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Mature Women and Higher Education: Reconstructing Identity and Family Relationships

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MATURE WOMEN AND HIGHER EDUCATION:

RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

by

LOUISE ANNE WEBBER

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MATURE WOMEN AND HIGHER EDUCATION: RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that through engagement with Higher Education (HE), mature women students experience identity change and transformation which could lead to conflict and strain on marital relationships. The aims of this thesis are to explore the effects of identity transformation on mature women and the family unit as a whole, through a consideration of the impact of HE on family life.

Qualitative methods were adopted using a narrative inquiry methodology of focused interviews, mind mapping and a student led mosaic approach to gather the data. Women with families were selected from one Foundation Degree in Early Years in a College Higher Education (CHE) environment. The views of their husbands were also gathered through interviews.

This thesis argues that HE study had transformative effects on the whole family, not just the identity of the women students. Previously to HE, the women's identity was firmly placed in the home as mothers. HE could be seen to change and reconstruct their position as a mother. These transformations and positional changes concerned family routines, relationships and parenting approaches. The women participants believed that their husbands benefitted from the secondary effects of transformation as a result of their wives' HE studies and identity change.

My thesis contributes to knowledge on this topic through the development of a model of family capital which consists of emotional, economic, cultural and social capital. Time is recognised as an important aspect of capital production and identity transformation. Husbands were viewed as reliable providers of family capital; however children who are normally viewed as consumers of family capital also became providers of capital. Through accessing capital support and having their studies valued by their family, women were able to justify their time spent on HE and minimise their feelings of guilt.

This thesis is of relevance for women students and HE tutors. Using the findings of this study, HE staff can highlight the transformative effect of HE study on women students. Through raising an awareness of the importance of family capital and support networks, then HE success is more likely to be achieved.

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At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Education has the

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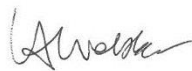
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Informal research sharing

I participated in the EdD conference (June, 2013) and led a discussion on alternative research methods. I shared my initial research findings at an Early Childhood Studies Subject Forum Event (July, 2013), a Research Conference at Plymouth University (September, 2013) and a Higher Education Conference at Exeter College (February 2014).

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Mothers accessing Higher Education (HE) programmes can often experience difficulty with balancing the competing demands of their family, work and study life. In my teaching experience (see Appendix 1 and 2) with mature female Early Years Foundation Degree students, I have observed that studying often leads to changes in their identity and family relationships as a whole. This section will introduce three contextual themes: the background concerning mature women seeking HE in the subject of early years, the uniqueness of Foundation Degrees in meeting their need for higher level qualifications and the impact on the family of a wife and mother who studies at HE level.

1.1 Mature women seeking higher level qualifications whilst working in the early years sector

Mature women in HE are worthy of investigation for several reasons. Previous studies on mature women students have cited caring responsibilities and the conflicting role of being both a mother and a student as a barrier to learning (Green Lister, 2003, Griffiths, 2002, Heenan, 2002). Citing both family and education as 'greedy institutions', in terms of time, seems to be a common theme in literature on mature women students (Edwards, 1993a; Hughes, 2002). This is particularly relevant for mature women (Reay, 2003), as they are often seen to be responsible for organising their study around the care needs of the family (Edwards, 1993; Heenan, 2002). Women often experience guilt over studying and try to ensure that neither their family nor their educational study suffers because of the other one (Merrill, 1999). The guilt comes from feeling that they are neglecting their family, or role as mother, or are fulfilling their own dreams. They can then feel selfish for doing so; this compounds the feelings of guilt. Although it can be argued that non-mature students with other caring responsibilities (for example, primary carers for a disabled or elderly relative) may experience some of these difficulties, these issues are documented as more prevalent for mature students who are mothers. The women students in this study often raised feelings of guilt, time pressures and balancing family, work and study needs in previous class tutorials. The same topics were also often mirrored in their reflective journal writing for their Continuous Professional Development module where they tried to make sense

of how to support their family, work and make time for study. These initial comments will be developed in the literature review on mature women, but indicate the unique pressures that women have to contend with alongside of their educational studies.

This thesis focuses on women, rather than men studying for a Foundation Degree in Early Years, for two reasons. Firstly, the demographic cohort of the mature students that I have worked with, in the last seven years as the Foundation Degree manager at a college, consists of mature women rather than men enrolling on the programme. Secondly, through my own experiences of juggling the complexities of studying and family life (see Appendix 1), and through my observations of women students, I have witnessed that identity can change and develop during academic study. The women are often seeking a change in their career direction or knowledge base and are more open to transformation, therefore are more likely to commit time and dedication to their studies. The strain of the 'greedy institution' on time (Edwards, 1993a; Hughes, 2002), and also the emotional guilt of time away from the family, often add to the pressures that they face, therefore their commitment to study is typically high (Swain and Hammond, 2011).

Early years provision is dominated by women employees, with 171, 000 women compared to less than 1000 men employed as Nursery Assistants in England in 2014 (Office for National Statistics, 2014). It can be argued that this is because childcare is often depicted as a female–dominated, poorly paid low status profession (Jones, 2003; Mistry and Sard, 2013; Rolfe, 2006) with caring viewed as a 'maternalistic assumption', (Moss, 2006; 72). Men often feel excluded from considering early years as a viable career pathway, or as a HE choice, as the prevalent perspective is that care is innate to women (Mistry and Sard, 2013; Moss, 2006). Another factor that can alienate men from early years work is that it is often viewed as a part time career choice. Working part time in early years is often viewed as a good choice for mothers as the working hours can be seen to fit in with their childcare needs (Rolfe, 2006). Employers in childcare often favour part time working hours for staff with flexible, shorter, working hours seen as a key advantage of working in early years. As the early years sector is often dominated

by women working part time, the HE programme is construed as a viable pathway for them as they are better placed to juggle academic study and their work, though this is not always easy.

Women working in early years are accessing HE programmes for two main reasons: top down government reform of early years (Osgood, 2009) and intrinsic factors of self fulfilment and actualisation (Osgood 2006). Government reform is in the shape of early years legislation intended to raise standards and staff qualification levels (Great Britain. DfES, 2005). The government's push for professional graduate qualifications (Great Britain. DfES, 2004; Great Britain. DfES, 2005; Great Britain. DfE, 2013; Moss, 2000), is based on the premise that a more highly skilled and qualified early years workforce will lead to better childcare provision (Great Britain. DfE, 2013) and improved outcomes for children's development (Great Britain. DfES, 2005; Great Britain. DfE, 2013).

Research by Osgood (2006) cited reasons of gaining self confidence and developing early years professionalism as personal intrinsic drivers for pursuing professional training and higher qualifications. Education enhances reflectivity, which in turn can lead students to challenge and critique their own professional practice (Cherrington and Thornton, 2013).

Although there are both professional and personal benefits for women embarking on an early years HE programme, it can be costly to them as it is emotionally and financially intensive (Osgood, 2006). Emotionally they may have to deal with the guilt of studying and juggling their family's needs; financially there will be cost implications, not only due to tuition fees but also with regards to loss of potential earnings whilst attending lectures. Therefore, it is not an easy decision to embark on a HE programme as there are so many variables for women to consider. Many women with families choose to study locally part time as it enables them to combine their study with work and the family (Jamieson et al., 2009). Juggling childcare, family responsibilities and, for many, paid work (Plageman and Sabina, 2010; Reay, 2003), accessible and flexible HE is often key to their success in achieving further qualifications.

1.2 The education system in England and Foundation Degrees

As a result of the Further and Higher Education Act (Great Britain. Further and Higher Education Act 1992), funding changed which enabled Polytechnics to have awarding degree status. The creation of Foundation Degrees followed in 2000 which were predominately taught in colleges, as a new method of provision designed to raise educational achievement and access to HE (Beaney, 2006). Foundation Degrees are aimed at students who are progressing from FE but also at adults who wish to develop new skills or capabilities for personal, social or economic reasons. The government's aspiration was to increase HE participation to 50% for all 18-30 year olds (Great Britain. DfES, 2003). This led to an increased financial commitment by the Government, which increased the growth of Foundation Degree programmes by 117% from 2002 -2004 (Nelson, 2006).

The main aim of a Foundation Degree is to encourage non traditional[1] students to participate in HE through local provision (Beaney, 2006). HE is more accessible to non traditional students as entry qualifications were lowered to enable those with non traditional qualifications to participate. This relates to mature early years workers because, whilst many may have gained vocational qualifications when they first left school, since this point they may have only been on informal short work related training courses. Thus early years workers who have lower vocational qualifications, rather than traditional A level qualifications (Bowl, 2003), are able to access graduate qualifications. Offering a degree through a Foundation Degree pathway can make a higher education look more manageable and accessible for non traditional learners (Fenge, 2011). This validates Foundation Degrees as a viable choice, particularly with women students who account for 64% of the part time learning community (HEFCE, 2010/12).

1.2.1 Uniqueness of Foundation Degrees

Although all Foundation Degrees are different, and therefore will offer varying student experiences (Ooms et al., 2012), there are some general commonalities. The main features of a

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[1] Students who do not have the traditional entry qualifications of A levels but have alternative entry qualifications. They may also have been out of education for many years (Merrill, 1999)

Foundation Degree are: employer involvement, development of employment related skills, workplace experience, flexible entry requirements to recognise prior learning and progression onto an Honours degree programme (HEFCE, 2006).

Foundation Degrees are unique in that HE can be offered at Further Education Colleges (FECs) due to partnership arrangements with HE Institutions (HEIs) (Parry, 2012); this is significant as colleges and universities can offer a very different HE experience (Creasy, 2013; Feather, 2011; Pike and Harrison, 2011). The three main differences between HEIs and College HE (CHE) are the institutional structure, teaching pedagogy and opportunities to engage in research.

FECs are structured so that they focus and prioritise personalised teaching (Creasy, 2013), whereas HEIs place a greater emphasis on research. Differences in teaching pedagogy are also due to variations in teaching hours and the different roles and expectations of CHE lecturers. Lecturers teaching in FECs have more class contact time with their HE students (Greenbank, 2007) and increased teaching hours compared to HEI lecturing staff during the working week (Feather, 2011). Student support was found to be greater in colleges than universities (Ooms et al., 2012; Parry, 2012), with students citing study skills support and tutorial provision as areas of strength in their first year of study (Snape and Finch, 2006). High levels of student support could be due to smaller teaching groups and a more personalised pedagogy (Parry, 2012).

Through additional pastoral support and increased tutorial guidance (QAA, 2006), a shared understanding in terms of the struggle women often feel in balancing their study and home life can be achieved (Callender, Wilkinson and MacKinnon, 2006). Through having good staff-to-student relationships struggles can be discussed, shared and solutions can be explored together which can increase retention and achievement (McGiveney, 1996). With more women now accessing HE through Foundation Degrees, it is important that Foundation Degree staff have an awareness of the barriers to success, such as: retention, non flexible teaching strategies and unresponsiveness to the differing needs of non-traditional students (QAA, 2006; Webber, 2014). They also need to be aware of the needs of part time students as they can often be perceived as invisible due to the majority of their week being spent away from college, at home or at work,

rather than on campus (Jamieson et al., 2009). For this reason, the success of Foundation Degrees requires universities and FE colleges to embrace a culture of change and responsive to the requirements of female mature students (Leathwood, 2006; Reay, 2003; Webber, 2014).

The Foundation Degree's focus on the integration between academic and work based learning is also attractive to mature students as it has a vocationally-based curriculum that reflects the needs of the industry (Greenwood et al., 2008). Research by Yorke and Longden (2010), found that 80% of students interviewed, who were on part time Foundation Degree programmes, were from an employment background rather than directly from school or unemployment. Although the Foundation Degree can also consist of some younger students straight from college courses (such as A level or BTEC) it also draws a lot of women students working in different industries who value extending their qualifications and sharing their experiences with a range of different practitioners (Greenwood et al., 2008).

Having locally placed university study also makes HE more physically accessible to women students as they can combine work or family commitments with getting to a local educational establishment easily (Great Britain, DfES, 2003; Greenwood et al., 2008). Locality, flexibility, support and links to employment are important to women students because a student's choice of institution is often heavily influenced by family and work circumstances (Bowl, 2003).

Foundation Degrees are an essential route into HE for mature women; this next paragraph will consider the uniqueness and nature of the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme (see Appendix 2). This programme has been designed with early years staff and employers in mind as the timetable is set around one or two fixed days to encourage early years workers to fit course attendance around their working hours. Group discussions, linking their professional experiences to theories derived from their studies are also an integral part of the programme (see also Green Lister, 2003; Greenwood et al., 2008). This approach is particularly encouraged in Early Years Foundation Degrees (Burke et al., 2009). As with research by Greenwood et al. (2008), students also appreciate the mix of lectures, seminars, tutorials, group activities and self-

directed study which builds their confidence and encourages them to create their own early years philosophies and perspectives.

Students often select this programme rather than distant or university campus learning as they appreciate individualised regular face to face and peer support that CHE can offer. This is valued by mature students (Parry, 2012). It is through these personalised pastoral relationships with staff that mature learners are able to share their concerns and discuss the pressures of studying as a rapport is built between lecturer and student. They can have questions answered individually if they doubt their ability and thus can gain greater self confidence. This is important to many mature women students as they have been out of education for some time and are devoting so much additional time and emotional investment into the programme. In my tutoring experience, prior to this research, I found that women students are concerned with two main issues; whether they can juggle their responsibilities and whether they can cope with the academic demands of the course. What is of upmost importance is their success on the course due to the perceived sacrifices made by themselves and their families in order for them to be there. This puts additional pressure on women students but is also another reason why they value these personalised pastoral relationships and in depth support that the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme prides itself on.

Through knowing and understanding my participants (see Appendix 1), both as their lecturer but also as a mature HE student, I used this knowledge to select appropriate research strategies that were tailored to this particular group. These included a participatory informal approach that was partially student led (see Chapter 4.3).

Despite the merits of the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme there is one main issue of concern. As tutor and lecturer to these mature women students, I have recognised that, despite pastoral support, small class sizes and HE being more accessible to mature students, withdrawals are still common place. The main reasons I attribute this to, are concerned with resulting damage to family relationships and studying impacting too greatly on time and family commitments (Snape and Finch, 2006). It is this issue that I now wish to focus on.

1.3 Impact on the family

Often mothers in HE have to compete with demands that are over and above those of other students, such as a heavy workload (for example: employment, childcare, household tasks), issues with time management, and family pressures (Jamieson et al., 2009; Reay 2003). These pressures can often also be unique to women because, as argued by Hughes (2002), there are historical and cultural assumptions that women will take on different social and family positions and, therefore, behave differently to male students (Plageman and Sabina, 2010). Although this can be seen as conceding to stereotypes, this is compounded in early years' legislation and discourse that firmly places early years services as a perquisite to enable mothers to return to work. An example of this is located in the recent 'More Great Childcare' document produced by the Coalition Government (Great Britain. DfE, 2013) which cites the importance of improving childcare facilities to enable parents, particularly mothers, to raise their children and work at the same time. Although New Labour's legislation, previously to this, demonstrated a change in government's assumptions about gender there were still gender differences in working time (Pascall, 2012). Fathers were more likely to be working longer hours in comparison to women who were often working part time (Pascall, 2012). Flexible working policies at this time were more likely to be gender neutral than promoting gender equality. More mothers took up these opportunities in order to balance work and home life than fathers, thus widening inequalities even further (Pascall, 2012). Although these two residing governments had different priorities and philosophies on gender, women's positions within the home and employment have not changed greatly in the last seventeen years. Therefore, through historical, cultural and government discourses, mothers can be positioned as in the home, taking on the main responsibilities of childcare and household tasks, as the typical assumption is that fathers are already at work (Moss, 2006).

When women begin studying at HE level, the housework and childcare responsibilities do not decrease; rather their HE study becomes another component to add to their lives. Men and women's roles in the home, in terms of childcare and household tasks, are often perceived as unequal, thus contributing to the heavy workload for women students (Plageman and Sabina,

2010). This view of women and men's lives and choices being different was offered as perspective by Oakley (2005) through her study in the 1970s describing how housework and motherhood can put limits on career and personal aspirations for mothers, as well as a loss of identity. Although it can be argued that many more women combine employment with family life since Oakley's study (see Great Britain. DfE, 2013; Hughes, 2002; Reynolds, Callender and Edwards, 2003), there are still reports of a lack of equality in terms of housework (McFall, 2012) or childcare (EHRC, 2009). According to research by the Economic and Social Research Council (McFall, 2012), women spend on average 15.4 hours on housework a week compared to men's 5.8 hours. Despite an increase in women's participation in employment over the last 30 years (ERHC, 2009), many women still retain responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks (Doucet, 2006; ERHC, 2009).

As women cope with the 'greedy institutions' of both family and education (Edwards 1993a; Hughes, 2002), the problem of being 'time poor' (Edwards, 1993a) can cause pressure and strain on the mother and the father if he is expected to take on some of the childcare or household responsibilities. Negotiating changing responsibilities and expectations, in terms of the woman's role as mother and wife in the household, can lead to additional stress, conflict and demands on her relationship. There can also be emotional turmoil for the woman, between being a student and being a mother, as decision making for mothers is often centred on finding the right thing to do for family well being (Williams, 2004). Sometimes these changes are embraced by the family and are seen as positive but there is still a period of readjustment involving modifications to family life and relationships.

Changes to themselves in terms of self confidence, perspectives and lifestyle can affect their family dynamics causing conflict and upset, as well as readjustment and compromise (Green Lister, 2003). Through learning and developing their knowledge base as a student, they are catapulted into a very different world as they begin to rethink their values and perspectives; this can then trigger friction in family and wider relationships (Green Lister, 2003). These changes are often encompassed by the concept of identity transformation. Although there are many different uses of the notion of identity, and it can be seen as a 'slippery' term (Lawler, 2014:1),

it is a useful for my research as it enables me to explore how the women view themselves. (The concept of identity will be developed alongside the formation of a theoretical framework for analysis in Chapter 3). I have observed mature female students grapple with their changing position of mother (see also Marandet and Wainwright 2010; Reay, 2003), wife, or early years employee, in contrast to the emerging position of student as they embarked on the Foundation Degree in Early Years.

Transformative thinking can enable women students to question their identity, perspectives and family relationships but also their decision to embark on an HE programme of study, as they try to negotiate or cross the border into unknown territory. This unknown territory of academia may be something that it is very different for them and not necessarily something that they feel is in their reach. Early years workers often locate their professional identity in their vocational and practical skills therefore reconsidering themselves academically as someone who can analyse theories or policies that previously they may have taken at face value can be exciting but also a challenge. This aligns with Walkerdine's research (2006), focusing on the complexities of waiting at the border between two very different, and sometimes competing, subject positions and ways of life. This concept is useful in considering how sometimes a woman student may feel like she does not quite belong in her previous identity as a mother, wife and worker or her newly constructed identity of what it is to be a mother, wife worker and mature student. These transformations to themselves, to family relationships and routines can emerge unexpectedly for women and their families.

1.4 Research aim

The aim of this inquiry is to investigate the impact of HE on a mature woman's identity and family relationships, with a specific focus on students from a Foundation Degree programme in Early Years. The themes of identity change and effects on family relationships will be explored in the shape of narratives told by the women students. Positioning myself as a mature women student, mother, wife and Early Years practitioner gives me insight into this topic and locates me firmly in this research process.

All research participants were mothers of children under the age of 18 years and all of these women were either working or volunteering in early years settings.

1.5 Reader's guide

Chapter 2 discusses literature on women students and examines the impact of HE on family relationships. It demonstrates that there is a gap in current literature on mature women HE students and the effects of their studies on family life.

Chapter 3 sets out the conceptual framework for this study drawing on strands of identity, positioning theory, transformation theory and family capital.

Chapter 4 describes my methodological position and explains how this has influenced my choice of qualitative research methods. It justifies the three phases of the research process and considers the validity and reliability of the methods used. Through reflection the ethical considerations are scrutinised, recognising both strengths and limitations of the approaches used.

Chapter 5 considers the transformative effect of HE on the women's identity, from the perspectives of the women. It explains the importance of motherhood to the women, their changing identity as a result of their HE experience, and the subsequent transformation to their knowledge base, perspectives and parenting style.

Chapter 6 discusses the impact of a woman's HE studies on husbands, children and parents. There is some data collected from three husbands but this is mainly considered from the perspective of the women. I mainly examined the experience of husbands through the eyes of their wives. Through a consideration of how HE changes a woman's identity due to a transformation of her knowledge base, parenting style, perspectives and enhanced self confidence, the impact on the rest of the family is considered.

Chapter 7 connects the concepts of identity transformation (Chapter 5), to the impact on the family (Chapter 6), through the lens of family capital. A framework of family capital is further

developed that demonstrates how large resources of family capital can benefit a woman student and aid her to achieve academic success.

Chapter 8 returns to the aims of the study and evaluates how HE impacts on a mature woman's identity, family position and relationships and considers effects on the family as a whole, drawing main conclusions of the study. The positive contribution to knowledge is evaluated and through this an optimum model of family capital is explored. The limitations of the study are discussed and areas for future research are proposed.

CHAPTER TWO - PREVIOUS STUDIES ON MATURE WOMEN

2.1 Introduction and main themes

This chapter will primarily focus on the literature surrounding the theme of identity changes to women as a result of HE study and consider the effects onto family relationships.

Although there are many examples of recent research on mature students (Callender, Wilkinson and MacKinnon, 2006; Swain and Hammond, 2011; Reay, 2002; Waller, 2006), there are fewer accounts based solely on women entering HE. Sources such as Reay, 2003; Marandet and Wainwright, 2010; O'Shea and Stone, 2011; Plagemen and Sabina, 2010, highlight themes related to social class, part time study or access issues and reveal issues of time poverty, juggling childcare and household responsibilities and transformation for mature women as by products of their main findings. There are also limited accounts of the experiences of women on Foundation Degree programmes. Fenge (2011); Burton, Golding Lloyd and Griffiths (2011) consider issues for women Foundation Degree students, but their focus is predominately on access and barriers to learning rather than family relationships. The barriers to learning are cited as previous educational experiences, application difficulties, institutional barriers and family commitments with their overall findings concluding that with institutional support some of these barriers could be minimised. However, the impact of having a mother who studies is only tentatively mentioned here.

Identity changes and effects on the family were highlighted as important in earlier studies in the 1990's. This was against a backdrop of expansion in HE, with local provision providing opportunities for women to enter HE (Pascall and Cox, 1993). From the 1990's and continuing into the next decade there were several studies on mature students, particularly women, accessing HE (see Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Parr, 2000; Pascall and Cox, 1993). Although the majority of these texts are dated they were selected for their significant contribution to the themes of my research and help to develop my understanding of how HE creates a changed identity for mature women. These research studies (see Appendix 3) were largely qualitative in nature, focused predominately on mature women with the exception of Schuller et al. (2004)

and Biesta et al., (2011), and largely used methods of in depth interviews with supplementary questionnaires. I will be referring to these studies collectively as a group and then highlighting differences where needed.

2.2 Identity and positioning in family relationships prior to HE

Identity transformation as a result of HE, is a key theme for both my participants and those featured in previous studies (Biesta et al., 2011; Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Parr, 2000; Pascall and Cox, 1993 and Schuller et al., 2004). For the women in these selected studies, gender and motherhood were key strands of identity. Women are portrayed as being positioned and constrained by their gender in terms of previous educational opportunities and socially constructed ideals of career opportunities for women (Pascall and Cox, 1993; Merrill, 1999). For some mature women students their experiences at secondary school were negative or they were not encouraged by their parents to pursue higher level qualifications (Pascall and Cox, 1993). Opportunities for work were restricted and governed by socially constructed ideas of the women's role of domesticity and care for the family. These studies (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Parr, 2000: Pascall and Cox, 1993) described women as not having choices, being passive and dominated by a lack of opportunities due to their gender. Although it can be argued that the women in my study are constrained by their gender in terms of their choice to enter a feminised profession of early years it could be counter argued that because of government changes in early years, women are now being encouraged to gain higher level qualifications in order to professionalise early years. Education has also changed since these studies (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Parr, 2000: Pascall and Cox, 1993) and opportunities to progress to college have opened up with 46% of men and 54% of women entering FE. More women are taking up the opportunity to progress into HE as statistics in 2013 shows a predominance of 8% more females to males in full time study and 20% more females to males in part time study (ONS, 2013a).

HE experiences were portrayed as being very different for women than men because of the stresses that are claimed to be unique to women (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999). This was attributed to women having identities that were firmly located inside of the family as the women

discussed gendered household roles as part of what they did and who they were (Pascall and Cox, 1993; Parr, 2000; Merrill, 1999). Domesticity and care could also lead to restrictions and barriers to a woman's ability to study because of the positional constraints of marriage, family commitments and work (Merrill, 1999; Pascall and Cox, 1993; Parr, 2000). For the majority of the women in these studies their main source of identity (before HE) was motherhood (Parr, 2000; Pascall and Cox, 1999). Although many women enjoyed motherhood (see Pascall and Cox, 1993), it did not fulfil all aspects of their life and they were actively seeking something else. Some women did not consider HE until the children were older and made less demands on their time and attention, delaying their application to study at HE until they felt in a position to fit it around the needs of the family (Pascall and Cox, 1993). In contrast to this, Edwards' study (1993a) found that children could adapt to the mother studying better than the husband and were resilient and open to change, thus making redundant the mother's concerns regarding how the children would cope. Merrill's (1999) study was the only piece of research that compared the experience of men and women in HE. None of the men in this study cited juggling domestic responsibilities or looking after children as an obstacle, whereas women with children cited this as a barrier to learning.

These studies[2] highlight the experiences of many different women rather than a small focused group, therefore individual voices and stories may have been be diluted. The focus is also predominately on the women's perspectives; the viewpoints of their husbands are not sought regarding the division of labour in the household. It is unclear whether the women were placed by their husbands or children as the one responsible for care and domesticity or whether they had situated themselves in this role. Edwards (1993a) recognised that once the women's HE study commenced, the children were more accommodating than the husbands and were willing to help with household tasks and take a share in this role. Will current mature women studies have these same feelings and responsibilities towards domestic and care responsibilities, is their identity prior to HE still located mainly in the family? For the women studying Early Years

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[2] As noted in section 2.1 I have referred to these studies (see Appendix 3) collectively as a group and highlighted differences where needed

Degrees their identity as early years workers may also be a key aspect of who they are. This may make them feel even more passionate and tied to their own children due to them valuing children because of their early years background and training. Their identity as a mother may also be a strong part of how they define themselves. My study will develop the key theme of identity change and consider how it is rooted in gender and family positioning.

2.3 Identity changes during the HE experience

HE study can have significant transformative changes to a woman's identity (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Pascall and Cox, 1993; Parr, 2000; Schuller et al., 2004 and Biesta et al., 2011). Learning is inseparable from identity or position (see Edwards, 1993a and Biesta et al., 2011), since personal changes and transformations for the women occurred as a result of their educational experience. Biesta et al., (2011) claim that the higher the level of involvement a mature student has with the course content, the higher the likelihood of personal change and transformation. If a student feels coerced into attending HE (for example by an employer), then their engagement with the course content might be low. In contrast, if engagement with the course is high, participating in HE develops into an important aspect of their lives hence becoming significant to their identity (Biesta et al., 2011). This could be attributed to women's feelings of achievement through educational success (Parr, 2000).

These transformative changes affected how they perceived themselves, or situated themselves, as mothers and as wives. The women spoke of the positive impact of HE study on changes to themselves personally as they achieved higher self-esteem and an increasing self confidence to demand more from their relationships and to want more for themselves (Edwards, 1993a; Schuller et al., 2004). Being a student gave them a sense of prestige and raised status that they had not experienced as wives or mothers. It also set them apart from other mothers and gave them a feeling of difference as they looked at life and society from a changed perspective (Edwards, 1993a). This was attributed to a transformation in values, attitudes and behaviours and a new awareness of themselves (Merrill, 1999), as well as an ability to be more analytical (Edwards, 1993a).

The women's shifting knowledge base and subsequent increased self confidence levels seemed to permeate into different spheres of life such as their children's education, family relationships and work situations (Edwards, 1993b; Schuller et al., 2004). They felt better placed to influence their child's education, have a greater involvement and voice because of their developing knowledge base and subsequent transformation to their identity. Their perceived raised status due to access to HE gave them a self confidence to speak to professionals and challenge issues they lacked self confidence in previously.

There are tentative accounts of how a woman's change in identity, as a result of her HE experiences, impacts on her husband. Schuller at al. (2004), discussed conflict with husbands as a result of a change of personal identity and Biesta et al.'s (2011) more recent study highlighted that personal transformations through lifelong learning can have effects on relationships and positions in the family. Though it is unclear what these effects are. Women also reported a lack of time for their husband which was linked to additional friction (Edwards, 1993a). Edwards (1993a) reported that verbal arguments with husbands were increased as the men felt threatened by the women studying, with 25% of 31 women splitting up from husbands over the course of the degree. The women cited emotional effects on the relationship, power/balance conflicts and a lack of success of connecting their husband and study together as a reason for the martial breakdown. However this does not account for other factors that may have led to marriages to breakdown or account for marriages that were already in crisis before their HE commenced. Some women may have chosen HE as they were seeking a change in their lives, as a result of a traumatic experience, personal relationship breakdown (Parr, 2000), or because they felt something was lacking in their lives (Pascall and Cox, 1993). This then led to feelings of guilt and selfishness as they focused on fulfilling their own needs (Edwards, 1993a). Education was then portrayed as an opportunity for a woman to escape domesticity (Edwards, 1993a), regain agency and control over her life (Parr, 2000) and attain self fulfilment (Pascall and Cox, 1993).

In order to manage the changes in marital relationships linked to HE study, some women developed strategies of connecting and separating their studies from their husbands (Edwards, 1993a). This resonated with my own story and experiences as I could trace my journey through

from connecting, to separating, to connecting, back to separating, depending on what level of conflict or encouragement I was receiving from my family. It can be seen as a sense of survival and a way of managing the competing demands of study and family life. To acknowledge and try to make sense of changes in identity and family relationships, Edwards use the ideas of Gilligan (1982, cited by Edwards, 1993a) to explain the premise of her connecting theory claiming that a woman's identity is intrinsically linked to connections with others. Edwards (1993a) developed three categories: connecting study, separating education and family, mixing connections and separations of education and family. Fifty-two per cent of 31 students were connectors, trying to connect home (husbands, children) with student life and study (going to university, sharing coursework, discussing university topics, meeting friends or bringing study home visibly). These women could not separate their identities into student, wife or mother and saw themselves as one complete person. In the connectors group, the women stated that their gain of knowledge was viewed by their husband as a threat to their relationship, this was closely associated with conflict and a quarter of these relationships ended. The other factors that may have contributed to the relationship breakdown were not considered. Nineteen per cent of women were separators and saw their student and home identities as completely separate. They did not wish to connect home and study in any way and enjoyed their own personal space and the privacy of keeping both spheres separate. This separation is important for some women as they see education as having an individual identity for themselves as a student which is disconnected to family life, rather than the more public shared identity of mother or wife (Parr, 2001). Twenty-nine per cent of women were both connectors and separators for different aspects and saw 'switching hats' as the only way of dealing with the demands of both spheres. However the women were not fixed into a category as over the duration of the course some women moved along the separator and connector continuum. Some became separators because the connecting was not working and this was done to save or ease their relationship. However other than citing marital conflict, Edwards' account of connecting and separating does not explain the role husbands played in the development of these categories.

2.4 Effects on family relationships

Throughout these studies cited, there are limited in depth accounts, on the impact of HE study on families but some positive effects on families have been tentatively recognised. Merrill (1999) discussed positive effects such as children developing independence and an openness to their mother studying. The majority of the women in Edwards' (1993a) study did not mention an increase in practical support with household tasks by their husbands, as they primarily cited that the division of domestic labour did not shift in the household, despite them being busier with HE study. Balancing HE study alongside normal family responsibilities and roles puts more pressure and barriers to learning on the women (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Parr, 2000; Pascall and Cox, 1993). However, despite these barriers, the women were able to recognise benefits of their HE study to their children's development. Some women reported that their children's upbringing was being positively enhanced through their knowledge of topics such as equality or psychology which affected parenting styles and skills (Edwards 1993a; Schuller at al., 2004). Leading to an improvement in their children's communication skills and an increased motivation to enter HE themselves.

Although children were often more supportive than husbands any support or acceptance the women received from their husbands was particularly valued (Edwards, 1993a; Pascall and Cox, 1993). About half of the 21 women in Merrill's (1999) study spoke of no support from their husbands and a small minority spoke of open hostility and obstructions to their studying. Those that received some form of support spoke of practical, emotional and moral support from their husbands (Merrill, 1999). This support corresponded with those women who spoke of equal and fair relationships with their husbands prior to starting HE. Although Pascall and Cox (1993) made limited references to the impact of a woman's studying on family relationships, some women also spoke highly of financial or emotional support from their husbands but there was no reference to practical support with childcare or household tasks. Pascall and Cox (1993) suggest that this emotional and financial support could be construed as the woman needing permission from their husbands to embark on an HE programme.

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Women that did not receive this encouragement and help with childcare, felt distress and frustration as their husbands gave little importance, emotional value or pride to what they were doing in comparison to the value or high esteem given to paid work (Edwards, 1993a). This lack of valuing their wives' HE study could have been ascribed to male supremacy. The women reported (Edwards, 1993a), that their husbands did not want them to return to education fearing the loss of power, preferring their wives not to be educated. The women became more analytical and were able to discuss more fully and argue from their own considered perspective resulting in power imbalances and conflict. This was also replicated in Merrill's (1999) study as she cited male hegemony as a reason for husbands obstructing HE studies. The women reported that their husbands were fearful of their increased knowledge, education and possible enhanced future career employment resulting in unwelcomed equality in the household. These views of the men's feelings and analysis of behaviours were given by the women students not their husbands; this is an area that can be developed within my study.

2.5 Summary and research questions

In this chapter, I have given an account of how marital relationships can be in conflict as women enter HE. This is linked, to male power and issues of gender inequality in the family as well as a lack of time for relationships. Research has shown that women experience HE differently than men as women hold different priorities. The women's identity and priorities were firmly entrenched in motherhood and family life.

Women took active steps to minimise the negative effects of their studies on their families through strategies of hiding their studies or working long hours. A lack of time seemed to be a recurring theme and a threat to many relationships as a result of juggling family and study commitments (Edwards, 1993a). This lack of time often led to feelings of guilt (Merrill, 1999), indulgence and selfishness (Edwards, 1993a) as women felt their decision to study affected others. To overcome this some women in Edwards' (1993a) study, consciously separated their HE work and family life through trying to hide their study from their family. Some also worked long hours in order to keep on top of household tasks and study commitments as they felt a

responsibility for minimising the impact of their studies on their family (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999). Women wanted support from husbands, when this was received it was appreciated and valued by the women. Some women actively sought to connect their studies to their husband through sharing what they were doing and bringing their HE discussions into the home. This approach was not successful for all of the women and those women that received little support or recognition felt frustrated.

However, HE was seen as a transformative space to change their identity in terms of developing confidence, raising status, becoming more authoritative and developing independence. This had effects on their children as the women's changed status and confidence enabled them to play more of an instrumental part in improving educational outcomes for their children. Children were more resilient and accommodating to changes in the household than the husbands within these studies.

My study aims to draw together some of the key themes of these studies with a specific focus on the identity and transformational aspect of HE with an interest in the effects of these transformations on family relationships. What is not clear is whether mothers studying HE courses continue to have similar effects on family relationships or whether gender related issues of housework and relationship inequality are still a concern in their everyday lives. Despite the findings raised in this chapter suggesting that women change significantly during their HE experience, there is no evidence put forward in these previous studies to claim that husbands can be transformed too, or that the dynamics of family life can be changed. The evidence often seems more negative in terms of their husband's responses; therefore pursing the viewpoints of the husbands is a focus worthwhile exploring.

My work will develop the research reviewed in this chapter and will include the perspectives of a small sample of husbands to illuminate this topic from a different angle. My three research questions are:

1. How does HE impact on a mature woman's identity and position in family relationships?

2. What are the effects of HE on women's long term relationships?

3. Are there any effects on families as a whole?

CHAPTER 3 - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of this chapter is to develop a conceptual framework in which to locate and position my research. This chapter defines identity and motherhood and explores the relationship between identity transformation (due to participation in HE) and positioning theory. I will show that family capital is a useful concept in exploring the role and importance of investments made by different family members supporting the women, which can then impact on identity transformation.

3.1 Identity introduction

The concept of identity will be used to account for how students construct and make sense of the changes and transformations that they undergo when embarking on a programme of study such as the Foundation Degree in Early Years. Identity is described as formed and shaped in the social context and through relationships with others (Biesta et al., 2011; Merrill, 1999; Schuller et al., 2004), but it is a term that needs clarity as there are multiple definitions.

Like Burr (2003), I favour the term identity rather than personality and use this as a tool to discuss how women perceive themselves. The essentialist view sees identity as an internal essence of a person flowing from an aspect of a person's nature rather than located in social relationships (Lawler, 2014). Instead I view identity from a sociological perspective. Identity is not seen as fixed or a final matter (Jenkins, 2008; Lawler, 2014), but as a fluid and continuous process (Taylor and Spencer, 2004), that is constantly changing and adapting in the context of social relationships. Taking a sociological viewpoint, identity can be seen as a 'collective approach', created alongside of others, rather than as an individualistic process (Lawler , 2014:3).

Learning to define who we are in relation to others is a vital part of identity formation; accordingly sameness and difference are key factors in identity construction (Woodward, 2004). Sameness would allude to the fact that we share common identities with others (Lawler, 2014) such as 'woman', or 'student'. There are many variations contained in these common identities

as we are all individuals with unique features and behaviours. Identification is another feature of identity, as we then identify with others such as 'I am a student now', and assume ways of being and behaving (Lawler, 2014). This is useful in accounting for the changes that a person undergoes in how they view themselves when they embark on a programme of HE. Their concepts of themselves as mothers, wives[3] and early years professionals may change in the climate and ethos of a student environment and educational institution. Or in contrast their perceptions of themselves as a mother or wife may influence how they develop their identity as a student. Through participating in HE they may modify their views, and change their perceptions of themselves; this then widens the possibilities and parameters of the duties they adopt, or behaviours that they may play out as part of their identity. However, considering identity in the boundaries of identification labels alone can be restrictive, as it does not fully recognise the tensions between different identities or construes it as lacking fluidity (Lawler, 2014).

Burr (2003) describes identity in terms of strands woven together. Brown (2006) portrays identity as a patchwork quilt, evolving and borrowing narratives from different social episodes that when woven together create the person. This is similar to Lawler's definition of being created through 'raw materials available – notably memories, understandings, experiences and interpretations', (Lawler, 2014; 24). Hence, the formation of these strands are based on social encounters, perceiving similarities and differences to others and assigning a label or identification to themselves e.g. mother, woman, wife, or early years professional. In the studies presented in Chapter 2, some of the different strands that could make up identity are motherhood, marital status gender, class (Edwards, 1993a), race and ethnicity (Parr, 2000). For a women student, these strands might be as illustrated in Figure 1. These strands will be constructed differently by each individual based on their perspective of the important aspects of their roles and how they describe themselves. The concept of identity strands is useful as it

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[3] The term wife or husband was used as all the participants in couples were married (other than 1 who got married during the duration of the course)

enables me to visualise how the women perceive their identity and the strands that are of importance to them.
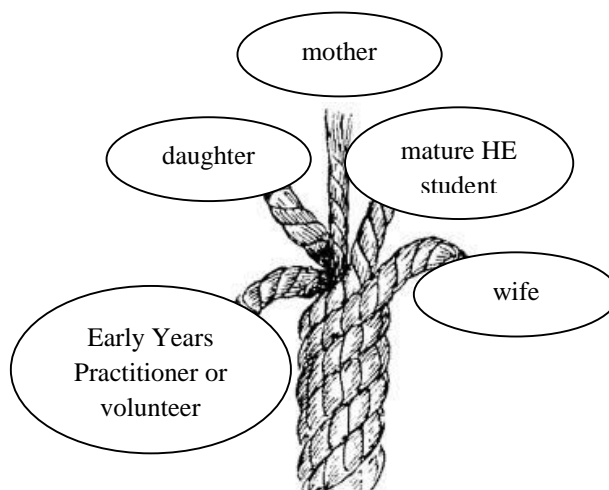
Figure 1 Example of strands of identity for a woman student
(Rope image source: Hyatt Verrill, 2014)

When considering the identity strand of being a mother it is necessary to define the difference between identity and role. Identity is a better framework because role theory does not look at the complexities and intricacies of the individual but at the tasks element and definition of the role. It can offer a stereotypical reality or job description and does not allow for lived in experiences of feelings (Edwards, 1993a). It is criticised as an inflexible and static concept (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999), which shows normative roles (Jackson, 1998). It does not demonstrate the uniqueness or realities of motherhood for each participant. In this study, women use the terms role and identity interchangeably as they find it difficult to separate between the two. I will use the term identity to describe how the woman views herself and the dispositions she shows, for example for the strand of mother she may see her identity as being a financial provider (Williams, 2004), being a consistent caring figure (Reynolds, Callender and Edwards, 2003) or both. In contrast, the term role will be used to define the patterns of behaviour, routines and duties that she may perform (i.e. household tasks, childcare) (Woodward, 2004). The patterns of behaviour may be deemed as socially constructed expectations of the fulfilment of that particular role (Scott, 2014).

Constructing what it is to be a HE student is a new identity strand for the women and may be difficult for them to make sense of with new discourses that are unfamiliar to them, such as self development and mental prowess (Burr, 2003). Identity change is often seen to be prevalent in times of trouble (Lawler, 2014), or extreme negative situations change such as through bereavement or relationship changes (Parr, 2000). I argue that identity change does occur through day to day life experiences and this is also significant and worthy of scrutiny (Lawler, 2014). Women would also experience identity change through the different stages of being a mother, as their child grows and develops so does their construction of motherhood.

3.2 Positioning and identity

… who one is … is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practice and within those practices.

(Davies and Harré, 1999:35).

The concept of positioning is a key component in identity formation viewing the individual as a constantly evolving being, which can be reactive and adaptive to the social environment (Davies and Harré, 1999). It enables identity to be considered beyond identification labels. Identity is shaped by positioning and 'is understood in relation to the different types of position we hold in life', (Biesta et al., 2011:94). In social constructionist approaches, positioning can be used to define how identity is produced (Burr, 2003). It is based on how our thoughts and understandings are acquired through social interactions and can be seen as 'patterns of beliefs in the members of a relatively coherent speech community', (Harré and Moghaddam, 2003:4). Positioning theory enables us to understand the intentions, meanings and dynamics of these social exchanges with others. However, these can be restricted by the rights, duties and obligations that we feel towards others (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999). We can be positioned as strong or weak, powerful or powerless, dependent or independent, yet positions can change as they are not fixed but fluid. Positions can be claimed or rejected; this forms the basis of identity construction.

Positioning sits well in a social constructionist framework as it is dependent on social exchanges and their interpretation. It is not seen as a 'general theory' but as a 'starting point for reflecting upon the many different aspects of social life', (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999:9-10). This allows individuals, through shared history and current events to understand what goes on in an interaction. No two interactions are alike or predictable due to the power of positioning along with morals and rights to speak in certain ways. A person would feel that they have certain duties and obligations to fulfil depending on the position they have assigned themselves or understand from their social encounters as to what is the expected behaviour (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999). Positioning theory offers something different to role theory in terms of allowing flexibility and positions to be developed in the social environment rather than being a fixed and generalised role. For example, a mother's behaviour and conversations would also reflect the position that she holds e.g. as a caring mother who is constantly available to attend to the needs of her children or as a mother with agency who encourages independence and autonomy in her children. This will also be influenced by her own emotions and personal history of what it is to be a mother (Davies and Harré, 1999). Positions can be in classified in three different ways (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999): deliberate self positioning, positioning by others or positioning by another force (for example, management, job requirements).

Deliberate self positioning (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999), can be used to display an aspect of identity 'I am a good mother'. Through this example the woman would position herself firstly as a mother and secondly as 'good' this signifies to the listener the importance of motherhood but also the importance of being 'good' to her children or 'good' at being a mother. This could then justify her actions if they are under the umbrella of presenting herself as a 'good mother' which alludes to working in the best interests of her child.

Educational success can lead to an increase in agency and self confidence; this may affect how a woman may position herself in a relationship (Biesta et al., 2011). Through education she may feel increased control and power over other aspects of her life. Positioning in this context acknowledges the power individuals hold, in accepting or rejecting the position offered to them, or through agency creating their own self positions (Burr, 2003).

Positioning by individuals or groups occur when people deliberately position someone else, either in their presence or in their absence. For example, the mother may feel forced into a position by her husband or child, for example, 'That's your job!' Alternatively, the mother may purposely position the father stating, 'They are your children too', implying that he has duties and obligations to follow as a father. Positioning also includes the perceived right to speak or right to be heard in a subject position (Tan and Moghaddam, 1999). For example, if someone is positioned as a leader then they are more likely to be given power and authority to speak on behalf of a group. This can impose restrictions on the possibilities of what a person can do; this can occur through first or second order positioning. First order positioning (Walton, Coyle and Lyons, 2003), accounts for how a woman positions herself as a mother. For example, she may feel that there are limits to how she allows her study to impact on the family based on her perception of her role and responsibilities as a mother. However, identity is not constructed independently but dependent on interactions with others. Second order positioning occurs when first order positioning is questioned or has to be negotiated. For example, if a family member questions the woman's interpretation and behaviour as a mother since entering into HE, this may lead to unrest for the woman student. Through having her concept of a mother questioned by others her identity may be reconstructed and reflected upon.

The concept of intergroup positioning is useful as group membership influences and controls how participants position themselves within group interactions (Tan and Moghaddam, 1999). For example, a woman may position herself in a lecture debate about equality in a contrasting manner to how she positions herself in a similar discussion with her family. In a student environment the woman might feel that she is legitimately entitled and expected to hold and express an opinion. In some families this opinion may be constrained due to the positions held by other family members or their attitude towards education.

The third aspect of positioning (by another force) could be illustrated by an organisation such as a college or university positioning the woman as an HE student with certain contractual obligations to follow i.e. attendance or study requirements. These may affect how accountable the woman feels and her resulting behaviour. This could lead to identity conflict as she feels

tension between her position as a student who is required to attend a lecture on time and as a mother wanting to take her children to school. These synchronous demands can place pressure and strain on a mother forcing her to make choices between student and mothering demands on her time.

These positions can be *tacit*, as the position taken up is enacted unconsciously and *intentional* where a person seeks to change or challenge the position that they have been offered.

3.2.1 Positioning and emotions

Emotions play a key part in positioning as they reflect the moral values and expectations of a culture and are linked to the duties and obligations that are played out in social life (Parrott, 2003). Emotions reflect the attitudes and values of the groups that we belong to and affect how we experience feelings such as shame, pride, guilt or anger. Emotions are socially constructed and a representation of a state and how one feels rather than something that is actually there (Walton, Coyle and Lyons, 2003). Emotions do not operate in isolation from positioning and social encounters. As discussed in Chapter 2.3, guilt is an emotion women may experience when trying to balance time with their family and time to devote to their HE studies. Hence, a mother may feel guilt if she perceives that she is not spending enough time with her children; this relates to her socially constructed ideals of her role with her children and wanting to be 'good enough' as a mother (Winnicott, 1996). Conflict may occur if a mother feels torn between wanting to achieve at her studies but also wanting to shield her relationship with her children from harm or damage.

Positioning and emotions are interlinked and an emotional position such as guilt can either be accepted or rejected. Guilt was evident in the women's accounts in the literature in Chapter 2.4, as well as a key theme raised in my tutorials with women students prior to the research commencing. Parrott (2003) uses the term counter emotions to describe how an emotion can be rejected and replaced by a different emotion. This then contradicts the initial position offered. For example, the position of guilt could be rejected by the woman student and given a counter emotion of pride through justification that not spending as much time with the children has

developed her children's skills of independence or resilience. A mother than may feel motivated to learn as she has justified that it is beneficial to her children or to herself. Within positioning theory motivation is seen as the '*orientation* of individual people to the world about them; what they experience themselves as wanting at a particular time', (Apter, 2003:16). How a woman orientates or positions herself may be dependent on what she is striving to achieve, this then may affect how she positions herself or allows herself to be positioned at that time.

The capacity to position themselves and others will differ from person to person in terms of capability to take up different positions, willingness to reposition themselves or others and the difference in their power to achieve this (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999). For these reasons, positions can be claimed or rejected. This could have effects on identity construction as this constant positioning helps to shape how a person perceives themselves based on interactions with others e.g. being a 'loving' mother or a 'working' wife contributing to the family finances.

3.3 Families

Families are a key a site for women to construct their identity position as mothers. How mothers view mothering (Woodward, 1997), depends on the age of their child, their cultural and their family perspectives and structures within society.

3.3.1 Historical context

Research into family life since the 1950's has shown a change in the way families[4] are structured and how they are viewed. Women's increased participation in the labour market has impacted on roles family members play in the home (Ridge, 2011; Woodward, 1997). This has affected a woman's identity as well as society's identification and construction of a mother over the last few decades.

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[4] The term 'families' was used in this study to account for the many diverse types of families in society (see Williams, 2004; Hughes 2002) i.e. blended families, same sex parents, nuclear families, step families. 'Family', was used to define the adults and children living in the same household as a unit of care, although in the research process there was also some recognition of the wider context of families in terms of support offered from the extended family.

Structuralist views of gender specific non interchangeable duties designed to avoid competition and strain of the nuclear family unit were prevalent in the 1950's-1970's (see Parsons, 1959; Young and Wilmott, 1973). This was supported by Oakley's research in the 1970's who concluded that housework and looking after the husband was the predominant role of 40 women studied (Oakley, 2005). Viewing household duties and childcare as biologically innate and predominately suited to women (essentialist perspective) also placed restrictions on a woman's care choices and place in the family (Woodward, 1997). These models position the mother firmly in the home with clearly defined gender specific roles and duties; this restricts and limits career or educational opportunities for women.

Morgan (2011) rejected the idea of a nuclear family or a 'cornflakes packet' image of the family seeing it as inadequate and discriminatory to non traditional families. He used the term 'family practices' to show that family is something that you do in terms of activities and changing practices rather than a particular fixed social structure. Morgan (2011) saw the family as diverse with different roles enacted across families through constant changes and evolving across time. This model accounts for family diversity and positionality in a way that essentialist or structuralist perspectives cannot.

3.3.2. Women and employment

Researchers such as Williams (2004) and Chambers (2012) maintain that there is a greater appreciation for diversity and difference in family life in more recent times, which has been influenced in part by policy reforms and changing priorities. This has led to an increase in employment participation with a steeper rise in women's employment than men's in the last 40 years (ONS, 2013b). However gender inequalities have not gone away as women's earnings and hourly rate is significantly lower than men's (ONS, 2014). Rises in female employment have a profound effect on family life (Reynolds, Callender and Edwards, 2003; Ridge, 2011). For example, when both parents are working children can take on more responsibility at home and become more independent and self sufficient (Baines, Wheelock, and Gelder, 2003). Baines, Wheelock and Gelder's (2003), research focused on the perspectives of both parents and

children and demonstrated how family life changed and altered when the parents became self employed. Changes included the children contributing time and labour to assist the parents businesses, including IT skills, customer care and business. This is relevant to my study as I can observe how changes to family dynamics and family life manifest as a consequence of the mother studying. This will be of relevance to my later discussion on family capital (see Chapter 3.5).

How a family defines motherhood and fatherhood affects employment choices for the family (Williams, 2004). Hakim (2004) claims that a woman's position in society is determined by her employment or family status, this also helps to shape her identity. Employment can give some women a sense of purpose and individual identity, yet others can experience a sense of guilt if they work outside of the home (Williams, 2004; Reynolds, Callender and Edwards, 2003). Hakim's preference theory (1995; 2006) argues that employment choices of women are based on preferences rather than responsibilities, obligations or constraints. This has been disputed by Ginn et al. (1996) who state that cultural norms, family traditions, financial constraints and caring responsibilities also play a part in the decision making and opportunities available. However, Hakim (1995) maintains that women have clear choices in terms of returning to work or staying at home and claims that preferences are influenced by differences in life goals for men and women (Hakim, 2011) rather than employment constraints. She classifies women into three distinctive categories; home centred, adaptive (combination of family life and work) and work-centred. McRae (2003) argues that although women may have a preference they are also heavily influenced by the constraints around the choices they feel able to make. McRae (2003) claims that some women are in a better position to overcome these constraints. These constraints are identified as normative (inner voice, identity, gender relations and norms within the family, partner influence etc) and structural (job availability, cost of childcare, qualifications etc). Within the normative constraints, those concepts and ideologies of motherhood would play a part in women's choices about the labour market. Families respond to changing financial and family commitments in different ways thus suggesting that preferences for work or ideas of motherhood can also alter over the life course (Ginn et al. 1996).

3.3.3 Fathers and employment

In the past the role of fatherhood has been reasonably well defined and generally understood in western society as earning the main family wage thus being positioned as the 'breadwinner', (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). I have argued that this has changed over time and is no longer seen as the norm as both husband and wife are more likely to contribute to the household finances (Chambers, 2012; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009; Lamb, 2000; Williams, 2004). However according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009), mothers still hold more traditional views on the main wage earner and who should be responsible for childcare compared to the fathers. This could explain fathers being in a state of flux as they try to interpret their role as positioned between being the main wage earner and taking an active role in parenting (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). This can lead to tension for the men between wanting to be the main provider and wanting to spend time with their children (Hatten, Vinter and Williams, 2002). This is an ongoing issue for fathers and one that is currently unresolved. Being in a state of flux or tension is also relevant for the women in this study as they try to interpret their role as mother or wife alongside the new role of HE student, this may have effects on the role of fathers.

3.3.4 Gender roles in the family

Although roles are more flexible in families, they are '…still underpinned by enduring gender differences and meanings of motherhood and fatherhood', (Williams, 2004:61). As mothers often take a lead role in organising children's activities, the strength of their marital relationship can be a factor in how involved the father is (Asmussen and Weizel, 2010). Research suggests that mothers see the role of caregiver as their primary role (Asmussen and Weizel, 2010). There appears to be '… strong cultural and structural processes that continue to shape fathering as secondary to that of mothering', (Ribbens, McCarthy and Edwards, 2011:98). This could also be due to strong male stereotypes of men devoting time and dedication to the work place (Hakim, 2006), some cultural expectations of men being seen as the main provider (Chambers 2012; Lamb, 2000; Williams, 2004) and a lack of flexible working practices for men (EHRC, 2009).

However, in each family unit, there may be diversity and change as family situations alter and develop. Mothering and fathering must be defined as 'constantly evolving in relation to each other' (Doucet, 2006: 245), with the capacity for less defined roles.

Negotiations are important in deciding upon family roles, responsibilities and expectations (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2011). Williams' (2004) qualitative research on the changing face of family life identified career and educational choices as being family dependent. Mothers were often concerned with the 'right thing to do' and therefore worked through a series of moral dilemmas when making decisions for themselves and the family. Social norms and cultural influences also play a part in shaping the role of mothers and fathers as well as affecting decision making within families (Chambers, 2012). Although negotiation takes place, roles are still reported on as gender specific (Williams, 2004; Chambers, 2012), as they are seen to develop in the context of each family therefore creating conditions by which different roles are played out. Although fathers are now more likely to be involved with caring for children in many households there is still an unequal gender distribution of domestic labour (Chambers, 2012; Williams, 2004). Inequalities located in gender roles could be a result of less flexible working conditions for fathers (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009). This gives a complex and emotional dimension to the decision making as choices that are made in families can be constrained by responsibilities to others, as well as how one is positioned in the family (Finch and Mason, 1993). The impact of their HE studies on the family was of primary concern to the women, this was shared in their tutorials. This could link to assumed core features of mothering as nurturance and protection (Lamb, 2000), which could affect how a woman is positioned and defined as a mother.

3.3.5 Meeting children's needs

Edwards' (1993) research into university life found that defining what it is to be a student is easier for some women than defining what it is to be a mother, as motherhood is seen as fundamental to them and difficult to conceptualise. Being a mother is complex and is tied up with 'doing the right thing for their children', (Williams, 2004:57). This idea of 'doing the right

thing' is influenced by social networks, moral considerations, culture and historical family practices (Williams, 2004). When considering the right thing to do a central consideration is prioritising the needs of the children (Reynolds, Callender and Edwards, 2003; Williams, 2004).The father is often viewed as being instrumental in providing for the financial needs of the family and the mother is positioned as essential in providing the expressive and emotional needs of the family (Reynolds, Callender and Edwards, 2003). The argument of 'meeting needs' is a complex one, are children seen as 'the holder of needs and mothers as the meeter of these needs?' (Lawler, 2000:3). According to Lawler (2000), good mothering constitutes meeting children's physical and emotional needs. If this is done successfully then the mothering is deemed good. One aspect of good mothering is giving children attention (time) as well as unconditional love. Being a good mother is also seen as being flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the children (Lawler, 2000). However the term 'need' is a fluid term as there are many different interpretations and constructions of what children need and how those needs can be meet. This gives a complexity for women if different family members hold different views on what those needs are. As children grow and change so does their needs, hence family practices need to adapt to accommodate these changes (Ridge and Millar, 2011). This influences a woman's creation of her individual sense of identity as a mother.

3.3.6 Mature students

HE can be seen as an enabling liberating space to construct and change identity (Anderson and Williams, 2001b).Creating a student identity can be important for mature students [5] as it helps them to feel like they belong in an environment that is alien to them (Williams and Abson, 2001). However defining the characteristics of a mature student, within literature, is problematic as there are so many variations of experiences and meanings to draw upon (Anderson and Williams, 2001a; Waller, 2006). Learning to make connections between theory and practice, learning to read and write, learning to think differently and having an increase in self-

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[5] Although the HE Statistics Agency (accessed 2013) defines a mature student as over 21, for the purpose of this research I have defined a mature student as over 25 with a gap in education; therefore returning to study is a life course and life changing decision.

confidence and self-esteem are all aspects of being a mature student (Bowl, 2003). Juggling HE, family life and sometimes work commitments is also a shared feature for mature students (Bowl, 2003; Callender, Wilkinson and MacKinnon, 2006; Reay, 2003). Being 'time poor' is often an issue of concern for mature students[6] (Callender, Wilkinson and MacKinnon, 2006; Plageman and Sabina, 2010), yet HE is something that women seek in order to bring about change for themselves and their families.

In summary to this section on families, although in many families many mothers now take up paid employment, there is still gender inequality concerning household tasks and care of the children. Women often work part time and position themselves as a caregiver to her children and husband. This triple role of wage earner, mother and responsible for household tasks positions the woman as responsible to others and limits the subject positions that she can occupy. All of these aspects create a woman's identity strand of motherhood. Although these aspects may affect other strands of identity such as gender or wife, the focus here is on the mother strand as this is common to all of my participants and a strand of identity that is often discussed in pastoral tutorials. As with any strand of identity this is not fixed as Hakim's (1995; 2006) preference theory would suggest, but fluid and changing over time depending on shifting dynamics and positioning.

3.4 Identity changes and transformation theory

Identity changes can occur when an identity position or strand is challenged or in conflict with another (Woodward, 2004). A woman may feel torn between wanting to construct an identity as a hard working and diligent student, yet may find this incompatible with being a mother who is readily available to her children; this could impact on a crisis or a change in identity. Therefore the concept of identity crisis is useful in my research as it could explain why students struggle with their emotions, when on the course, as they reconstruct or challenge what makes a good mother, wife, professional or student. The early years content of the course (see Appendix 2)

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[6] Many of the literature sources discuss mature students rather than just women, not all of these mature students have children

relates closely to their parenting experiences, therefore challenging previous assumptions is probable. Identity transformation could be as a consequence of wrestling with the academic demands, theoretical reflecting and changing individual professional perceptions. As education can be seen as an autonomous, independent, safe and enabling space to reconstruct identity (Parr, 2001) then change is to be expected. Parr's (2000) research on 49 women in a college or HE environment concluded that education gave women increased agency and autonomy and acted as a catalyst for change in their levels of confidence, self image and independence. Those seeking education as adults are often looking for change in one form or another; this could be a change in career direction, perspective or because of decreasing childcare demands as their children begin full time education (Parr, 2000; Pascall and Cox, 1993).

Through engagement with HE some strands of identity could become stronger or more important than others. Prior to HE they may have described themselves as a mother and wife, whereas during their studies they may add an additional identity strand of HE student. This could result in the women reconsidering their practical roles and putting their desire to study above of their desire to complete the housework duties they assign to a wife or mother. Through this change in identification and role, women are demonstrating the importance and value in their HE study. These transforming strands of identity are then in direct conflict with current roles or duties within the family. This change in balance can lead to a period of unrest and amendment as the student tries to assimilate to the changes and adjust to the existing representation of their perceived role and duties as a mother or wife. This can also lead to changes and transformations for family members around the mature student.

Transformation theory is helpful to this study as it illuminates how the socially constructed perspectives the women have held previously, including the duties and obligations within different positions can be challenged and re-examined (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999). This change in positions can be tacit or intentional if a woman decides to challenge a previously held position based on her developing knowledge base. Tacit positional changes may have resulted from a gradual change as the woman assimilates new knowledge this may subconsciously change her position on different topics and the vocabulary she uses. Intentional changes, are the

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result of a conscious decision by the women, for example, to reject the previous construction of always being responsible for household tasks. Women will have entered HE as they are looking for change educationally, professionally or for the family, so transformation in one form or another is an anticipated outcome of their studies. Transformation theory, according to Mezirow (1991), involves re-examining childhood values, beliefs and assumptions in light of new knowledge and experiences. It is not just adding new meaning to old perspectives but involves heightened reflection to reconstruct new meanings and interpretations. As previously stated, social reality is sustained by our language, culture and socialisation. These systems, assumptions and ways of knowing can be taken for granted. Newer perspectives in adulthood, particularly through education and engagement with academic reading and discussion, can result in these assumptions being challenged (Cherrington and Thornton, 2013). This can be redefined through critically examining the socially bestowed roles given to us. Those with wider life experiences, for example previous employment or motherhood, are more likely to engage in deeper transformational learning as they have increased encounters to reflect and draw upon (Taylor, 2009).

Mezirow (1991) uses the terms 'meaning' as interpretation; 'meaning scheme' as assimilated habits of expectation that are used as schemes or habitual ways of doing things which give personal boundaries for expectations and behaviour, this gives us criteria to judge what is right and wrong. A 'meaning perspective' therefore is seen as a set of meaning schemes. It is through making sense of a shared experience of social reality, that we create a set of rules and meaning perspectives that enable us to define ourselves and also develop a sense of identity. Therefore we construct meaning and significance through the environment and situations we are in (Mezirow, 2000), hence when a condition or environment changes, then our values and assumptions can be changed or tested.

Through this transformation of our own taken for granted beliefs we can have greater control over our lives (Cherrington and Thornton, 2013). This can be an emotionally intense experience (Mezirow, 2000), as previous interpretations and their significance, can be used to generate new meanings. This can lead to unrest or disorientation through the critical reflection process

particularly when previous assumptions are challenged (Erichsen, 2011). This links in with my previous argument concerning identity change.

Mezirow (1995, cited by Kitchenham, 2008) considered three types of reflection: content, process and premise with transformation being categorised as straightforward or profound. A person can reflect on the content of the problem, the process of solving the problem or the premise of the problem (Mezirow, 1991). Straightforward transformation occurs through content and process reflection of a previous meaning scheme. For example a woman might consider previous parenting decisions and reflect on areas of difficulty or potential areas of change and how to solve this, thus causing straightforward transformation of beliefs and behaviours as a parent. However, if a mother then examines her assumptions and premises to those behaviours, this may lead to a profound transformation to her future parenting practices through complex reflections and a transformation of meaning schemes.

3.4.1 Connecting identity and transformation theory through critical reflection

Burr's concept of identity being socially constructed aligns with Mezirow's perspective of meaning making based on social experiences. Transformation theory defines identity as an ability to see ourselves through the eyes of others, being able to take on a role and understanding of our self, according to the social context we are in (Erichsen, 2011). Transformative learning then looks at a reflective process where personal constructions of who we are and who we are in relationships is examined through interaction in different social environments.

Transformative learning involves an examination of assumptions in order to give way to a new set of expectations and meanings. Education provides a platform for transformative learning. For example, value laden course content such as spirituality or bereavement enables the student to critique both professional and personal values. Through authentic teacher and student relationships which are productive and trusting, confidence is developed in students which can lead to transformative thinking (Taylor, 2009). Both aspects are particularly encouraged through the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme through content that gives opportunities for

critical discussion and the creation of meaningful pastoral relationships through small class sizes.

Transformation theory can be employed to examine the change in women when they embark on a programme of HE study as their meaning schemes and perspectives are challenged. Through this process of critical reflection they may begin to search and examine their presuppositions that influence their actions but also their wider relationships. Therefore it is worth noting here (as in Chapter 2.3) that some women will also choose to embark on an HE programme due to a change in themselves that has begun the transformation process (Britton and Baxter, 1999).

Critical reflection is a key component of the process of transformation. Critical reflection is viewed as essential in the Foundation Degree in Early Years programme in enabling educational learning experiences to impact on personal identity and professional practice (Lehrer, 2013). Reflection is important in professional practice as it can enable practitioners[7] to challenge and change their own assumptions and beliefs (Cherrington and Thornton, 2013). Competing forces and demands on a professional can be linked to immense pressure and autonomy can be called into question (Schön, 1991). Through learning to reflect practitioners can develop their knowledge base which can lead to increased self-confidence and self-assurance. Through these opportunities students can become more aware of their values base (Thompson and Thompson, 2008), which in turn can place them in a stronger position to influence, change and transform situations around themselves. During this reflective process students can develop new ideas and influence future choices, decisions and actions. For many students, this reflection spills into their day to day life (both personally and professionally) and becomes a natural process of who they are.

3.4.2 Reflexive thinking, identity change, transformation and positioning

Reflexive thinking incorporates the wider social context and perspectives of others in a way that Mezirow neglects. Mezirow presents transformation theory as an insular and introspective

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[7] The term 'practitioner' is used within this thesis to define those professionals working within early years provision

experience and although there is recognition for the sharing of transformational experiences (Mezirow, 1991), there is no consideration to the wider context or family who can provide support through transformative learning (Taylor, 2009). It is an approach that focuses on the individual, and overlooks positionality when considering transformative learning which fails to recognise if a person's transformation can affect transformation for another. There is reference to how personal change due to family crisis or a disorientating dilemma can instigate personal critical reflection and transformation (Mezirow, 1991), but there is no appreciation of the effect of this on the family.

Reflection can enable students to question everyday occurrences and can be seen as disruptive as '…. it lays open to question anything taken for granted', (Bolton, 2005:1) and creates uncertainty. It can also be seen as focusing significantly on rational aspects of reflective practice and therefore neglectful of emotional matters (Thompson and Thompson, 2008; Thompson and Pascal, 2012). However a reflexive approach to reflection (Bolton, 2005), acknowledges emotional dimensions as well as wider forces that impact on one's thinking and experiences such as values, societal structures, and alternative perspectives. Through reflexive thinking, deeply held views can be considered (Bolton, 2005) and a critical appraisal of one's self can ensue. If a critical approach is taken then it is likely that change or transformation will take place as a consequence of these reflexive processes. This can lead to difficulties for some women students as they find that their critical approach is not always welcome in their professional (Thompson and Thompson, 2008), social or family environments. I will explore the question whether transformative learning is perceived by mature students as affecting other members of the family or whether they see it as only concerning individual learning. The next section will move from an individualistic approach of internal feelings and transformations to consider the role of the family in supporting a woman's return to HE.

3.5 Family capital

Family capital is an exciting concept as it recognises the systems in families that can aid and support individuals to achieve certain ends. It can be used to explore the complex network of

relationships in families and show how identity and family positioning can be defined and reinforced through the capital that is offered to or invested into each family member. The family can be a valuable source of capital and can provide individuals with support and opportunities to achieve success and advantages in terms of education (Coleman, 1988). Capital can be described as 'goods and resources' that can be beneficial to an individual or an asset to be cashed in (Jenkins, 2002:85). The concept of family capital encompasses all forms of capital in order to 'capture all aspects of investment made by the family' for the benefit of a family member, in this case the women students (Gofen, 2009:107). The different forms of capital are cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital. Although there is an overlap in the definitions of the different forms of capital, the concept of family capital can be developed to encompass these together and add a new dimension.

3.5.1 Economic, cultural and social capital

Before I define my model of family capital it is useful to consider different aspects of capital. Capital is discussed as 'accumulated labour' which produces some form of profit or advantage (Bourdieu, 1986:81). However Bourdieu views capital wider than in terms of human capital used to produce economic profit as this account does not fully explain the types of capital that can be produced (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986; 1991) introduced the terms cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital to clarify human capital as he viewed human capital as an abstract concept that did not fully illuminate the class inequalities in society (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu's forms of capital focus on the 'achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible', (Coleman 1988: 98). Bourdieu (1991) emphasised that limited access to capital could lead to educational inequalities. He viewed education as reinforcing class disparities and used his theory of capital to strengthen this argument. Although Bourdieu and others focused on improving educational outcomes for children, these terms are useful when considering the advantages that women accrue through having access to various forms of capital in the family. I have chosen to use the terms economic, cultural and social capital here to highlight how a woman's possession of capital can be advantageous within HE.

Those with greater economic resources can have increased chances of success at HE level (Bourdieu, 1991). A family's possession of economic capital can 'have significant impact on educational resources', (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002:114), as money is beneficial to pay for many added costs such as tuition fees, extra childcare, transport or textbooks. Many women contribute to the family finances through full time or part time paid employment. When they access HE they have to make a decision as to whether they continue to work the same hours, thus balancing paid employment and study which can be problematic (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), or whether to reduce their working hours. This may also put pressure on the family if the woman has to take a cut in income. Some husbands may reduce their employment hours in order to assist with childcare, hence the significance of large stocks of economic capital.

Cultural capital is defined as skills, abilities, mannerisms and knowledge, for example of the educational system, as habitual ways of behaving that give advantages to those fitting into university life (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). It also encompasses knowledge and acquisition of the right cultural resources that are appropriate to HE such as the possession of text books and qualifications (Bowl, 2003). This relates back to the possession of economic capital and consequential educational achievement (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). Women without prior HE knowledge, easy access to HE resources or who have been out of education for some time may feel like 'outsiders in the game', (Bowl, 2003:123). Women students working in early years could also feel at a disadvantage as they may not have had opportunities to practice research skills or understand academic language through their prior vocational qualifications. This feeling of unease would affect a woman's identity or behaviour both at college and in the family in terms of self-confidence, self-esteem or even levels of stress. In contrast, women who have access to text books, a computer, or who have already developed skills of information technology (IT) would feel better placed to cope with the academic demands of HE.

Women who are mothers, or who are early years professionals, will have cultural capital of early years terminology and theories, giving them a capital advantage in terms of subject knowledge. The accumulation of cultural capital is complex to define as some women would

feel at a disadvantage in some areas but at an advantage in others, resulting in tension to the identity strand of mature student.

Fitting into university life and achieving success, is made easier through the possession of social capital, for example 'who you know' or relationships that can be drawn upon. Social capital defines membership and belonging to certain groups (Ball, 2002) and is relevant to HE as it can be utilised to elevate one's social position and standing through the deployment of contacts (Bourdieu, 1991; Ball, 2002). Bourdieu saw social capital as having access to a network of relationships that aided success with education. These social contacts can be useful in helping to understand the HE milieu and could be located in the family through family members that have experience of HE or through friendships. This shows an overlap between cultural and social capital. However, some women students, who have been out of education or employment for a long time, may have limited social contacts that have had recent university experience.

Although women may have limited social contacts with HE experience, those women in early years employment may benefit from networking with early years professionals or other women that may have completed their studies previously (Webber, 2014). These networks can be beneficial in developing cultural capital of academic language, procedures and specialist subject knowledge.

The networking aspect of social capital is not as beneficial to mature women as social ties and bonding in family relationships which can give support and aid productivity (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988). Putnam (2000:22) saw family relationships as exclusive to others as they could 'mobilise solidarity'. This type of solidarity is important for women students as they wish for their HE study to minimally disadvantage or negatively impact on the family. Therefore having support and a shared goal from the family is of importance (Merrill 1999; Snape and Finch, 2006). Social capital found in family relationships can aid productivity, as long as there is mutual trust and trustworthiness (Coleman, 1988). Coleman gives examples of family ties and networks in business that enables productivity and support in order to achieve goals. It can be seen as having value in economic terms. In non economic terms, social capital can be seen in

family relationships in the form of time and family support, thus effecting intellectual and educational development of the recipient in order to achieve success (Coleman, 1988). However, the strength of family relationships and family values concerning education can affect the social capital or time on offer (Coleman, 1988).

Putnam (2000:22) views social capital as serving 'both public and private ends', which could be mutually beneficial to those involved in its generation and consumption. This is in contrast to Bourdieu, who perceived social capital as benefitting the individual to enhance their position further, rather than benefit communities or families. Unlike Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passerson, 2000), Coleman (1994) states that the marginalised or the working class could benefit from social capital as they were able to participate in reciprocal relationships, cooperate and develop trust in order to support successful educational outcomes.

Mothers are more likely to benefit from economic capital or cultural capital than social capital for the reasons outlined above but also because of the life skills the husband and wife have accumulated through employment and parenting. Economic capital may be accessed through the earnings they accrue and can also be converted into social or cultural capital more easily than vice versa (Swartz, 1997). Transferable skills can be acquired through employment or otherwise and may also be pooled. This may aid success in university life such as time management skills and IT skills. These can be passed on from the husband to the wife and are more readily available than social contacts. This could explain why women do not benefit as easily from social capital due to a lack of opportunity for women to make use of this capital rather than the family not providing it. The family, as a whole unit, is portrayed as a unique and valuable source of social capital which facilitates support, trust and improved educational outcomes (Ball, 2002; Bourdieu, 1991; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). However, Edwards (2004) goes as far to claim that mothers are more often a source of social capital rather than a beneficiary. In current literature there is a lack of detail and clarity regarding how the family can provide this type of capital for HE women students as the assumption is that the mother is the one responsible for meeting the practical and emotional needs of the children, putting their needs above her own (Edwards, 2004; Lawler, 2000; Reay, 2004).

As the acquisition of capital is advantageous, mature women who have been out of education for some time will feel at a disadvantage (Webber, 2014), as they may lack opportunities to accumulate all forms of capital (see Chapter 3.5.2). Families have the potential to provide a store of capital for mature women students as the network of relationships in a family can provide a strong foundation of support. These relationships are made up of everyday interactions and close relationships with family members, hence this form of support is more likely to be accessible. These relationships are underpinned by caring activities; therefore providing support is part of the role and function of a family (Williams, 2004). Through families investing capital in the women; they are more equipped to cope with the demands of HE.

3.5.2 Creating a model of analysis for family capital

Although the theory of capital is used to discuss education, I would like to develop this and consider the role of the family in providing capital. In the previous section I have shown an appreciation of how the family can play a part in supporting a woman through HE. For the purpose of this thesis e*conomic* capital will be referred to as having access to *material or financial assets* (Watson et al., 2009). *Cultural* capital will be referred to as acquiring *skills and ways of behaving that are appropriate to an HE environment,* this will include study skills and knowledge of HE systems. *Social* capital will focus on the *relationships in families that aid success at HE*. This will include *bonding and solidarity* through having a shared goal of achieving HE success.

Family capital is useful in my research, yet it is a concept that is tentatively used in literature. Family capital is most frequently mentioned from an economic perspective (see Sorenson, 2009), focusing on utilising family networks to enhance the family business. Long (2011) discusses family social capital which also acknowledges the important role of families in developing social capital. It is also mentioned from an educational or social perspective focusing on improving outcomes for children through interpersonal family relationships and support (Belcher, Peckuonis and Deforge, 2011; Gofen, 2009; Lau and Li, 2011; Moskal, 2014). This links in to my earlier discussion on the importance of family support of education as

identified by Coleman (1988). The key factors for family capital, identified in these papers, are positive relationships (Sorenson, 2009); family attachment and time (Wright, Cullena and Miller, 2001) and investment in the future of other family members (Gofen, 2009; Moskal, 2014). The family is not just defined as those in the household but there is also recognition of the impact of intergenerational interactions such as with grandparents providing family capital (Lou et al., 2013). Gofen's (2009) study focuses on factors that influenced first generation degree students' success and concluded that there was a strong correlation between large resources of family capital and student success. However, when family capital is missing or scarce it can have an adverse effect on a child's development or the success of a family member (Belcher, Peckuonis and Deforge, 2011).

Family capital as a concept is also useful in understanding what types of support systems could benefit a woman to achieve educational success. Although the concept of capital is used generally in literature on mature students is not labelled as family capital (Noble and Davies, 2009; Schuller et al., 2004; Webber, 2014; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). For example, Plageman and Sabina's (2010) research with undergraduate mature female students discusses family support in the shape of household chores, time to study, and financial support. This has been shown to reduce stress and encourage persistence to complete the programme. This demonstrates the importance of investments made by family members in the form of economic and practical support. The highest level of support to attend and persist with HE was gender related as it was offered by mothers and sisters of the female students (Plageman and Sabina, 2010).

My model of family capital will be structured around economic, cultural and social capital. However, there are two dimensions that are neglected in the concepts of capital already discussed (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000): emotions and time. Both of these aspects were significant in the literature on women in HE and women's identities (see Chapter 3.2.1 and Chapter 2.3) and connected with the identity strand of being a mother. This relates to wanting to do the right thing for her children, being the care giver mainly responsible for meeting children's needs and for the feelings of guilt experienced over returning to study. These feelings of guilt are interrelated to time. Although Bourdieu (1986) alludes to time in his debates

on capital, it is not emphasised as highly significant or a worthy of an aspect of capital. Therefore time and emotions are aspects of family capital and can underpin other forms of capital.

In this research, social capital is not an adequate term on its own to describe the social investments made by the family, therefore considering the concept of emotional capital is beneficial (see also Webber, 2014 for my original position on emotional capital). Parents invest emotional energy into the role of a mother or father, through early attachment with their baby, through regulation of their babies' emotions and through developing emotional literacy in their children, hence giving emotional support is part of their everyday role (Griffiths, 2004). Ignoring the emotional aspect of motherhood and this important strand as a woman would be neglectful to this study.

There is a gender imbalance to emotional capital as women are more likely to give this than receive it. Bourdieu does not speak specifically of emotional capital, yet he does acknowledge the role of mothers in emotional work in families in order to maintain relationships (Bourdieu, 1998; Reay, 2003). Nowotny (1981, cited by Reay, 2004), developed the concept of emotional capital, theorising it as the emotional resources exchanged in the boundaries of familial relationships. It is an investment in others rather than focusing on one's self. Reay (2004) particularly sees this as the role of mothers who maintain the 'emotional aspects of family relationships, responding to each other's emotional states and also acting to alleviate distress', (Reay 2004:59). In this way, emotional capital is regarded as a resource used by women to motivate and encourage children through educational experiences. This is construed as invested at a cost to women, as it is a gendered concept (Burke and Jackson, 2007). Supplying emotional capital can be draining to the contributor and also be sacrificial in terms of time. This adds another dimension onto the identity of a mother and also contributes to the feelings of guilt if a woman feels that she is neglecting this aspect of her role, due to the time constraints of her HE studies.

Feeney and Lemay (2012) maintain that women and men can both benefit from emotional capital. Emotional capital is viewed as positive investments in a relationship made between both marital partners that result in relationship success and longevity. The term investment is used to describe emotional reserves that are accumulated in a relationship that can be drawn upon and cashed in when things are difficult. The more assets that are stored or invested, the less damaging the depletion of these reserves will be. These investments are accumulated through positive shared emotional experiences in the relationship. These investments accumulate over time and are made up by thoughtful deeds, responding to each other's needs through intimate conversations and acts that make the other one feel valued (Feeney and Lemay, 2012) . This view of emotional capital enables women to be seen as a recipient of emotional capital rather than just a producer. It challenges the gendered notion of mothers not benefitting from emotional capital (Burke and Jackson, 2007; Reay, 2004); however this is dependent on the strength of the relationship between the husband and wife. Relationships which have accumulated this type of capital are more likely to be resilient, as these resources of emotional capital will be used as a buffer if relationships are under pressure or strain (Feenay and Lemay, 2012). This demonstrates that women can access emotional capital through family relationships. Through emotional support and a marital relationship that is resilient to stress and strain, mothers may be encouraged to complete the degree when it gets difficult.

Time is an additional aspect of capital that I wish to draw attention to. Being time poor (Edwards 1993a), balancing the demands of family, work and study commitments (Callender, Wilkinson and MacKinnon, 2006; Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Plageman and Sabina, 2010; Reay. 2005) and changes to family routines (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010), are all aspects of the strand of a HE woman student. Changing household routines and transformation to the woman's identity can change positions in the family household (Edwards, 1993a). In addition, if the woman has less time for the family because of her HE study, this may lead to guilt if she feels she is not fulfilling her ideal of a good mother. Time with children cannot always be postponed as an adult is needed to supervise them, to keep them safe, or attend to their physical or emotional needs. This supervision is often taken on by another family member for example

their husband or the children's grandparents if the mother has study commitments. Being unable to rely on these personal networks for childcare support can put barriers in the way of a woman studying or attending college (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010). Although responsibilities can be passed on to other people, this also takes time to organise. Women also try to free up time in other aspects of their role such as housework. This results in either the housework getting neglected, someone else in the family taking on this role, paying someone to do this, or the women reducing the amount of hours they sleep to accommodate the shortfall (Marandet and Wainwright, 2010). The family (both nuclear and extended) can be a great source of support in helping to manage this transition for the women and helping to free up time. How successful a woman feels in her ability to manage the competing time demands of the degree and family life may also influence her identity construction and how she perceives herself.

The concepts of time and capital are interlinked as capital can take time to accumulate, (Bourdieu, 1986). Time is both a form of capital and instrumental in creating other forms of capital. Time is a form of capital as it can affect educational achievement and be converted into other forms of capital. It can be useful in obtaining educational advantages such as acquiring time to study may develop cultural awareness of HE procedures and vocabulary. Time can be viewed as a solid investment (Bourdieu, 1986) in the family in generating capital. In the context of the family there are many different aspects of time that can be useful in the generation of family capital. Time can be an important factor in the production of cultural capital whilst on the course, as those women with more time may be able to gain support from others to learn IT skills or can develop the skills needed to pass assignments (Bowl, 2003). Some women will be able to access economic capital to buy childcare or help with housework, but not all women will have this as a resource or will want to access this. Capital can also be time bound and can be used up, for example economic capital can be exhausted. It can also be relevant at a given point in time, such as social contacts may be useful in securing a place on an HE course but may not be as useful near the end of the course. Cultural capital may be particularly beneficial in fitting into university life initially but once a student is acclimatised to university procedures this aspect of cultural capital may not be as advantageous either. Time is important in terms of other

family members relieving women from household tasks or childcare responsibilities to give her time to study. Time can be invested by family members in creating social capital and bonding thus fostering emotional capital and support.

My research will develop the concept of family capital that I have outlined here demonstrating that the family is a valid resource of different forms of capital. Aspects of economic, cultural and social capital will be viewed as crossing over into each other thus blurring the edges. Different facets of time as a source of capital and emotional capital will be conceptualised in my framework of family capital and the relevance of these two additional components will be analysed.

3.6 Summary

Identity is conceptualised in this research as identification strands that define a person such as mother, student or wife. These strands are seen as socially constructed and changeable dependent on the social context and experiences. They are constructed through a system of positioning and being positioned in everyday communications and social interactions, hence there will be a combination of self positioning and positioning from others such as husbands, parents or friends. As being a mother is an identity strand that all of the women have in common then defining this is of crucial importance. However this is a complex task in itself as each woman would hold her own meaning as to what it is to be a mother. HE can enable meaning perspectives to change and identity to be reconstructed in a context of being positioned or repositioning themselves. When the course content, such as the Foundation Degree in Early Years, is connected to personal concepts of childhood this then has repercussions for the meaning of motherhood for women students with families. This constant positioning, as their identity changes and develops, could lead to an identity crisis as they may feel that strands of their identity are in conflict with each other. This could impact on transformation to the woman and new perspectives and subject positions to be formed (see Figure 2). All of this could take place in a period and state of critical reflection as a student may begin to challenge and change

her own beliefs and assumptions.

Positioning and repositioning begins to occur as the woman student considers new information and constructs new knowledge and ways of being

Through participating in HE and constructing knowledge of subject, critical reflection occurs. As thought processes change, identity transformation takes place.

New meaning schemes begin to be reflected upon

Supported by family capital

Figure 2: Conceptual framework – Cycle of transformation

When looking at the conceptual framework laid out above with regards to identity change (see Figure 2), I claim that HE gives women students a motivational space to transform, change, critically reflect and reposition themselves. This could have a consequential effect on the family as they absorb the transforming identity of this family member. In principle, if women transform than it is conceivable that members of the family may change too.

FAMILY CAPITAL

Practical support – frees up time for the woman to study or assimilate HE skills

Emotional support - provided through communication, sensitivity and understanding which helps to alleviate guilt though the family's acceptance of her HE studies

ECONOMIC CAPITAL – reducing work hours to study or the husband reducing his work hours to assist with childcare or household tasks. Affording additional resources.

CULTURAL CAPITAL - this includes study skills and knowledge of HE systems acquired through family members

EMOTIONAL CAPITAL – emotional investments located within family relationships that create resilience to stress and strain

SOCIAL CAPITAL – family members showing solidarity though a shared goal

Supported by **TIME** as a form of capital

Figure 3: Model of family capital (based on literature review)

The model of family capital (see Figure 3) that I will be utilising in this research is constructed in a network of family relationships which offer a combination of practical and emotional strategies of support. The practical strategies can be an amalgamation of cultural, economic, social or emotional capital. This can make available time for the woman from household tasks or childcare responsibilities and enable her to gain study time. Time is also given by others in the family to the woman such as demonstrating IT skills or proof reading her work. Time offered by family members through practical strategies and offering emotional capital shows support and affirmation of what the women are doing. This helps to alleviate some of the guilt but an element of this as a mother who studies, still remains.

These two frameworks (see Figures 2 and 3) fit together and are dependent on one another in order to give the woman an increased chance of success at HE. HE is recognised as a transformative space for women to change their identity through a period of reflection and possible conflict between different strands of identity. This is facilitated and absorbed within family relationships as the identity strand of mother, wife and HE student cannot change and adapt in isolation to each other. A woman's position in the family will alter and transform due to identity change and changes in routine to accommodate the woman's study. Family capital is important within this process as support can be provided through different aspects of capital. This support is in the form of economic, cultural, social and emotional capital with recognition that time is the fifth aspect of capital that is instrumental in this process. However this model of family capital does not fully explain the role of time as a form of capital or how identity construction links into family capital. These aspects will be explored through the research findings.

CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND ETHICAL APPROACH

The aim of this chapter is to set out my methodological perspective, methods of data collection and analysis and the ethical awareness that underpins this research study. My methodology is qualitative in nature and consists of in depth focused interviews using a mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2011) of data construction. The mosaic approach is discussed more fully in Chapter 4.3.1, but can be described briefly as a multi method process of data collection that encourages reflexivity, participation and focuses on participants' experiences (Clark and Moss, 2011). I have chosen to write this thesis in the past tense as the women participants spoke retrospectively about identity changes and family relationships, recounting past stories and experiences.

4.1 Methodological approach

It is important to acknowledge from the start, that all researchers come with an inherent set of assumptions and beliefs (Crotty, 1998). Through my previous research and life experiences it is clear that I see the individual not as a passive recipient but an active and reflective participant in meaning construction (Burr, 2003). Meaning making, listening to voices, creating opportunities for multiple perspectives to be heard is an inherent part of my working practice as an educator, but also my own personal beliefs of the importance of listening to and valuing others. As a result, the themes I wished to explore were best suited by qualitative approaches on a small and in depth scale. Qualitative approaches enabled me to convey rich stories, rather than mute them through the use of statistics (Silverman, 2006), or through processes that did not enable me to fully explore the intensity and breadth of individual experiences (McRae, 2003).

This qualitative approach aligns with the epistemological position of social constructionism as there are many parallels between this paradigm and my research stance. Social constructionism understands the world from a social perspective, acknowledging that the world is constructed from our own perceptions and viewpoints, based on our interactions with others. Similarly, for women, studying at HE level is often not a solitary activity but can impact heavily on all areas of their lives (see Schuller et al., 2004; Biesta et al., 2011). Therefore, although the meanings

that they construct about their experiences are individual, there may also be commonalities across the data.

My theoretical perspective of an interpretive paradigm flows from this epistemological stance and allows me to interpret and describe meaning from the experiences that the women will share and construct. Through an interpretivist approach the 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world' can be considered (Crotty,1998:67). Critiques of this theoretical perspective surround the dominant power of the researcher to shape and influence behaviour and the temptation to focus on the micro environment so that wider influences or structures are not considered (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In this study, wider structural forces of gender constructions, the structure and impact of HE and societal concepts of motherhood are considered so that the micro environment is not just seen in isolation of the women's HE and family experiences alone. I also considered the possible impact of my role as the women's tutor and selected a methodology and methods that favoured participation and open dialogue. Through the participants using their own chosen research methods (see Appendix 8) they were active rather than passive participants in the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

A narrative inquiry approach is a way of 'understanding experience', (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:20). This was a fitting methodology for my research as it allowed me to build detailed stories of a few thus interpreting their social world. It is a medium used to explore an individual's meanings so that others can understand how they experience life (Gibbs, 2007). In addition, '…it enables researchers to explore experiences of voice that are unique to each participant, thus ensuring that, plural rather than single, interpretations of voice are presented by participants', (Cassell, 2006:250). As the women were revealing rich stories of their family lives the narrative inquiry approach resonated with my thinking as narratives also allow meaning to be conveyed through individual, emotions beliefs and values (Dodge, 2007). This is dependent on the skills of the researcher to firstly facilitate the retelling of these stories and secondly present them in a coherent way. I chose this as a methodology as there is a link for narrative

inquirers between their own personal interest and the social concerns and lives of others (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

I have drawn on feminist methodology values (Crotty, 1998; Letherby, 2003) regarding researcher involvement, collaboration and accepting personal experience of the researcher (Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2011) in order to reveal 'what is going on in women's lives' (Letherby, 2003:6). Although it is recognised that there are many different constructions of feminist values and perspectives (Hammersley, 1995; Hussain and Asad, 2012), it is the aspect of illuminating women's experiences that I wish to draw attention to. I recognise that women's experiences and subject positions may be different to men (Merrill, 1999; Tong, 2009), and accept that these values or perspectives have permeated into my chosen methodologies. I am aware that viewing men and women as having distinctive and diverse experiences is a stereotypical viewpoint, yet society often views men and women as different (Jones, 2003). Therefore there is the danger of being strongly influenced by society's view of 'discourses of masculinity embedded in traditions which are strongly heterosexual and orientated around nuclear families and primary female carers', (Jones, 2003:572). This is a theme I can explore through making 'gender visible' (David et al., 1993:208), by way of elucidating women's experiences of studying and balancing family life. In support of Ribbens and Edwards (1998) research findings, I agree that women's experiences as mothers in social life have not been well documented and continue to be underrepresented.

Hammersley (1995) argues against the construct of a distinctly feminist methodology stating that it is not that different to non feminist methodology and has the danger of creating further divisions and gender bias. However, I believe its uniqueness lies in its focus on gender and emphasis on personal experiences and narratives (Hussian and Asad, 2012). I have drawn on these principles as I wish to illuminate women's experiences using methods advocated by feminist research but in a way that is applicable to this study and my skills as an emerging researcher. However there are some aspects of my approach that are outside of feminist methodology. The rejection of non hierarchy in the research relationship (Hussain and Asad, 2012) and participants shaping the research at every stage (De Laine, 2000) are aspects that I

cannot claim. Through my lecturer/student relationship I cannot achieve equality in the relationship as my knowledge of research methods and the literature surrounding the topic area would be construed as being superior (De Laine, 2000). Within an educational environment removing hierarchy from the relationship would be impossible as although I have tried to avoid being dominant as the researcher and their lecturer the women hold constructions of an unequal relationship between us centred on marking and assessment. I also recognise that my methods are not fully participatory nor participant led as the participants have not been involved in defining the problem or contributing to the data analysis (De Laine, 2000).

4.1.1 My position

In this narrative methodology, it is important to acknowledge my role and impact as a researcher in the constructing and retelling of these stories. Hence my own standpoint and experiences have affected my interpretation (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and have influenced my own understanding of a situation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

There are two positions that needed consideration here. Firstly, as laid out in my biographical account (see Appendix 1), I come to this piece of research acknowledging my own ontological position and background as a mature woman student and mother. Secondly, acknowledging that my position as lecturer has had an impact on this research, as I was ultimately in a position of dominance, in terms of the students' perception of their lecturer as knowledge-giver and thus in a position of authority.

When considering my methodological approach I recognised that I am both an insider and an outsider in terms of the research topic. As stated by Mercer (2007), the concept of an insider versus outsider dichotomy can be misleading as dependent on the context; there can be a shift between being an insider and outsider. For example, I could share insider knowledge as I am a mature student and have knowledge of studying and balancing family life. However, I was aware that the topics of the pressures of college assignment deadlines could have created larger elements of outsiderness, due to my lecturer status. Through drawing on my insider viewpoint (Farnsworth, 1997), my chosen methodology was designed to encourage and draw out the

stories of the participants through empathy and knowledge based on my own similar but individual experiences of being a mature female student. To overcome the limitation of allowing my own experiences and emotions to impact on my ability to be critical (Drake, 2010) I began a research journal (see Appendix 4). This enabled me to reflexively record my own emotions and perspectives (Drake, 2010), thus limiting my own experiences surfacing and overwhelming the study (Farnsworth, 1997). I struggled with my own position as mother, wife and woman during the course of this study and used my journal as a platform to consider my own identity reconstruction. For different aspects of the research I was aware that I could be at differing ends of the insider-outsider continuum but through the adoption of this approach I was able to reflect on my shifting position (Hellawell, 2006).

Reflecting (May, 2011) and using a research journal was an integral part of the research process but particularly in helping me to mould and map my methodological journey. Through reassessing my values and identity (Bolton, 2005), my position in the research process was shaped, defined and reinforced. I used it to justify my approaches and to suggest ways forward (see Appendix 4) when I came against any barriers or difficulties (Larrivee, 2000). Through the process of reflective writing, I located gaps in my proposed methods (see Appendix 4) and drew out any issues or complexities (Bolton, 2005). This was not written in any formalised or prescribed way and the uninhibited and spontaneous aspect of this allowed me to use different mediums such as pictures and text to explore my feelings and emotions. Accordingly, reflection has been a key part of this research for both myself as researcher but also for the women who discussed their stories. Some of the women reflexively repositioned themselves in the interviews as there was a shift of how they portrayed their stories or their understandings of these stories (see Appendix 13). For example Marie began by stating that she felt guilt towards her children because of her studies taking up so much time. However, by the end of the interview she had reflected that her HE studies had transformed her parenting style which gave her children many more opportunities (e.g. horse riding, outdoor play) that she had not considered before. As discussed by Moghaddam (1999), one's life story is a continuous shift

and movement as it is retold and new experiences and meanings are assimilated. Therefore through reflection and retelling of their stories meaning was constructed.

Through reading the subsequent methods section it may appear as a linear straightforward process but in actual fact it was a journey of changes and developments. Through the compilation of this section it is clear to see where my chosen methods have originated from in terms of my research stance, personal beliefs and individual style of learning and of being.

4.2 Research overview

The research was set out in three phases (see Appendix 8 and Table 1) comprising of a focused interview with 11 women participants using a mind mapping approach (phase one), followed by a second focused interview using artefacts and discussion items led by nine[8] of the women (phase two). The final phase (three) was a focused interview with three of the women's husbands[9]. The data was collected over a period of eight weeks, with a two week gap between phase one and two to enable women to collect their own data.

Participants	Phases
11 women	*Phase one – Initial mind mapping and focused interview*
9 women	*Phase two – Second interview, particpant led*
3 husbands	*Phase three – Interviews with husbands*

Table 1: Research overview

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[8] Betty had left the programme so was unable to comment on long term changes. Hilary was a single parent and not able to comment on the effects of study on a relationship
[9] All women in couples were offered an opportunity to ask their husbands to participate in the research, three husbands volunteered

4.2.1 Participants

Data was gathered in an FE college, with mature women students studying an Early Years Foundation Degree. This group was selected for two reasons. Firstly, as explained in Chapter 2 there is limited research with small groups of women students therefore I selected one CHE programme to maximise rich data through illuminating a few detailed stories. Secondly, through tutoring mature women in a CHE environment, I am in a privileged position to listen firsthand to the women's stories regarding identity change and family relationships and wanted to illuminate and document these experiences.

All of the participants lived in families containing at least one child under 18 years of age. The term 'families' was used to account for the many diverse types of families in society (see Williams, 2004; Hughes 2002) i.e. blended families, same sex parents, nuclear families, step families. 'Family', was used to define the adults and children living in the same household as a unit of care, although in the research process there was also some recognition of the wider context of families in terms of support offered from the extended family. I focused on those students with husbands and children (aged under 18). All of the participants were in heterosexual relationships; this was the nature of the cohort not due to participant selection. The group was primarily made up of nuclear families and step families. A nuclear family is defined as consisting of two parents and their children whereas a step or reconstituted family is made up of family groups consisting of children living with only one parent and their partner or spouse (Scott, 2014).The term 'husband' was used to encompass any long term intimate relationship (over two years) such as wife or fiancé. Two students did not fit these criteria exactly as one participant's marriage broke down at the start of the course, so she was no longer in a relationship when the research commenced. As a contrast at the end of the period of data collection, I also included one single parent to highlight an alternative perspective (see below).

The participants were selected from students that were on or had just completed a Foundation Degree programme, so their experiences of study were still current (please see Table 2 and Appendix 5 for further details of the students and their families). All of the students were

selected as they previously discussed a range of experiences in their tutorials, varying between some support (four participants) or little support from their husband (two participants) and some were selected as I had no prior knowledge of changes to their identity and family relationships (four participants) so was therefore unbiased. I found as I was analysing the data that I was marginalising those participants who received no family support due to their single parent status and I wanted to explore this further.

HE status of participants			
	Full time	*Part time*	*Total*
First year students	3	1	4
Second year students	1	3	4
Third year degree top up year students	2	1	3

Ages of participants				
	20-29	*30-39*	*40-49*	*50-59*
Number of participants	1	4	5	1

Age categories of children of participants			
	Other	*Primary*	*Secondary or university*
Number of participants	2 (pre-school and primary) 1 (primary and secondary)	5	3

Educational status of husbands					
	Up to level 2 (GCSE or O Level)	*Up to level 3 (A level, BTEC or NVQ)*	*Up to level 4 (HNC)*	*Up to level 5 (HND)*	*Up to level 6 (Degree)*
Number of participants	*5*	*0*	*1*	*1*	*3*

Table 2: Participants details (see also Appendix 5)

I initially selected six mature women with families, from a usual cohort size of 40 students across the year groups. This initial group of six rose to eleven to encompass a mature woman from the pilot interview, two first year students, one student who withdrew from the HE programme and also one single parent (who were also first year students). Initially I only chose women students who had completed all coursework as I did not wish for there to be any conflict of interest when assessing their coursework. However, during the interviews the students stated that most of the changes to themselves and points of tension occurred in the first year of study, they spoke about increased stress, dips in self confidence, adjustments and conflict in relationships and roles. This led me to want to explore the mind mapping tool with first year students to see their responses and experiences. To overcome this ethical tension of interviewing first years, I utilised internal verification procedures to ensure their assessment grades were allocated fairly and in line with our marking policy (see Chapter 4.6 and Appendix 9).

A small sample size can be limiting and restraining, but it allows the illumination of in-depth stories in order to achieve a contextual picture or snapshot in time. This enabled me to delve deeper into the personal stories of each participant using multiple methods to construct an in depth qualitative study. Previous studies (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Pascall and Cox, 1993) concerned larger sample sizes and combined the comments of all the women to illuminate key themes. Using a small sample of women enabled me to illuminate the richness of their stories as a whole and gave me breadth in the findings.

May (2011) advocates the importance of building a rapport with participants in order to gain cooperation. Although, Oakley (2000) stated that this can be false and exploitative as rapport and friendship cannot be achieved in an interview. As the women selected are already known to me there is already a strong rapport established through the tutoring and lecturer/student relationship. Like Lehrer (2013), I felt able to ask questions that may have seemed personal or of a sensitive nature, as trust was already established. This tutor/student relationship also influenced the response rate, as all women participants readily agreed to be part of the research process when asked. Although I had not met the women's husbands before the research commenced, I had anticipated that my rapport and relationship with the women would encourage their husbands to participate. I was aware that I had not developed a rapport with the men so tried to put them at ease through offering them refreshments when they came to the unfamiliar college based research environment. This simple act was chosen deliberately to try to make the atmosphere less formal and more conversational. As I already had a connection with the women, this seemed to fuse some sort of tentative connection with the men, as their wife was known to me. This gave us some commonality and appeared to also aid the rapport between us. This is an example of social capital being utilised within the research process in order to gain access to participants.

4.3 Methods

Through initially selecting female participants known to me, I was confident to be able to take risks and use multiple methods to illuminate individual experiences through an open ended approach (Reinhart and Davidman, 1992). The risks were personal ones, as essentially I am a person that values a structured approach so using multiple methods and an open ended format that may limit my ability to control the research journey did not initially sit well with me. However, balancing this with knowing the participants, feeling secure in my ability to relate to the women participants gave me the self confidence to try a research design that was new to me that reflected feminist principles.

Within my chosen research design I chose to use multiple forms of media (Creswell, 2009; Etherington, 2004), to collect data (e.g. reflective journals, mind mapping, emails etc) to create a detailed picture. I wished to utilise participatory methods and really listen to the women's voices through this multi media approach.

4.3.1 Mosaic approach

I choose to utilise Clark and Moss's (2011) mosaic approach as a process of collecting data which advocates the use of multi methods to co-construct meaning. It was developed in early years settings as a research technique with children, staff and parents. It also is a tool that can encourage participants to 'step back and reflect on their views and experiences' (Clark and Moss, 2011:4). The main principles of the mosaic approach are participatory methods, encouraging reflexivity; having an adaptable approach and focusing on lived in experiences of the participants (Clark and Moss, 2011). Participatory methods empower the participants to actively take a role in the research process through giving them a voice and agency through becoming a researcher themselves. This method is relevant as it is social constructionist in nature recognising multiple meanings, not just one truth (Clark and Moss, 2011). Although the rationale for this method is to enable children and their voices to be central to the research process, I could see the merits of developing this approach with women. My application of the mosaic approach was to encourage the women to have some ownership of the research process, particularly as they were discussing the sensitive issues of their family relationships and changing identity. This approach enabled the women participants to select their own methods (for phase 2), which were in tune with themselves and their preferences, to encourage individuality and co-construction of meanings.

In order to encourage the participants to reflect, I suggested that they used multimedia methods such as mind mapping, photos, reflective journal entries and discussions with others. This enabled them to consider how they perceived themselves, their different strands of identity, an account of their family context and changes that had happened to them and their relationships during their HE programme of study. As a mature student, mother and also lecturer I felt

confident to draw on my own experiences, tutoring skills and knowledge of the women to be sensitive to their body language and to have some appreciation of when to encourage them to develop their ideas further and when to leave a topic. This adopted Schön's (1991) approach of 'reflection in action' as I was able to think on my feet and adjust my response according to the situation.

4.3.2 Phases of the research

My research was set out in three phases (see Appendix 8)

- *Phase one – Initial mind mapping and focused interview:* The aim of the initial interview was to introduce the topic to the women, through the use of a mind mapping technique to focus on the family context and positioning in the family.
- *Phase two – Second interview, participant led :* Participants were encouraged to bring artefacts (for example: photographs, reflective journal entries) or discussion themes to the second interview to elaborate their points and illuminate their experiences and reflections.
- *Phase three – Interviews with husbands:* To illuminate the topic from the husbands' perspectives.

4.4 Validity and reliability of the methods

There are debates on the use of the terms reliability and validity in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Morse et al., 2002). Many researchers use the word trustworthiness (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), or validity strategies (Cresswell, 2009) to demonstrate creditability of the research findings. Morse et al.'s (2002) criticism of this is that trustworthiness or validity strategies can evaluate the rigour of a piece of research at the *end* of a study but this fails to ensure the rigour of the research *throughout* the study. Morse et al. (2002) argues that using verification strategies can ensure that reliability and validity of the data is actively maintained. Verification strategies (see Appendix 9) enable the researcher to stop and reflect on the research process and make modifications where necessary. This tied in well with

my research journal approach of reflecting and changing my methods throughout every stage of the research inquiry. The verification strategies (Morse et al., 2002) I considered were:

- Methodological coherence – methods were adapted and changed during the process, for example husbands were included in the course of the research as a response to the research data

- Appropriate sample – a cross section of students were selected, all husbands were given an opportunity to participate

- Collecting and analysing data concurrently – reviewing the data as it was generated, enabled me to make modifications and ensure the research questions were addressed

- Thinking theoretically – by assessing the data as it was produced, I was able to see themes and theories emerging. This resulted in widening my research area to include first year students and a single parent

Reliability and validity have been considered and reflected on through the use of these verification strategies (Morse et al., 2002) thus ensuring academic rigour (see Appendix 9).

4.5 Data analysis

The focused interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by an administrative assistant. A synopsis of each of the participant's experiences was constructed using their artefacts (where obtainable) and focused interview responses as a resource in order to record their narratives as a whole initially (see Appendix 12 for condensed synopsises). Initially I used the themes of strands of identity; identity changes; impact on family relationships and family support to initially structure the data and construct the synopses. These themes were created partially through my review of the literature; my research aims (May, 2011) and through the questions set by the mind mapping exercise in phase one. This enabled me to see the stories as a whole to begin with, rather than as fragmented pieces into codes or themes which may lose the integrity and meaning of what was said (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Seeing each synopsis as a complete narrative enabled me to have a better understanding of each woman's comments before I began to dissect this and look for key themes.

Content analysis of the data occurred through a process of coding in order to find similarities and differences in these key themes using colour coding of the individual interview transcripts in order to make comparisons (May, 2011). The frequency of key phrases (May, 2011) was also analysed using common words such as stress, guilt, etc in order to make further comparisons and look for patterns in the women's responses. The common words were determined initially through my awareness of their frequency of their occurrence; this was then collaborated with a system of counting to corroborate this. Each word was considered in context as well as different words with the same meaning, for example, mum, mummy and mother. After the initial coding I managed my data by focusing on both each synopsis and theme in order to illuminate my understanding through in depth interpretation of the reduced data (Spencer et al., 2014). I used a framework approach (see Spencer et al., 2014) to organise my data which enabled me to combine the thematic and case analysis approach. It was important to keep the cases as a whole in the analysis so that they weren't taken out of context (Bazeley, 2013), but themes across the data could be generated. I did not wish to generalise the women or the men's experiences but draw on the differences and similarities in their narratives.

Using a thematic framework analysis approach enabled me to be systematic, comprehensive and transparent in my data analysis through familiarisation, constructing the initial thematic framework, indexing and sorting, reviewing and connecting the data then summarising the data (Spencer et al., 2014). Although this was time consuming, it allowed me to develop an in depth knowledge of the variety of data I had gathered. This enabled a thematic mind map to be constructed; this was defined and redefined (Saldana, 2013), in order to develop a theoretical model of analysis. My final three themes were identity construction during HE, the impact of HE on the family and family capital (see Appendix 10). Initially I explored the theme of support systems on offer in the family. Through further analysis of the data looking for similarities and common themes and through scrutiny of the literature I developed this into the conceptual framework of family capital.

4.5.1 Possible bias in the data collection methods and analysis

My reflexive approach continued with the data analysis as I was aware of the critical role I played when analysing and interpreting the data (Doucet, 2006). Etherington (2004:19) sees reflexivity as 'an ability to notice our responses to the world around us…and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communications and understandings'. Therefore understanding the social context is also important in justifying my methods of data analysis.

In the social context of the college and my research, the women were all known to me, whereas the men were not. As the women already had an established rapport with me and trust built through the lecturing environment, this had to be established with the men in their interview. The trust and rapport was on a deeper and more meaningful level with the women as I had built relationships with them over time and the relationships would continue after the research had completed. This was in contrast to the men who I may not have contact with again. The differences in my relationship with the men and women could lead to concerns about the reliability and validity of this research.

Through using positioning as a conceptual tool here it is worth noting that the women (and the men) may have positioned and presented themselves consciously in a certain light. Although the women were quite informal and involved me in the retelling of their stories using phrases as 'You know', 'You know what I mean?', 'We have talked about this before', I am still aware that they may have deliberately positioned themselves in the exchange. Positioning may also account for how they positioned themselves in terms of the accounts of their social identities (May, 2011), as the interview process is a way of a participant accounting for their position in different relationships and making sense of it (May, 2011).

My own experiences of this subject may have influenced my analysis as I could have re-presented the stories given to me and made conscious and sometimes unconscious decisions about which aspects of their stories to illuminate and which aspects to disregard (Etherington, 2004). In order to refute my initial assumptions regarding marital relationships being under

strain when the wife studies I took time to critically evaluate the data to find similarities and differences (Silverman, 2010).

4.6 Ethics

When considering an ethical approach a researcher's values cannot be ignored. My own values concerning the importance of HE, finding an effective balance between study and family life, developing student self confidence and identity were apparent in my choice of research design, methods, research questions, and my interpretations. It would be foolish to try to conceal these values as they are the guiding light and measure by which this research has taken place and effect all aspects of the research process (May ,2011). Therefore my values affected my ethics. All ethical decisions were made in line with guidelines from Plymouth University (see Appendix 11 for full ethical protocol). The ethical protocol was changed and amended as the research proceeded to encompass any changes in the research procedures such as including the husbands in the study. The ethical protocol and all amendments were approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. There were three main ethical issues that I was concerned with:

1. Unequal relationship and an imbalance of power due to lecturer and student relationship
2. The ethics of inviting husbands to contribute to the research
3. Gaining ongoing informed consent

Firstly, I was in a position of lecturer to the participants and therefore there was an unequal relationship and an imbalance of power due to lecturer and student relationship. As lecturer and tutor to the female participants, I considered whether this position supported or conflicted with my role as researcher. In terms of the focused interviews, I set boundaries and reiterated that my role was not to advise but to listen, and by facilitating a space for the students to speak, I was acting as co-constructer (as stated by Cassell, 2006) in the formation of their narratives. In the context of this research, the co-construction relationship would not be equal (McNamee and Hosking, 2012), as I was in the dual position of being their lecturer as well as researcher. I used the term co-constructing as I was part of the process, drawing out the participants' narratives and facilitating a safe space for them to do this, rather than being apart and distanced from the

research (McNamee and Hosking, 2012). I decided not to stay silent or unresponsive as acknowledged by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), as it is difficult in narrative inquiry to do this as our own stories effect how we react and respond to the stories of others. Although this was an issue I had raised in the reliability and validity section I do feel it is also an ethical issue as I found myself contributing to their story through offering a different perspective. Through knowing the students I felt in a position where I could ask further questions or extend their thoughts, this was intended to make them reflect more deeply. However, I was aware that this questioning approach needed to be done thoughtfully and through listening to their response, I could ascertain whether they were comfortable with this and judge whether to proceed or not.

I decided to go against research strategies suggested by Etherington (2004) in terms of sharing my own story. Although Etherington (2004) argues that in order for knowledge to be co-constructed then a balance needs to be in place between the researcher and participant with stories shared from both parties, citing that this is ethically appropriate, I disagree. I did not wish to impose my own experiences onto my participants as I was aware of the student/lecturer relationship and felt that there needed to be a professional boundary in place for both parties. My main goal through the research was to illuminate the stories of the women, not my own, hence I did not want to detract from their stories by interjecting with my own. Initially I believed that by doing this I could ignore my own feelings and experiences on this topic. However, it became apparent as I was listening to the stories of others that there was a stirring and changing of my own perspective and meaning making as my own story and emotions began to focus (see Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). I still did not desire for this to influence the participants, and in some ways did not want to make myself vulnerable, so chose to reflect on and acknowledge my own story and experience through my journal. This meant that I often had an inner battle between my own emotions and reactions during the interviews but it felt appropriate, both professionally and personally, to suppress this until I could express myself in my journal recordings.

Secondly, I deliberated the merits of inviting husbands to contribute to the research, in order to illuminate and add another dimension to the stories offered by the students. Previous research has shown that women's marital relationships can be threatened because of the effects of HE (Edwards, 2003a; Merrill, 1999; Schuller et al., 2004). Although I wanted to expand on the stories and look at wider topics, I did not wish to create discord or conflict by raising issues that may not have been considered or discussed between the pair. Initially I discounted this method as ethically unsuitable. However, as the interviews progressed, it became apparent that my belief was based on my false assumption that the stories told to me would mainly be of conflict and discord. I was surprised when this proved unfounded (see Chapter 7.3.2). At the end of phase two I spoke to the women about including their husbands in the study and whether they would be comfortable with this. My first priority and loyalty was with them as initial participants in the research. They agreed that this was something worth pursuing. I therefore felt that this initial ethical dilemma changed throughout the process in response to the data construction and views of the participants. The husbands who participated in the research appeared relaxed in the interviews and gave consent at the start of the interview for their comments to be shared with their wives. However, one husband did want an opportunity to review this at the end of the interview after he had reflected on what he had said. On reflection, he gave consent.

Thirdly there was the issue of informed consent. All participants were fully briefed regarding the nature of the study, their involvement, confidentiality and dissemination of the material in the format of a consent form. However it was important that the participants realised that consent was an ongoing negotiation. I needed to be aware of the participants' body language, for example if they began to look uncomfortable and wished to stop or not discuss certain issues any further during either phase one or phase two. This was evident in Esme's story as she showed distress recounting the catalyst that had led her to question her own relationship with her husband; this resulted in her crying and being upset. I offered her support through acknowledging her distress and offering her a handkerchief which seemed appropriate, I also

suggested that we stopped the interview. She did not wish this to happen but it was important that I was able to respond quickly and sensitively to the needs of the participants.

During phase two of the research, some of the women brought back pictures and text messages from their children. As I had not gained permission for the inclusion of these mediums from the children I gained consent from the mother. The mothers assured me that they had asked for the children's permission for the items to be used as part of the research.

Initially I decided only to interview the women at the college, as this was a professional space that they were familiar with. However three women wanted to participate in the research and were unable to come to the college. As I did not wish to exclude them from the research I offered them alternative venues such as the park and the participant's home. Being in the park offered no further ethical issues as we found a quiet space away from other people but being in the home raised many ethical issues. I had to reiterate to the student the nature of the discussion and explain that as her children were in the home I would stop the discussion whenever they walked in, as I did not wish for them to overhear the conversation. I thought this would make the discussion very difficult and stilted if the children popped in and out of the interview space, but it proved very natural and indeed seemed like a reflection of the student's study life at home. She was very confident and un-phased by any interruptions and quickly got back to her original train of thought. This reiterated for me how the women study in busy households. It showed me first-hand the importance of family to this particular student, but also her own unique way of balancing her own need for study, being part of a research process and the immediate needs of her family. This was a valuable observation of the research process.

The following safeguards were also employed to further protect the participants' rights:

1. Consent was obtained from all participants through the use of an ethical protocol showing the nature and extent of their involvement with the research collection. This protocol was in line with the Plymouth University's guidelines for research. This protocol was amended to include husbands.

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2. Students were initially selected on the basis that they had completed all assessments for that semester; therefore there were no concerns about their comments affecting the assessment process. All participating current students' work was internally verified to ensure a fair and non biased outcome.

3. No data was shared with fellow lecturers or external verifiers that were involved in any other assessments, therefore taking part in this research would have no bearing on their results.

4. Students could withdraw from the research at any time until the data collection process was complete, they did not need to provide a reason for this. They were reassured that choosing not to participate, or withdrawal from the project, would in no way affect the module assessment outcome of any students.

5. As this was a potentially sensitive subject area, as the participants were discussing changes in their own family relationships, they were able to stop the interviews at any time or choose not to answer any questions that they may have felt uncomfortable with. This was reiterated during the data construction stage.

6. All participants had initial access to their individual synopses to check accuracy of my interpretation of their narratives.

4.6.1 Limitations of the ethical protocol

Although all students were anonymous in the research process, there were limits to confidentiality as they may have been recognisable to each other in the report due to their close relationships as a student group. To help reduce this risk, I set up interview times confidentially, away from other students or through an email, so that others in the student group were not aware that they were taking part in this research. I also did not disclose to others that they were participating in this research, but explained that if they chose to divulge to others they could then be at risk of being identifiable. When their husbands were included in phase three this was renegotiated with the participants and it was explained in written and verbal format that this could affect their anonymity as the husbands may be able to recognise them in the research

report. I also asked the participants if they would like their stories joined with the husbands and told alongside each other, they all gave consent for this.

Due to the nature of the research topic I was aware that participants could talk about personal issues or difficulties that they may be experiencing in their relationships. To address this, boundaries were put in place in the focused interviews with a reiteration that my role was not to counsel them or offer guidance but to listen. I was also able to sign post students to the relevant counselling services both internally and externally to the college if they wished to further discuss any of the issues that they had raised.

4.7 Summary

The sections above lay out my stance as a researcher and the methods employed that flow from my methodological perspective and position as a mature women student and mother. The qualitative research methods employed fit the research questions by facilitating a flexible approach which encourages a participatory response from the women students through narrative accounts of their lived in experiences as students, mothers and wives.

CHAPTER 5 – 'YOU TRANSFORM YOUR WHOLE DEPTH OF THINKING … YOU JUST EVOLVE WITH IT'

This chapter explores the transformative effect of HE on women's identity, changes to their belief systems, perspectives and behaviours. The claims made here regarding changes to identity and the impact of these transformations on family relationships are written from the perspectives of the women based on their accounts. There were mixed responses from the women regarding a definition of identity, thus supporting my earlier comments (see Chapter 3.1) that there are many variables and usages of the term. They described three main facets of identity but discussed the latter two more fully. Firstly, by physical or personal characteristics: '*It's about somebody's individual personality and appearance',* (Heidi). Secondly, as perceived as who they were and how they behaved: '*It's what I am as a person, it's how I am I guess',* (Christina). Finally, as assigned by others or through environmental influences: '*Identity to me is more of how others see me than how I see myself',* (Maggie).

At the start of the interview, the women defined their identity in terms of roles or labels assigned by others or in the social context of family, paid work or their social environment. For example, 'mum'/ 'mother', 'daughter', 'wife', 'worker', 'friend' (see Figure 4). These findings were established through the process of each participant describing their identity through mapping it out on their mind map in phase 1 of the interviews (see Figure 4). They saw themselves through identification (Lawler, 2014) and relationships with others (Woodward, 2004). For example:

> I always wanted to be the best mum … I now have a good relationship with my children so I must have done something right. (Esme)

Figure 4: Strands of identity as identified by Jennifer

Being a mother was the most important aspect of identity for all of the women. Yet they also saw being a wife, daughter and part of a wider family network as significant. Their identity was also linked to their working role as over half of the women acknowledged their paid work as being part of who they were as it gave them status. This shows that identity for the women was clearly aligned with those practical roles of who they were and the relationships that they maintained, rather than their dispositions.

5.1 I've always been a mum … actually this [HE] is for me

Motherhood was the strand of identity that featured most heavily in all of their accounts of changing identity and the effects of HE on their family relationships (see Figure 4). This was supported by comments women made to explain how they felt about being a mother prior to HE:

> I was a mother and that was my life. (Heidi)
>
> My main identity is a mum, that's my biggest responsibility. (Jennifer)

They defined being a mother in terms of the time they were able to give to their children. Being able to work part time or be a stay at home mother, be the main carer and be available to their children was of importance to the women. They wanted to have time to play with their children, attend their sporting activities and provide nurturance, support and care:

> I always wanted to be a mum, it was my choice … I chose to work part time so I could be there for my children. (Esme)

> I only worked part time and I was at home with the children, also I saw that as my place. My husband literally went to work, he earnt the money and came home and played with the children, so I was very much a housewife, mother and wife, (Angelina)

These comments show two different perspectives on being a mother; *wanting* to do that role and feeling that it was a role *assigned* to them. For example, Betty (see Chapter 6.3.2) faced opposition from her parents when they were concerned with how the course was affecting her stress levels as she had suffered from post natal depression before. They wanted her to focus on 'being a Mum again' thus positioning her as a mother needing to fulfil the obligations of that role as they perceived them. These two different perspectives may affect how the women feel about committing a proportion of their time and focus into HE studies. How a mother defines parenthood affects her choices in life, for herself and her children. Before HE, the women had made choices that put their children's needs[10] above their own career or self satisfaction needs.

5.1.1 Changing concepts of motherhood

Prior to HE, motherhood was seen by the women as a separate and distinctive role to fatherhood. All of the mothers (with the exception of Kim) took full responsibility for household tasks (e.g. cooking, cleaning, shopping) and the main responsibility for the care of the children. Although they delegated some roles, the main responsibility for completing household tasks remained with them. They saw being a mother and housewife as part of their identity, with clear and separate gendered roles to their husbands. However, during the course of

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[10] The term 'children's needs' is difficult to define (see Chapter3.3.3). The women use it in this study as the essential requirements they must provide to aid the healthy development of their children. This is individual to each woman and can encompass physical, emotional, financial, intellectual or social needs.

the study it became clear that these roles could be interchanged and were flexible enough to encompass the changing needs of the family due to the study needs of the women.

The women's concept of being a mother, who put the needs of their children first, changed during the process of the HE programme. This was partly attributed to balancing motherhood and studying. They began to prioritise their own requirements, such as their desire to free up time to study, Heidi's account illustrates this. Heidi decided to be a 'stay at home mum' whilst her children were of preschool age and combined this with studying. This meant that when her children were all of primary school age she was qualified to follow a career pathway that would support the family financially and educationally through her developing knowledge base. The following comments illustrate this further:

> The amount of work that I had to do was so much that I was on the computer every other day …Sometimes Sam [young son] would sit on my lap when he started getting tired and he would fall asleep on my lap while I was sat on the computer typing. I actually loved that time in the afternoon when he would go to sleep. (Heidi)

Through giving her son this emotional support and responding to his care needs alongside of studying, Heidi felt able to balance the demands of motherhood and being a student. Other participants were more transparent about putting their needs to study as a priority, using the justification that this was their opportunity to put themselves first:

> I kept thinking I've got to do this for myself, I've always been a mum … actually this is for me. (Esme)

It became apparent through the process of the interviews that the women's identification as a mother changed during the HE experience. Although the strand of mother was important for them it was a fluid and evolving part of who they were. As their constructions of themselves changed so did their understanding of motherhood:

> I've always sat down, I've done activities with them, my house has always been like a pre-school as well … we always have the play dough out, the paint … I suppose that has had an impact as I haven't done as much as I feel I should … I have not had the time…I now sit at one end of the table and my nine year old will get her homework and sit at the other and she feels like we are both working. So in that respect I think it's having an impact on her. (Jennifer)

Jennifer changed her view of a mother needing to always be there to entertain her children to one of being able to study alongside of them. Although she sometimes experienced guilt about giving them less time, she could also see how this had enabled her daughter to have a positive educational work ethic. This was an unintended outcome of her HE studies.

5.1.2 Defining other aspects of their identity

The women found it difficult to initially describe their identity outside of roles and relationships with others. Talking about their roles seemed easier to the women and was discussed more frequently than trying to define who they were in terms of identity or dispositions. Only Esme, at the beginning of the interview, described dispositions of being humorous, confident (but not educationally) and assertive. However, through the process of the interviews, the women began to use dispositions to define themselves. The women reflexively repositioned themselves as they reconsidered and elaborated on their points. Although I cannot claim that the interview changed their identity, through talking through their experiences they were able to verbalise them in a different way. Although their identity appeared to change, which they attributed to HE, this is not something that they may have reflected on verbally to others to this depth, therefore the nature of the narrative methods employed gave them a space and an opportunity to do this. The women then began to use dispositions of self confidence, work ethic and emotional resilience as a result of their changing knowledge base in order to identify themselves. These dispositions were strongly situated in their relationships. Prior to HE, six of the women participants positioned themselves as not being educationally able, and lacking in self confidence in their own academic abilities because of negative experiences at school. They believed that their confidence developed as a result of their HE studies. For example:

> I was much less confident than what I am now, umm, I always felt that I wasn't
> as good as other people … I thought I would never amount to anything
> educationally. (Doris)

This is a position that some women had been offered by others that they had accepted, or a position that they categorised themselves with. For example Heidi had been labelled as not

achieving at school by her teachers. Whereas in contrast, Doris had positioned herself as not being good enough even though her teachers encouraged her to pursue HE.

Marie, who was experiencing difficulties in her marriage prior to HE, defined her identity through the destructive relationships she had had previously. She described losing self confidence, control, self belief, self-respect and direction in relation to her identity strand as wife. She did not feel that these relationships acknowledged her achievements or nurtured her self-esteem. Doris stated that her husband wanted her to achieve status through a career rather than being a stay at home mother:

> So my self-respect and self-esteem at this point [prior to HE] were very low ... I was pretty reliant on people that weren't very good for me… he [husband] consistently said, 'You have to do more, being a mum is not enough': he did not respect the mother's role. (Marie)

Although the women spoke of being happy in the role of mother they also did not feel content with the patterns of behaviour or duties assigned to this role and wanted something more:

> I think being at home all the time is lovely, but I think sometimes you need something else in your life. (Heidi)

> I was a mother, wife and daughter… I knew I hadn't found, well I had been in various jobs, none of which I really wanted to do. (Angelina)

The participants selected the Foundation Degree programme as they were actively seeking transformations and a change in their lives. Seven of the participants were already working in early years and wanted to develop their role and expertise, whereas four participants were new to the field. For instance, Marie was looking for a change in direction; she wanted a purposeful career as well as to find achievement and success in something for herself. Betty had previously found status through her paid work in health and social care but felt this was lost as she became a mother. Betty located her identity in workplace status and career success alongside being a mother and saw HE as a space to reconstruct her identity and regain respect and status. Identity change occurred as their perceptions about themselves were redefined and transformed. As discussed in Chapter 3, there can be a period of unrest or adjustment as the women and their families assimilate any transformative changes and adjust to differing forms of identity.

5.2 The course has absolutely, fundamentally changed me!

HE can transform ways of thinking and ways of behaving for women (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Parr, 2000; Pascall and Cox, 1993). This is reflected in changes to their personal beliefs, parenting practices, reflective abilities and self confidence levels, which my findings support. Identity changes and transformations were attributed by the women to an increase in knowledge which brought about a change in perspective (Cherrington and Thornton, 2013). These transformations involved re-examining their values, beliefs and assumptions in light of new knowledge that they gained through module content, wider reading and reflection (Lehrer, 2013; Thompson and Thompson, 2008). The women discussed general changes to their values base and beliefs through being able to perceive topics and situations from different perspectives by utilising an analytical and reflective approach. Marie's story (see Appendix 13) illustrates how her identity transformation changed her philosophy on life, reframed her position in the family, which she believes played a part in her marriage to ending:

> I will not give up on the course and chose that over my marriage … I have a
> changed perspective … I own my own space… I am in charge of me. (Marie)

5.2.1 Increased knowledge and a change in perspective

All of the women experienced a change of perspective through gaining additional early years knowledge and through the process of reflection. Through education, reflection is generated (Osgood, 2006) and this is something that is facilitated through the early years module content and through class discussions and assessment opportunities. The women credited their emerging reflective skills to reading at a different level, being more knowledgeable and changing perspectives because of the module content.

Although in Early Years programmes the intention of critical reflection is to bring about a change in professional practice (Lehrer, 2013), their reflection also occurred around issues of child development and learning, as well as relationships with others. This highlights an important aspect of identity and reveals that learning, reflection and change is not constrained to one strand of identity (e.g. as a worker) but can be transferred across other strands such as a

mother or a wife. Demonstrating that the 'academic and personal can be interlinked', (Mercer, 2007:24) as critical reflection impacted on the women students and their interactions in their families:

> … it does make her think twice about how she interacts with her children … I think she is more reflective, yeah, because I think it is easy as you get older to get tunnel vision and I think it has opened her mind to new ways and means. (Alan)

This change in perspective can be grouped into five themes: developing an analytical approach, seeing alternative perspectives and viewpoints, a change in personal relationships and interactions with others, an increase in self belief which led to a change in aspirations for many of the women.

These changes in perspective transformed their identity in a number of ways:

> I no longer take things personally. (Doris)

> I look at the bigger picture now … I look at things differently now …my perceptions are broader than before. (Esme)

> I am less erratic now. (Kim)

> It has given me more of a presence now, I always over simplified things before, now I don't need to. (Maggie)

Increased knowledge and a change in perspective brought about fundamental changes to two main areas of identity change: 'parenting' and 'professionalism'. They re-examined and changed their practices and perspectives as a parent and as an early years worker. Parenting will be considered as part of this thesis but the theme of increased professional knowledge will not be addressed here as it does not fit into the scope and breadth of this study.

5.2.2 Parenting

As part of their early years studies, the women found themselves analysing their own parenting practices as their knowledge of child development increased. This led to a greater awareness of their children's needs and also enabled them to change how they parented. Many participants are proud of their developing parenting skills:

> Doing the course has made me more in-depth, I can now look at it from a more theoretical point of view … I think that has helped me so I can analyse, you know, if my daughter is feeling down or whatever and I can think how can I handle this, so I can talk to her better and actually understand this is the stage she is going through. So I am meeting her needs better because I am more knowledgeable. (Esme)

However, this increased knowledge actually made two students examine their past parenting in a negative light which led to guilt but also a change in practice.

> I understand their [children] needs better and I understand their behaviour better and I understand my natural reaction a lot better, but that makes me feel really guilty because most of the time as a parent I think you react in the moment with the instinct … whereas now and from that guilt I probably over compensate so it does affect the way that I parent. (Kim)

Through a change in their perspectives, they began to challenge and redefine their identity as a mother. For some, this led to a period of unbalance or unrest (Erichsen, 2011). However, Kim was able to see this conflict in parenting approaches as a positive process as she viewed each module as an opportunity to reflect on previous parenting practices (see quote below). Kim had previous experience of being a young single mother with little support, she discussed that this was a difficult time for her, both financially and emotionally. Although Kim is now married and in a different position, she still felt that it was important to reflect back and compare her previous experiences to her current practices. The course content gave her an opportunity to question her parenting style and understand some of her earlier experiences. Through restructuring and reinterpreting her past, and formulating a new position; she gained greater control over her life, through the transformation of previously held beliefs (Mezirow, 1991):

> …every module that we have done has been a little bit of therapy as well... actually understanding some of the theory behind different aspects of things that I have been through has made it easier to understand things and let them go or resolve them ... I have been able to let go some of those demons and things which have been quite difficult as a parent. (Kim)

Questioning what was formerly taken for granted, can create uncertainty and can be viewed as disruptive (Erichsen, 2011). For Kim, it could be argued that examining previous parenting practices, which she deemed were inadequate and ill informed, was stressful and emotional. However, all of the women believed that even though analysing at a deeper level could be problematic, as you question former practices, it resulted in their parenting style changing for

the better. Angelina explained that she felt she over analysed her parenting decisions now. However, she still believed that this critical approach brought about benefits to her parenting and saw it as positive:

> I criticised myself heavily as a parent … each module that we have done has made me think about my own parenting. (Angelina)

This change in parenting style was confirmed by her husband:

> …she's learning some great stuff to actually bring back … having more knowledge about certain areas certainly helps you deal with behaviour management. (Bradley)

Transformation through knowledge acquisition also brought about a change in Marie's parenting and revolutionised her whole identity as a mother. Prior to HE, Marie was fearful for her children's safety and was overly protective of them. She was afraid to let them take risks and explore inside of the safe context of play (for example climbing high on a climbing frame). However, though a greater awareness of the importance of child led play and creating opportunities for children to practice decision making and independence, Marie changed her parenting style. As argued in Chapter 3.4.1, through the early years module content, students can become more aware of their value base. This puts them in a stronger position to influence, change and transform situations around themselves, both professionally and on a personal level. Marie's identity, prior to HE, was tied in to feelings of low self worth and lack of self belief. Marie believed that this restricted the opportunities she gave her children such as horse riding and climbing trees as she was fearful of the risks. Marie's self-transformation changed her perspectives on parenting:

> The course has completely changed me as a parent … My children have a completely different childhood now… I always said, 'You can't ride [horse ride]', because there was a panic at her [daughter] hurting herself, she is now riding, she's just spending more time outside.

Through increased knowledge and changing parenting practices the women felt that they had also become better role models for their children:

> This will make me a good strong positive role model for them …. I want them to grow up confident … the best way to teach your children is by doing it yourself. (Doris)

This was not just tied into educational role modelling but also through identity changes perceived or observed by others. Marie's daughter Katie (aged 14) contributed to the research through writing a brief summary commenting on how her mother had changed during the course. The change she discusses also demonstrates her feelings about her mother and step father's disintegrating marital relationship whilst on the programme (see Appendix 13 for further details):

> Mummy has become a lot stronger since she's been doing the course, she's become a better parent all round, its put Harry [Step Father] to the test as it's shown how much he does/doesn't care about how mummy feels about what she wants to do. I look up to mummy a lot more, she's become a lot more of an inspiration. (Marie)

HE study can be seen to lead to conflict between the strands of mother and student. Although Hilary was a single parent and did not fit the research criteria, her story was included here as an alternative example of transformation and resulting conflict of how she dealt with the competing strands of mother and HE student. Although she felt she had transformed her thinking on issues raised in the early years course content, she was not willing to compromise on her time with the children. She was unwilling to put study time ahead of family time:

> I feel more stimulated, generally more aware of looking at things in different ways. I adjust how I do things in my own routines…It is not a negative, but I have tussles but largely with myself and what I can achieve. I will not give up on the children so have to relinquish study time and achievement …I have a lot of frustration, as I do not give the Foundation Degree 100%, but feel I am giving what I can. I could give more but what gives? …. It does work, as long as I am happy to under achieve ... I won't compromise! (Hilary)

Although she recognised that her thinking was transformed there were limits to how much time she could devote to her studies as her strand of being a mother was more important than the student strand. This is an alternative perspective to the stories already presented. However, the difference is that the other women received support from different family members, Hilary received none. Hilary made the decision to not compromise on her time with the children so she limited the amount she studied.

An increase in knowledge and a change in perspective as a consequence of their HE studies linked to a growth in self confidence and increased feelings of guilt for the women.

5.2.3 Increased self confidence - 'The more you achieve the more you think you can do this'

The gaining of 'self confidence' is a term used in several studies on mature students (see Mercer, 2007; Christie et al., 2008) and can be manifested in social situations and on a personal level. The HE environment is seen as a 'protected staging area' where self confidence can be developed through a safe and supportive space (Mezirow, 1978:102).

The women attributed their growing self confidence to their success and achievement in their studies (see Appendix 13 for Doris' story). Mature students can find assessments harder to grasp as they have been out of education for a period of time (Bowl, 2003). When they do achieve success and pass assignments their self confidence is lifted:

> My grades were getting okay and that was certainly helping my confidence …
> my confidence has definitely grown on the course because I am doing it.
> (Angelina)
>
> I do now feel that I am ready to take on things I never thought I would be able
> to… I feel much more confident in making decisions. (Doris)

Growing self confidence, through assignment success, can initiate identity change and self belief. As women develop a sense of confidence in their ability and learn to trust their instincts, they begin to perceive themselves differently through the development of cultural capital:

> I have become more confident in my own capabilities once I did those first two
> assignments … after repeatedly getting passes, you then think, well actually
> what I am putting in I know, it's just having faith in yourself and what has
> happened as the years have gone on, my identity is thinking well, actually I do
> know what I am talking about … It is just having that confidence in yourself
> and I think each time you get a grade … you feel better about yourself.
> (Christina)

The development of self confidence enabled Doris (see Appendix 13) to reposition herself in her relationship with her husband, but also the wider family. She felt more confident to have discussions with her father in law, whereas before she felt intimidated by his status as a consultant within the medical profession. Doris felt more able to play an equal part in conversation exchanges as she realised she was more knowledgeable and able than previously considered. Confidence was raised by nine of the women as an aspect of changed identity. As their perceptions of themselves and their levels of self confidence were raised, so were their

aspirations. Having a new self assurance made them consider possibilities for themselves that they had not entertained before.

5.2.4 Feelings of guilt

The HE programme gives many positive identity changes, such as a rise in self belief, knowledge, self confidence and improved parenting practices, but nine of the women also experienced a sense of guilt. Their guilt was mainly centred on not having as much time for their children, husband or wider family members. The guilt came as a result of the women students' belief that they were neglecting their duties as mother, as they were using family time for HE study. Hilary did not express feelings of guilt, regarding her children, as she made the decision to always choose time with her children over her HE studies. However she felt guilt over a lack of time to study. Previously, the women (who experienced guilt) were the main carers for the children and, on the whole, had the main responsibilities for household tasks. When they had to split their time between their HE studies, family, household tasks and also for many of them part time paid work, this was very difficult. Their HE study therefore could be seen to lead to major disruptions to family life and routines. Kim illustrates this metaphorically:

> In the first year I felt like I'd had a baby, I felt like it was that tiring, that I'd just given birth to another child [laughs]. It just impacted the routine in that same sort of way that when you have a new born baby in your house, it just completely threw everything up in the air and didn't really ever go back to how it was before. (Kim)

The women expressed that they were putting their interests above the family which also added to their feelings of guilt:

> My house has always been like a pre-school [previously to HE] … I suppose that had had an impact, I haven't done as much as I should, or that I am used to doing, because I have not had the time. But that is more of the guilt on my point, for the children and for him [husband]. (Jennifer)

To overcome both family and HE study becoming 'greedy institutes' of time (Edwards, 1993a; Hughes, 2002), the women became effective managers of their daily routine. This enabled them to continue fitting in the essential activities and tasks that they construed as important in order to be a good mother. Heidi prioritised what she saw as the essential tasks of care and

educational activities which gave her less time for play with the children. Encouraging them to play independently was a new concept for Heidi. Esme saw taking time away from the house and her study to spend time with her teenage daughter as essential. Each participant viewed this differently but it was the elements that they could not let go of as a mother. Things like housework or spending time with their friends was not seen as essential to their identity or well being, being a good mother was. This essentially was a change in their identity and how they perceived being an effective mother:

> I realise how much I can achieve by being organised and juggling things …. It is my time really to get a grip on everything in my life and everything I want to be … I want to be a good mum. (Angelina)

Time away from the family was one source of guilt along with the feelings of being distant from the family when the mature women were pre-occupied with study. Feeling distant compounded the feelings of guilt; this affected how they perceived themselves as a mother and a wife, and could be connected to inner conflict and turmoil:

> I just felt I wasn't spending as much time with them and I was always busy … I was always trying to push them away because I wanted to sit down and study so yeah, there has been a hell of a lot of guilt in the last 12 months. (Jennifer)

The high intensity of course demands came as a surprise for the women and they then became torn between their own desire to study and spending time with their families or on family related tasks (for example; care or house work). Previously they had focused on putting the needs of their children as a top priority; this now had to be reconsidered. This created guilt as they felt that they were being selfish and achieving the degree for themselves. This guilt could also be compounded by others (see Chapter 6.3). However all of the women, other than Betty who deferred her studies to prepare herself and her family for the upheaval of studying for a degree, would not give up on the programme. They found strategies to manage, lessen or justify their guilt.

Minimising the amount of time that they studied in front of their children, by studying when they were at school, was one strategy that was utilised by seven of the women. These were mothers with pre-school or primary school aged children. Although the children all knew that their mother studied and went to 'big school', thus being an educational role model for their children, utilising

different strategies such as this enabled the women to feel that they were being effective students and mothers. Also, ensuring that the children were spending time with other family members instead, such as the children's father or grandparents alleviated some of the guilt. Spending time with other family members was also described as enjoyable for the children. Both of these strategies were effective as it allowed them to conceal some of their study time from their children so that the children did not notice or resent their mother's time away from them focused on study activities. Mothers wanted the children to be receiving attention from other family members, as when they studied at home in front of the children they were unable to spend time with the children due to studying. However, there were also times (for example in the school holidays) where the mothers needed to study more intensively whilst the children were at home. The women made additional quality focused time for their children by having clear study times and 'activity/play' times. Or they got the children involved, for example with a stop watch as a way of managing study time so that their quality activity/play time with mum was ring fenced and protected:

> The main times I study in front of them are in holiday times because study doesn't stop, because they're off school. My compromise is that I say, 'I need to get an hour or so done here, if you can play really nicely and then mummy will take you out afterwards' … they don't complain about it they know I'm doing it for a reason, because I want to be a teacher one day. (Angelina)

The women felt responsible for managing these strategies and ensuring that they could balance the needs of the family (particularly the children) with their need to study, thus ensuring that neither was neglected. For the women their perceptions of what it was to be 'a mother', was guiding them in their decision making and their efforts to show that they could manage HE and family life and be successful in both:

> If there was a problem you know and an issue and stress in the family I'd probably think it was my fault for not giving everyone enough time or putting too much pressure on my husband to do things when I should be doing it … If I can balance it all and keep everybody happy and that's kind of what I hold to myself, is that you know I need to do this for myself and why shouldn't I? (Angelina)

Through balancing the competing demands of their study and their family, the women (apart from Hilary) felt that they could cope with juggling different roles. This justified their studying and time away from the family. Although they felt guilty about the lessened time with their children,

they could also justify it in terms of what the children would gain from them doing the degree. This enabled them to balance the conflict of their guilt and their need to be an HE student and complete their studies:

> However much I love my children I have to think about my future as well … I want to be able to help my own children financially and academically and that is what drives me more than anything. (Heidi)

Although self confidence is raised and changes occur to identity, guilt over a lack of time for the children and family seem to be a real issue of concern for mature women. For some women they were able to minimise the effect of this guilt through different strategies of separating or connecting their studies (see Chapter 6.1.4 for further discussion). However, justification as to the value and importance of their HE study was the most important method in eliminating or minimising the effects of guilt and thus permitting them to continue studying.

5.3 Summary

The women's identity, in this study, was firmly located in motherhood. Initially they found it difficult to identify different strands of their identity other than as defined in their roles and relationships, particularly firstly as a mother and secondly as a wife. This indicates a complex picture and explains why decisions for the women were determined by how it would affect their family. Motherhood affected their career choices and position in the family as they were mainly responsible for childcare and household tasks.

The findings show that identity change, through transformation, was a key consequence for mature women students when returning to HE study. Through assignment success at HE level, their self confidence was enhanced. This affected their identity and family life as they felt more confident and able to take on different challenges as a faith in their own capabilities was generated. Previous beliefs of themselves, and particularly their constructions of motherhood, were challenged, reinterpreted, redefined and ultimately transformed through the process of critical reflection. Their change in perspectives enabled them to modify their parenting practices and become more reflective and analytical, as well as develop their early years knowledge base. This indicates that learning is not confined to one strand of identity or seen in isolation, but

knowledge acquisition, acquired through HE, can be transmitted across to other aspects of identity.

When the women choose to embark on a programme of HE study, they actively made a choice that considered their own career needs and personal development above the needs of the family; this went against their normal pattern of behaviour. This resulted in divergence, as how their studies would affect their children and their role as a mother was principally a prime area of concern for the women. This could also be linked to early years values of child centred pedagogy. When they began to change their parenting practices or reconstruct their beliefs about being a mother, conflict occurred. This conflict was mainly an internal battle of feelings of guilt and wanting to pursue their own interests of HE study.

Transformation through HE was not seen as without cost or impact on the family. Issues of lack of time for their children, husband or household tasks was a recurring theme, as fore mentioned this was connected to guilt. To overcome these feelings of guilt of a lack of time for the family, the women developed two methods of dealing with this: practical strategies and justification of how HE would benefit the family. Through practical strategies of allocating their time differently, minimising the amount of time they studied in front of their children by studying when they were not around, or ensuring that their children were being supported by other family members, they felt able to balance the needs of the family and their need to study. By justifying the benefits of their study to the family (and themselves) through educational role modelling, through raising their children's aspirations and the hopes of providing financial stability through an enhanced career trajectory, then these feelings of guilt could also be minimised. Minimising the guilt was seen as significant for the women students as HE study was important for their own self confidence and was not something that they were willing to give up. Subsequently to HE, being a mother continued to be of prime importance to the women but the women reconsidered and transformed their construction of this.

CHAPTER 6– IMPACT ON THE FAMILY

This chapter explores the effects of a woman's participation in HE on the rest of the family[11].
The women's HE experience had a profound effect on their identity, this then impacted on their
family too. Through the practical implications of studying, changes to the family routines and
structures ensued as a consequence of the mature women engaging in HE study. This affected
their position in the family and their relationship with their husband, their children and wider
family members such as their parents.

**6.1 Husband – 'Actually the biggest change is in my relationship [husband], that's the
impact'**

Higher Education was linked to fundamental changes in relationships between wives and their
husbands[12], due to a transformation in the woman's identity as well as change in roles in the
family. A set of themes emerged which can be categorised into three areas of change in the
marital relationship. Firstly, the women's identity change had an impact on the husband.
Secondly, this resulted in changes in the relationship which (thirdly) was linked to fundamental
changes in position in the relationship between the husband and wife. However this was not
always a linear process. For example, the woman's identity change could lead her to reposition
herself within the family with more confidence; this could result in a change in the relationship.

These changes had both positive and negative consequences on their relationship:

> Actually the biggest change is in my relationship, that's the impact. (Esme)
>
> It's changed both our lives; it's changed everyone's life, even the kids! (Alan)

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[11] The remarks here about the family are made by the women unless otherwise indicated.
[12] 8 out of 10 couples

6.1.1 Identity changes – Effects of the women's identity change on the husband

Increased self confidence, a more self reflective approach and an ability to see things from multiple perspectives was connected to a change in identity for the women. This was noticed by their husbands (as reported by the three men in the interviews):

> The educational side has given her the belief in herself perhaps a bit more. (Bradley)

These identity changes could then have an effect on their relationship with their husband as some women became calmer, more analytical, more confident and more content. The women saw this as positive and enhancing of their relationships with their husband as communication was aided. Angelina believed that her husband had to accept these changes:

> I think it is the fact that he's [husband] accepted that this [analytical approach] is now part of me. (Angelina)

Yet this acceptance did not happen straight away for Angelina's husband, initially there was a period of unrest within the relationship as positions were challenged:

> This caused quite a lot of conflict between me and my husband in the first year because something would happen and I would say, 'Hold on a minute, let's have a think about this, why is he [son's behaviour] doing this?'….That kind of analytical approach really wound him [husband] up…. I think he adapted to what I was becoming and things I was saying and I think I probably toned it down a bit…a lot of the conflict we had in year one has gone. (Angelina)

In contrast, Alan enjoyed having an increasingly confident wife (Maggie), as he saw her HE as a positive experience:

> I think she's more self satisfied and confident in herself because it's you know, the satisfaction of being able to do that as a mature student has sort of increased her overall confidence … I'm pleased she's doing it really, it's helping her to be more open minded about things. (Alan)

This view was not shared by all participants:

> It has been really tricky, David [husband] has seen me change, and he has really struggled with this kind of confident person now who just doesn't sit quietly and say nothing … he doesn't have to cocoon me and protect me as much. (Doris)

However, eight out of ten women emphasised positive effects on their relationship with their husband.

6.1.2 Changes in the relationship

Through the women's transformation of identity, positive changes in many relationships with their husbands occurred (according to the women). Having a more analytical reflective approach meant discussions were richer but also issues were able to be resolved:

> We do discuss things now and we maybe over analyse things together because Matt [husband] tends to do that as well. (Kim)

> The main major difference has been in my marriage, in the last year I do feel that my husband and I have grown a lot closer. (Angelina)

Feeling closer was not an experience shared by all of the participants. Initially, Doris saw the change and effect on her relationship with her husband as having negative repercussions; however the end result was that their relationship was made stronger. Perceiving the difficulties in her relationship (which she linked to her HE), in this way helped her to justify her studies:

> Although my studies are respected [by her husband] they are not always welcomed … and the impact on relationships, well it has caused issues but actually the flip side of that, you know the issues have to be resolved so every time you resolve an issue you are strengthening something. (Doris)

A change in identity impacted on the relationship but also the effects of the woman's HE studies could be connected to additional tension. These tensions were a result of role changes in the home whilst they were negotiating childcare or household tasks with their husband. These role changes could put an additional strain on a relationship and may highlight or extenuate underlying friction:

> I think though that if there is anything there, any areas of strain that they will be highlighted …Through the pressures that come about at some point, to different degrees you know. (Maggie)

The women were so heavily focused on their HE studies and ensuring that the children did not miss out from having less of their time, that time with their husband was usually reduced to manage this disparity:

> Joe [husband] probably was not a huge priority either at those points: all that really was important was that the children were okay and that I could get on with my studies. I did what I had to do… He [husband] understands what pressure I am under and he doesn't seem to mind. (Heidi)

Eight of the couples, were able to cope with having less time for each other as both husband and wife, seemed to accept that this was only for a period of time. Through having a strong relationship initially then the participants felt that this period of unrest and challenge could be managed:

> You need a strong foundation and you both possibly need to have that initial agreement of this is the journey you are about to go on, this is where you want to be, I think you need to have that quite clear and both be bought into the idea and ethos of it to be honest. (Bradley)

> I think because, because I let go of these things and I had to say to myself you can't do it all, you know let go of that, concentrate on that, and then once you know where you are with your college work you can work on your relationship, you know, you are only letting that go for a little while. (Esme)

As well as having less time for their husbands, all of the women in couples also felt that they experienced stress whilst on the HE programme, which then could affect their husband. This increased stress could lead to difficulties in a number of ways: through the woman becoming tired, grumpy or distancing herself from the family; through the husband having to take on more responsibilities; and through friction and tension when assignments were due in. Assignment deadlines were often a site of additional friction as meeting deadlines was difficult when the women were juggling so many responsibilities as a mother. One participant described financial stress and pressure on the relationship which she connected to her study rather than working, but believed the rewards outstripped any stress or tension:

> He [husband] worries about finances and although our finances are fine and we have the student loan, you don't just get the student loan do you? There is so much paperwork which he deals with … he feels that the rewards are worth it, that we have invested so much time and money and just our whole, and not just me … (Kim)

However the levels of stress, connected to the husband supporting their wife, could lead to unexpected health issues to the husband:

> He [husband] has had to do all the picking up [children from school] and its really affected his stress levels and because there is less time … he didn't think our relationship was affected although it was impacted by the sort of ricochet of

the stress in the day to day. For him he said that it magnifies the stress because things that I might have been doing before if I'm not doing them they still have to be done … last week he started taking beta blockers for stress and anxiety, it's just the length of time that you can manage. (Kim)

Although there was additional stress for the husbands at pressurised assignment deadline times, there was also a certain amount of pride in how they viewed their wives.

6.1.3 Change in position in the marital relationship

As HE transformed the women's identity it also transformed how some husbands saw the women:

It makes her go up in my estimations a little bit because it is hard and you know I am all for further education and stuff. (Alan)

I'm very proud of her [Angelina] and what she has done. (Bradley)

This could change how the women were positioned by their husbands in the relationship. Four of the women, before HE, discussed not feeling equal to their husbands. This could be as a result of their previous identity, as many of the women had negative early educational experiences which left them with a lack of self confidence in their own abilities. The women felt that their increased knowledge gave them an ability to be more informed and analytical in discussions. They also felt that their possible career routes, as a result of HE, gave them more standing and status with their husband. This enriched Kim's relationship and made her discussions with her husband more interesting:

I think doing the course has actually enriched our relationship because maybe its brought me up to the same sort of I don't know if it's the same level but you know we have lots of discussions and things and I think that makes it more interesting. (Kim)

There was also a role change in the relationship brought about by a change in division of labour in the household as eight of the husbands took on a greater share of childcare or household tasks. Childcare support was for two reasons, either to enable them to attend college (e.g. helping with before or after nursery or school care) or by looking after the children at the weekends to facilitate additional study time for the women:

> My husband does have to do slightly more … when they [children] are sick and I have a college day, I have made him do it. (Jennifer)

Eight of the women also relied on their husband to take a greater share in housework this was normally with cooking or cleaning thus freeing them up time to devote to their studies:

> Ross [husband] has definitely helped on a practical level … His role has changed at home … he's changed to adapt to the changing needs of the household. (Maggie)

> There has been a bit of a role change, I do a bit more around the house than I did, although I did do a bit, I probably find myself doing more now. (Alan)

6.1.4 Connecting or separating the identity strands of wife and student

How the women handled identity change, times of tension or a change in position within their marital relationship was linked to separating or connecting the identity strands of wife, mother and student. Some women tried to bring together their different strands of identity and merged being a mother and wife with being an HE student. The women saw themselves as one person and could not separate their identity. Others fragmented these different strands as a sense of survival, choosing to try to keep the strands of student and wife as a separate entity.

For some women sharing the journey together and connecting the HE study to their relationship with their husband was of importance (see Chapter 2.3 for an initial discussion). Describing HE study as a 'journey' is useful as it explains progress from one stage to another and can represent the distance that has to be travelled in order to achieve the end goal of completion. Sharing the journey and connecting their studies was through involving their family in their study for example by discussing topics, proof reading, studying in the midst of family activities and talking to the children about their career goals. For others, separating their HE study and their relationship with their husband was necessary in order to maintain the relationship.

Kim, Angelina and Esme shared the journey with their husband through discussing their studies and involving their husband in proof reading their work. This is an example of cultural capital that was valued by the women (see Chapter 7.1.1). Through connecting their studies with their husband in these ways, the women were able to merge the boundaries between HE study and family life and gain support and encouragement:

He [husband] reads all my work that I do, he proof reads everything that I do. (Kim)

I think for me, the turning point was probably, do you continue going on like this [stress in relationship because of HE] or do you talk and get it over and done with and say listen if this is what's going to happen then this is what I need of support from you because if we are going to go down this road [HE] you need to be with me on this journey, or it [relationship] will come to an end. (Esme)

Jennifer, did not actively discuss her studies with her husband or conceal them, yet having permission and approval of her HE was important. Although Jennifer had support from her husband, in terms of childcare and household tasks, she also wanted her studies to be valued and confirmed for the identity changes it brought about:

He [husband] said, 'I am happy for you to do it but I want to see that it goes somewhere'. I see what he means, basically he means that, 'You are putting this much time and effort into it, I want to know that you are going to earn more money at the end', … whereas I wanted him to say, 'I want you to do it because you want to do it and its good for you', but that's not quite what I got. (Jennifer)

Doris felt that she was given no choice but to separate the strands of HE student and wife in order to maintain her relationship. However, she did not feel it was necessary to separate the stand of mother. She shared her studies with her children and enjoyed the encouragement and support from her children. She perceived that her husband felt threatened by her changed identity and through her completing her HE studies. Doris' husband offered little support and at times withdrew his support completely as an unspoken statement that he was unhappy with her decision to embark on HE:

David is very busy and offering very little in the line of help and support. So I feel very 'put upon' and cross that he gets annoyed when I say I am tired and need to go to bed early. I cannot do it all – work, study, mother, housekeeper, gardener, cook fresh meals etc. (Doris – year 1reflective journal entry)

I would say there have been times where he [husband] has done less, almost to dig his heels in to prove a point. (Doris)

However this lack of support from her husband proved to be a motivating factor for Doris as although it made her feel upset, she became more determined to achieve success and complete her studies.

Women that experienced tension in their relationship, devised strategies to overcome or reduce open conflict with their husband. These strategies included minimising the impact of their study on the husband, by hiding any difficulties that they were experiencing or by being determined to complete their studies and leave any conflict to be resolved to a time after their studies were completed:

> This [HE] is something that I want and it was just sheer determination … So you find ways of doing it without causing too many ripples … I haven't got the energy for anything petty anymore so it's just easier to shrug your shoulders and say, 'Hey, ho!', and walk away from it [argument with husband over HE study] … As soon as you hand in that last assignment … as soon as all of that pressure is now off I thought I can go and talk to David [husband] without worrying, with a clear head. (Doris)

> I think I internalised and I thought you know what, I'm just going to go with the flow, I just don't have no puff left to fight. So the only focus was my college work … I think I had to let go of those things before I could find me … (Esme)

Connecting or separating the different strands of identity evolved with the nature of their relationship, their assessment workload and the acceptance or rejection of their studies by their husband, rather than a clear choice or preference by the women, this changed over the course of their studies (nine women). The women that separated their student strand from their wife strand found this problematic. I view this as a superficial separation. The image used in Figure 1 demonstrates how identity can be viewed as a rope with the different strands braided together. It can be difficult to try to separate the different strands of a rope as a rope is stronger when the different elements are braided together. Hence, as discussed in Chapter 5.2, learning is not seen in isolation confined only to the student strand of identity but could be transmitted and merged across all strands of identity. The women that tried to keep the identity strands of mother, wife and HE student as separate were merely trying to contain and hide their HE learning and transformation through not making it visible to their husband to avoid conflict or burying the issue until they had time to resolve it. Resolving this at some point appeared to be important for the women even if, like in Marie's case, the consequence of this was a permanent separation from her husband.

6.2 Children - 'My children have a completely different childhood now'

Being a mum was the most important part of the women's identity, therefore how their HE study affected their children was a predominate concern for them. The women tried to compensate for the guilt they experienced (see Chapter 5.2.4) through justifying how they felt their HE study had benefitted their children and family. When considering the impact of HE study on the children there were three main themes that were most frequently raised by the women in the interviews. I have already discussed a change in parenting style (see Chapter 5.2.2) due to the women's increased knowledge and change of perspective. A second impact on the children was that it could influence the children's education. Finally, some children's relationships with their fathers were changed as the fathers increased time spent with their children. Although some mothers tried to minimise the negative impact of their studies on their children by studying when they children were not around, the women expressed that their children knew that their mothers were studying, this was shared with them. Hiding their studies from their children was for a different reason then hiding their studies from their husband. The women chose to separate their studies from the children in this way so that the children did not feel neglected or that their mother's studies were more important than them. However, separating their studies from their husband by concealing them was a conscious effort by some women to avoid conflict as a minority of husbands showed resentment towards their HE.

6.2.1 Positive educational outcomes for the children

The women felt better placed to influence their child's education with their increased early years knowledge, role modelling, and feelings of self confidence and raised status. Jennifer used her increased self confidence and knowledge on children's development to fight a transitional issue for her daughter at primary school. Although as a practitioner working in one of these settings she has felt strongly about this issue for some time, it wasn't until it was affecting her daughter that she took action:

> I think it's having an impact on them [children] … as I have been fighting a
> transitional battle … I'm fighting for better working between reception class
> and preschool, because they are so much younger going in now … I have the

knowledge to say actually this is best for the children and we are doing it. (Jennifer)

As a result of their HE experiences, the women viewed education differently and transferred their belief in the value of education to their children. Kim, Doris, Jennifer, Maggie and Angelina believed that through their HE studies they have been effective educational role models for their children and they had raised their own and their children's educational aspirations. Although they felt time poor (Edwards, 1993a), through being effective managers of their daily routines, they were able to prioritise the aspects of being a 'good mother' that they deemed as most important. This resulted in them engaging and supporting their children's education more thoroughly as they raised the status of parental involvement and educational support at home. Strategies included emphasising the importance of reading, offering more focused support with homework and asking the children challenging questions. Mother and child relationships were also changed through older children offering support with educational study (see Chapter 7.1.1). This changed the relationship between the mothers, their children and education as it became a more important focus than before their HE experience:

> I'm far more aware of every single thing …. reading with them, and everything really, just little things I am far more aware of things. (Heidi)

> I think homework wise it has had an impact on her [daughter] ... it's positive; they can see that actually you have got to sit down and work. (Jennifer)

The children in eight families developed more independence and autonomy and less reliance on their mothers. Although the women tried to minimise the amount of time they studied in front of the children there were still times when they had to do this because of the high workload. For these families, sibling relationships improved, as the older children assisted the younger ones, they developed problem solving skills to resolve sibling disputes and take more responsibility for themselves:

> I think their coping strategies were they learnt to cook [laughs], you know they became very independent. (Christina)

Developing positive educational outcomes for children and adapting to their mother studying are findings that have already been discussed in other studies and continue to be the case here (Edwards, 1993a; Edwards 1993b; Merrill, 1999). A new finding from this study is the effect of

the women's studies on the relationship between the children and their father; it is this factor that I wish to focus more fully on.

6.2.2 Changed relationship between the children and their father

During the course of the women's HE studies, children's relationships with their fathers in seven families were transformed and changed. This was raised by seven of the women and two of the men. This stemmed from an increase in the amount of time fathers spent with their children, changed interactions and transformed parenting styles by the men. These changes were brought about by the women relying on their husbands for additional support with childcare in order to give them additional time to study at home or attend college.

Prior to HE, the women were positioned as the main carers for their children and saw themselves as being emotionally available and accessible to their children. The women did not believe that parenting was an equally weighted and shared role between themselves and their husbands. The women spoke about choosing part time work so that they fulfilled their perceived role as mothers. It is unclear whether this was self imposed positioning, or whether it was positioning by others, such as by their husbands or societal expectations. During the course of the HE programme, roles in childcare altered for many of the couples:

> They [children] all know that I am busy now and not available all of the time and not expected to be there for everybody all of the time, whereas it was always mum, whatever time, and they know now that it's not always me but its dad and that's got to be equally acceptable because he is perfectly capable and willing. (Maggie)

This shows a shift in how Maggie viewed her role as a mother, when compared to her comments about being a mother prior to HE study:

> It's kind of like I do whatever is needed for my kids. (Maggie)

A change in position and perspective of what it is to be a mother was also apparent in Christina and Betty's account:

> As a mother I ran around after my children, like you do …. It's actually been sometimes [during HE) where Dominic [husband] had to take over and I think

he's quite enjoyed it. They [children] have always had good relationship with their dad but I think they have almost benefitted more, definitely…. I think he has changed in thinking further ahead. (Christina)

It's me that's been the one to sort everything out, so it's up to me to kind of organise everyone [before HE]. When Lloyd [husband] started spending more time with the children they wanted to … be with him more and they were happy … really positive for the relationship, definitely. (Betty)

The end result was that eight husbands, the children's fathers, provided more practical support. The women discussed friction for some families as there were arguments about who was responsible for what. The change in roles had to be negotiated between the women and their husbands:

In year one there was a lot of friction definitely and we were both tussling over who gets time and who has to have the children. (Angelina)

Through giving this practical support, emotional support from the fathers followed too.

My husband has taken over, he's upped the game and he almost is thinking about it more because he's had to [supporting the children if they have a problem to be resolved], because I haven't always been there and he's been the first point of call so that's worked (Christina)

Through fathers thinking ahead regarding providing for their children's needs, through enjoying the additional time with their children, relationships had the potential to be enhanced and transformed between the children and their dads. Knowing that the children were receiving emotional and practical support from the fathers and that they were safe and happy did not completely alleviate the guilt. It gave the women a different type of guilt than seen in Chapter 5.2.4; guilt of not being fully focused on the family:

I do feel guilty as although I am in the house I am not really there … I feel guilty when I know that they [children and husband] are either sat at home not doing anything fun because I am working or they've gone out to do something fun and I'm not with them. (Kim)

Although the women felt guilty that they were not there, they also experienced jealousy as their identity strand of being a mother could be construed as being threatened or taken over by their husbands. Previously the women had been responsible for organising and participating in the children's activities; stepping back from this role gave them mixed emotions. As identified by Parrott (2003), emotions can play a key part in positioning, particularly as they are linked to the

duties and obligations played out in social life. This is a conflict of identity, as on the one hand they wanted to be a certain type of mother and on the other hand they wanted to achieve well in their HE studies therefore a contradiction in the duties and obligations of being both a mother and a HE student. The women discussed a tension in identity and conflict between competing strands and demands of being a mother and HE student as their previous assumptions of identity were challenged. To resolve this conflict and minimise these feelings, some students took HE work with them so that they could attend children's sporting events with their children and study (thus blurring the edges between mother and student identity strand). Some worked less hours (in their part time job) to study whilst their children were at school thus freeing up time outside of school hours with their children and some just accepted it:

> When they had football, what I should have done was stay at home and study but they wanted me to watch, so I went and I would read a book, whilst I was waiting in the 15 minute gap. (Maggie)

> I just felt constantly guilty so I dropped some of my hours [paid work] so I could create study time whilst they were at school. (Angelina)

> At the weekend with the children, yes, he [husband] will take them out, I feel terrible because I can't go, but the kids seem to have a great time and they don't seem to worry… I think I have just learned that's how it is sometimes … (Heidi)

6.2.3 Transformations to the husbands' parenting practices as a result of their wives' HE studies

As well as an increase in time that the children spent with their fathers, the women also noticed a change in their husbands parenting practices as a direct impact of transformations to their own parenting style:

> So it is wearing off on him [husband], what I have learnt … for example how he would respond to them ... if I am calmer then it would have influenced him, and then he is calmer about things. (Heidi)

A change in parenting style was reflected in the comments made by the husbands:

> Because if she's studied something and she sees the benefits of doing something in a particular way that gets better results, she'd probably talk that through with me … and then I'd look at that and either agree or disagree and then we'd come to, 'Right, this is our stance on this now together'. (Bradley)

Kim commented that her husband changed his parenting style as a result of proof reading her work, whilst providing cultural capital (see Chapter 7.1.1) He attended a parenting course to support his child's behaviour which reaffirmed his change in perspective and increased childcare knowledge.

> He [husband] did a parenting course … and he was able to understand what they were saying, he was relating it to theories and things he had read in my work, so he was star pupil! (Kim)

A transformation in parenting practices by the husband was also influenced by how supportive the men were of the women's studies. There was a link between having a supportive husband in terms of receiving emotional or practical support and a willingness to embrace news ideas or change their parenting practices as a result of the women's increased knowledge. Hence all of the women that received emotional or practical support from their husband reported on a change in his parenting practices. The two women who did not receive any form of support from their husband also did not observe any transformations in their husband's parenting practices (see Appendix 14).

Husbands who were open to identity change in their wives, and supported them, according to the women were more open and receptive to change for themselves. They were more amenable to the women connecting their studies to the home and transferring their knowledge and changed perspectives to family life. This could be linked to power dynamics in the relationship. Prior to HE, Doris' husband was positioned by Doris as the dominant and confident partner in the marital relationship, whereas Doris described herself as a 'mouse'. Whether her husband's resentment and resistance to her HE studies came because of Doris trying to change the routines in the family to fit around her study or whether it came as she became more confident is unclear. It may have begun whilst she was considering HE study and actively looking for change this could have led to discord and unrest in the relationship.

6.3 Parents - 'HE affected my relationship with Mum and Dad'

The nature of nine of the women's interactions with their parents[13] changed as they became more dependent on their parents for childcare support or sought study skills or emotional support. The women believed as their identity changed their personal relationship changed too.

Four participants out of eight with younger children valued childcare support from their parents. This enabled the women to attend college or study at home whilst the children were with their grandparents. Although this was a subtle form of investment in the women's studies it was a practical sign of support:

> They would help you know, if I need them to watch the kids for a while, my mum and sister would come and help and that was good … they had their granny so they weren't on their own. (Heidi)

Four students received support in the form of study skills and emotional support and encouragement from their parents which was unexpected. Maggie found that the support her father gave her was invaluable and a real source of motivation for her and approval of her studies:

> I felt a bit guilty at times [not seeing her parents as much as prior to HE] but my dad comes to see me … my dad asks me how I am getting on [with study]. He comes around if I am struggling for a chat, and I say, 'I'm stuck!', because he knows how I work and need to talk it out… He will come and say, 'Tell me' and I'll say, 'You don't know it Dad', and he'll say, 'Tell me!', and I'll tell him and he'll say, 'Now I'm off home, you get that backside over there and type it up!' So actually my Dad has made a difference, yes he has. (Maggie)

This type of investment in their studies through both emotional support and the source of practical study skills support was seen as invaluable to the women.

Through identity transformation, relationships between nine of the women and their parents also changed and transformed in both positive and negative ways (as stated by the women). Changes to their relationships with their parents included the women's position in the family changing to one of greater respect:

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[13] The term parents is used for both parents and parents in law

> My dad asks for my advice for a lot on things now, he tends to come to me of
> all the children [siblings] and with big decisions …. He obviously wants my
> opinion and that feels really nice. (Angelina)

For other women their raised status with their parents was the accolade of completing a degree

programme:

> I feel with my parents, I don't know, I can see the pride in me now, I can see it,
> I think it's probably always been there but I can actually see it now and feel it
> … I've come to realise that maybe my parents think there is something
> particular about me, but I never saw what they saw in me … I am different in
> terms of I feel more self-assured now, I have to admit that I'm not stupid.
> (Maggie)

There were also negative changes to relationships perceived by the women participants. Five

parents were not supportive of their daughter completing the HE programme and did not like the

change in identity or change in position in the family. They perceived HE as a selfish act or did

not understand the justifications for doing it. The women believed that this led to a strain in

their relationship with their parents but also intensified the women's feelings of guilt. This could

have resulted in the women hiding their studies from their parents, though this was not

mentioned by the women. There were three reasons reported by the women to a strained

relationship between the women and their parents: health, the neglecting of household duties

and the pressure additional household or childcare tasks put on the husband.

Betty explained that her parents were so concerned about her health and levels of stress that they

actively took steps to try to force her to stop her HE studies by withdrawing support with

childcare (see Appendix 12).

> They were doing a little bit of childcare for me … he [Betty's dad] turned
> around because he saw I was getting stressed out … and said that he wasn't
> going to look after Sophie [daughter] any more …He said, 'You need to take
> time off and just be a mum again!' … It's affected my relationship with my
> mum and dad … I was relying on them quite a lot for emotional support I felt
> my dad pressurised me into it [leaving the course]. (Betty)

Kim believed that her mother was concerned about the neglecting of household duties, which was

a role that Kim's mother saw as important:

> My mum has always been a stay at home mum … she can't comprehend why
> on earth I would want a degree when I have got children to look after and a
> house to keep tidy … She [mum] doesn't really understand at all why I would

> want to do it and from that comes absolutely no support in time. Its [HE] such a big part of my life and they [Kim's parents] don't understand it at all! (Kim)

Other parents were concerned about the effects of the pressures of study on family members:

> She [mother-in-law) helps me out … as she takes them [children] to school, this has helped me ... Unlike Jon [husband], who has an understanding of why I am doing this, she doesn't get it and thinks I should be at home, cleaning the house and looking after her son and the children. I have always had a good relationship with her … but the last year I have struggled with it. (Jennifer)

Although Jennifer received practical support from her mother-in-law, it was only tentative and based on the strength of the relationship rather than supporting her choice to commit to HE study. This shows a tension in wanting to help practically but not wanting to support wholeheartedly as there appeared to be a conflict in values between Jennifer and her mother-in-law over how to be a mother and wife.

A sense of guilt of the impact of their studies on the family was believed to be imposed on the women by their parents. This could explain why the women felt guilt when they studied as they felt a conflict between the identity strand of mother and HE student. Only two of the women (Doris and Marie) felt that their study was unwelcome and they linked this to conflict in the home with their husbands. The rest of the women felt supported in their studies by their husband and under no pressure to give up on the programme at all. Hence, many of the women believed that the strain of guilt and feelings of selfishness were derived from opposition and pressure by their parents, not from their husbands. It is clear in their accounts that pressures from their parents shaped their interpretation of what it is to be a mother. When they were following the social norms for their families and fulfilling the role expected of them there appeared to be limited conflict, yet when they stepped outside of this expected role, conflict was generated.

The need to connect (Edwards, 1993a) their studies with their parents was important for nine of the women as they sought reassurance and a sense of pride from their parents concerning their decision to enter into HE. Receiving emotional support and acceptance of their studies was important to the women, it gave them motivation to continue and endorsement that what they were doing was accepted by others:

> The people that are really delighted are my parents ... so you see, parental respect … I've craved it all my adult life … and my dad is really proud of me. (Marie)

> My mum died when I was twenty … I don't really see my dad a lot and I just wanted somebody to feel proud of me … So for Jon [husband] and the kids to see me achieve something for me is good … my biggest aim is for them to see me graduate, not just the children but Jon's mum as well, because I think that graduation, will make her think, 'Well she did do something that was actually quite big'. (Jennifer)

This type of investment of emotional support from their parents was more important to the women than practical strategies of support. All of the women with primary school or pre-school aged children lived locally to their parents or parents in law, although childcare support was achievable it was the approval of their studies that was more important.

Five women experienced a disconnection with their parents as they could not discuss their studies with them. This was difficult:

> She [mum] never says to me, 'How are you, how is the studying going?' which is kind of hurtful in a way really … I would like her to be proud of me. (Doris)

6.4 Summary

HE can cause profound changes to family relationships through the women's identity transformation, through role changes and positions in the family and through the transferring of knowledge acquisition, thus transforming parenting practices.

According to the women, relationships with their husbands were strengthened through the wives becoming calmer, reflective, analytical and more confident. Marital discussions were richer and issues were more readily resolved through a combined analytical approach. Some women were raised in status by their husbands, this created more equal and strengthened relationships.

For a small number of women, their identity changes were seen negatively by their husband and there was a period of strain as these adjustments and changes were assimilated. Some women hid their studies from their husband so that tension and conflict could be momentarily reduced. However this only appeared to be a temporary strategy as all of the women who experienced difficulties came to a point where they had to resolve this. Some resolved this during the course

(for example Marie); some resolved this once their studies were completed (for example Doris). Separating or connecting their studies to their husband in the form of minimising the effects on their family (separating) or enlisting their husband's help in the form of discussing their studies and proof reading (connecting), enabled the women to find ways to manage their studies and their relationship. Hiding their studies from others was dependent on the nature of the relationship and any conflict that they were experiencing. A pattern formed that showed that the women hid their studies from the children so that they did not feel left out or neglected but chose to hide their studies from their husbands to reduce conflict. Blurring the edges between mother, wife, and student strand seemed to be an effective strategy for some of the women, utilising strategies of separating and connecting their studies with the family when appropriate. Using these different strategies enabled them to achieve their goal of completing their HE course and achieving success, whilst causing minimal negative impact to the family.

The women believed that their children benefitted from their HE studies as they gained new educational role models and an insight into HE. The children's education was also reported as being enhanced through increased parental involvement with a higher emphasis and value on the child's education. Children developed skills of independence and autonomy as well as enhancing their sibling relationships. As the women's transformation of their parenting approach changed, their husbands began to change their approach too. This is described as straightforward transformation of beliefs and behaviours (Mezirow, 1991).

Minimising the disruption that their HE study impacted on the family was important for the women as it helped them to reduce their feelings of guilt. In particular, this was achieved by ensuring that the children were receiving emotional and practical support from their fathers to make up for the shortfall in time that the women were able to give. Children's relationships with their father were seen by the women to be enhanced and transformed through spending more time together, with the children relying on their father more for support. Although this was seen as beneficial to the children, the women still struggled with this change of position as a parent and some experienced feelings of jealousy and a conflict in identity as they balanced the competing demands of HE study and motherhood.

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A woman's identity transformation, as a result of HE, changed the relationship with her parents, according to the participants. Some women described a sense of pride and raised status in the eyes of their parents, whilst others reported on strain and tensions in their relationships. Many women's parents struggled with their identity transformation and role change in terms of the mother strand, some parents demonstrated this verbally or by withdrawing support of childcare.

This notion of receiving support from one source or another was an important factor in the women feeling that the degree was an achievable accomplishment for them. The next chapter will consider the types of support that the women received in the form of family capital from their husbands, parents and children and consider the factors underlying why this has been given.

CHAPTER 7 – FAMILY CAPITAL – 'I COULD NOT HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT MY FAMILY'

This chapter will develop the concept of family capital to ascertain the role the family plays in supporting the woman through her HE studies. The analysis so far, based on the women's perspective, demonstrates that a woman's HE experiences and transformation cannot be easily separated from family life. Family relationships can change as a result of a woman's engagement with HE. Receiving support from husbands in the form of housework or childcare can have a positive effect on a woman's capacity to study as well as transform children's relationships with their fathers. Relationships change between the women and their parents as some women experience a sense of pride by and emotional support from their parents, whilst others receive negativity and disapproval. Receiving limited emotional or practical support from a husband or parent can put additional pressure and stress on a mature woman student as she has to negotiate time to study alongside of her day to day tasks and may also have additional conflict, guilt and emotional turbulence to deal with. However, some women became more determined to complete their HE studies to demonstrate that they were capable of achieving this goal independently.

Through HE, the identity strands of mother, wife, daughter and mature student transform, develop or adapt, this affects family lives. As the family is a complex interlinked network, what affects one member has ramifications on the rest of the family. In order to study a mother will have to negotiate the other aspects of her life such as childcare, time with her husband, household responsibilities, and relationships with wider family members. These aspects are both on a practical and emotional level.

The concept of family capital is a useful tool here to ascertain how different forms of capital are utilised in order to achieve the end goal of enabling the woman to participate in HE studies and achieve success. Family capital will be used to consider, 'the aspects of investment made by the family' (Gofen, 2009:107) for the benefit of the woman student and also her family as a whole. Although investment is often seen in financial terms, it is a useful concept as it describes the

contribution of time or skills given by other family members in order to acquire future benefits. These benefits may be a better career trajectory for the women or improved earning capacity through achieving a degree.

7.1 Different aspects of capital provided by the family

This section will start by discussing the support families offered in the shape of cultural, economic and social forms of capital and will demonstrate the significance of time and emotional capital. Emotional support is viewed as an additional form of capital whereas time as a form of capital is seen as a strong thread that links all of the capitals together.

7.1.1 Cultural capital

Cultural capital was provided by the family through family members sharing their skills and knowledge of HE educational systems in order to help the women fit into university life (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). There were many instances of cultural capital provided by the husbands that were valued by the women. Proof reading their work was an effective strategy that appeared to demonstrate support from the husbands. It was a practical strategy that helped the women to develop their study skills, thus possibly impacting on their overall success of a piece of work. It was also construed as an endorsement of emotional support from the husbands and an important activity which enabled the women to connect their studies to their husband. It is worth recognising that husbands would have accumulated cultural capital themselves previously in order to be in a position to offer this type of support. Older children (at university) were also able to show this type of family capital through supporting the development of study skills, providing a sounding board to discuss university assignments and valuing what the woman student had achieved:

> She [Maggie/wife] didn't know what things meant, uni [university] terms and things like this, I remember them [wife and son] chatting here and she just couldn't grasp what these words were and what to do and over time he taught her basically about the world of the university if you like! (Ross)
>
> Rob [son] has helped because Rob has been doing a degree and we have shared it … he has made me value what I'm doing by the fact that he has valued what I have done. (Maggie)

Therefore it was not just the practical strategy of cultural support that was important to the women but the emotional aspect of support in this.

None of the women spoke of their parents giving them any cultural capital apart from Maggie who benefitted from unlikely study support from her father. This was a surprise to Maggie as her father had no prior experience of HE, however he was able to develop her study skills through giving his daughter time. Having an opportunity to talk through her studies was important but what was more important was having her assignment difficulties listened to and recognised. This affirmation of her studies, through emotional support, was important.

7.1.2 Economic capital

Some women benefited from economic capital[14] in a financial sense, in terms of pooling their resources with their husbands to enable them to cut back on employment hours in order to study. For some families this meant a reduction in income, for others the husband changed his working hours to give flexibility to assist his wife with childcare or household tasks. Through having economic capital the women were also able to purchase resources such as textbooks enabling them to access study materials more easily (Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002). This was more important than buying in childcare as many of the children were already at pre-school or at school whilst the women were attending their HE classes. What was essential was being able to study from home, having resources to hand to allow them to do this was invaluable.

7.1.3 Social capital

The literature review highlighted that women were more likely to produce social capital than benefit from it (Edwards, 2004; Lawler, 2000; Reay, 2004). It was difficult to locate very many examples of social capital within my findings. The women did not discuss social networks (Bourdieu, 1991), but they did discuss the bonding and solidarity aspect of social capital

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[14] Please note that nine out of 11 women interviewed received local government early years funding for their tuition fees, therefore economic capital from the family was not needed for this aspect of course costs. The remaining two participants had access to student loans for their tuition fees and only discussed tuition fees on one occasion (see Chapter 6.1.2) within their interviews.

described by Putnam (2002) and Coleman (1998). Some husbands had HE experience and therefore an understanding of the demands of study, this developed solidarity and a shared goal. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3.5.1, women are more likely to benefit from economic or cultural capital than social capital due to a lack of opportunity. What was more prevalent was the emotional capital on offer within families.

7.1.4 Emotional capital

Emotional capital is viewed as mainly consumed by men and children and provided by women (Burke and Jackson, 2007), my findings contradict this approach. There are many examples of emotional capital offered by the husbands in the shape of sensitivity and understanding communicated to the women. For example, the women appreciated their husbands acknowledging the pressure they were under and not asking them to stop studying. By showing concern for their wife, expressing pride and encouragement, the wives experienced an increase in self belief and an orientation to pass. Although some of the relationships experienced stress because of the pressures of HE study (Angelina and Bradley; Esme and Alan; Kim and Matt), the reserves of emotional capital that had already been developed through a mutually supportive relationship were drawn upon (Feenay and Lemay, 2012). The women believed that this enabled the husbands to respond to their emotional state. For example, he could share in her joy when she passed an assignment, or encourage her to complete her studies if she experienced self doubt.

Emotional capital was also in the form of justifying their wives' study to their own parents. Through this type of camaraderie and emotional affirmation the women were able to sustain the intensity of balancing their study, home life and work life. Husbands did not have to have cultural capital acquired through completing a degree to offer emotional capital in this way.

Children were also perceived by the women to be able to produce emotional capital. This was an unexpected outcome of the women's study. Previously to HE, the mothers had constructed motherhood as responding and meeting their children's needs (Lawler, 2000). This changed the mother child relationship, as the child could now be constructed as the 'meeter' of needs and the

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mother as having needs to be met. This form of emotional capital offered by the children was in the shape of asking them about their mother's HE experience, the women found this encouraging. When the children showed pride in their mother's achievements and what they were doing the women felt justified in spending so much time away from them. Although they still felt guilty the justification helped to compensate for this:

> I think they [children] respect me for that [studying] … and they ask me about it and they don't mind me studying asking if I'm studying today. 'You doing your study Mummy on the computer?', and they accept it. (Angelina)

> There have been times where I could have spent more time with them [children], but they have actually been very understanding about that ... they have both said that they are very proud of me. (Doris)

For women who did not receive any form of emotional support or visible pride regarding their HE studies and achievements from their husband, having their children share in their success was especially poignant and important. Marie recounted how her six year old son asked her how she was doing and celebrated her successful high grades. This type of interest was seen as an affirmation that what she was doing was respected and valued by her children and was not detrimental to them. As a new single parent that was especially important to her as she felt solely responsibility for the children's well being since the break down of her relationship. Receiving emotional capital from the children was particularly valued by participants like Doris and Marie who did not receive emotional capital from their husbands. It is possible that they may have become content with this as consolation for the lack of capital from their husband.

 As with studies by Merrill (1999) and Edwards (1993a), guilt was a strong emotion that the women experienced and the majority of this guilt was centred on feeling that they were neglecting their children through having less time for them. Therefore when they received any form of emotional capital from the children they took this as permission to study, acceptance and valuing of what they were trying to achieve.

7.1.5 Time as an aspect of capital

Time is an aspect of capital that I would like to consider here. Bourdieu (1986) views time as a commodity to increase profits. Time investments by family members in terms of childcare or

household tasks give women time to study thus aiding study success. However, time is often deemed as 'precious' or in 'short supply'. Time was of importance to the women as they saw themselves as time poor due to motherhood and HE being 'greedy institutes' of time (Edwards, 1993a; Hughes 2002). The women talked about 'managing time', 'wasting time', 'using time wisely', 'not having as much time', 'having no support in terms of time', 'finding time to study', 'making time' and study 'taking time away from the family'. Time is seen as something tangible that is precious and can be given, taken and obviously used up.

Time is a valuable aspect of capital that underpins and threads through each form of capital. The concept of an investment in time by others, within each form of capital, demonstrates an unwritten endorsement of the women's studies. When husbands give up their time, this may be social time or relaxation time; it is viewed by the women as approval of their studies.

Having cultural capital through knowledge of HE study skills, results in some husbands giving their time to assist their wives with proof reading and study support. Having a cultural awareness of the intensity of HE study by the husbands enables them to encourage the women, which aids their motivation and commitment to their studies. This could explain why some husbands offered their time through completing housework or childcare, which enabled the women time to study.

Emotional capital can be demonstrated through having support with practical tasks as the woman feel that their studies are supported and respected this gives her encouragement and an orientation to complete the course. Also, emotional capital in the form of sensitivity and time spent in supportive communication regarding the woman's studies can be given as a part of social and cultural capital activities.

The women valued the time given through support with childcare from their husbands and parents as well as help with household tasks. The time that their husbands and parents invested in these tasks meant that the women could devote more time to study. The women stated that the husbands invested more time in this way than their parents. According to the women

participants, children also freed up time for the women, through playing independently whilst the mother was studying or through helping with household tasks.

Although the women often felt guilt when their time was spent studying rather than with their children, one strategy to overcome this was to take up the position of this being for the 'good' of the children. This can be described as making a 'rational choice' (Scott, 2014), to develop knowledge and skills to enhance their own well being but also that of their children. This positions mothers as a human capital investment whose own accumulation of cultural capital and attitude towards education can have a positive effect on their children's educational aspirations (Davies, Qiu and Davies, 2014). Hence, children were a factor that kept the mothers motivated and committed to their HE studies as the women realised that they were becoming a different type of role model to the children (educational role model). Therefore, they believed that failure was not an option. The women positioned themselves as educational role models as this lessened some of their guilt, enabling them to perceive themselves as a 'good mother'. This position could be construed as an orientating factor as the women's basic beliefs and attitudes towards their children was one of support and time. Through positioning their studies as having a positive outcome for their children this could justify the time they spent on their HE. This provided them with a motivating factor when they were struggling with coursework or worried about how they spent their time:

> There have been times when I have struggled and thought, 'I can't do this', but there have never been times when I have thought of not doing it … I wouldn't want my children to see me pulling out of it. (Jennifer)

> I think, them seeing me do this and being a mum has carried me on, you cannot quit a course when you are a mum … you cannot walk away from it …you are an example to them. (Maggie)

Time, along with their HE studies, can also impact on identity transformation. Through having time to study, absorb the subject material and reflect the women were able to develop the transformations that started in their lectures. Time gives the women a transformational study space to assimilate HE knowledge and reflect on their changing perspectives.

> You do transform your whole depth of thinking, and the evaluation, and all the reflection ... I know that because I have read this, I have read that and you have solid knowledge. (Maggie)

The women transformed academically within the student strand of identity but also as a mother and wife within the home because of the change in roles as a result of time freed up by the husband:

> I went from full time Mum to part time Mum because I literally did do all the childhood stuff, you know, literally he [husband] just went to work and came home again and had the playtime and we do share the role a lot more now … now I feel more equal with him (Angelina)

However, it is important to consider the effects of giving up their time from the perspectives of the husbands, what are the costs of producing this aspect of capital for their wives' to consume?

7.2 Impact of offering large resources of family capital from the perspectives of the husbands

Having access to family capital was important for the women students as it aided their motivation, gave them additional time and permission to study. However, providing this was not always easy for the husbands. It was also not always a role that was welcomed by them as it could transform their lives too; this was not always seen positively:

> But I would have definitely said to the husband and wife think about what you need to do and go through what the changes will be ... So basically if the man wants to change totally his life then they would have to have a period where he would try and learn to cook if he's not doing that yet … being prepared after work to go straight to the kitchen … I didn't realise it would go like this … I don't think we really realised what the work entailed. (Ross)

Ross, like the other men in this study found that juggling additional household tasks also put additional pressure on him, this could be linked to additional stress. Despite these pressures, the women still continued studying:

> All of the changes that have happened in my life and my relationship breaking up and then getting back together and I actually sort of held onto this [HE study] and I thought to myself, well it must mean a lot for me to really hold on. (Esme)

This could also be due to the high levels of investment the husband had made to the women's study:

> There have been so many times I have thought I just can't do it anymore …
> he's [husband] the thing that pushes me to keep going because he'll probably
> never forgive me if I quit … We have all invested so much into it. (Kim)

From the women's perspective their family's investment in their HE studies, positive educational outcomes for their children (see Chapter 6.2.1), their enhanced self confidence and knowledge acquisition, were enough to keep them going and motivate them. Even though investing in their own time to support the woman was not without its costs for the men, the husbands might have been willing to 'trade off '(Reay, 2004:68) their own time with future economic benefits. For the husbands in this study, the investments that they had already made may also be enough of a reason to continue with the support.

7.3 Effects of a lack of family capital

Some participants received limited family support in the form of emotional, cultural, economic, social capital or time; this affected their capacity to study and their relationships.

7.3.1 Parents – 'I would like her [Mum] be proud of me'

Women appreciated emotional capital support from their husbands and children but also wanted it from their own parents. Some women discussed difficulties with their parents, as a result of their HE studies, as being a mature student did not fit in to some parents' ideal of what it was to be a mother. Positioning theory is helpful here to understand the different constructions of being a mother held by different members of the family. Through second order positioning (Harré and van Lagenhove, 1999), some of the women's parents tried to influence them through their conversations into their interpretation of the role of mother, as 'being at home' and being 'responsible for the children'. Although the women were affected and upset by this opposition and lack of encouragement they chose not to accept this second order positioning by continuing with their studies. Some women believed that their parents showed a disinterest in their studies and offered little family capital.

It is reasonable to suggest that these constructions of what it is to be a mother could have been developed through the parents' own emotions, personal history and experiences of mothering

(Davies and Harré, 1999). These concepts of mothering, interpreted from the perspective of my female participants, are more compatible to structuralist gendered roles of women being rooted firmly in the home (Parsons, 1959; Young and Willmott, 1973). Although there is a greater diversity and difference in families today (Williams, 2004; Morgan, 2011), perhaps these changes have not permeated into the previous generation? Many of these parents would have been young parents in the 1970s and early 1980s when Oakley's study demonstrated that housework and motherhood often placed limits on career aspirations. Although my participants may feel that there are still limits to their career choices, some participants may have rejected this position of motherhood as offered by Oakley. This could explain why some of the women's parents appeared to struggle with their daughters' changing role in the household and their new identity strand and position as a student and mother, more than the husbands did.

As seen in Chapter 5.2.4, guilt is an emotion that the women experienced due to spending less time with their family and as they saw it as 'putting themselves first'. I considered whether the guilt was self imposed or as a reaction to the attitudes and actions of others. In light of these findings offered by the women, it is fair to assert that pressures outside of the immediate family may have influenced these feelings of guilt regarding their changing identity strand and role of a mother. Yet using the justification (as outlined in Chapter 5.2.2) of their HE benefiting their children through role modelling and through financial and academic support, their guilt was alleviated as they demonstrated to themselves and possibly their parents, the importance of their HE studies.

The parents, particularly the women's mothers or mothers in law, viewed being an effective mother and housewife as an important aspect of the woman's identity (according to the perspectives of the women). They saw this as more important than the strand of mature student, this influenced the types of capital they were willing to give. The parents were more willing to give childcare support (a form of economic capital as it can replace the need for paid childcare) than social or emotional capital through encouragement or sharing in their woman's career goal aspirations. Providing childcare meant that they could show support for the family and demonstrated their position of care and the importance of being a 'good' parent. The women

believed that their parents made their disapproval of their studies clear by not showing an interest in their HE. The women saw this as a lack of encouragement and a failure to offer emotional capital.

7.3.2 Husbands and a lack of capital

Although Doris' experiences show a lack of practical support from her husband, my research predominately shows a shift in male attitudes regarding housework and childcare since Edwards study (1993a), as the majority of the husbands were accommodating and supportive of their wives' studies. Eight out of ten couples assisted with childcare or household tasks and the women reported that tasks were being distributed more fairly. In some cases, for example Ross and Maggie, the husband took on the responsibility for household tasks. This is in contrast to research by Doucet (2006), McFall (2012) and the ERHC (2009).This shift in role change also echoes research by Morgan (2011), who views the family as diverse with different roles enacted across families through constant changes which evolve in time. Therefore husbands were predominately seen by the women, as a valuable source of family capital. Although the husbands varied in their capacity to offer all forms of capital (for example only those with knowledge of HE could offer cultural capital), all husbands could offer emotional or social capital of support, encouragement and time.

7.4 Husbands' factors for providing family capital

Through incorporating the views of the husbands into the research process I was able to ascertain three main factors as to why they gave family capital in the shape of cultural, economic, social and emotional capital. Having a shared financial goal was raised by all three of the husbands interviewed as an important factor of family capital. This was also supported by six of the women:

> It's an investment for the future … so if it gets her onto the next rung of her career ladder, which hopefully it will, then it's well worthwhile. (Alan)

> So we are both very supportive of each other's dreams … I see it as a family dream really … we both agreed that actually there are things that we can do to make that happen … (Bradley)

> He [husband] said … I want to know that you are going to earn more money at the end. (Jennifer)

These reasons demonstrate why they gave social capital through solidarity of a shared goal (Putnam, 2002), and economic capital in order to achieve economic gains in the future. The husbands believed that just studying at HE for personal gain and fulfilment was not a justified reason to disrupt family life. Yet, once the husbands realised the impact of the degree on their wives' career prospects their support and time seemed to follow:

> It was a bit difficult because I would say, 'I've got work to do' … and it was a tussle. But I think that he [husband] sees the bigger picture and sees where we are aiming for, and what the future is going to be. (Angelina)

Valuing education was also important to the husbands as they could see the importance of HE study:

> I have done studying myself so I understand it takes time and again I am very supportive of her doing it. (Bradley)

> Higher education in his family is quite important, nearly everybody in his family has got a degree … Matt [husband] thinks, its for the long term, and it's quite important to him … so he sees it as being quite a vital part or just an important thing for me to do in life. (Kim)

The husband's cultural capital and family values regarding education can also effect the social capital on offer (Coleman, 1998).Through experiencing HE for themselves, the husbands had some understanding and appreciation of the time commitment and level of intensity involved so were better placed to give social or emotional capital due to the cultural capital they held:

> He [husband] has empathy because obviously having studied himself, he knows how demanding it can be. (Esme)

Although a husband with limited HE knowledge can generate capital support (see Chapter 7.3.2), a lack of cultural capital could put a barrier between the husband and the wife. As apparent in Doris's experiences, when the husband had not experienced HE there could be feelings of jealousy and resentment which could cause a barrier between them. Due to a husband's lack of educational experience or success at HE level, this could cause an obstacle to cultural, social and emotional capital generation. The husbands may not be able to create academic confidence or enthusiasm for HE study, thus providing a potential gap in emotional support. Coupled with the changing identity and educational status of their wife, positions in the relationship would change thus causing discord and a lack of emotional capital provided by the

husband. This resulted in Doris hiding and separating her studies from her husband (see also Edwards 1993a) in order to minimise the conflict:

> I do also think there is an element of jealousy there as he hasn't done it ... I think he almost feels that he can't join in … So you find ways of doing it without causing too many ripples … (Doris)

The final key factor underpinning support was the strength of the relationship (this was the one key factor unpinning support from the parents too):

> It depends very much like we said before, on the way your relationship works and if the husband or partner is willing to sort of be a bit flexible and change … You need a strong foundation. (Bradley)

> You have to have a solid foundation to start with … we know each other so well, he knew when I was flagging … I think that is my biggest strength and as far as family is concerned that has always been solid, but it has impacted when you are really stressed and everyone has adapted around me, but I only think that's because I have that strong network naturally around me. (Christina)

Through having a strong and supportive relationship, the strains involved in studying and the resulting impact on the family could be dealt with together.

Although both the parents and children were able to give different forms of capital, the husbands showed the greatest capacity to be accommodating, in all areas of capital. Firstly financial, through seeing the financial gain from higher level qualifications or having a shared career goal. Secondly their educational background (degree) was significant through having experience of a degree or valuing HE for themselves. Finally having a strong marital relationship was important as the husbands were more likely to offer to alleviate the workload when they saw their wife struggle with HE study, childcare and household tasks.

7.5 Impact on a woman's educational success

Families with large resources of family capital are in a strong position to accommodate and adjust to a woman's HE experience. Through having a flexible approach, childcare roles in the family can be interchanged to accommodate a woman going to college and provide study times at home and elsewhere.

7.5.1 Large resources of family capital

Having a large capacity for family capital demonstrated by their husband could contribute to a woman's HE success through encouragement and through practical strategies of support:

> He [husband] is so supportive of me … if I couldn't go home and have him as a sounding board then I don't think I would have got through it … Also, with the juggling of roles the fact that he is taking on more this year has made a massive difference. (Angelina)

> The things that he [husband] does with the children [childcare and emotional support] are usually when it comes down to me meeting a deadline or not meeting a deadline, he's usually the one that makes it possible. (Kim)

Although it is recognised that women can achieve success without support it can be more problematic:

> I think she could have done it but I think she would have found it more difficult without that support. (Bradley)

If a husband does not offer family capital through practical or emotional strategies of support, it can be located elsewhere through encouragement, pride and motivation from their children or from their parents. However, without this support or encouragement, juggling HE study and family life would be difficult because of the guilt that many mature women students experience when they spend less time with the family or focus on something for themselves (Merrill 1999; Edwards 1993a):

> If anyone at home was sort of against it, even the kids, it would be hard work for her. (Ross)

> I think I was relying on that quite a lot as well, just that reassurance that he does want me to do it and that it is ok for me to take myself off and not sit with him in the evenings … You need that kind of, like you say permission and encouragement. (Kim)

This endorsement and emotional capital of support was important as it enabled the women to focus on their HE, without investing energy in trying to conceal their studies from the family or minimise any detrimental effects.

7.5.2 Limited resources of family capital

Access to different aspects of capital in the form of family support is a key factor in a woman's success at HE but what about those students who do not benefit from access to family capital? This section will draw on Hilary's story and demonstrate how a student coped without family capital and the outcomes of this. Although it is only one story and cannot be used as an indicator for all women without family capital, there are themes here that are useful.

Being a mother was the most important strand of Hilary's identity and she put this above being a student (see Appendix 12 and Chapter 5.2.2). Hilary did not access any family capital. Although she could have received social and emotional capital from her brother through phone call support, she forfeited this and used her time with her children or on her studies when the children were in bed. Economic capital could have been beneficial to Hilary in terms of buying childcare support. Yet once she balanced out cost implications and the additional factor of time for transport she realised that she was just as well to study from home with the children around her. The capital that she could have utilised she chose not to access, she stated that this affected the outcome of her studies as she failed many assignments initially. Hilary believed that *'it does work as long as I am happy to underachieve'*. However, she did receive a form of support that she was willing to accept:

> I have support and motivation from within and from you [tutor], as part of your
> educational role. Through showing understanding about the demands of the
> course and having to juggle it all, and an understanding and awareness of all of
> the struggles and the demands of the course and the children. You empathise
> with having children and have understanding as an umbrella. I actually feel that
> you have given me slack [flexibility] and I am indebted. (Hilary)

Hilary received social and emotional capital from her tutor in college hours; this did not conflict with her time with the children at home or affect her family routines in any way but was essential to her as a form of encouragement and solidarity. Having someone who understood the pressures she was under and the complexities of juggling family life and study was beneficial. She was also oriented to providing financially for her children in the future hence her desire to gain higher qualifications. This gave her an incentive as she described her support from 'within'.

7.6 Summary

The chapter has demonstrated that having large sources of family capital or investments, available from their husband, children and parents is a crucial factor in a woman's success in her HE studies. My optimum model of family capital consists of emotional, cultural, economic and social capital with the thread of time underpinning each form of capital. Within my model of family capital, aspects of capital are not seen as entirely separate as different aspects can cross over and merge together. Through cultural capital of supporting a wife with her proof reading, social capital of a shared goal can be nurtured which can lead to emotional capital of encouragement. Therefore time can allow other forms of capital to be cultivated. Time when woven into each form of capital facilitates a strong foundation of support.

Although time and emotional capital were not seen as highly significant in the literature (see Chapter 3.5), my findings demonstrate the importance of these two aspects. Time for study gives the women a transformative space to reflect and reconsider their views and perspectives as well as assimilate new knowledge. Through the family adapting to the different role or positions the mother may take in the home, this gives new possibilities to the women to change and transform their identity. Identity transformation can also be impacted by the emotional capital on offer through the family as through both practical and emotional strategies of support the women feel valued and their HE studies accepted. These practical strategies and acceptance help to reduce the feelings of guilt and enables them to explore and change their identity construction of who they are.

Husbands offered the largest capacity for family capital as they have the greatest influence on the mature women's capacity to study because of the nature of their cohabiting relationship. The three main factors that were instrumental in this support were reasons of a financial nature, having an educational background thus valuing HE studies and having a strong and supportive relationship. These factors have explained why the men were willing to invest cultural, economic, social and emotional capital through both a practical and emotional commitment. Offering these strategies was not necessarily without consequence for some husbands, as they

experienced stress due to an increased work load at home. For some husbands there was additional stress and pressure of learning new skills to enable them to contribute more to household tasks or childcare support. The change in roles in the family seemed to be developed in families as the need arose, rather than being a conscious decision that was discussed before HE study began. Therefore, the intensity of the HE workload for the women and the increasing level of support strategies required from the husbands often came as a surprise to both parties. Despite these pressures, the women continued to study and the majority of men continued to give capital support, indicating the vast levels of investment from both parties.

Women believed that their children became providers of capital rather than just consumers. When the women received indicators that their studies were accepted and valued by the children then they felt justified to continue. Emotional capital offered to the women was in the form of verbal interest in their studies, encouragement or pride. Playing independently or helping with household tasks facilitated time for the women to study which could be viewed as an additional form of capital. Cultural capital was offered through the children assisting with the development of study skills. These forms of support also motivated the women to continue with their studies as they saw themselves as educational role models for the children. This is a non conventional and subtle form of family capital, but nonetheless it is still showing an investment in the woman's studies. Through feeling that their studies are welcomed by their children or non detrimental to their well being and through the justification that they are positively enhancing their future educational prospects, the guilt for the women was alleviated. Justification of their studies is a recurring theme in this study and of prime importance to the women.

Some women discussed family capital support from their parents; this was in the form of assisting with childcare (which saved financial costs) and for a limited number of women emotional capital of encouragement and pride in their studies. It was the aspect of emotional capital that was most important to the women. The women felt elevated to a new position of one of achieving success when the parents showed pride in their HE accomplishments. Those that did not receive this or any form of understanding or appreciation of their HE studies struggled

and craved this type of emotional support and opportunity to share their HE studies with their parents. The women found a lack of emotional capital and encouragement difficult, but it did not deter them from continuing with their HE studies as they had access to capital from their husband or from their children. The women sought approval from their parents but what was more important to them was to highlight the positive ramifications of their study on their children and to reduce the impact of their studies on their children.

For all of the women in the study there was a hierarchy of priority in the family in terms of not allowing their studies to affect different family members. Children occupied the highest position as the women put many strategies in place to ensure that their children were not affected detrimentally. Receiving emotional capital support from the children was especially important to validate what they were doing and demonstrate that the children were coping and happy. Husbands were the women's second priority. Husbands had the potential to give the largest amount of time, economic capital, social and emotional capital in the form of solidarity and encouragement as well as give cultural capital of study support. The husbands were able to give different forms of capital but maintaining their relationships was also important to the women. Parents were the third priority for the women. Although having childcare support was important, emotional capital was craved by the women more. This could be because they received childcare from their husband. Their husbands also largely shared their career goal so there was already solidarity there. When this type of emotional support was missing in their relationship with their parents, the women found this hard and detrimental to their relationship, creating a barrier and resentment.

Through having access to large resources of family capital then the guilt of the impact of their studies on their family could be alleviated for the women, time could be found to devote to their HE studies and motivation to continue with their studies was increased.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

8.1 Analysing the findings based on the three research questions

This thesis began by posing the question whether HE transforms a woman's identity and questioned whether this had effects on family relationships. Previous research highlighted gender related issues resulting in marital strain and conflict due to the demands of HE study. My research set out to question whether these issues are still current in today's society. This final chapter will begin by reinforcing the key questions, analysing the main findings leading to my model of family capital. Limitations of the study, areas for further research and the wider applicability of the study will be considered[15]. Please note that the majority of the findings are from the perspectives of the women unless otherwise stated.

8.1.1 How does HE impact on a mature woman's identity and position in family relationships?

Women constructed their identity firstly as mothers, then as co-constructors of different relationships. Although the women had traditional gender related roles in the home prior to HE, this changed and transformed during their studies. They reconstructed their identity and positioning as a mother and adapted this when exposed to the early years' course content along with a developing ability to reflect. They developed confidence and self-esteem, facilitating reflective and analytical thinking and acquiring a changed perspective on issues raised by the course content and their life experiences in general. The women participants expressed that the majority of the husbands and children adapted to the time constraints imposed by their studies and rallied round to share out household tasks. Their HE course impacted on the women's identity and roles within the home as a result of women being willing to pursue educational opportunities that changed family dynamics and routines. This was embraced and supported by the majority of the husbands and all of the children in this study demonstrating roles in the

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[15] A personal reflections section (see Appendix 15) was constructed as a means of consolidating my learning and enabling me to reflect on my changing position not only as a researcher, but also as a mother, wife and mature student

family were flexible to accommodate changes. This paints a very different picture of family roles compared to early studies in the 1990's.

8.1.2 What are the effects of HE on women's long term relationships?

Marital relationships were predominately able to accommodate and adapt to the changing identity of the women students. For some families there was initial tension and friction, as the women and their husbands learnt to adjust to the transformations that were brought about through engagement with HE. Relationships that were already strong and stable prior to HE, were resilient to the additional pressure and strain.

Marital relationships were enhanced through the women's identity transformation as discussions between husbands and wives became richer and mutual respect grew stronger (this is according to the women's perspectives). Husbands that were open to identity change in their wives were likely to be more receptive and accommodating to transformations impacting on the home. For example, when husbands were comfortable with their wives gaining in confidence or taking a stronger lead in discussions they did not object to changes within roles as they could see the benefits of transformation. Those husbands that were not supportive of their wife's identity changes were more resistance to change within the home. Mutually supportive and stable relationships facilitated resilience more easily, this allowed for changes to be buffered (Feenay and Lemay, 2012).

8.1.3 Are there any effects on families as a whole?

Concepts of motherhood and feelings of guilt are underlying factors that impact on decision making for women. Findings showed that the women's construction of what it was to be a good mother was often in conflict with their identity as a student, but they found ways to deal with this. Children adapted well to their mother studying, particularly when the women put strategies in place to minimise detrimental effects. The women believed that they became educational role models for their children and supported their child's educational development through increased awareness of early years education and its importance. Children's relationships with their

fathers were enhanced through spending more time with them and being more aware of their needs. These changes to family life demonstrated to the women that there was value in the adaptations that had been introduced to the household, changing their concept of HE study as a selfish act, to one that benefitted the family. These findings challenge the essentialist views of motherhood (Woodward, 1997) and veer towards Morgan's view (2011) of families that change, evolve and adapt to respond to changes in the environment. Families that are adaptive, responsive and flexible, demonstrates a different perspective on family life than offered by early studies into mature women students (Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999, Parr, 2000).

8.2 Towards family capital

This thesis contributes to the development of new knowledge through three main arguments: a conceptual framework that enables analysis and comprehension of the findings, transformation affecting other family members, which leads to my optimum model of family capital.

8.2.1 Conceptual framework of identity strands, positioning and transformation through critical reflection

The conceptual framework offered in Chapter 3 demonstrates the interplay between changing strands of identity, positioning in relationships and the effects of transformations on mature women students. It illustrates that identity is not fixed but through the concept of different strands of identity it can be seen that when one strand is changed or affected this has an effect on other strands. The effect of one's position in relationships can challenge aspects of identity such as identity construction of what it is to be a mother.

It is worth recognising that there could be conflict between subject positions or one subject position could reinforce another. If a woman was dealing with an educational difficulty at her child's school she may combine the subject positions as both mother and HE early years student. Through HE, her educational knowledge and agency may be increased as she feels an enhanced right and authority to speak based on these two positions of early years student and mother. This example shows that subject positions cannot be seen quite as singularly as Tan and

Moghaddam (1999) imply and would suggest that identity is also considered as having the possibility of blurring the edges between different strands rather than seen in isolation.

Through reflective thinking, transformations can take place that enable strands of identity to be assessed and positions to be aligned in relationships. These transformations are facilitated through the continuous cycle of change (see Figure 2) that has effects on relationships and families as a whole.

8.2.2 Transformations affecting other family members

Transformation is not just an insular process; this study has demonstrated from the women's perspectives that an individual's identity transformation can alter the views, perspectives and actions of others. Previous studies (Biesta et al., 2011; Edwards, 1993a; Merrill, 1999; Parr, 2000; Pascall and Cox, 1993 and Schuller et al., 2004) have focused on transformations to mature women students as a result of HE and recognised that this can have positive implications directly for children but have failed to acknowledge how these changes can positively affect the husbands. In this thesis, transformations to the husbands parenting approaches were confirmed by both the women and their husbands. Therefore the cycle of transformation (Figure 2) can also effect change for their husbands (Figure 5) through transformation of the mature women students. This challenges Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformation being an insular and introspective experience and recognises that, through identity change in the women, meaning schemes can be reformed for the husbands.

Through the mature women participating in HE and constructing knowledge of the subject, critical reflection occurs. As their thought processes change, identity transformation takes place, this is then shared with and observed by their husbands

Positioning and repostioning occurs - as the husbands considers the new information they begin to construct new behaviours and ways of being a parent

New meaning schemes of parenting begin to be reflected upon by the husbands

Figure 5: Conceptual framework – Cycle of transformation for the husbands

Mezirow (1978; 1991) argues that learners need to critically examine their values base in order for transformation to take place. It is difficult to state whether the husbands had rationalised and analysed for themselves or whether they had observed and copied changed behaviours from their wives. Drawing on Mezirow (1995, cited by Kitchenham, 2008), transformation can be seen in two categories: straightforward and profound. For the husbands, this could be categorised as straightforward transformation of parenting practices and values based on their observations and discussions with their wives. The educational environment plays a part in transformative learning through facilitating opportunities for reflective activities that can challenge previous assumptions (Mezirow, 1978; Taylor, 2009). This transformation is on a smaller scale for the men than the women; as they have not been through the educational experience themselves, it is more likely to be a transformation of behaviours rather than transformed thinking and ways of being.

Family capital is considered as a key aspect of this cycle of transformation. Through having access to large resources of family capital, women are able to develop cultural awareness and skills of HE, gain emotional support and solidarity and devote time to their HE studies enabling

these transformations to take place. Transformation can take place without family capital, though it is more difficult for the women as capital can provide them with time, reassurance and motivation to continue with their studies.

8.2.3 Optimum model and conditions for family capital

The findings presented in Chapter 7, shows that family capital is central in facilitating HE success. Practical strategies of childcare and household tasks through investments of time are important. Emotional capital of encouragement and support, cultural capital of understanding the HE milieu, economic capital to invest in resources and social capital of solidarity, are also principle factors in family capital. Edwards (1993a) notion of connecting studies is similarly important as those families with large resources of capital were good connectors of study and home life. Gaining support from their children, connecting their husband or parents to their studies through sharing what they were are doing and initialising support was also crucial in gaining acceptance of what they were doing and easing guilt.

Gaining emotional support and access to time was of utmost importance. The women viewed their identity as a mother and student as being 'time poor'. Their construction of a being a good mother was perceived as giving time. Guilt was alleviated by the husband giving time to the children and the women knew that the children were spending time with another family member. Emotional encouragement from the women's parents was important to demonstrate support of the women studying, and show it was of value. Children supporting their studies and giving them time to study was another sign of approval of their studies.

My optimum model of family capital can be visualised in Figures 6 and 7. This conceptualises the different types of capital and the factors that contribute to it. Husbands are acknowledged as the greatest providers of family capital when women embark on HE studies.

FAMILY CAPITAL

Practical support – frees up time for the woman to study or assimilate HE skills

Emotional support – provided through communication, sensitivity and understanding which helps to alleviate guilt though the family's acceptance of her HE studies

in the form of

in the form of

ECONOMIC CAPITAL – reducing work hours to study or the husband reducing his work hours to assist with childcare or household tasks. Affording additional resources.

CULTURAL CAPITAL - this includes study skills and knowledge of HE systems acquired through family members

EMOTIONAL CAPITAL – emotional investments located within family relationships that create resilience to stress and strain

SOCIAL CAPITAL – family members showing solidarity though a shared goal

Practical and emotional strategies of support accumulated through family capital demonstrate that the family values the woman and her choice to study. This helps to reduce her feelings of guilt and affords her space and time to explore new possibilities for identity and positional change in the family

Figure 7: HUSBANDS' FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PRODUCTION OF FAMILY CAPITAL

Financial

Educational

Strong relationship

this leads to **TIME** and acceptance – which gives a transformational space to assimilate knowledge

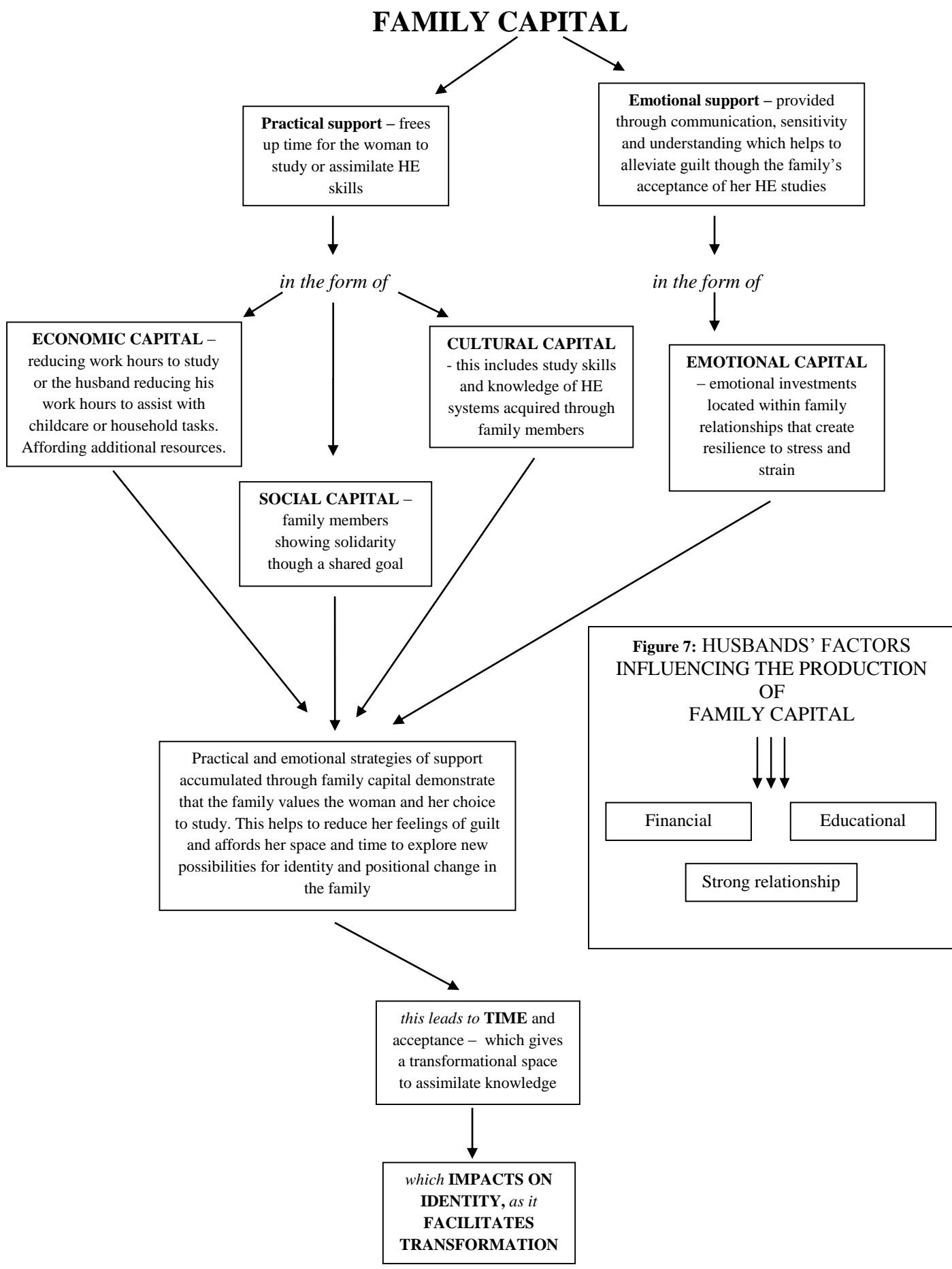*which* **IMPACTS ON IDENTITY,** *as it* **FACILITATES TRANSFORMATION**

Figure 6: Optimum model of family capital

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The model demonstrates that the aspects of capital (emotional, economic, cultural and social) all demonstrate acceptance of a woman's study and creates time for her to study. Families that offer capital in this way are also more receptive to change and more accepting of the women's personal transformations and changes to the family unit (for example, family role structure or parenting techniques).

8.3 Limitations with study

This study has offered an account of the experiences of women HE students and their husbands considering the impact of studying on family relationships. It was conducted on a small scale with students of one Foundation Degree course and their husbands. As a consequence of this methodology, there are limitations which need to be contemplated. This study only considers the views of three husbands rather than all of the husbands, as only three husbands volunteered to take part. Therefore their comments cannot be seen as representative of all husbands but shows the experiences of this particular group in this period of time. However, comments made by the women regarding their husbands were also included however this is from their perception of their husband's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Husbands who were in conflict with their wives over their HE studies may not have been willing to take part; my sample may only include those who are positive about and accepting of their wives' HE studies.

This study fails to account for a representation of those women who withdrew from the programme before completion. The one woman participant that was interviewed did cite family pressures and a lack of parental childcare support as her reason for course withdrawal. This is an area that could be further researched to ascertain whether a lack of family capital is an implication for course withdrawal.

The proposed model of family capital has some limitations as it is based on why husbands gave support and only speculates from the women's perspective as to why their parents were willing or unwilling to give support. Husbands provided most of the family capital, so providing a working model for this group is justifiable. This model provides a basis for further research to account for husbands who were unsupportive.

8.4 Wider applicability of study

This study has used empirical research to conclude that HE study is transformative to women students (beyond the remit of education) and demonstrates that a lack of family capital can make studying more problematic for women. These are issues that are important to HE staff, to enable them to highlight the possible transformative effects of HE study on family life for potential women students and their husbands. Through raising the awareness of the importance of family support through the investment of large resources of family capital, the transition to HE can be made easier for women students and their families. Women without family capital from their husbands rely on their children for emotional support or withdraw into themselves. Therefore, providing a network of emotional and social support and understanding in a CHE framework is important in order to bridge this potential gap. CHE offers an appropriate forum for this as it boasts of smaller class sizes and increased pastoral support, therefore this is a marketable feature for CHE providers. An awareness of the complexities of studying for mature women students can help tutors to promote peer group (emotional and social capital) and study skills support (cultural capital), as well as helping women to develop strategies for finding study time.

In HEI's, where pastoral support and smaller class sizes is less prominent and accessible than in CHE, other strategies can be employed to support mature women. Women without access to family capital (like Hilary) may require opportunities to develop emotional capital which builds confidence and self belief; study skills support for cultural capital and opportunities to network and build peer relationships to develop social capital. Therefore policy makers need to be aware of the importance of timetabling teaching time and opportunities to facilitate these activities for mature women.

8.5 Areas for further research

This research has started to consider the effects of a lack of family capital on women. Further exploration of this is needed to consider what strategies women, without access to capital, put in place in order to achieve success. It could also explore the potential for accumulating capital on

the course and the role of tutor and peer support in this process. This could be extended to consider the views of women who have left HE programmes to ascertain whether a lack of family capital, played a part in their decision to withdraw.

Based on my own experiences I am also interested to find out if higher level study, for example master's and doctorate level, causes more profound identity change and greater levels of stresses and strains on family life.

Through a consideration of these issues, further insights into women students' identity transformation and effects on family lives can be deliberated.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: AUTHOR BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Context

I come to this piece of research as a woman, mother, wife, mature student, Early Years practitioner and Programme Manager of a Foundation Degree programme. All of these positions have shaped this thesis and have influenced my own meaning-making of a situation; they are pivotal to my choice of research topic and my methodological approach. My personal belief is that knowledge is not something that exists to be found, but something that is constructed through experiences and interactions with others. Therefore, my own historical and social perspectives will have influenced my interpretation of the themes contained in this thesis.

Identity themes/positioning in family relationships prior to HE

As a child, teenager and young adult I often lacked self confidence and shied away from large groups preferring the company of children or small group social interactions. I valued close relationships and in depth connections and communications with others. This developed into an ethos of caring for and meeting the needs of others which led into a career in early years. I did not feel confident enough or academically able to go to university so chose a career as an early years worker instead. I continued working in childcare until I became a farmer's wife and a mother. Once I was a full time mother, I realised that although I loved my role, I did not want to be tied to the farm, my husband or family. I recognised that I desired a separate identity and found this in Higher Education (HE). I was actively encouraged and supported, by my husband, to gain additional qualifications to map out a career that I wished to pursue. Nevertheless, my identity prior to HE was firmly located in the family.

Positioned as a mature student who came late to academic study and through non traditional routes, I identified with research by Green Lister (2003), as l too have lacked in self confidence and have located myself in a fragile position of not truly believing I was capable of succeeding. As previously mentioned, this stems from early childhood experiences of a lack of self confidence in large social situations and generally underestimating my own capabilities.

Therefore, I hold the belief that building self confidence through relationship building (Bolton, 2005) and empowering women to succeed and fulfil their ambitions is important. This is an important point in terms of my career choice. My work is principally with mature women students returning to study, as I manage a Higher Education (HE) Foundation Degree programme in Early Years in a Further Education (FE) college. Therefore, what is important to me, is developing trust, empowering women and enabling them to fulfil their early years career ambitions in small personalised groups of accessible local support.

Identity changes during the HE experience

I acknowledge that my construction of what it is to be a woman has changed during this doctorate process. My childhood memories are of questioning gender stereotypical roles, which were generated in the farming culture that I was brought up in. This interest in equality was suppressed for many years and through reading and research during the doctorate programme I was given a voice and platform to begin moulding my feminist perspective. This has been shaped by positioning theory; considering how subject positions in dialogue and social interactions can constrain our choices and shape our reactions and resulting discourse interchanges (Harré and Lagnehove, 1999). Burr's concepts of 'identity strands' (2005) has made me consider who I am and the influences that make me the person that I am. Reynolds, Callender and Edward's (2003) research into women's identity, employment and family life has enabled me to question gender roles and positioning in family life.

Effects on family relationships

I can identify with some of the emotions women experience when entering into HE such as differing levels of self confidence, guilt over family issues and juggling time. In my own personal family relationships, my HE study has been portrayed as positive experience for the children and I have been positioned in and outside of the family as successful, inspiring and worthy of admiration. However, coupled with this, have been the financial pressures of studying, the negative impact of study on family time and the tensions that have occurred as I have changed and developed my viewpoints on different topics. Therefore when considering the

study experience of the women participants it may be difficult to separate this from my own emotional perspective and feelings.

Links to thesis

My own HE study experiences and lecturing role have led me to consider one particular issue that affects mature students on the Foundation Degree in Early Years: how a woman's increasing self confidence and early years knowledge acquisition can change her, and can subsequently change her position in her relationships. The supposition that I keep coming back to, is that support from a husband is often crucial to a woman's success. I have observed women withdraw from the Foundation Degree programme because of pressure from their husband and guilt over neglecting their family. During a tutorial, some of the women have cited changes in themselves as they have adapted to university life. They discuss how their values, ideas and even conversations often change, thus putting pressure on their marital relationship. As a female student changes, some husbands consequently appear to struggle with this, particularly if they feel that they are getting 'left behind', or required to take more of a share of the childcare or household tasks. In contrast, I have also heard women talk about the support they have received from their husbands in a positive way, citing emotional support, help with the practical aspects of the course (for instance, proof reading, getting library books, binding work), as well as help with childcare so that the wife could study.

Research is often chosen due to personal significance for the researcher (Etherington, 2004) and, in my case, my own experiences are an integral part of this thesis. Hence, I locate myself firmly in the research process and have reflexively made my contextual values, beliefs and position clear throughout this study in order to show transparency.

Appendix 2: UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUNDATION DEGREE IN EARLY YEARS

Unique characteristics of a Foundation Degree	Unique characteristics of this Foundation Degree in Early Years programme
Locally placed provision	Central city centre accessible location, dedicated classroom space, offered over 1-2 days a week to suit employers.
Flexible entry requirements	Vocational qualifications and professional experiences are welcomed; entry criteria are flexible to enable those experienced practitioners with lower entry qualifications to gain entry onto the programme.
Small class sizes	Small class sizes enable professional experiences to be shared easily, thus promoting reflection.
Flexible learning delivery	A mix of lectures, group activities, self-directed study, seminar groups, discussions and group work are encouraged to develop confidence and to enable students to reflect on their own practice and share experiences. All students are encouraged to take an active role, thus aiding transformation and identity formation.
Increased tutorial pastoral support and personalised pedagogy	All students have regular one-to-one tutorials to discuss their progress; this can include discussing their barriers to study. Many mature women use this as an opportunity to share the complexities of juggling family, work and study life. They are also offered opportunities to reflect on their progress, the development of their knowledge base and also make links to their practice through support with reflective journal writing.
Development of workplace skills	Workplace experiences are an integral part of the course; students are encouraged to reflect on their workplace and develop practice using theoretical perspectives to enhance understanding.

Appendix 3: SUMMARY OF MAIN LITERATURE ON MATURE WOMEN

Research study	Participants	Methods	Main findings
Pascall and Cox (1993)	43 HE women mature learners	Longitudinal mixed methods	Restricted educational opportunities due to gender and socially constructed ideas of appropriate roles. Identity prior to HE was predominately located in the home. Education gave the women choices and identity changes
Edwards (1993a)	31 HE mature women students	Family educational biographies, interviews to generate synopses	Habitation of public and private spheres affects how a woman is positioned and choices available to her. Marital relationships were often under strain due to HE studies, identity changes in terms of self confidence, self-esteem and a change of roles. Three categories developed connecting study, separating education and family, mixing connections and separations of education and family.
Merrill (1999)	30 mature HE women and a small sample of men for comparison	Qualitative methods, interviews	Raises gender, class and stress in relationships as barriers to study. Inequalities for women are demonstrated as women are portrayed as having different constraints (e.g. marriage or family) to men when studying. Women experienced changes to identity which changed their values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour.
Parr (2000)	49 HE women	Ethnographic qualitative approach	Previous identity rejected; reshaped identity with strands of self confidence, independence, positive self image etc. Education gives feelings of success and achievement, identity previous to HE was rooted in gendered roles of domestic and caring responsibilities.

Schuller et al. (2004)	145 young people and adults aged from 16-42	In depth interviews	Focused on positive and negative benefits of learning to the individual, family and community. Changes to identity e.g. rise in self-esteem and self confidence or a greater sense of purpose. Negative outcomes included conflict with others due to changes in identity.
Biesta et al. (2011)	117 people aged from 25-84	3 year mixed methods longitudinal study	Main argument: learning could not be separated from identity or positions, personal changes and transformation can have effects on relationships and positions with society and families.

Appendix 4: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL ENTRIES TO JUSTIFY AND DEVELOP METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

07/08/12 - Feelings after pre-pilot research

- *I feel the questions were too structured, I would like to encourage more of a freer narrative however I am aware that this student is quite a concise student and tends not to waste words! I am concerned that my approach may be too constructed and constrained therefore it may not generate enough evidence.*

- *Interviewing students known to me is a bonus as she admitted afterwards that she would not have been as open to someone she didn't know. Knowing me gave her the confidence to be open about her relationships, she trusted me.*

- *Not enough data on identity, however this may be developed in phase 1 journal entries.*

- *The thesis title and key questions work*

- *I am concerned about the theoretical perspective from which I can base this but positioning, confidence and identity are key themes here.*

- *Gender issues – HE can be empowering, husbands can support this changing identity and take on different roles to put ambitions of wife as a priority. Emphasises that gender roles can be equal – welcomed by this husband! Why are women feeling guilty? Guilt over images/assumptions of what a mother should do?*

Action

1. *Encourage a freer narrative – develop this style through effective dialogue and starting point*
2. *Continue to read around identity, confidence and positioning theory*

22.03.13 - I hate the methods section!

As I write my methods section, which I was finding very difficult to get into, I am more convinced of my feminist perspective and less convinced that I want to include male voices. Initially U and V wanted to make sure that I was not showing discrimination to men but

actually this study (like Edwards and many others) could be focusing solely on women as that is where my interest lies. I feel using men is only a tokenistic approach and it will look like that. Every method that has been chosen is with the women learners in mind. The main bulk of my reading concerns women. I am not really interested in the male student experience for this research or whether it is similar or different to women. What I am most interested in is the women's voices. What is happening to them, how do they construct their experiences, what meaning can they make for themselves? This is the group I mainly work with therefore have a key interest and understanding of.

I will write this up in my methods and discuss with U and V. This is a radical turn around but one that I feel I can justify and should make my study stronger. I feel that using men will be picked apart at the Viva as they may see through it and see that it is tokenistic and not really what I want to look at all.

Appendix 5: PARTICIPANT FAMILY DETAILS

Female Student	*Husband*	*Programme Information*	*Child 1*	*Child 2*	*Child 3*	*Child 4*
Angelina, aged 38	Bradley **(male participant in study)**	Second year, part time student	Alex, aged 9	Alice, aged 5	-	-
Betty, aged 35	Lloyd	First year student (interrupted her studies due to childcare issues)	Matthew, aged 5	Sophie, aged 3	-	-
Christina, aged 42	Dominic	Third year degree top up, part time student	Jack, aged 17	Anna, aged 15	-	-
Doris, aged 41	David	Second year, full time student	Isobel, aged 9	Fiona, aged 8	-	-
Esme, aged 55	Alan **(male participant in study)**	Second year, part time student	Emily, aged 17	-	-	-
Heidi, aged 33	Joe	Third year degree top up, full time student	Ellie, aged 9	Sam, aged 6	Mandy, aged 5	-

Name	Partner	Study	Child	Child	Child	Child
Hilary, aged 42	-	First year, part time student	Imogen, aged 6	George, aged 5	-	-
Jennifer, aged 37	Jon	First year, part time student	Ella, aged 9	Ben, aged 7	Megan, aged 4	
Kim, aged 27	Matt	Third year degree top up, full time student	Colin, aged 9	James, aged 7	Izzy aged 4	-
Maggie, aged 48	Ross **(male participant in study)**	Second year, part time student	Rob, aged 21	Henry, aged 19	Claire, aged 16	Kin, aged 13
Marie, aged 41	Harry (separated whilst on course)	First year, full time student	Katie, aged 14	Oscar, aged 6	-	-

Appendix 6: MIND MAP FOR FOCUS INTERVIEWS

1. ME - Identity, roles **before** Higher Education experience

2. ME - Identity, roles **during** or **after** Higher Education experience

3. Changes/ transformation – what has changed, why?

4. How has this impacted on your different relationships?

Appendix 7: SPEECH BUBBLE PHRASES

The speech bubble phrases were:

- *I kept thinking I've got to do this for myself.*

- *I started to feel guilty because I wasn't there.*

- *I think my family has seen my confidence go up.*

- *It was in my first year that it really hit me as I've never experienced anything like that before.*

- *This is something I want.*

- *I think he has changed to accommodate me.*

- *I feel different now, I feel more self assured.*

- *You change how you think and you question and you critique and I think this has improved me as a parent.*

- *I think I had to let go of those things before I could find me.*

- *I feel more, I don't know important is not the right word, but I feel I can have more of a presence now.*

Appendix 8 – RESEARCH PHASES

Phase one – Initial mind mapping and focused interview

My research was set out in three phases. The aim of the initial interview was to introduce the topic to the women, through the use of a mind mapping technique to focus on the family context and positioning in the family. Through this informal mapping technique the women were encouraged to tell their stories of their experiences. This approach enabled the women to deviate from the topics of identity and effects on the family, therefore revealing other things that were insightful but not initially themes I had set (see May, 2011). Phase 1 was the least participatory of the phases as I had pre-planned the themes. However there were only 4 themes set which enabled the women to explore each theme from their own perspective without being governed by many rigid interview questions. This method included an initial discussion centring on whether the course changed them or their family dynamics. The initial interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. The mind map tool was developed initially from an excerpt of an assessment journal by a student who had used a mind mapping technique to consider the different identities as a mother, professional and student. This was really insightful, yet simplistic and was something I wanted to develop as a research method. I used 4 mind mapping bubbles during my pilot interview along the themes of identity, transformation and impact on family relationships. These themes were derived from my review of the literature and my research aims:

1. ME - Identity, roles **before** HE experience

2. ME - Identity, roles **during** or **after** HE experience

3. Changes/transformation – what has changed, why?

4. How has this impacted on your different relationships?

It became apparent after the pilot interview that I needed to clarify each participant's understanding of 'identity' to give a common understanding of how the word would be used. I also noticed that both of the pilot participants used the mind mapping tool in different ways and

decided to reassure all participants that the use of the mind mapping tool was optional and used as a basis for discussion.

The mind mapping technique, with questions interjected as the discussion proceeded, was similar to the descriptions in May (2011) of a focused interview. The method of a focused interview was selected over an interview, as an interview seems to suggest, '… an exploitative relationship' due to the power status of the interviewer (Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2011:42). Whereas personal stories, in the form of focused interviews, were more appropriate to my research stance and perspectives. The key aspects of this approach centred on flexibility, participant control and the discovery of meaning (May, 2011). Using a focused interview with an underpinning focus on the research questions, rather than set questions allowed for the individuality of the participants, as what may have seemed a suitable sequence of questions for one may have been inappropriate for another (Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2011). The pilot study demonstrated that using a less structured interview method enabled rich data to be constructed quite naturally, as the participant revealed changes inside of family relationships without the need for direct questioning. This also allowed me to play a less dominant role as researcher, which aligns with my feminist perspective. The rationale for this initial focused interview was to enable the women to begin to tell their stories of their experiences in terms of the main themes of the research, concerning identity transformation and the effects of this on their long term and family relationships.

Participants were offered a second interview to discuss the topics that they raised in phase one. This also gave them time to continue to reflect on some of the themes discussed.

Phase two – Second interview, particpant led

Particpants were encouraged to bring artefacts or discussion themes to the second interview to elaborate their points and illuminate their experiences and reflections. The second interview lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Their artefacts and discussion themes included:

- Email notes from a child showing how their mother had changed during their HE experience

- Recounted conversations with their husband about changes to the student's identity or changes to the family day to day routines or relationships

- Recounted conversations with wider family members and friends about changes to the student's identity

- Pictures drawn by the students' children showing their experiences of their mother studying

- Continuation notes on the mind mapping sheet

Prior to phase two, I developed one other resource as a result of the initial analysis of the phase one interviews. Initailly this was devised as an additional resource to be used if the women had not brought any artefacts or discussion topics to phase 2. However, it also became important as an additional discussion tool to enable the particpants to discuss and expand upon some of the key themes raised in phase 1 if they chose to. I put some of the key quotes into speech bubbles (see Appendix 7) and asked if they wanted to discuss any that were significant or of interest to them. I purposefully did not ask the participants to select the comments which were similar to their experiences as I did not wish to narrow their responses.

As with phase one, and with the general principles of a mosaic approach, the emphasis was very much centred on being led by the women through the artefacts or discussion tools that they brought to phase 2. Through continuing with the research themselves through interviewing their families, friends or reflecting in their journals then they had some ownership and autonomy in the research. I was also sensitive to their body language in terms of how far to develop the discussions thus respecting their willingness to participate and answers questions or withdraw from the process. For example if a woman looked uncomfortable or was hesitant in talking about a topic then I did not ask further questions, thus letting the woman take the lead.

Phase three – Interviews with husbands

In phase three, I conducted interviews with the women participants' husbands. Initially I had planned to interview male Early Years students in order to ascertain whether they also experienced changes in identity and effects on family relationships. To show some

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comparability I planned to use mature male students from other local FdA Early Years programmes, as there were no male mature students on my programmes. The rationale for selecting male Early Years students recognised that although the male students may perceive family life differently to women, they had the commonality of being Early Years professionals. Therefore my assumption was that their understanding of caring responsibilities and an ethos of care (Penn, 2000) might be on a similar par to the women. Similar methods of data generation were planned with both the women and the men to make sure that I presented the same opportunities for both groups.

This was not possible as I found it difficult to locate a group of male participants despite contacting tutors from other colleges for support. It was also evident, through the research phases, that my research had moved on and there was validity in talking to the husbands. I was surprised when many stories from phase one and two were of encouragement and cooperation from the participants' husbands in terms of both emotional and practical support. Also many of the women spoke of how they had had many conversations with their husbands about the impact of their study on the family and even spoke of this as part of their own research for phase two of the interviews.

Appendix 9: VERIFICATION STRATEGIES

Verification strategy (Morse et al., 2002)	Definition	Analysis of reliability and validity	Weaknesses or limitations
Methodological coherence	Do the questions match the methods? Do these need to be changed or adapted throughout the process?	Through the use of multi methods that were flexible and directed by the participants a reflective approach was taken and analysed in the research journal. The method of thinking on my feet was also relevant during phase 2 in the interviews, as I 'reflected in action' (Schön, 1991) and tailored my approach and utilisation of the planned research resources to fit the needs and responses of the participants. This was always mindful of the research questions. Validity was also achieved through using 2 phases, as this gave the participants different opportunities to express their perspectives and to develop their own thinking on the issues raised. The third research question was changed throughout the process as access to male students	As I did not want to interrupt the flow of the stories of the participants during the interviews, or limit their participation, there was a danger that the research questions could be lost or not fully met.

		became problematic and the research findings from phase 1 pointed in the direction of interviewing husbands.	
Sample must be appropriate	Do the participants have knowledge or can represent knowledge of the chosen subject	As a tutor to the women participants I selected half of the group seeking both positive and negative stories of support and relationships. The other half of the group were selected having no prior knowledge of the participants to ensure a random cross section of views.	As the men were not known to me they may not represent a cross section with different perspectives. However, sample size is small but relevant as it can be used to enhance the stories of their wives rather than as a representation of all husbands.
Collecting and analysing data concurrently	Focusing on what is known so far and what needs to be known	Reviewing the data as it was constructed and having a reserve list of participants enabled me to gain viewpoints from multi perspectives so that I ensured that the research questions were addressed and that there was sufficient data to enable the data to be investigated with authority. Being flexible in my approach meant that I was willing to extend the research to participants in the first year and to husbands due to issues and responses raised by the participants.	The time constraints on this could have caused me to make quick and inadequate assumptions as to whether the data was sufficient.

Thinking theoretically	Themes that are beginning to emerge in the data to be confirmed in subsequent data to build a solid foundation.	Through reviewing the data as it was constructed, I was able to see themes and theories emerging. This enabled me to widen my research area to first year participants and husbands too. Having a two week gap between phase 1 and 2 also allowed sufficient time for this process to be started.	The time constraints on this could have caused me to make quick and inadequate assumptions about emerging theories
Theory development	Deliberating moving from the theory found in the data to linking it to wider theory to generate understanding. Thus the theoretical development will be robust and comprehensive as there is a clear alignment between the data and theory.	Using the reflective research journal enabled research theories to be developed through the consideration of the data. Logical thought processes, thinking and analysis developed as a result of this.	Data may be too vast to code and themes may not be clear.

Appendix 10: THEMATIC MIND MAP

Thematic mind map
(version 4)

Parenting

Professionalism

Increased knowledge

More reflective/ Analytical

Changed perspective

Identity during/after HE

Increased confidence

Guilt

Enhanced education

Parenting knowledge

Changed relationship with their Dad (positive)

Children

Impact on family

Family capital

Relationship with parents/in laws

Change in roles with male partner

Relationship with partner

Positive capital

Negative capital

Positive effects

Negative effects

Childcare

Housework

Positive effects

Negative effects

Husband

Children

Parents /in laws

Husband

Parents /in laws

Appendix 11: ETHICAL PROTOCOL AND CONSENT LETTER [16]

Participant Information

The following information tells you about the study should you be willing to participate. This study focuses on the effects of higher education on identity reconstruction and the knock on effects of this to family relationships for mature women. Comparisions will be made with mature male early years students.

Research Summary

There is limited recent research into the effects of higher education on identity reconstruction and the knock on effects of this to family relationships for mature women. This research aims to inform practitioners and mature students of the impact of Higher Education (HE) on family relationships with a focus on 3 main research questions:

1. How does Higher Education impact on a mature woman's identity and position in family relationships?

2. What are the effects of Higher Education on women's long term relationships?

3. How are these experiences comparable to mature male students?

Research methods

I will carry out a minimum of 6 focused interviews with Foundation Degree (FdA) in Early Years mature women students who have families. There will also be a small proportion of students who have withdrawn from the programme early. A focused interview is semi structured in nature and will focus on the key themes of identity transformation, exploration of possible changes to family relationships or changes or position in the family. The key aspects of this approach centre on flexibility, participant control and the discovery of meaning. I will ask you to draw a mind map as a guide to the discussion focusing on your identity as a student and family member. This will lead to a discussion on how HE has effected you and possibly your

_____

[16] This is the original ethical protocol, this was adapted as the research changed and developed.

family relationships. This initial meeting could last between 30 minutes and up to an hour. This meeting will take place at a college in a teaching classroom or a meeting room or will be via Skype. Your account will be written up in the form of a summary to highlight your experiences.

Informed Consent

All participation in the project is voluntary. You can choose to withdraw from the research at any time until the data collection process is complete, you do not need to provide a reason for this. Choosing not to participate, or withdrawal from the project, will in no way affect the module assessment outcome of any students that I may be currently assessing. Please be reassured that I will not share any of the data with fellow lecturers or external verifiers that are involved in your assessments, therefore this will have no bearing on the results. All students' work can be internally verified to ensure a fair and non biased outcome.

Openness and Honesty

There is no deception involved in this study and there is no covert element to this study.

Right to Withdraw

All participation in the project is voluntary. You can choose to withdraw from the research at any time until the data collection process is complete, you do not need to provide a reason for this. Choosing not to participate, or withdrawal from the project, will in no way affect the module assessment outcome of any students that I may be currently assessing. All students work can be internally verified to ensure a fair and non biased outcome.

Protection from Harm

This is a potentially sensitive subject area as you are discussing changes in your own family relationships. Therefore as researcher I will encourage a participatory approach that gives some ownership and autonomy back to you to help to restore a more equal power balance. You may also stop the meeting at any time or choose not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with. In terms of the focused interviews I will need to put boundaries in place and

reiterate that my role is not to counsel or offer guidance but to listen, and by facilitating a space for you to speak, I will be acting as co-constructer in the formation of your narratives. I will sign post you to the relevant counselling services in the colleges if you wish to discuss any of the issues that you have raised further.

Some of you are my students so are known to me, therefore there may be issues of power that may influence the research. To overcome this I want to reassure you that your decision to take part in this study will not influence your place on the programme in terms of favourable or unfavourable treatment or assessment decisions. I also want to reassure you that anything that you disclose about your family will not be mentioned outside of the research interviews or discussed (e.g. in future tutorials) unless you choose to approach the subject. This research is not part of my work as your lecturer and will be seen by me as outside of and our relationship as lecturer and student.

Confidentiality and Data Security

You will all remain anonymous, and will be given a different name in any publications. When setting meeting times I will do this confidentially, away from other students or in an email so that others are not aware that you are taking part in this research. Hence, I will not disclose to others that you are participating in this research but if you divulge to others you may be identifiable due to some of you knowing each other well. Therefore I must inform you of the limits of confidentiality as you may be recognisable to each other in the report. Therefore please consider carefully the implications of this as this may also be published and written up in the form of journal articles for public viewing. Please be reassured that I will not share any of the data with fellow lecturers or external verifiers that are involved in your assessments, therefore this will have no bearing on the results.

Artefacts used such as journal entries will only be used with permission; all participants or family members noted in them will be made anonymous. Any photographs used in the focused interviews will be kept by you and will not be used in the final report or publicly released.

All focused interviews will be audio recorded for the purpose of writing up accurate transcripts. These will be heard by the researcher and admin assistant who will be briefed in appropriate confidential procedures. All written data and audio recorded material will be stored in a locked room, all computer based data will be password protected and will be stored for 10 years, which is in line with Plymouth University policy.

Reporting and Debriefing

As participants, you will have initial access to your individual summaries to check accuracy of my interpretation of your narratives. The data will be used as part of my thesis research and may be used in resulting journal publications. You will have an opportunity to see a research summary or the finalised thesis by email or paper copy.

Benefits of Taking Part

Essentially your participation in this research study will benefit the research as it will allow key themes to be explored. This will benefit other lecturers and prospective students as the outcomes of this study will enlighten themes around identity changes for women and the effects of this on their relationships. This could lead to better awareness and more focused support for women in higher education. For you personally, there are the benefits of contributing to a research project such as this and documenting your experiences as a historical record. Through the process of reflecting on your experiences this may develop your skills of self awareness and refection thus influencing possible further study or reflective practice as a whole.

Contact Details

If you have any questions please contact: Louise Webber

Tel: 01392 400651   Email: louisewebber@exe-coll.ac.uk

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS RESEARCH

Study Title: Mature Women and Higher Education: Reconstructing identity and famiy relationships?	
I am prepared to be involved in the study and am happy that my anonymous data is included in the research.	
WRITTEN CONSENT FORM	
	Please Tick
• I understand what is in the written information about the research.	
• I have had the chance to find out more about the study if I wished to.	
• I know what my part will be in the study and I know how long it will take.	
• I know how the study will affect me. I have been told if there are any possible risks.	
• I know that the appropriate Research Ethics Committee has seen and agreed to this study.	
• I understand that personal information is strictly confidential: I know that the only people who may see information about my part in the study are the research team	
• I freely consent to be a participant in the study. No one has put pressure on me.	
• I know that I can stop taking part in the study at any time.	
• Refusal to take part will make no difference to my university studies	
Researcher: Louise Webber **Contact details:** Email: louisewebber@exe-coll.ac.uk	

Tel: 01392 400651	

Signing this consent form indicates that I have read and understand the attached paper and am willing to participate in the study described, starting in or after April 2013.

Your signature: ………………………………   Date: ……………………………………

Your name (Please print)…………………………..

Contact address……………………………………………………………………………..

Your email address ……………………………………………………………

If you wish to receive a summary of the research please tick the box.	
If you wish to receive a copy of the completed thesis please tick the box	

Consent Form

Please complete and return electronically or in hard copy.

Appendix 12: SYNOPSES

Angelina and Bradley's story

Angelina is a 38 year old childminder who has been married to Bradley for 12 years. Bradley is a director of a web company and has a level 4 qualification, they have two children aged five and nine. Angelina's identity changes included: being more confident, more driven, more analytical and able to see things from multiple perspectives now which has enabled her to see life differently. Although Angelina believed this analytical approach caused some issues with her husband initially, this was resolved through the realisation of what Angelina could achieve in terms of career progression through the degree. Bradley has taken over a large share of household and childcare tasks and changed to accommodate Angelina's need for time to study. Both Angelina and Bradley acknowledge that Bradley's support has been a contributing factor to her success on the degree. The children have also been supportive and accommodating which has also helped.

Esme and Alan's story

Esme is a 55 year old Family Support Worker who works in a Children's Centre. She has been in a relationship with Alan for 23 years and has one daughter living at home, aged 17. Alan is a full time police officer and had experience of Higher Education himself as he completed a degree 17 years ago. Whilst on the programme, Esme discovered that she had dyslexia which was a major identity shift for her as she realised that she was a not a 'lesser person' as she previously believed and this enabled her to acknowledge her own abilities. She now feels more knowledgeable and has a better understanding which has enhanced all of her relationships as she can look at things in depth from a theoretical viewpoint. Although initially her relationship with Alan suffered as she concentrated so fully on her studies she had nothing left of herself to give to her husband. However this resolved itself during the programme and Esme felt supported by her Alan through his encouragement and helping her through proof reading her work. Alan was very positive about Esme's studies as he viewed HE as a valid tool in self development.

Maggie and Ross' story

Maggie is a 48 year old Nursery Manager who has been married to Ross for the past 24 years and has four children aged from 13-21. Maggie's identity prior to HE was solely centred on being a mother, housewife and choosing a career path or job that fitted around her children's needs. As the course progressed Maggie grew in self confidence and knowledge and described herself as having a 'presence' and being an educational example to her children. She benefited from strong support from her husband, Ross, who took on many of the household, childcare and cooking tasks and Maggie saw him as instrumental in her success on the degree. Ross believed that it would be difficult for a wife to study at HE level without a supportive husband who was willing to adjust and change to accommodate his wife's study needs. Ross also saw his son as being instrumental in his wife's success through the educational support and camaraderie he provided as they were both studying HE at the same time.

Betty

Betty is a 35 year old full time mum and early years volunteer at a pre-school setting. She has been married to Lloyd for seven years and has two children aged five and three. Betty described her identity before motherhood as being located in her work which gave her status. Betty felt that she lost this status when she became a mother and also suffered from post natal depression. Starting HE gave her pride and raised her self-esteem as she found she could balance motherhood and studying toward her career goals. Unfortunately Betty's daughter failed to settle at nursery, Betty's parents also withdrew their childcare support as they were concerned about the course putting too much stress and pressure on Betty and her family. Betty did receive some childcare support from her husband, which enabled her to study from home, but the guilt of her daughter not settling at nursery coupled with the withdrawn support from her parents resulted in Betty withdrawing from the course. Betty returned to the course in the following autumn once she had spent the year preparing her daughter for the transition.

Christina

Christina is a 42 year old pre-school leader who has been married to Dominic for 21 years and has two children aged 15 and 17. Dominic is a company director. Christina described her identity prior to HE as a pre-school leader, a daughter, a daughter in law, a sister, a wife and as a mother. Through being on the degree programme, her self confidence in her own abilities and her ability to complete assignments increased. This led to her identity changing as she realised that she did know what she was talking about (confidence in 'knowing'), she felt more reflective (both at work and at home), her self-esteem increased through assignment successes and developing self confidence. Christina believes that her children learnt to cook and be more independent through her being busier with HE, they have also learnt to go for her husband for help rather than relying on her as much. Christina believes that she could not have coped with the Foundation Degree without the support of her husband and family.

Doris

Doris is a 41 year old Teaching Assistant who has been married to David for the past 11 years and has two children aged eight and nine. David is a carpenter and has a level three qualification. Doris described her identity before HE as 'lacking in self confidence' and 'not feeling as good as other people'. She described herself as a 'mouse' that hid behind her husband. During HE she became confident as she began achieving high grades and felt ready emotionally, psychologically and physically to branch out to new avenues. Feeling differently about herself and her developing self confidence has affected her relationship. She no longer feels she has to hide behind her husband and actually feels that she is more confident than him, this along with the time commitments of HE study caused friction initially. She believes having to adapt to becoming a more confident and independent woman may have been hard for him to adjust to. She feels that her daughters understood what she was doing and they were very understanding if she did not spend quite as much time with them, however when they needed her she always put them first. Her daughters learnt to play independently which enabled her to study and showed pride in what she was achieving.

Heidi

Heidi is a 33 year old full time mother and volunteer at a local primary school. She is married to Joe, a landscape gardener and has three children aged five, six and nine. Before HE she described her identity in motherhood and explained that this was 'her life'. Her biggest identity change was as a mother, she changed from being fully attentive and available for her children, to a mother who was balancing her time with the children and study. She felt the course had affected how she parented as she is now more aware of their developmental needs and during the Foundation Degree prioritised time to help them educationally. She feels her perspectives are much broader now and she is constantly reflecting and questioning herself, this has led her to be less judgemental, calmer and a lot more confident. Her identity changes and subsequent changed parenting style have had an impact on her husband, Joe, as he has a calmer and more reflective approach too.

Hilary

Hilary is a 42 year old single parent and volunteer at a pre-school. She has two children aged five. She described her identity prior to HE as, 'A Mum. I will always put me as a Mum first'. Hilary has found that since HE she has changed her perspective as she now looks at things in different ways, she feels more positive about herself. Hilary believes that this has benefitted her children as her developing knowledge base and engagement with HE has added an additional element to her children's awareness of 'what is different in life'. As a single parent Hilary is solely responsible for the care of her children. Hilary now feels she experiences more stress, as she has more things on her mind she can lose patience more easily with her children. She feels frustration at balancing her time to study and time with the children. As she is unable to give 100% to her study, she believes that she is not achieving the grades she could achieve, however she will not compromise on her time with the children. Hilary feels it is better to under achieve as she has no alternative as motherhood is her top priority. She receives no practical support and limited emotional support from family members. Hilary feels the greatest benefit of support has been from her tutor. Having a supportive tutor with a flexible approach, who understands the complexities of juggling family and study life has really helped her.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a 37 year old pre-school deputy manager. She has been married to Jon for 14 years and has three children aged four, seven and nine. Prior to HE, Jennifer described her main strand of identity as being a Mum as she viewed that as her biggest responsibility and always saw herself as putting others first. Jennifer has become more self assured and self confident since embarking on the HE course but has changed how she spends her time with her children, due to time constraints and changed priorities. Her time with the children has changed from playing with them and planning creative activities to being an educational role module and supporting them with their homework or issues at school. Jennifer has felt supported by her husband with the childcare and household tasks. She has also received practical support from her mother in law, yet she has shown disapproval of Jennifer's studies as she believes that Jennifer is neglecting her husband, children and duties at home. Jennifer has struggled with this disapproval, but believes that her husband has supported her through this.

Kim

Kim is a 27 year old full time mother and volunteer at a local nursery. She is married to Matt, a manager of an IT department and has 3 children aged, four, seven and nine. Kim's identity prior to HE was tied into being a single mother when she was younger, she felt this gave her a reduced standing and status in the local community. Whilst on the programme she became more knowledgeable of early years practices, this led to a period of unrest as she grappled with previous parenting decisions which she viewed as poor. However, the programme has taught her to be reflective, analytical and see things from other perspectives, this has enabled her to resolve past difficulties as she now understands previous issues in a new light. She believes her increased early years knowledge has impacted on both her and her husband's parenting practices and that her analytical skills have enhanced her relationship with her husband. She believes that her status has been raised at home and socially due to completing her HE studies. Kim has relied on her husband for additional childcare, support with her studies and general

household tasks which she thinks has put a strain on him. Kim could not have completed her Foundation Degree without the support of her husband.

Marie

Marie is a 41 year old mum who has recently separated from her husband Harry (beginning of term 2 in the course). Marie has 2 children aged 14 and 6. Marie located her identity prior to HE as never achieving any formal qualifications, always starting things but not completing them, and being tied into destructive relationships. Marie described the course as giving her self confidence, self-esteem and enabling her to achieve autonomy again. Marie's philosophy as a mother has changed, as she has a more relaxed parenting style, this has impacted on the children as she has a less cautious approach and now believes in risk and challenge opportunities for her children. Marie has received support and encouragement from her children in the form of them being proud and celebrating when she achieves high grades and playing independently thus giving her time to concentrate on course work.

Appendix 13: DETAILED STORIES FROM MARIE AND DORIS

Marie

I have chosen to include a detailed example of identity change here in the form of Marie's story to show how a marriage can be affected though identity change as a result of an HE programme. Marie's identity change and the secondary effects on her relationship with her husband impacted on the already problematic relationship which then disintegrated. However, Marie viewed this change as necessary and positive. The following extract from her interviews illustrate this further:

> I do feel like I'm a very, very, different person. I'm not sure Harry [husband] likes the person that I am now. (Marie)

Marie's former identity was encased in previous experiences of not completing tasks (e.g. qualifications) as well as having bad relationships where she relied heavily on her husband:

> I had a dreadfully destructive relationship with Katie's father… my self-respect and self-esteem here [points to mind map] were pretty low. (Marie)

Her habitual way of not completing or achieving qualifications or career goals, positioned her with her parents, and through her own eyes, as a disappointment and not realising her potential. This affected her identity as she also saw herself as a failure:

> I have started and failed several things in my adult life… so you see, parental respect, I've never had it… They [parents] always think I have failed as I have never lived up to my potential; … I now have a massive determination to finish it [HE programme], but not just finish it, finish it with style. (Marie)

Marie's destructive relationships also resulted in her losing self confidence and not feeling that she could take control over her own life and be independent. Her meaning perspective and identity was one of a lack of self confidence, low self-esteem and an over reliance on others:

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> I don't think I ever commanded myself, I always drifted … I'm a little bit shocked that a year down the line I am sticking something out! (Marie)

With the transformative nature of her HE experience, she made changes to her identity that caused her to alienate herself from her former role and reframe her position. Her husband neither shared her new perspective, nor supported her identity change, thus the relationship ended. This supports Mezirow's (1991: 194) claims that, 'there is evidence, however that "significant others" may not always be central to perspective transformation'. As Marie explained:

> I will not give up on the course and chose that over my marriage … I have a changed perspective; I let the children have risk and challenge opportunities… I am in a stronger place now … my own self-respect has gone up, now I have my own drive… I own my own space… I am in charge of me. (Marie)

Marie regained her autonomy and changed her philosophy on life. She attributed this change in identity and transformation to her participation on HE:

> I don't physically have enough time in the day to worry about anything like that, there is no negative space in my life … It's all about me and the kids now … Having a presence that says I've got pride in myself but I just feel like I've got my own personal space. I am not scared of being alone anymore… The course has given me the confidence to say you can do this, you can actually challenge yourself and you can succeed. (Marie)

Doris

Doris' experiences highlight how a mature student's self confidence can change both personally (feelings) and socially (actions), in quite a transformative way. Doris linked this to educational success. Previously to HE Doris described herself as a *'little mouse'*, using her husband to take the lead in social situations where she appeared quiet and *'invisible'.* She located her lack of self confidence in her earlier experiences as a child *'born out of wedlock'*, to Doris this was an important part for her identity. This positioned her as feeling *'not as good as other* people' and

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she felt *'looked down on'* by others. This affected her self confidence at school and although she felt the teachers believed in her educational abilities, she doubted herself and felt *'held back'* by her background and lack of self confidence and self belief:

> …the teachers at school always used to say to me, 'You are going to go on and do something', and I thought, 'No, not me, I will never make anything of myself', so that held me back. (Doris)

Doris' confidence in her own abilities did not appear immediately but, over a period of time, she related this to achieving success in her assignment work:

> I know I am the kind of person that will always feel like I am 'not good enough' always the underdog and only worthy of praise when I am achieving to a very high standard. (Doris –Year 1 journal entry)

> Because I think through doing the degree, it is almost that I had to prove to myself that I was worthy … I was so scared that I was going to fall flat on my face, I'm not going to be able to do this…I think I've got 57% on my first piece [assignment] and I'm so proud of myself … I proved myself that I was capable of learning all of those new skills … I actually feel proud of what I am doing. (Doris)

Self confidence, acquired through HE success, then spilled over into other aspects of her life as she felt, *'more confident and able'*. This impacted on her relationship with her husband and she sensed that the power dynamics in their relationship had changed.

> So probably, I am quite the confident one now in many ways he [husband] is the one that is not quite as confident when you scratch the surface a little bit (Doris)

Appendix 14: LINKS BETWEEN HAVING A SUPPORTIVE HUSBAND AND TRANSFORMATION OF HIS PARENTING PRACTICES

Woman student	Received emotional support	Received practical support	Transformation of husband's parenting practices	Connected HE study to their husband	Connected HE study to their children
Angelina	✓	✓	✓	✓ discussed HE topics, discussed different approaches to parenting	✓ **X** both seperated and connected study - completed it whilst children were at school and actively involved them in holiday time, discussed links between study and career goal of teaching
Betty	**X**	✓	✓	**?** Only on programme for 6 weeks	**?** Only on programme for 6 weeks
Christina	✓	✓	✓	✓ discussed HE topics, discussed different approaches to parenting	✓ studied at home in front of the children, discussed stress of assignment work and deadlines with them
Doris	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X** did not discuss HE with husband as this caused conflict, minimised intensity of studies	✓ studied at home in front of the children, discussed career goals with children and purpose of HE study
Esme	✓	✓	✓	✓ **X** discussed HE topics, discussed different approaches to parenting, involved husband in proof reading. Sometimes seperated study from husband through withdrawing and stepping back from the relationship to focus on study	✓ discussed pressures of studying with daughter, shared study skills and IT tips

Heidi	✓	✓	✓	✓ discussed HE topics, discussed different approaches to parenting	✓ studied at home in front of the children
Jennifer	✓	✓	✓	✓ discussed the difficulties HE was causing her relationship with her mother in law with her husband, enlisted husband's support in childcare to enable her to attend college	✓ studied at home in front of the children, discussed career goals with children and purpose of HE study, studied with children whilst they did their homework, got children involved in managing study/play times
Kim	✓	✓	✓	✓ discussed HE topics, discussed different approaches to parenting, involved husband in proof reading.	✓ studied at home in front of the children
Maggie	✓	✓	✓	✓ discussed HE topics, discussed different approaches to parenting	✓ discussed pressures of studying with son, shared study skills and tips
Marie	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X** did not discuss HE with husband (whilst together), caused conflict	✓ studied at home in front of the children, discussed stress of assignment work and deadlines with them

Appendix 15: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I feel it is important to add a concluding statement that considers how this research has impacted on me and my family, from the perspective of being a mother, wife and mature student. At the start of the journey I anticipated that I may change, develop my views and my time might be consumed by study, but I had not fully appreciated how this would affect my marital relationship. Through studying as a mature student previously, I had anticipated that I would need to be focused and have clearly structured study times to minimise the impact on my children. This was achieved and I took steps to ensure that I was always available to support the children with their interests and activities. I decided never to prioritise my study over them and became adept at making the most of any opportunity when they were not around to study so that they did not feel pushed out. What I hadn't envisaged was how this would affect my husband. Like Esme, I learnt a strategy of switching off from our relationship so that I could focus quietly on analysing issues and themes from my research. I became preoccupied, distant and aloof in order to juggle the stresses of intensive study at a high level and manage my time with the children so that they were not neglected. My marriage suffered for a time, as I felt I could not fully relax because I was busy trying to cope with the demands of household tasks, work and study. Like many women featured in this study I was not willing to let go of my time with the children but was willing to let go of time with my husband in order to maintain the momentum of study. At the time of study I was not able to see this pattern and blamed my husband for complaining about the effects of HE study on our relationship. His protests of me changing were taken as a crisis in his confidence as a result of my studying, rather than a cry for an emotional attachment to be fused again in our relationship.

With the progression of this study, I found that my own experiences were becoming more and more distant to my findings of positive and supportive marital relationships. This put emotional pressure and feelings of unrest on myself which I transferred to my relationship thus intensifying the feelings of isolation and difference between my husband and I. This illustrated to me how being an insider in research can be difficult to manage and how emotionally involved a qualitative researcher can become with their research topic.

In summary, my identity has been transformed as a result of my research experiences; I have become more confident self assured and knowledgeable on certain topics. This, along with the effects of studying, has had effects on my relationship as initially causing a barrier and distance between my husband and I. However, like findings of Feenay and Lemay (2012) the strength of the relationship and the emotional reserves built up over the years have created a buffering effect that enabled the relationship to cope with these changes and become stronger because of them.

Appendix 16: KEY TERMS

Early Years provision –Childcare provision for a child from the age of birth until the end of the foundation stage year (ending immediately before the 1st September next following the date on which the child attains the age of five) (Great Britain. *Education Act* 2006).

Childcare – Any form of care for a child, which could include education or supervised activities (Great Britain. *Education Act* 2006).

Student vs. learner – Although there is debate over the use of the word student rather than learner, I, like Biesta (2010) have favoured the word 'student' as opposed to 'learner', as 'learner' can denote a deficit in the student as being in a weaker position of lacking knowledge. My construction of a student/lecturer relationship is pivotal to this research as I value the experiences of mature women students and wish to illuminate and facilitate their thinking, understanding and knowledge construction rather than instruct or lecture them.

Mature student - Although the HE Statistics Agency (accessed 2013) defines a mature student as over 21, for the purpose of this research I have defined a mature student as over 25 with a gap in education; therefore the course choice is a life course decision and life changing decision.

Non traditional students - Students who do not have the traditional entry qualifications of A levels but have alternative entry qualifications and may have been out of the educational system for many years (Merrill, 1999).

Further Education College (FEC) – An institution which provides education following post-16, compulsory secondary school education. It is mainly aimed at 16-18 year olds but also has provision for adult students.

Higher Education Institution (HEI) – An institution which provides education at degree and post graduate level for adult students.

College Higher Education (College HE) – Higher Education (HE) provision in a college of Further Education

Husband – Husband or male co-habiting partner

Parent – Parent or parent-in-law

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