more prominence on the structured time needed to enable them to study.

Carlos

Carlos had '100% commitment' from his wife and talked of her as 'absolutely incredible over the last six years while I've been doing this'. He told of 'setting the vision' for the family and of 'showing how they will benefit in the long run'. He felt this was important not just for his wife but for his children as well.[124] He acknowledged that it was asking a great deal of his wife as he would remove himself physically from the family each weekday evening for six years, so she was responsible for the children at this time. This is in contrast to Maggie and Weronika above who studied at times that would not impact on the family as much as possible and also reflects different paid working patterns. Carlos knew what he wanted to achieve, which was to work towards leaving the RAF with the best chance of good employment following his departure. It was important to him that his family understood this:

> it's also, trying to help all those around you, buy into that, how are they
> going to benefit out of it. And [wife] knew immediately where I was
> coming from.

Carlos had worked independently for most of the time. As an OU student he had little interaction with other students and for him that worked: 'it's not complexity and scale that I have issue with, I'll work through them, I know I can do that'. For emotional support he leant on his wife.

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[124] His children were 10 (twins) and 5 at the start of his degree.

It's when I get confused, whereas confusion, lack of clarity or ambiguity,

that's when I get really, really frustrated, and that's when I need

somebody emotionally supportive, when I get enraged!

The emotional highs and lows which Maggie mentioned and through which she had been supported by her husband, Carlos had also negotiated by support from his wife. Here too family and study were interlinked, as Carlos saw his personal goals as familial ones, having made a 'commitment to lifelong learning, [wife] knows that, the rest of the family know that, but it's got to have some meaning'. His intention was to continue studying on completion of his degree. At the time of the interview it was uncertain what direction that might take, but Carlos was driven by the notion that it should have meaning not only for him but also for his family. So although the narrative here is study for the benefit of the family, there is an acknowledgement and understanding that this move to becoming a graduate takes a great deal of work and that this work has to be fitted in around a full-time job. This will impact on the family but because it was 'sold' to them, packaged in a particular way, that of long-term benefit to the family for short-term sacrifice (albeit 6 years), it was accepted by his partner and children. Carlos' family had 'bought into' his vision. The 'study as benefit for the family' narrative was often portrayed as a female narrative, (see for example Reay, 2003)   but it is very evident in Carlos's experience and explanation of his strategies for success.

Glen had a similar study pattern to Carlos and support for this from his wife, yet he considered his goal of becoming a graduate (and possibly a post-graduate) as a personal goal rather than a familial one. He acknowledged that his study impacted greatly upon his family and yet was of no particular benefit to them.

The types of support required by the students and offered by their partners, parents and children have been highlighted to show that there are many different ways in

which support is required and offered. Practical support was needed by both men and women in my study and was given by partners and others in the form of taking responsibility for childcare and general domestic duties. In relation to doctoral level studies Diana Leonard (2001) reports that there is a 'large group of supportive wives [who] bring up children virtually as single parents' (2001: 4). Though patterns varied in this study both male and female partners took responsibility for the children at least at some points regularly during the week and across the length of the degree programme.

There were three major gendered differences that emerged in my research. Firstly, there were gendered differences in childcare patterns, with female partners more likely to take responsibility for childcare during weekday evenings and male partners during weekends. This partly reflects the different employment patterns of the women and men in general, but particularly within this sample. All but one of the men (Colin) worked full-time. Eight women worked full-time, 4 of these had no children, 2 were single parents and 2 had partners and children. Seven women in this study worked part-time and 5 of these had children at home. The remaining five women did not work outside the home, and three of them had children at home. Figures from 2004 show that of all working women 57% work full time and 43% part-time, in comparison with 91% of men who work full time and just 9% working on a part-time basis (Aston *et al*, 2004: 42).

Secondly, academic support was given by male partners to female students, but there were no instances reported by male students of receiving academic support from their female partners. This may be because of gendered differences in academic levels between partners or because of confidence levels of the women in their own academic ability. Indeed, it may also be that men are more reluctant to admit to needing or having received academic support.

Thirdly, financial support was given by men to their female partners whilst studying but in this sample there were no instances of women supporting men financially during their studies. The four women who did not work outside of the home had their study-related expenses sponsored by their partner's wage. That sponsorship had been discussed and negotiated in most cases and agreed that the fees for the degree were affordable within the family financial budget. In cases of financial difficulty family sacrifices had been made to ensure the student had the necessary funds. The largest financial sacrifice mentioned was a family holiday, and many students (and partners) reduced the frequency with which they socialised.

Emotional support was reported more by the women, and whilst Carlos was the only man to report on this he was particularly vocal about the emotional support he had received from his wife during his degree. He attributed much of his success to her emotional support, without which he questioned whether he would have finished his degree.

Although I have reported here on the support given by partners to students and how important that support had been to these students, I do not want to be considered as naive or as looking at this situation through rose-coloured spectacles. I am well aware of the difficulties that higher education[125] can cause in a relationship, particularly if one member of the partnership is not supportive and/or understanding of the other's attempt to study. Many mature students come into higher education looking for change in their lives, maybe looking for something for themselves or looking for a new challenge. Part of that change or that challenge may well cause them to question their current relationships and situation. This in turn may lead to a

[125] Indeed education at any level, but the focus here is higher education.

change in or a break-up of relationships (Griffin, 1994). This may not have been the intention when embarking on their studies, yet it sometimes is the consequence of change through the study process. However, the complexity of the relationship between part-time education and family is an area that requires further study. My study has shown that in some instances, relationships were strengthened during study because of the support offered and given. This remains however, a hidden narrative in the general perception of mature students' journey.

Having considered different types of support I now move to detail the structures of relationships and how the students reported the impact this had on their study journey.

Single students

In this sample Jean, Krystal, Steve and Paul were single and had no dependents. They discussed fitting in their study in different ways. For Jean the thought of having to work around others and negotiate time was problematic. Krystal described how she could choose how, when and where she worked but that fitting the other tasks into her life still had to be done. Being single meant there was nobody else to do chores such as shopping, house and garden maintenance.

Steve and Paul were both single, and both had support from their respective mums. Paul lived with his mother who still fed him regularly; his tea was on the table when he arrived home from work. Steve's mother also supported him in practical ways. She cleaned his house and also visited the university to sort out his finances at the end of his degree as Steve could not get time off from work to do so. So the single women in this study did their domestic tasks themselves, whilst working full-time and studying, but the men reported needing assistance and support, and in this case both received this from their mothers.

Other students, both female and male, also reported support from their parents. Even though these students were all mature students many still asked for and relied on parental support in one way or another. Weronika (married) and Katie (single) both relied on parental support for childcare. Katie's requirement was regular weekly childcare. Her parents looked after her daughter overnight one day per week which allowed Katie time to go to university classes: 'it's like their contact night with her, you know what I mean, up late, all the rest of it, bit of spoiling, ice cream for supper'. Her daughter had enjoyed the regular contact with her grandparents. Weronika's childcare need was less often but more intense. At examination time her mother would visit from Poland and stay with the children for a week whilst Weronika left the family home and locked herself into a hotel room to concentrate on her revision.

Bridget (single) considered her father to be a 'sounding board' in a way that for example Tia and Carlos relied on their partners:

> If I give him a scenario of information, he will give me a solid opinion. I know it is opinion rather than (…) analysis if you like, but he'll give me, and quite often it will make me think, oh I never thought of it like that, and I will go and look at that angle, that sort of side of it. … he has been my sounding board most of my life.

He was very happy to act in this role and Bridget reported that he thoroughly enjoyed their discussions.

When I arrived at Carlos's house for the interview I was greeted by his mother who was waiting in the house to let the surveyor in for an appointment. She was cooking the family meal while she waited. As can be seen from the examples most of the parental support was actually given by mothers, with only Bridget mentioning any significant support from her father. Mothers then tended to give practical and

domestic support whilst Bridget's father, in acting as her sounding board, was giving more academic support.

Support by partners, parents and children of the students have been acknowledged, yet there were other family members named as important to and impacting on the students on the journey through their degrees. Katie's sister was important to her during her studies. Her sister had died just as Katie was considering starting to study[126] and yet it was often the thought of her sister that kept her at her desk at night: 'she's sat on my shoulder going, hey, we'll go for a beer when you've finished that paragraph'. She described the sadness she felt of her sister's death and explained why it was her sister who so often kept her writing:

> the sad bit, the really sad bit for me was my sister died five years ago, in
>
> April (…) and I think part of it, part of her dying was me kicking myself up
>
> the arse and saying what are you going to do then, and it was like, how
>
> do you make a difference? What do you do?. … And I think that was a
>
> lot to do with it also, that inspiration, to actually get to the end, the thought
>
> of her, stood there going [FINGER WAGGING] 'oh no you don't quit'
>
> (Katie).

Pete's sisters had also been of help to him during his degree, one with practical and one with emotional support:

> [my sister] lives in Derby, my youngest sister, and she's like ringing up
>
> and saying, 'how are you getting on with your course?' Checking I'm OK

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[126] Trauma was indicated by two students in relation to other family members and here Parr's thesis (1996) about mature women students and trauma is an important study. In this study two students had suffered the death of a family member (one prior to and one during study). The deaths had been instrumental in motivating the student to successful completion of their studies.

and that. And [sister] the eldest, she's been helping me, 'cos she works

in an office, so she's been able to photocopy things for me (Pete).

This practical support had been important to him and he also appreciated his sisters' interest in his studies. They were the only people he discussed his studies with, having no friends with similar interests. The practical support his older sister was able to give by photocopying documents had obviously been valuable: 'it's no good working on the shop floor, you don't get those perks'.

Marilyn was inspired and encouraged to study by a family member, in her case it was a cousin. She had been the first person to voice to Marilyn the notion that she would be capable of doing a degree:

she was the first person to say when she got her PhD, 'you know you

could do this'. I mean not a PhD but she did her BA Honours first, then

an MA and then a PhD. She said er, yeah, if I can do it you can do it.

Her cousin had also offered practical support:

I mean, she lived in Canada, why the hell she thought she could help me

I don't know, but she would say to me, you know if you want any help

with your essays or anything, you know, just, just send one over and I'll

see what I can do for you whatever (...) I never did.

Unfortunately this cousin and another had been killed in the 9/11 disaster in New York and whilst she was obviously shaken by this event[127] it spurred Marilyn onto completion:

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[127] Marilyn made a short film for the BBC series 'Telling Lives' about her feelings watching the 9/11 disaster unfold, knowing her cousins were visiting that day.

when she was killed that made me even more determined I thought, oh [cousin] would be chuffed if she knew I was continuing, you know, I think it would be nice, just in her memory really to continue.

Even though Marilyn was struggling with her dissertation at the time of the interview she was determined to complete (which she did). The belief this cousin had in her had encouraged Marilyn to apply for and to start the degree.

During Diane's degree a relationship had developed with a cousin with whom she had previously lost touch:

there is one of my cousins who I haven't seen, we've not kept in touch for the last 20 years or so, more than that probably and we got back in touch again, when she moved.

Once they had made contact and begun meeting again:

we just found that we were just interested in all the same things, … we were just so alike, she was really into the course and she'd done an MA recently, so I suppose it enhanced that relationship really as she was interested in what I've been doing and I was interested in what she'd been doing.

This relationship had developed despite the years apart and the difference in ages. It was enhanced mainly by their similar interest in their studies.

Other family members were also affected by the 'ripples of education'. When Tom spoke of his granddaughter his eyes lit up. When I asked if he had to negotiate his time for study with anyone in the family he laughed and said 'only my granddaughter'. He explained this was

because I love taking her out, but I'm playing really, we're pals, so we

spend time together, in fact she loves the library here, she came with me

to the library, she loves it.

The fact that both her grandfather and now her mother were studying at university

had led to his granddaughter already making plans to attend the same university:

my granddaughter's saying she's coming here now, and I'm, no you'll go

away when the time comes, and she's said, no mummy's going to [this

university], you're going to [this university], I'll come to [this university], so

you never know.

Tom had started university at the age of 54, having been 'far too clever to go to

school … I knew best at 18, I didn't need it'. His reason for starting the university

course was that he had 'been ignorant most of [his] life', he wrote and performed

poetry but he 'started to realise that while Joe Public loved it, it was badly written and

I decided that I wasn't all that bright. I'd got ideas but I needed to structure them, so

it sort of came from there'. Tom's decision to improve his standard of writing had

turned into a 'thoroughly enjoyable' six years. In his first year he had taken an

access course and followed that with five years at university. His quest to improve

his writing, attending university and discussing the subjects and the process with his

daughter had then encouraged her to undertake a degree as a full-time mature

student and was also inspiring his young granddaughter to look towards a university

education in her future. His love of poetry and writing had brought him into the

university system and changed the habitus of his family with regard to higher

education as something that their family did. A university education was no longer

for other people; it was for people like them.

Marilyn was also a grandparent and her granddaughters were interested in her

studies. They were 13 and 15 at the time of the interview and she explained they

would stay over with her and discuss what they were doing at that time in working towards their GCSEs. They were certainly more actively interested in her study than her children were. They would send her details of newspaper and other articles of interest that they came across in their own studies. She reported this was because they understood what she was doing as they were studying themselves.

Separating or connecting family life and study

Gerson states (1985 cited in Edwards, 1993: 32) 'men are better able to keep paid work and family as separate spheres in their lives'. In this study, the men who raised the issue of family, both in terms of impact on and support by, were those (Carlos and Glen) who studied at the Open University. Because they were at the OU their study and home life were physically interconnected, more so than if a student goes out to a face-to-face class. During weekday evenings both Carlos and Glen would go to their study and spend two to three hours studying, each still in the home, but separated from the family. They were permitted to do this as they had 'buy in' as Carlos called it, support to remove themselves from the family, and '100% commitment' which enabled them to remove themselves from childcare and other domestic duties during this time. Carlos stressed though that when he was there, at other times: 'you've got me, the whole of me'. Carlos and Glen were different from each other however because Carlos discussed his studies and the highs and lows of the process with his wife, whereas Glen appeared to separate himself, both physically and emotionally.

The ability to remove oneself from the family situation and be permitted to work in this way was not always available and in my sample it had a gendered dimension. Jane and Gina said they were not able to work well at home in the evening because they were still required to look after the children even when their partners were there and theoretically had responsibility for childcare. Leaving the house and going to

study at the university would have been an option but as Gina and Jane both lived over half-an-hour's drive from the university this was not practical as the drive would have added an extra hour onto the time they would be away. Though despite the length of the drive and the distance from home, this strategy may actually have given them more study time. Jane gave an example of a colleague who spent one of her non-class evenings per week babysitting for another's children. In this way the student was able to sit and concentrate on her studies once her friend's children were in bed. She was no longer at the 'beck and call' of her own teenage children and she could not be distracted by jobs in her own home. Talking of trying to study at home during the evening Jane reported:

> I've tried that a few times and I know if [husband] is here at night, if I can
> go upstairs at 6 o'clock, after tea. … Well, it doesn't work, just like you
> said and you can hear them playing around down here, and then they are
> in the bath and then it's time for bed, and it's 'but I want mummy to read
> me a story as well', and then I have to read [other child] a story as well.
> And then it's mummy will say night-night as well … but I'm trying to give
> something to everybody, but for me as well. Doing it the best way
> (Jane).

Jane's children were still very young, her second child born during her degree, so there was little understanding on the children's part as to what studying entails. Her husband though did little to prevent the interruptions and whilst he was financially supportive of her study, both in paying for the degree programme and paying for a babysitter whilst she attended class on the nights he was away from home, there was little mention of either emotional or practical domestic support. Even though Jane tried to separate herself physically, she seemed unable or unwilling to separate herself emotionally from her childcare responsibilities although her partner was in the house.

Within relationships negotiations of roles and responsibilities are obviously a two-way issue. Carlos and Tia had both discussed what was needed for their study requirements with their partners and kept to the pattern negotiated. Even when Jane attempted to physically separate from her family she still wanted to be, and was drawn into, being involved. She did not wish to miss out on bath time and story time as Carlos did. However, the difference here is that Jane's children were much younger and as such demanded more hands-on care than Carlos's older children (10 and 15).

Gina had supported her husband through a part-time degree before she embarked on hers. He studied three nights a week at which time she had full responsibility for the childcare. Whilst she studied he had responsibility for the childcare on the nights that she was out of the house. However she did not feel that her husband took on the same level and amount of this responsibility. Although she stressed that he was 'fine, there has not been a time when he's had a go at me for doing it, or made me feel guilty for doing it. I do that for myself'. At this point she sounded quite resentful for the

> three nights a week and many Sundays that I had to disappear with the
>
> children so he could get on and do it, or supposedly got on and do it
>
> (Gina).

Whilst she had two nights out each week for classes, other study time during the nights and weekend had not been negotiated. It was assumed (by both her husband and herself) that she would do this during her day off (from her paid work) during the week. Despite Gina increasing her work hours there had been no further discussion or negotiation of domestic responsibilities. She still did the bulk of this before she went to work in the morning even though she was now working four full days per

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week and doing a part-time degree. Like Jane, Gina put the family before her study.

This was despite the fact that she reported that both she and Jane were

> the sort, we don't just want to pass, do we? We really put our heart and
> soul into it doing, you know, not just to get a 40% the pass, but to do the
> best that we can. You work to your own standards, don't you really and
> you're the same aren't you, so sometimes it has been a hard slog. (Gina)

The work required to 'do their best' had though to be fitted in around the family and

work requirements without the structured time 'out' of family responsibilities available

to the male students Carlos and Glen and the single-parent families of Bridget and

Katie. Although reporting on leisure time Haywood *et al* (1990) state:

> women have less leisure time, participate less in most leisure activities
> and draw on a narrower range of leisure options than men. They also
> spend most of their leisure time in and around home and family (1999:
> 130).

Time, activity and space are therefore more limited for women and this in relation to

study restricts both their access to and ability to prioritise it in the same way as men

appear to do. Reflecting on the ability to undertake lifelong learning within her own

work/life balance, a woman working in HE reported: 'to do research we need a wife'

(Loumanksy *et al*, 2007: 235), stressing that women with families are not in the same

'starting place' as men and single women with no family responsibilities. This is a

similar picture to the students in my research. Women with families could not as

Gatrell suggests 'mak[e] yourself and your studies the priority' (2006: 49).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have called the impact of part-time study on the family, ripples, to

signal ripples caused by a stone in a pond. The family ripples created by part-time

education, I suggest, may be less dramatic than the shockwaves created by a member of the family studying full-time as a mature student. There appears to be less change in personal identity mainly because of the different timings. Study is not as intense so the impact on family time is less, and study is over a longer time-frame. Therefore, there is more time for the family to negotiate study and family time as well as the growing-up of children during the length of the degree. The changes that occur are more gradual than the immersion of a student into a full-time degree programme with the related change in identity. To a certain extent some of these 'gentler ripples' are gendered. The women in this study particularly reported that they did not want their study to 'impact too much' (Shirley) on the family. They were aware that their educational efforts might indeed cause shockwaves within the family and tried to adopt particular strategies of low impact to ensure that this did not happen. This was so even within the narratives of women such as Weronika, where her study was directed towards a change of career, and one that would definitely have a positive impact on the family financially, when she completed her studies and became employed as a lawyer. This diminution of the impact of study on the family dynamics, however, was not evident in the male narratives. Their study patterns did and were expected to cause an impact on family dynamics and this in most cases was supported by partners and children, allowing men their space to study.

Comparison between full- and part- time students with regards to the effect study has on family relations is one area that would certainly benefit from further research, as is the gendered nature of familial support mechanisms. Raddon's study (2007), although focusing on distance learners at Masters level, is significant as it fully details the gendered nature of the part-time learning. It provides a 'fine-grained analysis' (Fuller: 2007) of the cohort. Of particular interest to this study, Raddon stresses:

> it was notable that issues such as caring and domestic responsibilities, in
>
> particular, were areas in which gender themes were highly evident. This

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reflects the large body of feminist research on gender, learning, care and domestic work (2007: 178).

She continues that whilst it is important not to 'essentialise' the experiences and themes 'gender clearly is an issue' (2007: 178). The issues raised show gendered familial support mechanisms and also different presentations of the issues around support from women and men, with women highlighting domestic concerns with greater regularity than male respondents. However, the students under investigation by Raddon were post-graduate students and thus had their earlier undergraduate experiences to draw upon to support their personal learning practices. The programme was also 'a professionally-orientated course' and many of the learners already worked 'in fairly senior roles or are advanced in their careers'. Almost half of the respondents had no children and those that did had older children (2007: 167). There were differences from the interviewees in my research. One major difference was that in an already 'fairly senior role' continuing professional development will be part of an expectation of the role, and thus raise the profile and status of study both within the family and wider community. The similarities though of challenges of time and space for studying and the 'specifically gendered aspect of women's responsibility for caring and for domestic work in the "greedy" sphere of the home' (2007: 179) are very relevant to this study. As shown above, the issues of home and space when studying as a distance learner impact differently from those of a face-to-face learner as a greater proportion of the study is done within the home. To relate back to full-time students, there is still the expectation that a high proportion of study time will be spent on the university campus. For both part-time and distance learners this is likely to be a lesser proportion of the overall study time. Thus the issues of home and family are more significant when investigating part-time students, and as Schuller noted (above) an area in need of further investigation.

Many of the students in this study were in long-term partnerships and the support received particularly from partners was seen as crucial in their success as part-time students. Support came in many forms and crucially both women and men benefited. Four types of support were discussed; practical, financial, academic and emotional. In some instances partners could be supportive in one area, for example by offering practical or financial support, but unsupportive in another, such as emotionally. It was not only partners who could offer support; in some cases parents, children and siblings were part (or all) of the support network. However families, as well as partners can offer 'mixed support'. There were some students who felt supported by family even when they could give no concrete examples of support. Lack of prevention from studying, by a partner or the wider family, was thus occasionally interpreted as support.

Within my study part-time students acted as role models to both children and grandchildren. This could change the family habitus in relation to HE study. They developed an awareness that HE study was accessible to 'people like them' and although not an easy journey, it was one that was largely reported as enjoyable. This enjoyment translated into more positive expectations of education. Enjoyment as a resource for successful study will be returned to in chapter 4, 'It's just what I do'.

Even where students reported that they were 'doing it for themselves' part-time study impacted on the family in many ways, both positive and negative, but these impacts on the family were negotiated. Where sacrifices were made (and major sacrifices were reported in order to enable students to complete their degrees) they were by both the students and their partners, but more obviously and extensively by the students themselves.

There were clear gendered differences in the support accessed by the students. Married men with children reported more support than women with children, but in

comparison the men were working full-time whereas in most cases the women were working part-time. However, the single mothers in the study structured their time and space in a similar way to married men, and because they had no partner to work around or support them, had greater freedom of when and where to choose to study. As Raddon reports, 'the women in particular write very positively about their partner's support' (2007: 175) which as she shows is quite different from earlier studies.

Finally, this chapter has shown that students in many different family structures can be successful students. In this sample there were students in couples, families with young children, families with teenage and adult children still living at home, families whose children had left home, as well as single people. They had all successfully negotiated both study and work commitments alongside family ones. There were many examples of underrated mentors, partners, parents, children and other family members on whom the student relied for emotional, practical, academic and financial support. The family ripples of education in the majority of these cases were positive and the narratives of 'I would not have finished without my partner's support' were a dominant theme and a stronger narrative than I had expected to find, even though as I have reported the positive narratives were not always unproblematic. However, some of the students had little support from family members and for those interviewees 'other people' were important to their study success, in both the initial inspiration and enthusiasm to begin study and crucially in maintaining that motivation to continue their study journey. Chapter 3 follows with a discussion of how students interacted with 'other people' (both intra- and extra-institutionally) during their studies, and how these others impacted and supported the interviewees in the absence of, and in addition to, support from the family.

Chapter 3

The importance of social bonds: Students, tutors, Councillors and God

This chapter examines the impact of 'other people' on my interviewees in their pursuit of part-time study. By 'other people' I mean people who are not relatives of the students who have had an impact on the part-time students, either before or during their period of study. The focus on such people arises because the interviewees repeatedly and very specifically mentioned individuals beyond family members who had been important in relation to their studying.

The group of people discussed in this chapter falls into two broad categories in terms of location: intra-institutional and extra-institutional. The intra-institutional group refers to those with whom the interviewees had contact in their higher education institution. It includes other students in their cohort and staff, both academic and support. The extra-institutional group includes work colleagues and bosses, friends and neighbours and occasional others (including God!). As I shall discuss, certain gender and class differences emerged in this context.

The relevance of this chapter lies in the fact that just as one does not live life in a vacuum neither does one study in a vacuum. Duck begins his text: 'Nobody needs convincing *that* relationships are important to our lives' (1991: 1) and as Piette (2002) states: 'the role of students' social relationships, both with staff and students on a course, and in students' life outside has perhaps not been accorded the attention it deserves in the lifelong learning literature' (2002: 4).[128] This chapter gives it that

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[128] See also Gaynard (2007) for further discussion on the importance of peer support for women undertaking part-time study.

attention. 'Other people' were important for some students as they had little opportunity to discuss their studies within their family. For others, the interaction was in addition to that which they had from their family. Among those for whom 'other people' were not important a few suggested that relationships with other students could be a drain on their time available to study, even if the social interaction might have been appreciated. In writing about friendship, Allan (1996: 100) suggests that 'friendships are not just freely chosen. They are developed and sustained within the wider framework of people's lives. The choices people make, in other words, are constrained by aspects of social organization over which they have relatively little control'. Here I draw on literature about friendship, as for certain students the relationships with other students developed into friendships whilst for others they remained the 'other students in the group'. The point made by Allan that friendships are 'chosen' within the limits of given social structures is significant and will be returned to later in the chapter, particularly in relation to cross-gendered friendships.

Within my sample some students had multiple contacts that were important to them during their studies, whilst others relied on one person. Open University students Weronika, Tia and Carlos all felt they got full support from their respective partners and considered 'other' contact unnecessary, regarding the latter as a drain on study time. According to Allan (1996: 105),

> people in stable social situations, who have, for example, lived in the
> same area for some period and whose domestic and employment lives
> are settled[129], are likely to have built up a network of friends and have
> relatively little space for new friendships.

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[129] These three students would certainly fit that category.

However, others in the sample established firm friendships networks during their degree in a similar way to that anticipated by full-time students.[130]

The women in my sample were more vocal about all relationships than the men, whether the relationships were supportive or otherwise. Some of the men barely mentioned relationships with others. I undertook a detailed analysis of the transcripts in terms of the frequency with which friendship/relationships with other students were mentioned, to see whether I focussed more on relationships when talking with female interviewees than with the males, but this was not so. In most of the interviews I asked very similar questions but on the whole the men gave less full answers, even on probing about this area. It just was not reported as important to their studies.[131] Dickens and Perlman (1981, cited in Allan, 1996) suggest that whilst men tend to have larger friendship networks than women, women are more likely to confide in friends and discuss fears and anxieties. Belenky *et al* (1997) affirm that 'many more women than men define themselves in terms of their relationships and connections to others' (1997: 8). This would make the women more likely to discuss the role of friends within their lives during the interviews than the men as they would see friends as an important part of their lives, and therefore their studies. And as fears and anxieties are more likely to be discussed by women, discussion of fears and anxieties about study could be seen as feminised thus less likely to be discussed by men, between themselves and with me in interview.

Allan (1996) suggests that 'men are frequently involved in social activities with others which are geared around quite specific activities and pastimes. However, many,

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[130] UCAS now has a social-networking site for students to 'meet' others before they arrive at university.

[131] Yet see Messner, 1992; Williams, 1992; Franklin II, 1992 for research into the importance of men's friendships across different ethnic groups (cited in Whitehead, 2002: 158).

though not all, of these relationships are likely to be quite shallow in terms of the degree to which significant personal issues and concerns are discussed' (1996: 93), so it may also be the case that the men were just focussing on the activity (be it study or the interview) and thus less vocal on personal issues and concerns whereas the women were prepared to and wanting to discuss these.

As completing a degree takes time, relationships on the periphery may become problematic since the student has to focus on study in order to be successful, whilst still giving time to family and possibly developing new relationships amongst her new peers. As Rachel said with regards to existing friendships: 'It is more difficult, you do have to restrict yourself with regards to social life and I was sending an email every year, I know I've fallen off the radar, but I'm back now'. The first part of the chapter focusses on the new relationships, both with students and staff at the HEI and later moves to considering existing relationships.

Intra-institutional relationships

In this section contact with other people in the HEI during the degree is considered. The others under consideration are students who studied alongside my sample, tutors and other university staff.

Students

Throughout this thesis I argue that studying for a degree as a part-time student is in many ways different from doing so as a full-time student. For those undertaking a full-time degree programme fellow students are considered to be integral to the experience of being a student, and indeed whole weeks (previously 'freshers', now 'welcome' weeks are a standard part of the full-time university entrance

experience[132]) are organised to enable new-comers to interact with others in the same situation to allow these relationships and friendships to develop and to imbed new students into university culture. My professional experience and my research here have shown that part-time students' relationships with their fellow students are less straightforward. Establishing new relationships with fellow students does not appear to be central to becoming and being a part-time student, although many participants reported it as an important facet of their success.

In the case of traditional 18-year old students beginning a full-time degree, the expectation is still that they will move away from home, live in university accommodation and be immersed in university life for the next three to four years of their life, with university being the main focus not only of study but also of their social life, where friends, in effect 'become surrogate family members' (Wilcox *et al*, 2005: 716).[133] As Kember states: '[part-time] students cannot undertake a rite of passage as pictured by van Gennep (1960), and enter a new way of life as a full-time on-campus student does' (1999: 110). Many of the students in this sample did not identify themselves as 'real students' because they did not fit the expectation and norms of the category 'student'. And just as part-time students do not undertake certain rite of passage into their new circumstances, neither are they likely to experience separation from their current milieu. Thus emersion into a new friendship group is not considered by them or the institutions to be a major priority in this venture.

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[132] Many institutions are now offering some type of induction event to part-time students, but certainly in my own institution the length and depth of the event may vary depending on which department is offering the provision and can be as short as one hour.

[133] As explained in the introduction I acknowledge that not all full-time students have this experience, but this is still the 'expected' one.

Tinto (1975, 1987) uses Durkheim's (1961) theory of suicide to suggest that the students least likely to drop out of courses are the ones most closely integrated into university life. Part of that integration is the friendship network that develops within the cohort of students studying any particular course. The journey through the part-time degree can be affected greatly by one's cohort of students and interactions with other students. Wilcox *et al* (2005: 707) argue that 'to understand higher education student retention equal emphasis needs to be placed on successful integration into the social world of the university as into the academic world'. As I shall analyse, for some part-time students the social side of the degree was as important as the subject of study, for others it was more marginal and sometimes problematic and a component of the programme where much improvement was suggested. Over half of my sample considered that the social aspect of studying was particularly important. Aspects of the social that were significant included: having a bond with others and knowing they were in a similar position; support from other students when the work or the emotional aspects of study were hard; general support through regular interaction; the various strengths individuals brought to the group; and academic and intellectual discussions.

Having a bond with other students and knowing that others were in a similar position kept Julia, for example, on the course when she had to write her first assignment and did not understand what she was being asked to do:

> You form bonds, sort of bonds, that are there in similar situations, and you realise that you are not the only one. … Yeah, and you're all struggling, and you speak to each other, and I think that plays a really big part, having somebody to turn to, and to talk to, and I think you always imagine that you're the only one that's going to struggle (Julia).

Julia's bond enabled better acceptance and coping with the situation, even though it was a new situation that took her beyond her original comfort zone. Without the development of this early bond Julia reported that she might have been one of the 'dropouts' from the programme. Kember (1999) found this to be the case, suggesting that friends can be an important source of help with a course, and one of his respondents stated, in a similar way to Julia: 'Luckily the support from my group kept me to stay in the course. I knew that I wasn't the only person to have problems in the first assignment' (Kember, 1999: 120). Johnson and Johnson (1989) confirm this:

> Considerable relief is often felt when persons discover that they are not
> the only person who has reacted they way they have or who has
> experienced the feelings they do. Discovering the similarity in
> experiences, reactions, actions and feelings reassures individuals that
> they are normal (1989: 14).

Understanding that the reactions and feelings towards the new experience are quite normal can help the student to go through the process of doing the assignments and move forward onto the next piece of work and the next module, rather than thinking they are the only one struggling with the assignment and the process of doing it, and allowing those worries to prevent them from moving forward in their studies.

For Rachel the building of new bonds had been particularly significant. At the same time as starting her degree, she was made redundant and her long-term relationship ended, leaving her homeless:

> I know, it's like a sad story, isn't it. In the first seminar group when you
> have to introduce yourself I was like 'has anybody got a job?' I had
> nothing, so for me that was quite important to build up a little friendship.

Because you spend so much time here in the evenings[134] you don't have

much other social life throughout the year, so that was really nice, I did

like that. (Rachel)

The ties became stronger as the years progressed: 'Right through the year, we

would maybe go for something to eat after a lecture or just a drink in the bar'. These

friendships developed and Rachel attended weddings of others within her group. At

the time of the interview Rachel had literally just finished studying, her final exam had

been held in the previous week. The group had discussed how to keep their

friendship active when they were no longer seeing each other three nights per week.

They realised that they needed to be pro-active, not to let the friendship fade away

when they no longer had 'that luxury' of seeing each other structured by their degree

course.[135]

Work on the retention and recruitment of widening-participation students including

part-time students by Alsop and Gonzalez-Arnal (2006) suggests 'that contact with

and support from other students in the same position as them was a key ingredient in

enabling successful study' (2006: 8). Diane had a particularly supportive friendship

group that had grown out of her studies:

I suppose the big, the main factor in it was that I really liked the people

that I was on the course with, we will all get together, we socialise

together, so that was a big part of it really, and I suppose in some ways

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[134] Her degree required attendance 3 or 4 nights per week, depending on the yearly cycle.

[135] Contact with Rachel towards the end of this project suggested that they are still in regular
contact despite no longer seeing each other in class. Two of the group now have babies and
visit each other regularly.

was secondary, but we were all as passionate about the subject as each
other, so I suppose we've been a very supportive group. (Diane)

Her group met regularly outside of class, and had met since finishing their studies. Their next group outing had already been planned and they had booked the group's Christmas meal. Their degree was 'Country House Studies', and this subject gave them an agenda for outings. Although still reporting that she was 'surprised' to have earned a degree she was elated that she had joined, and become good friends with an enthusiastic group of like-minded people: 'I can't imagine us never being in touch now'.[136]

The students above had experienced a small group of people in the same situation making a new friendship group. For others it was the acquisition of one particular person as a friend in the same situation that was important. Here Lucy describes her friendship with one of the other students. As above Lucy met and gelled with many of her cohort and they frequently went out socially as a group, but with one particular student she had been like 'peas in a pod, … she's older than me, she's old enough to be my mother, but we hit it off really well and we've got on really well and encouraged each other'. They had 'talked through everything' and Lucy had received a great deal of support through her final year even though her friend had repeated her own penultimate year. Lucy and her friend had been able to offer each other more support as they were not in the final year together and so were able to focus on one dissertation followed by the other rather than diluting the concentration by trying to focus on both subjects at the same time. Although Lucy felt sorry that her

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[136] Again contact with Diane suggests that some of the group are still meeting and visiting country houses regularly two years after the end of their degree programme. Allan (1996: 108-9) suggests that the 'sociability' of friendships is barely mentioned as without it the friendship would not exist, but that in some relationships shared social activities (in this case visiting country houses) provides the main context for the friendship.

friend had not made it through the degree and graduated alongside her, she acknowledged that the fact that they gave each other such support may also have been detrimental to her own study in her final year:

> in hindsight it has probably kind of worked out for the best, because (…) er now that we weren't doing year six together because we would have had each other's research projects in our heads as well as our own, because we talk through everything, so in hindsight it maybe has worked out. (Lucy)

Sue, another interviewee, also had received a great deal of support from one particular student:

> Mainly if I was stuck, I would ring her and she would say oh, come down. She's always been helpful, she's been *more than* helpful, and she'd do anything she can. We've often sat on her living room floor and we've had books out, and notes out all over the floor. (Sue)

Sue also acknowledged that the whole group had been emotionally supportive to her though to a lesser degree:

> Emotional support I've had from the other people on the course, 'cos we've all had times when we can't do it anymore, and they've all been encouraging, you know, come on you can do it. And I think most of them hit a problem at some point. So emotional-wise I would say they were [my support]. (Sue)

Sue reported that others in her group had received support in a similar way.

When any of the students had 'hit a problem' the group was supportive and would ring or email each other to give encouragement and motivate them through whatever

crisis was at hand. Nonetheless her own main support had come from the one particular student to whom she would turn first.

The support in times of difficulty, either from the group or one particular student, had kept many of my interviewees focussed and enabled them to continue studying through a particular rough patch. Bridget had lost study time owing to a domestic incident and found it difficult to keep up with her university work alongside an acrimonious court case, but with support from others in the group she had dealt with the situation, caught up work-wise and managed to carry on. Although Bridget reported being quite a private person, the others in the group had known that she had had difficulties and offered support by email and telephone, collected lecture notes for the classes that she was not able to attend and delivered books back to the library to stop the fines building up. In this way, and with support from the academic department by allowing her a short extension time to hand in her work, Bridget completed the year only a little behind schedule and was able to start the new academic year with all her previous work completed and submitted.

Many of my interviewees stressed that they were willing to support others in the groups that they had been in, in many ways and this was part of the study experience for them. They wanted the other students to complete the degrees, particularly when they had become close through up to six years with the same cohort. When others dropped out it had been unsettling, a reminder that lives are messy and that major difficulties can cause even the most self-confident and determined of students not to complete as planned and within the original time frame. In some cases the group support and camaraderie was so important that students chose to complete their studies and graduate with an ordinary degree rather than completing the required credits for an honours degree. This was usually when students had been studying

under duress from outside pressures[137] and would only complete their honours degree at a later date than their fellow students. Students in this situation are very aware of what their decision means and why they are making it, but for them to graduate with their class mates is important. Not to do this would, to them, have been seen as a failure. Strength of friendship groups, combined with difficult personal circumstances made the decision to leave with a lesser qualification than originally planned a sensible decision in the circumstances.

Crises points were not the only time when part-time students benefited from the support of their peers. More generally, regular support was key to their success, either when they met at class or through telephone calls, email and text messaging. This theme was repeated by many in the sample, even those who felt that friendship and socialising with other students was not particularly important for them. Berni stated:

> I don't socialise with them. Obviously, some live in [town name], some
> live in [town name], there is quite a distance and [town name] and things,
> but we do speak on the phone. We will bounce ideas around with each
> other, either on the phone, or we will text or things like that. …Yes, you
> would get on the phone and be, what about this, I'll read it to you and you
> then read me yours.

The geographical spread of the students on Berni's course had made out-of-class face-to-face social interaction difficult but phoning, texting and emailing were part of the regular interaction outside of class with four other students with whom Berni had formed a group. She would have liked the opportunity to work together face-to-face

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[137] For example, one student that made this decision had a partner who had been diagnosed with a brain tumour, another was looking after a newly-disabled relative, and a third was commuting across country on a weekly basis to care for elderly parents.

outside of class. Because of the geographical spread of the group, break-times during the day at university were a vital part of this regular interaction[138]. When the group did meet at university they got together and would talk about their work, discuss what they had done, ask what others had done and how they had found the work:

> because when we do get there on a Tuesday we are all like [SIGNALS CHATTING WITH FINGERS] and you do, have you done this, I've done that, can I have a look at yours, oh I didn't do it that way, why did you look at that, I thought this was good, didn't you read that. So that is quite good.

Through these interactions, they helped each other to understand various topics. One example Berni gave of a possible misunderstanding was when the group was studying the nature/nurture debate:

> you might not be learning it right, there was one particular week we were doing something about nature/nurture, attachment theory and all things like that, and, erm, we all started talking in the break, and I said, oh, I don't think it's that, and somebody said, yes it is, that's what she said, and I'm like, no she didn't say that at all, so after the break we went back and said, we think it's this and they think it's that, what is it? And then they put us right and I think if you didn't have that conversation you might have gone on learning from that point and learning something completely different.

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[138] In this way part-time day students may have more time to socialise together between classes than those who attend classes in the evenings.

This general interaction was felt by Berni to be important in helping her understand the topics taught to the group. She was concerned that not having that conversation with her fellow students might have meant her misunderstanding a whole topic. Such checking, through bouncing back ideas with one another, was valuable for her.

Jean thought that any friendship was of secondary importance to the degree itself but she acknowledged that a person having made friends within a group was more likely to become a successful student. She discussed the fact that one of the things that she felt made students successful was regular attendance, and having friends in a class was more likely to make you attend, even if the motivation was flagging:

> If you have friends in the group you are more likely to go even if it is cold, dark and raining on a January evening. You have got to have that motivation. If somebody expects you to be there it is good, even if it's your own friends. (Jean)

Gina and Jane kept in regular contact with each other: 'we do support each other, don't we? It is, you know, you are nearly there, only a few more thousand words and you will be finished'. They would lend each other books and photocopy articles of interest for the other.

Of the men in this sample only Steve talked about regular interaction in the same way as the women above did. He stated that within his group there was

> very good support, socially, but also they've helped me with note taking, as I have problems with my fingers and I can't write so fast, so I've had notes taken from some of the people, and obviously, miss any class they all collect the notes for you anyway, so I think it has been good like that, and we've all encouraged each other, ringing each other, emailing each

other and everything, and we've all inputted what we can to help each other.

In Steve's case he got little support from his family, in fact his mother actively discouraged him from attending any higher-level education, advising that it was better for him not to try than to attempt it and fail. However, Steve had started studying at BTEC level at his local college, continued to an HNC and then transferred to university with many of the same group to complete to degree level: 'about 50% of the HNC carried on with the university' (Steve). It was the support of his peer group from college that initially persuaded him and continually encouraged him to persist in his studies. During the five years he had studied with this group of men they had become 'mates' and occasionally went out socially as well as giving academic and practical support to each other. Without this support, and had he have taken his mother's advice, he would not have continued beyond the HNC. Steve was not especially confident in his academic ability, the support given by his student peer group was significant in his study journey and they had acted as both peer-mentors and peer-tutors at various points.

In their work on Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), Donaldson and Topping (1996) describe various forms of peer-assisted learning, including but not limited to, cooperative learning, peer tutoring and peer mentoring. Although the processes described by Donaldson and Topping are more formally constructed, the students in this sample reported ways in which they had informally worked in a PAL-way. Weronika and Tia both reported being and becoming peer-tutors for other members of their groups. Sue and Marilyn described cooperative learning in a way which supported their learning processes. Marilyn also often took on the role of peer tutor with a couple of students in her group. Jen and Katie reported mentoring other students, both peers on the courses they were on and mentoring others during the

process of becoming students and in their efforts to engage in new learning opportunities.[139]

Carlos had limited contact with other students as he studied at the Open University, but when asked if he would have preferred further contact acknowledged that it would have been beneficial:

> I think any human would, that is where you develop for God's sake, yeah, a problem shared is a problem halved at the end of the day.

Reflecting back on the process he realised that in the only module he did have greater contact with another student he had achieved better results.

Not all students had had successful and meaningful contact leading to friendship from their studies. Colin, for example, explained that in his case interaction was limited by two factors, his personality and the gender division of the classes he attended:

> There were two difficulties. One was my own personality, I do tend to be a bit introverted, which wasn't helped by being at sea and the second thing is of course that I did find myself the only man amongst classes which were 99.9% women.

He would have preferred more general interaction, feeling that it would have helped his understanding in a similar way to Berni's description above. However, this did not happen in his study experience: Colin, in his late fifties when he started studying, had spent much of his working life away at sea in the sole company of men. He was therefore unused to female company and cross-gender friendships. He said: 'I was

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[139] For more details of formal peer-assisted learning see www.peerlearning.ac.uk or www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/resouces/pal.html.

stranded with a lot of women, most of them who were a generation different to me, they were women, I suppose 25, 30s.' This was a problem for him as he did not feel able to join in any interaction that was available:

> They were nice people you know, nice enough people, but they weren't people that I had, that I could identify with, [140] you know. So I didn't find to be quite frank, sitting down at a coffee table indulging in conversation, women talk in groups and for a man to sit down with a group of three or four women to sort of talk, unless you were actually talking about the subject matter then you are at a bit of a loss, you start to feel a bit self-conscious, or at least I did.

He had conversations with the women within the classroom, and talking one-to-one he felt was acceptable and comfortable when talking about the actual subject matter. Colin suggested this was a problem created not only because of the different ages and genders of the members of the group, but also because they were such a disparate group of people from 'different social backgrounds and different environmental backgrounds'. He thought that other than the course they had little in common. Here Allan's (1996) work is relevant, with the suggestion that the move towards friendships is set within a particular social context. In Colin's case, his background and his expectation that cross-gender friendships were unusual prevented him from working towards further connection with the others (mainly female) in the group with whom he felt he had little in common. However, two female members of the same group had a very different experience and rated the support given by the group and friendships created in the group as of paramount importance to them. They reported contact outside the group and support from other students

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[140] Colin was used to a very masculine environment but this contradicts Allan (1996) who suggests that even shy men prefer women to talk to.

within the group. Clearly, different group members experienced the group very differently.

Nevertheless, Colin described that although he would have appreciated more contact, it was not a serious problem. He thought that interaction in the context of group work was beneficial:

> there is a certain amount of knowledge to be gained from interaction with other people, they have an idea and they put it forward and then you put another idea forward and between the two of you during the conversation you probably find a third idea arises, you are never quite sure where it comes from.

As this however had not happened for him, Colin suggested that it was a problem not only for him but also possibly for part-time students in general:

> The interaction between the students, but how you are going to solve that problem I don't know but that seems to be inherent within the part-time system to be frank.

Colin did not elaborate on this. But issues such as limited time probably played a role in this view. The other men in this study also had limited regular interaction with others and depending on their motivation did not regard it as always necessary for their studies. In my earlier research, however, limited opportunity for interaction with other men was raised as problem by some of the younger men. Kieran who studied in a group with just one other man, suggested that it was important for him to have

Ben in the same group, and that if Ben had not been in the group, or if Ben had left Kieran himself felt he might also have given up his studies (Medhurst, 2003). [141]

Although there were a few women who thought that regular interactions with other students were unnecessary for their studies, on the whole the women in my sample were more likely to consider this part of their degree experience, and a part that helped them to enjoy the experience and get them through difficult times. Even the women for whom it was not necessary, and who considered themselves independent in their studies including Jean, Tia, and Maggie, saw that it was useful as a backup and the relationships that did develop were an added bonus as long as they did not interfere with their study. Maggie, talking of how relationships had developed, reported:

> we've got on alright, there are one or two of them that have got really
>
> friendly with each other, and I'm quite friendly now with another girl who
>
> is quite local. She's quite an independent type as well, so we get on well,
>
> but you know, in our own way.

The interaction within a given group was not just about studying the subject and recognising similarities of interest. The students enjoyed the diverse range of people they met, and this was frequently commented upon. Groups had ranged from 18 – 80 year olds and spanned the social spectrum so interaction was with a very diverse group of people. Whereas Colin had raised this diversity as a problem, most considered it an advantage. One of the advantages of the students all being mature was the strengths and expertise brought to the groups because of their different

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[141] Kieran was in his late twenties when he started a six-year part-time degree programme in the social sciences. He was in year 3 at the time of the interview. At the end of year 5 the only other male in the group had to intercalate owing to ill health. However, Kieran, at that point just one year from graduation did stay and complete the degree despite his earlier reservations about being the only male in the group.

social and work backgrounds and experience. Steve reported how some of the group were particularly helpful with IT as they worked with and were therefore more familiar with the IT packages that had to be learnt as part of the Business Management course.

> Well, like some people are more computer orientated, you know, they would help people, or help each other, so I'd say yes, it was a real good class really, a good class, which does help, which helps everyone, we all input a bit.

The ability to benefit from different skills and strengths meant that the students had learnt more from this interaction than without it.

One way in which Julia was able to benefit from the range of experiences the students brought to the group was that one of the men was 'very academic, I think he put an awful lot of time and effort in it, he would get the books before the module started, and read up on it' whereas she 'would draw more from [her] own experience [rather] than from reading the books'. By bringing together both learning styles, Julia felt they had both benefited.

This friendship was one of the few cross-gender friendships that had developed. Many of the friendships and support networks that were discussed as important were single-gender friendships. Indeed, the possibility of cross-gender friendships was questioned in terms of whether it would be 'allowed' by others. Both Keith and Colin questioned the legitimacy of cross-gender friendships within the study environment:

> It is predominantly females on the course and that might look a bit iffy if I was going off to meet other women all the time. I don't mind, I get on well with most of them on the course, but it might be questioned. (Keith)

Keith did not state by whom it would be questioned, whether this would be by his partner or the student's partner, but expressed the sentiment that such cross-gender relationships were unacceptable.

Colin was very much task oriented in his studies. He was there for a purpose and for him the purpose was to learn more about the subject. The secondary benefit of socialising was not recognised by him and socialising was reported as more difficult as he was not used to conversing in groups of women where he was the only male. Although he was there to study and learn a new subject he did not feel willing or able to learn new rules of social interaction, which challenged his gendered expectations of friendships. He thought this was partly due to his age, but as reported earlier this was also an issue for Kieran (a younger student), so it is a concern that departments offering heavily gendered subjects must take into consideration. For the main part, the diverse populations of part-time degree groups was valued and enabled friendships to develop that would otherwise not have materialised, as in the case of Lucy whose close friendship had developed with a woman old enough to be her mother.

Although I have suggested that the development of friendships within particular groups was gendered, the need and desire for academic discussions was raised equally by the men and women in my sample. The main reason Tom had attended university was to get this space for academic discussion. His only other experience of intellectual discussions had been in the pub with one particular friend who had originally been his inspiration for going to university: 'we can clear a pub, we can go and sit in a pub and an hour later we'll look round and they've all gone' [LAUGHING]. He knew he wanted the intellectual development that doing a degree would give him, but he stressed that the main reason for his choice of a course with face-to-face teaching was the 'love [of] the interaction, that's why I didn't go into the Open University because I wanted to talk to people'.

Tom also questioned why some of the other students were studying when they did not seem to enjoy intellectual discussion. When asked how the interaction with the other students had been he replied:

> Mainly very, very good, apart from some very nice, middle-class, middle-aged ladies, who came for reasons best known to themselves. [They] didn't want to talk about philosophy or theory or anything interesting … we would argue quite passionately and they'd walk away and say you mustn't do that. And I'd be, this is what we are here for, but I sometimes wonder if they were. It's like life, all different sorts of people.

Tom thought that those 'middle-class middle-aged ladies' did not want to discuss academic issues. He wanted the social interaction but with an academic focus, whereas he felt that they were attending purely for the social interaction.

Judy wanted social contact alongside academic interaction. The fact that she moved from one university to another as she and her partner relocated meant that she was not in the same group from the start and this made it much more difficult to establish social relationships. To integrate the work she had done in her previous university meant that she was also moving between year groups at her current university so that even when she joined a group she was not a permanent member. She would sometimes join with one year group for a module and the next semester she would study with another year group. She had been pro-active on arriving to try and integrate and suggested that she was lucky in one module as she just happened to sit near someone else in a similar position, but she felt there had been no support from the course tutors to help newcomers integrate within the groups. As she stated:

> There is very little opportunity to get to know the people that you're with and if you don't start at the beginning you are not really in anybody's group.

This was one area where she thought her previous university had been far superior as there were more opportunities to get to know the others in the group through group work and group-building exercises.[142] Judy thought that more opportunities for group work of this type would have helped her and others in a similar situation and recommended that this should happen as standard practice.

Bonds, either with one person or with a small group, enabled many of the students in this sample to continue and enjoy their journey of study, suggesting that it would have been harder and less pleasurable without these social ties. But for some interviewees interaction was not important. However, as discussed some appeared to be quite task/goal oriented, and they also acknowledged that they were not particularly social people and did not need the social interaction to the same extent as others, or that they already had a wide social network and had little room to develop relationships further at the expense of the existing ones. Both Weronika and Tia fitted this category. They thought that the interaction they had had tended to benefit others rather than being a two-way process or of help to themselves. Weronika acknowledged though that when she helped someone as a peer tutor it did further her own learning as the process of teaching others consolidated this learning. Tia said 'whenever I did enter into interaction, I interacted with other students; it tended to be a sort of mentoring of them'. She continued by explaining that she did the degree backwards (by starting with a specific module on 'Issues in Education' because she felt she had some issues in education, then went to the more general courses in psychology) and although she enjoyed encouraging and mentoring others it constrained her personal study time:

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[142] This may be because she started in a group at the same time as the other students in her original HEI, so developed those relationships as the group was forming, rather than joining an already established group.

When I interacted with other students, mentoring them, you know, 'it's not

so bad, don't take it so much to heart, let's think of some study methods

to get you where you want to be', or lending them mind maps, it became

a bit of a drain, so I didn't do it so much, as I just didn't have time.

Within the discussion of 'others' during the interviews, students repeatedly made reference to those who did not complete, who were not successful students, so I now move now to discuss the reflections my interviewees had on those who left as it was an important part of the students' narratives. As the discourse about part-time students is frequently negative (Davies, 1999) and dropping out is seen as the norm (see *inter alia* Quinn *et al*, 2005, McGivney, 1996), my sample were 'deviant' in the sense that they stayed the course. Students who had dropped out may have taken time out and come back into the system at a later date, chosen a different course or decided that higher education on a part-time basis was not for them, either at that time or indeed at all.[143] I asked my interviewees what they thought of those who did not stay the course, what they thought their reasons were and similarities or differences between the two groups, those that successfully completed and those that did not. Within my sample there were reports of: an average of 50% drop-out rate; a class of 80 with only eight remaining at graduation; a class originally filling a large classroom that by the time of the interview only half-filled the room; and in Bridget's group only two out of 46 graduated. These startling figures obviously have implications for the institutions that offer these types of courses, an issue to which I shall return in chapter 5. At the same time it has to be recognized that for the students who stayed, the volume of drop-out also had implications.

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[143] For a comprehensive overview of those who drop out of the system, and a reworking of the term to a less negative understanding (but not necessarily focussing on part-time students) see Quinn *et al* (2005).

Over three-quarters of the women in this sample raised the issue of other students who had dropped out of their course. Some mentioned this at great length; in Sue's case it was the first thing she brought up in the interview. Less than half the men mentioned it, and only Keith mentioned it at any length. This may be due to the difference of task orientation and social orientation, or the greater concern of women for relationships (Belenky *et al*, 1997: 8). During the interview there was no direct question about the issue of those who had dropped out.

My sample provided a variety of analyses of why others dropped out from the course and the effects this had. Bridget reported that it was difficult to consolidate working groups, particularly in the early years because people would be there one week and not the next. Jane felt it was hard to watch others leave, she felt sorry for them, but also did not think that those who left early had put much effort into their attempt. They had not been successful in moving from 'fitting it in' to the 'altered states' that Piette (2002) discusses. Many in my sample, including Jean, Keith, Bridge, Liz, Tom, Colin, Rachel and Gina suggested that staying the course was a personality issue. They considered themselves 'finishers'. As Liz said:

> I always finish what I started, even if I do badly, I don't think I've ever left anything. [LAUGHING] Not the dinner, not the chocolate bar! I finish everything.

Tia said that she did not know the ingredients that made up a successful part-time student but suggested that in a similar way to having a first child, no-one can tell you the upheaval a part-time degree will create in your life. She said that this upheaval can sometimes be too much, particularly if you still have young children because of the amount of time, energy and 'headspace' that they both take. This is similar to Edwards' (1993) argument about families and institutions both being 'greedy

institutions'. Liz also suggested that the 50% drop-out rate[144] on the course had to do with the course being predominantly populated by women, many of whom had jobs or careers as well as children and it was just not possible be able to access that 'head space' in the juggling of all of these commitments (Arksey *et al*, 1994; Blaxter and Tight, 1994).

Dropout and the reasons for it were an issue that Bridget thought institutions should discuss with students on entry or early into the degree programmes, to raise awareness of the potential pitfalls and problem areas. She believed that awareness could lead to prevention, or at least make the students consider how they would deal with any problems that arose. It is, of course, impossible to predict how the future six years of the average part-time degree course will pan out for anybody, and what future events may hold and the reactions to them in relation to current priorities. However, a considered approach to one's potential options might prevent some of the dropping out now so prevalent.

Keith believed he had a finisher/completer personality but suggested that an important issue for his course might well have been the funding. He reported that those who had stayed were funded by an employer and those who had left might not have been. This of course may have been a particular issue for this specific course and, indeed, other courses where employer or other kinds of funding are a possibility.[145]

Some students thought that others had dropped out without giving their degree a reasonable amount of effort or time to settle into routine. These students thought

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[144] Liz had discussed this with the programme leader who told her this was the normal drop-out rate for the course, whatever support strategies they tried to put in place.

[145] Employer and other funding is an issue that is being addressed in the HESCU research by Callender (2007c).

that they had worked through the same issues as those who dropped out, how to fit study into already busy lives, particularly when there are young children involved. Bridget stated that you had to be selfish to be able to do this. Perhaps these students had learnt to be 'selfish', though I would not label it as such. Reay suggests that many women report altruism about studying, 'giving back' to the community or the family 'justifies what they clearly perceived to be an entirely selfish act' (Reay *et al*, 2005: 305). I would propose that the students gave themselves permission to be a priority in their lives for a period of time. Possibly those who had left the programme had not been able to do this for a variety of reasons. As Sue stated: 'you are just fitting in a priority for yourself', in her case and many others having already prioritised others for much of their lives. As student drop-out is problematic for institutions as it leads to reduced funding investigation of the reasons for drop-out is obviously an important area of research[146]. However, as these students suggest there often appears, on the surface, little difference between them and those who drop-out so it is as important, if not more so to concentrate on those who complete successfully in order to make visible the successful students' stories and to act as inspiration to those who would wish to follow. I now move away from the discussion of student/student relationships to look at the relationship between the students in this sample and the staff in the HEIs.

Staff/student interaction

The students in my sample, for the majority of their studies, studied separately from full-time students. This is important, since working with part-time students only is a particular experience for staff who can take full account of the part-time nature of the degree.

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[146] See King (2008) for recommendations for changes to funding as this is increasingly seen as untenable in a move towards a more flexible system.

Adshead and Jamieson's (2001) research on part-time students suggests that 'greater awareness on the part of some tutors, or the classroom dynamics and the needs of individual students, might contribute to a higher retention rate' (6). Many of the students in my study reported that the staff they had encountered had been of vital importance to them. Staff were, on the whole, described as excellent, committed, supportive, going beyond what was expected. Some were, however, described as not being liked, either by the student or by the whole group. Most descriptions of this type were discussed in terms of a clash of personality or dislike of a particular teaching method.

It is interesting to note that many of the tutors were mentioned by name,[147] particularly the excellent ones. There was a focus here on individual tutors. Many were singled out for particular praise and on listening to the interviews I can hear the smile in my voice when I hear of excellent teachers because I believe that a good tutor can make such a difference to the student experience. Students, particularly adult part-time students, are not just in class to learn by rote, but to be enthused and excited by a subject, to learn to think and to question. Enthusiasm for the subject and support of the students' endeavours by the staff were reported by many of the students. This was reminiscent of the advertisement 'you never forget a good teacher' (DfES publicity campaign for tutor recruitment, 2002). Students recalled and remembered their education journey as a series of personal bonds, not least with specific staff. The journey was predictably enhanced when these personal bonds were positive.

Bowl (2003:97) reports:

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[147] This happened in the institutions where I was not familiar with the staff as well as my home institution, where the students interviewed were aware that I knew the tutors.

For part time students, the main point of contact, for both academic and personal issues, was one subject tutor, seen once a week, or once a month, depending on the structure of the course. Generally speaking, no specific time was allowed for part time students to have one to one contact with their tutor.

My respondents confirmed this to be the case, but despite less regular or rigid arrangements for specific time being allowed for tutorial-type one to one contact there were instances reported. Some of the students had been taught in small classes (as part of the pedagogic understanding of the department) and as such had much more opportunity for personal interaction within the active and participatory classes.

Many interviewees talked of their good relationships with members of academic staff. Tom talked of one member of staff with whom he had a tutorial:

She did a tutorial for me, and this course was on a Saturday and it was 10 'til 4, the tutorial was 4.30 for half an hour and we both walked out at 7.30, had not got any further at all, but I was so appreciative, that sort of passion is really, (…) I know you can't have that all the time, it's impractical, but when it does happen that's the bit of university that really sticks. You must have passion to be doing this.

This tutorial was with a member of staff with whom he said he disagreed, him 'being a Marxist and an Atheist and I think she was Roman Catholic, and I think through the rules of academia she couldn't say that'. Yet the passion, that dedication to the students and the willingness to spend time in academic discussion on a Saturday evening was remembered and recounted with genuine appreciation and admiration. Gina and Jane both agreed that their tutors had been very important throughout their six-year degree programme: '[Tutor] is so enthusiastic, it was his classes that we

stayed late, he could just go on and on'. They also agreed that 'every single one of them has been really good'.

Rachel had a particular tutor for whom she had a great respect:

> We had one lecturer this year that we all really adored, it was an option
> so you already liked the topic, it was actually gender, [lecturer name], she
> was incredible, she just sits down, and it just comes out, she doesn't
> have any hand outs, nothing, you are just in the story. … when it was
> somebody like [name] you are just like, have all this new energy because
> it's such a different topic than most people's work anyway so it's nice.

Not all lecturers had been so inspiring however.

> I think it was personal taste, I think it's always the case, there were some
> lectures where I would just sit through the first half and think, just give me
> the handout because you are just reading off it, I can just do this at home,
> and there were lectures where you just have fun, you know, you just love
> to listen to them. (Rachel)

Diane had supportive and helpful tutors with whom her group had developed a close working relationship:

> we did actually go out yesterday and we took [course tutors] with us, and
> we bought their lunch as a thank you, they've just been so helpful really.

The tutors had also applied for and received some funding and encouraged members of Diane's group to contribute work for consideration. They wrote essays and some were chosen to be included in a book, an impressive achievement for undergraduates:

[Course leader] got funding for this, the students that were on the course, anybody who, it was voluntary and anybody who wanted to do anything, you know an essay on some aspect on country houses in the county.

Katie had received moral support that encouraged her to go on when she was faltering at the final hurdle. On attending university to register for the final year she felt that it was too much:

when I went to enrol for my final year, erm, as I walked into the university, the room where you sign all the forms and everything, I was just stood there in absolute floods of tears and [administrator] came over and was, 'what's the matter, what's the matter?' And I was, 'I can't do this, I can't start doing it', and [course leader] came over and said, 'what's the matter', and I was still saying, 'I don't think I'm clever enough, I don't know why I've bothered'. You know, you are good enough, I got this big motivational talk on, you know, yeah, as far as diversity goes, it doesn't go much worse than the situation you're in, but you've got this far, you know, come on, is it worth jacking it in at this moment? And I was, ok I'll sign up.

She signed up, completed the degree and graduated in the summer just after the interview took place. For a single mum who considered herself 'not very academic' she had proved that she could be academic and that she had the stamina to get to the end of a part-time degree that took five years from start to finish. The encouragement from the course leader at a vital time had kept her on track. The course leader had shown a genuine interest in her, she knew her personally and her situation, and was able to convince her of how far she had already come in terms of studying and encourage her to complete her final year and her degree.

Lucy similarly benefited from tutors knowing her personally and being familiar with her personal journey. She explained that coming through the courses that were run in the local community had been a good experience and the tutors still 'kept an eye out' for their students:

> And it's good if they know what you are doing, what course you are on and whatever, so I think that those who teach the particular courses are good at keeping an eye on their students and seeing how they are getting on and that sort of thing. …they'll see them in the corridor and it's like you know, 'hi Lucy, how are you doing?', that is a real plus that contact, they should keep that up.

The fact that students are seen and known as individuals, not just as 'another student', and that tutors keep track and ask how they are getting on was considered by Lucy to be important. That personal contact, to feel that somebody in the establishment knows about you was a powerful motivator for many students (see Broadfoot, 2008).

A tutor who inspired Bridget had retired during her time at university and this had caused her upset:

> there was one tutor that I got on with particularly well, who actually retired, so I was completely gutted when that happened. He was exceptionally good, because if you showed an interest in something, he always had heaps and heaps of papers that he could bring in and say there is some extra reading about the subject. He was rather good.

Not all her relationships with the tutors had been as good as this one, but most had been at least satisfactory. However, not all students had built relationships with the staff. When I asked Liz about this she suggested there was no relationship:

Fine, well there isn't one, no, except in the lecture, I don't see them as
lecturers, I think I've spoken to my personal tutor two or three times. I
haven't needed anything. Whenever I've had to go and ask for anything
they've been perfectly helpful, perfectly reasonable, but I just haven't
asked for anything.

A number of students suggested that they would have felt a failure if they had
needed to go to or contact a tutor. This was particularly the case with students
studying at the Open University. For Carlos, the need to contact anyone for support
or to discuss the subject rarely came up during his degree:

It's actually quite interesting that you say that, because I never really
apart from [wife] leant on anybody. We have tutors, I may have rung
them up a couple of times, when there was something I couldn't see, but
apart from that it has always been from within, as it were.

Glen had spoken to tutors during the tutorial time but had not needed anything further
from them:

The only contact was if I needed it, I don't think I ever needed to phone
any of them, the offer is always there, but I don't think I ever needed to.

Like Carlos and Glen, both Weronika and Tia, all OU students, had minimal contact
with tutors:

I never found that I needed to phone the tutors, I never, I always find
enough in the books, and enough on the internet, or doing my own

research, which I always enjoyed, that I didn't need any extra help, so that was fine. (Weronika)[148]

Tia found that she got on well with the tutors:

Fine, I always got on really well with my tutors; I think they always found me quite challenging, because I had an opinion, just a little one! [LAUGHING] (Tia)

And despite getting on with the tutors she had no wish to contact them: 'I always felt it would be a failure if I rang the tutor.' (Tia)

Weronika and Tia were confident women who completed Open University degrees with first class honours, and as such were independent learners and liked this style of learning.[149] But Steve and Pete, who did not feel independent or necessarily confident in their academic ability, wanted more from the tutors and felt that they should have had more. They were disappointed that it did not come 'as standard' (Steve). They were aware that they could have asked for more help and support, but they felt that they should have received more general contact and support without having to ask for it

Maybe a bit more (…) personal tuition time I'd say would have been quite good. … Like, most probably they were available, but they weren't advertised enough, I don't think. (Steve)

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[148] A view confirmed by Bowl (2003:98).

[149] Both commented that to study at a traditional university might not have suited them as well, and Weronika was worried about the greater interaction, and perhaps less independent learning in her follow-on course.

And rather than ask for help individually, he felt that it should have been offered to the whole group, over and above the scheduled teaching time:

> Like say there was a problem with a certain aspect of something that a few people were struggling with, maybe they could say, right we will stay half-an-hour over for whoever wants to stay, I think maybe that could have been a bit more organised.

Bowl (2003:88) reports that students:

> Expressed a desire for greater support and guidance, but did not seem to feel that they could ask for more help from tutors, nor did they feel that tutors would offer such help.

Shirley, in the same group as Pete and Steve (described above) thought that the relationship with the tutors was 'brilliant, super' apart from a couple who had 'been difficult … but I haven't had any problems'. Yet when asked about contact, like Weronika and Tia she 'tried to avoid that, as I felt as though I should really be getting on with it on my own'.

There may well be a class issue here. Weronika and Tia are both middle-class women.[150] Shirley, Pete and Steve were working-class but less confident about their academic ability. According to Tett (2004: 254) where there is a choice of HE providers, working-class students choose institutions with other students 'like them' in terms of class, gender and race (Tett, 2004: 254). If there is little choice in an area, perhaps with only one provider, the choice will be either to attend courses by that provider or not attempt HE. This may leave working-class students as a minority and

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[150] Even if they had a working-class upbringing and did not like the class system (Tia).

less able to request the support they feel is necessary for them but that the institution does not offer as standard.

Tia reported that she had challenged quite a few of the tutors because she had, and was prepared to offer, her opinion on various topics. Weronika went further than that with one particular tutor in her final year, and challenged the marks she had been given in that module. She described the marking system of the Open University as 85% and upwards for a First. For one module she started with 84% and stayed at that level for every piece of work submitted, whereas on other modules she would submit the first piece, and then her marks would steadily improve throughout the module. She challenged the mark given, but the tutor, new to teaching and to the Open University, was steadfast that she would not give a first as there were mistakes in the work. When Weronika checked what was wrong with her work 'one "there" wasn't there and one "a" wasn't there. They were the only mistakes in the whole 3,000-word, 8-page assignment'. The tutor said that the work was 'Absolutely excellent, but you have missed "there" out, I cannot give you a first.' Weronika subsequently appealed to the Open University, a process she described as 'a circus really, that I didn't need in my last year, it was really very stressful'. However, finally she received a letter from the head of the law school within the Open University, stating that it was 'the best work that he had read in years, and it was re-marked at 98%'. The tutor had been inexperienced and wrongly interpreted the marking scheme. Weronika's challenge of the mark was not only for herself she explained, but if the tutor misunderstood, that could affect other students' marks as well. Weronika was rewarded for her persistence and gained a first-class mark.

Both Tia and Weronika confidently challenged the perceived wisdom and correctness of their tutors: This is a difficult thing to do, particularly to challenge the marking of an assignment. It needs confidence in one's academic ability but also confidence in understanding the processes and systems of higher education. Steve similarly had a

grievance about the process of a particular module, but did nothing about it apart from have a grumble in the course of the interview with me. Yet this could well have impacted on the marks received for the module. Confidence in academic ability and social confidence here led to Weronika challenging the system but Steve accepting the way the university runs the course, even when this potentially disadvantaged him. As Reay asserts 'even when class is not overt and articulated in people's decoding of the social world, it is still there as part of the implicit, taken-for-granted, understandings they bring to their relationships with others' (1997a: 227). In this case Weronika and Steve's different understanding of the relationships and their position within HE led to different actions in very similar situations.

Marilyn also had problems with the tutors on her programme, not with the academic process as in Weronika and Steve's case, but with their attitudes towards her as a student:

> I've had run-ins with one or two of them, you know, because of well,
> you're not going to talk to me as if I'm like five or six. You know, I might
> not know the subject, obviously you are learning a new subject (.) but you
> are still allowed an opinion (…) but when you put an opinion forward
> you're shot down in flames as if to say 'well you know nothing' …. [And]
> people have been made to look idiots.

Yet despite this feeling she considered tutors vital to student experience and particularly in relation to retention: 'Oh yeah, the tutors are, the tutors really, it's all down to them as to whether you're gonna keep people.' She suggested this as one area that could be improved by HEIs. She had found one particular tutor to be sexist and felt that was not acceptable, particularly for someone who held a position of responsibility:

I find him to be very sexist and I mean his attitude to women is just crap,

er (.) someone who calls his er (.) don't think it's his wife, it's his girlfriend

'my woman' you know I don't think it's, well it says everything, you know.

There had also been problems with her dissertation tutor. She had not been taught by him previously and she described him as 'deep as the Atlantic Ocean … he's obviously a philosopher' and felt that it would have helped her to have someone who knew her capabilities and 'how her mind worked'. The fact that he lived quite a distance away from the university and was a part-time member of staff made contact more difficult. She felt restricted by the fact that she could not just drop in to see him as she would have been able to if her supervisor had been a full-time member of staff, and as she only had email access through her part-time work this further limited the possibilities of contact.

Babad *et al* (1999 cited in Carlson *et al*, 2000: 264) suggest that over time students' disposition to the items they value within the educational setting change. In the early years tutors' sense of humour and expression are important, but in later years students move to valuing more academic constituents of their education such as course content with tutor personality becoming less important. It may be that being asked to reflect directly on their experiences of their study journey had brought tutor personalities and teaching styles to the forefront of the students' memory and thus made these vivid in their narratives, but for this sample good tutors[151] were reported as an important feature in the successful completion of study, and 'the gift [we were] given' (Medhurst, 2003). This is an area that deserves further investigation, particularly for differences in tutor/student interaction between full- and part-time students.

[151] 'Good' was variously reported as enthusiastic, supportive, approachable, and fun.

Overall, the relationships between staff and the students were reported as positive. Much support and encouragement had been given, particularly when tutors were obviously aware of the situation in which the students studied. Where problems were reported they were usually constructed as personality problems and with one tutor rather than with the teaching body as a whole. In such cases any problems were short-lived as the students knew that they would move onto a new topic and a new tutor when they changed modules. However, in my role as course leader I do know of students who have dropped out of courses rather than be taught by a particular member of academic staff and so this is one area that must be addressed by HEIs,[152] certainly when there is little or no choice as to which modules to take within a degree programme. I shall return to this issue in chapter 5. Having considered relationships the students had with those within the universities the following section moves on to discuss relationships that students had with others outside of the institutions who impacted on their studies in some way.

Extra-institutional relationships

This section covers three broad areas: first, work and work-related relationships; second, the role of friends other than students; and third, 'others'. The 'others' category includes people who were named as important in some way by the students along their educational journey and encompasses a variety of acquaintances.

Work

Twenty-two of the students in this sample worked whilst studying for their degree. Work was therefore important and in many cases constituted a significant part of their lives and identity. Sixteen of the twenty women worked, nine full-time and seven

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[152] By careful selection and staff development.

part-time for at least some of their degrees. Of the seven men, six worked full-time throughout their degree. This is a different position from full-time undergraduates who work part-time while studying full-time where studying is considered the main part of their identity. In general part-time students study alongside their work, whereas full-time students work alongside their study.

Many working part-time students had to negotiate relationships both with work colleagues and their superiors when undertaking a degree. This section will therefore be divided into two parts, the first detailing relationships with work colleagues, and the second part centring on relationships with management in the work-place.

Many of the students had very supportive work colleagues. This was particularly so among the students taking the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). It can be explained by the fact that it is quite usual in the social work profession to study alongside work. Many of the students' colleagues had gone through the same process previously, so could empathise and support them in a very knowledgeable way, and also offer resources. Jen explains:

> The support I've got from work with resources is just fantastic.
> Colleagues that are social workers, one time I think I had nearly 40 or 50
> books that people had lent me, absolutely fantastic.

It was not only with resources that her colleagues had been helpful, they had helped increase her confidence by believing in her and asking her opinion as they knew she was studying and would be up-to-date with the various laws and policies required.

> Colleagues are now asking for advice and support and just some
> knowledge, and they'll often come to me rather than to other workers, not

that I know everything, but it will be oh, Jen knows these things, she's up-to-date, and I'm quite proud of that now.

Her increase in self-esteem was shown in her work practices, and acknowledgement of her ability from colleagues had increased it further.

Keith and Berni were also taking the DipSW and had the opportunity both to discuss their studies with colleagues and to borrow books. Berni acknowledged that this had helped her a great deal as borrowing from the library was problematic since she lived some distance away from the university. Liz had had support from her colleagues within the school in which she taught. The staff, the majority female, would be supportive in making sure she was not overloaded with work, particularly on study evenings, ensuring that she left on time to get to classes, and taking work from her at examination times. Her co-workers were of a similar position, in terms of class and age, and were interested in her decision to go back to education in order to retrain as an educational psychologist. Two had gone on to courses themselves after discussions with Liz, seeing that she had coped with the workload and enjoyed studying.

Students studying on non-vocational courses also had support from work colleagues. Sue had been offered and borrowed books from members of staff in the school in which she worked. The Deputy Head had been particularly supportive and had searched out many books for her which had been useful in the writing of her dissertation. Lucy, who worked in various jobs alongside her degree, had received support and encouragement from colleagues in the school that she worked in as a classroom assistant and stated:

> A few said that I was an inspiration because I'd done it that way, we don't know how you managed, but you've shown us it can be done, a couple of girls said that, so all the staff, they were very pleased for me.

Lucy was excused from additional lunchtime duties, and she was able to move into a spare classroom to enable her to concentrate and do some work during the lunch break. However, she had received no support in her other, non-educational jobs.

As these examples show, people, not least work colleagues, who understand the process of higher education and the reasons why students undertake this challenge tend to be supportive. Those who have little knowledge of, understanding of or interest in the process of education tend to be less supportive. By this I mean that colleagues who do not know why a person would want to put themselves through the process find it hard to understand it, and thus offer little support or even show any interest in it, even if they are close colleagues.

In Tom's case, doing a degree separated him from his work colleagues. He was an electrician by trade and his working hours were spent on building sites. He knew he would be derided if he raised some of the subjects, or even the fact that he was studying at university so it was a hidden part of his identity whilst at work:

> I couldn't discuss this on a building site, they'd think I was mad, well they
> do anyway. … Oh yes, (…) I, what I do is very lucrative, (…) I couldn't
> afford to do anything else, I'd love to teach, I couldn't afford it, but the
> downside is the people I have to work with, they are intolerant,
> misogynist, racist, they are, well, you know building sites, I'm sure you
> can imagine.

He continued that when he wrote poetry[153] he would pick up copies of *The Sun* or *The Star* from his colleagues and that would make him angry enough to write his poetry. The inability to discuss the subjects that interested him with those he worked

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[153] He used to perform this in the local public houses.

with and thus spent the majority of his time with, was a cause of sorrow for Tom and one of the reasons he went to university in the first place, as he was looking for a space to have intellectual discussions.

As with Tom, Glen's degree was totally separate from his work. However, Glen saw this as a benefit, since he wanted something completely different that could take him away from his job and give him another interest. He had chosen to do a History degree at the Open University, having quite purposely decided on something that was not work related:

> I have a long-standing interest in it, in parallel with an interest in
> technology, from quite a young age. And I also wanted to do something
> that was not work related. It was separate, so I wouldn't be constantly
> doing the same thing, I do technology all day, and then to do a BSc, I
> don't want to do that, so that's the reason I chose [history].

Colleagues who knew that an interviewee was studying then tended to be either indifferent or supportive. No one reported that any colleagues had been purposely disruptive of the students' attempt to study. Many students, however, did not even discuss the fact that they were studying with colleagues as they felt the reasons and the process would not be understood. Where there was support[154] this tended to be on a practical level, for example the lending of books or the protection of study time. Moral support was also offered, with colleagues asking how the studies were progressing and giving encouragement to continue. The students who received this from colleagues appreciated the fact that it was acknowledged that they were studying by their work mates, and particularly the practical support.

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[154] Those working in education had this support more frequently than those working in other areas. Their colleagues had experience and understanding of HE.

Many of the students' work managers supported them by funding their study and allowing them time off. This included all of the DipSW students. Some of the women in the sample had changed their work hours prior to or during their degree to allow greater concentration on their study. This will be discussed further in chapter 4 where issues about resources are raised. However, management could also be supportive in other ways. Berni, studying for her DipSW, found it encouraging that she could discuss her studies with management and supervisory staff at work, and the fact that some of them were teaching on similar programmes meant they were fully aware of the amount of work expected of the students. They would check that she was coping with the workload:

> Even my boss at work will ask, 'how is it is going?' and I'm like, oh you do remember little me down here then? … The two seniors doing the teaching, they are very aware of the amount of work, by how much work there is, I think before they didn't realise how much there was, it was, oh you'll be alright, but now it is like, 'are you ok?' (Katie).

Jen, also studying for her DipSW, had a manager who also acted as a mentor. This was useful to her in terms of discussing her academic work and her assignments and she felt that relationship was particularly supportive:

> We discuss any issues and I can say, oh I'm really struggling with this or I don't really understand that and she'll point me in the right direction. It will be, have a look at this, and if there is anything I can help you with, come back. (Jen)

This support from management and senior colleagues was appreciated wherever it was offered. It was not offered to all students however.

Although Tom was less than complimentary about his workmates, the fact that 'everybody [was] on the fiddle' within the workplace meant that unknowingly his employers had helped him:

> If ever there was anything I needed to do at university, I shouldn't but my trade helped there, I can get out and do whatever was needed, so that worked to my advantage, if I needed to get to the library or if there was a seminar.

Steve reported that work had helped him. Again, as with Tom's case, his employers were not always aware of this:

> In a way I've been supported through work, but not directly say encouraged, but what I've managed to ask for. …if I wanted to ask for information (…) I would eventually get it off somebody, eventually [LAUGHING] it's so difficult with it being a local authority, you know, but I'd say indirectly they've helped me in ways what they don't know.

By this he meant that he had used work resources such as photocopying and access to the internet.

Carlos had support from work and management and acknowledged that this was because the armed forces were becoming more attuned to learning within their ranks. *Learning Forces,*[155] was becoming better known and it was easier to ask for support with study and time to enable the student to catch up if work had taken over more, such as on manoeuvres or similar:

[155] The lifelong learning training centres within the military.

So once you have established an understanding between yourself and your line management, erm, that if I need to take a day off to get an assignment in, 'cos I couldn't do that in my own time, because of long hours or detachment or whatever, then that's fine.

The director to whom Carlos was responsible was particularly supportive of his attempt to study. This was shown by the fact that he put Carlos forward for a *Learning Forces* award when his immediate manager was not interested. The director's support was justified when Carlos won the award.

For Shirley, the only person she really talked to at all about her studies was her manager. He was supportive and she talked to him particularly about her dissertation which was about the company that she worked for:

My boss really, because my dissertation especially is on the place I worked, so he was the only one really I could talk to about it, I couldn't talk to my husband about that as he doesn't know the way things work where I work, but [boss] was good. I got a lot of ideas and feedback from him.

Towards the end of her degree she found him helpful and supportive despite the fact that he had been disparaging when she told him that she had applied to do the part-time degree:

My boss said to me when I'd been accepted on the degree, he said, how have you been accepted? You haven't got seven A levels or whatever.

This shows a lack of understanding on his part about part-time education and the fact that both life and work experience can be taken into account for admission. However, if Shirley had paid attention to his attitude and comments when she was initially researching the programme she could well have been put off at that stage.

Rachel's workplace had been less than supportive in her endeavour to complete a part-time degree, and the pressure of work had meant that one year she struggled even to get to class. Although she had tried to negotiate more flexible hours to start and finish earlier enabling her to get across London to get to classes on time, it had got to a point where the pressure was making her ill and she had to take time off on sick leave:

> I just couldn't make it anymore, just because there was no point for me trying to walk up here at 7 or 7.30 when the class finishes at 8, 8.30, I might as well not go.

When she had gone on sick leave her employers realised that she was not indefatigable:

> After that month off I think I shook them, I was destructible, they always kind of figured, well Rachel can do everything. Then we negotiated that I was going to start earlier and leave at five so I had an hour to relax to come here on time and I could get unpaid leave to take my exams because I was giving all my holidays to studying to take the exams.

Her period of sick leave had given her time to consider the direction she wanted to take in life and on her return she booked an extended period of leave which enabled her to go to Camp America. She subsequently changed her job and her career path completely even though originally she had studied for pleasure with no desire to change her career path.

The overall picture that emerged from the students was that those who received support from the workplace often found this was from individuals rather than the company per se, except where there was financial sponsorship. Those who did support the students' endeavours were more likely to have been through higher

education themselves or have an understanding and an appreciation of higher education. Sue for example had moved from the insurance industry into an educational setting during the course of her degree. She reported that 'in private industry, education is forgotten about; they just want you to get on with the job'.

Three key factors emerged that impacted on work colleagues' support for part-time study. Firstly, colleagues having done HE themselves, secondly, working in a field related to the course, ie, social work, and thirdly, having relevant resources, such as time to offer or books to lend. Importantly, among this group of successful students were both students supported by colleagues and students who treated their degree as entirely separate from their work. Overall, then, support from others in the workplace was significant for some students. For others study and work were entirely independent of each other and there was a desire to keep the study processes personal. This was both a product of personality and the desire to have a change from the routine and the subject of the workplace. It may also be a need to keep it from the employer as for some it was part of a move away from existing employment (see Latchman, 2007).

I now move beyond the study and work environments to consider other people who my interviewees mentioned as important or having an impact upon their studies.

Other people

This section includes a wider group of people such as friends, neighbours, a local councillor and God. These were all influential in different ways for particular students' journeys. The ways in which they were important differed depending on the situation, and the encounters ranged from one-off comments, to support throughout the whole degree process.

Thus, friends had been influential in both Tom and Judy's decision to study at degree level. A friend who lived with his family for some years encouraged Tom through the discussions they had to look for more intellectual exchange. This friend had also done a degree as a mature student and following his example Tom embarked on an Access course and then a degree. His friend was now teaching in the further education sector and Tom also talked of wanting to go into teaching, but explained that his current career as an electrician was too well paid to make the move to teaching. He continued to have great discussions with his friend though and hoped to have more, similar relationships in the future where he could continue to develop his love and knowledge of philosophy.

Judy had a friend who had asked for help in rewriting an MA thesis:

> Well, what made me think I could do it actually was, she was doing her
> MA and had had it sent back to her because it wasn't good enough and
> she said to me, would I help her. So I helped her rewrite the English and
> I thought well if I can do that for her, I can do it for me.

Even though she had no other friends or family at the time who were involved in higher education this one episode had started her thinking about the process of doing a degree and so she investigated what might be possible.

In Tia's case, it was a comment by a local councillor that had put a spark in her imagination about the possibility of doing a degree. When I asked if there had been anyone who had encouraged her to do the degree she reflected:

> (…) Yes there was actually, and he was a labour councillor, and I was
> very new to the area at that point, and I got selected to go onto this
> seminar thingy in York, and I ended up with the director of education, two
> labour councillors, a chair of education committee. They taught me how

to play dominoes [LAUGHING] in a pub in York, and you've got to believe

I knew nothing about anything, not even about the Northern ways, from

the South and that, but in talking to him, he talked about doing a degree

with the OU and he said, you should do a degree Tia. And at that point I

went, yeah, laughed at him, like I'm going to do that, but even now if I

could see him, I would say, thanks mate, because, you know, he planted

that seed that later grew.

Even though this event had happened a few years before she actually started the

degree, she said that from then on she had looked to see what might be of interest to

her, whilst also waiting for the time to be right for her and her family.

Katie's friendships were important during the course rather than prior to it. There had

been a number of people, friends and neighbours who had helped, particularly with

childcare during the five years she studied.

I've got a great next door neighbour, especially like the last January to

sort of April this year, especially, it's been a case of send [daughter] next

door, sort of thing, and you get on with it, so you know, she really helped

and I've got friends who have come, when she's not been at her dad's at

a weekend, and I've got friends who've come and said, come on

[daughter] we'll take you out for the afternoon, let your mam get on with it,

so, they've all, between them, been rocks.

For Katie this friendship network was invaluable in allowing her the space to study.

In return she had been very enthusiastic about study and how it could help advance

a person's career, and had encouraged some of her friends to follow her on the study

path. One friend was now a fully qualified travel agent and another was considering

nursing. Katie had wisely advised her to take some basic skills qualifications, to

ensure that she was 'up-to-scratch' and to get into the habit of studying.

For Lucy, the 'person' who was important to her was God. She was a born-again Christian and believed that it was God's will that she had come to the degree at this time and that it worked out for her. Both her and her husband had prayed about the opportunity:

> We did pray about it and stuff and so he, (…) you know if it is God's
> provision it will come around.

Even though it was earlier than they had planned for her to do the degree[156] the way was open for her, they believed:

> That if it's not right the Lord will put a wall in the way, or put a block and
> you'll close that door, but the doors were always kind of open, so yeah, I
> went through them and here I am now. [LAUGHING]

Lucy truly believed that it was 'meant to be', so even when it was hard work, and she had three part-time jobs to pay for the course it still felt like God's will. For her, in a similar way to those students who believed they were 'finishers', this motivation was powerful; all she had to do was follow the path through the open doors.

Other friends that were important were mentioned. Keith felt that because his peers[157] were university educated, it made studying a usual process and easier for him to go through:

> I mean actually most of the people I know, you know, socially, they are
> similar, you know our friends that we see every week, they are teachers,
> so it is probably part of the culture, the wider culture which we are in. The

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[156] Her original plan was to aim for a full-time degree course when their four children were all of school age.

[157] His partner had also just completed a degree.

culture in which I am in up here anyway. Interesting, I don't think

everyone has that sort of, peer group, maybe that makes it harder.

So although Keith was an independent learner, his social group had all completed

higher education, he viewed them as his peer group and regularly discussed his

educational progress with them.

Others who mentioned friends did not have a similar network as Keith. When I asked

Steve if any of his friends had studied he laughed:

No, nah, nah, nah, maybe study the sporting page, horse racing or

whatever, that's about it, study the form of the horses, that's about it

really. [LAUGHING]

He did not feel this absence made studying a harder process, but denied the latter

when he was with his friends, and conceded this:

I just understand what they're like really … to be fair they aren't interested

talking about that, so I don't really talk about it really very much.

This denial, however, makes the degree a hidden process. As only 11 per cent of

people in Hull[158] have higher education qualifications compared with a national

average of one in five (Ofsted, 2005: 34) it is hardly surprising that Steve had a peer

group that did not include any graduates. Steve could have been seen as a beacon

and a motivational force for change among his friends in terms of his progress in

higher education. However, his low-key approach to discussion of this with his

friends made this unlikely to happen.

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[158] The percentage is lower in the area Steve lives in.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there were students in this study who felt that 'other people' were important to them during the course of their studies. Those reported as being significant to their success were the other students on the programme, tutors and outside friends and acquaintances. Those who considered that other students were of paramount importance to their success suggested that institutions need to consider this in their planning.

 Thomas confirms this view, stating:

> To improve student retention and success in the context of widening
>
> participation there is a greater need to listen to students' voices and use
>
> this to inform policy and practice (2006)

Although, for example, flexibility and accessibility of study programmes are considered important by institutions they must be balanced by the needs of students to form relationships. By offering too much flexibility cohorts of students may not study together regularly and therefore friendship groups may be less likely to form(see for example, Wilcox *et al*, 2005; Tinto, 2003). This may be problematic for those students who need friendship and peer support to be successful. Student peers were a major source of support for some students in this sample and this was particularly so for single students and those with less supportive partners. This is important when for many part-time students the classroom is often the only time available to develop those relationships (Bourner and Race, 1995: 30).

Not all students required support from their student peers. Indeed a minority of students found contact with other students a drain on their time. This to some extent contradicts the above argument about student cohorts being important. However, it was mainly the students who studied at the Open University that reported that other

students could be a drain on their time, rather than being a support to their studies[159]. The students in this research who had chosen to study at the Open University could already have been independent learners who knew they worked well on their own prior to signing up for their degree programme, or who had learnt to be independent students as they studied over the course of six or seven years[160]. These students also had strong family support. My own work experience is mainly with students studying on face-to-face programmes rather than through distance learning, and certainly for these students the friendship networks that develop are central to their success. At a recent graduation party the student awarded the prize for the highest-marked dissertation across the department paid tribute to her student peers in her acceptance speech. She started by stating: 'without the other students on the course I would not have completed this degree' and went on to explain that it was for them she turned out on cold January nights when she would have rather stayed in and watched the television, it was to them she turned when needing support and it was to them she dedicated her prize. Westland (2004: 288) confirms this though slightly nuanced, in that she shows that whilst her research respondents were 'very closely bonded' the friendships 'didn't necessarily carry on outside the course'. In her work on mature women part-time students Gaynard (2007) reports that friendships that develop alongside study are a major yet hidden side-effect of the part-time study process. Friendships within the part-time student body, particularly cross-gendered and age-differentiated student relationships are an area that needs further investigation[161].

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[159] For further comparison of OU and Birkbeck students see Woodley (2006).

[160] In this study, Tom started by stating he had chosen not to study with the OU as he wanted face-to-face interaction 'with other human beings'.

[161] Cross-gender friendships are also raised as problematic within the workplace within Gardiner and O'Rourke (1998: 137).

Other people who were important to the students included colleagues at work. Not all students were fortunate enough to have supportive colleagues and in many cases those who were supportive were those who understood the process of, and had participated in, higher education. Those students working in education or in the public sector had better work support than those working in other occupations where there was less understanding of 'being a student' and the desire to follow this path.

Most of the students in this sample had someone with whom they discussed both the content and the process of their studies. In many cases this was a partner, but where a student had no partner or where a partner was either not particularly supportive or knowledgeable about the education process this person was often a fellow student. In many cases, though not all, the 'fellow student' had developed from 'fellow student identity' to that of 'friend' (Allan, 1996: 85). Whoever this person was, there was usually somebody. Educational success and support – from whatever quarter – were therefore intertwined.

Both chapter 2 and this chapter are important for the thesis as they demonstrate that to fully understand the part-time student, it is necessary to look wider than an individual student / potential student. The networks around the student/potential student are of central importance to the success of the part-time student. I argue that existing networks of the part-time student (family and extended network groups including work colleagues) are of greater importance than to the full-time student, and remain so during their time as a student. Most full-time students immerse into student life, new networks develop and become more prominent in their study journey (Kember, 1999). For part-time students these networks do develop but they do not become as encompassing. This is an area that would benefit from further research investigating differences and similarities of full and part-time students and their network/support groups.

I now move onto chapter 4 where the resources that the students draw upon to aid them in their studies are considered. These resources, like the people who support the students, were reported as coming from a variety of sources, some external to the student and others personal, internal resources.

Chapter 4

Resource-related strategies: 'It's just what I do'

In the previous chapter I discussed those people outside family who had been important to the students in their learning journey. This covered people both within and without the universities in which they studied, and explained how the students had drawn upon various relationships in order to assist their studies I now move to a focus on other resources that my interviewees drew upon to aid them in their studies. The chapter is presented in two sections. Section one includes resources such as space, finances, time, the students' own skills in time management, and employer support. Section two looks at resources that the students utilised in their studies such as their attitudes towards their studies and being a student, including their discourses of luck, self-belief, motivation and enjoyment.

Boorman *et al* (2006) recommend further research into the resources that part-time students require in order to ensure their needs are provided for, and also to see how the part-time student body may differ in this respect from the full-time student body. This chapter looks at the resources the students themselves provide or bring to their study rather than those provided by the institutions. This is important if as Boorman *et al* suggest part-time students are less likely to use the resources provided by the institutions. Thus part-time students may be more self-sufficient and self-reliant than full-time students but they may also draw on different resources, at least to some extent, and draw on them differently. In exploring this issue, it is important to examine the additional resources they bring to HE as mature students, as the former are not always acknowledged or appreciated by tutors or institutions (see Edwards, 1993: 99).

A room of one's own

A space to work in is an important resource, as is access to IT. The majority of this group of students used their home and personal computers as their work space, but some also accessed space and IT provision within their institution. I shall firstly consider the space available within the home and then follow this with a discussion of how university space was used by some students. As raised in chapter 1, many of the students in this sample considered that the space available to them at home important for their working practices. A room of one's own was regarded as a necessity by Virginia Woolf (1929) for women to be able to write, however, not all students in my sample were able to procure personal space. Lucy described 'four kids in a three-bedroom house, to have a study would be good, it's just wherever' (Lucy). And Tia had a 'bit of a hot desk, we all work on it, but there were certain rules about clearing your stuff off' (Tia). This 'hot desk' was in the 'spare bedroom-cum-study' until her father moved into the house which further reduced her access to study space.

Others, however, were more fortunate in their arrangements and considered it a necessary part of their success in studying that they had been able to detach themselves from the family space and routine and go to a particular place to study. Tom described his study place:

> I'm very lucky, I've got a massive summer house, which is my domain really, and I've turned it into a library, […] it's in the garden and we often eat out there, it's very pleasant, but it's away from the house, so I don't tidy when I'm studying and they just ignore the mess and get up and walk away, around it, because when you go back everything is still there.

Carlos described his study space:

You've then got to develop your environment in which you're going to

study. You know, can you find a quiet little corner in your house?

PM   And do you have that quiet corner in your house?

Well, I established it. That was one of the things that had to be

established. That is my space. I have had that for the last six years.

And that was one of the things when we moved here. I have got a space

in the loft, it was important to get that established (Carlos).

For Glen this was of equal importance:

Well, when I started we lived in Hampshire, and there was a small

extension at the back of the house, which we put a door on and turned

into an office. The house we are now in, there is a small room on the top

floor which has, it's no bigger than a cupboard, but it has a door and a

window and power so I turned that into an office, so again, lucky (Glen).

These men all reported being lucky to have personal space in which to study, and for

these men the 'structuring structure' (Bourdieu, 1994) contributed to their success. It

suggests both the sense of the fortuitous nature of having that space (though the

men clearly expended effort to secure it) and that men are more likely to be able to

negotiate that space within the family home. In this research though, many of the

women also had some personal space, even when they were cohabiting with others

even if this space was sometimes reported as sufficient but not always ideal. Jane

had to move from the third bedroom when her second child was born, to work on a

desk in the hallway. Gina worked 'wherever', either in her bedroom or on the kitchen

table but found she was too easily distracted if she was working there while others

were about. Berni had a dedicated space which had then become a joint space:

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I mean [husband] was really good last year when I started, made me a

desk area, and bookshelf to put my things on and a pin-board to put my

timetable and my study stuff on and that, so that is sort of my little area,

well, it was my little area until [husband] decided to put his tools up there,

so I did have an area, [LAUGHING] so we are sharing it at the moment.

Diane worked in the dining room when the family were not in, but when others were in the house she moved into her bedroom to try and get some peace to study.

The ability to negotiate access to space effectively may be an indicator of a well-functioning, well-integrated family, respectful of each other's needs, and is also dependent on the availability of space and resources to transform the space. It may also contribute significantly to a student successfully completing her studies. Those who do not complete their degree programmes may have a different story to tell, and access to space and facilities is one of the recurrent barriers discussed within adult education literature (see Cross, for example, particularly about situational barriers, 1981: 99; Bourner and Race, 1995).

Having a particular place in which to study may be seen either as a luxury or as a necessity. Many were fortunate and did indeed have a space of their own in which to work, and considered themselves lucky to have that space. If they lived in a family home they had in the main negotiated that space with the family. In this study male students living with partners all had some private study space, or one in which they had greatest claim of ownership. Female students in families were more likely to have shared use of communal spaces, often with conflicting demands on the space available. Single parents, in this case mothers, were more able to secure a personal study space; as the only adult in the house space allocated as study space required usually little negotiation since the children in these families were relatively young. Chapman (2004) recognises that 'domestic practices are fluid and require constant

renegotiation' and that 'change occurs as people move through the lifecourse …

[and] as external factors impinge on their choices and opportunities' (2004: 1). Yet

the home as a physical space is relatively under-researched in sociological literature.

Chapman argues that 'The importance of the domestic sphere as the place where

people can achieve their personal, social and economic aspirations, use their

imagination, be creative, [and] enjoy their leisure' (2004: 5) has been underestimated

Here I have just touched on this issue as discussed by my sample. Depending on

family structure, stage in lifecourse and external factors such as distance from the

HEI, the space within the home was more or less important as an issue. For

example, the students with adult children who had left the family home had more

space, whereas Jane with very young children had less space as she had previously

had a spare bedroom as 'her space', on the arrival of her second child she moved to

study in the hallway. As she lived a distance from the university she did not have the

opportunity for studying there, she only attended for classes and to visit the library.

Overall, then, the question of space requirements for study within the home were

partly imbricated in many factors which included relative distance from the HEI at

which study was undertaken. Those living close by were more likely to use the HEI

as a study space resource than those living further afield, or with significant and

multiple commitments.

The distance students lived (and worked) from campus was the most identified

reason for not using the on-campus facilities. Gina and Jane both stated that the

distance they lived from the university and their time restrictions were the reasons

why they did not work at the university and use the facilities more:

> I've got half an hour to get to university and then get parked. … By then I
>
> am consciously watching the time and thinking, oh, it is nearly 2 o'clock,
>
> I'll have to go soon to collect the children from school (Jane).

Jane would have liked to have made more use of the university space as she felt it more conducive to her work habits, she reported that being in the university library made her more productive, and acknowledged that was partly because she could not become embroiled in domesticity whilst away from the house. Maggie only went to the campus for classes as the volume of traffic meant that her journey could take over two hours, and Berni and Jen also travelled to their university campus only to attend classes.

Callender *et al* report that 'most part-time students were working and had familial ties, their choice of institution, ... were constrained and influenced by these realities' (2006: 21). Generally part-time students are likely to choose a 'local' university, with 46% reporting that proximity was a very important reason for their choice (2006: 21). Clearly geography is important, and there will be rural/urban differences in distance from an HEI and in travel-to-study times (see for example Jackson, 2003: 373). As institutions are increasingly providing campus-based part-time degree programmes rather than 'outreach' programmes in remote locations (Ryley, 2007), distance and accessibility have to be considered by the institutions which cannot expect that part-time students will as a matter of course have personal access to space and IT that they can draw upon. As discussed here a room of one's own may be a luxury that not all part-time students have access to. Therefore study space and IT facilities at university that are accessible at the required times are an important resource for part-time students. However, as my research shows time constraints as well as distance from the place of study may mean that part-time students are not able to attend to access these resources and institutions need to consider how to ensure that students are not then disadvantaged in their studying.

Time Management

As Callender *et al* (2006) most recently and others previously report (see for example Blaxter and Tight, 1994; Bourner and Race, 1995; Arksey *et al*, 1994) time management is a particular issue for part-time students. Callender *et al*'s research shows that 62% of part-time students definitely or mostly agree that they do 'not have enough time to study' and 78% state that they 'struggle with study and other commitments' (2006: 79). As 87% of part-time students are employed and 35% have children (Callender *et al*, 2006: 14) there are many strong claims on the students' time. Within my sample issues about lack of time and time management were often foremost in the narrative when I asked how the students had experienced their studies, and similarly Callender *et al* report that 'time poverty affected a higher proportion of students than financial poverty' (2006: 59-60). I do not wish to deny that time management was a major issue for many of these students, but I do want to question the strength of the negative discourse in relation to part-time study and time management. It is important to remember that the students in my research were at or near completion of their respective programmes of study; many had enjoyed their degrees, stated that they would miss it when it was over, were looking for something (quite often further study[162]) to take its place and had successfully moved from 'fitting the study in' to 'altered states' (Piette, 2002). They had managed their time, both on a weekly basis and long term over the period of their study. And yet many of the comments regarding time management were negative, suggesting that the students had internalized the discourse of struggling with time, and the juggling of commitments as dominant in the discourse of part-time study, and much of the

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[162] 46% of part-time students surveyed were planning on doing further study on completion of their current course (Callender *et al*, 2006: 71). A widening participation report from the University of Hull shows similar figures. 47% of past students had gone onto further study and 62% of current students were planning to do further study on completion of their current course (McAndrews, 2005).

literature discusses time-management as a negative issue. This negativity suggests that part-time study is going to be a difficult task to manage, and that this will be the major issue that part-time students have to address. This certainly emerged in the narratives produced by my interviewees. However, they were equivocal about the importance of time management as key to their success. Weronika and Rachel are just two students who raised this issue:

> All this time management, it's ok, I wish I had it, but, of course, it is that
>
> interest and the support. And the conception of a lot of people is that you
>
> have to be so organised, ok you have to be organised to some degree,
>
> but that's not the main consideration. You will always find the time if you
>
> want to do it. (Weronika)

Weronika's husband had questioned her working practices, suggesting that she should be more organised in how and when she worked in relation to her many other commitments. She said herself she wished she was more organised, but she was not. Her insight that 'you will always find the time if you want to do it' suggests that although she did consider it important, time management was not the major issue for her successful completion.

Similarly Rachel on discussion of coping with the long and late study hours suggested that:

> Everybody always used to ask me that. Are you not knackered when you
>
> go to lectures? And it was like, well yes sometimes I am, but because you
>
> are interested, because you are really there through your own choice, it's
>
> fun. When it was somebody like [tutor name] you are just like have all
>
> this new energy.

Tia had a similar philosophy:

It was just a case of getting your head down, and doing it. You've chosen

to do it … and I always said that to myself … that sums it up, this is my

choice, to be here, so get on and do it.

Tia, with two children, one of whom she home-educated, often had very limited study

time, yet her passion for studying and her conviction of its benefit overrode

considerable practical difficulties of managing to find time to study. Tom went further,

looking for more intensity of work and related deadlines:

I need pressure, it's a six-year course, part-time for six years, and I did it

in five, and the best time was the two years that I did double credits,

because I had more to do. There really isn't enough to do, one seminar a

week, and an essay at the end, it's not very much. When there was

pressure I was at my best. I think that I was probably well suited to a full-

time degree, but it wasn't to be.

Tom felt he needed the pressure to be at his best, Tia liked the pressure of the

deadline and suggested that although she was 'not a risk taker by nature, [she was] a

"to the edge" person' and admitted that 'it does give me a little thrill to think how close

can I take it? Oh, that was a bit close this time!' This obviously links to the

motivations for study which will be considered in the second half of the chapter.

In light of these comments regarding time management and stresses regarding lack

of time I do not suggest that we promote studying for extra credits, leaving work until

last minute before the deadline to get a thrill, or that every evening lecture will give

renewed vigour to every student. I do suggest however, that if we do not articulate

these alternative discourses, time pressures and time management as a struggle will

be the dominant discourse part-time students hear. The alternative discourse I am

suggesting is one in which the 'struggle' and 'problems' of managing time are ones

that are turned into challenges met, and successfully negotiated within the family and

the workplace, transferable skills that are so desired by employers and government alike. The students in this sample had negotiated their time, both with themselves and others, to enable them to complete part-time degrees alongside other, often very heavy work-loads and commitments. They had many balls to juggle, but had done so without dropping too many, or when they had been dropped the students had been strong enough and secure in their learner identity to be able to pick them up and carry on to completion without too many problems or damage to themselves or those around them. As time management is seen as a major barrier both in access to and when embarking on study it is obviously an issue of importance for both students and institutions, therefore a successful part-time learner is one who can manage their time within the limits of what is available to them, as well as what is required from the course of study. There may be many students for whom time pressures may well have become too great and who do not make it to the end of their chosen programme. Callender *et al* suggest that a 'sizable proportion of students were ill informed in advance of their studies about what their course involved' (2006: 60). This can be remedied to a certain extent by comprehensive course literature and good pre-course contact and advice, and a higher profile of what it means to be a successful part-time student. With the development of the learner as an important part of one's identity, even time management problems can be overcome as learning becomes part of what is done on a day-to-day basis, during the week or at certain points in the year. The 'altered state' that Piette (2002) describes is a valuable narrative and one which as a discourse can allow students to see that when first studying it is/can be difficult to manage to fit study into an already busy life, but that through the development of 'self' as learner, learning practices (in whatever form) become 'built in' and develop into something that 'is just what I do' (Pete).

One recurring theme in relation to time management and employment patterns which emerged was the fact that many students had taken annual leave to enable them to meet deadlines and / or take examinations. In the move towards increasing employer engagement with study, this is one issue that needs to be addressed. Some students had been able to negotiate this at work, and some, like Liz, Katie and Berni, had been given short periods of leave of absence. Liz could take one day off per exam and Katie was given one extra day's leave for each annual leave day that she took to enable her to complete her final dissertation. Berni had been allowed a week's study leave for revision before her examinations. Using annual leave for study purposes in this way obviously impacts on the family, as less leave is available to spend either away on holiday or as time together. In some cases this had been negotiated and in others it was just accepted as the way that it had to be, part of the sacrifices made in the short term to attain the long term goal.

Bowl (2003:134) suggests that:

> There appear to be two inbuilt assumptions within the framework of HE about the time available to students: the first that it is fairly limitless, the second that it is relatively flexible.

For the students in her study and the part-time students in this one these assumptions are incorrect and therefore damaging.

Finances

Finances and the financial implications of studying are current news-worthy items (see, for example, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 10/8/2007: 5). Yet in the

period that these students studied[163] paying for higher education was just starting to come into the public conscious as part of the discourse of HE. However, part-time students have always paid fees for their study and this was a major difference between the modes of study prior to 2000 when the first fee support for those on low incomes became available. Here I move to show how financial issues were considered by this sample of students as the matter of paying for the courses and related expenses, and also how they saw these financial requirements in relation to other expenses. Included in this section is information about financial support by employers and how that support was viewed.

Within higher education there is a prevalent myth (Callender, 2007b) that many part-time students get the cost of their course paid for by their employer. In this sample it was only students taking vocational programmes, in this case a Diploma in Social Work and a BA in Business Management, who received funding from an employer. Callender *et al* (2006) report that a majority of 59% of undergraduate part-time students pay their own fees, with 35% having some or the entire fee paid by an employer. Different samples[164] used in earlier research by Woodley (2004) and Finch *et al* (2006) found 41% and 19% respectively had some or all study fees paid by their employers[165] (cited in Callender *et al*, 2006: 31).

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[163] All finished their degrees by 2003/2004 so depending on the length of study had started 1998/2000.

[164] Woodley's (2004) study 'had a limited remit and focussed primarily on fees in England and the *Student Income and Expenditure Survey* (Finch et al, 2006) excludes students in Scotland' (Callender, 2006: 11). At the University of Hull (McAndrews, 2005: 13) 15% of undergraduate students had fees paid by their employer with a further 11% having some contribution from an employer.

[165] The different levels of employer financial support recorded are both because of the different samples used, as well as the inconsistency of reporting and data collection about the part-time student body.

The level of fees paid was beyond the remit of this research, but many students reported that they felt their course represented value for money and the cost of the course was not a particular issue. Many accepted that the course had to be paid for; Bridget even suggested that if it had been three times the cost she would still have found the money from somewhere as she was so determined to study. Sue reported: 'I think the actual fees, I don't find too bad (…) and that is the biggest expense'. Having previously studied for a floristry diploma with higher fees and spent an additional £20 per week on flowers, she considered her degree very good value for money: 'In anything you've got to pay, so you may as well pay and get a decent one'. Liz also considered her degree to be good value:

> I was just so surprised, I think it's incredibly good value. I've paid for it
> myself … it's not a hideous huge amount for the tuition, it panned out at
> about £850 a year and I think that is so reasonable.

Within this sample, those studying for the Diploma in Social Work had their fees paid, cover was provided in their workplace, course books provided and travel expenses refunded. Whilst recognising it was a generous package, Keith was particularly scathing about this:

> You know, we are seconded … from work, but it is not from the goodness
> of their hearts though. Tony [Blair] gave them money, you know, to fund
> us to go out and get more qualifications, they get money to cover our
> being out of the workplace, I'm sure the county council wouldn't give us
> the money to do it otherwise. … I'm sure I wouldn't do it. It wouldn't be
> worth the stress (Keith).

He went on to suggest that those without this funding package would be more likely to drop out of the course.

Other students receiving funding from employers were studying for a Business Management degree. The funding packages they received were less generous but more usual, with fees, but no additional expenses paid by the employer. This financial support was received by two women, both of whom worked full-time[166]. According to Callender *et al* (2006) if students were receiving funding having course fees paid was the most usual pattern of funding, but there are gendered differences. Men in full-time employment are more likely to receive funding and a higher level of funding than women, except where women work full-time in which case they are as likely as their male counterparts to receive funding. As women are more likely to be working part-time than their male counterparts they lose out on funding for courses on this basis (Callender *et al*, 2006). Yet there are more women studying part-time despite a lack of funding. This is one area where research-informed reforms could possibly support more women being able to access support through state funding, but that is often denied when 'family income' is the threshold level taken into consideration for funding decisions[167].

In my study and as shown by Ramsden[168] (2006a: 459) there were gendered differences in funding support, and this is exacerbated by the gendered nature of part-time provision. Lord Dearing, in his 1997 report, called for funding of part- and

[166] Julia worked full-time for the majority of her degree, but in her final year, in order to be able to focus on her dissertation, dropped some hours and so became part-time. At this point her employer no longer funded her studies but she considered the time available more important than the funding.

[167] At the current time (2008) single part-time students earning less than £16,089 (couple £18.089) income are entitled to have their full fees paid (with a sliding scale determined by the number of dependents), up to £26,825 (couple £28,825) allowed to have part fees paid. Those earning above these limits get no support with funding. These limits are for students studying at least 50% of a full-time course. Studying any less than 50% of a full-time programme in credit terms means students are ineligible for any funding. There is a long-awaited funding review due in 2009.

[168] Particularly as certain subjects are more likely to be funded. First degrees Architecture building and planning and Engineering and technology are the highest employer-funded subjects. These are much more likely to be populated by male students.

full-time study to be equivalent so that decisions about mode of study were 'financially neutral'. Ten years on this is still not the case (Latchman, 2007). As women constitute 62% of all part-time students (Ramsden, 2006a: 41) this affects them disproportionally. Students reported that the fees were reasonable, or alternatively they had 'managed'. Students on low incomes had received funding in the form of fee remission when that had become available. Overall, though, fees did not emerge as a significant issue in my sample. This indicates that for this research cohort their expenditure was seen as money well spent. I question though whether those who are successful students are those who can afford to be? If a student is struggling financially, study may well be seen as a luxury that can no longer be afforded. In this case it could be then that those who can afford to study are more likely to be the successful completing students. It is important that the funding regime should ensure that this is not the case.

When discussing additional expenses in relation to the courses many of the students considered themselves quite thrifty. They chose to buy their books from a variety of second-hand sources (student and charity book shops) and the main additional expenses mentioned were childcare and transport. Jane's childcare responsibilities had not only restricted the time available to attend university to study, but also had an associated cost. She was married, but her husband's work meant he was away from home much of the time, including many evenings during the week. This meant that she had to employ a babysitter. 'I had to organise that, and it was expensive.' She was very aware of the extra cost of the babysitting:

> It's the money and you're conscious of that. If I had to go to the library I
> would have to ask them to come a little bit earlier so I could get to the
> library before class, so that was more money, and then you are
> conscious of getting home and some classes it was nearly ten o'clock
> before you get out, and I would be like, oh I've got to get home.

And yet overall it was these relatively small extra costs that had been more of a concern than the course costs.

In considering how much the course and related expenses cost them, most equated it to something similar in their budget. Rachel and Marilyn both equated the cost to a night out: 'if you're thinking about a night out at the cinema I suppose it'll cost you a tenner. So really I suppose, erm, the cost is equivalent to a night out' (Marilyn). Rachel stated: 'I thought I can afford that. Because if you really think about it, it is about forty quid a month, well that's a night out in London, you know, so I thought I could actually afford that, so I thought why not?' The fees and related costs were seen as financial sacrifices that were considered both to be affordable and to be a sacrifice that was worthwhile in the larger scale of financial planning. With the new HE funding regime implemented in 2006 where full-time students pay increased fees (usually £3,000 per annum) the position for future part-time students is still unclear. The students in my research sample had considered the possibility of what increased fees would mean for them and for similar students in the future. Tom stated: 'I can't see what is going to happen, CCE [Centre for Continuing Education], how is it going to survive? I don't know … Amateurs like me, £600 a year, yes we grumble but it is not really that much but £1,500, sorry I can't justify this' (Tom). He was worried about what the possibility of such increased costs would mean for the department, and thought that it would be 'tragic' for the future of similar courses, departments and students. Diane had investigated studying for a part-time degree in the past but had not been able to afford to do so financially. She felt lucky that the level of the fee was set as the price it was, which had made the course accessible to her at that time but had 'a letter to [local MP] brewing, because [she was] feeling so incensed about this situation'. The relating of course costs to something else within the budget was also raised in my previous research (Medhurst, 2003). The students considered the cost equivalent to a family holiday, and as such negotiated these costs within their

family.[169] However, non-participants in my previous study cited (expected) course costs as one reason that they did not access part-time education. Although not a major issue within this research sample, finances are seen as a considerable barrier to part-time study by non-participants and cost is one of the six general factors that act as a deterrent[170] (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982 cited in St Clair, 2006: 11). Boorman *et al* (2006: 39) report that all of the institutions in their sample were reviewing part-time undergraduate fee policies, driven partly but not wholly by the introduction of variable full-time undergraduate fees in 2006. The major finding was that 'individuals who pay their own part-time undergraduate fees are price sensitive and any substantial increase towards a level pro rata to the full-time fee would be likely to reduce demand substantially' (2006: 40). When fees are at a level that can be equated weekly to a night out or yearly to the cost of a holiday this may be seen as an economic sacrifice that is achievable and acceptable. Further rises so that the cost is greater than these equations may become problematic for the majority of part-time students who continue to pay their own fees. As providers of part-time study, then the policy makers in the HE sector need to proceed cautiously when considering fee levels and the impact higher fees have on the recruitment of the future students. It is not only the fee level, it is also the press coverage of funding, and therefore the perception of fee levels. I frequently speak to potential part-time students who have only heard stories of full-time students and the debt crises which means that potential students abandon their dreams as they feel that study would be unobtainable

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[169] As the primary wage-earner, they may have held the power in these domestic negotiations (see, for example, Stevi Jackson 1993: 182).

[170] As well as cost the list includes: lack of confidence; lack of course relevancy; time constraints; low personal priority; and personal and family reasons.

financially. This again reflects the need for IAG for the part-time sector, to enable potential students to make informed decisions[171].

Having considered some of the external/structural resources students draw upon in their efforts to become successful students I now turn to internal / individual resources and here I shall consider the discourse of luck[172], self-belief and motivation. Luck was a constant theme throughout the narratives, and in reflecting upon their experiences as students 'good luck' was considered by many to be important in the journey to becoming a successful student. Good luck was reported as a factor not only for these students themselves, but also for future students. Luck has been Richard Wiseman's (2004) research focus for over ten years. He reports that lucky people use four basic principles by which they generate good fortune: 'They are skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities, make lucky decisions by listening to their intuition, create self-fulfilling prophesies via positive expectations, and adopt a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good' (Wiseman, 2003: 3). He goes on to suggest that 'although lucky and unlucky people have almost no insight into the real causes of their good and bad luck, their thoughts and behaviour are responsible for much of their fortune' (2003: 3). It is within this framework that I use the discourse of luck, integrating it with the success narrative as 'lucky people are successful and successful people are lucky' (Summers and Watson, 2004: 2). The proposal that thoughts and the related behaviours of the students are important to the eventual completion or otherwise of the programme is reiterated in the following section on self-belief.

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[171] This is one of the suggestions that King (2008) makes.

[172] Luck can be seen as something external, yet I use it here as an individual/internal resource as I refer to the actions and reactions of students in relation to their belief of themselves as lucky. For a discussion on luck as an internal or external resource see Liza Day and John Maltby (2003: 99).

Creating and noticing chance opportunities

Students reported they were lucky as they had seen and taken the opportunity of doing the degree. This could be illustrated by Diane who 'never set out to do a degree' and fell into it 'almost by accident'. Although this is how she reports it in the interview, she had 'looked at part-time degrees in the past but I suppose financially we'd never been in a position for me to be able to do it and the kids were little then'. Relocation to a new area with her husband's employment meant that she had more time available than previously, and her children were now older. Her circumstances had thus changed, she noticed the opportunity, picked up the course literature whilst exploring the new area, had taken the opportunity and followed it through to completion, even though she had not set out to do a degree. She, like Westland's (2004) students, could be said to have been 'looking for a rabbit hole down which to fall'.

Maggie also falls into this category. She too reported how lucky she was. For her the opportunity to do a degree presented itself directly at her feet. She had previously done some short courses at her local institution, and as is sometimes the case with outreach part-time programmes, active recruitment occurred. Her name had been given to the tutor responsible for the degree who then rang her with the course details. As it happened the timing was wrong for Maggie as she was about to leave for an extended holiday to celebrate her silver wedding anniversary, but the following year she contacted the tutor to see if the programme was running again since her appetite had been whetted and she then grasped the opportunity.

Liz created the opportunity to study as she investigated the career path she wanted to follow and worked out how to do this. As a teacher she already had a first degree but to train to be an educational psychologist she needed a psychology degree. This was achievable by taking a part-time degree by evening study. To enable her to do

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this however she realised that she would have to alter her work patterns. A reduced work-load in terms of working hours was the best solution so she put this proposal to her principal who agreed to let her job become a job-share. She felt lucky that she in such a position to negotiate this, as she realised others would not be so fortunate and would have to make other, perhaps more complex arrangements in order to negotiate time to do a part-time degree. Liz also reported that in London she was in a lucky position as she had a relatively small mortgage since she had lived in her current accommodation for many years. This meant that she was able to withstand a reduced income for four years. For her coping with a reduced income meant that she would buy fewer clothes, take fewer holidays and have fewer luxuries for the four years in which she was studying.

Shirley had been feeling restless in her work and was looking for an opportunity for self-development but was not sure which direction to take when the local HEI's part-time course prospectus arrived on her desk. She had left school with 'O' level qualifications but was encouraged by the literature which advised that work experience could count towards the matriculation requirements. She applied and was accepted. Despite having no background knowledge of HE she decided that it was the right move for her, and the serendipitous arrival of the prospectus helped her follow through her decision to progress to higher education. Had the prospectus not arrived she would not have considered contacting the local university to ask about the possibility of studying part-time as she did not know part-time degrees were available there[173] or that they could be accessed without 'A' level qualifications. She felt lucky that she had picked up the prospectus, and that she had followed through her initial reaction to apply, despite discouragement by those in her workplace.

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[173] The issue of visibility of part-time programmes is raised in chapter 5.

These opportunities for study had either been noticed or created by the students as reported here and then followed through to successful completion. As Wiseman states thoughts and behaviours are important in the discourse of luck. These students thought they were lucky in that they had found an opportunity and then acted upon it. Their belief in their luck in finding the right opportunity for them also helped in their actions throughout their studies. However, their narratives clearly suggest a more complex scenario than luck alone. My interviewees were clearly both ready and looking for change. They responded to a culturally-endorsed form of initiating change – education (Griffin, 1994). Their 'luck' was therefore not a random occurrence but, in many respects, a culturally and structurally encouraged outcome of a specific lifecourse and career trajectory. I now move to Wiseman's second point, that of following intuition.

Making lucky decisions by listening to their intuition

As reported above, Shirley followed her initial reaction despite others trying to dissuade her from entering the part-time HE programme she had 'found'. Her previous understanding had been that you could not enter HE without 'A' level qualifications so the prospectus changed her perception, and then allowed her to investigate further and follow through her intuition.

Lucy made the decision to attend university earlier than planned. Although she attributed her success to 'God closing no doors', she found this opportunity and followed it as 'it just felt right at the time. She listened to her 'belief'. Originally she had planned to start a full-time degree (after taking short courses in the community) when her children were all in school, yet the opportunity to study presented itself much earlier and in a different format. Her community courses led her to the part-time degree, and despite her partner's initial reluctance to her changing her plans 'the doors were always open', so she went through them. Becher states: 'A door that

seems to stand open must be of a person's size, or it is not the door that Providence means for that person' (cited in Cryer, 2000: 7) [174]. Luck, providence or God were on her side, the doors were the right size and open and she went right through them and followed through to successful completion.

Creating self-fulfilling prophesies via positive expectations

A number of the students believed they were 'finishers' (Liz, Tom, Jean), they had 'tenacity' (Marilyn) or 'determination and stamina' (Bridget) and 'Jack Russell-like qualities' (Rachel) or were 'bloody-minded' (Tia) and 'stubborn' (Keith). They believed in themselves and these qualities which facilitated their ability to finish. In this way they created self-fulfilling prophesies via the positive expectations they had of themselves. Henry Ford is credited with saying: 'Those who believe they can, and those who believe they can't, are both right'. These students believed they could study to successful completion and they did. The actions they took then at least partially created the conditions for successful completion. For example, Rachel's Jack Russell-like qualities encouraged her not to let go of the degree, to continue studying even when she failed an examination and had to repeat it the following year. She held onto the expectation that she was going to complete the degree, despite a set back. A person who considered herself unlucky might move towards leaving in a similar situation: 'I'm unlucky, I've failed, I knew I would, I will not try again, there is no point as I expect I'll fail' and thus leave the degree or put in less effort in the future which could then result in more failed examinations.

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[174] Modified for sexist language in Cryer.

Adopting a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good

Some students certainly had bad luck during their studies, but this was not dwelt upon. It had been resisted and a resilient attitude helped them to overcome their bad luck. Bad luck had come in the form of exam questions for Rachel; the 'wrong' questions had come up during her exam in her penultimate year. She walked out of the examination, and thus had to repeat the exam in her final year. However, she accepted this was the case, and allocated greater time for revision in her final year because of this experience. In relation to walking out of the examination hall she felt she had been lucky as when writing an employment reference her course tutor had decided not to mention this. Bridget also discussed bad luck and problems along the way; however, she felt that a small amount of courage and a great deal of luck had helped her reach the end of her studies, despite difficult circumstances. She reported that one needs luck in one's studies so that 'over a period of six years things that happen in different aspects of your life don't become hurdles rather than challenges, in if they are challenges you can overcome them and still carry on studying'. She felt she had had such luck as although she had been presented with challenges they had not become unconquerable and she had been able to continue her studies.

As has been detailed in chapter 2 there were many different family situations among my sample, and across that diverse range of family structures many students reported themselves to be lucky because of their family situation. Judy reported that she was lucky because she did not have children, so that she did not 'have people pulling me in lots of different directions'. Maggie was lucky that her husband's salary allowed her to work part-time rather than full-time: 'I was lucky that I didn't have to work full-time … or to chase that salary'. Jen felt lucky because things were going right within her family which allowed her to continue with her studies. She had friends whose family situation had prevented them from continuing in their studies, so

she felt lucky that this was not so for her. Others like Liz felt lucky within their household because they had space to be able to study. In a similar way Tom reported being lucky, as described earlier in the chapter, because he had his summer house that could be used for study. Glen felt lucky that he had been able to make office space in both houses he had lived in during his studies.[175]

Students also reported being lucky as their employers had been supportive. Liz felt lucky that her Principal had granted her permission to move to a job-share; this was even though he knew that she was planning to leave teaching on completion of her degree. Steve reported being lucky that he managed to get his annual leave at the time he needed it, when it was busy at work and if others had required leave at the same time he would not have been able to take time off in order to complete his dissertation.

Many students reported being lucky with the tutors they had. Diane's description of her tutors and the course centred on her particular group being lucky, not least because the course had changed since 'We just all feel so lucky because we will be the only people who have actually managed to do the degree this way. … I just can't speak highly enough of [tutor and tutor]'. Her particular degree was located in a local Country House: 'we have just been so lucky, it is a lovely place to be as well as to study'. Krystal felt lucky because she had gained a place on the programme, as not many were available, and she could not have studied for the DipSW in any other way. Krystal also explained that she was lucky in relation to the structure of the course. It fitted into her workplace and work patterns, whereas others had to take months out of their current paid jobs in order to do the placements within the programme. Rachel was lucky to be able to organise her work placement with the

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[175] See Chapman (2004) and Chapman and Hockey (1999) for discussions of gender and domestic space adaptation and negotiations.

family of her ex-partner. Some of the students, including Tia, Carlos, Gina, Glen and Jane believed they were lucky to study at this time/stage in their lives as they considered that they had been relatively immature at the age of 18 so it was the best time for them to make the most out of higher education.

Although many of these situations could be analysed from an alternative viewpoint, not one of luck but of structural support and of position in the family or life course trajectory for example, that was not how the situations were reported by the students. The ability to seize one's 'luck' was partly a function of motivation which is one of the successful students' resources. Within feminist literature, (see for example Silius, 2005; Leonard, 2001) using the discourse of luck is often viewed as problematic. If women profess themselves as reliant on luck in getting to a particular position in a career structure or in achieving a degree, it suggests that they are not claiming personal competencies, and denying their own agency in the path undertaken (Leonard, 2001: 3). Thus using the discourse of luck could negate academic abilities and skills, hard work and perseverance. I have sympathy with that argument. Too many women deny that they have worked hard and have the academic ability to get to the positions they are in, yet I do not suggest using the discourse of luck as an alternative to adopting agency. Students do not complete part-time degrees just because they are lucky. They are determined, bloody-minded, tenacious, hard-working and have stamina. They are agentic, but, as shown here, the discourse of luck and their belief that they are lucky people informs their decisions (to choose to study regularly and to give their studies priority) and their practices (to study for a particular qualification on the way to a higher-level qualification or employment) so that it moves them towards being a successful student.[176] Luck was thus reported as

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[176] I use my own discourse here as an example. I suggest I am lucky to have been in the right place at the right time to secure the research assistant post to enable me to write this thesis, and also that I was lucky that my employer gave me the opportunity to take leave-of-absence

important to many of the students even though it was their beliefs and actions that contributed to their successful completion. Liza Day and John Maltby (2003: 99) state that 'individuals who believe in good luck reject the types of maladaptive beliefs usually associated with irrational beliefs and this, in turn, leads to psychological well being'. Psychological well-being then contributes to being able to cope with the demands of a part-time degree alongside other demands in life. Luck though, is not the only subjective resource that the students reported and I follow now to discuss motivation.

Motivation

Pat Cryer (2000: 37) reports that three necessary conditions for success (at post-graduate level) are motivation (i.e. the wish and the determination to succeed), health and support. I believe they are equally important at undergraduate level, particularly for part-time adult students who have many similarities with post-graduates.[177] Support has been an issue discussed throughout my thesis, particularly in chapters 2 and 3. I have not focussed on health in this thesis[178] but the following section discusses the motivation of the students in this research. This briefly addresses the motivation to start studying, but mostly deals with the motivation to continue to successful completion of the degree. These motivations may be different or change during the timeframe of the degree. An example of this was shown in my previous

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from my post. However, I had previously studied and successfully completed an undergraduate degree and a masters degree, I worked in a department for lifelong learning and this thesis would contribute to the knowledge of the student body of that department so although I did and do feel lucky in obtaining this opportunity, it would not have happened by luck alone. My actions, my agency, my decisions and practices contributed to my being in the 'lucky position'.

[177] Similarities include the age of student, the fact that many study part-time, are employed alongside their degrees and have family responsibilities.

[178] I would argue that both mental and physical health and stamina are vital for embarking and sustaining the long-term commitment of a part-time degree (both one's own health and that of one's family).

research (Medhurst, 2003). Stuart's motivation for starting the degree was very personal: his wife had undertaken study as an adult to degree level and he felt he was being left behind. He wanted to be able to have conversations with her at the level she was at now. He therefore undertook a part-time degree alongside his full-time job. During the course of his degree, enthused by the subject matter of a social science degree, he found that his enjoyment of the subject kept him motivated during six years of study. Despite having no inclination to change jobs upon embarking on the degree, he realised that he could change his career path, and this kept him motivated towards the end of his degree. Stuart successfully completed his part-time degree and undertook further study and is now a fully-qualified social worker. He had not realised how his motivation might change during the degree. His initial motivation, to be able to understand his wife's conversations, provided the impetus for embarking upon the degree. But that was just the start.

Colin felt that without determination and self-motivation an attempt to study for a part-time degree would not even be made. Pete felt his self-discipline and self-motivation came from his difficult childhood; his parents had separated when he was very young and he had taken up karate as a way of dealing with this. This, he felt, had instilled in him an understanding and an ability to rely on himself, to be disciplined and to keep working even when he found it difficult. Katie's motivation had been to ensure that she and her daughter had a good life despite being a single-parent family. As well as loving the subject she also knew that the long-term gain from obtaining a degree would be worth any short-term discomfort and sacrifice. This had kept her motivated to sit at the computer night after night after her daughter had gone to bed.

Enjoyment

One of the main motivations both for study and for keeping up momentum during the degree was love of the subject. This was reported as the main impetus for studying and for successfully completing the degree. Jean said that the motivation was high for herself and those in her group who 'really, really liked the subject'. For those who struggled with motivation at certain times it was often dislike of the subject matter that caused this. Carlos explained: 'I'm not going to put the effort in, I won't expend unnecessary effort' on subjects that were not of particular interest or whose relevance he found difficult to see. He admitted that when there was little interest in the subject he struggled with motivation 'even with that military instilled discipline'. Keith agreed with this point of view and was certain that 'You really need an interest to keep that motivation going, the human brain will not take the info in if you don't' (Keith). Weronika had always enjoyed study, and thought that overall the best strategy for success was to 'enjoy what you are doing'.

Love of the subject expressed itself as enjoyment which was repeatedly referred to in the narratives of this group of students. They had on the whole enjoyed their experience of studying. Judy, for example, enjoyed the early part of her degree in particular: 'I think enjoying it is a good point. I have enjoyed it yes, and I certainly enjoyed it in the early days, a lot more, inject some fun into the proceedings I think' (Judy). She advised that 'if people enjoy coming then it makes them want to come back' and that to be successful 'you've just got to keep going back'.

This desire for enjoyment and excitement in the study process was also reported by Claxton (2001). Citing work by Goleman (1996) and Csikszentmihalyi and

Csikszentmihalyi (1992) Claxton discusses the 'state of flow'[179] in which 'good students tend to be those who can gain access to the state of flow whilst they are studying. For students who access this state 'learning becomes more attractive and enjoyable'. Goleman states that students who 'by failing to hone the skills that would get them in flow [when studying], both forfeit the enjoyment of study and run the risk of limiting the level of intellectual tasks that will be enjoyable to them in the future' (cited in Claxton, 1999: 56). The students in this study reported enjoyment with words such as 'buzz' and 'new energy' (Rachel), 'focussed and positive' (Liz), and a 'certain satisfaction' (Carlos). Claxton argues that 'learning often takes place close to the emotional point where challenge may tip into threat' (1999: 56). Clearly, enjoyment is not something one has or does not have. Rather, it results from a complex interaction of factors. Therefore the enjoyment of the learning process is important for successful students. Enjoying the process means that it is less likely that the learning becomes a threat rather than a challenge. This love of a subject and the enjoyment of learning can encourage further study. Taaffe (1998: vi) shows that PhD students' enjoyment of the subject is vital:

> The verdict was unanimous. They did a PhD for love … Their eyes light up when the librarian brings them a big, heavy pile of dusty books … [In] the chemistry lab, things are, essentially not different … They talk about the 'buzz of discovery' and 'loving what they do' (Taaffe, 1998 cited in Cryer, 2000: 13).

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[179] The state of flow is 'such a good match between the learner's motivation, her learning power and the demands of the task that there is simply no room left over to feel self-conscious, to be aware of any extraneous considerations or even to be concerned, in the moment with success or failure. The flow is accompanied by a feeling of total concentration and even excitement' (Claxton, 1999: 56).

For Weronika studying law had been a lifetime desire: 'I enjoyed the subject very much, I am so interested in it, it has fascinated me all of my life'. Katie's enjoyment of studying for her teaching certificate had been such that she felt it was fun, it was 'such a laugh that it hardly felt like work at all'. Gaining enjoyment from the study process, and enjoying the subject are therefore important components of successful study and something that within the business of HE is sometimes forgotten. In these days when recruitment and retention are words that are never far from the lips of Senior Management Teams or corporate plans, enjoyment seems to have gone out of fashion. Yet if we look at the experience of these students who successfully completed degree programmes of up to seven years in length it was their enjoyment that was paramount for their continued commitment. It was their enjoyment that kept them motivated throughout the programme.

Not only did the students talk about their own motivation, they also discussed others who motivated them in their studies, and how their studies motivated others. These others include family (partners, children and grandchildren), friends and neighbours. Jean felt that the fact that others expected her to be in class was a good motivator. Colin believed that the adult students he studied with motivated each other, and after the initial drop-out the students left were highly motivated to be in class and to study. He felt much more so than 'ordinary students', by which he meant full-time 18-year olds. Julia got some of her motivation from other members of the group. There was one man in her group whom she described as 'the academic one'. When he was struggling and needed encouragement to continue his studies it motivated her since - if even 'an academic' type of person had struggles in their studies - it meant that it was alright that she did. Encouraging him to continue and giving him advice on how to stay motivated helped her in turn.

Katie thought that she could motivate others by being an example and also by the motivation she gave to others. She planned in the future to work towards teaching

teachers or trainers because of how she was motivated by her own particular tutors whilst studying for a teaching certificate alongside her degree. Her degree course leader had given a particular motivational talk to her when she had doubts about completion. She was reminded of her situation and all she had overcome to get as far as she had on the study path and that had inspired her to complete. Her desire to understand more about motivation led her to write her undergraduate dissertation on this topic.

As discussed in chapter 2 part-time students can influence other family members to study, to create what I called the ripples of study. This was the case particularly with Tia, Tom and Carlos. Their experiences as part-time students had been very influential in their families so that Tia's husband for example followed her to the Open University on completion of her degree. The television was on much less often in the evening, as the family mostly now sat studying, reading or discussing elements of their studies. Tom's daughter followed in his footsteps and embarked on a full-time degree and his grand-daughter was, he disclosed, already at the age of six, looking forward to going to the same university. Carlos's children had been inspired by his study habits and had emulated him in the practice of studying regularly every night, in a way that they had not previously. His study had led them as a family to have many discussions about learning and working practices and also the merits of part- and full-time study for young adults particularly with regards to the then incoming full-time fees.

Gaining good marks for their work acted as motivation for some students to work long hours. The opposite was also true, when it was understood that a certain degree mark was unlikely to be obtained (both Judy and Carlos realised part-way through their studies that their original goal of a first-class degree was unattainable). Berni reported that she was competitive, but only with herself. She always wanted to achieve a higher mark than her previous assignment and this motivated her to work

hard. With each new module Weronika's marks would be in the low first-class category and she then would follow the assignment feedback for the tutor to gain higher marks for her latter assignments. However, Glen felt that for him good marks were not so much of a motivator as they might have been for other students. Though he always aimed as high as possible his marks remained very consistent throughout his studies.

When looking at the motivation to do the degree, not just the motivation needed to carry on and complete successfully, many talked of missed opportunities or the lack of opportunity to do this when younger, and very much follows Britton and Baxter's 'unfulfilled potential' category (1999). Judy's motivation was to prove to herself that she was 'not thick'. As a child she had failed the 11+ examination[180] and had since worried about her academic ability. Having successfully completed a degree she now saw that she was academically able. Tia asked this question of part-time students: 'Did you view yourself a failure in the education system?' as she felt that many who returned to study as mature or part-time students had been disadvantaged in their early education, either because of gender or class or particular circumstances. She was not a supporter of the UK education system and felt it failed many able children. She believed that many of these children were failed by the system in their initial education and would make up a large proportion of adult returners. This was certainly the case for some in this sample.

Although Jean had had the opportunity to study when younger and had done so, she reported that the motivation for many in her class was that they had not had the opportunity to study at the age of 18. She felt this was a strong motivator, and they wanted, in a similar way to Judy, the chance to prove to themselves (and sometimes

[180] The selection examination for entry to type of secondary school.

others[181]) that they were capable of higher education study. Colin had a similar motivation. He felt he had not done as well as he could have done educationally when he was younger so this was his opportunity. However, he also felt compelled to have 'something' to do in retirement and as he said, he had 'no interest in golf'!

Carlos thought that being older meant that he was more motivated to study than he had been as a young man. There were fewer distractions than there had been when he was younger, and his desire to provide a good future for his family motivated him to look for the best way possible to do so. This meant getting a good degree before he left the forces. Others had similar motivations, to work for a degree to improve employment chances. Tom and Glen however acknowledged that although they would like to use their studies to move into a more fulfilling job, their current pay level and status would not allow for a change of career. Tom was an electrician and Glen an engineer. They had done well in their respective careers, yet were unfulfilled in the work they did. Keith had been similarly unfulfilled before taking his full-time degree as a mature student.

To motivate oneself to undertake and complete a part-time degree as an adult student, alongside work, family and many other commitments takes a great deal of stamina and determination. One of the greatest internal resources that the students reported drawing on was their belief in themselves as finishers and completers. Many students reported that they believed that they would complete the task they had set out to do. This self-belief meant that they then took actions to move them towards their goal. They addressed any challenges along the way rather than

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[181] At graduation this year one graduate told me that she was determined to graduate and go back to her old school with her degree certificate and show them what she was capable of. She had been told in school that she would make nothing more than a shelf-stacker.

allowing them to become problems. Larson (1979 cited in Bourner and Race, 1995:140) asks:

> Do you know what a challenge is? It is a difficulty that you want to solve.
> It's what you need to make life an interesting, fun game.
>
> Do you know what a problem is? It's the same thing as a challenge – it's
> a difficulty – only we don't want to solve it so we don't let it be part of our
> game. … Challenges and problems are the same thing – you're what
> distinguishes them from each other because you are the one who
> decides whether you want to enjoy solving them or hate solving them
> (Larson, 1979).

Kember poses the question: 'Why is it that some students facing a multitude of conflicting demands seem able to cope with both them and their course, while others, apparently under considerable less pressure, fall by the wayside?' (1999: 110). To answer this question I would suggest that state of mind, believing in oneself and one's practices which in turn creates a mind-set of completion is vital so that even when faced with that multitude of conflicting demands students cope and continue to study. Below are just some of the words from the students showing their 'Jack Russell-like' qualities that enabled them to continue when others might have chosen not to.

> I'm not really a person who likes to walk out after three years. … I'm
> pretty determined, I'm like that, you know sometimes they ask you to
> compare yourself with an animal [LAUGHING] I know, I would have
> always said that I'm a little Jack Russell, I do get my teeth into things and
> I won't let go, maybe it's my upbringing I don't know, but it's one of those
> things, I just am (Rachel).

Sheer determination I think, erm, personality-wise I think I am just a stayer, if I start something that I want, rather than things that society expect women to do, but if it is something that I want, then I will stick at it (Bridget).

Well, because I am who I am, I couldn't not; it is the way I am. You know, you don't go that way and then stop before the end (Tom).

I always finish what I started, even if I do badly, I don't think I've ever left anything. [LAUGHING] Not the dinner, not the chocolate bar! I finish everything. … It's just a character thing, I would finish it, other people would take an extra year, there are one or two people who were doing their project last year, they've taken an additional year, it never occurred to me, I just did it (Liz).

I think I've got a stubborn streak, determined, I think I've got that sort of nature, I'm determined, and once I start something I'll finish it regardless (Marilyn).

This self-belief that they would complete, kept Rachel on track even when she failed an examination during her studies, and Marilyn heading towards completion even when her financial situation meant that the course fees became problematic. It kept Bridget studying even during a stressful and emotionally-draining court case. The tenacity shown by the students in this sample particularly over the long periods of time needed to complete a part-time degree enabled these students to address life challenges as they occurred, showing what Claxton (2001) described as 'stickability'. He states that 'staying intelligently engaged with learning challenges that matter to you, despite difficulties and setbacks is perhaps the most important quality of the good learner' (2001: 55). For lifelong learners such as these, stickability was an

important quality, and one that in today's world of instant rewards is frequently disavowed.

Obviously the narrative of self-belief and stickability highlighted here comes from students who completed their studies. They believed they would complete and they did complete. Others of course did not. How do their narratives differ from these? Kember suggests: 'Those who do not complete a course prefer to attribute their withdrawal to factors outside their control in order to salvage some self-esteem' (1999: 114) and that this is explained by attribution theory (Bar-Tal, 1978; Weiner, 1972, 1974). Kember proposes that students who do complete attribute their success to internal factors such as 'hard work, perseverance or cleverness' (1999: 114). This is confirmed by the narratives here, particularly those of hard work and perseverance, yet the 'cleverness' narrative did not emerge, with many of the students, particularly the women stating that you do not have to be particularly clever to complete a degree. For example, Bridget stated that whilst others may think of you as clever for doing a degree, she believed that 'I don't think that you have to be clever to do a degree, I just think you have to be really determined' (Bridget). Gina also reported that it was possible to get a degree through hard work, not cleverness: 'You know it's just hard work, so I think that has been a good thing just finding that out. That [a degree] is available to everybody, not just academic people'. And Katie attributed her success to her 'common sense'. This reflection on personal traits is similar to that of the women in Jackson's study reflecting on their ability to study which she labels as 'differently academic'.

Kember states:

> Students are not pre-destined to remain in one or other category because
> of their background characteristics. However adverse the circumstances
> may seem, students can and do succeed in integrating study with their

conflicting demands. Others who appear to have very favourable

circumstances fail to accommodate even quite moderate study demands

(1999: 114).

I suggest that one reason that some achieve whilst others fail to complete even

under 'quite moderate study demands' may be a matter of self-belief as shown

above. The Ford quote (above) is quite apt here, as is the anonymous saying[182]

'watch your thoughts for they become words, watch your words for they become

actions, watch your actions for they become habits, watch your habits for they

become character, watch your character for it becomes your destiny'. The thoughts

about one's self and the self-belief in being a finisher/completer type of person then

guide words and actions that lead to becoming that which is believed about oneself.

Before Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile in 1954 it was believed to be

impossible for a human to run at such speeds, yet after he had passed this landmark

time 37 others completed the distance in less than four minutes the following year,

with over 300 completing the sub-four-minute mile in 1956 (cited in McKenna 2004).

Thoughts and beliefs about what is and is not achievable are thus shown to be

powerful motivators. If students believe that a part-time degree is an achievable goal

it is more likely to be achieved than if it is seen as unachievable. Despite reports of

slight procrastinations from the interviews of 'having the cleanest toilet ever' (Tia) or

'not being in the mood' (Maggie, Julia) or of 'being indolent' (Liz) the students

reported that because of their busy lives when they got the opportunity to study they

would study. Although describing herself as indolent Liz went on to explain that 'I

seem to be one of those people when I've got a very restricted amount of time I pack

it all in and get it done' and this idea came through strongly in the narratives.

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[182] Quoted from a statue in the Vigeland Park in Oslo.

There were a few reports of procrastination and putting off the work. Students may have had habits which meant that they had to get other things done first and out of the way (for example, Gina) but they worked the required hours. Even when Carlos had motivational problems because he 'absolutely hated' one of the courses he had to take, he pushed on. There was 'no point in beating yourself up about it' (Carlos) and he would try to 'just do what you can, within your faculty, and within boundaries of stress'. The self-belief of being a finisher meant the students realised and accepted what needed to be done in order to finish and kept working at it until it was done, even when difficult situations arose.

Luck was one of the strongest narratives in the interview data; the ways in which the students interpreted their situations as lucky did indeed play a part in the study journeys of these students. As Summers and Watson (2005: 4-5) state: 'even if we can't control events that happen to us, we can control our reaction to them and therefore the results'. This is very similar to Wiseman's findings that it is the thoughts and behaviour around the discourse of luck which are important, and that is what is of interest here. Because the students believed they were lucky in their situations or dispositions they acted in such a way as to move them closer to being a successful, completing student. I have included the section on luck because it was so prevalent in the students' discourse, yet am aware of the criticisms regarding the disavowal of agency particularly in relation to women relying on the luck narrative.

Conclusion

Despite a reliance on the narrative of luck throughout the interviews, interviewees were not just passively expecting the degree to happen to them, they were highly agentic and motivated towards successful completion of their studies. Students' motivations both for starting and continuing studies ranged from wanting something for one's self, to wanting a better job to be able to provide better for one's family, to

wanting to prove to self or others a certain level of intelligence that was not currently shown.

Although not usually referred to as a resource, enjoyment of studying and the subject of study came through strongly in the interviews. If students are enjoying their course they will be more likely to overcome any barriers or challenges during their studies and be more likely to join this group of completing successful students, rather than ending up another drop-out statistic.

This chapter has shown that part-time students participating in their study demonstrated a great deal of personal resources which they can and do draw upon throughout their studies and indeed it is an advantage for part-time students that they have these resources. Yet the HE sector cannot ignore the fact that HEI-provided resources are a part of the successful students' story for many students. This will be investigated in chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Institutional Provision: 'Stapled on to the margins' [183]

This chapter moves to a focus on HE institutions and the provision they offer to part-time students. This is done by drawing on my sample's reflections on their experiences of choosing to study, interaction with their particular institution and their view of the general status of part-time studies in the HE sector and within the UK. Throughout the chapter I raise the questions of a) how the HE sector and institutions understand the issues of part-time study and b) whether or not part-time students feel that their needs, wants and concerns are taken into account by these institutions. This is done using the concept of habitus as a framework. Edwards (1993) found that most studies investigating the experience of mature women's return to education 'approach the subject from the perspective of "education" rather than that of mature women students' (1993: 9) and this in turn reduced the women to students with 'bag and baggage' that had to be dealt with, but within this 'the bag and baggage of higher education [was] rendered invisible' (1993: 10). By focussing on higher education institutions, making the bag and baggage of HEIs visible, via the concept of institutional habitus, this chapter will address what institutions do and can do, both as individual institutions and as a sector, to enhance provision for existing and prospective part-time students.

A concept developed by Bourdieu, and used extensively in the sociology of education, habitus refers to the norms and practices of particular social groups or classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The dynamic concept of habitus is however 'more than norms and values, because it is embedded within everyday actions, much

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[183] 'Stapled on to the margins' (Bowl, 2003: 98).

of which is sub-conscious' (Thomas, 2002: 430). Amy Stuart Wells defines habitus as 'how one's view of the world is influenced by the traditional distribution of power and status in society' (1997:423) and as such incorporates a 'matrix of perceptions and appreciations' (1997:423). Thus an individual's habitus is unique (Stuart Wells 1997: 424) and is developed from the family, class, gender, race and religion, initial schooling and other interactions with the social world. This is not to deny an individual's agency; in fact, it is agency which makes the habitus unique despite similar demographics and situations. It is agency which means that individuals will react to situations and opportunities differently despite similar habitus to a particular group.

As many of our everyday actions are sub-conscious and taken for granted, habitus can be hidden until/unless it is highlighted. Norms and values are so much a part of an individual that it is difficult to articulate just how they developed and how they could change if so desired. Yet habitus does change, it changes over time, on coming into contact with new people and new ideas, when joining new groups and taking on some of their norms and values[184]. And just as an individual's habitus can change so can institutional habitus (Reay, David and Ball, 2001; Reay, 2003 and Thomas, 2002).

Habitus as described is the 'norms and practices of particular social groups and classes' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) so by extension institutional habitus refers to the norms, practices and embedded everyday actions of particular organisations, in this case higher educational institutions. Reay *et al* (2001) describe this as the 'impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation' (2001: para 1.3), so in this occurrence how the

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[184] If the norms and values of the new group are not readily accepted, full acceptance into the group would be unlikely or possibly problematic.

HEI appears 'from the outside', to the general public and the prospective student, will affect who can and does decide to apply to be a student both within the sector and to a particular institution.

An institutional habitus 'determines the practices of the university' (Thomas, 2002: 439), yet the habitus needs to be made explicit.

> The field of HE has its own orthodoxy, its own way of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs, which give it legitimacy. These principles are only ever half-articulated and many of the orthodoxies of thinking and acting are implicit and tacit (Tett, 2004: 260).

With so many institutional norms and practices being 'implicit and tacit' it is possible to view what happens, but difficult to understand why things happen if the practices are different from an individual's own and familial norms. This then leads the adult part-time student to feel like Bourdieu's 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). And thus as a 'fish out of water', less likely to either join in the first place, or successfully complete. Therefore, following Reay (2003), Reay *et al* (2001) and (Thomas 2002), I suggest that it is imperative that the sector and individual HEIs look to their own institutional habitus with a commitment to move from a habitus that excludes, ignores or discounts the adult part-time student and part-time student experience, to one where the part-time student feels included and considered, supported and accepted.

> Institutional habituses, no less than individual habituses, have a history and have been established over time. They are therefore capable of change but by dint of their collective nature are less fluid than individual habitus (Reay *et al*, 2001: para 1.3).

Institutional habitus may indeed be less fluid, but is still, according to Reay *et al*, capable of change. This, of course, is no simple or straightforward task, yet it is an important one in the quest to enable more part-time students become successful students, and the concept of institutional habitus can be an useful tool in doing working towards future accessible universities. Avis (2006: 347) proposes that

> Bourdieuian tools provide an important conceptual resource in attempting
> to grasp the complexity of social, economic and educational relations.
> They refuse a simple duality between agency and structure, and offer a
> way to develop nuanced and complex accounts of learning cultures.

By using the concept of habitus and institutional habitus in this chapter I offer a critique of HE's relationship with the part-time student body in order to address ways in which this relationship could be improved, which overtime could enable more part-time students to become successful students. When looking to the future of HE Coffield and Williamson (1997: 123) stress that it is important to 'acknowledg[e] that social institutions are socially constructed and that legitimacy of social institutions is something that has to be debated, fought for and secured'. He argues that

> If universities did not already exist, they would have been invented. What
> is less certain is that modern societies would choose to develop the kinds
> of institutions which they presently have (Coffield and Williamson, 1997:
> 121).

What kinds of institutions would modern societies choose to develop if they did not already exist? The current dominance of the full-time student in the majority of institutions is a result of historical and political decisions which privileges the full-time student and thus renders the part-time student invisible or forgotten (Callender, 2006). The Open University, created by Royal charter in 1969, (Lunneborg, 1994: 136) has a very different habitus from full-time institutions. Its raison d'etre is part-

time distance learning. Similarly Birkbeck has as a core mission to 'provide part-time higher education courses which meet the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of adults; in particular those who live or work in the London region' (www.BBK.ac.uk accessed 23/6/2007). These institutions are seen from the outside as being very different from full-time focussed institutions and from the perspective of the prospective part-time student institutions in which they are likely to be 'a fish in water' rather than out of it, or at least know that there are others in a very similar position to theirs.

To discuss ways in which part-time students could feel more like 'fish in water' in the HE sector this chapter is divided into five sections which loosely follow the students' movement through a degree programme. The decision making process of part-time students is therefore addressed in the first instance; this examines the visibility of part-time provision within the public gaze, and includes but is not limited to publicity for part-time provision. Secondly, I discuss the institutional view of part-time students. I then focus on teaching provision. Fourthly, the administrative provision of the part-time programmes is addressed. Finally I look at how students respond to current HE provision in terms of whether or not the interviewees would recommend being a part-time student.

'To be or not to be' a part-time student?

This section investigates how a person becomes a potential part-time student and then how the move is made to become a part-time student. As considered in the introduction the visibility of part-time provision in HE is limited apart from that of the OU and Birkbeck[185]. The limited visibility of the part-time degree provision by

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[185] Although this is my external view, discussion with Sue Jackson (Professor of Lifelong Learning and Gender at Birkbeck) revealed a different viewpoint. On visiting London I see posters everywhere advertising Birkbeck, she felt there were very few.

individual HEIs and the HE sector as a whole is partly because of the historical and political decision-making in regards to the HE sector, where prominence and preferential status has been awarded to full-time study[186]. There is little that can be done in regards to historical political decisions which have shaped the sector into that which it is today. However, by highlighting how institutional habitus can affect the decision-making process of potential part-time students this section addresses what could be done in the future.

Firstly the institutional habitus of the HE sector will be addressed and then the focus will move to that of individual HEIs. As a sector part-time HE provision is growing. Between 1997/98 and 2003/04 part-time provision grew by 45 per cent against growth in full-time provision of 12 per cent (Callender *et al*, 2006: 8). Yet, despite the title, part-time provision and part-time students' issues were largely ignored in the 2003 White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* and the subsequent legislation. The House of Commons Select committee raised this issue 'The White Paper is principally concerned with young, full-time students. *The needs of those who fall outside that category must be properly taken into account if the higher education sector is to provide truly improved access* (HC 425-1: 49 cited in Callender *et al*, 2006: 8 my emphasis). Yet the reports by Ramsden (2006a), Callender *et al* (2006) and Boorman *et al* (2006), commissioned by Universities UK and Guild HE are the first large-scale systematic reporting of part-time provision in the UK. If even the DfES can ignore this important and growing section of the sector it is hardly surprising that it is not highly visible to the general public. In other countries part-time provision for adults is much more common. In Finland for example, 'the level of post-compulsory education is so high that there is seen to be no great need for special

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[186] See Schuller *et al* (1999: Chapter 2 Getting to Where We Are: Recent Developments and Debates) for a discussion on this issue

promotion' [to create a learning culture] (O'Keeffe, 2003: 31/2). In Canada and the

USA studying part-time as an adult alongside work commitments is almost

expected[187].

The creation of a learning culture is one that is a large-scale undertaking and indeed

that is one development that the European Commission[188] is concerned with. In its

attempts to create a European Area of Lifelong Learning (EALL), it sets out 'building

blocks' which include: 'creating a culture of learning by increasing learning

opportunities, raising participation levels and stimulating demand for learning;

facilitating access by developing the supply side to enable learning by anyone,

anywhere, at any time; and developing a partnership approach: all relevant actors, in

and outside the formal systems must collaborate for strategies to work "on the

ground"' (European Commission, 2002: 5). By working towards and achieving these

building blocks the EALL starts to challenge and change the institutional habitus of

the HE sector at a national level from a 'top-down' perspective. For students the

change that offers the opportunity to learn within a system that is accessible for

'anyone, anywhere, at any time' then part-time study becomes more of a norm for a

greater proportion of the adult population.

Changes at institutional levels are equally important. Just as the sector can attract

individuals by a particular habitus, individual institutions also have a habitus that can

either attract or detract certain students. Work by Reay *et al*, (2001); Reay, (2003)

and Thomas, (2002) discuss this issue. Thomas points to the 'ways in which the

values and practices of a HE institution impact on student retention' (2002: 423) and

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[187] There are of course different funding regimes in these countries and these to a certain extent determine how and when higher education is undertaken.

[188] I am using the EC reports here, despite concern that its policy documentation in regards of lifelong leaning and lifelong learners is problematic in that the fact that learners are gendered, raced and classed is ignored. See for example Brine, (2006).

Reay *et al* (2001) show how this is wider than retention, it will also affect who can and will decide to apply for a particular institution. Thus an individual institution's habitus needs addressing if it wishes to change the student profile that it attracts.

For an adult to become a student takes a conscious process of decisions and is different from and more complex than a teenager making the 'expected' decision following compulsory schooling. As discussed throughout this thesis these decisions may stem from internal or external impetus and motivations and include the desire to have something for one's self; to prove to one's self or others that study at a higher level is possible; to make up for missed or denied opportunities; an interest in a particular subject; or the desire to improve job or career opportunities by getting up-to-date, relevant or higher level qualifications. Any combination of these motivations is also possible. Fuller (2007:217) illustrates the 'choice biographies' are very different from the restricted choices these adults had in their early years. This decision-making process is however taken within the confines of the social structure that exists in the UK today. As shown above, both national and institutional habitus is influential in how visible part-time studies are as a whole, and how accessible the institution and the sector are to a potential student.

Because of the position of part-time higher education in the UK many of the students in this sample experienced surprise on first finding that they could do a degree on a part-time basis. This was particularly so in the case of students who studied face-to-face in a predominantly full-time provision university. Many had stumbled across the information about their degree programme almost by chance. Diane had picked up a leaflet when she visited a local country house and found that she could join a certificate programme that was held there. Maggie had previously done some short courses within her community when she received a call from a tutor informing her of the degree programme that she subsequently joined. This tutor had been given her name by another student who had signed up for the course. Another interviewee,

Steve, suggested that both the university and the government should publicise the courses more, particularly in his area where the population is below the national average for people with higher education qualifications (Alsop and Gonzalez-Arnal, 2006), and especially the fact that those on a low income are entitled to support with fees[189]. He felt strongly that this would not only help bring more people into the university, but would bring in those on low incomes who might benefit most from doing a degree (see Marks, 2003). Even in 1991 Bourner *et al* were suggesting that 'the scale of part-time degree course provision nationally … has now reached a level where there is a prima facie case for some central initiative in disseminating information (1991: 128). This has yet to happen[190].

For Diane the lack of knowledge about studying for a part-time degree with a full-time focussed institution was an issue. 'People just don't understand you can do it this way'. She studied at a university focussed on full-time provision, and whenever she talked to other people about her studies it became clear that they had not realized that there was the possibility to study to degree level on a part-time basis at a local university. The question she was asked mostly was, 'is it an Open University degree?' This indicates the extent to which part-time study has become identified with a single institution[191] in the UK, the Open University.

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[189] From 2004 students studying 50% of a full-time course were entitled to a means-tested grant of up to £250 which replaced the means-tested loans of £500 and the means-tested fee grant of up to £575 replaced the fee waivers. A full grant was available for students with incomes of less than £14,999 (Callender *et al*, 2006). In the lead-up to 2006 when fees for full-time undergraduate students were first implemented, the discourse around higher education focused on what impact fees for full-time students would have on the higher education sector, individual institutions and students themselves. Fees and fee waivers for part-time students barely got a mention, even though part-time fees have historically been linked on a pro-rata basis to full-time fees (Callender *et al*, 2006: 23)

[190] The funding of the Lifelong Learning Networks however may be seen as a move towards this. This funding is time-limited though and runs to 2009.

[191] And Birkbeck for London-based students.

The Open University is 'one of the most successful public institutions of modern Britain' (Coffield and Williamson, 1997: 121) and, in contrast to the perceptions of local universities detailed above, has high visibility. There was ample knowledge about Open University degrees, and indeed some students enrolled at other HE institutions would refer to their part-time studies as being 'like an OU degree' to explain what they were doing if it appeared that the idea of studying part-time for a degree was not understood. With over 20% of the part-time market, the Open University is the largest single provider of part-time HE in the UK (*Part-time Students in Higher Education* …, 2006: 3) and as such it was acknowledged as the 'logical choice' for some in this study. Glen, for example, stated that it was 'blindingly obvious':

> It was the obvious choice. Because it was so obvious I didn't look into any other way of doing it, I know I can do it in different ways, but it was just so obvious, it's set up to do it this way, it specialises in it. It's not tacked onto another university, that's what it does, so yeah, so that was the choice, blindingly obvious if you want to do distance learning part-time, OU.

This 'blindingly obvious' route combined the part-time mode with distance learning. This, of course, is one significant difference of the OU from other HE institutions which offer the part-time mode as face-to-face provision[192]. The Open University invests significantly in publicity to ensure that it is visible to the public[193]. Not only do

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[192] The OU delivered distance learning to 173,015 students in 2004/5. Of these 154,660 were undergraduates and 18,355 were postgraduates (www.HESA.ac.uk accessed 6/11/2006). It is the only HEI to teach over 20,000 part-time students (*Part-time Students in Higher Education* …, 2006). The other HEIs in this study catered for between 2410 and 11,165 part-time undergraduates (www.HESA.ac.uk, accessed 6/11/2006).

[193] The OU spent over £14million on student publications and recruitment in 2005 (OU, 2005).

they advertise in many mail shots throughout the country[194] but they also advertise on television. This visibility, and its institutional habitus makes the choice to do a part-time degree through the Open University almost the default option for some potential students especially if it is little known that they could study face-to-face in their local HE institution. In comparison, the local HE institution is likely to have a much smaller budget when it comes to advertising, and part-time provision will be only part of what the university advertises so there is internal competition for marketing-related funding (see for example Tysome, 2006), and the institutional habitus will also affect how much status and strategic importance the institution gives to part-time studies. This means that advertisements for part-time courses taught locally tend to be much less prominent and visible than those from the Open University. Advertisements in both the national and local press are expensive and running a year-round advertising campaign is beyond most departmental budgets. Targeted advertisements are more likely to be used. Advertisements aimed at small student numbers are expensive and may be uneconomical for an HEI.

Weronika stated that she did not know that part-time degrees other than those from the Open University were available: 'I'd never heard that you could do it part-time'. She finally discovered that it was possible (when discussing further study options with an OU friend) but suggested that the emphasis given to part-time courses by institutions other than the OU was minimal: 'the [general] advertising is sometimes big spread, and then in little letters, "we also do it part-time"'.

Students studying in HEIs with a full-time focus suggested that not only should the advertising of particular courses be more visible, but the whole idea that it is possible to study for an undergraduate degree on a part-time basis should be given a bigger

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[194] The OU also follows up any enquiry made with repeat personalized letters at pertinent times, eg 6 weeks before the closing date for the following academic year.

platform. From an institutional perspective this would be advantageous in terms of attracting more students. However, resources are limited and shared (not always equally) throughout the university. As part-time courses in the main are not advertised to the same market as a university's bulk intake, full-time undergraduates[195], courses that are run on a part-time basis often lack the advertising support of the university's main prospectus and marketing strategies and the structure of Universities Central Admission System (UCAS)[196].

Part-time students also often decide to go to university much nearer to the course start dates than full-time students[197]. The decisions are lesser-impact[198] decisions in that the students are not usually making decisions to move away from the family home and totally change their lifestyle[199]. Because this decision-making process runs to a different time scale from that expected of full-time students this can also mean that advertisements aimed at the full-time market, even if they include Weronika's observations of 'we also do it part-time', may be wrongly timed for the part-time market.

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[195] Fifty-one percent of all students are full-time undergraduates (www.hesa.ac.uk, accessed 6/11/2006).

[196] Recently however, King (2008: 9) includes 'UCAS to be expanded to include information about part-time courses, and where appropriate, provide an application route' as one of her recommendations.

[197] In my role as course leader of a part-time degree, I often had applications arrive up to and after the advertised start date of the course, rather than applications being submitted, and decisions made by institutions months in advance of the start of study as is necessary for full-time courses.

[198] This is not to argue that the decision to study part-time is minor in terms of impact on self and family, just that the decision is not usually about moving home or other major life changes, at least not initially. The decision, however, for women particularly, may have been engendered by a major life change (see Marks *et al,* 2003).

[199] Marks *et al* (2003) argue that the decisions made by working-class men and women to enter higher education are different (see chapter 2).

The students interviewed who were at the two wholly part-time focussed HE providers did not mention the issue of visibility/advertising in any negative way. For them the advertising had worked and shown them the different options of doing a degree. As Birkbeck students are considered to be 'like OU students who happen to live in London' (Woodley, 2006) they have a more established choice between studying face-to-face at Birkbeck or as distance learners with the OU: both institutions with a focus on, and a good reputation for, teaching part-time students. Because of the habitus and marketing issues discussed, for non-London based students the choice between the Open University and a local HEI offering part-time provision is much less clear[200][201]. As examined in the introduction part-time courses were difficult to find on some full-time focussed HEI websites, and a determined search was needed to identify the variety of options available. Potential students would however have to be aware that part-time degrees in full-time focussed institutions were available before they engaged in a lengthy search.

The institutional view of part-time students

Institutional habitus informs the institutional view of students – full-time and part-time, undergraduate and postgraduate - and practices related to them. The number of part-time students in HE institutions varies from over 20,000 taught at the Open University to 46 HEIs that teach less than 1,000 part-time students (Ramsden, 2006a: 66). The proportion of part-time students as a percentage of the student body

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[200] London Higher is now publishing a marketing leaflet that is targeting students to *Study London* (2006). This advertises the variety of options (including part-time) for studying in London as well as the benefits of doing so (www.studylondon.ac.uk/studylondon_complete.pdf accessed 6/11/2006).

[201] London also has a more diverse population, with a higher percentage of people from outside the UK in residence. For many their country habitus will include studying as part of what they do. For example, Weronika (of Polish descent), expected to continue her studies to degree level; women of similar age and background in the study from the UK this was much less a norm or expectation.

in any particular institution will affect the visibility of this group differently across the sector. In 2004/5 part-time undergraduates comprised 25.8% of the total student body in HE. This is greater than the total number of postgraduates in higher education which equates to 23.3%[202] (www.hesa.ac.uk, accessed 6/11/2006), yet I would argue that postgraduates are a much more visible body of students than part-time undergraduates within the HE sector, both in terms of physical space and acknowledgement within full-time focussed institutions and within policy documentation and research[203]. They are, as a body, more visible in the institutional habitus of many HEIs.

Diverse student bodies (eg part-time – full-time; local – overseas; undergraduate - postgraduate) have different requirements in relation to the HEIs they attend. At the same time HEIs' habitus will be determined by the emphasis they place on the particular student groups that they market themselves to. Thus, the institutional habitus of an institution with a focus on part-time students will be different from an institution with a focus on full-time students, and from my interviewees' narratives this indeed was the case.

The students studying at institutions where part-time study was the norm reported that their institution considered the specific needs of part-time students. The only negative comment here was from one student who found her 6pm class start problematic since she worked full-time and had to get across London to the campus. Those studying in institutions where full-time study was the norm, made more

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[202] This figures includes 9.9% full-time postgraduate students and 13.4% part-time postgraduates (www.hesa.ac.uk, accessed 6/11/2006). They will also be attracted by a particular institutional habitus.

[203] Post-graduates occupy a different relational position to the institution. They contribute via different mechanisms to the funding of the institution and support the research culture, and there is more research done about this group of students.

negative comments regarding the university's habitus, provision and practices. When part-time students studied together with full-time students, information was sometimes given out to full-time students in sessions which the part-time students were not expected to attend[204], which can result in missed information. One student reported that her HEI 'very much catered to full-timers. I have to find out a lot for myself'. And another stated that 'although I feel all students should be proactive in their own studies at times it feels as though the university is also restricting the opportunities for individuals'. The example given was of 'Talks! By speakers or societies only available during the day sessions, even the meeting for mature students was booked for 2 – 4 pm!'. This lack of consideration, or acknowledgement that not all students are available to go to sessions during the day, and the assumption that all students attended all other sessions, are part of the 'institutional habitus' that revolves around full-time students and treats full-time students as not only the dominant but the only type of student that is considered; all others are expected to 'fit in' with this dominant pattern, and thus given a full-time advantage (following Eveline, 1998). And if they do not then it is their problem, their issue not that of the institution. In Edwards' terms, it is the individual's bag and baggage that needs dealing with (1997).

Veronica King[205] (2006) argues:

> Don't make assumptions about students. Don't assume that they are all
> 18-year olds without responsibilities. There's no such thing as a typical

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[204] This instance was reported by a student who studied an option module within a full-time focused department. The student was taking only one module that semester (as required by the part-time programme) so was not privy to the information given out by the lecturer in a non-compulsory module.

[205] Vice President (Welfare) National Union of Students.

student any more, and you need to remember that (cited in Swain, 2006: 38)[206].

When only one type of student is considered by an institution, it becomes the 'other' students' responsibility to adapt to the norms of the institution, rather than the institution considering how these often unseen and unthought-of norms affect the non-standard or non-traditional student. With an increasingly diverse student population, more consideration as to how institutional habitus affects the experience (of all students) is needed to illuminate those practices that could restrict access or prevent some students from succeeding.[207]

One positive example from an HEI with a full-time focus was a part-time chemistry degree. This programme runs during the day, with the majority of its students attending on a day-release basis from industry in the locality. It runs in conjunction with the full-time programme in the chemistry department. The main benefit for the part-time students was that the timetable was organised so that they could attend just one day per week. The timetable was fixed so that students knew that Monday, for example, was the day that they attended university. The full-time students attended the taught classes on the same day and so much of their contact time was concentrated into this one day. Although one academic proposed that this model amounts to 'the tail wagging the dog' it meant the department had taken a more holistic view of their overall target student body to formulate a model that would work for all who wished to attend and not just the full-time undergraduates. This is important particularly for students who work, as the ability to negotiate irregular or flexible days off is not always possible. It fits well with the widening participation

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[206] Yet see below for section on Student Unions.

[207] Student experience is becoming a much more visible issue within HE, particularly with the National Student Survey.

rhetoric, even though it is considered a radical move and a logistical impossibility by many who would be reluctant to consider changing conventional delivery patterns (Vulliamy and Medhurst, 2003). However, it also has to be said that this particular pattern was workable because the part-timers themselves constituted an homogenous group with the similar study requirements. It also poses an interesting conundrum because flexibility is usually heralded as required for a diverse student body, but in respect of timetabling issues, the stability of a fixed timetable allows for other responsibilities, the 'bag and baggage' (Edwards, 1993: 10), to be negotiated around this fixed point (Alsop and Gonzalez-Arnal, 2008 and Cappleman-Morgan, 2004).[208]

The students' interaction with the university, when and how the institution was attended, and for what purposes, is now addressed. Colin's involvement with the institution was 'purely the academic side, we came, we did it and we went' and that appears to be the view that some institutions have, particularly those with a full-time focus, of what part-time students want from them. Again institutional habitus is apparent here; the idea that the part-time student comes, studies and leaves is convenient for the institution as it does not have to look further at what it could do, as an institution, to support the part-time students' experience and journey to successful completion. It becomes the part-time student's responsibility to attend class when it is offered, to drop in and fly out again, and not to disrupt the habitus of the full-time students or demand anything extra of the academic or administrative staff or support services. Yet if we remember both Kember (2001, 1999) and Thomas's (2002) recommendations that promoting a sense of belonging and social inclusion in the institution is more likely to reduce drop-out and enable a better success rate, then

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[208] Flexibility is a key theme within King's (2008) report commissioned by John Denham to contribute to the debate on higher education, with a focus on part-time provision.

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this institutional ignoring of differing needs and patterns contributes to the part-time student only accessing the academic side of the institution and thus not feeling a sense of belonging. If institutions consider that the part-time students may wish to participate in (some of) the social culture that a university has to offer they have to adapt their practices accordingly. Of course not all part-time students may choose to access such facilities, just as all full-time students will not. However, they should at least be offered the opportunity to do so if they wish, and different facilities may well be used differently.[209]

Steve, for example, did want to attend the university for some of its social activities but felt that the institution did not consider part-time students: 'it is too much centred round the full-time students'. He wanted to attend the summer ball with some of his classmates:

> the student ball say, it was all the tickets were only just sold during the
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> day, so by the time we got there, there was only 7 tickets left and we only
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> just managed to get one (Steve).

His suggestion to the university was that they should 'put a couple of hundred tickets aside just for part-time students to sell on a night time, because we can't get in during the day'. This suggestion is just one way in which the part-time student body could be considered, and be more closely integrated into the institution. I, along with many in my department, was also guilty of the assumption that part-time students would not want to be involved in the social activities on offer. I learnt my lesson only recently when I was challenged by a new part-time student asking why she had not been sent

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[209] Thomas (2002) advises of the 'need for alternative venues for socialization' and 'point[s] to the value of smaller social venues, where students can more readily feel comfortable. and be more certain that they will meet people they know' (2002: 437). One way in which institutions could address this is by offering all part-time provision in a particular building and have a coffee bar open before, during and after the time these classes run.

information about the whole range of freshers' activities. This had not even been considered. Since we work with adult returners, most of whom have multiple existing responsibilities and networks, consideration of them wanting to attend the various social activities on offer was one that we had not even contemplated. It was only when challenged by a younger part-time student who did want to be involved in these activities that distribution of this information was organised in conjunction with the students' union. As the part-time student body continues to expand and becomes more diverse this issue will become increasingly relevant.[210]

There were other aspects of university social life that some within this group of students had participated in. Tom, for example, had attended and thoroughly enjoyed lecturers by Nawal El Saadawi, Edward Said and Richard Dawkins. He had also seen two Samuel Beckett plays on campus. Judy, on the other hand, 'regret[ted] not being part of that student scene'. As she said: 'it's just not like that when you are an adult' and although she had participated with friends in university social life at the age of 18, she thought the lack of social activities for part-time students problematic and would have appreciated the opportunity for further integration. For Judy, as an adult studying part-time, it was 'just blooming hard work'. On the whole, not many of my interviewees participated in the social activities on offer at their universities. Any social interaction outside of the classroom tended to be organised by groups within the class, and this was most likely to be a drink after class if facilities were available for this[211]. This socialising was mainly mentioned by the women in this study. However, Thomas (2006: 9) suggests that from the student

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[210] It is not only part-time face-to-face provision that is attracting more young students: 'In the mid-1990s, only one OU student in 20 was under 25. Of the latest entrants, the proportion is closer to one in five' (Wheatcroft, 2005).

[211] Students at one university reported that they would have used the students' union bar but it was too crowded and noisy for them to 'fight their way in' to get a drink after class, so they would meet in the pub across the road before going their separate ways.

perspective relational issues are of major importance. The opportunity for these

relations to develop should not just be left to within the classroom.

Not being a student

The institutional habitus did not lend itself to this group 'feeling like a student'. Many

interviewees started their narratives by telling me that they 'don't really see it as

being a student, it's just me, you know what I mean, it's just me' (Pete), or they 'didn't

feel like a student' (Rachel), not in the way that 'you would understand a student'

(Colin). They had successfully been through the process of undergraduate study;

however, they did not consider themselves to be or to have been 'a student', even

though studying had become an important, albeit small, part of their current identity.

Their narratives indicated the internalization of a normative view of students as an

homogenous entity, and one into which they did not fit. The mindset, even of these

students, in line with many among the general public and in academia, was that

'student' meant a person who is usually 18 years old, no outside responsibilities and

studying on a full-time basis. They did not identify with 'student'.

> I don't feel like a student. Well, being older, not living in halls, and that
>
> student life, … you didn't really feel like a student-student (Rachel).

> I don't really see it as being a student … I've been doing it for so long, it's
>
> just me, it's just what I do, no (…) I just don't (…) I don't see myself as a
>
> student … I just see myself as me (Pete).

This is a concern for institutions because of the changing character of higher

education, the move to a mass, more accessible higher education with a diverse

student body. Part-time provision is one way that the government envisions the

growth of higher education (Universities UK, 2006; Leitch, 2006). If though, as these

students state, they do not consider themselves 'students' it has implications both for

individual HEIs and the sector as a whole. The implication for the institutions is that whilst 'student' means full-time undergraduate, continuing straight from school, it makes any different type of student, be they part-time, mature, distance-learner, 'other' and an outsider, creating access and other hurdles. One reason why these students may not identify as 'student' is because of the dominant discourse that surrounds higher education. The dominant discourse is one of full-time 18-year old students. In this discourse, 'non-standard' and 'non-traditional' students are positioned as other, and are not typical of the 'normal' student body. Sue Webb (1997) has argued that the polarized classifications of non-traditional / traditional and non-standard / standard has become so familiar within HE discourse that the former labels are now used as short-hand for any student other than the full-time 18 year old, but by doing so other differences such as age, gender, class and 'race' are hidden. Clustering all 'other' students and using labels such as 'mature', 'non-traditional' and 'non-standard' interchangeably hides not only diversity but similarities. By drawing on Foucault's 'regime of truth' Webb (1997: 67) suggests that the discourse used about 'alternative students' in higher education can in fact suppress other discourses and thus reduce their visibility.

Students of all types need to be able to identify both as a student and as a student of a particular institution so that they can feel included in that institution, feel a sense of belonging (Kember *et al*, 2001) and are not just a 'sort of addition' (Colin) who should be 'grateful for being allowed in' (Hughes and Brine, 2006). Institutional provision, the institutional habitus and attitudes of staff at all levels can all contribute to making a difference here. At a wider level policy makers also have a role to play. Currently in most policy documents the 'student' is not 'named'; the student is a neutral entity, neither male nor female, not working-class or middle-class, not aged and not 'raced' (see Hughes *et al*, 2006 and Brine, 2006). Since 1989 however mature students have been 'an invisible majority' (McNair, 1998: 162). Women overtook men as a

proportion of the undergraduate population in 1996/7 and in 2004/5 made up 58.5% of the UK undergraduate student body[212] (www.hesa.ac.uk, accessed 6/11/2006) and the gender gap is increasing[213] (www.scotland.gov.uk, accessed 13/11/2006). 87% of participants in part-time first degrees are white, 12.9% are from ethnic minority backgrounds, the majority being Black Afro-Caribbean or Black African (2004/5 figures from www.hesa.ac.uk, accessed 6/11/2006). The 'number of part-time students has undoubtedly risen dramatically over the past few years' (Kember, 2001: 326), now amounting to one million students and over 40% of the higher education student body (Ramsden, 2006a: 10). The 'student' of the past no longer is the dominant presence in HE. It is therefore important to recognise students as 'socially situated beings' (Cappleman-Morgan, 2006: 3).

Feminist writers have attempted to influence writing about women (eg hooks, 1984) to ensure that it is apparent just which women are being talked about, that 'woman' does not mean only middle-class white woman, and that Black and working-class women are called such but so are white women and middle-class women. Similarly I think that it is important that we should not just label 'part-time students' as 'part-time students' and leave 'students' to denote 'full-time students'. We should encourage full-time students to be labelled, to raise the issue that there is more than one type of student in this increasingly diverse higher education landscape, and certainly more than one type of student that can be a successful student. Maybe the concept of the full-time student is itself outmoded since even most full-time students now tend to

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[212] The female proportion of undergraduates ranges from 57.4% in Wales to 62% in Northern Ireland (2004/5 figures from www.hesa.ac.uk, accessed 6/11/2006).

[213] Between 1998-99 and 2003-04, the number of female higher education students increased by 10 per cent to 151,600. Over the same period the number of male higher education students increased by only 2 per cent to 120,265 (www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases, accessed 13/1/12006).

work. In the case of full-time students however, 'student' is still the major part of their identity, in a way that it is not with part-time students.[214]

Lack of inclusive practices by HEIs led some of my interviewees to think that their institution, although offering part-time provision, seemed to dismiss the part-time student body, or consider them as unimportant, or not consider them at all.

> It just seems that everything is set up for the full-timers and it's not really that set up for the part-timers (Pete).

> I don't think that the staff were quite aware of the problems involved, … the fact that the university is geared to full-time students and part-time students are a sort of addition (Colin).

These comments, from students studying at institutions with a full-time focus, reflect the view that they felt their differing needs were not considered. They thought they were an addition, not 'normal, ordinary undergraduates' (Jean) but something different from, and outsiders to, the norm. The institutional habitus did not include the part-time students.[215]

In institutions with a part-time focus the identity of a part-time student is much more visible and the diversity of the student body is given greater consideration. In

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[214] At a recent induction event for part-time students the Support Officer for Part-time Students waxed lyrically about a time in the (near) future when students will be 'just students - not full-time students or part-time students or mature students, just students'. I am concerned about this slightly utopian viewpoint. I too would like students to be students, but I feel that if this is done without a serious analysis of the differing needs of different types of students, individuals will be expected to fit the dominant norm, as directed by the institution, reducing the ability of anybody for whom that is not suitable, 'non-standard' in any way to be students within the system at all.

[215] Having previously seen an evening student bringing in her own toilet roll, one academic reported that at the beginning of each semester she rang the facilities department to remind them that the part-time students would be in for the 'evening shift'. Without this reminder facilities were frequently left unclean and lacking the necessary provisions.

contrast, in institutions with a full-time focus that offer some part-time provision the identity of the part-time students is often hidden from view. There are pockets of support for part-time students, departments that offer part-time study often work extremely hard on behalf of part-time students' rights and needs, and yet this can be negated by the overall institutional habitus and general opinion, both within and without academia, that 'student' still means 18-year old full-time student.

Teaching provision

I now move on to consider teaching provision and how that affects part-time students, not only in their learning but in their decisions to take up study. This includes the choice of face-to-face versus distance learning; the yearly structure; the hours of provision; the length of the programme; the flexibility of choice or options available; who teaches the part-time students; and the standards and perceptions of standards of the part-time courses.

Weronika felt distance learning was the only choice that she could make. At the time she was not aware of other options and her circumstances meant that she moved around, and out of, the country because of her husband's job. Distance learning enabled her to continue studying in a way that would have been much more problematic had she been physically tied to a university. Glen's choice was also 'blindingly obvious' as he wanted to study from home and he moved around the country with his job. He never considered any other type of part-time study. Tom, however, chose not to study via distance learning, even though he was well aware of the opportunity to do so. His decision was driven by the fact that he wanted face-to-face academic stimulation and contact, he wanted to talk to people about what he was studying.

Judy's decision of where to study was dictated by the fact that she needed to study during evenings and weekends:

I could do it in one evening and some Saturdays … and I thought well

that's my only option so, … when I found that course was there and it

could fit with what I needed, then obviously it was the right one to do.

The other courses available in her vicinity were offered as an afternoon and evening package. As in Tom's case this would not have been possible for her because of her work commitments, yet she wanted to complete her study with face-to-face teaching provision as that was how she had started her degree. The choice between face-to-face teaching and distance learning was not one that came through in many of narratives from these students, but must have been considered by the students when making the decision of what, where and when to study.

From an institutional perspective the timing and type of provision of part-time courses is dictated by various external and internal institutional and economic decisions and constraints. These include consideration of who the prospective students are and what their requirements might be, and how well this potential body is known and understood. If they are an homogenous group from industry as the chemistry example above, then day-time provision may be appropriate. If they are likely to be working full-time then day-time provision may not be convenient and evening provision more likely to recruit. In institutions where space is at a premium, teaching in the evening may be a more viable option to ensure that there are suitable rooms available. When teaching is offered in the evenings, there are obviously economic implications for departments and institutions. Evening teaching done by full-time staff means they are not available during the day for other teaching and duties.[216] When the teaching is done by part-time staff they need recruiting and retaining. And just as

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[216] In some institutions evening teaching carries a premium for the tutors.

the question of what patterns of provision are suitable for students because of work and domestic responsibilities so similar questions pertain to staff.

Service provision during the evenings also needs budgeting for. Catering facilities need to be open for refreshment provision before, during and after classes; porters need employing to ensure buildings are open; heating and lighting needs to be on, particularly during the winter months. All of this is expensive, if not underwritten by significant student numbers. If an HEI were to consider offering part-time provision via distance learning then the appropriate costs as well as pedagogical considerations need to be factored into the equation. It is clearly the case that institutions need to seriously consider how to cater successfully for different types of student.

The yearly structure of a degree programme needs deliberation. At the Open University the teaching year is flexible, with most undergraduate courses starting in February or October and lasting nine months. For most other HE institutions the academic year runs from September/October to May/June. If a part-time programme is fitted into the existing academic structure of an individual institution it may mean less divergence from administrative procedures and timescales but may cause particular stresses to the students the programme is hoping to recruit. A major concern regarding yearly timing is the Christmas period. Women in particular, find Christmas can be a problematic time for studying, as it is a time when the family is very busy, it becomes a 'greedier institution' (Acker, 1980, Edwards, 1993). Yet the university may also want time from the student, as examinations or essay deadlines either precede or more usually follow the Christmas break.

Lucy had problems of conflicting pressures between the family and the university, with her young daughter saying: 'your headmaster's snide, you don't even get a Christmas off' and Lucy professing that 'she has only ever known me going to uni

and doing stuff over Christmas holidays and Easter holidays'. Any attempt to fit a part-time programme into a different yearly structure from the usual one of the university however, could well cause significant local (course, programme or departmental) administrative problems. As it is, information systems within full-time focussed universities need additional administrative effort to 'fit' the part-time student and courses into the full-time system. These systems alone need to be adapted to offer greater flexibility in their definition of 'the student'.

Another matter that has to be considered by the institution is the number of taught hours particular programmes have. This issue was raised by the interviewees, some wanting more and some fewer contact hours. From an institutional point of view the number of hours taught needs to be addressed from both a pedagogical perspective and a recruitment/retention one. Tom thought that part-time students in his university were being short-changed because they only received two hours teaching per week. In comparison, a full-time degree student on a similar programme was receiving sixteen hours. Parity of provision would suggest that part-time students should receive eight hours[217]. When the university in this case tried to increase the number of contact hours, the number of registered students fell. The problem here for the university is that they will not be able to accommodate all the students' wishes, and is an area where further research could be focussed. Research-informed reforms in regards of study hours could be one area that could lead to greater retention of a student cohort.

The lowest level of contact hours in my sample was Tom's programme with just two hours teaching per week. Other institutions expected attendance at classes up to four nights per week. The hours of personal study required rises in inverse

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[217] Assuming they do 50% of a full-time course.

proportion to the number of taught hours. Whilst pedagogical arguments for the level of teaching should take precedence over economic ones, observation of the level of recruitment and retention has to be of concern to the institution. Bourner *et al* report: 'the level of non-completion is much higher for students on longer courses (4 years or more) than for shorter courses (3 years or less)'(1991: 126) and yet there is high student drop-out for 'those for whom the required pattern of attendance necessitated more than three journeys each week to attend classes' (1991: 119). HEIs therefore need to address the balance between weekly patterns and programme length to achieve maximum part-time student participation and retention.

Some institutions offered part-time students module choices, in others the modules were dictated by the programme that the students were registered for. As discussed in chapter 3 social cohesion between groups is important for retention issues, but may in turn prevent choice of modules of individual interest. The flexibility or lack of this with regard to option or module choices can be seen as negative by the students. However, Bourner *et al* (1991) recognise that flexibility may be more resource-intensive. Whilst working with part-time programmes, module choice was not offered at certificate level but was at diploma and final degree stages. The student group themselves however, had to agree on the module, so the module taught would usually be a majority preference rather than an individual one. Modules were also staggered over different academic years; if for example module A was not to be offered in the first academic year, we would try to ensure that module A was offered the following year. This constitutes very limited choice for the part-time students, but had the benefit of involving students at least partially in the decision-making process. Part-time provision thus required compromise both from the institutions and the students themselves regarding programme content. This choice however is dictated by limited student numbers and by the lack of strategic importance given to these programmes within the institution.

Two other important and often interconnected issues arose: who teaches the part-time students and perceptions of standards of the part-time courses. I consider it essential that teaching staff for part-time courses should be good tutors and of similar status to the teaching staff for full-time courses. They may indeed be the same staff as for full-time programmes. Rachel enthused about a lecturer of international fame:

> We had one lecturer this year that we all really adored, it was an option
> so you already liked the topic, it was actually gender, [lecturer name], she
> was incredible, she just sits down, and it just comes just out, she doesn't
> have any hand outs, nothing, you are just in the story. … When it was
> somebody like [her] you are just like have all this new energy because it's
> such a different topic.

In the same institution however, there had also been tutors who 'just stand there with the button and click, click and would just read exactly what they typed up' when Rachel reported she would think 'just give me the handout …I can do this at home'.

Bridget had also experienced difference in the standard of tutors:

> There is quite a large variance in ability of the tutors, not that they don't
> know their subject but in the way in which they effectively put that over.
> Every single one has had a completely different technique.

The standard of teaching as well as the discourse about part-time degree programmes led some of the students to question the level and quality of the programme they were studying. Colin, for example, was 'a great respecter of exams'. He considered his part-time programme, with continuous assessment, less academically challenging because of the lack of examinations. 'I often feel (…) … is it easier than full-time? And this sometimes niggles me'. Jean also questioned the level of the pass mark and indicated that she thought that part-time and full-time

'weren't equal, that's where I upset somebody because I actually said it was easier to get say 60 marks in lifelong learning than it was in history and they didn't like that'. Jackson in discussing 'being academic' reports some students clearly thought that 'some subjects are clearly more 'academic' than others' (2004: 60), although she is considering women's studies here, this argument is also clearly relevant to mode of study; some modes of study are considered more 'academic' than others and to paraphrase Orwell 'all students are equal; but some are more equal than others' (1945:1998).

Rachel, on the other hand, felt that her part-time degree was highly valued:

> I know that it is quite known that if you go to [university name], it is known around, they know that you can handle things altogether, they know that you can multitask, dealing with all your family at home and the study. …They know that you can do it if your degree is from here. So that's good to know that you get that when you are looking for work.

Coming from an institution that taught many students on part-time degree programmes but being aware of the discourse that they might not be of as high a standard as full-time programmes I confirm that all quality assurance procedures were adhered to and the external examiner reported that some of the undergraduate dissertations produced were of Masters level. This external examiner has an international reputation and is a senior figure at one of the major part-time providers of higher education. Bourner *et al* (1991) considered the issue of perceptions of the standard of part-time degree courses in their research and found that 'three-quarters of the respondents to [their] survey thought that their part-time degree courses are of equivalent standard to full-time degree courses' (1991: 139), yet the perception of 'others' of part-time degree courses called this into question. This was true of both employers and academics. 'Over 25 per cent of the respondents thought that

academics in institutions of higher education believe that part-time degree courses are of a lower standard than full-time degree courses' (Bourner *et al*, 1991: 139). More recent research has shown that 'employers have a positive attitude towards employees who gained their qualifications by part-time study' (*Attitudes to Part-time Study,* 2006: 4), with 30% of employers believing that part-time students are of slightly better or much better standard than their full-time counterparts and 45.7% that part-time students are of a similar standard. Only 2% of employers were reported to believe that full-time students are of a better standard than part-time students (*Attitudes to Part-time Study,* 2006: 9). As this report is based on employers' perspectives it does not comment on the perception of academics within HE.

The recent reports on part-time higher education in London by Universities UK (Ramsden, 2006b, Brown, 2006) do not report on standards or perceptions of these and this is perhaps an omission that needs to be addressed by further research. Callender *et al's* research (2006) does however show that 47% of students felt that the 'good academic reputation' of the institution they studied at was very important in their choice of where to study, and 24% had chosen their institution following a personal recommendation (2006: 21) so a perception of high quality provision is vital to the institutions for recruiting their future students. This provision though may well be different from existing full-time provision and draw on the knowledge of those entering HE. As Quinn expressively states:

> The diologic relationship between curriculum and student within
> mainstream HE is rarely explored. …The university of the twenty-first
> century deserves nothing less than a curriculum that responds to change
> and to the new knowers within it (2006: 12).

Transformative curricula are available within particular part-time provision, but not all, some part-time provision replicates full-time provision and has no recognition of the knowledge learners bring with them into the academy. Where it is in place it can be criticised as not being academic, or indeed as being 'differently academic' (Jackson, 2004). As Quinn points out this debate is hidden within HE and is an area where further research on access needs to incorporate part-time provision to move HE provision forward beyond 'access to silence' (2006: 12)

Administrative and service provision

Many of the problems that students raised in their narratives were related to administrative and service provision. The institutional habitus that informs much administrative and service provision is based on the notion of full-time students and their availability and requirements. Issues mentioned by my interviewees that resulted from this habitus included general ones such opening hours and accessibility, registration and fee payments, resource provision, inductions and the students' union. Not surprisingly, these issues were raised more frequently by those studying in institutions with a full-time provision focus.

Registration and fee payment processes

Anyone working at or studying in a university will know that the registration period and payment of fees can be a busy and stressful time. It often involves long queues and attendance at specific locations at particular times to fit this logistical nightmare into a period of just a few days at the start of the academic year. This is the case for part-time students as well as for full-time ones. For part-time students, often with full-time jobs, this can cause particular problems. Judy, for example, had to take an afternoon off work to register at her university:

I haven't been particularly impressed with that and it's not open when, some of the aspects of it are not open when you can go. And registering, it's not open when part-time students can go. You can't pay your fees, I had to take an afternoon off work to go and register.

She had also come across problems when she had tried to pay her fees: 'They are very inflexible, and even if they are there, they won't help you. The desk isn't officially open but somebody's there, but they won't help you'. This problem partly has to do with staff levels and procedures, but also with the assumption by some staff (and staffing policies) that all students are available on a full-time basis and that they have nothing more important to do with their time than stand in queues to sort out the registration process and the paying of fees. The inflexibility in this case had caused Judy problems, and she had had to return on a second occasion to pay her fees. As she lived over two hours away from the campus this involved a serious time commitment and meant that she had to take time off work to attend when the office was open.

Steve had similar problems with fees. At the end of his degree, he received notification that there was a problem as his fees had not been fully paid through the fee remission process. He rang to try to sort it out, but in the end he had to get his mother to go into the university to resolve it as he was not able to do so over the phone:

[it's] all centred round full-time students, because you try and get there to sort it out, and you have to get there during the day, sort things out that way, so I had to get my mother to sort that out for me, otherwise how else could I sort it out, when you are at work? (Steve)

Because of the nature of his job even ringing during working hours was problematic, and this was not accounted for. He was given two days to respond to a letter with a

threat that he would not be able to graduate if the problem was not sorted out within that timescale. His working hours, being long and inflexible, did not allow this so he had to ask his mother to deal with it in person. This could have been resolved if there had not been the assumption that all students are available to go to the university to deal with problems within two days of receiving a letter. An out-of-hours or lunch-time telephone service could have been offered, a direct email line to the finance officer dealing with the query, or bringing the problem to the students' attention earlier, with not such a tight deadline might have allowed him to take some time from work to attend to this issue.

From an institutional position there are obviously economic, procedural and staffing-level issues to take into consideration. I am aware, for example, of the amount of behind-the-scenes work that needs completing at registration time and the instance reported was probably not staff being unhelpful, as Judy perceived it to be. Yet as the number of non-traditional students increases the flexibility of opening hours and access to service provision has to be modified to take account of this.

Not all comments regarding the registration process were negative. Members of staff had talked individually to students and informed those who paid their own fees that there were fee remissions available for low incomes earners. This was thought by the students to be important as they would not have known about these benefits otherwise. This itself is an issue, and although it was reported positively in this instance it was only at registration that the students were being informed that there may be fee remissions available. This returns to the notion above of how visible part-time studies and policies are to the general public. How many students may not have applied because of the lack of knowledge that they may be entitled to attend the university and not pay fees?

A further example that illustrated the way that part-time students are a hidden body excluded by the habitus of certain HEIs as much as by the legislative bodies is the fact that they were very much forgotten about when the new fee legislation was announced in 2004:

> No matter that its plans for increasing participation were hugely
> contingent on attracting greater numbers of part-time students – its entire
> bill for restructuring university finance was predicated on the full-time
> student model. … Apart from a few token gestures on grants that few
> believed would make any material difference, part-time students had
> been completely omitted from the legislation. (Crace, 2004)

For my sample of students the new fee legislation was not relevant, but many did not know that other financial support was available. Pete felt that greater publicity about fee remission and financial support for those on low incomes would encourage more people to consider studying. He thought that the cost of a part-time degree put many in his situation off from applying and yet he was able to get full fee remission which meant that he did not have to pay any course fees for the final two years of his degree.

Registration is one area where the universities could improve their administration processes, to be more customer friendly to all students but particularly students with external responsibilities. Minimally, it should not be assumed that students all have the time to be able to come to campus for an extra visit, possibly during the day when teaching provision may be in the evening, to attend for an unpredictable length of time and to be able to attend during restricted office hours. With improvements of electronic systems this could be dealt with and indeed is one way in which universities are beginning to address these procedures. Electronic provision must not be the only way that registration can occur. When part-time students are more

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likely to be working-class than their full-time counterparts[218] personal access to technology should not be assumed by HEIs.

Library provision

Access to materials such as books is obviously important for any degree. My interviewees had both negative and positive experiences regarding this provision. Pete had problems with the library which he attributed to his part-time status. He felt that part-time students were discriminated against as they were not able to go into the library early in the day to secure a computer to use, and as the places were limited it often meant that by the time he was able to attend the library there were no places available. This, coupled with changes in university policy about using personal laptop computers in the library, had meant that his library use had become more problematic during his time as a student. There was a renewal system for books that could be used over the internet and this was helpful. However, it could only be used in advance of the day that the books were due back, so for him books available on a three-day loan had proved awkward to renew. As a system this may further penalise part-time students who do not have access to the internet or their email accounts on a daily basis. Again technology is seen as an advance, and in many ways it can help part-time students to manage their interface with the HEIs, yet a reliance on digital technology should not be the only way in which these services can be accessed.

Other problems with the library that were reported by my interviewees were not obviously specific to part-time students. Many university libraries are beginning to

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[218] There is less information about the social class of part-time students than full-time students because the former do not apply through Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) (*Part-time Students in Higher Education* …, 2006). 'While social class data are unaccountably sketchy, it is clear that part-timers are often among the most needy students' (*Part-time Policy Needs Full Review*, 2006).

use automated return systems for books, but for these students a 'book drop'[219] had been used. Both Tom and Steve had fallen foul of returning books via the book drop where returns had then not been removed from their records. This had resulted in large library fines, long negotiations and eventually the fines being cleared. Neither had received apologies however and felt aggrieved with this process: 'they did find them in the library, no apology but they found them, I got a letter saying I owed them £4.50, but no apology' (Tom). I do not suggest that this problem would arise only for part-time students. However, this service is more likely to be used by students who come to the library during the evening and weekends when issue desks may not be staffed.

Other students also had problems; they had borrowed the maximum number of books allowed on their ticket, but because they used the library during evenings and weekends when issue desks were closed it was not possible to return the books and have the record cleared to enable them to borrow again. Although this problem has been addressed in many libraries with the introduction of more self-service machines for both checking in and out books, but at the time it was problematic for these students.[220]

Judy stopped using the library completely as it cost her too much in library fines to be able to use the books. In the beginning she would borrow books and renew them electronically. However, if the book was requested by someone else she was not always able to return it. This meant that she either tolerated paying the fine, and

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[219] A book drop is a system whereby students can return books to the library when the issue desk is closed. This is usually by means of putting a book into a secure box. The book is then taken off the student's record when staff empty the box.

[220] In the past I have taken out books for students on my own staff card as library cards were not valid beyond the end of a semester, even when the part-time provision was taught throughout the summer period.

taking the book in the next time she attended class the following week, or she took a four-hour round trip to the library. The associated time and travel costs meant that she decided in the end no longer to use the library: 'I've encountered problems with overdue books because I'm not going to drive all that way to take a book back, so I have encountered some large fines so after that I stopped using it, I buy the book, it's cheaper [LAUGHING].' Judy also found that although 'they do talk about having this fantastic library, I haven't found it that way at all'. According to her many of the books were old or simply unavailable.

Obviously library provision is not restricted to part-time students so full-time students can encounter similar problems. However, lack of time for searching for books may penalise part-time students as well as competition for limited stock. Simply being only there in the evening after full-time students have already gone through the stock will limit availability. Judy found the library difficult to negotiate. One of the reasons for this may be that she had become familiar with a previous university system and found the new one confusing because it was different. Bridget's experience of the library provision had been much more positive. Like Pete she also had limited time to use the library, but she had used this to her advantage and accordingly cited library staff as the people from whom she had received the most support, as detailed in chapter 3:

> I've found a lot of them, when for instance, you say, I've only got an hour
> and a half because I've got to go home and collect my children, erm, all
> the computers are taken by full-time students who are 18. … And they
> will quite merrily go and say, excuse me, can you come off that computer
> please … and then you can go on it for an hour and then the problem is
> sorted.

Although she encountered the same problem as Pete, she dealt with it in a different manner: she was more assertive in finding a solution. This could possibly have worked for Pete. However, he had never tried it. Bridget found that library staff were very professional in their job and helped her find the best texts available:

> Quite a lot of them seem to have incredible knowledge, and will say, oh that thing you were asking me last week, I found something, and they will bring you a book that you will think, that is just that little bit more than the job's worth, that sort of attitude.

Keith also made use of the virtual library in his HEI, which allowed him to request books via the internet which were there for him to collect the next time he attended. He had found this service invaluable. He took a vocational course and was impressed that the students were given the core text books for each module as part of the course.

Induction

Lack of time to familiarise oneself with the facilities is an issue that may be more prevalent among part-time than full-time students. Some orientation during course time is necessary, especially at the beginning of programmes, particularly when as Bowl (2001) suggests, new entrants may not be familiar with the processes as they have no prior experience and no social capital to draw upon to help them in this. This raises issues of what students are taught and need to learn at university. Obviously independence is important for university students, adult part-time students particularly, as they often, as previously discussed, have less time to find things out. This was one area where Colin felt the university could improve. He thought that 'they make a lot of assumptions about what you know and what you don't know … [and] the teachers assume that you know as much of the internal workings of the university'. Further discussion revealed that he had spent many years studying for

his shipping qualifications at evening classes run by a college, and he felt that there had been a different ethos or habitus, one which was geared up to part-time students where staff understood the part-time process and had indeed often experienced the same process. This was something he thought lacking in his current course, where the assumptions and the processes were based on full-time students which made his experience more difficult than he felt it might have been. He acknowledged that it was a difficult issue to resolve, and that a handbook would help, but that not all would read or refer to a handbook.

Both Bridget and Marilyn wished for further induction procedures to be built into the programme. Bridget suggested that a summer school before they started the programme would be beneficial:

> a kind of summer school for one week where you could actually stay on campus and that would include all these things like (…) facilities for mature students and an induction to the library, some of the things that we learnt were available in the library you wouldn't have known about unless you have gone and sought them on your own. …Whereas it wasn't until the end of the fourth year that we were given that kind of introduction as to where the abstracts were in the library. Some people had no clue that there was more than one level in the library! (Bridget)

Marilyn echoed these thoughts:

> I can't remember who it was, probably [tutor name] took us to the library and showed us how to get a book out – that was all, where to look you know, floor three, H6 Q or whatever and you would be able to find a book and basically that was all we were shown. (Marilyn)

She reported that they were not advised how to obtain electronic information or passwords and it was only near the end of her degree that she had found that there were electronic journals.

> That would have been handy to know, the first year we started, never mind into the fifth year. … It's like people are drip feeding you the information, slowly, that you are not allowed to know these things until you get to the fifth year. The people who are in the first year ought to know about these facilities.

I concur with Bridget and Marilyn that the induction process should be more comprehensive than what they appeared to receive but also realise that from an institutional position it is a balancing act between giving enough information and overloading new and possibly nervous students on arrival in unfamiliar surroundings. I also agree with Bowl (2001) that these processes need to be made visible and so understandable to non-traditional students. One argument by Bourner *et al* (1991) is that students who experience a period of 'block' or residential teaching have a 'reduce[d] likelihood of non-completion' (1991: 134) so this is one reason for considering such provision.

Induction processes are becoming more common across HEIs as intuitions work hard to retain those students they have attracted. They aim to familiarise new students to the institution and the institutional habits and practices. This must be done sensitively and with the part-time body in mind. Part-time students should not just be allowed to attend (if able) the full-time induction provision, as this often focusses not only on the joining of university, but on the leaving of home.

The students' union and student representation

Despite the words of the vice president of the NUS that HEIs should not just assume 'one type of student' (King cited in Swain, 2006) my interviewees articulated problems regarding the students' union, which should be accessible to all students regardless of mode of study. One of the students had wanted to become the student representative for his group, yet the meetings were all held during the day when he was unable to attend. The course he undertook was a dedicated part-time course, so to hold staff-student committee meetings during the day seemed inappropriate. Even when meetings were held during the so-called twilight time, this in some cases meant a 4 pm start. For full-time workers this could mean taking at least 2 hours out of a working day to attend a voluntary meeting. This is not always possible and student representation then moves down the list of students' priorities. This shows a lack of consideration by those working within the institution as well as those representing the students' union, of the part-time students' requirements in relation to the degree programme. Training for being a student representative was also offered only during Wednesday afternoons.

Other provision offered by the institution was criticised as not being publicised to part-time students. There was little knowledge, for example, that careers services were available to all graduates in the institutions. These services could prove invaluable to part-time students wanting to move from current jobs and careers into new areas. Again accessible opening hours need to be considered. Alongside accessibility, staff ought to have an awareness of the different career paths and structures that the more mature student may have had and how age and family responsibilities can impact on the types of jobs that may be appropriate or considered.

Students also had problems with information not being sent out methodically, and again expectations that part-time students would be able to attend at the university's convenience. Keith stated he was

> Not very impressed with the whole uni set-up. Think they are worse than
> a furniture van full of monkeys. That is not just my opinion either, it is
> quite widespread. They chop and change things, letters go out, but we
> don't all receive them.

He suggested this inconsistency was possibly because it was the last year that his particular course was offered, however this is bad practice which should not be acceptable within a professional organisation.

Bridget had become frustrated by the university sending paperwork which invited her to events she could not attend due to work commitments:

> being a part-time student there is nothing more annoying than receiving
> paperwork that says please come to the [name] campus between 9 – 1
> on the 17th Saturday of January [sic] for a day specifically designed for
> mature students. 'Cos guess what, Saturdays and Saturday mornings
> are not conducive for mature students.

Although she was pleased that there were more events organised for part-time students she felt that the timing needed more thought and discussion with the students[221].

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[221] For further discussion on how institutions could be more accessible to a diverse student body see Longworth (2003) *Lifelong Learning in Action: Transforming Education in the 21st Century,* particularly Chapter 6 'Improving Access – Learning Wherever, Whenever and However People Want It'.

That is really annoying when they send things like that; I think I can speak

for everybody bar one who is semi-retired on our course that could not

make it on a Saturday morning. Most of us work on a Saturday morning,

and the two who don't, one is in a local team, rugby, squad of boys, so

he's always away on a Saturday morning, and everybody else has got

small children or families to support, so if you are going to set up any kind

of activity for mature students, just ask them when they can make it, and

give them a variety, you know, a morning session or an evening session,

or a straight after work session, or will combine this an hour before your

first class or immediately after your class finishes.

Because of the institutional habitus the lack of consideration of the part-time student

came through in many of the narratives and is an issue that many would like to see

resolved. My thesis is one way to raise issues such as these. The difficulty is that

there is not just one type of part-time student, and in consequence different needs for

times of access to meetings and facilities arise. It is understood, both by the

institutions and the students, that what suits one student will be the exact opposite for

another. Lack of attendance at events, for example and however, was not usually

because the students did not wish to attend them. Rather, their timing did not fit the

timetable of the students' circumstances. It may be that certain events need to be

built into induction processes and teaching time, and offered on more than one

occasion.

It is important to say that the problems encountered were not insurmountable for

these students. On the whole they were minor worries, problems that they

complained about during their interviews but that did not deter them from their

studies. However, these are the students who stayed the course; the successful

ones who tended to see themselves as finishers. Some of the problems discussed

above, however, may well have been the last straw for those who did not finish the

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course, the large majority of those who started (see chapter 3). Having dealt with part-time students for many years I am aware that a large library fine, missed events due to letters not being received and assumptions that the students understand the workings of the university have all been factors in individual student drop-out. This means that the problems raised here as minor should be taken seriously by institutions to ensure that they are not regular occurrences that could cause less determined students to walk away. The full-time institutional habitus in many cases caused or exaggerated problems discussed. Making this visible is one way that these problems can start to be addressed.

Would you recommend part-time study?

This section details the students' responses to the question: 'would you recommend part-time degree study to a friend or colleague?' which elicited a range of answers, and which is important given that 61% of students reported that personal recommendation was very or fairly important in choosing their institution (Callender *et al*, 2006: 77). When this question was first raised the majority of the interviewees recommended the experience to others, yet on probing further part-time study was recommended but with a 'health warning'.

The initial question evoked many enthusiastic responses: 'Oh absolutely. Oh yes, yes' (Shirley), 'Yeah, absolutely' (Rachel), 'Definitely' (Jen), 'Oh definitely yeah' (Steve), 'Oh absolutely!' (Gina). And Glen would 'encourage anyone to do it'. Bridget, although positive in her reaction, joked with me 'absolutely not! [LAUGHING] I would say do not go near the place, it is evil; it will spoil your life [LAUGHING]. No, I wouldn't really' (Bridget). Following these animated replies many students subsequently answered that they would consider the individual's personal circumstances before recommending part-time study as a viable option. Some suggested it would be sensible to take past experience and qualifications into

account as well as the lifestage of the prospective student. Katie was very emphatic: 'If it was, if it was somebody that I knew that was (…) erm, that was quite literate and quite numerate, I would say, go ahead, do it'. However, she was definite that returning to higher education without first doing an introductory course was not a good idea. 'If it was somebody I knew who had a basic skills problem then, absolutely not. I'd tell them to go and do the general certificate or whatever'. This was exactly what she had recommended to a friend who had wanted to start a nursing degree:

> her accent is no different to mine, so when I say she's not got good
> English I don't mean like the way she speaks, I mean the way she writes.
> You can't just set out with poor English.

Katie and her friend had various discussions about starting to study and how best to approach it:

> I asked what qualifications she left school with and I said, well, I think you
> should spend this year going to college, doing your English first and
> seeing where you go from there. Because you can't just go from, to me
> anyway, from doing absolutely nothing, leaving school with no
> qualifications, doing absolutely nothing, and then just turning up on a
> seven-year nursing course, because it just doesn't happen for you, does
> it?

Katie's advice was to build up to doing a degree. By advising her friend to do English first she suggested that this would give her a taste of being back in education,

improve her skill level and enable her to find out whether studying really was the right option and whether she was capable of moving up to degree level[222].

Because of her background as a lecturer, Jean was keen to let others know about the opportunities for doing a degree on a part-time basis and felt that it would be a good idea for most people:

> Depending on who it was, if it was someone who really had no experience of higher education I would probably make it clear to them what some of the hassles might be, some of the problems. But in principle yes, I would always say yes.

Colin had enjoyed his experience of part-time study and would recommend it:

> Oh yes, oh yes without a shadow of a doubt, I can't, I've gained an awful lot over the last six years that you can't (…) there's no way that I've lost anything, no I've gained an awful lot and I have enjoyed it, every well, I wouldn't say every minute, but 95% of it.

Jean and Colin were both retired and had the required resources to spend on doing a degree. Younger students did still recommend part-time study but were more prudent in their recommendations. They realised that the work could be hard, or that fitting study into already busy lives could be difficult, and so were more hesitant to recommend it, whilst still saying that it would be a viable option for many. Pete, who had struggled with his degree, still felt that the experience would be something that he would recommend to others:

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[222] In this way Katie's friend was using 'hot knowledge' (Quinn, 2005: 53) to investigate possible routes into HE.

I would be impartial, but I would encourage them, but I wouldn't, I'd say

it's bloody hard, I'd tell 'em it's bloody hard. I'm saying I'd be impartial but

I'm not, am I? I'd try and be as neutral as I could, but let them know that

it is hard work. … And I would try to help them as well … Well, it's things

like, get organised, it's hard work, good luck [LAUGHING] and I think

you'll get something out of it.

Those who hesitated to recommend part-time study said: 'I think I'd sit down and take a fair bit of time discussing my experiences with them, I don't think I could honestly recommend it whole-heartedly' (Tom); 'I probably wouldn't if they had small children to be honest' (Liz). Keith replied 'depends on the person, and their circumstances, if they have young children, or a workplace that is not supportive, or if they are not good at working on their own, then I would say no' (Keith). Sue had been asked about doing a part-time degree by a friend and replied to my question 'what have you told them?' 'Truthfully? I've told them not to do it over six years' (Sue).

These considered responses reflect the respondents' experiences. Sue and Marilyn both described the length of time that a part-time degree could take as a reason not to recommend others to follow their example: 'I think even if it was just a year less it would be different. If it was like five years rather than six' (Sue). Both Liz and Tia were concerned that for women with small children 'the sacrifice might be too high' (Tia). Tia linked family lifestage to the age of the student as well, 'I would say, mature people over 35 with the right attitude could probably do it' (Tia). Tom's reluctance to recommend the experience was based on his 'romanticised view of academia'. He wanted more 'passion in everything at university' and had found that early in his course but lacking towards the end. He had 'expected to bump into Jeeves at every turn, very naive, I am quite happy to accept that, but this is a true reflection on what I saw and what I expected' and cynically suggested that to complete the degree successfully 'You've got to be able to write the cheques!'

Overall most of my participants would recommend the experience of part-time undergraduate study, albeit with reservations or conditions depending on the circumstances of the person in question. I think that the advice given by these students is a reflection of their experiences and of watching others who did not complete the course successfully as to what did and did not, and might and might not, cause problems along the way. Of course these students are the successful ones, the ones who made it to the end of the degree and passed whilst keeping the other 'plates spinning' (Pete) or those 'balls in the air' (Tia).

Most of the reflections on their experiences here concentrate on the personal circumstances and resources a potential student needs to successfully attempt a part-time degree without recourse to the HEIs making any changes to their practices. For students it is understandable that they focus on what resources and circumstances they feel are best for potential students to attempt a part-time degree, but for the institutions to only address what the students should possess or have as resources is not acceptable as this leaves the students as the ones with 'bag and baggage' that needs addressing. If the institutions do not look at themselves in a similar way and address the ways that they can alter it leaves the whole responsibility for becoming a student and becoming a successful student with each individual student. This is too great a responsibility for individual students to take on board.

Conclusion

This chapter has made the 'bag and baggage' of the higher education institutions visible; it has raised the issue of how institutional habitus affects the institutions' perceptions of and provision for the part-time students as well as students' perception of the institution. As institutional habitus differs across institutions, it is for the institutions to look at themselves and see how they appear to the part-time student body. How do the institution's norms and values, embedded in their

everyday actions, appear to a potential student? Do they appear to have a focus on and an interest in part-time students, or do part-time students have to fit into a structure and a system that ignores them at best and discourages them from even applying at worst? This does differ across different institutions both physically and in their marketing materials, many with a full-time focus are moving towards a higher profile of their part-time provision. For example, Hull, a full-time focussed university now has a part-time prospectus that covers all part-time provision offered by the institution. This, however, has been a long time coming. Previously, separate departments had to market themselves, within the constraints of a departmental budget.

Where an institution has large amount of part-time provision on offer within a full-time focussed institution, is it visible from a new/potential student's perspective? How can the information and the provision be accessed? Does the potential student need to know which department to contact or is there a central part-time provision information point? These are just some of the questions that institutions can start to ask of themselves.

The focus on the students' perception of their institution was important to ensure that some of the institutional practices they encountered were made evident. This showed that how an institution presents itself in regard to part-time visibility including its marketing and advertising presence, in terms of its teaching provision and the status it affords its part-time programmes, impacts on whether its current students would recommend it and upon the journey that part-time students undertake through their degree. Those studying in full-time focussed universities were more likely to consider the treatment of part-time students to be 'ok' (questionnaire question 6.8), whilst all those studying at part-time focussed considered that the treatment of part-time students was 'reasonable' or 'very reasonable'.

The question that continually needs asking is why are some institutions within the HE sector is so resistant to change? Why is an institutional habitus that hides and negates the part-time experience so persistent when there are very real changes in demand and student populations, in part, but not wholly because of changes in HE funding? Issues of academic snobbery and institutional inertia are just two reasons. Part-time undergraduate provision is not seen as prestigious apart from at Birkbeck and the OU where it is central. Part-time provision has always been seen by the HE sector as a bolt-on and is treated as such, as second-class throughout[223]. The 'tail wagging the dog' mind-set is prevalent in many academics across the sector (certainly within full-time focussed institutions), and this will require a major culture change to overcome. Making the part-time student body more visible and more successful via changes in the institutional provision and practices will go some way towards this, but this itself will not be sufficient, policy and funding regimes will need to make the part-time/full-time choice cost neutral[224]. Where part-time study is seen as a viable, productive mode of study (for both students and the institutions that provide the opportunities), in the way that it is seen by students and the wider public about Birkbeck and the Open University, the institutional habitus encourages more visibility as well as more viability of the part-time study mode. As HEIs develop more part-time provision, the visibility and viability of part-time courses will increase within the full-time focussed institutions as well as these exemplars. The political will for more flexible study is now being seen as a way forward for HE, the practicalities of how this will happen need addressing and investigation of institutional habitus is one

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[223] King (2008: 4) reports that the 'inequity of treatment [between full- and part-time students] compounds the perception that part-time students are somehow less important or less deserving than full-time students'.

[224] As Dearing (1997) suggested it should be. This 'cost-neutral' should be the aim for both institutions and students so that the decision to study and to offer provision is made on what is best for the student, rather than on the grounds of cost.

way in which this can move forward to make part-time study a choice for more students. As Coffield asked, what types of universities would be invented now? I would like to suggest that Birkbeck and the OU would be the exemplars to work from in building a new type of university, with an institutional habitus that promotes lifelong and part-time learning, that is open to all, with flexible learning as a core principle, acknowledgement of students' wider roles and responsibilities both within families and communities, and with student-centred learning and teaching practices. They would be institutions whose administrative and service provision works for the benefit of the whole of its student body and not just a proportion of it, and whose status and academic rigour is celebrated by students, academic, employers and the general public alike.

A future like this for HE may be seen as Pollyanna-ish (Porter, 1994), as impractical or as just plain unnecessary, but if there was the opportunity to develop new universities for the twenty-first century they would be the principles I would want to propose and suggest them as productive and important principles for the future of HE. As we do not have the opportunity to build new universities from scratch we need to take the best of what is on offer at the moment, and build from that. The examples of the OU and Birkbeck have been highlighted here, but they are not the only ones. Around the country there are small pockets of part-time provision within full-time focussed institutions that do attract and support part-time undergraduate students. They are, however, from an outside, sector perspective, largely hidden from view. It is imperative that the sector and the institutions make them more visible, it is important that we show the success stories to enable future potential students to see that there is a way to do a degree other than full-time at the age of 18. Then it is important that when the decision is made that a person wants to take their education to degree level that the options are widely known and available, so that more students are able to grasp the opportunities. As Atkin (2000) reports 'when

the paper said you could do it part-time, that was it', that was it, they continued their learning journey in a way that suited them. Leitch recommends:

> A new offer to adults to help further embed a culture of learning across
>
> the country, ensuring everyone gets the help they need to get on in life:
>
> raising awareness and aspiration; making informed choices; increasing
>
> choice and ensuring individuals can afford to learn (2006: 140)

If this leads to further visibility and real choice for potential learners to access the HE system in a way that suits them and not just the institutions (or employers) then that will be progress.

This chapter has highlighted the need for the HE sector and institutions to look at themselves in regard to the part-time student body in general and in particular the types of part-time student that they want to attract and can provide good quality provision to in order for the part-time students to be successful in their attempts to become graduates. Bowl states:

> If widening participation is to be made a reality, the nature of the
>
> relationship between the university and its students needs to change and
>
> the habitus of teachers and tutors needs to shift (2003: 157).

Linking back to the previous chapters the learning and working practices of the students, the relationships with families and communities, and the resources that students draw upon focussed particularly on the students and what they and their supporters could do to enable and ensure their learning journey be a successful one. Here I argue that the institutions should be a larger part of that supportive network. There should not just be one or two teachers who are fantastic, they all should be. The administrative and service provision should be first-class and accessible whether a student attends at 9 am or 7 pm. The institutional habitus should be made obvious

and not implicit and hidden, thus enabling first-generation students to understand the habits and practices of an alien institution before accessing it and whilst studying. The hallowed walls and ivory towers of the past that worked to exclude 'non-traditional' and 'non-standard' student should be well and truly dismantled for the student of the future to enter, so she can enjoy studying for her part-time degree, and then pass on the love of learning to those around her, so that those family and wider community ripples expand to really create a learning culture.

Conclusions

The socio-cultural understanding of an undergraduate student in the UK in 2008 remains predominantly that of a full-time student. This notion is both dominant and prominent in the mindset of many people, including policy makers and those within the HE sector.[225] The 'standard' student continues to be an 18-year old who usually moves away from home to go to university to study, and lives the full (and full-time) student experience. This 'full' experience is expected to include immersion in 'student life', indeed into the 'total institution' (Goffman, 1961) including the well-publicised social aspect of 'being a student'. This is the case despite the dynamic and shifting position of higher education in the early 21st century. Thus, anyone other than this perceived normative student becomes 'non-standard' (Webb, 1997:65). The students' narratives explored in the research I have presented here revealed that this 'standard' student is pervasive even in their own thinking and when they know the situation to be different for them.

Part-time undergraduate students are hidden in the meta-narrative of what it is to be a student, and my thesis shows that a detailed and deeper understanding of the part-time experience is needed to contribute to more students successfully negotiating the part-time degree route. While the popular discourse, most research and the majority of policy discussion (see for example Woodley, 2003) and decisions about 'the student' focus on the young full-time student, the growing body of part-time students (see Callender, 2006; Callender *et al*, 2006; Boorman *et al*, 2006; Ramsden, 2006a; Frean, 2008) continues to be marginalised and consequently disadvantaged within

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[225] As shown by the fact that this body of students was missed from *The Future of Higher Education* and *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (DfES 2003a and 2003b), (Callender *et al,* 2006: 8)

the higher education sector. One of the aims of my thesis was to bring the part-time 'success' narrative into the public discourse.

The literature for this study was both wide-ranging and limited. Wide-ranging in that I was able to draw on sources from lifelong learning, adult and continuing education, higher education, study skills, education, sociology, reports from governmental and educational bodies and yet limited because there is little written specifically about students studying part-time at undergraduate level. This is 'in contrast to the wealth of data collected on full-time students' (Callender, 2006: 10) and yet until 2006, when a flurry of reports was published, there was little work on this group, and much of what there was came from the 1980s and early 1990s (for example Tight, 1982, 1991a, 1991b; Blaxter and Tight, 1993, 1994; Bourner and Race, 1995; Bourner *et al*, 1991), a very different period in higher education terms, prior to financial support for part-time students and fees for full-time students. The work commissioned by Universities UK (UUK) and London Higher published in 2006 (Callender *et al*, 2006; Brown, 2006; Boorman *et al*, 2006; London Higher, 2006) begins to address the lacuna of research on this group of students as does this thesis, but more is required, particularly when 'future development of viable fee policies and initiatives for part-time students throughout the UK … is hampered by our lack of knowledge about these students' (Callender *et al*, 2006: 10). This lack of knowledge, combined with the negative perceptions of part-time HE (Davies, 1999) and the inequity in the funding regime, continue to undermine and undervalue part-time students, their experiences and their successes.[226]

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[226] Callender has been commissioned by HESCU to research 'part-time students motivations, expectations and aspirations', but had to fight in order to get a fraction of the amount that the equivalent full-time research was given (2007, 2008).

As this thesis has shown there is no singular 'part-time student'. Instead we need to develop a fuller understanding of the many part-time students and student types, as although I and many others discuss 'the part-time student' or the 'part-time student body', there is no such thing as 'a typical part-time student' in the singular. Indeed, as my research shows, these students are a diverse group and different provision[227] will suit different types of student. It is, then, important to investigate 'part-time students' but to do so recognizing that they do not constitute an homogenous group[228]. Part-time students in part-time focussed institutions highlighted stronger support and a smoother journey within the HEI, there were no 'nasty surprises'[229] (Maggie – full-time focussed university) and 'lack of support' (Tom – full-time focussed university). Tom continued that he considered 'the university as a centre of excellence, but I've not seen evidence of it, having been in it' and reported that what it took to complete a part-time degree at that full-time focussed university was the ability 'to keep writing the cheques!' 'Fine-grained analysis' (Fuller, 2007)[230] is important so that trends, and consequent successful 'types' of students, do not remain concealed. Moreover, we should remember Boorman *et al's* (2006: 6) warning that 'a single "part-time undergraduate higher education policy" would make no sense'. It is imperative that research covers not only differences between part-time students; there also needs to be fuller investigation of similarities to and differences from full-time students. I suggest this because much of the provision for

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[227] Time of provision, intensity of provision.

[228] For example, at Hull there is a successful part-time chemistry BSc programme. This is populated by students who are on day-release from employment, funded by employers and who study one day per week alongside full-time students. These are very different circumstances from a student studying on a part-time degree in the evening, alongside full-time employment, with no support (financial or otherwise) from their employer.

[229] She found out mid-way through the final year that there was to be an examination rather than continuous assessment.

[230] Such as by gender, age, life-stage, familial commitments, part-time /full-time work, first-generation applicant.

part-time students uses research with/on full-time students and their experiences and extrapolates from this, assuming similarities[231]. It is important that this research also ensures that part-time study is not seen as a second-class alternative to full-time study and relegated to an 'add-on' (see, for example, King, 2008). As Boorman states: 'part-time undergraduate study cannot be seen as an adjunct to full-time study or as an alternative. For many part-time students the alternative would not be full-time study but not studying at all' (Boorman *et al*, 2006: 5). If the sector and individual institutions wish to offer high-quality, accessible study for a diverse student body then part-time study has to be an integral and important part of that equation. The Leitch Report (2006) advises that much of the increased provision needed to achieve the 'prosperity for all in the global economy' of its title will be by part-time provision[232]. Dearing (2008) advises that

> there is no way we can get to 45 percent of the population[233] between 19
> and retirement being at a minimum of level 4 in achievement, without a
> major engagement with part-time students who are now below that level
> (2008: 5).

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[231] As was the case at a Widening Participation Student Experience Conference where full-time student data was used (Woodley, 2003). Indeed, every time I raised the issue in academia about part-time students with full-time jobs, academics would respond by reminding me that many full-time students now have part-time jobs. I understand this to be the case, but maintain that 'student' is still prominent in the full-time student's identity, and any work is fitted around their study schedules. Undeniably, more full-time students are working alongside study, further in depth investigation of this alongside research into part-time students with full-time jobs will enhance our knowledge of the whole student population.

[232] There is much that I find problematic in the Leitch report: namely the absolute focus on skills and economy and the exclusion of any of the wider benefits of learning, but it is one driver that will direct the HE sector and those in the lifelong learning sector will have to work with (and around) its recommendations for the foreseeable future.

[233] As recommended by Leitch.

Fuller and Heath (2008) claim that whilst those aged over 30 were on the periphery of the 'old widening participation focus' they are now more central to the Government's targets. Dearing (2008) states that in aiming for this 45 percent target the HE sector is 'engaged in widening access' but stresses that

> those part-timers, at least as much as those who come in at eighteen
>
> from non-traditional backgrounds, are going to need support' (2008: 5).

This support is needed, however, not because they are less-able students, the deficit view (Thomas, 2006: 1), but because they often arrive with less social and educational capital. They need support to enable them to negotiate around the HE 'half-articulated orthodoxies … that are implicit and tacit' (Tett, 2004: 260). The support is also needed because many full-time institutions with a small amount of part-time provision do not necessarily consider the part-time students' experience in detail or work towards enhancing this. According to the students in my research it is often a case of 'here is the provision – it is up to you to find it, access it and succeed'. Fuller and Heath's research support this picture by showing that

> No single agency … had responsibility for providing impartial advice and
>
> guidance on education and employment decisions to adults *across the*
>
> *life course*, and specifically in relation to opportunities for *higher level*
>
> study. Neither [had they] found any evidence of universities directly
>
> reaching out to the sort of people who have participated in [their]
>
> research, despite their 'potentially recruitable' status[234] (2008:8, original
>
> emphasis).

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[234] The participants in their study were all qualified to Level 3.

To achieve the goals of widening participation and those set by the Leitch report, part-time provision cannot continue as an appendage, an add-on, a line in a prospectus or advertisement that states in small print, 'this course is available on a part-time basis'. It is encouraging that there is a section on 'Part-time Studies and HE' in the 'Debate on the future of higher education' led by John Denham (http://dius.gov.uk/policy/he-debate.html). Part-time provision can no longer be ignored as it was previously; in the current economic climate it is too important to both HEIs and the economic future of the country.

There needs to be a shift in the very heart of HE culture. Dearing argues that 'it is not as if vastly increased numbers will turn up just because some Government sponsored and supported report says we need an extra X million qualified to level 4' (2008:5). To be successful both for institutions and students any expanded provision for the future (in whatever format – foundation degrees, employer-led, employer engagement, expansion of existing part-time provision) has to be research-led provision which understands the greater diversity of the part-time student body, acknowledges and accepts the students' 'bag and baggage' (Edwards, 1993) as an important and often major part of the students' identity, and is flexible and supportive. HEIs need to recognise that the institutions and the sector have their own 'bag and baggage', their own habitus, which in itself can be challenging and restricting, and which may need dismantling or altering so it is not just the student's responsibility to try to fit into an existing and problematic full-time focussed structure. Only then will *successful* part-time student become a norm. Indeed, as Quinn concludes, maybe those who 'drop out' and wish/try to return are the 'real lifelong learners, frustrated by an outmoded system' (2005: 67).

Mantz maintains (2000) that 'For some, part-time education is clearly a hard row to hoe, and policy needs to be illuminated – and influenced – by accounts of real-life experience which can only be captured through qualitative research' (2000: 246).

Throughout this thesis I have highlighted those real-life experiences with a variety of vignettes that highlight differences of the part-time student body, whilst in addition showing that part-time students in diverse situations can be successful.

In undertaking my research I opted for a qualitative approach. Woolcott (2001) states:

> One of the opportunities – and challenges – posed by qualitative approaches is to treat fellow humans as people rather than objects of study, to regard ourselves as humans who conduct research *among* rather than *on* them (2001: 20 original emphasis).

He urges that descriptive accounts should be in the first person, going on to stress that for 'reporting qualitative research, it should be the rule rather than the exception' (Woolcott, 2001: 21). I have followed this advice and tried to ensure that the reader can hear the students' stories in their own words. I, as author, however, selected which words to present, giving me power over these fellow human beings (Richardson, 1990, 2000) yet I have tried to 'stay faithful to the [students'] stories' (Parr, 1998). Richardson (1990) declares: 'Telling collective stories is one way in which we as social scientists can use our skills and privileges to give voice to those whose narratives have been excluded from the public domain and civic discourse' (1990: 28). I hope that I have used my skills and privileges to give voice to these part-time students and represented them and their views of their time and experience as students in a productive manner.

The collective story then, of successful part-time students, includes diverse gendered, age, class and life-stage narratives. The story also tells of success over adversities; including the negative representation to near invisibility of part-time students within individual HEIs and within the HE sector; onerous work and family commitments; and perseverance despite personal set-backs of individual students.

Despite differences in individual status, motivations and resources available, the collective story is that part-time study is available, but at the current time you may have to look hard to find it; it is possible, but will take hard work; you may be considered 'odd' by 'others' (including family, peers and colleagues) for trying to do it and it will require frequent and recurrent negotiations with significant others in order to enable space, energy and motivation in one's life to do the required study. These negotiations may involve changes to work and family practices (Morgan, 1996) and an acceptance that study has to be a priority at least some of the time in order to be successful. 'Student' or at least 'studying' has to become an important (albeit often small) part of your identity. It has to become a regular part of your personal practices. The resources that people draw on, including practical, physical, academic and emotional, will change over the time of a part-time degree and vary between students but are important in creating and sustaining the momentum towards the end goal.

Gender

Part-time students are more likely to be women. This means that any change in the make-up of the part-time study availability will mean that it is women who are most likely to be affected. This is important; many of the current and prospective students will be mothers and have partners. For many of them family will be priority, and they will be unable and unwilling to stop 'being mothers' (Edwards, 1993: 63) even if they stop doing/reorganise/reprioritize some of the required tasks, they will still have major caring responsibilities (Alsop, Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey, forthcoming and Cappleman-Morgan, 2004). For them to be successful, students should be identified and named, not just be unidentified un-gendered students (Hughes *et al*, 2006). When planning structures for part-time provision an understanding of the gendered nature of the student body and the responsibilities that a majority of the students will bring with them to the university is vital to ensure that the structures themselves do

not force the students to fail, or fail to complete. For example, a senior academic with responsibility for widening participation and lifelong learning suggested that 'twilight' teaching was one answer that could successfully work for both full-time and part-time students. Teaching would be between 4 pm and 7 pm, extending the 'normal teaching day just a little', I pointed out that for carers with young children this was probably the worst possible time of day; there is the school run (often school runs), children's tea, bath and bed time. Getting someone else to do these tasks is difficult (especially if there is no live-in partner and even when there is, the partner may not be home from work to cover these responsibilities, and increasingly we do not live close to parents/siblings). It is easier to get child-care (formal or informal) either earlier in the day, or in the evening. Although he had children (now grown) he had not considered this.

Cappleman-Morgan (2004: 11) argues that whilst disability legislation considers that 'a person is only disabled when confronted by negative attitudes and environmental factors' so too carers in the HE system could be considered 'disabled' by the attitudes and environmental factors of the university but without the protection of any legislation, and I would add often with considerable narrow-mindedness.

However, this is not to say that male students do not have or take responsibility for families, but the reality for many is still that women have greater responsibility and spend more time on family and household tasks than men (Aston *et al*, 2006: 28)[235]. Nevertheless, men should not be forgotten in this gendered equation. British men are more likely to work long hours (over 48 hours per week) than men in other EU countries (Kodz *et al*, 2003: 14) and, in trying to increase the number of successful

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[235] This is also a class issue. Older students are more likely to be from lower socio-economic groups than young students (Hogarth et al (1997) cited in Fuller, 2001: 237). And lower socio-economic groups are more likely to have 'traditional' gender roles (Warren, 2003).

students, working hours also need to be taken into consideration. Men, particularly in manual jobs, (arguably the ones who will need to be recruited) will need to be considered with 'fine-grained analysis' (Fuller, 2007)[236]. Without such analysis the ability to adapt to larger numbers of part-time students will be problematic for institutions and for both female and male students, albeit for different reasons, and possibly with differing solutions.

Age/life-stage

Age, or more specifically life-stage, is another important factor to consider with regards to the part-time student body, and for many similar reasons to a gender analysis. Different ages/life-stages bring with them different responsibilities. Those with heavy work-loads, in terms of the numbers of hours worked and/or the intensity and stress levels of employment held, as well as those with family responsibilities will have less time to devote to study and as I showed in chapter 2 certain family life-stages are considered more 'workable'.

In my study, the impact of the family life stage varied from person to person. Whilst it was often commonly accepted that studying with young children was particularly problematic this did not mean that part-time student carers of young children were not successful as exemplified by Jane and Tia's stories, both of whom had their second child whilst studying.

Increasingly, as the student population ages, and indeed with a focus on increasing the numbers of adult students and not just those in the 18 – 30 aged group, there

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[236] Fuller suggests that what is required is fine-grained analysis of 'intra-cohort participation', so not just stating that X% of the overall student population are studying on a part-time basis we must research and show close analysis, for example X% of the part-time student body are women over 30, X% are 1st generation participants, X% are from non-white British families.

also has to be consideration of the caring responsibilities of those students with aging and infirm parents (Alsop, Gonzalez-Arnal and Kilkey, forthcoming).

Family is important. As Whitehead reports most people 'continue to define themselves, socially and ontologically, as members of a family' (2002: 152). Although families are often considered and reported in HE as problematic and challenging, in my study many reported that their partners were the main support mechanism. This covered academic, practical, financial and emotional support. This was particularly reported by those in long-term relationships. They were the 'underrated mentors' (Tia). 'I could not have done it without my partner's support' was a frequently repeated comment in the interviews. To them study was integrated as another part of life that students and partners shared and dealt with in general negotiations of their own family routines.[237] For those with children in the family, children (of all ages) knew or were made aware of the importance of the studying to the student and that sometimes study may have to take priority over family needs. Study time was usually taken out of the 'parental personal time' and this timing differed by gender in that men were more able to use regular evening study time and were 'allowed out' of family responsibilities to do so, whereas women's study time was more fragmented, and in many cases it still had to be interwoven with familial responsibilities.

The average number of hours shown in my research spent on study by successful students was approximately 15 hours per week, the gendered and family implications of this need considering alongside personal circumstances, but it is important that this is not only the individual's responsibility. Institutions need to be aware that flexibility needs to be built into the system for when personal circumstances dictate

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[237] Fuller and Heath (2008) also suggest that a stable family background was an important factor in their 'potentially recruitable' respondents.

that time to study is not available, and not penalise students by policies that are too rigid and regulations that prevent progression. This is a view endorsed by King in her recent report on *Part-time Study in Higher Education* (2008). However, flexibility should not be seen as a panacea for HE to the issue of part-time studying within a full-time focussed sector. Total flexibility may not allow the creation of support networks, which as shown below were important to the success of some of the students in this research.

Support Networks

Although Callender asserts that friends/friendships within the HE institution are not as important to part-time students as to full-time students (2008) my research suggests that, on the contrary, friendship networks with other students are an important consideration and institutions should make attempts to ensure that friendships between students have the opportunity to develop, not only as a secondary consideration but as an important part of student retention and successful study journeys. My research has shown that friendship groups are particularly important, especially for those who do not have family support. Friendship (or at least a friendly/collegiate working group) within study groups are of vital importance in relation to retention, especially in the early parts of study during the transition period from non-student identity to student identity.

Many of the students in my research reported that if they had not made friends in the early stages of their studies they may have found it difficult to continue. When the studying became problematic it was their friends/peers who persuaded them to carry on. Additionally they felt obliged to turn up to class so as to not let their friends down, and this sufficed until the particular crisis had passed. Similarly, Thomas (2006, 2002) reporting on issues of importance from the students' perspective, shows that

relational issues are highly important. That is to say relationships both with peers and tutors are crucial at critical periods.

My research indicates that tutors are also a key component in the students' success. Students sought tutors who were exciting and inspirational to make their learning enjoyable, but as important was the fact that tutors showed an interest in them as individuals and knew them, and knew their story and their progress through the HE system. This is corroborated by Thomas (2006: 10) who states that 'acts of friendship, kindness and respect [by tutors] appear to have an impact on students' motivation to study … [and] these factors impact positively on their academic progress'. Patricia Broadfoot confirms this: 'Learning is most likely to take place where learners feel teachers know them personally and relate to them as real people' (2008: 6).

Luck

Luck was a constant theme throughout the narratives. A discourse of luck can be seen as problematic (Leonard, 2001; Silius, 2005) in that it can deny personal agency, academic abilities, skills, hard work and perseverance. Nonetheless, students reported that they felt lucky in many ways. Lucky they were able to access higher education on a part-time basis, lucky they had found the course, lucky they had not been struck down by too many problems along the way, lucky they had family support, lucky they had been in a position financially to commit resources to their study, lucky they were at a particular lifestage, lucky they had good tutors, and lucky that the doors were open for them. Using Wiseman's (2003: 3) four basic principles of lucky people, namely, being skilled at creating and noticing chance opportunities; making lucky decisions by listening to their intuition; creating self-fulfilling prophecies via positive expectations and adopting a resilient attitude that transforms bad luck into good I showed how luck was reported by the students.

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However, this narrative of luck was not to deny their agency. Students acknowledged that they had, in fact, been agentic in the choices they had made towards being a student and completing the degree, however, they recognised that it was not necessarily a traditional life choice for someone in their position (Fuller, 2008) and that they had favourable circumstances that allowed them to make the choices they had. They appreciated that not all their peers had completed alongside them, and were grateful that they were the ones who had been successful, whilst recognising that others may have had less fortunate circumstances. They recognised in themselves that they were determined people, that they had staying power and Jack Russell-like qualities (Rachel), and that they were 'completers'. Their 'lucky' circumstances, combined with these qualities, were, they considered what carried them from their tentative steps on joining HE to becoming graduates. They were, they reported, the 'lucky ones' to graduate. Obviously, the HE sector can address some of these issues, to enable more students to be 'lucky'. Specifically issues such as excellent tutors, financial support and resources, visibility and accessibility of HE in flexible modes of study. Issues such as family support, life stage and family crises are less straightforward to address by the sector and individual HEIs. However, this does not mean that the students' 'bag and baggage' (Edwards, 1993) should be ignored by the establishment. It is not equitable that the lucky, resilient, determined individuals are the only ones to complete and HEIs have a responsibility to all who wish to access the provision.

The establishment

HEIs need to closely examine their provision if they seriously want to increase the number of part-time students who enter, study, and leave as successful students. Currently, part-time provision (with the exception of the OU and Birkbeck) is usually based on a full-time university model which makes this provision inaccessible and in many ways unacceptable for part-time students. Introspection is required of both

individual HEIs and the sector as a whole. Some part-time students are currently successfully negotiating through the system; however, it cannot be left to the 'lucky completers' to negotiate their way through a system built for, and that privileges, full-time students. Leitch (2006), Dearing (2008) and Denham (2007b) all propose that part-time as a mode of study will become more important and the part-time student body will need to increase in numbers as we move further into the 21st century.[238] For these future students to be successful there needs to be significant investment into research on how best to investigate and, if needed, change the institutional habitus so that these students are attracted to courses[239], changes made to the whole ethos so that part-time is no longer seen as second-class, and support mechanisms put in place so that the adult part-time students coming into HE are not failed by a system that still works on the full-time 18 year-old model: a system which sees anything 'other' as deficit (Thomas, 2006: 1) and which expects full focus on study to the exclusion of all else. This is not a possibility for the many part-time students in the system at the moment and those who will access it in the future[240]. As Coffield and Williamson (1997) suggest, if we were to build universities now they would not look as they do. If there was a possibility to build a new university now it would have to have strong and close links with the community, it would value personal achievements as well as qualifications, and respect that adult students enter the establishment with numerous skills and different proficiencies. It would offer accessible, flexible and relevant provision. I would be proud to work in such an

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[238] The change in demographics meaning fewer 18-year olds will be coming into the HE system by 2010/11 (Lutzier, 2007; UUK, 2008).

[239] As Fuller and Heath (2008) assert there is no single agency that has Information, Advice and Guidance for adults as its mission. Finding useful, quality, correct information was mainly a question of luck or persistent and repeated searching. As shown in chapter 5 the students reported finding out about their course by accident.

[240] Increasingly, this is also the case for full-time students who have to work and have caring and other responsibilities.

institution. As building new universities is not a possibility I will continue to work towards change in the existing HE system.

The PhD process: self-reflection

Krieger (1991) states that 'research is a process that affects the researcher most of all' (cited in Norum, 2000: 337) and Norum comments that '[r]esearchers are biased. We are biased by our experiences, our education, our knowledge, our own personal dogmas' (2000: 319). The research I have undertaken for this thesis has affected me greatly, far more than I imagined when I set out on this particular journey and, as discussed earlier, I am biased in researching/writing it. In conducting this research I had expected to learn more about part-time students, I had not expected to learn so much about myself. From immersion in the transcripts I expected to learn about the students and their journeys and working practices but did not realise how much these would affect my own when engaging with their narratives. Not only did I learn about particular working practices but also that many different types of practices can lead to students being successful. This was extremely valuable to me. As a mature student myself some of the lessons should perhaps have been learned earlier in my studies, and some were, to a certain extent. However, many of my earlier working practices could have been described as lax at best, and at worst, counterproductive.[241] But working through the process of this PhD I have learned that I am a successful student even if I did not previously classify myself as such. When working with my interviewees I used completion as my definition of successful, and by that definition I had already completed an undergraduate degree and a Masters degree before

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[241] Although in retrospect they were often justified by study having to take a secondary role to my family and work.

embarking on the PhD so it encouraged me to accept that I, too, am a successful student[242].

One of the reasons why this thesis is complete is because of the way that I learnt from the stories my interviewees told me. For instance, Tom and Karen's emphasis on personal space led to the bulk of the writing being done in an adapted shed at the bottom of my garden! Weronika and Maggie's awareness of the impact on the weather forcibly reminded me to equip myself to deal with my own Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Tia's identification that she was a 'to the edge' person and Carlos's acknowledgement of needing challenges helped me appreciate these traits in myself and recognise that I could be and was successful, and that these traits had contributed to my success despite previously seeing these things as personal negative traits.

From Tia, Tom, Carlos, Rachel and Weronika I learnt to be a far more independent learner and appreciate the skills needed in doing so. From Bridget I learnt that short bursts of working are more productive for me, and from Jane and Gina that although I do not consider myself to be particularly domestic, household tasks prey on my mind, and I can use the breaks between my short bursts of work productively so that I get both writing and other jobs done.

One major lesson I learned from Tia, Liz and Tom is to think of myself as a finisher, a completer. Reading the transcripts I started to understand the power of this self-belief. Even though my own self-belief was very different at the start of this PhD process, when I was confronted with the students' stories I began analysing my own, and realised that I too am a finisher. Previous study may have taken longer than the

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[242] At least by this definition, though I still find it difficult to claim this.

expected time-frame to get to completion but this time, the self-belief that I would finish this thesis, combined with favourable family circumstances and firm direction and deadlines from my supervisors meant that I believed I was going to finish, and would be successful. This was a vital and life-changing mind-shift.

I expose myself in this way as it is important to me to be reflexive in my practice. Norum (2000) states that 'as researchers, we ask those we work with to disclose personal details of their lives. Should we not call upon ourselves to do the same?' (2000: 336), although as researchers we also guarantee anonymity for our respondents and in a PhD there is no such anonymity, so we leave ourselves vulnerable. She goes on to suggest though that exposing ourselves in such a way can empower others. By being reflexive and showing here how much I had to learn not only about part-time study/students but about myself and my personal working practices in working through this process I hope that others can see that they do not have to know everything and have the perfect conditions and working practices to set out on the journey, and that as long as we keep studying we will continue to learn about ourselves.

Final remarks

To conclude, in this thesis I have shown that the power of the discourse around Higher Education in the early 21st century privileges full-time students which consequently disadvantages part-time students. This follows Joan Eveline's assertion (1998) that it is more 'fruitful to name male advantage' than to 'focus on female disadvantage' (cited in Jackson, 2004: 132/3). By naming and showing how advantaged full-time students are by the discourse and the amount of research and research funding that goes into knowing the full-time experience, part-time students are discriminated against. Yet despite this some are able to be successful students. By making public the successful part-time narrative a key aim of my research is to help raise the profile of successful part-time students, to bring into the discussion what it takes to become a successful part-time student, what it means for academia both as individual institutions and as a sector, and how part-time study needs to become a norm of our society as we move further into the 21st century. The focus on skills and knowledge that is the current government rhetoric around lifelong learning can be seen as damaging and limited, especially when there is little or no consideration of the wider benefits of learning. Whilst Leitch (2006) Dearing (2008) and King (2008) among others have called for a greater availability of part-time study and greater numbers of part-time students, the reality for these students is that they continue to be invisible in the HE sector and they struggle against systems designed for full-time students. Yet as the government seeks to educate these people using the full-time model, full-time norms will continue to disadvantage part-time students so that it continues to be the few, strong and independent students who successfully complete. As Bridget reflected 'there is only myself and Steph left from a class of 46'. Others will attempt and not complete adding to their sense of failure that many carry through from their compulsory education days.

Research is necessary with current / successful and prospective students at entry level as well as on completion to enable providers to understand more thoroughly the part-time student experience in all its forms. However, the main focus of the research needs to be on the HE sector and individual HEIs, and whilst accepting that not all institutions will be able to be all things to all students, introspection is needed primarily on policies, funding and support mechanisms. My research has focussed on the success stories. The part-time student body would also benefit from fine-grained analysis (Fuller, 2007) of those who do not make it to completion. This, done in a compassionate manner, in a similar way to Quinn *et al* (2005) where 'drop-out' is not seen as a disaster, and promotes a full understanding of lifelong learning without a 'focus on linear progression and completion' (2005: 13) would add to our knowledge of the part-time student body and ensure that the full-time focussed HE sector is not setting up part-time students to fail[243].

The funding review in 2009 will be significant when Leitch (2006) and Dearing (2008) declare that part-time provision in HE is going to become increasingly important to the HE sector. Indeed, as Latchman reports (2007) the Government can state that the funding for part-time students is 'better than ever before … [which] is true but reflects a history of total neglect for such individuals'. However, there is still a full-time privilege (Eveline, 1998) within the funding regime both for students and HEIs. One major funding issue is Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQ) and this has to be addressed in relation to lifelong learning provision. Whilst it is important that provision is available to those who have not had the opportunity to study at HE level in the past, the opportunity to retrain and redirect oneself should not be wholly

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[243] One example of the system starting to be responsive is from the University of Hull. From 2008 there will be a 'Flexible Degree Framework' in place which will allow greater flexibility within the structure of degree programmes. Programmes could then be extended up to 12 years without penalty or negative consequences. However, we have yet to see how this works in practice.

removed[244]. As above (in the discussion of 'drop-out'), the ELQs issue focusses on a narrow understanding and interpretation of lifelong learning where all progression is deemed to be linear and upward, and where universities are seen to be just providers of qualifications with no acknowledgement of the wider benefits of learning.

Whilst funding is an important issue it is not the only concern. HE as a sector needs to know more about the full experience of part-time students studying alongside often very busy lives. Any period of five or more years will contain some momentous and crucial events for most adults. These may include birth, death, marriage, divorce, children leaving home, becoming a grandparent, a major illness of self, partner, child or grandchild, promotion, demotion, redundancy or relocation. Life does not stop just because you are taking a part-time degree, and significant life changes pose challenges. With a flexible and supportive system that acknowledges these life challenges, they do not have to mean the end of studying.

Annette Fitzsimons in *Gender as a Verb* (2002) suggested that her motivation to write a PhD was the desire to produce a new theory, and a grand one at that. I had no such grand ambitions. Malcolm Gladwell in *The Tipping Point* (2002) writes

> A book, I was taught long ago in English class, is a living and breathing
> document that grows richer with each new reading. But I never quite
> believed that until I wrote *The Tipping Point*. I wrote my book without any
> clear expectation of who would read it, or what, if anything, it would be
> useful for. It seemed presumptuous to think otherwise (2002: 262).

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[244] With ELQs it will become increasingly difficult to retrain and early decisions about life plans are not always appropriate further in life. For example Liz – a traditional age graduate (in Classics), followed her first degree with a PGCE and then 20 years of teaching. To move on in her career she wanted to become an Educational Psychologist – which requires a psychology degree – with ELQ-funding this would no longer be possible except within exempt subjects.

Not having as grand ambition as Fitzsimons, and like Gladwell not wishing to seem presumptuous, I had little expectation that anyone would ever read this PhD, much less find it useful. If I had learnt only one thing during the process to help me in my work with the part-time students it would have been worth the effort, and I have learnt so much more. However, now it is complete I consider that it has an audience and it will be highly useful for, and relevant to, practitioners and academics working within HE both developing and delivering part-time provision; potential and current part-time students looking for ways to navigate a successful route through part-time provision; and for policy-makers looking to understand part-time students more thoroughly, and then develop future policy with part-time students very much at the forefront of this process rather than as an afterthought.

The future of HE will look very different from today, it will include a greater number and a higher proportion of part-time students and those requiring more flexible study alongside both work and family commitments. By highlighting a positive part-time narrative and the current full-time privilege, and encouraging introspection of this by HEIs, this work will contribute to that future to ensure that these students will not be 'the real lifelong learners frustrated by an outmoded system' (Quinn et al, 2005: 67).

If readers of this thesis gain a deeper and more thorough understanding of the part-time student body then I consider I have done a valuable job. In attempting to learn more about the part-time student body I wanted to make audible the part-time students voices and I found that, in my attempt to do this, my respondents have educated me.

> Much of what we now know and want to communicate in this book came to us as *fresh* knowledge, even though, upon reflection and a retrospective look at our own and others' prior writings, we realized that this knowledge was not new but had been, for us, underground,

unarticulated, intuited, or ignored …In the end we found that, in our

attempt to bring forward the ordinary voice, that voice had educated us.

(Belenky *et al*, 1997: 19/20, original emphasis).

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Part-time students' experiences of first degrees

Please insert a tick in the relevant box. Please complete all sections as fully as possible. Please add any further comments you feel are appropriate.

PT = PART-TIME FT = FULL-TIME

1   General Information

1.1   **Your age** _____

1.2   **Age on entry to your current course** _____

1.3   **Gender** Female ☐ Male ☐ Other ☐

1.4   **How would you identify yourself?**

Working Class ☐ Middle Class ☐ Upper Class ☐

Comments _____

1.5   **How would you identify your upbringing?**

Working Class ☐ Middle Class ☐ Upper Class ☐

Comments _____

1.6   **Ethnicity** _____

1.7   **Marital / Partnership Status** _____

1.8 **Do you have any children?** Yes ☐ No ☐ **If no go to section 2**

1.9 **If yes, how many?** _____

1.10 **What age/s are they?** _____

1.11 **Do they live with you?** Yes ☐ No ☐

2 Starting to study

2.1 **Route into degree programme?** A levels ☐ Access ☐ Other ☐

If other please detail _____

2.2 **Highest Qualification on Entry** Below GSCE ☐

GCSE / Equiv ☐ A level / Equiv ☐ Degree ☐ Other ☐

If other please detail _____

2.3 **What is / are your main reason/s for doing this course?** _____

_____

_____

2.4 **Is this your first attempt at Higher Education?** Yes ☐ No ☐

2.5   **If No, please describe your previous experience** _____

_____

_____

2.6   **Why did you decide to do this course *now*?** _____

_____

_____

2.7   **Did you consult anyone for advice in following this route of study?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

2.8   **If yes who / in what capacity?** _____

_____

3   Your Programme of Study

3.1   **Degree Programme Name** _____

3.2   **Name of Institution** _____

3.3   **Type of Institution** New University (post 1992) ☐ Old University ☐

College of Higher Education ☐ Other ☐ _____

3.4   **Department or Faculty that runs your course** _____

_____

3.5   **Expected length of course** _____

3.6   **What year are you in?** _____

3.7   **Do you anticipate completing at the expected time?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

3.8   **If no why not?** _____

_____

3.9   **How much extra time do you think you will need?** _____

_____

3.10   **Average number of hours per week in taught classes** _____

_____(if you
are in your final year and only doing a dissertation/ independent study how many
hours per week did you attend taught classes in past years)

3.11   **Average hours spent per week on independent study** _____

3.12   **When do you attend?** day ☐ evening ☐ both ☐

3.13   **Do you attend classes with** FT students ☐ PT students only ☐

both FT and PT students ☐

3.14   **Why are you studying part time?** _____

_____

3.15   **Would you prefer to study full time?** Yes ☐ No ☐

Comments _____

_____

3.16   **Do you attend/ make use of a study group?** (informal or formal)

Yes ☐ No ☐ Comments _____

3.17   **Do you feel that your institution recognises your specific needs as a part-time student?**

Yes ☐ No ☐ Comments _____

_____

4   Work

4.1   **Are you currently in paid employment?** Yes ☐ No ☐

4.2 **Have you been in paid employment at any time whilst you have been studying this course?** Yes ☐ No ☐

If NO to both of these questions please go directly to Section 5

4.3 **Occupation** _____

4.4 **Is your work** Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐

4.5 **Number of hours worked and when?** Eg evening shifts _____

_____

4.6 **Do you come to classes in your own time or do you get time off from work? (eg day release)**
_____

4.7 **If you have a partner are they in employment?** Yes ☐ No ☐

4.8 **Does your partner work?** Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐

5 Finances

5.1 **Do you receive any support with fees?** Yes ☐ No ☐

5.2 **If yes, is that support** fee waiver ☐ employer support ☐

grant ☐ bursary ☐ other ☐ _____

5.3 **Have you had to rearrange finances to be able to afford this course?**

Yes ☐ No ☐ Comments _____

6 Your experience on the course

6.1 **Are you enjoying your experience as a part-time student?**

Yes ☐ No ☐ Comments _____

_____

6.2 **What do you expect from the course?** _____

_____

_____

6.3 **Does anyone else you know study? (apart from fellow students)**
_____

_____

6.4 **What reaction do you get when you tell others you are doing a part-time degree?** _____

_____

_____

6.5   Do you feel you have changed whilst studying for a degree? ____

_____

_____

6.6   What do you like best about being a part-time student / studying / the course? _____

_____

_____

6.7   What do you least like about being a part-time student / studying / the course? _____

_____

6.8   How do you think your institution treats part-time students?

Very Reasonably ☐ Reasonably ☐ OK ☐ Unreasonably ☐

Very Unreasonably ☐ Comments _____

_____

_____

7 The future

7.1 What do you plan to do after graduation? _____

_____

_____

7.2 Would you advise others to become part-time students?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Comments _____

_____

_____

7.3 Is there anything you would like to add about your experience as a part-time student _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Many thanks for your time.

Pam Medhurst   01482 465662

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Appendix II

Interview schedule

Introduce myself. Thank participant for filling in questionnaire, agreeing to be interviewed and for attending.

Permissions sheet – anonymity. Tell them the research is for my PhD and how it will be used and where it will be accessible.

General

How do you feel about being a student? Why do you think you have made it to the end of the degree?

What type of working practices have you adopted to be successful? (Managed learning/ finances / time etc)

Do you tell people about the fact that you are studying? How do you tell them? What sorts of reactions do you get?

Lifecourse

Why was it right for you to do this degree now and not at the 'traditional' age of 18?

Do you still think this was the best time to do it?

Time

How much time do you think you spend per week studying?

Has that changed over your degree?

When do you do most of your study?

Do you have to negotiate time for study with anybody?

How do you negotiate time for study?

What are the things that most affect your time available for study?

Space

Where do you do your independent study?

Do you have a particular place or do you work wherever you can?

How do you feel that has affected how you have worked? Others?

Do you have a study space in the house? Have you had to move things in the house in order to have a study space? Was this an issue?

Learning strategies

What do you do to meet the coursework deadlines? Did you meet them?

What do you do if you have multiple deadlines?

What kind of use have you made of the library? Has this changed over time?

How often do you buy books for the course? Or are you more likely to use library/ internet / photocopy facilities?

People – Family

How have you negotiated the desire to do a degree with family responsibilities?

Do you / how do you feel your relationships have developed over your time as a student? Particularly key relationships?

If children – how do your children feel about you studying for a degree?

How did your parents feel about you becoming a student?

Do you have a particular person that you discuss your studies with or confide in?

People – Others

How do you feel your relationships with others outside of the family have developed over your time as a student?

Have you made use of a study group or working with another student, or has your independent study been independent? Why/ how has this worked for you?

How has the interaction been with other students generally?

Would you have liked more/less interaction with other students outside of the taught times? Why?

How has the interaction been with the tutors or other staff from the institution?

Is it usual for 'people like you' to study? Do you know many others in your family/circle of friends/work colleagues that study? Does that make it easier/harder for you?

Financial strategies

Part-time study is not without financial cost. Practically, how did you deal with the costs - course fees / books / travel etc?

Has the way you manage your finances changed during the degree?

Have your attitudes towards money changed during the degree?

Negotiations re costs?

Support

Do you feel you have been supported in your studies? In what ways?

Where do you feel you have had most support from?

Has there been anyone who has encouraged you or acted as a mentor? At any point?

General

If a close friend, family member or colleague was considering doing a part-time degree what do you think it would be helpful for them to know?

What do you wish you had known before you started, that you only found out along the way?

What do you think it takes to complete a part-time degree successfully?

Would you define yourself as successful?

Is there anything else you wish to say about your time as a part-time student, or any areas you thought we would have discussed that have not been mentioned?

Thank for time, remind that they can contact me if want any further information or if they remember something else.

Appendix III

Student Biographies

Name	Age[1]	Upb[2]	Now[3]	Work	Partner	Children[4]	Grad[5] entry	P/Child[6] Grad	Partner[7] Grad
Bernie	27	MC	MC	FT	Y	N	N	N	N
Bridget	38	MC	MC	FT	N	Y - AH	N	N	na
Diane	41	MC	MC	PT	Y	Y – adult AH	N	N	Y
Gina	36	WC	WC	PT	Y	Y - AH	N	N	Y - MS
Jane	31	MC	MC	N	Y	Y - AH	N	N	Nk
Jean	64	MC	MC	N	N	N	Y	Nk	Na
Jen	42	WC	MC	PT	Y	Y - AH	N	Nk	Y
Judy	42	WC	WC	FT	Y	N	N	N	Y
Julia	35	WC	WC	PT	Y	Y - AH	N	N	Y
Katie	33	WC	WC	FT	N	Y - AH	N	N	Na
Krystal	29	WC	MC	FT	N	N	N	Y Step-F	Na
Liz	47	WC	WC	PT	Y	Y - LH	Y	Nk	Y
Lucy	27	WC	WC	PT	Y	Y - AH	N	Y – F MS	N
Maggie	52	MC	MC	N	Y	Y – adult LH	N	N	Y - MS
Marilyn	57	WC	WC	PT	Y	Y – adult LH	N	N	N

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Rachel	26	MC	MC	FT	Y	N	Y	Nk	Nk
Shirley	39	WC	WC	FT	Y	Y – adult AH	N	N	N
Sue	46	WC	WC	FT	Y	Y – adult 1 LH 1 AH	N	N	N
Tia	34	WC	-	N	Y	Y - AH	N	N	N
Weronika	33	MC	MC	N	Y	Y - AH	N	Nk	Y
Carlos	35	MC	MC	FT	Y	Y - AH	N	Nk	N
Colin	57	MC	MC	N	Y	Y – adult LH	N	Nk child Y	N
Glen	40	MC	MC	FT	Y	Y – AH	N	N	N
Keith	39	WC	WC	FT	Y	Y - AH	Y	N	Y - MS
Pete	34	WC	WC	FT	N	N	N	N	Na
Steve	34	WC	WC	FT	N	N	N	N	Na
Tom	54	WC	WC	FT	Y	Y – adult LH	N	N	N

Key

1   Age on entry to the degree programme

2   Upb – Upbringing – WC (working class) or MC (middle class), self-classified

3   Self-classified class position at time of interview

4   Children – AH – At home, LH – Left home. (Adult 16+)

5   A graduate on entry to this degree programme

6   Parent or child a graduate (F = Father)

7   Partner a graduate – MS – Mature Student (where known)

Nk   Not known   Na   Not applicable

All names are pseudonyms.

Bernie: White British middle class (MC), married, no children yet, although was planning to start a family on completion of her degree. She was 27 at the start of her studies, her first attempt at higher education. Bernie worked full-time within the social services sector and was granted day-release to study one day per week. She was the first in her family to undertake a degree programme and was interviewed in her home. She advised her younger sister to study full-time at university at the traditional age.

Bridget: White British MC, two children, was divorced before she started to study. She was 38 on commencement of her degree and it was her first attempt. Although she did complete university application forms at the age of 18, she did not enter HE at that point as she had married during her A levels. She studied social science as a part-time student taking classes in the evening. Bridget worked in the voluntary sector. Initially working part-time to enable her to fit in her study, she increased her hours and took on further responsibility during the course of her degree and worked full-time during her final year. She was the first in her family to complete a degree and she was interviewed in her home.

Diane: White British MC, married with grown-up children still living at home. She was 41 at the start of her studies. It was her first attempt at HE and she gained a degree in Country House Studies on a part-time day basis. Most of her study took place in a local Country House. She worked part-time and changed jobs during her degree to one related to her studies. She was interviewed in her home.

Gina: White British working class (WC), married with two school-age children. She was 36 on commencement of her degree. This is her first attempt at HE, she studied for a social science degree on a part-time evening basis. Her husband studied for his degree previously, also on a part-time basis. Gina worked part-time as a medical

secretary and increased her working hours towards the end of her degree. She was interviewed with Jane at the latter's home.

Jane: White British MC, married with two young children, one of whom was born during the period of her studies. She intercalated for a year at that point. She was 31 when starting her studies and she entered at level 5 (Diploma Stage) as she already had an HND. She studied for a social science degree on a part-time evening basis. She is a full-time mum and was interviewed at her house alongside Gina.

Jean: White British MC, single, no children. She had retired from university lecturing and was aged 64 at the start of her degree programme. She had both a first degree and a post-graduate qualification, acquired on a full-time basis, the degree at 18 and the post-graduate qualification some years later. She started her current degree in local history one year prior to retirement. She was interviewed at her university.

Jen: White British WC upbringing, identified as MC at the time of the interview, married with teenage children. This was her first attempt at HE. She was 42 at the start of her studies, worked part-time in the social services sector and studied for a Diploma in Social Work on a day-release basis. She was interviewed in a public house following her last examination.

Judy: White British WC, divorced with a new partner but no children. She was 42 on entry to her studies, her first attempt at higher education and her degree had been taken across two universities as she moved because of her current partner's job. She studied as a part-time student taking classes in the evening. Her partner has a degree and works in education. Judy was interviewed in her place of work, a further education college.

Julia: White British WC, married with one daughter. She was 35 at the start of her studies and it was her first attempt at higher education. She studied for a degree in

Business Studies on a part-time evening basis. She worked part-time as a pricing and contracts co-ordinator and was interviewed in her home. Her husband is a teacher and was currently studying for a post-graduate qualification in maths alongside a practical qualification in plumbing.

Katie: White British WC, divorced prior to commencing her degree, with one daughter in primary school. She was 33 at the start of her degree. She studied for a degree in Business Studies on a part-time evening basis and was the first in her family to get a degree. She started studying at the local college and transferred to the University on successful completion of her HNC. She works full-time for a large international company as an employee relations advisor and was interviewed at her place of work. Her sister died just before she started her higher education.

Krystal: White British WC upbringing, identified as MC at the time of the interview, single, no children and did not plan to have any. A long-term relationship broke up as she entered higher education. She was 29 on entry to her studies and this was her first attempt at higher education. She works full-time in the social services sector and studied for a Diploma in Social Work on a day-release basis. She was interviewed in her home.

Liz: White British WC, with a partner and a daughter who left to go to university during the course of her studies. She was 47 on entering her degree programme. She had a first degree in classics and was a teacher and special needs co-ordinator. She studied Psychology on a part-time evening basis, and planned to train as an Educational Psychologist. She was interviewed at her university.

Lucy: White British WC, married with four school-age children, although the youngest child was just one when she started her degree. She was 27 at the start of her degree programme and this was her first attempt at HE. She studied Cultural Studies through evening classes for part-time students. Her first courses were open

courses within the local community. She worked in various jobs during her degree, including as a Teaching Assistant and in a Sports Centre concurrently as well as holding various voluntary positions within the community. Her husband had also studied part-time for a degree, although his studies were on hold due to work commitments at the time of the interview. Her father successfully completed a part-time degree when she was a child. She was interviewed at her university.

Maggie: White British MC, married and with grown-up children who had left the family home, and grandchildren. She was 52 at the start of her studies and it was her first attempt at higher education. At the beginning of her degree she studied in a local community centre during the day, but then the degree moved to the university site and classes were offered in the evening. Maggie is retired and felt she 'fell into the degree by accident'. Her husband and children have degrees, her husband studied for his on a part-time basis through the army with the Open University during the early stages of their marriage. She was interviewed in her home.

Marilyn: White British WC, married with grown-up children who have left the family home, and grandchildren. She was 57 when she started a degree in social sciences on a part-time evening basis. She worked part-time and was the first in her family to study at degree level. She was interviewed in her home.

Rachel: White European MC, has a new partner and no children. A long-term relationship ended just prior to starting her degree. She was 26 on entering her Psychology degree and studied on a part-time evening basis. She studied full-time for a first degree in Business at the age of 18. She changed jobs during the course of her studies and held various part-time positions related to her degree at the time of the interview. Her long-term career aim was to be a university lecturer. She was interviewed at her university.

Shirley: White British WC, married with older teenage/adult children who still live in the family home. She was 39 on commencement of her degree in Business Studies, completed on a part-time evening basis. She worked full-time and was interviewed at her university.

Sue: White British WC, married with grown-up children, one of whom still lives at home. She was 46 on commencement of a social science degree and studied on a part-time evening basis. Her daughter has a degree and encouraged her to study. She worked full-time and changed jobs during her degree. She worked in education at the time of the interview. She had been accepted on a PGCE course to follow her degree. She was interviewed in her home.

Tia: White British (no socio-economic classification given but had a working-class upbringing), married since the age of 18, with two children, one of whom she home educated. She also did some part-time tuition in psychology. She was the first in her family to get a degree. She was 34 on commencement of her studies and was interviewed in a coffee shop in her home town. She gained a first-class degree in Psychology with the Open University. During the time of her studies she had a miscarriage, her son was born, her mother died shortly after his birth and later her father's new partner died.

Weronika: White European MC, married with three school-age children. She was 33 at the start of her degree and this was her first successful attempt at HE. She had started other OU courses previously. She gained a first-class degree in Law with the Open University and fast-tracked to complete the required credits in four years. She was a partner in her husband's IT business, managing the legal side of the business and also had responsibility for the family farm in Poland which she visited on a regular basis. Her husband had a degree which he completed with the Open University. She had been accepted on a Legal Practise Course in the September

following the interview so she could qualify to become a Lawyer. She was interviewed in a coffee shop.

Carlos: White British working MC, married with three children. He was 35 on commencement of his degree programme and studied with the Open University. He was in the Armed Forces. He was the first in his family to get a degree and was interviewed in his home.

Colin: White British MC, married with grown-up children who had left the family home. He had retired from life at sea as a Chief Engineer and was 57 years old when he started his degree on a part-time basis, mostly studying in the evenings, but a couple of modules were studied alongside full-time students during the day. Two of his three children had degrees and his daughter-in-law interviewed his mother as part of her PhD. He was interviewed at his university.

Glen: White British MC, married with one school-age child. He was 40 at the start of his degree in History and studied with the Open University. He worked full-time as a radio communications engineer and was the first in his family to gain a degree. He planned to study to a higher level in the future. He was interviewed in a coffee shop.

Keith: White British WC, with a partner and a teenage step-son. He was 39 at the start of his studies and studied for a Diploma in Social Work on a part-time day-release basis from his full-time work in social services. He had a first degree, completed as a full-time mature student. His partner had recently completed her degree. He was interviewed in his home.

Pete: White British WC, single, no children, lived with his mother. He was 34 on commencement of a degree in Business Studies completed on a part-time evening basis. He worked full-time in a factory and was the first in his family to gain a degree. He was interviewed at his university.

Steve: White British WC, single, no children. He was 34 when he began a part-time Business Studies degree on a part-time evening basis which he started at the local college to HNC level. He was the first in his family to study at degree level. He worked full-time as a local government officer and was interviewed in his home.

Tom: White British WC, married with grown-up children who had left the family home, and grandchildren. He was 54 on commencing his degree and studied for a degree in Cultural Studies on a part-time evening basis. He worked full-time as an electrician. He was the first in his family to gain a degree; his daughter had begun studying full-time at the same university at the time of his interview. He was interviewed in his university.

Appendix IV

Table 8 Age on entry to degree programme by gender

Female age on entry	Number of students	Male age on entry	Number of students	Total
20 – 29	16	20 – 29	2	18
30 – 39	20	30 – 39	6	26
40 – 49	10	40 – 49	3	13
50 – 59	8	50 – 59	4	12
60+	3	60+	0	3
Total	57		15	72

Source: Questionnaire data, 2004/05 – 72 returns.

Table 9 Part-time students by gender and family status

	Female	Male
Single - no children or children left home	20	5
Single parent - children at home	6	0
Single parent - older/adult children at home (16+)	3	0
Couple – no children or children left home	12	3
Couple - children at home (-16)	11	5
Couple – older/adult children at home (16+)	5	2
Total	57	15

Source: Questionnaire data, 2004/05 – 72 returns.

Table 10 Social class: self-classification, current status and upbringing by gender

		Female	Male
1.4 How would you identify yourself?	Working class	30	6
	Middle class	25	6
	Upper class	1	1
1.5 How would you identify your upbringing?	Working class	32	5
	Middle class	24	5
	Upper class	1	1

Source: Questionnaire data, 2004/05 – 72 returns – not all completed this question.

Table 11 Educational level on entry to degree programme

Highest Qualification on entry	Female	Male
Below Level 2 (below GCSE)	2	1
Level 2 (GCSE or equivalent)	12	1
Level 3 (A level or equivalent)	31	9
Level 4 or above	11	4
Total	57	15

Source: Questionnaire data, 2004/05 – 72 returns.

Table 12 Previous experience of Higher Education

Is this your first attempt at HE?	Female	Male
Yes	23	7
No	34	8

Source: Questionnaire data, 2004/05 – 72 returns.

Table 13 Consideration of part-time students by institution

How do you think your institution treats part-time students?	Mainly PT university	Mainly FT university
Very reasonably	14	11
Reasonably	8	16
Ok	0	18
Unreasonably	0	1
Very unreasonably	0	0

Source: Questionnaire data, 2004/05 – 72 returns - not all completed this question.

Table 14 Consult/decision making process prior to study

Did you consult anyone for advice in following this route of study	Female	Male
Yes	21	6
No	36	9

Source: Questionnaire data, 2004/05 – 72 returns.

People consulted ranged from family members; university personnel; friends

(including recent graduate); professional in the career student aspired to;

boss/supervisor and career advice at place of work (FE college) and Open University

study guidance advice.