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Women, Higher Education and family capital: ‘I could not have done it without my family!’

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 family relationships. This paper analyses the links between family support and students’ feelings of success. The findings are based on qualitative research methods focusing on whether HE changes a woman’s identity and reconstructs family relationships using a theoretical lens of family capital as a tool of analysis. A narrative line of inquiry was used to build detailed stories of a small group of women students and their partners. The eleven women students were selected from one Foundation degree in Early Years programme at a Further Education institution. Data was constructed using mind mapping, focused interviews and a mosaic approach of participant led research. This paper shows that HE transforms women’s lives and the lives of their families. My paper contributes to knowledge on this topic through the development of a model of family capital. The paper concludes that through accessing family capital and having their studies valued by their family, women are able to minimise their feelings of guilt and be successful in their studies.

Keywords: mature women; family capital; Higher Education; family relationships; mothers

Introduction

This paper investigates how Higher Education (HE) affects mature women students’ family lives, through the theoretical lens of family capital (Gofen 2009). It reports on an aspect of my doctorate research with a small group of Early Years Foundation Degree female mature students and their partners focusing on identity change for the women and the effects on their families.

Previous research on mature women students highlights the difficulties mothers experience when juggling HE and family life (Edwards 1993; Merrill 1999; Parr 2000; Pascall and Cox 1993). Having caring responsibilities can be seen as a barrier to learning for women students who are in traditional gender roles in the home (Green Lister 2003; Griffiths

2002; Heenan 2002; Jamieson et al. 2009). Noddings' (2002, 42) study of care, claims that women are concerned with 'maintaining and enhancing caring' relationships within the family. Therefore to neglect or offload these caring relationships as a mother may seem inconceivable. Mothers often feel responsible for organising the care needs of their family around their study needs; this can be a complex task (Edwards, 1993; Heenan, 2002). When women perceive that they fall short of providing adequate care for their family, because of conflicting interests, they experience feelings of guilt and strain (Brook 2015; Noddings 2013). Women often feel selfish as they try to balance the competing needs of study and family life (Merrill 1999) and experience a constant feeling of a lack of time to do either aspect full justice (Edwards 1993; Hughes 2002).

These feelings of guilt and selfishness are often very different to those experienced by male students with families (Brooks 2015) or the younger students that they are studying alongside of. These consequences of HE are also seen as unique to women students as they are competing with historical or cultural assumptions and socially constructed ideas regarding their position in the family (Brooks 2015; Hughes 2002). Although this may be seen as conceding to stereotypes, recent research (The Fatherhood Institute 2016) demonstrates that men and women's roles in the home are still seen as unequal in terms of childcare and household tasks. Therefore women have to add the component of studying to the routines and responsibilities they already have.

Alongside of changes to routines, changes to a woman's identity are to be expected in female students (Webber 2015). Transformations to themselves in terms of confidence and changing perspectives can affect family dynamics and relationships; this can cause a period of readjustment and sometimes conflict (Green Lister 2003; Webber 2015). These identity changes can affect women's relationships with their partners, their children and also shape their parenting approaches (Webber 2015).

Sometimes changes to a woman's identity and household routines are embraced by partners and support follows, sometimes partners withdraw support (emotionally and practically) to show their disapproval (Edwards 1993; Webber 2015). Although previous studies have highlighted these difficulties, my research contributes to the field as it offers insights into why partners give support in practical and emotional terms, how this support is played out and the effects of a lack of support on mature women students. Within this paper, the types of support on offer will be contextualised within the theory of 'family capital'. I use the word capital to define the resources and advantages that can be beneficial in education. What is not clear from previous research are:

- the types of capital on offer within families (family capital)
- the reasons why partners give practical and emotional support
- the impact of family capital on a woman's success in her HE studies

This paper will explore these three main themes.

Methods

A narrative method of inquiry, putting 'women's experiences at the heart of the research', (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2005, 32), was selected with multiple methods of a mind mapping interview, focused interview and a mosaic approach. The mosaic approach, developed by Clark and Moss (2011), advocates the use of multi methods such as participation, reflexivity, adaptability and focusing on experience, which enables participants to take an active role in the research process.

The research was set out in three phases:

Phase One – Initial mind mapping and focused interview (women only)

The aim of this initial interview was to introduce the topic through the use of a mind mapping technique to focus on the family context, identity change and positioning in the family.

Phase Two – Second interview, participant led (mosiac approach) (women only)

Participants were offered a second interview to discuss the topics they raised in phase one. They were encouraged to bring to the interview any artefacts or examples of their discussions with their family members to elaborate their points and illuminate their experiences, focusing on the themes raised in phase one. This included:

- pictures and messages from their children
- recounted discussions with their partner
- journal reflections

Phase Three- Interviews with women participants' partners

Three partners of the women students were interviewed in order to ascertain their perspectives regarding any identity changes for their female partners and the consequential effects on the family.

Participants

The participants (see Table 1) were selected from mature women students that were completing or had just completed their Foundation Degree in Early Years Programme.

Table 1 – Participant details

The students were selected on the basis of meeting the criteria of having children under 18 years of age and a partner (of over 2 years). Hilary was the exception to this as she was a single parent; her experiences offered an alternative perspective. The eleven participants were selected from a college within the South West. Three men were also interviewed to highlight their experiences of supporting a partner that studies. All of the women were given an opportunity to invite their partners to participate in the research, only three partners volunteered. Both the men and women held traditional roles within the home and prior to HE the mothers were largely responsible for childcare and household tasks. All of the participants were in heterosexual relationships; this was the nature of the cohort not due to participant selection. All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Although only a small sample size is used in this paper, like Waller (2006), I believe that it is still sufficient to generate rich data. My aim is to highlight and illuminate in-depth stories in order to create relatable rather than generalisable data.

Data analysis

A thematic framework was used as it enabled me to be systematic and create transparency and consistency. This supported me in reviewing, connecting and summarising the data (Spencer et al. 2014). The main themes for data analysis were:

- Identity prior and during the HE experience
- Transformations that occurred
- Impact on family relationships

As a result of the analysis it became clear that high stocks of family support were an important factor in a student's feelings of success, this developed into my theory of family capital.

Theoretical Lens - Family Capital

I view *family capital* as the systems in families that can aid and support individuals to achieve certain ends. It demonstrates how families can utilise the resources within to assist other family members in order to achieve a common goal. Hence, the family is a valuable source of *capital* and can provide individuals with support and opportunities to achieve success 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). 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. This is

evident in the work of Duckworth and Cochrane (2012) who argue that cultural and social norms within education put certain groups at a disadvantage. Their work with FE learners demonstrated how structural inequalities put those without access to certain capital privileges in a deficit position. They argued that some learners are, ‘...better placed to deal with situations through the various forms of capital invested in them by their families’, (Duckworth and Cochrane 2012, 583). Skeggs (2002) also recognised that some women lack access to different forms of capital, resulting in reduced opportunities to access higher education.

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. 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. Through families investing capital in women HE students; they are more equipped to cope with the demands of HE.

Creating a model of analysis for family capital

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 family relationships and support (Belcher, Peckuonis and Deforge 2011; Gofen 2009; Lau and Li 2011; Moskal 2014).

My model of family capital will be structured around economic, cultural and social capital. For the purpose of this paper *economic 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. Like Duckworth (2014, 25), I view these capitals as having the potential to ‘overlap and feed into each other’. However, there are two dimensions that are neglected in the concepts of capital already discussed: *emotions* and *time*. Both of these aspects were significant in my earlier paper on mature women in HE and a woman’s identity as a mother (Webber 2015). This relates to wanting to do the right thing for her children, being the care giver mainly responsible for meeting the children’s needs and for the feelings of guilt experienced over returning to study. These feelings of guilt, which is an emotional response, are interrelated to time. Although Bourdieu (1986) and Duckworth (2014) allude to time in their debates on capital, it is not emphasised as highly significant or worthy of an aspect of capital. The concepts of time and capital are interlinked as capital can take time to accumulate, (Bourdieu 1986). Also, strong ties within families enable emotional support to develop through investments of time (Duckworth 2014). Therefore I maintain that 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 and may develop a cultural awareness of HE procedures and vocabulary. Time can be viewed as a solid investment (Bourdieu 1986) in the family in generating capital. Therefore time and emotions are aspects of family capital and can underpin other forms of capital. Although Duckworth (2014) argues that families are in a good position to offer capital she focuses largely on the development of social capital within families and underplays the potential for families being able to offer all forms of capital. My research will develop the concept of family capital that I have outlined here demonstrating that the family is a valid source of different forms of capital (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Model of family capital (based on literature review) (Webber 2017)

Findings and discussion

I think my biggest strength is my family ... 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 around me. (Christina)

I don't think I could have done it [HE] without him [partner] ... I wouldn't have been able to maintain it [HE study]. (Kim)

According to the findings there is a strong link between family support and success at HE level for women students. Women with families often struggle to separate their HE experiences, resulting identity change and family life. As these aspects are interwoven it is natural that family dynamics, relationships and routines also change. Receiving support from a partner can affect a woman's capacity to study (Edwards, 1993), but can also affect her attitude to her study. Through believing that her studies are welcomed and accommodated by the family then she is able to focus on her studies without the additional pressure of negativity, disapproval or a lack of emotional or practical support:

I think I was relying on that quite a lot as well, just that reassurance that he [partner] 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)

Receiving limited emotional or practical support puts additional stress on women students with families as they try to negotiate study time around the needs of the family. These different aspects of support provided by the family are examples of family capital. My 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 (Gofen 2009, 107), in this case the women students.

Different aspects of capital provided by the family

Through analysis of common themes expressed in the stories and experiences offered by the woman and the men, different forms of capital were revealed. Bourdieu's forms of capital were used as an initial starting point but it was found that these types of capital alone did not fully explain the capital on offer. The families offered different types of support in the shape of cultural, economic and social forms of capital. Time and emotional capital were also seen as important.

Cultural capital

Duckworth's research (2014; Duckworth and Cochrane, 2012) illuminates the inequalities within the education system excluding those that do not have adequate stocks of cultural capital. Receiving cultural capital support, from within the family, helps women students to understand academic language and settle into university life (Winkle-Wagner 2010).

Cultural capital was offered in the form of their partners proof reading their work, helping with referencing and essay planning, helping to develop IT (Information Technology) or study skills and giving general advice about university systems and processes. Often cultural capital was offered at the start of the woman's studies as she initially adapted to university life.

One of the things he [partner] said was, 'I notice that I don't have to check your spelling as much as I used to when you started', and he's noticed my writing is a lot better and flows more easily when he does read it now so I think he's quite impressed, you know ... especially I think correcting my grammar and things like that ... he was supportive like that (Esme)

Women also benefitted from cultural capital from their older children who were also going through a university experience.

She [Maggie] didn't know what things meant, uni [university] terms and things like this, I remember them [partner 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)

Offering cultural capital in this way was also seen as endorsement that their studies were respected and valued by their partner and children, this emotional support was as important to the women as the cultural capital support in itself. However, it is important to recognise that providers of cultural capital will need to have had knowledge or experience of HE systems in order to produce this type of support. Therefore not all family members will be in a position to offer this.

Economic capital

Like cultural capital, opportunities for economic capital are also restricted to some students. Some women benefited from economic capital¹ in a financial sense, in terms of reducing their working hours to focus on their studies. Some partners changed their hours to be more available around the woman's study needs or to give them more time to help with childcare or household tasks:

Well, I have asked to do the hours [reduced hours], I am able to do this in my work. So they have let me have these hours so that I can be home at this time so if I couldn't do that then maybe she couldn't have gone to Uni ... but with the Uni work as well it's worked out brilliantly, if I was doing shifts we'd be in trouble. (Ross, Maggie's partner)

Other women used financial resources to purchase additional study materials and textbooks to enable them to study from home and fit their study needs around the family more flexibly (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002). Having textbooks at home enabled them to balance

¹ 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 course costs.

their studies and family life more easily although at times this could cause additional stress on the family:

It's [HE studies] taken over the family life, the home, because there are books everywhere, once it's set out on the table it stays there until I've finished. (Jennifer)

Social capital

Social capital is most commonly described as access to social networks (Bourdieu 1991).

This was not common in my research findings but the findings reflected the bonding and solidarity aspect of social capital described by Putnam (2000) and Coleman (1988). Through partners having experience of HE themselves they are more likely to understand the demands of study, this develops solidarity and a shared goal:

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, Angelina's partner)

However, unlike cultural capital, social capital can also be offered by those families without experience of HE through the sharing of goals and ambitions:

I have said that I want it to do it [HE study], to better the job I am in, to be able to move up, to earn more money that is more of what he [partner] understands ... although he didn't quite understand why I'm doing it, to start with, I think he does now ... he said at the beginning, he'd be supportive (Jennifer)

As previously mentioned, women value this endorsement of their studies and feeling that their goal is shared by others. What was more prevalent and important to the women was the emotional capital on offer within families.

Emotional capital

Emotional capital can be viewed as the 'emotional resources – such as support, patience and commitment – built over time particularly within families', (Zembylas 2007, 451). Emotional

capital can also include emotional responses such as resilience, motivation and high self-esteem. Having high stocks of emotional capital can enable women to recognise and talk through the feelings of guilt or uncertainty that HE study may cause (Webber 2014).

Emotional capital is often perceived as provided by women and mainly consumed by men and children (Burke and Jackson 2007), my findings contradict this perspective. There were many examples where both partners and children offered emotional support and encouragement. This helped develop the women's emotional capital as it enabled them to maintain motivation and gave them a stimulus to continue:

He [partner] never in any way asked me to stop, what he did do was say, 'Are you sure you are alright? You know it's not the be all and the end all', and I said, 'Yes', but it was just that not knowing in that first 2 assignments that whatever I submitted would actually pass, does that make sense? And I really thought, I used to think 'Oh my goodness, it's not going to pass, I am not at the right academic level', in those first few assignments and he was saying, 'Yes, you can you can do it'. (Christina)

At different points in the women's studies their relationship experienced stress because of the pressures of studying:

She has what she calls her stressful moments when she has got to get stuff [assignments] in and sometimes I bring her back down to earth and say, 'You know you are probably sixty percent ahead of everyone else, just relax', and also sometimes I'll kick her ass and say, 'You're not going to be watching TV tonight you've got to work', ... she has her moments when she starts doubting herself, you know I give her a bit of a reality check and say how great she is and look at the marks you know. (Bradley, Angelina's partner)

Doing the course has really put a lot of strain on us ... I feel again really guilty for putting this extra huge weight on the whole family then. So for him [partner] although all these stressful things day to day are really difficult I think he's probably the thing that keeps me going because there has been so many times where I have thought, 'I just can't do it any more, I don't even want to do it anymore' ... he's the thing that pushes me to keep going because he'd probably never forgive me if I quit (Kim)

Women that were in stable and supportive relationships, who had built up strong reserves of emotional capital with their partner, were able to be resilient to any signs of stress or pressure

(Fenney and Lemay 2012). They were able to draw on their mutually supportive and established relationship which could bear the brunt of any temporary turbulence or stress.

What was surprising was that children were able to offer opportunities for mothers to develop emotional capital. Many children would support their mother emotionally by asking them about their HE experience, showing pride in their achievements and even encouraging them when it proved to be stressful. When the children offered emotional support in this way the women felt justified in spending so much time away from them. This helped them develop emotional resilience and motivation:

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)

As with studies by Merrill (1999), Edwards (1993) and Brook (2015), guilt was a strong emotion that the women experienced. The guilt was mainly centred upon feeling that they were not spending as much time with the children as they wanted to. Although they still felt guilty the reserves of emotional capital they had previously built up were further increased through the support and encouragement from their children. Having an awareness of being a role model to their children also motivated them to continue with their studies:

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 something. I think, my biggest aim is for them to see me graduate ... (Jennifer)

Opportunities to develop emotional capital were most important to the women and most frequently discussed in their interviews. Women's guilt was alleviated when they had emotional endorsement from their families and felt supported in their studies. These guilty feelings centred on their beliefs that they were neglecting the

family through a lack of time or not being fully focused on the family because of their studies. Women with high stocks of emotional capital had resilience and motivation to continue and battle through these feelings of guilt.

Time as an aspect of capital

Time is an additional aspect of capital that I wish to draw attention to. Being time poor (Edwards 1993), balancing the demands of family, work and study commitments (Callender, Wilkinson and MacKinnon 2006; Edwards 1993; Plageman and Sabina 2010) and changes to family routines (Marandet and Wainwright 2010), are all aspects of being an HE woman student (Webber 2015).

Changing household routines and transformation to the woman's identity can alter positions in the family household as different members take up different roles (Edwards 1993; Webber 2015). In addition, if the woman has less time for the family because of her HE study, this often leads to guilt if she feels she is not fulfilling her ideal of a good mother (Noddings 2013). 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 care needs. This supervision is often taken on by the woman's partner if the mother has study commitments:

I went from full time Mum to part time Mum because I literally did do all the childhood stuff, you know, literally he [partner] 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)

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)

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).

...when I started my degree, it was an issue for me because my routine and organisation did, at times, become out of my control. And I didn't like that, I didn't like the house getting messy and then I thought after a while I just had to let it go and so that was hard for me I think ... That [housework] was the first thing I had to drop because I couldn't drop my studies and I couldn't drop the children's health and things like that, could I? ... I did what I had to do, like the cooking and things like that, but after that, you know, it was the study and things like that really [took priority] (Heidi).

... maybe my house isn't as clean as it always has been ... I don't see that as a problem. It [housework] will get done; it's just not a priority. (Jennifer)

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 how she perceives herself:

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 you know I'm working hard as long as everyone's happy and I'm doing what I should be doing then why not? (Angelina)

When partners give up time to support the woman in their studies through proof reading her work, though taking on additional household tasks or childcare, the women see this as an unspoken endorsement of their studies. This aids their motivation and commitment to their studies:

He [partner] is so supportive of me, I think if I couldn't go home and have him as a sounding board then I don't think I would have got through it. And also, with the juggling of the roles the fact that he is taking on more this year has made a massive difference, yes, definitely ... I see it as my husband, you know, as the one that got me through this. (Angelina)

Having time freed up from chores or feeling that their studies are welcomed and supported by others gives women time to devote to their studies. Time gives them a transformative space to reflect on the course content, assimilate new knowledge and change their perspectives (Cherrington and Thornton 2013; Harré and van Lagenhove 1999; Mezirow 1991):

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)

As demonstrated in Figure 2, through a combination of practical and emotional strategies of support in the form of economic, social, cultural and emotional capital; time and acceptance of a woman's HE studies follows. This gives women the time and space to focus on their studies, transform and change perspectives which enables them to be successful in their HE programme.

Figure 2. Changes that family capital engenders (Webber 2017)

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

Impact of offering large resources of family capital from the perspectives of the partners

Although access to family capital was important to the women it was not always easy for their partners to provide this:

But I would have definitely said to the partner 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, Maggie's partner)

Although this put additional pressure on the women's partners, causing possible stress and tension in the relationship, the women were not willing to give up on their studies:

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 was often linked to the high levels of investment the men had put into the woman's studies. Thus demonstrating that family capital not only provides support but, as stated previously, is a contributing factor in aiding motivation and success at HE level:

There have been so many times I have thought I just can't do it anymore ... he's [partner] 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)

Although giving up their time could cause stress and was not always easy, often the men were willing to 'trade off' (Reay 2004, 68) their time for future career or monetary benefits for their partner.

Partners' factors for providing family capital

We have established that family capital can aid a woman's success and motivation at HE level through providing time and space to assimilate new knowledge, change perspectives and complete her studies. Through including men in the research and using the comments made by the women, I was able to develop three reasons as to why men provided support (Webber 2017):

- Having a shared financial or career goal
- Valuing education
- Strength of the relationship

Having a *shared financial goal* and seeing the benefits for the family in the long term gave the men an incentive to offer family capital:

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, Esme's partner)

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, Angelina's partner)

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 [partner] sees the bigger picture and sees where we are aiming for, and what the future is going to be. (Angelina)

Having solidarity of a shared goal (Putnam, 2000) is a factor explaining why social capital is offered. However, it is evident from the comment by Jennifer (see below) that her partner needed to see the benefits to the family of HE before giving support. Merely studying for self-fulfilment was not an adequate enough reason to result in a shared goal:

I asked him, 'What do you think about me doing it [HE] and everything', and he 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, that kind of thing, 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)

As previously mentioned partners that have experienced HE themselves or *value education* are more likely to offer cultural or social capital as they understand the process or it is an established family tradition. As Coleman (1988) states a partner's educational values and experiences can affect the social capital on offer:

I have done studying myself so I understand it takes time and again I am very supportive of her doing it. (Bradley, Angelina's partner)

Higher education in his family is quite important, nearly everybody in his family has got a degree ... Matt [partner] 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)

Having studied previously also gives the men empathy and understanding, which affects the emotional capital on offer.

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

I think because I was a mature student as well so I think you appreciate it more [being able to study]. (Alan)

However, for some students a lack of cultural capital acquired through studying can cause barriers and resentment in some relationships. Doris' partner had not experienced HE and she believed this caused resentment and difficulties between them. He was unable to offer cultural capital due to a lack of HE experience. Social capital was difficult to produce as he did not understand or support her in her goal resulting in an emotional barrier and disconnection between them. To overcome this Doris tried to minimise the disruption at home by hiding or separating her studies from family life (see Edwards 1993):

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 factor underpinning support was the *strength of the relationship*. As mentioned previously having a strong relationship can act as a buffer when there are times of strain or tension (Feenay and Lemay, 2012) .

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

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 (Christina)

Having a strong relationship also means that the partner is more likely to offer support when the woman looks to be struggling with the HE workload, household tasks or childcare.

Although partners, wider family members (such as parents) and children had the potential to offer family capital, partners were in the best position to offer different forms of capital. Partners had the opportunity 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 to develop study skills. Having access to these types of support and maintaining their relationships with their partner was of utmost importance to the women.

Impact on a woman's educational success

Although women with limited family capital can be successful with their HE studies, it can be problematic; therefore being able to draw on support is advisable:

I think she could have done it but I think she would have found it more difficult without that support. (Bradley, Angelina's partner)

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

The things that he [partner] 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)

When women have limited capital they can access it from other sources such as friends, wider family networks, peers (Duckworth 2014) and university tutors.

Hilary's story, as a single parent, illustrates this well:

I will always put me as a mum first ... 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? I have to be happy with my choices ... 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 – single parent)

Having encouragement and practical support from home, where it is more readily accessible, is useful to women students and does make studying and juggling family life easier to manage:

He [partner] 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)

Conclusion

Although this paper does not attempt to account for or generalise all women's experiences, there are some common themes of note here. Firstly, *accessing family capital can aid a woman's success on a programme*. Family capital can consist of:

- Economic capital
- Social capital
- Cultural capital
- Emotional capital

Time then runs as a thread that underpins and links all of the different aspect of capital together as capital takes time to generate and also provides women with time to commit to her studies. Through accessing capital from the family women feel that their HE studies are welcomed, this helps to alleviate the guilt that often comes with studying, gives them additional time and also gives them motivation and an incentive to complete their programme. Although women can complete their studies without family capital often they will seek capital from elsewhere whether this be friends, wider family members or from staff in the HE institution. Being able to access capital from the family is convenient due to its

location and availability but also provides emotional support and a feeling of solidarity that is so important when the majority of a woman's HE study time takes place in the home.

Secondly, this research has found three *reasons why men (partners) provide family capital*:

- Having a shared financial or career goal
- Valuing education
- Strength of the relationship

These reasons help to explain why women experience varying degrees of family capital investment in their studies from their partner. Knowledge of this may help staff in HE Institutions offer varying forms of capital to plug this gap (see also Webber 2017). This could include study skill workshops (to help develop cultural capital) or opportunities to develop peer support (to aid social or emotional capital generation).

In closing, access to family capital can provide a myriad of support strategies and advantages for women who are mothers in HE. 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 family routines.

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