CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: A STUDY OF HOW WOMEN COPE WITH THE TRANSITION TO PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMMES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The aims of the present study were to investigate how women manage the transition to professional programmes of higher education and to identify what might assist and hinder their coping. Initial conceptualisations were based on an assumption that there would be an interaction between the different spheres in which the women operate; the private, the professional and higher education. The literature reveals a preoccupation with either psychological or social factors but there is a lack of theory which integrates these and 'solutions' put forward, aimed at assisting women in education, are broad and general.

The investigation took place in a School of a British University where the professional areas chosen were social work and health care education. A feminist ethnographic approach using multiple methods of data collection was taken. However, as the central focus was an investigation of subjective accounts a phenomenological perspective was adopted and the methods used were mainly qualitative. The investigation took place over two phases, covering the period of transition to programmes over two consecutive years.

The overarching theme to emerge is the importance of continuities in terms of what women 'bring' from the private sphere and their professional context. Aspects of these continuities were found to centrally impinge upon the women's sense of who they are and their current situation, and arise from their social situation. Higher education does not always recognise the importance of these continuities. The private sphere, the professional context and higher education are conceptualised as 'greedy institutions', with competing demands and value bases. It is the movement between these contexts which causes problems for women. An integrative framework based largely on Breakwell's (1986) theory of coping with threatened identity is developed. The framework is extended to include a feminist analysis of the social context in order to understand the women's coping. Specific suggestions are put forward to assist mature women students 'manage' the transition.

To my son Leo

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

'I walk into the classroom, I'm feeling rather nervous. This is the first day of the course, the first time I've seen most of these people. I'm anxious because this is the first time I have been a participant observer. I wonder if I am doing it right. I feel different, I don't quite belong - I'm not a student in the same sense that the others are or really a member of staff. I know from talking to a few women before they began their professional programme at Huddersfield University that, for various reasons, they felt different from the traditional student in higher education and that they were concerned that they might not fit in.

The new students are being offered coffee and biscuits - that's a nice touch, it seems to give them the opportunity to chat before the more formal introduction begins. I see a couple of students I know (from interviewing them a few weeks earlier) - what a relief, some familiar faces. One of them, Claire, seems rather anxious and tells me that she feels like a 'little fish in a big sea' rather than a 'big fish in a little one' which she had done in the job she had just given up running a residential home. She says she would rather be in a case conference than here at this moment, which reveals to me the extent of her anxiety. I am aware through my conversations with women before they came to the University that they were looking forward to this moment but their excitement was tinged with apprehension.

After a while the students begin to sit down for the beginning of the more formal introduction to the course. I sit next to, and speak to, a women I have not met before. She tells me she came to the Welcome Weekend the day before. She said it was good for her children to see where 'mum was going to school', now they could visualise where she was. We chat for a while about her family. Others I have spoken to have told me that the responsibility for their family and domestic duties is mainly theirs. There are worries about how they will fit it all in, not only their domestic responsibilities but, for many, additionally work; will they be able to 'juggle' it all?

The woman I have been speaking to says she is rather concerned about the practice essay which she has been asked to write. She says she thinks this is a good idea but is worried that it might not be on the right lines. This reminds me of my anxieties about standing up in front of all these people soon. I will be telling them about my research - which gives me a fluttering sensation in my tummy. What will the new students think of

me and, even worse, what will the staff who I already know think? I know from speaking to several women that they are also worried about their abilities to perform not only academically but also in terms of their professional expertise. A few around me are talking about the difficulties of finding somewhere to park that morning and travelling to the University. There is a buzz of nervous anticipation and excitement. The programme leader arrives and the formal proceedings begin.'

This encounter highlights the main themes which emerged from the present study of mature women students beginning professional programmes of higher education. Though the way I have put the scenario together is rather contrived in order to highlight these themes it is based on my observations of the first day of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) programme in the School of Human and Health Sciences at the University of Huddersfield in 1993. This School was the setting for the present research. The study was conducted over two consecutive years over a period of approximately six weeks before the students began their programme to just over two months after they had been at the University. This is referred to throughout as the period at and around the point of entry or the transition to the programme.

Research which aims to investigate the transition of women to programmes of professional higher education is the study of a contemporary phenomenon. Within the context of changes in British higher and professional education mature women students taking professional programmes are a relatively new but increasing part of the student population. In 1992 women comprised 47 per cent of all mature full-time students and 48 per cent of mature part-time students (DfE, 1994) whereas in 1965 only one in sixteen entrants to higher education was female (SRHE, 1996). The lack of numbers of women in higher education in the past and the discrimination they faced has been highlighted by feminists (see, for instance, Deem, 1978; Dyhouse, 1994). The proportion of women taking the programmes in the present study was nearly 85 per cent. This is linked to the specific professions involved, social work and health care studies, these being areas of work dominated by women. This is representative of the horizontal gender division of labour, women being concentrated in particular areas of work (Beechey, 1986, pp. 91-92) which can be seen as echoing their domestic concerns (White, 1989, p. 6), in this case health, nursing and welfare. The students taking these programme were all classed as mature (over 21 on entry for undergraduate courses and over 25 for postgraduate, DfE, 1994, p. 1). The recent reorganisation in health care education has meant that, with the exception of a few degree and certificate level programmes, the university sector is a new environment for the education of this group (Birchenall, 1995). The typical higher education student is said to be becoming a mature student studying part-time, despite the enduring image of the traditional school leaver university entrant (Duke, 1994, p. II).

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Boud (1992, p. 7-11) has argued that what a student 'brings' to the educational setting will have an influence on learning and to ignore this diversity is to risk excluding certain sections of the student population. The importance of investigating what students 'bring' to the educational setting has been recognised recently. Weil (1988) argues that the more quantitative educational studies in the past failed to highlight the importance and influence of previous experience, social background and social context on adult learners (p. 20). Haselgrove (1994 pp. 4-5) argues that educational research in Britain has only provided a partial picture because the focus has been on students as learners and has taken little account of the rest of their lives. From a feminist perspective this can be seen as stemming from the tendency to separate out the public and private spheres, learning being important because it is in the public domain but the rest of students' lives are not regarded as important because they are in the private domain. Now with mass higher education 'marginal' groups are moving into the 'mainstream' and therefore there is more interest in and pressure to look at the overall student experience (p. 6).

In Chapter 2 I evaluate the literature of relevance to issues associated with women entering and being involved in an educational environment. This includes literature on women reentering the education system but particularly studies related to entering and being in higher education in Britain. I discuss the 'obstacles' which are said to impede women's participation and suggested solutions to the 'problems' women face. Feminist theoretical perspectives which aim to explain women's experience both inside and outside the educational environment are outlined. Issues which are of particular relevance to the actual transition to higher education are highlighted. The contribution of recent more detailed studies of mature women students' experience by Edwards (1993a) and Pascall and Cox (1993a) are evaluated.

The aim of the present study was to investigate how women manage the transition to professional programmes of higher education and identify what assists and hinders their coping. Several research questions arose from this aim and are detailed at the end of Chapter 2 together with my early conceptualisation of the perameters of the transition.

Entering higher education is depicted as a time of change for women, therefore I initially conceptualised this as a period of transition. I evaluate psychological theories of transition in Chapter 3 in the search for an appropriate theoretical framework for the study, concluding that these fail to provide an adequate framework for understanding the experiences of mature women students. I argue that an integrative framework which links the psychological and the social is necessary. In the second part of this chapter I develop an integrative theoretical framework based on Breakwell's (1986) theory of threatened

identity. The importance of the social context is elaborated by using feminist theory of how women construct their identity.

The methodological approach which I took is outlined in Chapter 4. As one of the main aims of the study was to access the participants' accounts of their experience a phenomenological perspective was adopted as it provides the philosophical basis for investigating subjective accounts and meanings. This involved adopting a mainly qualitative approach because it is more appropriate for exploring subjectivities than one centering on quantitative data. In line with the feminist-standpoint perspective (Harding, 1987) coupled with the reflexive ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) taken most of the chapter details my account of the development of the study. Details of the three programmes from two professions chosen are outlined. The multi-methods design over two phases, covering the period of transition over two consecutive academic years, is described in detail.

In Chapter 5 I describe the characteristics of the students beginning the three programmes. I argue that women in the present study were not a homogeneous group but they did have certain common characteristics which could be grouped together. I describe the use of the concept of 'career' to describe objective similarities and differences which are developed into four particular career types. However, these ideal types did not capture all the potentially important 'career' characteristics of the participants and other relevant aspects are described. In the later chapters these 'career types' and other characteristics form the basis of the analysis of the participants' subjective accounts of their experience of the transition.

In common with other studies many participants reported a sense of anxiety but also excitement at beginning their programme of professional higher education. In Chapter 6 I outline the reasons the women in the present study gave for embarking on their professional programme and relate this to their enthusiasm (and lack of enthusiasm) on beginning their programme. Despite having strong motivations many also experienced anxieties. These are explained in terms of threats to identity (Breakwell, 1986).

The central theme of the present study is the importance of continuity. In chapter 7 I outline the important continuities for the women involved and I consider the ways these continuities interacted with the new educational environment, impeding or assisting the transition, as well as how the environment threatened or enhanced continuity. Participants experienced disjunction or integration between these continuities and the new educational environment. Certain psychological theories highlight the centrality of aspects of the

women's continuing sense of who they are but these do not take into account continuities associated with the social structure.

Concerns relating to ability to undertake a programme of professional higher education were frequently expressed by the participants in the present study. In Chapter 8 I outline the three ways in which these concerns (and lack of concern) were expressed. One way related to worries about ability to manage the demands of study, together, for most, with the demands of family and work. A second kind of anxiety related to academic and professional ability and finally a few were concerned about financial constraints. These worries about ability to take the programme are linked to theoretical perspectives which highlight the social influences on mature women students' experience.

In Chapter 9 I discuss the ways in which the new educational encounter impacted on important continuities, making many women feel different to others or not legitimate students in higher education. The question 'Do I belong?' was frequently being asked. I highlight key ways in which the participants felt different from what they perceived those in higher education to be like. Concerns were not only linked to comparisons with dominant images of those in higher education but worries about potential discrimination or not being 'visible' in the masses of students. Anxieties can be explained in terms of threats to the identity but these arise from the social context.

The analysis of the data in the present study suggests that over the period of the research most of the participants became integrated into their programme of professional higher education. They coped, in various ways and to varying degrees, with a number of threats to the 'principles' of identity (Breakwell, 1986). In Chapter 10 I examine the evidence which suggested that there was a process of successful integration for most of the participants. I then outline how the threats to the different 'principles' of identity were ameliorated and how these link to Breakwell's (1986) theory of coping with threats to identity as well as other theoretical perspectives. Suggested solutions in assisting women entering educational environments in the literature (see Chapter 2) are developed raising issues for consideration in integrating mature women students into programmes of professional higher education.

The aim of the present study was to investigate how women manage the transition to professional programmes of higher education and identify what assisted and hindered their coping. In the final Chapter I return to the research questions presented in Chapter 2 and discuss the findings of the present study in the light of these. Firstly, I discuss how what women 'bring' from the private sphere and professional context outside higher education affected their coping. I reformulate the question about whether key differences and

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similarities between women affect their coping and ask whether a typology of 'careers' based on discernible differences and similarities in coping can be developed. Secondly, I discuss how features of the University affected their coping. Thirdly, I consider how coping with the transition can be assisted and ask a further question about the possibility of developing specific issues for consideration in assisting the transition. Fourthly, I discuss how the process of coping can be understood. Finally, I describe ways in which my thinking about the transition has developed as the study progressed.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN AT AND AROUND THE POINT OF ENTRY TO HIGHER EDUCATION

In this chapter I evaluate the literature of relevance to issues associated with women entering, and being involved in an educational environment. The focus is the British educational context, including literature on women reentering the education system but particularly studies related to entering and being in higher education. I discuss the 'obstacles' which are said to impede women's participation outlined in much of the literature on women reentering educational environments. Feminist theoretical perspectives which aim to explain women's experience both inside and outside the educational environment are discussed. The literature which details solutions to the 'problems' women face by being involved in education is evaluated. Issues which are of particular relevance to the actual transition to higher education are outlined. The limitations of the relevant literature to date are highlighted. At the end of the Chapter I describe the aim of the present study and the research questions which were developed from this aim, the review of the literature and the early conceptual framework. Finally, I depict my early conceptualisation of the study.

An Overview of the Relevant Literature

In Britain the study of mature women students is a small but growing area (Tight, 1994, p. 146). Edwards (1993a, p. 9) notes an increase in interest in the study of mature students generally since the late 1970s but Pascall and Cox (1993b, p. 20) argue that there has been little work on the actual experiences of mature women students in higher education. Of the studies which I found of relevance to beginning programmes in higher education there is very little specifically on women's experience of the initial period of transition.

There is considerable literature on women's access to education and how this can be better managed. This is mainly in the area of adult or women's education and is specifically related to initiatives to aid older people and women returning to education. For instance, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has published widely in this area (see, for example, Coats 1996; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN 1991 and Women's Educational Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991) and three of their journals, Adult Learning, have recently been dedicated to women's education issues (Vol. 2, No. 7, March, 1991, Vol. 6, No. 5, January 1995, Vol. 8, No. 2, October 1996). Much of this literature makes suggestions for 'good practice' in educational provision for women but as

Coats (1994) notes there has been little detailed research of exactly what is involved in this 'good practice' (p. 48). It is argued though that much can be learned from 'good practice' in terms of improving higher education provision for women (Coats, 1994).

In the area of higher education research a few studies, especially from the late 1980s to date have focused on mature women students (see, for instance, Dicker, 1992; Cox and Pascall, 1994; Edwards, 1990a & 1993a; Henry, 1994; Karach, 1992; Leonard, 1994; Morgan, et al. 1981; Pascall and Cox, 1993a & b; Roberts, 1994; Sperling, 1991). To date I have found very little literature which relates specifically to women at and around the point of entry to the professions involved in the present study, social work and health care. Many of these recent studies of women and higher education draw on what Weil (1988) describes as the 'language of experience', using qualitative methods which are aimed at exploring women's accounts of their experience rather than the 'language of observation' which, it is argued, focuses on questions which are not always central to those involved, which have commonly been used in educational research in the past (pp. 17-18). It is this literature on women's access to education and mature women students' experience of higher education which is evaluated in this chapter.

The 'Barriers' to Beginning Programmes of Education

The transition to education has been conceptualised in terms of 'barriers', 'obstacles' or 'hurdles' which impede women entering education (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Stewart, 1988; Sperling 1991; McGivney, 1993, NIACE REPLAN 1991; Roberts 1994). In most of these studies these impeding factors are discussed in terms of psychological and structural 'barriers' but there are overlaps. I, therefore, discuss the factors highlighted in the literature as 'barriers' under the headings of structural and psychological but the more substantial literature will be drawn upon to examine the impact of these 'barriers'.

The psychological 'barriers'

Lack of confidence in their abilities is reported to be an impeding factor for women returning to education (see, for instance, Deem, 1978; Dewar et al., 1994; Innes, 1992; Keen, 1990; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN 1991; Roberts, 1994; Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986). Hutchinson and Hutchinson (1986) say that from their respondents came the message that they felt disadvantaged in terms of self-esteem and assurance in comparison to younger colleagues (p. 95). This lack of confidence and esteem is related in the literature to various factors such as unsuccessful schooling, being at home for years and the undervaluing of the domestic role, monetary dependence on their

husbands while raising a family and having time away from studying (see, for instance, Barnett, 1992; Keen, 1990; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988). Edwards (1993a) also notes that the literature states that mature women students lack confidence but she argues that this is only in certain contexts. The women in her study were confident in seminar situations, which are not important in terms of assessed work, but they lacked confidence in more formally assessed arenas such as essay writing and examinations (p. 84).

Feelings of guilt or selfishness with regard to returning to education are also reported in the literature (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; McGivney, 1993; Morgan, et al., 1981; Pascall and Cox, 1993a; Roberts, 1994; Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986 & 1988). Wisker sums these feelings up by saying that the women in her study saw education as:

'a stolen pleasure, self-indulgence, an activity which should be sacrificed when other duties call' (1988, p. 74).

Edwards (1993a) analyses these feelings of guilt and selfishness more fully in relation to education and the family being 'greedy institutions' for women which demand exclusive rights over them and put pressure on them to relinquish the commitments of the others (p. 70).

A major theme running through the studies of Pascall and Cox (1993a) and Edwards (1993a) is that of the relevance of 'identity'. They point to contradictions and discontinuities in women's identity when they become students. Edwards (1993a) states that the literature on women with children and their relationship to paid work suggests that they feel a tension between work and family which is often described in terms of 'balancing' or 'juggling' (p. 33). In combining family and education Edwards interprets this sense of 'juggling' as reflecting a structural tension in terms of family and education being 'greedy institutions' (pp. 62-80). Pascall and Cox (1993a) draw on Hopper and Osborn's (1975) theory which they argue is one of discontinuity of role experience. Especially young women feel discontinuity in that the satisfaction which can be gained from 'private' identity is being eroded. Pascall and Cox (1993a) state that the private sphere is becoming less attractive but this change is not without problems. The women in their study had been brought up in a culture where self-esteem was expected to come from the private domain but they were now 'attempting to change the configuration of their lives' (p. 79). A few authors describe this tension in terms of role conflict (see, for instance, Morgan, et al., 1981, p. 42) but both Edwards and Pascall and Cox see identity as more than simply fulfilling particular roles. Pascall and Cox (1993a) argue that women expected

to find fulfilment in their private career, and that being a wife, housewife or mother involves more than, for instance, as a mother bearing children (p. 58). Edwards (1993a) is particularly critical of theories of role conflict because they do not examine the material and structural dimensions of women's lives and underestimate the importance of women's 'core' identity as a wife and mother (pp. 11-12).

Pascall and Cox (1993a) and Edwards (1993a) discuss how being involved in higher education can lead to feelings of being different for mature women students, for instance, to the white, middle-class 'bachelor boy' student in higher education (Edwards, 1993a, p. 86). Edwards (1990a & 1993a) describes feeling 'different' as a sense of deviance. She says that over a third of the women in her study felt:

> 'that particular sets of their experience that formed an important part of their identity were not really admissible (in the ethos of higher education), reinforced the sense that women had of being deviants within a system with the norms of the white middle-class bachelor boy student' (1993a, p. 86).

This sense of deviance was felt more acutely by the working-class and black women in her study (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 140-144). Being different was felt in terms of differences to those both inside and outside higher education. Pascall and Cox (1993a) imply anxieties about a potential change in relationships with others. The women in their study were asked directly whether higher education conferred status and authority. They were 'cagey' about using these terms though most acknowledged that education did give them something in terms of status and authority and they stated that they were anxious about what this might mean to their relationships with 'significant others' (pp. 85-90). They draw upon Bernstein's theory of cultural forms to explain these difficulties for women. They argue that in pursuing 'personalized organic solidarity' there are contradictions which result in anxiety and this is reflected in their participants' view that they wanted to change their inner self yet remain the same to others (pp. 92-95). Gains in terms of potential status and prestige could therefore set women apart from other people and lead to feelings of being different, for instance, from other mothers or from the population in general (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 57-60).

Edwards (1993a) writes about the 'pain' of being different in that it could set women apart from others. She emphasises that 'being different' is not just about the women's 'psychological make-up' but the social structure demands certain behaviours and attitudes of women which lead to their particular experiences (pp. 146-147).

In relation to these psychological 'barriers' McGivney (1993) acknowledges that there are these 'obstacles' when women return to education generally (p. 10) but argues that 'threshold' courses (community based courses) can prepare women to move on to other forms of education in that they give them confidence (p. 73). Though it is not clear in the literature if the women had attended 'threshold' courses it does appear that many who were involved in higher education experience psychological consequences. It is also explicitly stated that these psychological factors are intrinsically linked to the social context.

The structural 'barriers'

Structural factors can be divided into different aspects of influences on women. There is the structure of the educational institutions and the wider social structure in which women operate. Firstly, I discuss the literature on the social structural impeding factors.

Part of the wider social structural 'barriers' relates to the continuing demands in women's lives. Many have highlighted that the domestic demands on women outside the educational institution can impede their participation (see, for instance, Aitken & Pfeffer, 1993; Deem, 1978; Hutchinson and Hutchinson 1986; Leonard, 1994; Perring, et al., 1988; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Stewart 1988; Wisker, 1986 & 1988). Wisker (1988) argues that some women in her research managed both studying and domestic responsibilities but for others it was very draining physically and emotionally (p. 74). Edwards (1993a) similarly notes that many women in her study often felt on a 'knife's edge' in relation to coping with the demands of each (p. 73).

Maynard and Pearsall's (1994) study is important here because they compare men's and women's experience of being in higher education. They argue that when women enter higher education the 'demands of home continue unabated throughout their academic lives'. Men give up their previous main occupation and, because of this, their main commitment is to student life while women continue to have demands from both (p. 239). Edwards (1993a, p. 106) and Roberts (1994, p. 4) also note that when women enter higher education there is not a shift of responsibility for domestic work. The literature, more generally, reflects this perspective. It is argued that in all Western industrial societies it is still, by and large, women who are responsible for young children (see, for instance, David, et al., 1993, p. 2).

A further aspect of structural 'barriers' is the reported effects on relationships with others outside the educational setting. Edwards (1993a) notes that research on mature women students' relationships outside the educational environment usually focuses on their effects on women's ability to study (pp. 9-10) but most of the literature evaluated here looks at

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the effects of study on relationships. One of the main relationships examined is that with women's husbands or partners. Maynard and Pearsall (1994) say that the data from their study suggests that men become more active in the home when they become students, which assists their relationships, whereas women's participation is seen more negatively as it detracts from the home (pp. 232-234). Morgan et al.'s (1981) early study also notes husbands' difficulties with their wives' new role as a student (p. 39). Leonard (1994) states that a third of the mature women in her study met with considerable resistance from their husbands and a quarter had experienced domestic violence (pp. 172-173). Edwards reports the ending of eight (out of 31) mostly long term relationships over the period of her study due to the women being involved in higher education (p. 134) . As Wisker (1986) puts it:

'Husbands and partners are not always generous enough to see as wholly positive the sudden transformation of their womenfolk into students whose minds are broadened and who seek to challenge established roles as they demand more time and space to study' (p.5).

Edwards (1993a) analyses underlying power dynamics. She outlines various ways in which men felt threatened by their partners' studying. She concludes that the ability of women to connect education to their relationships outside was linked to power. Both women's partners and their parents believed that education should not enter the home and interfere with their domestic commitments. If the women saw this in a similar way, and kept the two separate, there was less likely to be conflict   (pp. 104-119).

These studies examine the issue of relationships from the women's perspective giving a negative view of effects on relationships. However, there are also indications of positive effects on relationships, for instance, Edwards (1993a) reports that a few of the women in her study were able to renegotiate their relationships with their partners in the light of their educational experience (p. 154).

The majority of studies which examine relationships do so in terms of relationships with partners. Edwards (1993a), however, examines the effects of studying on various other relationships - children, the extended family and friends. With regard to women's friendships outside the educational environment Edwards (1993a) reports that the effects were more acute for working-class women in particular but also for those who were black. They could feel 'cut off' from friends. Higher education could alter a woman's status with their friends (pp. 141-144). Similarly, Pascall and Cox (1993a) report an ambiguity and anxiety about higher education giving status in relation to others. The women in their study were:

'particularly concerned with the impact of education upon the self and the way that self was then presented to the world... in terms of their face to face interaction with others who are important and significant...to raise the issue if status is to pollute the relationship' (p. 88).

Support from family and particularly partners is seen as important to women. Roberts (1994) found that the women in her study were particularly concerned that they had the support of their family (p. 4). Morgan et al. (1981) note that many women in their study praised the support given by those outside the institution but for various reasons they, as researchers, were sceptical about how great this support actually was although they did get the overall impression of supportive partners (pp. 39-40). Edwards (1993a) analyses what is meant by support in relation to the women's partners. In a time when equality and sharing are seen to be important aspects of these relationships, she highlights inequalities in relation to men giving support to women. In terms of the practical division of labour in the home this, for most, did not change. Women still did most of the domestic work but regarded this as reasonable. It was emotional support which was felt to be more important. Most wanted this 'sharing' but only one third of the women's partners were freely willing to give it (pp. 107-110). The expression of the importance of support could therefore be seen to be more of a desire than a reality.

Edwards (1993a) criticises much of the educational literature for seeing mature women students as having certain 'bags and baggage' - families, partners, uncertain educational abilities, their previous experience. These studies tend to focus on these as 'problems' and the impact they have but she states that women *are* their experience, they do not just bring it with them, implying it is an intrinsic part of them. It is the institutions of higher education which need to examine their own 'bags and baggage' and they who need to change (pp. 9-12).

Several who have written about returning to education more generally have highlighted many 'barriers' but argue that entry to higher education can mean encountering different and more acute kinds of practical and attitudinal 'barriers' (see, for instance, McGivney, 1993; Sperling, 1991). The practical barriers when entering higher education are generally seen as relating to lack of information and guidance, lack of coherent pathways, lack of childcare provision, inflexibility of course structures, lack of transport and lack of finance (see, for instance, Coats, 1994; Deem, 1978; McGivney, 1993, Sperling 1991; Wisker, 1988). These in general are seen as arising from women's social position.

The structure of higher education has been described as being centered around male values, beliefs and attitudes. Sperling (1991) examines the structural and attitudinal barriers of institutions of higher education. She argues that many of the practical barriers relating to women's responsibilities are well known, if institutions choose to acknowledge them, but there are also more subtle barriers arising from the reality of women's lives, for example, a preference toward people with standard entry qualifications, which most women will not have, as many come via an access course route. These amount to discrimination on the part of institutions of higher education because they do not take them into account. Others also note the difficulties for women in entering the 'male instrumental world' of higher education (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Pascall and Cox, 1993a; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). Thompson (1983) argues that it is not just a question of improving women's access to education but a radical change in the nature of what is being offered needs to be made (p. 93). A few studies note that certain kinds of women can find higher educational environments particularly difficult because they are based on white, middle-class male knowledge, for example, working-class women (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a), black women (see, for instance, Bryan, et al., 1987; Dicker, 1992; Edwards, 1993a; Henry, 1994) and lesbians (Corin, 1994).

The 'barriers' include discrimination through admissions procedures because of non-traditional entry qualifications and because of views of women and domesticity and their suitability for higher education (Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Sperling, 1991), inappropriate curricula (Belenky et al., 1986; Berryman, 1987; Karach, 1992; Keen, 1990; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988), inappropriate teaching and learning strategies (Karach, 1992; Keen, 1990; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Roberts, 1994; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986 & 1988; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991), inappropriate assessment (Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1993; Wisker, 1988), management by men (Wisker, 1988) and a general hostile and unwelcoming environment (McGivney, 1993). McGivney argues:

'Many women will not complete courses or achieve their highest potential if providers of training, further and higher education do not pay more attention both to the transition process and the needs and experiences of women students' (McGivney, 1993 pp. 73-74).

The literature suggests that returning to education generally can present certain 'barriers' for women but these are more acute in relation to higher education which is seen as not meeting the 'needs' of mature women students.

What Women 'Bring'

There is a sense in the literature of a balancing out of the 'problems' that mature women students 'bring' with the assets and attributes they are perceived as having. Several authors highlight women's enthusiasm in returning to education (see, for instance, Innes, 1992; Pascall and Cox, 1993a & b; Wisker, 1986 & 1988) and their determination (see, for instance, Hart, 1991; Keen, 1990; Wisker, 1986 & 1988). Wisker (1986) argues that they have made the decision to return and have a desire to learn (p. 4). Women are also seen as being determined and resilient despite the difficulties that they face (see, for instance, Hart, 1991; Keen, 1990; Roberts, 1994). Black women are seen as having special powers of coping in comparison to black men (Henry, 1994, p. 48). Maynard and Pearsall (1994) in their comparison of men and women in higher education say that women displayed a resilience in their ability to cope and the additional demands did not seem to directly affect their academic performance (p. 239). Wisker (1988) highlights the fact that though mature women students can be seen as educationally disadvantaged, because of their earlier educational experiences, they can become very successful students in higher education (pp. 68-71). Mature women students are therefore seen as doing well despite disadvantages.

One relatively widely documented area in the literature on mature women students is their reasons for being involved in education (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a & b; Hart, 1991; Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Innes, 1992; Karach, 1992; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Perring et al., 1988; Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1993). Two main reasons for their involvement are suggested, the attainment of a socially valued career or for self-fulfilment. A few studies have explored the issue of women's reasons for beginning a programme in higher education in a substantial way, involving detailed analysis of qualitative in-depth data on the subject (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Pascall and Cox, 1993a and b). It is argued that women feel unfulfilled because of their 'private world' position. Pascall and Cox (1993a) state that all the women in their study felt that domesticity was not enough as a 'life's work and source of identity' (p. 58). One of the key elements which most of the women in Pascall and Cox's (1993a) study were said to speak about enthusiastically and unreservedly was that education was seen as a means of achieving self-fulfilment (p. 90). Pascall and Cox (1993a) link self-fulfilment reasons with theories of cultural forms, particularly those of Bernstein. They conclude that what most women expressed can be understood in terms of Bernstein's 'personalized organic solidarity' which represents a counter-culture to 'individualized organic solidarity', in that they were intent on doing their own thing and being themselves (pp. 92-93). In relation to professional education Dewar et al. (1995, p.1) report professional pressure to take qualifications such as the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing because of the new

training arrangements for nurses under Project 2000. Studies of women's reasons suggest that women have much to gain through their involvement in higher education which could account for their determination and enthusiasm.

Others studies highlight the value of women's experience. Innes (1992) argues that they are a wasted resource (p. 117), while Wisker (1986) says that to them study is seen as social and sociable, they have a lot to offer in terms of support and experience and a different perspective (p. 4). Edwards (1993a) argues, however, that despite higher education's promotional literature emphasising the value of this previous experience the women in her study found this undervalued on the whole, especially in relation to their experience of the private sphere (p. 102).

The Main Theoretical Perspectives on the Issues Women Face

It has been argued that women in our society are disadvantaged and this is what causes them problems when entering education (see, for example, McGivney, 1993 & 1996; Keen 1990; NIACE REPLAN, 1991). This argument is then related to the higher education system itself. McGivney (1993) argues that the attitudes of education and training institutions toward women reflect the values of society more generally (p. 87); higher education being seen as patriarchal and male dominated (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Karach, 1992; Roberts, 1994; Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1983; Wisker, 1988). Sperling (1991) argues that the structural and attitudinal barriers are seen as being 'normal' parts of women's lives and therefore not as barriers, which she says is 'a misconception that is perpetuated by the patriarchal structure and content of the education system itself.' (p. 200).

Another related level of explanation is that expounded by Wisker (1988, p. 67) and Edwards (1993, p. 86). They argue that institutions hold a 'bachelor boy' view of students; students are seen as 18 year olds, middle class, white and male. This can lead to feelings of being different, not really welcome and tokenism on the part of mature women students (Edwards, 1993, pp. 86-88).

These analyses are general but certain aspects of them in relation to women and higher education have been taken further theoretically, in particular by Edwards (1993a). The main theoretical aspect is the development of the concept of a private/public dichotomy. The idea of public and private spheres is well established and contended in feminist literature[1] (see, for instance, Elshtain, 1981; Harding, 1986a; Pateman, 1983; Rosaldo,

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1 See Edwards (1993a, pp. 21-26) for an exposition of the main arguments.

1974; Stacey and Price, 1981). This is the notion that the public sphere of paid work, formal education, politics and culture is associated with men and with it comes power and authority. The private world, on the other hand, is that of the family and domesticity and is associated with women having lower status than the public domain. Men are seen as dominating in both these domains, explicitly in the public and more implicitly but not less powerfully in the private (Hearn & Parkin, 1987). Edwards (1993a), Leonard (1994) and Pascall and Cox (1993a) use the notion of public and private domains in their analyses of mature women students experience of higher education.

Edwards (1993a) argues that she accepts the criticism from certain feminists, for instance, Pateman (1983) and Harding (1986a), that the private and public may not exist as actual structural domains, that they are too simplistic and are ideological construct but she argues that these concepts do exist in people's experiences. She says the dichotomy is a useful analytical tool but it must be realised that they are not constant over time or between people. She demonstrates in her analysis that the:

> 'private and public worlds... in the form of education and family, are not separate entities. They interact and impinge upon each other, with particular implications for the position of women within each' (p.15).

The public and private dichotomy is developed further by using the notion of boundaries. David et al. (1993) define boundaries as demarcations of social and psychological space. They give the example of the psychological demarcation in relation to ideas about:

> 'a "private" self distinct from a more public persona, or notions of "me as a mother" as distinct from (say) "me as a student"' (p. 13).

Edwards (1993a) says that the concepts of private and public set up these perceived boundaries between these two worlds: they are bounded spheres (pp. 28-29). Edwards uses this concept to examine the consequences for women of crossing the boundaries between the spheres of higher education and the family and demonstrates that, because of difference in the value bases of the two domains, this can be problematic. David et al. (1993) argue that the concept of boundaries is useful in making connections between the public and private spheres as there can be a tendency to see them as two separate entities which can lead to problems theoretically (p. 22).

Another theoretical concept, linked by Edwards (1993a) to those already discussed, is the notion of 'greedy institutions' (pp. 62-81). Edwards takes this idea from Coser (1974) who describes a 'greedy institution' as one that demands 'exclusive and undivided loyalty';

it does this by diminishing the importance of other roles and pressurising the person to relinquish links with others who might have conflicting demands. It is argued that the family is a 'greedy institution' for women but not for men because it demands women's emotional and physical time in a constant and continuing way that is not the same for men (Coser and Coser, 1974). Edwards builds on Acker's (1980) notion of two 'greedy institutions': the family and education. She argues that the value bases of each of the greedy institutions are different and incompatible as they are based on the notion of the public and private spheres. Women feel they need to succeed in each sphere but as their bases are different, this results in conflicts in terms of physical and emotional time which results in feeling of guilt. Guilt, Edwards argues, is one way 'greedy institutions evoke voluntary compliance and commitment to their requirements' (p. 70). The way the women coped with the demands of both was to try to impose structure by being organised but they were often on a 'knife's-edge'. She argues that:

'the greedy standards of educational and family life took no account of the actual practicalities of the contexts and conditions under which the women attempted to meet these moral or normative paradigms' (p.80).

This explains some of the psychological and structural problems women encounter, not only in relation to feelings of guilt but because being a mother and a student are more than 'doing', they are 'ways of being' (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 10-12, 128-145).

The notion that women have a different psyche to men is linked theoretically to the private and public concept (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 20-21). Edwards states that psychological difference theory is based on Ortner's (1974), Chodorow's (1978) and Gilligan's (1982) theories. Because men and women inhabit different worlds they develop different psyches. Women's personality is relational, they define themselves through their family relationships and are more empathetic and compassionate, whereas men, because of their public domain position, have a sense of themselves as more separate. Again these ideas have been criticised by other feminists (for instance, Harding, 1986a) for being ideological constructs but Edwards (1993a) argues, in the same way as the private/public split, that they exist in people's social realities. She argues:

'the fact that the two domains and the psyches that inhabit them are ideological constructs rather than factual descriptions does not make them less important for our perceptions of social reality' (p. 20).

Edwards concludes her study with questions about the existence of a female psyche as she points to evidence which contradicts theory. She suggests that further exploration of the

area is necessary but that she has shown that separating and connecting orientations do exist. As with women's differences in wanting to separate or connect family and education, difference theory may be better seen as a continuum with women more weighted towards the connecting end and men towards the separating end. This would better account for people's actual experience (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 156-157).

It has long been argued by feminists that knowledge in our society is created and disseminated on the whole by men (see, for instance, Deem, 1978; Spender, 1982, Thompson, 1983). Spender (1982) argues that when women learn about many of the subjects taught in higher education:

> 'they are taught about men, and men's view of the world, and this is a lesson in male supremacy' (p.27).

One area which is particularly well developed theoretically and relates to the 'barriers' for women entering formal educational environments is the inappropriateness of curricula which is explained in terms of 'clashes' in 'ways of knowing'. This concept of different 'ways of knowing' is linked to the theories of different psyches and the private and public hypothesis. The theory was developed by Belenky et al. (1986) in what has been described as a 'landmark study' (Merdinger, 1991, p. 42) and is based on the work of Gilligan (1982). Belenky et al. interviewed women involved in formal post compulsory education and family advice services in the United States. Using Gilligan's terminology they distinguish between 'separate' and 'connected' knowing. Separate knowing is related to so called objective detached institutional knowledge and connected knowing is relational which is described as 'women's ways of knowing'. Edwards (1990a, 1993a & 1993b) argues that many feminists have pointed out that when women return to education they are entering a sphere dominated by patriarchal knowledge. The knowledge in this sphere is argued to be superior to other forms of knowledge, being objective and separate from everyday subjective concerns.

The theory of different 'ways of knowing' has been used in studies related to women in higher education in Britain (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a & b and Weil, 1988). These authors argue that such a perspective allows gender related patterns to be taken into account. Weil (1988) says that entering a traditional higher educational environment can represent a 'significant disjunction' for mature learners because of their social background, gender and the development of particular learner identities (pp. 28-36). Edwards (1993b) explores this interface between educational knowledge which she calls 'the university' and family knowledge, that is, 'the university of life', arguing that women found 'shifting between the two epistemologies could be uncomfortable' (p. 163). Higher education and

family require very different things from women and the two 'ways of knowing' are socially constructed around different ideological bases and assumptions which can conflict. She says these epistemological frameworks are hierarchical, arguing that the knowledge of the mature women students in her study was not valued in academic life. This is especially in relation to being a mother despite the implication of the value of previous experience in promotional literature of higher education.

Others do not explicitly call this concept different 'ways of knowing' but imply a similar notion and 'clash'. Karach (1992) in a small-scale qualitative study which arose from her own 'contradictory and problematic' experiences of higher education reports this clash. While the women involved in her study stated that they felt empowered by their academic knowledge, they felt gaining it was 'traumatic' and there was a sense of alienation from the system imparting it. They found it hard to integrate their own 'experiential forms of knowledge in the formal processes of learning' (p. 311). Karach argues that the problems and contradictions are not the fault of the individual because they:

'occur commonly enough to be able to view them as fundamentally related to institutional and relational practices, and the ideology of English/Western higher education' (p. 316).

She argues that the problems women encounter are due to the hierarchical nature of knowledge and relations between staff and students, academic knowledge and academics being seen as superior.

It is clear from this literature that there is a power relationship, with the institutions of higher education in a more powerful position than mature women students. As Edwards (1993b) puts it:

'indeed, mother-students have to work with, and come to some form of resolution between the two ethoses and 'ways of knowing' because the institutions themselves do not have to address such issues' (p. 155).

Women's 'ways of knowing' have been represented as applicable equally to all women as part of their feminine psyche (see, for instance, Merdinger, 1991; Karach, 1992). Edwards (1993a & b), however, argues that 'ways of knowing' are socially constructed. Rather than relational ways of knowing being intrinsically part of women's psyche, she sees it as a sphere in which women operate and one which is important to them but that women differ in whether they want to connect or separate their ways of knowing to the educational establishment. Edwards (1993a) argues that at one time or another, two thirds of the

women in her study wanted strong connections but others did not or mixed the two. The suggestion is therefore that women may want to make connections between their personal knowledge and formal educational knowledge but this is frequently not possible.

Solutions to the 'Barriers' Women Face

Wisker (1988), Coats (1994) and Sperling (1991), show that certain 'good provision' in adult, further, women's studies and access courses has 'broken down' some of the 'barriers' for women returning to education generally. Sperling (1991) argues that good provision is client orientated and puts mature students' needs as central, rather than expecting them to adapt to the system. Similarly, various guidelines for making women 'welcome' are put forward in the literature (see, for instance, Coats, 1994; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). Most argue for the creation of a 'women friendly environment' (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987, p. 22). On the whole, however, these guidelines are general and are not always linked to research. Coats (1994) argues that there has been little detailed research on what exactly is involved in 'good practice', which she has sought to address by a detailed study of six kinds of provision for women (p. 48) but her guidelines as still general. This literature does not indicate how individuals and particular groups experience and overcome problems. NIACE REPLAN, (1991) admit their guidelines are general but say they are to be used flexibly but that certain key aspects cannot be ignored (pp. 10-11). These key factors are reflected in much of this literature. Research is beginning to emerge which clarifies and critically examines particular aspects of these solutions. I broadly group these solutions under psychological and structural as they are largely discussed in this way in the literature but they overlap.

Psychological

The psychological solutions on the whole revolve around restoring confidence and self-esteem (see, for instance, McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991) and developing beliefs in ability to cope (see, for example, Roberts, 1994). These can be by various means. Spears (1988) argues that courses for women returning to education need to include a substantial component which addresses feelings and internal conflicts (p. 59). Others argue for more counselling and tutorial support because of the demand the course makes on them (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Karach, 1992; Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986 & 1988). Wisker (1986 & 1988) advocates counselling for the relationship difficulties that studying can cause. Sperling (1991) provides evidence that counselling helps students to cope with family commitments and study (p. 206). More support and

guidance generally is also advocated (see, for instance, Coats, 1994; Hart, 1991; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988).

Edwards (1993a) is critical of the solution of counselling and developing personal coping strategies. These approaches draw 'attention towards individuals rather than the institutions whose values and ethos are so counterposed' (p. 138). Adopting a personal coping strategy implies that an end goal is in sight in relation to the women's family but this is rarely the case. Looking after their family is more of a 'socio-emotional process' rather than being the achievement of particular goals. Being a mother/partner and student 'contain element of just being these things' and therefore the idea of using a strategy, apart from trying to be organised, is not relevant (pp. 136-140). Appropriate solutions to psychological problems need, therefore, to be developed.

Structural

McGivney (1993) takes a broad view with regard to problems which the social structure generally can impose arguing that a combination of political, social, cultural and economic changes are necessary to facilitate any real improvements. She says that 'women's position will only change when there are significant changes in attitudes to women' (p. 87), though these problems can start to be addressed if educational institutions recognise the disadvantages women face. Others also support this view (see, for instance, Keen, 1990; Morgan et al., 1981; Roberts, 1994; Sperling, 1991). McGivney (1993) sums this up by arguing that:

> 'improvements in financial support, childcare support and in the curriculum, ethos and approaches of education and training institutions would help women to manage the transition (from informal to formal education)' (p. 83).

Commitment to rigorous and ongoing equal opportunity programmes in all areas of provision are seen as vital (see, for instance, McGivney, 1993; Henry, 1994; Leonard, 1994). The main areas outlined in the literature related to initial contacts including more and better initial advice and guidance (Coats, 1994; McGivney, 1993; Morgan et al., 1981; NIACE REPLAN, 1991); improved inter-sectorial links (Coats, 1994; McGivney, 1993); the provision of 'taster' days/ Open days/ improved first contact (Barnett, 1992; Coats, 1994; Innes, 1992; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988); the presentation of a realistic picture of what higher education is about (Edwards, 1993a; Karach, 1992); improved access (Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1993; Wisker, 1988); premises which are welcoming, accessible, comfortable and safe (Coats, 1994; Keen 1990;

NIACE REPLAN, 1991) and a sensitive admissions policy and informal welcome (Coats, 1994; Wisker, 1986 & 1988).

Other recommendations revolve around the teaching and learning process and include the provision of study skills courses (Coats, 1994; Leonard, 1994; Wisker, 1986) and planning than involves women (NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1988). Changes in the curriculum are demanded by many. This is in relation to it becoming more 'woman centered' and taking account of women's experience (Belenky et al., 1986; Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Karach, 1992; Keen 1990; Leonard, 1994; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988) and in terms of course content which is relevant to women (Belenky, et al., 1986; Coats, 1994; Karach, 1992; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker 1986 & 1988). Its exponents recommend a curriculum which enables women to make connections and use their experience; which is collaborative; in which knowledge emerges from their experience; and which takes students' knowledge as the starting point. Merdinger (1991) advocates this in social work education as it is largely taken up by women and social work's clientele are mainly women. Edwards (1993a) notes, however, that beginning with, or bringing in, students' own experience would not suit all and some flexibility is therefore necessary. Disciplinary boundaries need to be broken down, for instance, between research and teaching and students should be allowed to pursue areas of interest to them in such a way that they are not penalised if they do not wish to bring in their own experience (p. 151).

Other solutions in terms of teaching and learning include the demolition of disciplinary boundaries because, it is argued, women's lives are complex (Wisker, 1988). Co-operative as opposed to competitive methods (Coats, 1994; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991) and facilitatory as oppose to authoritarian and more flexible teaching styles (Coats, 1994; Karach, 1992; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988) are also advocated.

There are calls for more women teachers to redress ratios (Wisker, 1988) while others advocate women-only courses (see, for instance, Coats, 1994; NIACE REPLAN, 1991). Those who advocate women-only courses are mainly in the area of initiatives aimed at encouraging women back into education or in non-traditional areas but some do advocate this in relation to higher education (see, for instance, Sperling, 1991). It is argued that women want, and feel 'safe' in, women-only groups. These provide the opportunity for positive bonding between women which gives them a 'sense of greater strength' (Keen, 1990, p. 15). McGivney (1993) states that opinions as to the value of single sex provision vary and that it cannot be assumed that all women need and would benefit from this (p. 44). Edwards (1993a) argues though that the gender of tutor is unimportant as many of the

women in her study saw them as an academic (pp. 93-96). However, Roberts (1994) notes that the women in her study reported that they gained valuable support from staff who were encouraging (p. 4). The contradictions in this area perhaps emphasise that it is the qualities of approachability and friendliness which are valued. Roberts (1994) notes that the theme of support ran through her interviews with women entering higher education. As well as support from their family and previous tutors being important the friendliness of the staff and students they met when they came for their initial interview impressed them (pp. 4-5). Others also note this support, for instance Sperling (1991) says that group support and accessibility of tutor are important (pp. 210-211). This is related to a sense of disappointment reported in the literature in that a few women expected personally based relationships with tutors but this did not materialise (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Karach, 1992). Leonard (1994) argues for specific support services for mature women students (p. 175) and Henry (1994) argues that support networks both inside and outside higher education are particularly important for black women in order to help counter racism (p. 48). Additionally, Corin (1994) suggest supportive networks for lesbian women who can feel isolated in higher education contexts which are deeply anti-lesbian.

The support of other students is a major theme in the literature. For instance, Hutchinson and Hutchinson (1986) say that support from other mature students was important (p. 99). This support, for most, is based on similarities and sharing of experience (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 96-98) and relates to the feelings of being different, discussed earlier, in that others in a similar situation can understand the issues involved.

Approaches to assessment which take account of demands on women and their skills are favoured (see, for instance, Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1993; Wisker, 1988). Sperling (1991, p. 204) argues for continual assessment as this takes account of outside demands on women but Wisker (1988, p. 77) says that continual assessment can be a problem because it can coincide with their domestic responsibilities. There is, therefore, a contradiction here and a lack of firm research evidence.

Others solutions are more practical and related to support facilities such as financial assistance, low cost provision or grants for part-time study (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Hart, 1991; Keen 1990; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991) and childcare support (Barnett, 1992; Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Hart, 1991; Keen, 1990; Leonard, 1994; McGivney, 1993; Morgan et al., 1981; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988; Wisker, 1986 & 1988; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). Bryan, et al. (1987) argue that childcare can be one of the biggest problems for black women entering higher education, especially if they are single parents (p. 99). Flexibility of

provision that takes account of demands on women, it is argued, is vital (Barnett, 1992; Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Hart, 1991; Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Keen 1990; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1993) as is more flexibility in modes of study, for instance, more part-time courses, a credit system, modularisation and more independent study (Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986 & 1988).

The Initial Period of Transition to Higher Education

Though the literature discussed so far points to potential issues and problems of relevance to women at and around the point of entry to programmes of higher education there is little which specifically explores women's experience at this time. There is, however, a hint in the literature that some of the issues are of a transitional nature and are different to the overall experience of higher education. McGivney (1993, p. 83; 1994, p. 120) talks about the 'transition needs' of women when entering higher education which implies that beginning a programme requires and involves particular things that are different from the overall experience. She sees these mainly in terms of the 'barriers' already discussed, the main two being lack of childcare and finance (1993, p. 77; 1994, p. 120). She does not, however, discuss women's experience of the transition.

Others more explicitly discuss women's experience of the transition to higher education. Edwards (1993a) talks about the women in her study being nervous upon beginning their course. She relates this to uncertainty about their abilities, seeing others as more capable and the fear that they alone could not cope (p. 57). Similarly, Leonard (1994) noted the initial nervousness and apprehension of the women in her study but says that this was 'tinged' with excitement (p. 169). Morgan, et al. (1981) state that for the women in their study the fear of failure and difficulties of getting into learning lessened as time went on, the first year being a time of great insecurity (p. 44).

There is very little research directly related to the transition to professional programmes of higher education such as those under investigation in this study. This is noted by Dewar, et al. (1995, p. 2) in relation to nurses and midwives returning to study in higher education. In their investigation of the development of an orientation module aimed at these health care professionals (who were predominantly women) they found that many had not studied for some years, they had little understanding of the academic requirements within higher education and their anxieties were associated with a sense of personal inadequacy. They also report concerns about how these students would fit study in with their already busy lives (Dewar, et al., 1994, p. 253, 1995, p. 2).

Edwards (1993a, pp. 133-134) also highlights that the first year can be a time of other crucial changes. For the women in her study most of the relationships which ended did so during the first year. The women who adopted a connecting orientation initially changed to a more separating approach to education and their family for reasons of conflict with their partners. These women did so towards the end of the first year. Edwards argues that 'the first year would seem, logically enough, to be a crucial period for setting the women's orientation' (p. 133). There is a sense of major upheavals in terms of personal relationships which are particularly prevalent in early involvement in higher education. The literature also suggests that entering educational environments can also have repercussions on other important relationships.

Edwards (1993a) states that when women enter higher education they are entering, as feminists point out, a 'world of male-defined structures, values and knowledge' (p. 82) which several studies demonstrate can cause problems for some women (see, for instance, Belenky, et, al. 1986; Edwards, 1993a; Karach, 1992). Weil (1988), who examines the experiences of non-traditional students generally, says that in her study 'women's voices predominate' (p. 22). Because of social background, gender and the development of particular learner identities, non-traditional students can experience 'significant disjunction' when entering a traditional higher educational environment (pp. 28-36). She also examined the experience of men and women from white middle-class backgrounds, arguing that though similar issues arose for them in the transition there were differences which arose from their social position and prior learning experience. They were more apt to 'play the game' and tolerate disjunction (pp. 37-38). Therefore beginning a programme of higher education may cause problems for women, especially if they are not middle-class.

The literature also suggests that certain expectations are not realised when women enter higher education. Edwards (1993a, p. 94) and Karach (1992, p. 312) argue, for instance, that women can expect personally based relationships with tutors which do not materialise. Another example from Edwards (1993a) is that women expected to be able to explore their own interests and thought that they had valuable life experience to offer but frequently found this was inadmissible (pp. 82-83). Impressions of higher education could therefore lead to certain expectations which were different in reality.

It would appear that certain issues are to the fore in the transition to programmes of education and that these have psychological consequences for women.

The Limitations of the Previous Studies

The literature to date on women at and around the point of entry to education tends to focus on particular kinds of women. Women 'returners' to education have been extensively researched (see, for instance, Hart, 1991; Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1987; Innes, 1992; Keen, 1990; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Pascall and Cox, 1993a & b; Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Stewart, 1988; Thompson, 1993; Wisker, 1988). The term 'returner' is usually applied to, as Pascall and Cox (1993b) put it, 'women students who return to education after a break, particularly after a break which included marriage and children' (p. 20). However, Britton and Baxter (1994) argue that some mature students have not had clear breaks from education and enter higher education via an 'interrupted route' rather than being a 'returner' (p. 2). Therefore mature women students may not always be 'returning' after a break from education and therefore some of the solutions presented in the literature may not be appropriate to all, such as, for instance, study skills courses.

Many of the studies also focus on certain types of mature women students, in particular students with children (see, for instance, Edwards, 1990a, 1993a & b) and women entering non-traditional areas such as computers and science based professions (see, for instance, Barnett, 1992; Innes, 1992; Roberts, 1994; Thompson, 1993). Though many of the conclusions are applicable to other kinds of mature women students others are only relevant to these particular groups. The experiences of students in traditionally women orientated professions, such as social work or health care, are not examined in detail though they are included in a few studies (for example, Pascall and Cox, 1993a & b). Students who are single, are not mothers or whose children have left home are neglected in most of the literature. Maynard and Pearsall (1994) make the point that there is a tendency to overlook the difficulties faced by single mature students and suggest that this is possibly because they tend to be younger and merge in with the 'standard entry' students (p. 239). The literature evaluated here also does not examine the implications of the mode of study, for example, whether students are part-time or full-time. Edwards' (1993a) study specifically involved women in full-time higher education studying for a degree. While this represents a proportion of mature women students it is only part of a much wider picture. In line with national trends women's higher education experience is increasingly becoming part-time, related to continuing professional education, involves studying intermittently, at postgraduate level and takes place in different settings (Duke, 1994, p. III; McNair, 1993, pp. 3-4).

The diversity of mature women students is acknowledged but in many cases ignored. Women are seen as so different from each other that only broad similarities are examined (see, for example, Wisker, 1986 & 1988; NIACE REPLAN, 1991). Wisker (1988) argues that the only things which unite women are their gender and age (p. 68). Edwards (1993a) does, however, highlight certain important class and race differences between women in their experience of higher education. Others have also noted differences in experience for mature women students because of race (see, for instance, Bryan, et al. 1987; Dicker, 1992; Henry, 1994) or sexuality (see, for instance, Corin, 1994). Age and particular life situations are neglected in the literature.

Conclusions

My evaluation of the literature in the area of women at and around the point of entry to education has revealed various themes. The relevance of women's social position in terms of reasons for being involved in higher education and that involvement can give rise to potential problems and threats, both inside and outside the institutions of education. The thread of continuity and change is evident in terms of women's lives and identities. There are continuities from women's social position and background but changes which being involved in higher education can mean. An important theme is that the social structure, including the structure of higher education, can inhibit and cause problems for women.

It would appear that issues of relevance in both the actual transition and the overall experience of higher education, though arising from the social structure, are experienced on a psychological level. However, the structural influences can become translated into personal problems because of psychological reductionism. Certain solutions revolve around not questioning the demands on women and offering counselling which is criticised because it can depoliticise problems. Many of the solutions do attempt to seek change in the structure of higher education but this is, on the whole, in general terms, not taking into account the needs of individuals or specific groups. In particular there is a lack of theory which links social and psychological factors.

Edwards has made a major contribution in her critical analysis of women's experience of higher education which has highlighted inadequacies in other studies. Her development of theory in this area is particularly valuable. Based on feminist theory, she has modified and used the concept of public and private spheres, associated psyches, the notion of 'greedy institutions' and 'ways of knowing'. She demonstrates the ways in which women experience these constructs. Together with other feminist analyses this has highlighted the gendered nature of women's relationship to education and the social structure. Her study is, however, largely sociological.

The study of mature women students at and around the point of entry to education to date does not fully explore issues which might be of relevance to how they cope with the transition to programmes of professional higher education. The suggestions made to assist women in education are general and have not been researched in relation to entering professional higher education.

The Aim of the Present Study

The aim of the present study was to investigate how women manage the transition to professional programmes of higher education and identify what assists and hinders their coping. From my evaluation of the literature and initial conceptualisations of the project (see figure 2.1) several research questions were formulated. It seemed reasonable, at this stage, to assume that this would be an interaction between the different spheres in which the women operated and that these would influence how they coped with the transition. In the literature women are said to face certain psychological and structural 'barriers' arising from their position within the private sphere and associated with the public domain of higher education. Though there is little literature about the professional context, Dewar et al. (1994; 1995) report certain problems and issues for nurses and midwives beginning programmes of higher education such as their reasons for taking their programme being related to professional pressures, lack of confidence because of not having studied for many years and concerns about fitting study in with already busy lives.

Much of the literature to date on women's experience of higher education relates to being full-time, on social sciences degree programmes or entering a non-traditional discipline. Mature women students are also commonly represented as being older with children who are growing up. The women in the present study were in women-dominated professions, many were part-time and a significant proportion did not have children or had young children. This led me to hypothesise that both their current personal and professional situations might affect their experience of the transition and that there might be certain important similarities and differences between them.

The literature reveals a preoccupation with either psychological or social factors but there is a lack of theory which integrates these. I, therefore, wanted to investigate how the process of coping might be understood in terms of a multi-disciplinary approach. Finally, the 'solutions' put forward in the literature aimed at assisting women in education are broad and general which led me to consider how coping with the transition could be assisted for women beginning the kinds of professional education involved in the present study.

Research questions

1. How does what women 'bring' from the private sphere and professional context outside higher education affect their coping with the transition?

> 1a. Do their reasons for taking their programme of professional higher education affect their coping?

> 1b. How does what they 'bring' personally and/or professionally affect their coping?

> 1c. How does their current personal and professional situation affect their coping?

> 1d. Are there any key differences and similarities between women which affect their coping?

2. How do features of the University affect women's coping with the transition?

3. How can the process of coping be understood?

4. How can coping with the transition be assisted?

Figure 2.1 Early Conceptual Framework

THE OUTCOME

Good

Poor

Coping

THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT
Public bounded sphere

EARLY EXPERIENCE OF
PROFESSIONAL HE

Institutional Context e.g. Registration,
the Library, Freshers' Events

The Course Programme -
kind and mode

Induction

Programme

Other

Early

Programme

Experiences

THE WOMEN'S CONTEXT
Private bounded sphere

Reasons for taking course -
linked to 'private world'
position

What bring - personal
background e.g. tendency
towards connectedness, lack of
confidence, determination

Current situation -
continuations from private sphere

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT
Public bounded sphere

Reasons for taking course -
linked to professional context

What bring - professional
background

Current situation -
continuations from professional

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CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous chapter I evaluated the literature of relevance to mature women students at and around the point of entry to education, demonstrating that there is little use of psychological theory to explain their experiences. Entering higher education is, however, depicted as a period of change which has psychological consequences for women. For instance, Pascall and Cox (1993a) argue that the women in their study saw education as the beginning of a process of change in their lives (p. 139). Edwards (1993a) states that for the women in her study the first year of a programme of higher education was an important time in terms of ramifications for them on their relationships with their partners (p. 133). And Weil (1988) suggests that non-traditional students can experience 'significant disjunction' when entering traditional higher education (p. 29). This led me to conceptualise the time at and around the point of entry to professional programmes as a period of transition which is how it is depicted in the literature on mature students more generally. Beginning programmes of higher education has been conceptualised as a transition (see, for instance, Weil, 1988 p. 28). Schlossberg, et al. (1989) argue that when an adult is thinking about, is involved in, or leaving education, they are in transition (p. 13).

The conceptualisation of the study as a period of transition means that there is a substantial body of psychological literature which might be of relevance in developing a theoretical framework for the study. I, therefore, undertook a literature search of theories of transition and change within the social sciences. I evaluate several related areas here for their usefulness in developing a theoretical framework but argue that they fail to provide an adequate framework for understanding the experience of women in transition to professional programmes of higher education. Having rejected psychological theories of transition I go on to describe the development of a more appropriate framework largely based on Breakwell's (1986) social psychological theory of coping with threatened identity but also drawing on feminist theory.

The Conceptualisation of Transition in Theories of Adult Development

Schlossberg (1981) conceptualises adult development theories as forming a continuum, from theories of individual differences at one extreme to theories of age determining life situation at the other, as shown in figure 3.1. This, she describes, being based on whether the theories explain transitions and adaptive behaviour in terms of individual idiosyncrasy, life stage or chronological age (p. 3).

Figure 3.1: A continuum of views

Individual   Life Span   Transition   Stage   Age

(Source: Schlossberg, 1981, p. 3)

I now discuss these categories of theories and assess their usefulness.

Individual

Neugarten (1979) argues that as people get older they become less similar, which she describes as 'individual fanning out' (p. 891). If this view is taken it is impossible to generalise about any particular age or stage being related to particular events which occur in adult life. I would argue that though events are not linked to a definite age there is a tendency for certain life events to occur at certain times in many women's lives in Western industrial societies, for example, having children, children leaving home, or having responsibility for ageing relatives. Certain biological events are also broadly time-related for women, for instance, having children or going through the menopause. The meanings and demands of particular events will have implications for women in relation to whatever else they are doing at the time. Pascall and Cox (1993a) also suggest that most of the women in their study returned to higher education because of a dissatisfaction with domesticity and the low-paid work associated with it (p. 76), which indicates that being involved in higher education may be linked, for women, with a particular time in their lives and certain related events.

Life span perspectives

In life span perspectives events are seen as central rather than the particular stage of life. The focus is on the whole life span and they oppose the age and stage view which is seen as progressing in one direction, being hierarchical, related to time and being irreversible. Life events are seen as 'pivotal' in the individual's development (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 4). Sugerman (1986) states that 'life-span developmental psychology constitutes a general perspective'; there is no specified route a life should take and 'developmental trajectories are socially and historically situated' (pp. 2-3). This perspective emphasises the importance of events in peoples' lives but it is vital to be able to assess the impact of the experience of particular time-related events in women's lives. Entering higher education may be a key event for an individual but it happens within the context of their life situation and stage in the broadest sense. This perspective is useful in so far as an event such as being involved in higher education can be assessed as having an impact on a woman's family which may create the need for first or second order change. This relates not to the size of the trigger of a life event but to the degree to which the family needs to alter its beliefs and behaviour to accommodate the event. First order change can be incorporated into existing patterns or definitions of relationships. However, second order change requires changes in definitions of relationships which will profoundly alter the family system (Burnham, 1986, p. 40).

Theories of specific life transition

Lowenthal et al. (1975) investigated four groups of adults about to embark on what are seen as the common transitions of adult life - high school seniors leaving home; young newlyweds about to start a family; middle aged parents faced with the 'empty nest'; and those about to retire. They found that the four groups differed in their outlook, the stresses they faced and how they perceived these stresses. They conclude that it is not age that was important but what else is going on in people's lives. This perspective implies that becoming a student at any age consists of the same sorts of issues. While some issues will be similar the literature indicates clear differences between traditional age and mature women students. For instance, continuing domestic demands are a key issue for mature women students (see, for example, Edwards, 1993a, p. 106; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994, p. 239; Roberts, 1994, p. 4).

Stage and age theories

Stage and age theories of transition typically frame transition in relation to 'normal' and linear stages in the life cycle, linked to age, and the problems and tasks associated with the change from one phase to another (see, for example, Erikson, 1968, Gould; 1978; Levinson, et al., 1978). Gilligan's (1977; 1982; 1993) and Brown and Gilligan's (1992) studies and theory of girls' and women's development attempted to redress the male bias of the early age and stage theories, though they follow the same stages of development. Gilligan (1977, pp. 482-483) argues that women's development follows the three-level progression of all social developmental theory, from an egocentric, through a societal, to a universal perspective. The main difference being that women develop an 'ethic of care' rather than an 'ethic of rights' which men develop (Gilligan, 1982; 1993). In the transition to womanhood girls lose 'voice' as they become more silent, not being able to say what they think and feel directly (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). Travis (1994) argues, however, that 'on the contrary when women gain experience, power and confidence their "voices" change' (p. 351). Pascall and Cox (1993a) argue that for the women in their study education had 'played a key role in enabling new choices to be made about the balance between private and public life' (p. 143). Mature women students' experience does not easily sit within this framework as they would be considered 'out of step' with what is 'normal' for their age or stage in life.

Gilligan's theory has also been criticised for not taking account of race and class differences or economic history, Haste (1994) notes that what is absent is conventional sociological notions of power in terms of social and economic forces (p. 402). Another major criticism is that Gilligan ignores the influence of culture which is now evident in many disciplines including cultural psychology and particularly in social psychology and the analysis of discourse (Haste, 1994, p. 402). Their attempt to describe universal categories associated with a particular stage of life does not take into account societal changes over time. Gergen (1980) and Burman (1994) argue that these developmental theories are historically situated. As society changes transitions in relation to these theories become non-normative and more individual, for instance with the rise of mature students. This has been recognised by authors such as Krager, et al. (1990), who state that changes in the age range of the student population have necessarily led to reformulation of theory (p. 45).

Theories of adult development generally have been criticised for prescribing normality, being gender (apart from Gilligan) and culturally blind and therefore oppressive (Morss, 1993). Burman et al. (1996) argue that being committed to a particular developmental model is too constraining as it produces accounts of women's lives by creating a structure for 'normalising the diversity of women's experiences and positions' (p.7). Salmon (1985, p. 50) notes that those who do not conform to what is seen as a normal life course are seen as deviant. Developmental theories emphasise discontinuity in the life course but, as Salmon (1985, pp. 4-5) argues, it would be better to see this as continuous because people retain their own sense of 'personhood' throughout their lives. However, as Lie (1990) points out, there are variables associated with the life course such as age, marital status and children's age, as well as the culture of an organisation, which can impede women's progression (p. 109).

Theories of the Commonalities of Transitions

Another area of theory closely related to the study of adult development is that of drawing together the similarities of transitions. I now evaluate these theories.

Transition as a common process

Theorists have studied a variety of life transitions, for instance, becoming a parent, relocating because of a job move, being made redundant, bereavement, the family life cycle and developed theory around the common elements of such transitions (see, for instance, Bridges, 1983; Hopson and Adams, 1976; Carter and McGoldrick, 1980). Hopson and Adams (1976) describe the common features of transitions as passing through particular phases which can vary in intensity and length depending on the relevance to the person. All produce stress but these may or may not be experienced by the person. People develop particular strategies to manage transitions and can be helped to develop more efficient strategies and profit from such a change. Bridges (1983) describes the process of transition as one of endings followed by a period of confusion or distress, which he calls the 'neutral zone', which leads to a new beginning. In order to help people in transition, Bridges argues that you need to understand how people have coped in the past with endings. Some theorists use a bereavement model to explain the process of transition. These emphasise the losses experienced and are therefore more applicable to particular kinds of transitions (see, for instance, Brammer and Abrego, 1981 and Hopson and Adams, 1976).

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Other theories conceptualise transition as an interruption or time of loss of control. Mandler (1990) argues that transitions cause disruption to on-going plans. The interruption to the investment made in such plans leads to tensions which are manifested in terms of anxiety. Therefore a transition leads to anxiety because of a change in activities and routines. Similarly, Fisher (1990) conceptualises a transition as a period of lack of control and the task of the person is to gain control over the new environment.

Theories of common process, interruption and loss of control imply discontinuity and the subsequent adaption to the new situation. The term transition implies discontinuity and is often defined as such. For example, a dictionary definition is:

> 'passage from one place, state, stage, style or subject to another' (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary).

In psychology it is similarly defined. For instance, Burke et al. (1992) argue that the 'concept of transition implies that individuals are in a process of movement from one situation to another' (p. 159) and Hopson and Adams (1976) define a transition as a 'discontinuity in a person's life space' (p. 5). Similarly, Schlossberg et al. define a transition in the following way:

> 'an event (such as returning to school after working for many years) or a nonevent (staying in school over an unusually long period of time without completing a degree) that alters one's roles, relationships, routines and assumptions' (1989, p. 14).

Discontinuity could account for aspects of mature women students' experience. The literature suggests changes can occur, for instance, being involved in education is argued as having an effect on women's relationships with their partners (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a, pp. 132-136; Leonard, 1994, pp. 167-173; Wisker, 1986, p. 5). However, there are also important continuities in terms of relationships, responsibilities and identity. Edwards (1993a) argues that being a wife and/or mother are not aspects which can easily be set aside (p. 12). Most women also continue to be responsible for the family and domestic chores when involved in higher education (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a, p. 106; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994, p. 239; Roberts, 1994, p. 4).

Theories of role change

Within the symbolic interactionist tradition transitions are conceptualised as the change between roles (see, for example, Allan and van de Vilert, 1984; Oatley, 1990), the emphasis being on role conflicts and tensions. It has been argued though that roles have a deeper meaning for identity than role theory implies. Edwards (1993a) and Pascall and Cox (1993a) see women's roles as more intrinsically linked with identity than these theories would suggest. Edwards, drawing on Elshtain (1981), argues that being a mother and/or wife are 'core' identities (1993a, p. 12). Land (1989) demonstrates this in her personal account of becoming a mother. She found becoming a mother difficult despite having more support than most women. She says:

'One of the abiding features of motherhood is that it is a state of being and a very preoccupied state at that. I do mean state and I really do mean abiding. I do not mean a 'role' which implies something entailing choice and something which is played for a finite time' (p. 75).

Similarly, Pascall and Cox (1993a, p. 58) state that women's domestic roles involve more than doing housework. Burman et al. (1996) argue that the psychological discourse of 'roles' assumes that 'gender roles' are taken up and exchanged unproblematically, or even that they are chosen. This 'fails to engage with the deeply gendered structure of our experience' (p.7). This deflates the power dimension of women's position and in effect blames them for it.

Theories which group common features of transition in order to describe the process and role theories have various weaknesses as frameworks for explaining the experiences of mature women students, most notably their failure to highlight important continuities for women which arise from the social context.

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Occupational Career Theories

A further theoretical area which I evaluated was that of occupational careers. One of the key motivational factors identified for women entering higher education is related to a change of career (see, for instance, Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Pascall and Cox, 1993a). The study of careers and the theory which has emerged from this is a large area, much of it based on the psychological developmental theory (see, for example, Arthur et al., 1989). I evaluate here two specific areas which I saw as potentially fruitful for developing a theoretical framework, that of work role transitions and women's career theory.

The transition cycle

From the study of work role transitions, such as promotions, Nicholson (1987a) has developed what he calls the 'transition cycle'. He has applied this cycle to other kinds of life transitions (1987b). This cycle has various phases from preparation, encounter, adjustment, stabilisation, back to preparation for the next transition. His model places more emphasis on the cyclical nature of transitions than that of Hopson and Adams (1976), in that the first and last phases are the same and that people are continually entering transition situations. For the various phases he describes differing tasks, problems, strategies and role management. This model, in common with other process models, illustrates the dynamics of a transition as changing over time. It has general applicability, offering a useful framework for counselling, guidance or interventions with regard to where individuals' 'are at' in the cycle and the issues associated with that phase. It, however, comes in for the criticism levelled at counselling solutions for women in higher education expounded by Edwards (1993a, p. 138) as it psychologises problems which are out of women's control.

Nicholson (1987a, pp. 190-214) has also constructed a taxonomy of nine dimensions to depict the variability in transitions. One of these is the concept of 'continuity', which is missing from theories of the process of transition. Nicholson describes continuity as how transition cycles connect (p. 199). This fails, though, to reflect the magnitude and influence of the continuities for women associated with the social structure, although he recognises that the development of transition theory in its social context is a necessary future direction for research (Nicholson, 1990).

Women and career theory

Theories of male development and male career development, such as Super (1957), have been criticised for being unrepresentative of women's career experience (see, for instance, Gallos, 1989; Ornstein and Isabella, 1990). Several critical perspectives have emerged which attempt to explore the issue of developing a theory of women's careers. For instance, Gallos (1989) examines theories of women's psychological development but concludes that there is a lack of a coherent framework for theory. As with theories of women's lives and development theories of women's careers need to integrate 'knowledge about psychological and developmental issues, structural and institutional concerns and cultural beliefs about the genders' (p. 127). Gallos advocates a more integrated approach but theory is under development in this area and I did not find an integrated framework.

Theories of Transition to Higher Education

Traditional students

There is a considerable body of literature on younger students and the transition to higher education. These typically focus on the issues relevant to moving away from home, the key one being homesickness (see, for instance, Brewin, et al., 1989; Fisher and Hood, 1987) and the related issue of separation from the family of origin (see, for instance, Lapsley et al., 1989). Though these offer insights they are not wholly relevant to mature students as the vast majority travel daily from home and have long since separated from their family of origin. Many of the issues to do with their present families are ones of continuity rather than separation (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a).

Mature students

Several studies focus on the transition of mature students generally to higher education (see, for instance, Beard and Hartley, 1984; Morgan, 1990). Schlossberg has developed a general theory of transition which has been applied to being involved in higher education (see, Schlossberg, et al., 1989). Schlossberg, et al.'s (1989) conceptualisation of the transition process is not that dissimilar from that of Nicholson's (1987a). It is one of moving into a new situation, moving through it and moving on, there being common elements associated with each phase. Thus their model also highlights the dynamic nature

of a transition. Their framework goes further, however, by emphasising individual differences of altered roles, relationships, routines and assumptions. They argue that the needs and coping strategies of adult learners in relation to these within the different phases can be assessed. In 'moving into' new situations there are common elements - the need to become familiar with the rules and expectations. The 'moving through' is more concerned with balancing study with the rest of their lives which begins once the learner 'knows the ropes'. The 'moving into' and 'moving through' are more integrated for women, though, than Schlossberg, et al.'s theory suggests as the continuing demands on them are relevant at both stages. Schlossberg, et al. (1989) argue that the old situation changes and the new begins to become integrated (p. 15). This, however, fails to take account of continuities and that women might not be able to integrate the new fully. This point is made by Edwards (1993a) in that a few of the women in her study were not able to connect family and higher education in the way they wished because if they did they would put their relationship with their husband in jeopardy (pp. 132-133).

Within their framework Schlossberg et al. (1989) argue that people have certain strengths and weaknesses in four particular areas - the situation (the circumstances of the transition); the self (how they see the transition); financial and social support; and the strategies they use to cope. By examining the strengths and weaknesses in each category it is possible to make predictions about how students will cope (pp. 14-20). While this does highlight some of the elements of a transition which are external to the person it does individualise the solutions. It implies that a counselling and guidance approach needs to be taken and that individuals can freely employ particular strategies which will help them in the transition. Edwards (1993a) argues that the use of personal coping strategies is not appropriate for women in higher education, as meeting the demands of the family is not goal-orientated but rather an ongoing 'socio-emotional process' (pp. 136-139).

My evaluation of psychological theories of transition and adult development has shown them to be inadequate as a framework for understanding women's experiences at and around the point of entry to higher education. Earwaker (1992, pp. 12-32) argues that to understand the experiences of people in transition to higher education an integrative framework is necessary, as becoming a student is both an individual and a social process. He criticises developmental and transitional theories for leaving out the interpersonal and social dimensions, arguing for a psycho-social approach within the context of wider social changes. He points the way forward as one of looking at the meaning of transition to

people. The concept of 'career' from Goffman (1968), he argues, is useful in that it describes a clear thread of personal identity which can accommodate change and discontinuity. Earwaker, however, does not develop a coherent framework to explain the transition to higher education and does not explore the experience of transition in substantial student focused research.

Theories of transition offer one valuable perspective in terms of showing that a transition is a dynamic process which has psychological consequences. A few also allude to the importance of social relations. The fundamental problem with these theories is that they do not take account of continuities from the social context, such as race, class and gender, which Edwards (1993a) has demonstrated are important in the experiences of mature women students. A psychological framework of transition on its own is not adequate. Earwaker (1992) and Gallos (1989) have pointed the way towards the need for an integrative framework, one which is able to take into account *both continuity and change.*

The Development of an Integrative Framework

The basis of the framework which I now describe comes from Breakwell's (1986) model of identity, threats to identity and coping with threats to identity. Breakwell's perspective emanates from social psychology and is based on well established theory in that area. This model is linked here to a feminist perspective in the development of a new framework. The relevance of Breakwell's theory to the present study is highlighted by one of the case studies she uses. She examines how and why women entering 'sexually atypical' areas of employment, 'men's work', might feel threatening and encounter problems (pp. 63-75). This has resonances with the situation of women entering higher education as much of the literature highlights that women are entering a male dominated environment (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Edwards, 1990a, 1993a & b; Sperling, 1991; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991).

Rather than seeing change in terms of a discontinuity, Breakwell (1986) investigates its impact on identity within a framework which recognises that people will respond differently to change. Importantly, Breakwell also highlights the influence of the social context. Her theory emanates from European social psychology which focuses on the collective basis of self definition embedded in the cultural context as oppose to the United States definition where the self is defined at the intra-psychic level (Hayes, 1993). She has

developed an integrative framework for understanding the structure and processes of identity. She describes identity as 'a dynamic social product, residing in the psychological processes, which cannot be understood except in relation to its social context and historical perspective' (p. 9). Her theory of identity 'seeks to link the intra-psychic and socio-political processes' (p. 11).

An overview of Breakwell's theory

I will now outline the main propositions of Breakwell's (1986) theory. The structure of identity (see figure 3.2) is described as consisting of the *biological organism, content and value dimensions,* and a *temporal frame* (pp. 11-22). The *biological* aspects refer to the physiological characteristics of a person which interact with the social initially and form a core to identity but one which becomes less sizable as time progresses. The *content* dimension relates to the way in which people define themselves. It consists of their roles, relationships, group memberships, values, attitudes and personal constructs - the uniqueness of a person. This dimension is organised in terms of the relative importance of aspects of it to the person but is in a state of flux depending on changes and demands from the social context. The *value* dimension refers to the importance a person places on the contents aspect and is constantly revised in the light of changes in social values or the individuals position in relation to these. The content and value dimensions develop over time, according to experience. The *temporal* dimension involves not only the person's subjective ideas about time and their biography but also social time, in that actual social events take place. The structure of identity therefore emphasises not only its psychological aspects but the importance of the social context.

Figure 3.2 The structure of identity
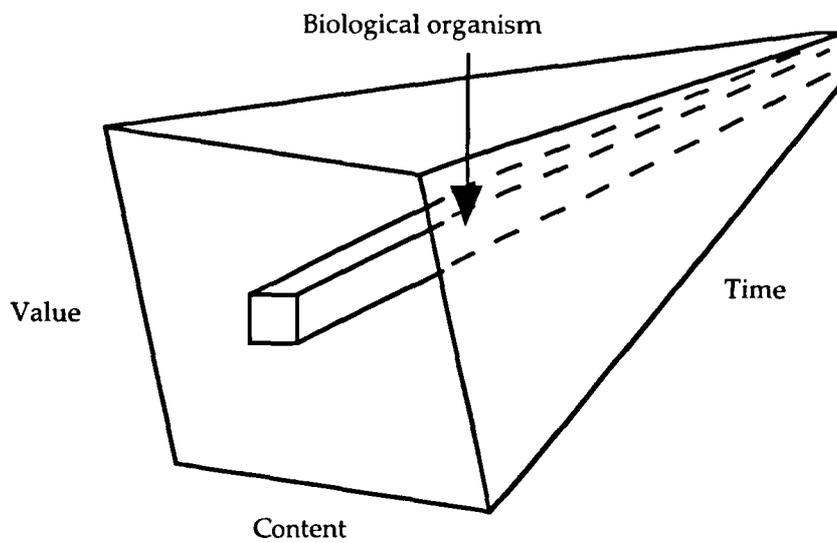
(Source: Breakwell, 1986, p. 20)

Breakwell's framework includes a description of the *processes* and *principles* of identity (pp. 23-27). The *processes* are those of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation. This means events are not simply absorbed but are modified by these processes. These processes therefore determine the content and values dimensions of identity. Breakwell identifies three main *principles* of identity which operate in Western industrial societies and which are temporally specific (pp. 24-27). These are described as guiding what are seen as desirable states for the structure of identity. She outlines three prime current principles: the need for *continuity* over time and situation; the need to feel personally and socially worthwhile (*self-esteem*); and the need to feel unique or *distinctive* from others. Breakwell states these are not exhaustive (p. 25).

The intra-psychic dynamics of identity thus far outlined are set within the social context in Breakwell's theory (pp. 35-38). Identity is socially and historically specific being a product of the dialectic between the individual and the physical and social world (p. 28). The social context includes interpersonal networks, membership of groups and social categories and intergroup relationships. These structures prescribe particular roles, beliefs and values. Social influence processes provide the ideological context and consist of systems of values and beliefs, social representations, social norms and attributions. At a particular moment in time the individual is faced with choices between different ideologies (see figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 The social context of identity

Structure:
Interpersonal
networks

Group
memberships

Intergroup
relationships

Social time

Social influence processes:
establishing the ideological milieu
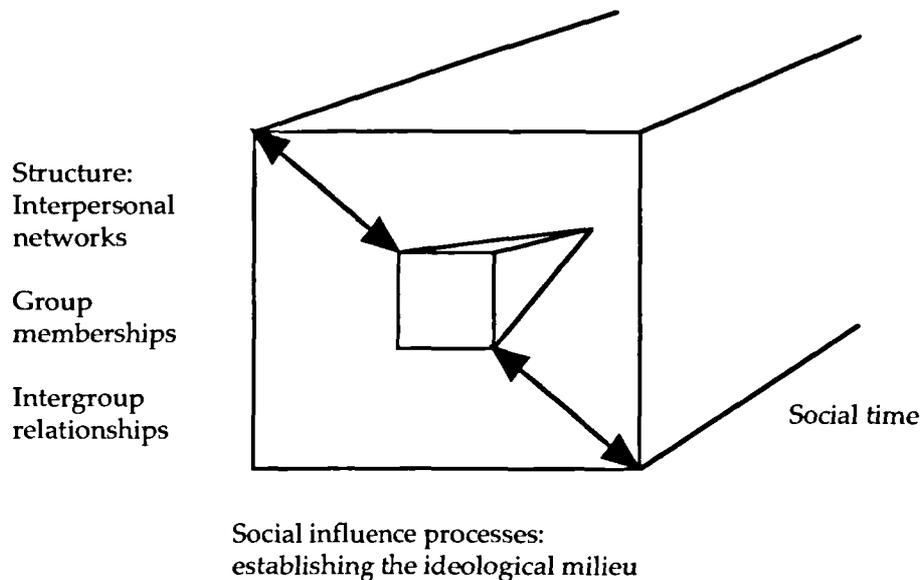
(Source: Breakwell, 1986, p. 38)

Breakwell (1986) argues that change, of whatever nature, can bring about change in identity (pp. 38-43). This change arises from the movement of the individual in the social matrix which can be internally motivated; for instance, choosing to be involved in higher education, or can be imposed by external forces; for example, being made redundant. It can also be external in the form of social change, that is, independent of the individual. Breakwell states that 'any movement in the social matrix will require the individual to process potential new contents and values for identity' (p. 39), though this will not inevitably lead to changes in identity. Breakwell states:

'A threat to identity occurs when the processes of identity, assimilation-accommodation and evaluation are, for some reason, unable to comply with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem, which habitually guide their operation' (1986, pp. 46-47).

That is, when one or more of these are perceived to have been challenged. Threats are only experienced if the person is consciously aware of them as such.

Breakwell (1986) discusses at length a range of ways in which people cope with threats to identity. She defines a coping strategy as:

'any thought or action which succeeds in eliminating or ameliorating threat can be considered a coping strategy, whether it is consciously recognised as intentional or not' (p. 79).

Coping strategies are at three levels - the intra-psychic, interpersonal and intergroup. The intra-psychic operates on a cognitive and emotion level relying on the processes of identity (i.e. assimilation-accommodation and evaluation) rather than action (p. 80). The interpersonal is based on changing relationships with others through negotiation and manipulation (p. 109). The intergroup relies on group membership (p. 128). Within each of these three levels Breakwell describes a number of strategies which it is possible to use, discussing the usefulness and limitations of these. For instance, she states that group dynamics can provide 'fertile breeding ground' for coping strategies (p. 128), such as group support originating from individuals coming together with others when they share a threatening position (p. 130). Strategies at each level do not take place in isolation and they will interact and have implications for strategies at other levels.

I have briefly outlined the main propositions of Breakwell's theory of coping with threatened identities. Now I describe how I have developed this into an integrated framework suitable for exploring women's experience of the transition to programmes of higher education.

Identity

In their studies of mature women students' experience of higher education, Pascall and Cox (1993a & b) and Edwards (1993a) have argued that identity is an important aspect of being involved in higher education. The literature points to discontinuities and contradictions in terms of identity for mature women students. For example, Edwards (1993a) argues that becoming a student can lead to feelings of being 'different' to the image of the 'bachelor boy' prevalent in higher education (p. 86-88); to other mothers (p. 59); and different because a change in status which 'set them apart' from friends and relatives (pp. 140-146).

The term 'identity' is not without problems, often being used in very different ways depending on the perspective underpinning it (Breakwell, 1986, pp. 10-11). It is used particularly loosely in much of the literature on women and higher education. For instance, Pascall and Cox (1993a) analyse domesticity and higher education as potential sources of identity for women without explaining what they mean by the term identity. Edwards (1993a) implies that identity is more than assuming roles as it is not just 'doing' a particular thing but a way of 'being' (pp. 11-12). She implies that identity is socially constructed as she argues that the ideological structures of the public and private domains and associated psyches do not exist in reality but people do draw upon them when describing their experience (pp. 26-31). Karach (1992) examines the effect of higher education on the self and identity and argues that mature women students, while feeling empowered by the experience, can also feel a sense of dislocation with previous identities (pp. 310-331). On the whole definitions are vague and the term identity seemingly used unproblematically.

Breakwell's (1986) framework of identity is a complex and integrated one which brings into focus different interrelated dimensions. The 'principles' of identity are particularly relevant to understanding the potential implications of, and influences on, change and transition. Breakwell describes these as the need for *continuity* over time and situation; the need to feel personally and socially worthwhile (*self-esteem*); and the need to feel unique or *distinctive* from others (p. 24). She states these 'principles' are not exhaustive and I have therefore extended them to include self-efficacy and authenticity which I argue are particularly relevant to the transition to higher education. In Breakwell's later work (1992a, pp. 35-36) and in the studies of others (see, for instance, Gecas and Mortimer, 1987, p. 268; Twigger, 1993, pp. 3-4) the principle of *self-efficacy* is outlined. This refers to peoples' beliefs in their abilities. Gecas and Mortimer (1987) also describe the concept of *authenticity*, referring to one's sense of reality (pp. 268-270).

These 'principles' are central to understanding the impact of change and I will therefore now clarify their definition and describe their relevance to women in higher education. As with the term identity, *self-esteem* is one which is often bandied around without clear definition. Self-esteem is defined by Gecas and Mortimer (1987) as 'the positive or negative regard in which one holds oneself' (p. 268). Breakwell's definition highlights that this is related to feelings of personal worth or social value (1986, p. 24). Gecas and Mortimer say that self-esteem can be positive or negative but that people are motivated to seek positive self-esteem (p. 268). Argyle (1983) states that many psychologists have

thought it necessary to theorise the need for self-esteem (p. 27). He argues that self-esteem is one of the 'drives' which determines social behaviour in that it directs people towards certain goals (pp. 12-13). It has been argued that self-fulfillment is at the heart of mature women students' reasons for returning to higher education (Pascall & Cox, 1993a, pp. 90-92) which can be translated into self-esteem needs.

Distinctiveness refers to a person's sense of being unique (Breakwell, 1986, p. 24). Mature students will often be leaving, or still involved in, a situation (for instance, work or home) where they are known and entering one where they are not known. This in itself could be difficult but there are further implications in being distinctive. Breakwell (1986, p. 72) argues that people like to feel distinct in ways which are positively valued. This can be related to women wanting to be involved in higher education because it was seen as conferring status and prestige (Edwards, 1993a, p. 57). This distinctiveness in terms of status and authority is not without problems though, for instance, Pascall and Cox (1993a) report that the women in their study were concerned with the way being involved in higher education changed them and how they appeared to others who were important and significant in their lives (p. 88). Breakwell (1986) argues that 'distinctiveness can only be achieved by being willing to reject standard expectations and orthodoxies in the interests of creativity and uniqueness' (p. 113). Distinctiveness can therefore have both positive and negative aspects in that people like to be distinct from others and higher education can provide this kudos but that it can also lead to feelings of being different from those important to women in their lives outside the educational environment.

Breakwell (1986) argues that people are motivated towards *continuity* over time and situation and between past and present self-concepts (p. 24). Gecas and Mortimer define continuity in terms of 'the individual's biographical self', that is, the 'configuration and sequencing of our experiences over time' (1987, p. 267). Edwards has emphasised that being a mother, wife or student are more than merely doing these things but are 'core' identities (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 11-12). An elaboration of this is that women involved in higher education have continuity, whether they like it or not, in terms of continuing demands, responsibilities and relationships. There are continuities in terms of their sense of who they are but also in terms of social structural demands associated with those identities. It is these elements of continuity which are absent in many of the psychological theories of transition (including Breakwell's theory) and which are particularly pertinent to women. They cannot simply 'set aside' aspects of their sense of who they are and their lives in

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order to participate in university life as these aspects impinge on their very being. The transition to programmes of higher education can challenge these continuing and essential aspects of women's lives. *Continuity is therefore a key aspect of transition for women.*

The concept of *self-efficacy* originates from Bandura (1977) and is founded on the idea that people's beliefs in their abilities will influence action, motivation and their emotional reactions in demanding situations (Breakwell, 1992a, p. 35). Self-efficacy is defined by Gecas and Mortimer (1987) as 'the sense of mastery, causality and control in affecting one's environment' (p. 268). This also has motivational qualities in that people like to have control and mastery over their environment. Twigger (1993) describes self-efficacy as feeling competent and effective (p. 3). Edwards (1993a, p. 73) argues that women in her study could feel on a 'knife-edge' of coping with the demands of family and education. Other studies have also highlighted the problems women have, for instance, in relation to their worries about their academic abilities (Innes, 1992; Keen, 1990; McGivney, 1993; Roberts, 1994, Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986). Another aspect of self-efficacy is that of efficacy beliefs. Breakwell (1992a, pp. 35-36) argues that self-efficacy is to do with beliefs rather than actual outcomes. If people do not believe they can act in a particular way they are unlikely to be able to do so. This can be seen in terms of the resilience of mature women students. Several studies highlight their determination and it is argued that they cope despite the difficulties they face (see, for instance, Hart, 1991; Keen, 1990; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Roberts, 1994).

Gecas and Mortimer (1987) describe *authenticity* as the 'fundamental sense of self, one's sense of reality' (p. 268). Authenticity relates to the meaningfulness of aspects of identity. They draw upon existential accounts of authenticity but argue that it is a person's perception of what is 'real' and what is 'false' which is important and this is contingent of systems of social meaning. It has been argued that higher education portrays a 'bachelor boy' image of the student (Edwards, 1993a, p. 86; Wisker, 1988, p. 67). Mature women students may therefore feel they are not a 'real' and a legitimate student. Gecas and Mortimer (1987) also link authenticity to Rosenberg's (1981) concept of 'mattering', the feeling that a person is important to others. The idea of 'mattering' is drawn upon in relation to students' involvement in higher education (Schlossberg, 1989). Schlossberg (1989) argues that 'marginality' is one pole and 'mattering' the other and that institutions should clearly indicate to all students that they are important (p. 14). The concept of marginality and experiencing 'false' authenticity tie in with Breakwell's (1992a) description

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of 'psychological estrangement' (pp. 37-38), which can lead to feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, self-estrangement and social isolation.

There is a sense in the literature that mature women students do not matter, are marginal and are not catered for in higher education (see Chapter 2). This is reflected in studies of women in other organisations. For instance, Walters (1987) says that the Civil Service is a culture which 'opens itself to women and yet squeezes them out; which integrates them, yet marginalizes them' (p. 14). Cockburn (1991) states that many studies of women and organisational management report the creation of an environment where 'women don't flourish'. Men create a masculine culture in which women can feel 'you are out of place here' (p. 65). Gecas and Mortimer (1987) argue that, as with self-esteem and self-efficacy, people are positively motivated and want to feel a sense of authenticity (p. 270) therefore, if people feel maginalised or different, authenticity is threatened.

Identity and the social

Breakwell (1986) argues that identity is socially and historically specific (p. 28). The social context includes interpersonal networks, membership of groups and social categories and intergroup relationships. These structures prescribe particular roles, beliefs and values. Social influence processes provide the ideological context and consist of systems of values and beliefs, social representations, social norms and attributions (pp. 35-36). She states that there is a certain amount of choice available to the individual in the formation of identity, contradictions and conflicts within a particular ideological context allowing some freedom (p. 34). Breakwell draws on materialist explanations of the dialectical relationship between the individual and the social order to explain how this operates (pp. 31-34). This outlines the influence of the social bringing into focus the importance of 'gender relations and of the family in the construction of an individual's consciousness and identity' (p. 31). The individual is seen as being moulded by the social order and its institutions but has the potential to resist them because of contradictions between and within social institutions. This can be seen in terms of women who are involved in higher education. Though they can be seen as moving away from ascribed gender roles they can draw on the discourse of life-long learning to make this legitimate. Identity is therefore seen as socially constructed but the individual has some 'freedom in the direction of action' (Breakwell, 1986, p. 35).

I develop the framework further by bringing a feminist perspective to bear in explaining the way in which women construct their sense of who they are. I use Edwards' (1993a) development of theory based on the public/private dichotomy. The public world of work, education, politics and culture is associated with men and male power. The private domain, associated with women, is that of domesticity and the family and is of lower status. The private and public domains have different associated psyches, women's personalities being relational whereas men have a sense of themselves as more separate (Gilligan, 1982). A corollary of this is differences between men's and women's 'ways of knowing'. Women's ways of knowing are said to be 'connected' and relational, whereas the knowledge of institutions of higher education is 'separate' male knowledge (Belenky et al, 1986). The private and public dichotomy and its associated psyches, Edwards (1993a) emphasises, are not structures which exist in reality but are important in the way women experience family life and higher education (p. 30).

The concept of bounded spheres sets up demarcations between the public and private worlds. Edwards (1993a) argues that because women are crossing the boundaries between these spheres they encounter problems because of the different value base which each employs. The notion of family and education as 'greedy institutions' creates a way of analysing the structural conflicts involved. Each 'greedy institution' has conflicting value bases which are incompatible and each puts pressure on women for undivided loyalty (pp. 62-64). Edwards' (1993a) theory provides an analysis of the social context in which women involved in higher education operate which adds a feminist dimension to Breakwell's (1986) theory of identity.

Race, class and identity

Theories of the self-concept in social psychology have been criticised as being Eurocentric (Hayes, 1993) and 'context neutral' (Yardley, 1987, p. 212). They fail to recognise that other cultures may not share the same view of the 'self'. Breakwell (1992b, p.3) argues that theories of identity and the self-concept, though distinct, are linked. Identity theory is therefore open to the same criticism. Breakwell (1986) states that the 'principles' of identity are specific to Western culture but that the 'processes' are universal (pp. 181-185). Phoenix (1987) argues that black people are influenced by, and many accept, dominant ideologies as well as learning from their own social networks (pp. 58-59). Similarly, in his analysis of a small group of black (from Asian and Afro-Caribbean parentage) working-

class young women's academic success at school, Mac an Ghaill (1988) argues that, because they were English born, they acknowledged that they had experienced different influences to their parents but also identified with their parents' culture. On the other hand, they shared the dominant white cultural view of them as black immigrants and the associated racist response (p. 19). Mac an Ghaill points out that the black young women did not see culture as a 'static phenomenon, made up of a deposit of ethnicity that is handed on from one generation to the next' (p. 21). This demonstrates the dialectical and social nature of identity.

Several authors have highlighted differences due to ethnic origin. For instance, in a study of the concept and meaning of femininity to young black women, second generation West Indian migrants to Britain, did not take up the Eurocentric view of femininity. Instead they adhered to their own cultural construction of femininity (Mirza, 1992). Likewise, Edwards (1993a) argues that all but one of the black women in her study saw race as more important than class, class not being part of their identity as it was seen as being related to 'white British society' and therefore not relevant to them (p.8).

Edwards (1993a) and Phoenix (1987) also argue that the identity of white working-class women differs from that of the middle-classes. Differences in identity which relate to class and race, and possibly other aspects such as, for instance, sexuality, need to be taken into account. The methodology employed in the present study (the qualitative techniques of informal semi-structured interviews, loosely structured diaries and participant observation - see Chapter 4) meant that participants could relate their experience in their own terms, thus allowing for differences in their conceptualisation of their sense of who they were.

Higher education as a threats to identity

Breakwell (1986) argues that change, of whatever nature, can bring about changes in identity (pp. 38-43). When a women becomes involved in higher education she is moving within the social context. She is involved with new groups and interpersonal networks and the movement can lead to the involvement in new belief systems. This sort of change therefore will alter patterns of social influences which in turn may effect the individual.

Several studies have highlighted various problems that women encounter when entering or being involved in higher education. For example, a 'clash' between 'ways of knowing' -

the 'connected' knowledge of women and the 'separate' knowledge of institutions of higher education (see, for instance, Belenky et al., 1986; Edwards, 1993a & b, Karach, 1992; Merdinger, 1991; Weil, 1988) or the sense of feeling 'different' from friends and others or the image of students in higher education (Edwards, 1993a). Edwards particularly outlines how many women with families encounter problems. These relate to combining the different spheres of family and education as there are contradictions between them.

Breakwell states a threat to identity occurs when the processes of identity do not comply with the principles of continuity, distinctiveness and self-esteem (1986, pp. 46-47); that is, when one or more of these, or the other principles outlined above, are perceived to have been challenged. When a person seeks to change their position in the social matrix, Breakwell argues, this can create threats because in trying to enhance the position of one principle of identity others may be threatened. By conceptualising aspects of the transition to a programme of higher education as threats to the different 'principles' of identity it will be possible to analyse what helps and hinders mature women students to integrate into programmes of professional higher education.

To understand threats to identity, Breakwell (1986) argues, it is necessary to investigate both their personal and social meaning. Personal meaning comes from an individual's 'belief systems and values assimilated into the identity throughout life' (p. 76). The social meaning comes from the historical context of social representations. Breakwell says that 'if the nature of the threat..... is to be understood, the ideologies which contextualise them must be understood too' (p. 75). Thus Breakwell draws upon social representation theory to understand the social context of threats to identity.

Social representation theory is one of the main theories of European social psychology (Hayes, 1993). It originates from Moscovici (see, for instance, Moscovici, 1984). Social representations are generally shared explanations adopted by large groups or whole societies which have an ideological function. They are theories held about human nature, the way the world is and how things do or do not change. They can be used to explain things and to justify particular actions (Hayes, 1994). In essence they are social constructions of reality. They reflect 'dominant systems of belief and value in presenting an acceptable interpretation of objects, persons or events'. The importance of social representation theory is that it highlights that there are competing representations of reality, which originate from 'disparate ideologies held by groups with competing interests'

(Breakwell, 1986, p. 55). It is the most dominant representations which will hold the most weight. Hayes (1991) argues that social representations are the way that ideologies become cognitively 'real' to an individual (p. 33). Social representation theory thus provides a way of describing dominant constructions of social reality and, in conjunction with Breakwell's theory of threats to identity, of assessing why these ideologies may cause problems for mature women students.

Coping with threats to identity

Breakwell (1986) describes various ways in which people cope with threats to identity at the intra-psychic, interpersonal and intergroup levels describing these as strategies which it is possible to use (pp. 77-147). Edwards (1993a) has strongly criticised the use of the term 'strategy' to describe how mature women students with families cope with situations. It is based on the public world of male activities and understandings and one aspect of this is that, because of the way women are represented in academic accounts, they can fail to recognise themselves. This approach has the potential to undermine women's actual experiences. A further implication of the term, Edwards argues, is that it assumes the achievement of particular goals in relation to the family but this is rarely the case as women are more orientated towards 'socio-emotional processes' in caring for their family. The idea of adopting a particular strategy is therefore not relevant (apart from being organised) (pp. 136-139).

The use of the term coping strategy in Breakwell's (1986) theory has a different emphasis to that used in the theories of transition where it is implied that people can simply adopt a particular strategy which will help them to cope. Breakwell demonstrates that there is a variety of options available in order to cope, some of which are useful and others not. She also highlights the constraints to coping, including the social context (pp. 148-179). The coping aspect of the framework needs to be developed by changing the emphasis to the investigation of how women actually manage and what helps and hinders them in this.

Summary

Breakwell's (1986) theory of identity, threats to identity and coping provides a viable starting place for the development of an integrative theoretical framework. It links the psychological experience of change and transition to social context. It has been further

developed by the inclusion of self-efficacy and authenticity as 'principles' of identity along with those outlined by Breakwell (1986), continuity, self-esteem and distinctiveness. Using a feminist perspective the concept of continuity has been extended to take account of important and unavoidable continuities in women's lives and the sense of who they are. Figure 3.4 represents this new framework.

Figure 3.4 Framework for understanding the transition to programmes of higher education
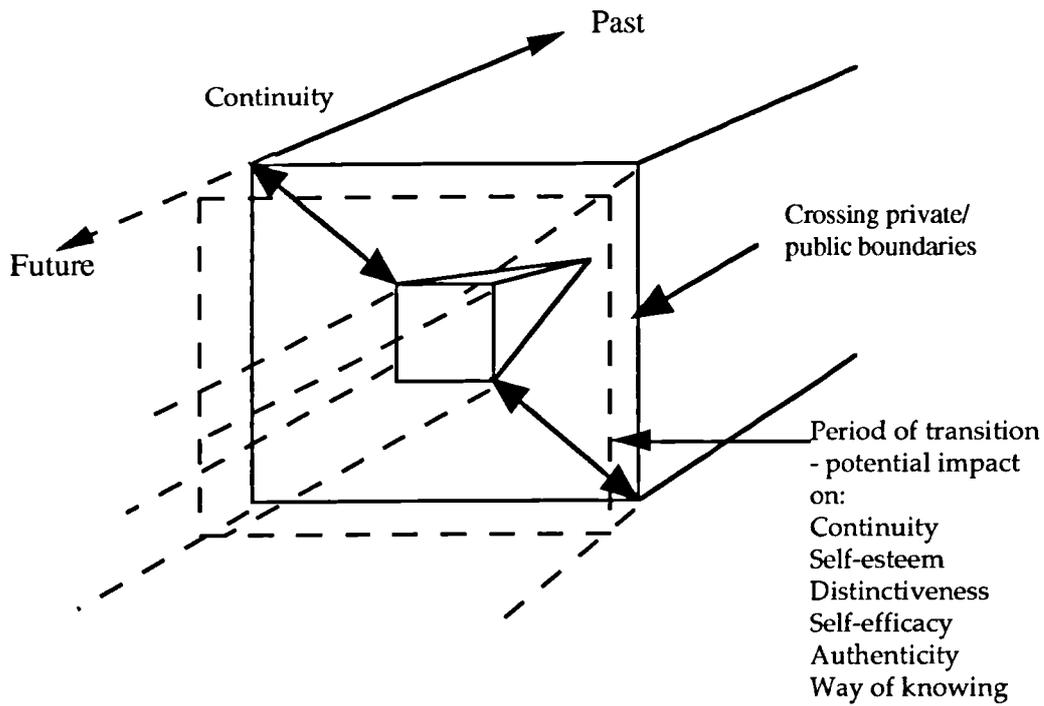
CHAPTER 4

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS STUDY - METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will discuss the methodological approach that I have taken to investigate mature women students' accounts of their experiences. A phenomenological perspective was adopted because it provides the philosophical basis for investigating subjective accounts and meaning. A mainly qualitative approach was used as I argue that it is more appropriate for exploring subjectivities than one centering on quantitative data. A feminist perspective, coupled with a reflexive ethnographic approach, meant that the focus of the study was on reflexive processes, the participants accounts and carried the implication that the study should provide the basis for the improvement of women's situation. As part of the reflexive analysis I explore the influences of my own background and experiences in the choice and formulation of the study.

The focus of the research was on the contemporary phenomenon of women at and around the point of entry to programmes of professional higher education which necessitated that it be conducted within its real life context. In line with an ethnographic approach a multi-methods design was adopted using questionnaires, informal semi-structured interviews, participant observation and the diary method. Issues of the trustworthiness of the data are considered and the measures used to enhance credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability outlined. The procedure of data collection over the two phases (over two consecutive academic years) is explained. Analysis was based on the philosophy of a 'grounded' perspective but with the recognition that it is impossible to approach research without presuppositions.

Methodological Epistemology

The philosophical underpinning of the methodological approach taken here is phenomenological[1]. This is the concern with an individual's subjective account of reality, the aim being to capture the meaning of a particular experience from an individual's point of view (Smith, 1995, p. 122). In order to gain an insight into a person's understanding and

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[1] The phenomenological approach within psychology arose out of a dissatisfaction with the explanations of behaviour in psychoanalytic or behaviourist terms, which see humans as driven by unconscious inner motivational forces or by their external environmental conditions (Atkinson et al. 1987, p. 433).

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experience I argue that a qualitative approach was most appropriate. Henwood and Nicolson (1995) note that, despite the different approaches used in a series of articles in a special issue on qualitative research in the Psychologist, the common element in all of them was the exploration of the participants' subjectivities (p. 110). It is this which makes a qualitative approach particularly suitable for a phenomenological perspective. In the terminology of the philosophy of science, a 'new paradigm' in psychological (Banister et al., 1994, p. 4, Henwood and Nicolson, 1995, p. 109) and educational research (Weil, 1988, p. 17) is reported as having emerged in recent years based on the adoption and recognition of the importance of qualitative methods in these disciplines[2]. Quantitative methods are not seen as appropriate or sufficient for exploring subjective experience. Gillett (1995) argues that it is what goes on in the 'black-box' between input and output connections which is critical. The exploration of this, Gillett argues, cannot be done by observing but can only be accomplished by getting 'inside the forms of life and the socially normative regularities in which the person's activity has taken shape' (p. 112).

Gillett (1995, p. 112) describes the process whereby insights are gained into a person's perspective by using the notion of *verstehen*. This involves the researcher making sense of what a person is doing through empathetic identification. Gillett argues that it is the self-reporting by a participant which becomes central, the researcher entering into discourse with people in an attempt to explore their 'world'. He argues that 'to keep sight of this an investigator must be open to the reality of the subject and the quality of his or her experience' (p. 114). My task as a researcher was therefore to find a way to gain access to a person's individual perspective.

Banister et al. (1994), in defining a qualitative approach highlight one of the major issues in social research, the role of *interpretation* (p. 3). Deem (1994) argues that 'however comprehensive or descriptive an account of qualitative research is, that description is always a selection from reality and therefore in some sense interpretational' (p. 163). A qualitative study is one in which the researcher is central to the sense being made of the

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[2] The origins of social scientific research can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century when it hoped to develop a 'science of society' based on the natural sciences. This application of the natural sciences to the social is known as positivism (Shipman, 1988, p. 6). This developed in psychology into the main approach used in what is described as the 'quantitative paradigm', an empirical approach which aims to collect and statistically analyse data based on certain well established principles and practices (Henwood and Nicolson, 1995, p. 109).

situation (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 3). This view can be seen as being linked to the epistemology of a qualitative perspective. It has been argued that the qualitative approach is based on particular epistemological positions, one of the main propositions being constructivism (Banister, et al. 1994, p. 9; Henwood and Nicolson, 1995, p. 109; Maclean, 1987, p. 132). Henwood and Nicolson (1995) define constructivism as the meaning constructed by people within 'cultural, social and historical relationships' (p. 109). From a constructivist perspective certain aspects of research are open to question, particularly the relationship between the researcher and the research. Banister et al. (1994) argue that one aspect of this is an emphasis on questioning the personal and political interests of the investigator (p. 9). Throughout this research I attempted to take account of my part in the study by engaging in a 'reflexive analysis' (Banister et al., 1994, pp. 13-14), which I make explicit throughout the rest of this report. This represents an attempt to address one of the methodological 'horrors' in social research (Woolgar, 1988, p. 33), reflexivity.

Inherent in a qualitative approach is that theory and the empirical dimensions are linked (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 10). This thesis is written in a linear way as if the theoretical framework was developed in advance of the empirical aspects, which was not the case. The theoretical framework emerged during the course of the study as part of the process of the investigation. Part of this investigation was to find a framework which best suited the phenomenon under investigation (see Chapter 3). The theoretical aspects were investigated and developed in parallel to the collection and analysis of data. There has been an ongoing interaction between theory, literature and data but the aim was not to 'test' theory but to explore how it 'fits' and develop it further in the light of the analysis and interpretation of the empirical data

My Account of the Development of this Research

This research arose out of a wider project on innovative approaches to professional higher education. Funding was obtained from the Polytechnic and Colleges Funding Council for two research studentships. A Steering Group was set up to manage the overall project initially but once the study area for my research was defined there were few restrictions on how the research progressed. I took up this studentship as a 'second choice' in pursuing a research career towards PhD having had a proposal for another study turned down. There was therefore a sense of disappointment initially which went as the research proceeded in line with my interests.

My interests informed the choice of the focus of the present study; these are women's experiences and change and transition. As a woman who is divorced for reasons of a sense of being taken advantage of, and who has had the impression of experiencing life in our society differently to men, I became interested in feminist explanations as an undergraduate. Like other people I have undergone changes and transitions in my life (including various transitions to programmes in higher education which I reflect on in the findings chapters), some of which have been relatively easy and others more difficult and painful. Because of this I developed an interest in these processes as an undergraduate. My interests therefore could be seen as stemming from an attempt to make sense of my own experience within behavioural sciences explanations. The personal has led to academic interest. My perspective is a combination of my interests and the theoretical, epistemological and methodological stances which I have chosen. I have used these to try to make sense of other women's experience of change and transition, while recognising that other women's experience may be different from my own.

Which qualitative approach?

There are a variety of different interpretative frameworks and methods within the qualitative 'paradigm', which have different philosophical underpinnings, aims and outcomes (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 8; Henwood and Nicolson, 1995, p. 110). The approach which I decided to follow has been described as combining a feminist perspective with a reflexive ethnographic approach (Webb, 1992, p. 1335). Both of these approaches are well established in the social sciences. Webb argues that they are compatible because of the reflexive aspect of each. I will demonstrate that they are also compatible because of their focus on the participants' perspective and emphasis on action as an important outcome of research.

Ethnography originates from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology but has recently been used in social psychology (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 34). It is defined by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) as the participation of the researcher:

'in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned' (p. 2).

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Hammersley and Atkinson (pp. 14-23) emphasise the importance of reflexivity in the process of ethnography because they argue the researcher cannot 'escape the social world in order to study it' (p. 15). The researcher's involvement is seen as centrally important. May (1993, p. 116) argues that the researcher will 'contaminate' the situation but by understanding how they are affected by the social setting the study is enhanced. As Hammersley and Atkinson put it:

'Rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them' (1983, p. 17).

For instance, I noted that a few women commented that meeting me prior to coming to the University provided them with a point of contact and a chance to talk about the transition. This aspect of reflexivity represents the more general point about the researcher's influence on the study but a further aspect, in ethnography, relates to the method synonymous with it, that of participant observation. Part of the process of *participant* observation is about analysing how, as a person, the researcher is affected by the social situation which they are investigating (May, 1993, p. 116). Throughout this study I have attempted to analyse this by recording how I perceived the events in which I was involved. For example, the day I became a participant observer I recorded in my research diary:

'I began being a participant observer with the postgraduate students. I felt nervous myself, it was a transition in my research for me. I was anxious, nervous and excited.'

This represented moving into a new situation and getting to know new people which evoked particular emotions in me. The method meant that I was forever having to initiate new social encounters which I found to be stressful and gave an insight into how the new students might feel as they were involved in a similar activity.

Ethnography is linked to a phenomenological perspective as it is about understanding lived experience (Banister et al., 1994, p. 34). It is concerned with becoming intimate and familiar with people's understandings, customs, lives and behaviours in their 'natural' setting. May (1993) describes ethnography as being about gaining an 'empathic understanding of a social scene' (p. 114). It involved a certain amount of integration with and observation of the groups being studied. For instance, during the induction week of one of the programmes in the present study the new students were asked to make a presentation to the group. I was included in this and gained an insight into how the

students might be feeling about having to do this in this specific situation, as well as observing and talking to them about their experience of carrying out this presentation. Not only is ethnography related to understanding experience, there is an implication that the information will be acted upon (Banister, et al., pp. 34-35). One of the intentions of the present study was that it should put forward issues for consideration in assisting women in the transition to professional programmes of higher education.

A feminist perspective also informed the development of the study. This does not represent a unified methodological or epistemological approach (Griffin, 1995, p. 119; May, 1993, pp. 10-11; Maynard, 1994; Reinharz, 1992), there being many ongoing debates about ontology, epistemology and methodology (see, for instance, Banister, et al. pp. 122-123; Henwood, 1993, p. 5; Maynard, 1994; Stanley and Wise, 1993 for a discussion of different feminist critiques). Stanley and Wise (1993) criticise the use of typologies such as 'conservative' or 'radical' feminists to describe different feminist positions because they argue that they over-simplify and create distinctions where they do not exist (p. 49). They state:

'Women who would describe themselves as belonging to a "type" frequently fail to recognise themselves in the descriptions provided. These descriptions fail to correspond to the actualities of life experienced by feminists. Many women see themselves as adhering to beliefs and feelings derived from a number or none of the typologies described' (p. 50).

Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that typologies are better interpreted as 'deeply moral assessments based on largely conventional political concerns' (p. 51). I would describe my own position as combining two particular feminisms. It stems from my belief, based on 'feminist empiricism' (Harding, 1986b), that existing bodies of knowledge can be improved and supplemented. I have drawn upon Breakwell's (1986) theory of threatened identity to develop a theoretical framework but recognise that this needs to be expanded to take account of women's experience and therefore I use feminist theory to do this (see Chapter 4). Reinharz (1992) argues that empirical feminist research is guided by feminist theory and sometimes by critical and mainstream disciplinary theory (p. 249). Though the theoretical framework which I developed is based on mainstream psychological theory its development to include feminist theory has allowed for the differentiation of women's experience of being involved in higher education from that of men's. To address some of the limitations of this approach I have combined it with elements of what has been

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described as 'feminist postmodernism' (Harding 1987). Maynard (1994) argues that this epistemological position 'along with other variants of postmodernism, is critical of universalistic grand theories and rejects the existence of an authentic self' (p. 19). In line with this position I believe that women do not have a unitary female experience because of differences such as race and social class. The qualitative epistemological position I take is that of the social constructivism (Banister, et al. 1994, p. 9; Henwood and Nicolson, 1995, p. 109; Maclean, 1987, p. 132) because this highlights that meaning is constructed by people within 'cultural, social and historical relationships' (Henwood and Nicolson, 1995, p. 109) and therefore their sense of who they are does not come from 'an authentic self'.

The position I take reflects my view that existing theory may have something to offer in an understanding of women's experience but I recognise the validity of recent (postmodernist and post-structuralist) criticisms of such theories within the social sciences. It also reflects a tension which I felt in conducting a PhD project within the social sciences, with a leaning toward psychology. Burman et al. (1996) identify compromises apparent to some degree in all research. They argue for 'the need to analyse institutional locations both as determinants of, and constraints upon, research agendas...' (p. 9). In developing my PhD proposal I was concerned that it would be accepted and therefore opted for a theoretical framework which conformed to traditional notions of research within the social sciences; based on, and linked into, existing theory.

The approach which has allowed me to operationalise these different positions is that described as 'feminist-standpoint' (Harding, 1987) which is said to hold together the tensions within feminism (Banister et al., 1994, p. 123). This is argued to be the understanding of women's lives from a committed feminist exploration of their experiences of oppression (Maynard, 1994, p. 19). There are some central widely agreed tenets which have informed the research process in the present study. Griffin (1995) describes the main elements of feminist-standpoint research as including:

> 'the focus of women's experiences as the basis for research, including the development of theoretical frameworks; the notion of the researcher as accountable to other research participants and to a wider feminist constituency; the argument that the 'personal' or 'private' realm is also political; and a reflexive perspective on all research as part of a knowledge validation process ...' (p. 120).

There is also the implication in feminist-standpoint research that issues explored do not purely have to be related to gender or women. Griffin (1995) states that feminist-standpoint research can be about examining issues of race, class and age in women's lives (p. 120). One of the aims of the present study has been to additionally explore these and any other relevant dimensions. The feminist emphasis on exploring accounts of experience (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 124; Griffin, 1995 p. 120) makes it particularly appropriate.

Reflexivity within feminist-standpoint research is characterised by a concern for critical analysis of 'objectivity' which is seen as a certain kind of masculine subjectivity and critically reflects the way in which subjectivity influences the production of the research (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 124). The concept of 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 1991, p. 164) implies that the researcher makes known the interpretive processes in knowledge production, including her own agendas and background. This does not mean that, once the objective-subjective aspects are disrupted, objectivity is surrendered because rigour and systematic analysis should be maintained (Burman, et al., 1996). A feminist perspective, therefore, stems from particular concerns within a framework which recognises the influence of power and the political within and outside the research process. By taking a feminist stance I am reflecting my own interests and concerns with the way women have been studied in social scientific research in the past with the aim of reporting their accounts in a discursive and recognisable way (to them).

I will now describe how a feminist-standpoint perspective has informed the methodological aspects of this study. The emphasis, as described by Webb (1992, p. 1335), is that the researcher attempts to create a relationship between herself and participants which is as equal as possible, where issues of relevance to the women themselves are explored, and the research is seen as a means of improving women's lives. It is these aspects which have informed methodological considerations.

Although the researcher attempts to create as equal a relationship as possible it is recognised within feminist-standpoint research that there are power relations between women due to social structures (Banister et al., 1994, p. 123). As part of the reflexive analysis an exploration of my own background was necessary. My family of origin had middle-class values but were not particularly well off financially, though we lived in a 'good' area of town. I was brought up in a small town where there were very few people of other than white British origins. To a certain extent I have 'strayed' from my middle-class beginnings by being involved in manual catering work for several years, taking a Behavioural Sciences

degree and being 'aware of', and interested in (though maybe not that experienced), the differences in perspectives of other, more marginal groups. I am therefore white, was in my mid-thirties at the time of the study and would probably be described as middle-class.

Throughout the study I got the impression that most participants saw me as a peer and felt in a similar position as mature women students. I had conversations with most of the interview participants about shared experiences, for instance, career hopes and disappointments, having children (particularly in the second phase interviews when I was pregnant) and concerns about combining outside commitments with study. As I had shared experiences with participants as a woman I made use of these as suggested by Stanley and Wise (1993, pp. 62-64). There were certain indications, however, that my difference from the participants had an influence. Despite being specifically sought, only two women from ethnic minority groups were interviewed. Edwards (1990b, pp. 483-485; 1993c, p. 188) emphasises that there can be difficulties in white women contacting and interviewing black women because of the meaning of race. The black women in her study saw higher educational institutions as white middle-class places and the people associated with them as white and middle-class. In my research Mary[3] who was black[4] indicated that in her experience black people tend to stick together when entering a new situation as a sort of 'safety net' because they were certain another black person would not be racist. This caution could have contributed to the low response rate. Of course another explanation could have been because there were only a few from ethnic minority groups on the programmes studied (see Chapter 5).

Rose described herself as working-class. I noticed that she seemed rather nervous throughout the interview which I conducted with her. Toward the end she told me that she had been worried I had come to assess her suitability to become a social worker. She had therefore probably not perceived me as an equal throughout the preceding part of the interview. It was clear that my perceived differences had had some influence on the

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[3] All names have been changed and pseudonyms used. Where issues of a particularly sensitive nature are discussed I have used no name at all to further protect the participants' anonymity. One of the second phase interview participants who gave feedback on the findings of the study said that she was glad that I had done this when issues of a particularly sensitive nature were discussed. See appendix 1 for details of each woman interviewed.

[4] Throughout this study I refer to characteristics of participants, such as their race, class, sexuality, etc. only when this is a relevant factor in any interactions, for instance, between the participant and other people, (including me) or aspects of the University.

research relationship as I was seen by Rose as being in a powerful position. At times, however, I felt less powerful. For instance, before conducting a particular interview I was given quite a grilling by the participant with regard to issues of confidentiality and possible misinterpretation of what might be said. This caught me off my guard and made me feel vulnerable as I thought the participant was about to refuse to be interviewed (this was not the case and my reassurances put her very much at ease). Deem (1994) notes instances in her own research when the researched can seem more powerful than the researcher, saying the researched have the 'power to resist our invasion of their lives' (p. 157). There were, however, many indications that a more equal relationship had been created, for instance, one women said when I offered to send her a copy of the transcription of the interview which included the discussion of a particularly personal issue, 'I'd love to yes.... it's quite empowering'. The use of the term empowerment to describe what the researcher is aiming for in feminist research is over-emphasising what can be hoped to be achieved. The aim is to create as equal a relationship as possible, while recognising that there will be issues of power due to real and perceived differences. Throughout the research I attempted to create as equal and reciprocal a relationship as possible.

Another central tenet from a feminist-standpoint perspective is that the topic of the research should be of relevance to the participants. For the majority of participants the focus of the research seemed relevant to their lives; for instance, Jenny said:

'When you said what you were doing earlier on, I thought that's something I'd like to get involved in, that's quite interesting....'

However, it was not seen as a central interest to all. Judy commented; 'It's not an over interesting topic.... if I'm truthful', though she did relate to me at length her experiences of beginning the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). In Pascall and Cox's study of mature women students returning to higher education they describe their participants as 'intimately and emotionally involved with the subject of the interview' (1993a, p. 21). The actual topic may not have been of particular interest to the participants but I would argue that becoming a student represented an important and committed aspect of their life. This is borne out by the indication that many were taking the programme, in part, for reasons of self-fulfilment (see Chapter 6).

In ethnographic research there is a focus on action being a result of research but in feminist-standpoint research the emphasis is on transformatory or emancipatory goals (Banister, et

al., 1994, p. 124). Action is intended specifically to improve women's lives. Outcomes of the research have had this aim. For instance, a report detailing issues for consideration when introducing students to programmes of professional higher education was given to the staff involved at the end of phase one of the study (see appendix 2). A seminar was presented and a seminar report was given to all staff involved (see appendix 3) towards the end of the project and issues for consideration in introducing women to professional programmes of higher education were circulated to all staff involved at the end of the analysis (see box 11.1, p. 230). I gave three conference presentations on the study (Johnson, 1994a; 1994b; 1995). Additionally, there is my potential influence through publications arising out of this study and I anticipate future involvement in higher education at a level where I might be able to instigate change. Deem (1994) warns that a researcher has to be cautious about what can be hoped to be achieved. She argues that there can be:

'apparent slippage between thinking that outcomes of research can critique the status quo and imagining that the critique will have any effect upon that status quo' (pp. 165-166).

Deem say that many researchers are relatively powerless and there are questions about whether social research can really empower people or just add to knowledge about them. Nevertheless, my intention was that in a small way I might be able to effect a degree of change.

Habermas (1978) identified three different reasons for interests in finding out about phenomena in the social sciences. Empirical science is related to the interest in prediction and control; phenomenological studies are associated with understanding meaning; and critical theory with emancipation. In adopting a phenomenological, ethnographic and feminist perspective I am combining an interest in understanding experience with an attempt to improve the position of women. A feminist perspective moves beyond a pure phenomenological approach by listening to women's accounts but not always taking them at face value (Griffin, 1995; Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995; Hollway, 1989). It is recognised that women's accounts of their experiences are always mediated through the social context, power and politics.

The ethnographic approach and feminist perspective which I have taken are, therefore, compatible and complementary as they endorse reflexivity, focus on the participants' perspective and emphasise action as an important outcome of research.

The choice of research strategy and design

The feminist ethnographic stance adopted and the research questions necessitated the study of the experience of the transition to programmes of higher education in its real-life context. It was therefore not possible nor ethically desirable to control variables. A design which would explore issues was appropriate. An exploratory study is one which aims to find out what is happening, seek new insights, ask questions, assess a phenomenon in a new light and is usually qualitative (Robson, 1993, p. 42). It has been established that there is little research directly related to mature women students' experience of the transition to professional higher education (see Chapter 2), therefore an exploratory investigation was most suitable initially. Part of the investigation was also about gaining information on the characteristics of students, an element more associated with a descriptive survey strategy. A small-scale survey was incorporated into the overall design.

Given the initial exploratory nature of the investigation, the use of multiple sources of data seemed most appropriate. Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 146) argue that using multiple sources of data gathering can greatly strengthen a study's usefulness to other settings as transferability is enhanced. It is suggested by Maynard and Purvis (1994, pp. 3-4) that feminist researchers should consider using multiple methods rather than simply adopting interview techniques traditionally associated with this perspective, in order to 'maximise input to the research'. They warn, though, that this should not be done with the naive assumption that it is possible to gain a complete picture of the 'truth' but that different methods can highlight different aspects generated by them as well as similarities. Though participant observation is most usually associated with an ethnographic approach, it is also implicit that other sources of information should be used, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) state in their definition, ethnography involves 'collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues' (p. 2). In the present study the data collection techniques of a questionnaire, interviews, participant observation and the diary method were employed.

The main purpose of the present study was the investigation of the transition to programmes of professional higher education. To strengthen the design I decided to conduct the study of the period of transition over two consecutive years. This was done by the incorporation of a two phase strategy into the research (see figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Phases of the study

	August	September	October	November	December
			Programmes Began			

Phase One
1993

Interviews ◄────► | ◄──── Participant Observation ────►

Diaries ►

Phase Two
1994

Participant Observation ◄────►

Diaries ►

Interviews ◄────────►
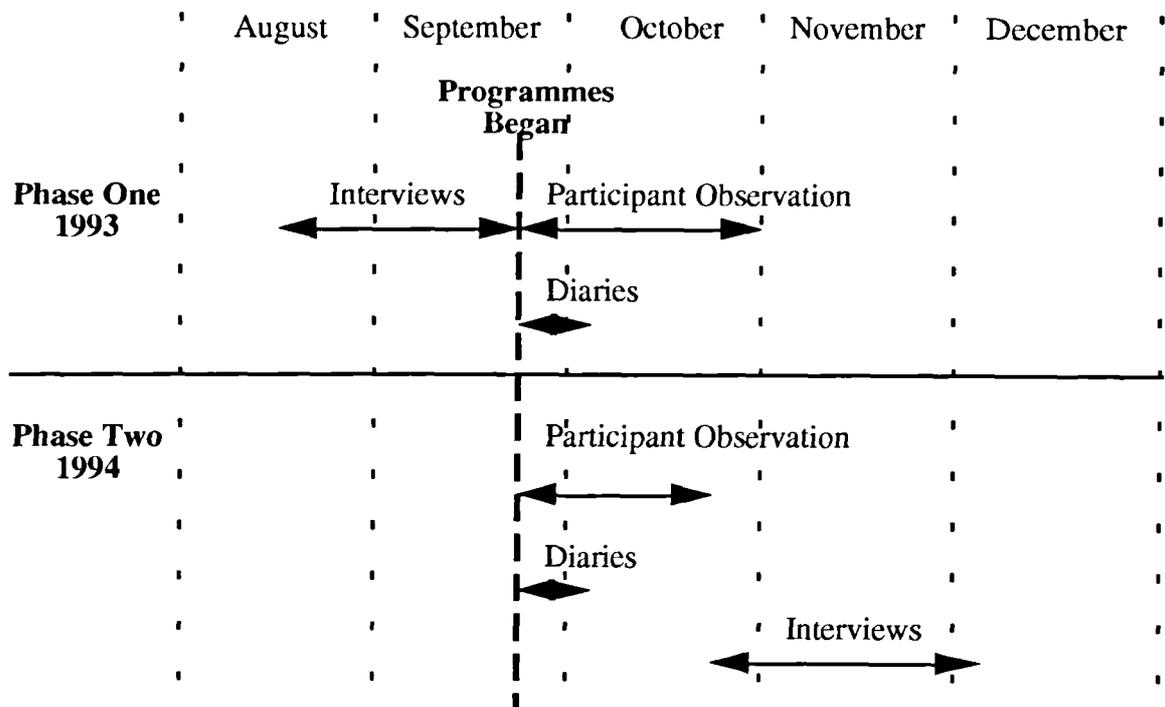
I chose three programmes in two areas of professional education to be involved in the study. One, the Postgraduate MSc/Diploma in Health Professional Education (HPE), was a postgraduate programme for health care professionals who wished to teach (mainly nurses, midwives and health visitors). This could be undertaken either full- or part-time. The second programme was a diploma level programme for nurses, midwives and health visitors in practice who wished to upgrade to this level, the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN). This was part-time with students attending the University one afternoon and evening a week, over a two year period. The third was also at diploma level and for people who wished to qualify as social workers, the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). Two out of four possible routes of the DipSW were involved, the Standard and Sandwich Routes, the Standard being full-time over two years and the Sandwich part-time over three years. These were chosen for several reasons: because they recruited only mature students which was a focus of interest; because they were likely to continue into the foreseeable future; because good relations had been established with tutors which I anticipated would facilitate access; and because there were sufficient numbers of students on the combination of programmes selected for the study to be substantial. The main strategy used in the selection of programmes was therefore purposive sampling; it was related to my judgments about both typicality and my interests (Robson, 1993, p.141).

Purposive sampling was also used in other choices which evolved as the research progressed, with regards to who, where, when and what to study.

The research design had a longitudinal element in that it was partly constructed to examine the process of change over time (Hakim, 1987, p. 87). It was not, however, longitudinal over a 'long' period of time but within each of the two phases. In each phase I was involved with people from the same groups for approximately three months. This could be described as a semi-longitudinal design.

Dealing with some of the other 'horrors'

I will now discuss what are described as the 'methodological horrors' of research and explain how I took measures to deal with these within the present study. These 'horrors' are *indexicality, inconcludability* and *reflexivity* (Woolgar, 1988, pp. 32-33). I have already covered issues associated with reflexivity. *Indexicality* refers to the notion that an explanation is always linked with a particular time or setting and that it will change as settings and situations change (Woolgar, 1988, p. 32). In the traditional research paradigm it is assumed that this can be controlled and hence findings replicated and validity and reliability ensured. Banister et al. (1994, p. 10) suggest that, rather than suppressing these variations in qualitative research, it is better to 'theorise' them; to explore patterns of influence on the setting and account for the part they play in the study. Throughout I make explicit particular influences and issues which were specific to settings and incidents.

Banister et al. (1994, p. 11) and others (including Lincoln and Guba, 1985, pp. 294-301; Pidgeon and Henwood, in press; Robson, 1993, pp. 403-407) argue that the assumptions of reliability and validity (and others from the quantitative paradigm) are not appropriate for qualitative research and must be reformulated. Based on Lincoln and Guba, Robson proposes that the concepts of *credibility, dependability* and *transferability* better serve qualitative assumptions than the notions of validity, reliability and generalisability.

Credibility is paralleled to internal validity; is the phenomenon under investigation accurately identified? In the present study I employed various measures, as suggested by Robson (1993, pp. 403-404), to enhance credibility. By using material from different sources I was able to triangulate certain aspects of the study. By adopting a participant observation approach I was able to build up relationships and become familiar with the 'culture' and by being involved in this for a significant period of the transition, and over

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two successive years, I achieved a degree of 'persistent observation' and 'prolonged involvement'. Additionally I gave a number of presentations on my analysis and conclusions to colleagues at the institution involved (see, for instance, appendix 3), at conferences (Johnson 1994a; 1994b; 1995) and to participants from which I gained feedback which has informed the development of the study. At the end of the first phase all the students involved were provided with feedback on the findings (see appendix 4). All the second phase interviewees were sent a copy of early drafts of the findings chapters. All the comments I received indicated that the themes arising from the research were recognisable, with several indications that certain aspects were particularly relevant.

Reliability from the quantitative perspective is seen as corresponding to *dependability* in the qualitative (Robson, 1993, pp. 405-406). Reliability is the extent to which the same results would be obtained by using the same research tool. Banister et al. (1994, p. 11) say that this, together with internal validity, rests on the assumption that it is possible to replicate research. They (and Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 148) argue that a qualitative researcher never makes the claim that a study is totally replicable. To repeat would be a different piece of work. There are ways of achieving a degree of dependability, however. Robson (1993) says it can be achieved through triangulation and 'academic audit'. An 'academic audit' relies on ensuring that a clear, well documented and systematic approach is taken in the process of collecting and analysing data. This is then open to the scrutiny of other academics in line with the principles and acceptable standards related to the methods employed. Marshall and Rossman, (1989) suggest keeping a research diary where design decisions and records are kept (p. 148). I did this throughout the course of the study and most of what is detailed in this chapter comes from that diary. By providing a substantial amount of detail of the process of collection and analysis of material I have laid open the approach taken to the scrutiny of the reader.

Transferability is equated with external validity; how far are the findings generalisable to other populations? Because the sampling techniques are different in qualitative research, statistical generalisability is not possible or appropriate. Robson (1993, p. 405) argues that within the qualitative approach the focus is altered with the onus on the person wishing to make the generalisation. The person carrying out and reporting the study needs to provide enough detail, particularly in relation to the theoretical framework, for others to assess how it links with a body of theory and thus if it can be transferred to other settings. In providing such detail in this study it is hoped that this has been achieved so that the reader can assess its applicability to other settings. The present study took place in a 'real life' setting and it

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has been argued that it cannot help but be valid in the particular setting described but the parameters must be sufficiently stated (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 145). I have attempted to make explicit specifics of the situation and setting and the reader will be able to judge influences on particular instances and hence their applicability to other situations. I will, however, make suggestions as to the transferability of the findings to other situations and settings by changing the focus to one where the onus is on me to relate these to the theoretical framework.

A further 'horror' described by Woolgar (1988, p. 32) is *inconcludability*; the notion that accounts are never conclusive and can always be added to. While this is seen as detrimental in positivist research, Banister et al. (1994, pp. 11-13) argue it is used to advantage in a qualitative approach. This can be achieved by welcoming others' accounts and by following changes during the course of the study. I have attempted to address this by seeking feedback through presentations and the negotiation of accounts with participants and colleagues throughout the research process. I recognise, however, that there will always be a 'gap' between what is written in this account of events and the meanings produced in the situations described but, by collaborating with participants, it is hoped that this has been minimised. As suggested by Banister et al. (1994, p. 12), the end result of qualitative research, and therefore this study, is provisional, inconclusive and open to further interpretation by the reader.

In a reformulation of the concept of objectivity, *confirmability* is argued to be more appropriate in qualitative study (Robson, 1993, pp. 406-477, based on Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Robson argues that attempts can be made to assess that the results of a study 'flow from the data' (p. 406). This, he states, is the second aspect of the academic audit. For practical reasons it was not possible to ask someone to examine and audit the data or provide, in an appropriate format, all the constituent parts of the materials involved over the course of this study (though systematic records and a research diary were kept). Robson suggests this is a formidable task and unreasonable to be expected in small-scale research but I have taken measures to make available to the reader selected aspects of the data collected (see appendix 5 which includes a randomly selected interview from each phase of the study, a sample of five randomly selected diaries from each phase and the participant observation fieldnotes from a first formal session which students attended in phase one and two) and will detail how the process of analysis was carried out. The reader thus becomes the academic auditor and can assess whether the findings have come from the data.

The first phase of the study

Initially I made the decision that the first task was to establish information about the characteristics of students beginning the programmes involved in the study. As with all institutions of higher education there were existing demographic data on students, for instance from application forms and collated university statistics. Information from the central student records office was obtained for the previous years entrants but this was limited to details of age, gender, entry qualifications, ethnic origin and region in the country from where the student had come and only collated after students had enrolled so was not available for prospective students. An examination of the kind of information available from application forms and student profiles indicated that this would not to be a viable way of collecting information on student characteristics. The information was not standardised across the programmes and it was limited. It did not include, for instance, aspects such as social background, marital status or whether they had children or not, which have been demonstrated as being important dimensions for mature women students in the literature (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Dewar, et al. 1995; Weil, 1988). I decided therefore that the best way to collect information about student characteristics was to design and administer a questionnaire to prospective students.

The questionnaire

The 'Life History Questionnaire' (see appendix 6) was constructed to determine characteristics of prospective students. This requested details of their previous experience and background (not only work but all the main things which they had done since leaving school) and present life and work situation.

The questionnaires were sent by post with a covering letter (see appendix 7) and prepaid return envelope to every student (both men and women) who was 'on the books' at the end of May (130 in total), four months before the beginning of the programmes. Sixty-seven questionnaires were returned within two weeks. A second wave was sent with a reminder letter in mid-June. A further 29 were returned, making the response rate a satisfactory 74 per cent. There was a low response rate from ethnic minority groups (one 'White Irish' on the HPE; one 'Pakistani' on the DPSN; and four 'Black Caribbean' and one 'Black other' on the DipSW) which reflected the low numbers of students from these groups on the programmes (see Chapter 5).

Analysis of the questionnaire was intended to establish categories which would capture some of the main characteristics and differences between students. Three main groupings were identified (see Chapter 5 for more details) and used as the basis for the selection of interviewees.

Some methodological problems were encountered in the questionnaires. Not all the respondents eventually began the programmes, a few even indicating when they returned their questionnaire that they would not be coming. One aspect which emerged as important later in the study was that of previous educational experience. The question asked about educational qualifications failed to elicit the more detailed information which the qualitative methods revealed as important.

The interviews

From the literature on mature women students (see Chapter 2), and from talking to one of the student counsellors at the University of Huddersfield, it was clear that the main method of investigation had to be one which would sensitively explore women's accounts of their experience. It has been argued by feminists that traditional (male) research methods fail to get at the heart of personal and intimate aspects of women's lives and make it impossible to interview women because a two way interaction and subsequent rapport is not created (see, for instance, Oakley, 1981, p. 41). However, Deem (1994) argues that it cannot be assumed, as some feminist writers do, that women researchers automatically establish a rapport with other women (pp. 157). In-depth interviewing is, however, recommended as this allows participants to verbalise their own constructions and tell their own story (Phoenix, 1990, p. 97). Though there is no one feminist method, in-depth interviewing has tended to be the method most associated with feminist research (Edwards, 1993c, p. 183; Maynard, 1994).

I made the decision to conduct informal semi-structured interviews, as I wanted the participants to focus on specific broad areas which might be of relevance to the transition. Jones (1985a, p. 47) suggests that, in any case, there is no such thing as an unstructured interview. The researcher defines the relevance of the data collected and it is a 'conversation with a purpose' but most importantly there is no such thing as 'presuppositionless research', the researcher should have some broad questions in mind. The interview schedule (see appendix 8) was designed around two main themes. The first followed on from the Life History Questionnaire and aimed to explore, in more detail, participants'

assumption that their expectations of the programme would be important. Issues implicit in the theoretical framework were additionally taken into account in constructing the schedule, particularly the concept of continuity and change in recognition that the new situation might represent a threat to identity (Breakwell, 1986). As Jones (1985a, p. 47) suggests, the intention was not to adhere rigorously to the schedule but to be led by the interviewees.

The issue of how to 'get at' a person's class is a contentious one in the social sciences but as part of this investigation I wished to explore issues associated with the women's social background. The social classes are generally held to be upper, middle and working classes in Western societies (Giddens, 1989, pp. 219-221) and usually based on the husband's class. Class, however, is a complex issue and Edwards (1993a, p. 8) notes that women's relationship to class has been constantly debated recently with little consensus, even within feminist circles. Giddens (1989, pp. 222-223) outlines the subjective method of eliciting people's views of their social position, which involves asking them to which class they consider themselves to belong. Edwards (1993a) also used this subjective method in eliciting mature women student's views about their class situation as, she argues, this 'served as a better guide to many of their understandings of the effects of their gaining an education upon their social relationships' (p. 8). In line with the methodological approach I judged the subjective method to be the most appropriate.

The groupings established from the questionnaires were used to select the sample for the interviews. Selection was carried out randomly within each of the groups. Numbers were selected in proportion to size of group identified in the questionnaire and roughly in proportion to the numbers of students on the programmes under investigation. A letter, with a reply slip and prepaid return envelope, was sent to the thirty women[5] selected as possible participants, inviting them to take part in the study (see appendix 9). A 'flyer' was also included giving more detail of the research, myself and my experience of higher education and including a photograph of me (see appendix 10). The aim of this was, in line with the feminist philosophy, to convey the message that I had been in a similar position to them and was genuinely interested in their experience. It is suggested that this sharing of yourself or reciprocity can reduce the power imbalances in research (Graham, 1984). If the recipient did not reply to the initial letter a 'gentle' reminder was sent emphasising my independence from their programme. If they did not reply to this I did not pursue the matter further. I contacted the women who wished to participate to arrange a mutually agreeable

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[5] As the focus of the study was on women's experience it was decided at this stage to purposively sample and only interview women.

further. I contacted the women who wished to participate to arrange a mutually agreeable time and place. I made it clear that I could interview them where they wished, whether this be in their own home, at the University or their place of work.

I then confirmed the interview in writing and asked them, in preparation for this, to write a brief sketch of themselves in relation to their expectations of the forthcoming course (see appendix 11). This was based on the personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) idea of writing a self-characterisation in order to elicit the person's way of seeing their world (Francella and Dalton, 1990). The main aim was to encourage participants to focus on their anticipation of becoming a student which I would be exploring further during the interview.

Twenty interviews were conducted with women between the middle of August and the beginning of the programmes at the end of September 1993 (see figure 4.1). Ten who were about to embark on the DPSN, eight on the DipSW and two on the HPE programme. The interviews lasted for an average of one hour. They were recorded (with the interviewees permission) and subsequently transcribed. I recognised that the interview method might touch on sensitive topics (Lee and Renzetti, 1993) and had therefore found out to where I might refer participants if any issues which disturbed them came to light. For instance, the Universities' Counselling Service and specific services offered by the Students' Union.

Horowitz (1993, pp. 4-5) argues that it is important to acknowledge that there are always differentials of power in research and in order to address these the researcher should explore their own subjective experience and also the participants' views of the research relationship and power dynamics. Participants were asked at the end of the interview how they felt about being involved in the kind of research that I was conducting. Initially I had tried to ask directly about power relationships but after asking a couple of people this it did not seem appropriate as it put them 'on the spot' and it was not clear to them what I meant by this. I thought therefore that a general question was more appropriate. Whether this 'got at' issues of power relations is not wholly clear, as it is unlikely within our society's social conventions that participants would have been forthcoming about such feelings of inequality, but it did give some useful insights, particularly in relation to the relevance of the study to them and the perceived similarity between them and me.

After each interview I immediately wrote down the main points as I remembered them, partly as a 'back-up' in case the cassette recording failed but also in order to reflect on what had been said. I then filled in a sheet detailing my impressions of how the interview had

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in assessing the interview dynamics but also for recalling non-verbal and unrecorded details. As Edwards (1993c, p. 185) suggests the interviewer is not just a 'recording instrument' of subjective experience, she will influence the situation in various ways. This recording of other details therefore formed part of the reflexive analysis within the study.

Only seven people wrote the requested self-characterisation. This was in part due to it not always being possible to send the letter requesting that they did this to all participants as some interviews were organised at short notice. A few did not mind writing a piece about their expectations but others did, seeing it as an 'essay' or being unsure what was required. I concluded that it was too contrived a psychological technique for this situation. The participants were, however, quite prepared to have a conversation with me (perhaps because this kind of encounter is a more acceptable social convention and therefore one of the strengths of the interview technique). The characterisations which were completed were collected, with the participants permission, and used to supplement the interview material.

One of the main criticisms of the use of the interview technique is that, though it is a valuable way of understanding a person's experience, it does not provides the link between a person's account of their actions and actual actions themselves, 'it tells the social researcher little about the reality "external" to the interview' (May, 1993, p.108). May argues that a fuller understanding can only be gained by witnessing the events to which a person refers (1993, p. 109). With the life history and other retrospective information this was not possible but, as participants were anticipating the transition to programmes of higher education, the method of participant observation addressed this weakness as I was be able to observe events as they happened.

The participant observation

Participant observation is the technique most closely associated with an ethnographic approach (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 35; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 2; May, 1993, pp. 111-132). In sociology it has been used to study small-scale situations within the researcher's own society (Burgess, 1982, p. 45) which was my intention in the present research. Participant observation is concerned with events as they happen, in the setting in which they occur. A key feature is that the researcher seeks to become part of the group under observation (Robson, 1993, p. 194). Burgess (1982, p. 45) states that participant observation is not only a method of field research but a role which is used by the researcher. It is not only about observing but entering into conversations with participants

to establish their interpretation of events. Burgess emphasises that a participant observer needs to 'share in the lives and activities of those whom they study' (p. 45). Becoming a participant observer, therefore, raises key issues related to access and field relationships (Banister, et al., 1994, p. 37).

Access to the 'field' was carefully negotiated, with programme leaders initially but also with all tutors and university staff who would be involved with the programmes. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note that issues of obtaining access are most acute initially but are ongoing throughout the data collection process (p. 54). I kept programme leaders fully informed at every stage and after preliminary discussions with them prepared and distributed a statement of intention to all staff involved (see appendix 13). Negotiating access was an ongoing and delicate process. I continually paid attention to issues of access and keeping channels open. I gained permission from all staff whose sessions I would be involved with. Two of the programme leaders were particularly 'open' as regards me becoming a participant observer with their students. The third, however, raised some concerns about the ethical problem of gaining the participants' consent which required further negotiations and reassurances.

I decided to be an overt participant observer as I felt this to be the only ethically justifiable way to conduct the study, as to be covert would be deceiving participants. I presented myself to students as a friendly interested party, making the point that I was a researcher and the purpose of my study apparent. At the beginning of each programme I gave a talk to the students explaining who I was and what I was doing. Though I was making it clear what I was doing, I was still aware that there are ethical problems of gaining consent from all the students involved with this method and this was highlighted by the concerns of one of the course leaders. This represented a dilemma - if I asked permission from everyone beginning a particular programme and one person refused I would not be able to be involved with the group as a whole. I decided that the only way to deal with this was to emphasise each time I spoke to a particular participant that material which arose from our conversations could be used in the research.

In line with the overt approach taken, I mainly adopted a role which alternated between a 'participant as observer' and 'observer as participant'[6]. I became a peripheral member of the group as I was seeking 'an insider's perspective on the people, activities and structure of the social world' (Adler and Adler, 1987, p. 36), yet did not take part in central activities or roles within the groups. Throughout my involvement as a participant observer I sometimes felt a tension between being a participant and an observer. Williams (1990) also noticed this tension in her field research with nurses and describes it as 'wanting to be with (in the sense of sharing perspective) those I was encountering and wanting to separate myself' (p. 258). Williams had been a nurse and was studying nurses which was similar to my situation in that I had been and still was a student and was studying students. In my research diary I wrote:

'I wanted to get involved as if I were a student and one of them, as this is a role that is more familiar to me and to a certain degree I had to get involved but I did not lose sight as to why I was there - I had to look at things in a different way.... I was not looking at the content of what was being said in teaching sessions but wider issues. I had to hold back sometimes from leaping into discussions which I was inclined to do as a student.'

The danger is that in becoming too familiar or involved in the situation the researcher can 'go native' and lose sight of observing the situation. Though I was aware at times I could lapse into being more of a participant than observer it was this awareness which brought me back to the task in hand. It was also necessary, on occasions, to place more emphasis on being the participant or the observer.

As I was interested in students on three concurrent programmes, I was physically unable to observe all aspects of these and therefore had to be selective. The HPE programme began a week before the other two which enabled me to be involved in all its induction procedures. The social work programme had a week long induction but the DPSN programme began on the Thursday of that week and consequently I was not able to be present for one day of the social work induction. To make the participant observation manageable I decided to follow particular modules on programmes. I not only observed sessions but, more importantly,

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[6] In the literature on participant observation four main roles are frequently outlined depending on the researchers degree of involvement (based on Gold, 1958). These range from being a complete covert participant, a participant as observer, an observer as participant to a complete observer.

talked to students during their breaks and before and after sessions. The train was an unexpected source of encounters with students. I travelled from a nearby city by train daily to the University as did several other students on the programmes studied. I noted that more information was gained on how the students were experiencing events during these less formal encounters but by actually attending more formal sessions, such as lectures, I was able to gain an insight into what they were encountering as well as contextual information about particular settings and situations.

I became a participant observer for approximately six weeks from the beginning of the programmes studied (see figure 4.1). I was also involved in a ongoing way, throughout the full academic year, with nine social work students as their personal tutor. The emphasis of my role with them was as a member of staff but at times I was able to check out hypotheses with them and gain additional insights.

As a peripheral group member I maintained a certain amount of distance but formed a range of relationships with group members from simple acquaintances to close contacts (Adler and Adler, 1987), though these were opportunistic. Though part of the participant observation is about observing, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p. 106) say that considerable use is also made of informants. This was used to gain information about activities and to check inferences from observations.

Brief fieldnotes were written by hand as and when I could do this. Full fieldnotes were typed up on computer disc after each main contact to minimise the mixing up of recollections from different contacts. Details were recorded of who, where, and when; contextual information; what was happening; what was said; the sequence of events; how I interacted or influence the situation and any thoughts or ideas I had about what was going on (see appendix 5 for an example).

I ceased attending official sessions in the end of October, about six weeks after the students began their programmes. I began to get the sense that the initial transitional concerns were 'settling down'. The participants did not seem to show the same sorts of concerns and anxieties as at the beginning; the focus seeming to switch to concerns about getting assignments done and the amount of work to be done. I began to withdraw by attending fewer formal sessions. However, I still talked to students (and they talked to me) as and when I encountered them and recorded details of these encounters but did not intentionally

seek them out. Because the aim of the study was to investigate the period of transition, ongoing intense involvement as suggested by Skeggs (1994, p. 73) was not appropriate.

The diary

To supplement the other methods of data collection I needed to find a way of evaluating the induction procedures which the students encountered at the beginning of their programmes. I decided to use the diary method as this is a way for participants to record their views as events took place (or soon after). This has the advantage over the interview techniques in that events might be difficult to recall at a later date (Corti, 1993). The diary method is not without problems, especially potential biases such as mis-reporting but Robson (1993, p. 254) suggests that it can be useful as long as it is not used as the sole method of investigation. One of the problems with participant observation is that only a certain, relatively small amount can be observed. The diary method has the advantage of supplementing this with the views of a substantial number of the participants (though their responses were relatively brief). It is also a further way of 'getting at' the person's perspective of events which might not be possible simply through observing them (Bryman, 1989, p. 227).

The format of a diary can vary from being unstructured, to asking for responses to specific questions (Robson, 1993, p. 254). The students were asked to complete a loosely structured diary in the present study (see appendix 14). This had the advantage that it was in keeping with the qualitative and feminist ethos of this study. As the diary is a self-reporting method it is important that the instructions are clear (Robson, 1993, p. 255) and straightforward (Bryman, 1989, p. 227). The diary was compiled as an A5 booklet which consisted of the 'flyer' (see appendix 10) as an introduction; instructions for completing it including an example (as suggested by Corti, 1993); assurances of anonymity; a page for each introductory day with a checklist of what was required including details about the activity in which they were involved, what they did, did not and might find useful; and a page for reflections on the whole period of introduction. The 'Approaches to Study Questionnaire'[7] (Richardson, 1990) was incorporated. Finally, some general details were requested such as sex, age, ethnic origin and name (the request for their name was only

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[7] The Approaches to Study Questionnaire aims to assess whether students take a deep or surface approach to learning. A deep approach relates to a meaning orientation where learning is achieved through comprehension, interrelating ideas and the use of evidence and logic. A surface approach relates to a reproduction orientation relying on memorising and rote learning (see, for instance, Gibbs, 1992).

included in case I wished to make any comparisons with data collected at a later date). Defining ethnic origin relied on participants' own description, as with the subjective method of assessing class used in the interviews.

Three slightly different diaries were constructed to suit each programme. I distributed the diaries when I gave my general introductory talk about the research to each group and collected them at the end of the specified period. The period of time over which the diary can be expected to be kept is important. It needs to be sufficiently long to capture events but if this is too long it may not be completed or may be too great a task to expect of participants (Corti, 1993). As the aim was to evaluate the introductory period and early transition to programmes, I decided that the first few days was an appropriate length of time and would not put too much of a burden on the new students. 83 diaries (62.5 per cent) were completed and returned out of the 133 students involved in three programmes.

An unexpected outcome of information gathered in the diaries was that students recorded much of their initial feelings, particularly their anxieties and concerns. This gave an unanticipated insight into their experience at this particular time which was not captured by the other methods. The diary also acted as a substantial method for evaluating the style and structure of induction which was supplemented by the participant observation material.

The analysis

As the participant observation began to be scaled down analysis commenced in a more systematic way, though some preliminary analysis was undertaken throughout the data collection process. The analysis aimed to reflect the general philosophy of a 'grounded' approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Material was explored to ascertain emerging themes which were grounded in people's accounts of their experience while suspending theoretical presuppositions. However, within the feminist ethos, I recognise that it is not possible to approach research without certain presuppositions. Charmaz (1995) argues that some researchers, including herself:

'subscribe to interpretive views of the research process as created through the researcher's discipline and theoretical proclivities, relationships with respondents, and interactional constructions and rendering of the data' (p. 30).

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I decided not to follow a discourse approach to analysis because of its potential to deconstruct gender as an issue (Harding, 1986b). Harding suggests that there is a feminist postmodernist position and while this is seen as valuable as a critique of science, deconstruction of gender may demean its significance. Harding argues that the feminist-standpoint position should not be given up because of its emphasis on changing power relations (1986b, p. 195).

Systematic methods of material exploration were applied, mainly adapted from techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984 & 1994) but also drawing on specific analytic techniques suggested in the grounded theory approach (see, for instance, Strauss and Corbin, 1990). A provisional 'start list' of 'first-level' codes (see appendix 15) was formulated from the way I conceptualised the study, emerging themes and the research questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 58). These codes were not, however, devised prior to fieldwork commencing, as Miles and Huberman suggest, but were based on some preliminary analysis[8]. Open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 61-74) was used, in that codes were also devised around features of the material collected. These codes were applied to the participant observation fieldnotes and, in conjunction, they were summarised using a standardised form for each contact on a contact summary sheet or document summary form (adapted from Miles and Huberman, 1994, pp. 51-55) (see appendix 16).

These summaries were then analysed to generate broader more analytic 'pattern' or 'second-level' codes (Miles and Huberman, 1994, pp. 69-72). This involved grouping sub-categories or 'first-level' codes to form a smaller number of main themes. This is similar to the creation of axial codes in grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, pp. 96-115). Five main pattern themes were generated: the *process of transition* which related to how perceptions changed over time; any *anxiety* and concerns expressed; links to previous experience; *career paths* which were issues to do with student characteristics; and finally, *features of the institution* which had helped or hindered the integration process. These had various sub-themes which could be specific to that theme or represent a linkage between themes, for instance, work and family commitments came under student characteristics but could also be related to anxieties.

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[8] This approach to devising preliminary codes aimed to address one of the weaknesses of the grounded theory approach. It has been argued a researcher cannot approach a study without some preconceived ideas and theories (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995, p. 117). By making it clear that analysis was based partly on my conceptualisation of the study and the research questions I am making explicit how my approach to the study has influenced the analysis.

The data from the diaries were transcribed onto computer disc. A word processing package was used to 'cut and paste' and therefore rearrange the material. The data were recompiled by event or general contacts on a day by day basis for each programme. Within these, data were rearranged under nine sub-categories, these included, for instance, positive or negative comments (see appendix 17). The event or general contact was then summarised onto a contact sheet (see appendix 16). An element of content analysis was used as the frequency of positive and negative comments were counted which gave an indication as to the frequency of occurrence of certain aspects. The contact sheets for the diaries were then further summarised under the pattern codes devised from the participant observation. The largest proportion of these fell under the final theme, features in the institution, which indicated that the diaries served the intended purpose of evaluating the induction. The 'Approaches to Studying Questionnaire' (Richardson, 1990) included in the diary was not analysed as part of the present study due to a lack of time and qualitative focus of the research. At this stage I felt that it did not contribute to the main aim of the study; the exploration of the experience of transition.

The interviews were transcribed by a person outside the University but I listened to each tape recording, checking the transcriptions and making any corrections. Each interview was then summarised by recording details on an interview summary sheet (see appendix 18). These summaries were based on the questions asked but also any unexpected information was recorded as were the themes to which the information related and any reflective comments. A summary of all the interviews was compiled from these sheets. This was then assessed in relation to the themes derived from the participant observation and diaries.

Throughout the process of analysis I kept analytic memos, recording ideas about links between the data or the assessment that material fell into a more general category (Robson, 1993, p. 386). These informed the development of the emerging themes. The summaries of the three data collection methods were then brought together in an overall summary of the phase one material under four main pattern codes. I adapted and modified the themes in the light of the exploration of all the material and the analytic memos. The four themes were: *anxieties* expressed; *previous experience*; *the relationship between the study and the rest of student's lives;* and issues associated with the students sense of who they were - their *identity*.

At the same time I was exploring how the emerging themes linked to existing theory. I began to develop the theoretical framework centred around the idea of threats to identity and coping with threats (Breakwell, 1986). In order to draw conclusions from the analysis of this first phase data I used the technique of developing a matrix to establish how concepts link together. This enabled the checking of themes, exploration of the strength of themes and provide a way to begin to link the data with theory (Miles and Huberman, 1994, pp. 239-244). A two-way matrix was developed based on the emerging themes and 'principles' of identity (see appendix 19 for a summary of the matrix).

From this analysis of the first phase data I compiled various interim reports. For instance, a report was written and distributed to the tutors and university staff involved with the programmes studied. This detailed the main themes and made suggestions of important areas to consider when introducing new students to programmes of higher education (see appendix 2).

This first phase was exploratory and from it only tentative links could be made. For instance, there were considerable indications that students were particularly anxious but they found ways of coping with their initial anxieties, however, there was little information on the reasons for their anxieties and how they coped with them. Links were made with existing theory but I considered that more data was needed to explore and develop theory further. There was also the need to evaluate any changes which might be made as a result of the report given to tutors on key areas to consider for integration of new students. This formed the justification and rationale for a second phase of data collection.

The second phase

Pidgeon and Henwood (in press) say that the aim of grounded theory is to build a complete comprehensive theoretical system but they argue that within smaller-scale studies (such as the present one) it is difficult to achieve such an ambitious aim. They therefore give suggestions for more achievable goals. One which applies to the present study is that of 'local theoretical reflection', which they state is engaged in at an intermediate stage of analysis. This includes creating 'cycles of interpretation' through a further data collection, coding and category building process. This was one of the aims of the second phase of the study; to explore and elaborate further the emergent themes and establish explanatory links with the theoretical framework.

A further aim in the second phase of the study was to evaluate any changes which might have been made to introductory aspects of programmes as a result of the report distributed to university staff (see appendix 2). This represented an action research dimension of the study. Robson (1993, pp. 438-439) describes different usages of action research but says that 'improvement' and 'involvement' are central to this approach. It is implied that those involved in the practice are also involved in the research process (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 165). Banister et al. (1994) define the main aim of action research as being:

'to understand these problems [emanating from practitioners concerns], the researcher, who may or may not be an actual practitioner, formulates speculative and tentative general principles about the problems that they have identified. From these it is possible to generate hypotheses about what action is likely to lead to (desirable) improvements. The action can then be tried out and data on its effects collected, and the data can be then used to revise the earlier hypothesis' (p. 110).

Though I was not a practitioner because I was not fully employed as a lecturer in higher education (although I was in a small way as tutor to Sandwich Route students on the DipSW) the problem of integrating students successfully into higher education was brought up as an issue by members of the Steering Group set up to manage the overall project on innovatory approaches to professional higher education. In the first phase 'speculative' and 'tentative' principles were formulated and 'hypotheses' about how to improve student integration were suggested in the report given to staff. The aim in the second phase was to evaluate any changes which were 'tried out' by tutors with the aim of revising earlier hypotheses. This action research dimension related to the overall ethos of taking an ethnographic and feminist approach as one of the intentions was that the research should lead to improvements for mature women students in higher education.

The final aim of the second phase was to focus on aspects which were particularly relevant to mature women students. In the first phase the aim was to explore generally the issues involved in the transition to programmes, some of which were also relevant to other students, for instance, men and younger students. In line with the feminist ethos and issues raised in the literature on mature women students (see Chapter 2), I wished to explore further aspects which were particularly related to being a woman. This 'focused conceptual development' is outlined by Pidgeon and Henwood (in press) as another way of achieving 'local theoretical reflections' in grounded theory by focusing on, and more fully exploring, a limited set of themes. This relies specifically on the technique of purposive sampling

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because the sample is chosen on the basis of its relevance to the evolving theory. The aim was to develop depth rather than breadth of vision (Pidgeon and Henwood, in press).

The choice of the focus was on issues which were particularly relevant to mature women students and was related to how they coped with the transition to professional programmes of higher education. The second phase therefore consisted of a continuation of the first phase but with a more focused dimension. The same main research methods were employed but modified to meet these aims. As more in-depth information was required about the transition once students had arrived at University I decided to conduct interviews later on in the data collection process, once they had began their programme.

The participant observation

Contacts with programme leaders were re-established and negotiations for access to become a participant observer with the new students on the same range of programmes began. As with the first phase, access to two of the programmes was not regarded as a problem by the programme leaders involved. However, the third raised concerns about the issue of informed consent in participant observation again and this threatened access to this particular programme. Despite my reassurances, this tutor was still concerned. Her argument was that when students begin their programme they are particularly vulnerable and will therefore comply with a researcher's requests. After further discussions it was decided that a copy of my 'flyer' (see appendix 10) would be sent out to all prospective students with their preliminary programme information. The tutor would also incorporate in her letter an explanation of my project and give the students the opportunity to contact her if they had any concerns about my involvement. An updated version of the statement of intentions was distributed to all staff involved with the programmes and their permission sought for me to attend sessions. Deem (1994) notes that with extended qualitative research there can be problems of trying to convince people of the legitimacy of the research activity and that the researcher may constantly have to renegotiate access (p. 158).

During the second phase of data collection I was between four and six months pregnant. Though I had been relatively well throughout the first three months I felt I had to prepare some form of contingency plans for data collection as I was in a potentially more vulnerable position with regard to my health. It was imperative that I capture the moment of the transition as it happened as to fail to do this in a similar way to phase one would jeopardise the study (or at least postpone it for a year). The contingency plans were particularly

pertinent to the participant observation, as the diary could be administered by someone else and there was a certain amount of flexibility as to when I conducted the interviews. The contingency plans consisted of two exercises based on the personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) method of asking a person to write a self-characterisation to elicit their perspective on events. The first one requested that they write their 'story' of beginning the programme during their second week. The second exercise asked them to continue the 'story' in the fourth week of their programme. Included in the contingency plans was my 'story' of who I was, what I was doing and why I could not be there, which was to be read out to students. My supervisors agreed to put the contingency plans into action if, at any stage, I was absent (see appendix 20 for full contingency plans). I anticipated that these exercises would capture something different to my involvement as a participant observer but at least it would be possible to gain an insight into the students' perceptions of the early transition, as it happened.

The fact that I was pregnant appeared to have a positive influence on participants' perceptions of me. Though my pregnancy was something which was not immediately obvious it was a topic which often came to light during my conversations with participants. It had an impact on field and interview relationships. I seemed to be viewed in a more sympathetic way and perceived as similar to many of the participants. This appeared to be related to me going through an experience which has great significance in our society and with which people, particularly women, identify. My pregnancy and its influence formed a further part of the reflexive analysis of the study. In the event, I was well throughout the period of participant observation and the contingency plans were not used.

The participant observation in this phase was conducted in much the same way as in the first phase but was more focused. I particularly noted issues which appeared to be associated with being a mature woman student, any aspects which appeared to evaluate changes to programmes and any material which elaborated the main themes established in the first phase, while remaining open to any new directions. I was involved in an ongoing way again as tutor to eight new social work students. I was a participant observer for approximately four weeks during this phase as I decided it was necessary to leave enough time to conduct interviews while the transitional issues were still uppermost in students' minds[9].

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[9] The phase one data suggested that as time progressed the issues associated with initial concern gave way to different anxieties such as, for instance, concerns about assessment.

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The diary followed much the same format as in the first phase but I modified it in light of analysis of the phase one data and the stated aims of the second phase. A question was included about how the student felt on a day to day basis. In the section on reflections on the introduction a question was incorporated which asked how participants felt they were coping so far. The Approaches to Study Questionnaire was omitted as it was deemed not to be relevant to the focus of the study. The flyer was also omitted as this had already been sent to students on one of the programmes involved and was given out separately to all the other students during my introductory talk. As in phase one, the diaries were distributed to students at the beginning of programme introduction. I also gave a brief explanation of my research and assured anonymity.

In the second phase a total of 159 students were on the three programmes, 83 diaries were completed and returned (52 per cent). Preliminary analysis of the diaries began immediately because they were to be used in conjunction with the participant observation fieldnotes to select the purposive sample for the interviews. The diaries were split into three groups depending on my assessment of how the students appeared to be coping with the transition. The criteria for selection were as follows:

Group A - Those who expressed confidence by the end of their introduction and appeared to be coping well. For instance, a typical comment in the diary which summed up how they were coping would be 'very well'.

Group B - Those who expressed uncertainties. They appeared to be coping well with certain aspects but not others. This was assessed by there being a balance between the positive and negative comments recorded. Typical comments which summed up how these respondents were coping were 'quite well' or 'coping OK, still a bit nervous'

Group C - Those who by the end of their introduction still appeared to be anxious. They recorded more negative than positive comments. Typical comments were 'felt bewildered' or 'just holding on'.

This assessment of how the students were coping was applied to the participant observation fieldnotes at the end of the introductory period and a few participants were moved to a different category in the light of this further analysis.

The interviews

A purposive sample was selected for interview based on the assessment of coping in the participant observation and diaries. Within each of these categories I identified potential participants who specifically mentioned issues related to them being a women which had impinged on the transition in some way. The main criteria that was used to judge this was that they mentioned issues to do with caring or being responsible for others. For instance, Caroline wrote in her diary that she was worried about finding time to study with two young children. By focusing on issues of relevance to women, the findings may not fully represent the spectrum of issues and problems which women face in the transition to programmes. It does, however, provide a way of more fully exploring aspects identified as being relevant to women. Within the parameters for the purposive sample, women were then selected randomly. Equal numbers were chosen from each of the three coping categories, roughly in proportion to the numbers of students on the three programmes. Ten were selected from the DPSN programme, seven from the DipSW and three from the postgraduate HPE programme. The recruitment process then proceeded in a similar way to phase one. A letter was sent, mainly internally, to approximately 30 potential participants (see appendix 21). A 'gentle' reminder letter was sent to those who did not reply in the first instance. Because of the way the women responded to the request to be interviewed the 20 were not evenly distributed between the three coping categories (A = 5; B = 8; C = 7).

The semi-structured interviews were based on the themes which emerged as relevant in the first phase but the main focus was on how participants perceived they were coping (see appendix 22). Questions were more focused and direct than in the first phase, the aim being to expand and gain a greater insight into the themes from the first phase. Specific questions were asked about the effect the participants felt being a woman had on the transition to their programme. I asked the black women if they felt their race had had an impact on the transition. As the literature suggests that black women have a different experience of higher education than white women (see, for instance, Dicker, 1992; Edwards, 1993a, p. 99, 140), I felt this question was justified. I wanted to go beyond the white reality which might be maintained by me as a white women conducting the interview and confront the issue of differences between races directly. In a similar way when asking for the participants' subjective view of their social class, I asked if this had had an influence on them in the transition. These more direct questions were asked toward the end of the interview in order to give the participants the opportunity to describe their experience in terms which they

chose initially. I also asked questions about issues which women had written about in their diaries or which came to light during the course of the participant observation related to being a women.

The interviews lasted on average just over one hour. They were conducted over a period of a month and a half, one month after the programmes had commenced (see figure 4.1). They progressed in a similar way to those of the first phase. If anything of a particularly sensitive nature was discussed, I offered to send the participants a copy of the transcript (only one participant took up this offer and she had no objections to anything being used). Many of the participants were interested in knowing the outcome of the study and I promised to send them a copy of the results. I did this and, in line with a feminist-standpoint approach, gave them the opportunity to comment on them and, if they wished, withdraw their contribution (see appendix 23). The taped interviews were again transcribed by someone outside the University but checked by me before analysis.

The analysis

The coding frame in this phase was more prespecified than in the first phase. It was based on the outcomes of the phase one analysis and related mainly to the themes which emerged and 'principles' of identity (see appendix 24 for the codes used). For each data collection method these were modified slightly as the different methods elicited material. For instance, the codes used to categorise the participant observation fieldnotes were extended when applied to the interviews to take account of the questions asked, for example, questions asked about social class. The codes were applied manually to fieldnotes, diaries and interview transcripts. The transcripts were then 'imported' onto the qualitative data analysis computer package Hypersoft and the codes entered. 'Retrievals' were carried out on single category searches to establish what issues were relevant to a particular theme. Categories were then combined, in pairs, until all possible combinations were exhausted, in order to assess where themes overlapped. These retrievals, particularly on the interviews, produced a huge amount of material which could have been unmanageable. I manually eliminated any 'databit' which was duplicated under more than one category or combination of categories. I did this by assessing to which theme the segment of data most related. Information about other categories was not lost in this process as the retrievals report for each 'databit' included a list of the other categories under which it had been coded. Though the single category searches could be used in 'theory-building' (Tesch, 1990), it was the overlaps

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which reveal relationships between categories which have the potential to be more useful in theory generation and making tentative explanatory links.

A summary for each data collection method was compiled. Both the first and second phase data were then explored, compared and links made. The overarching theme was one of *continuity and change*. This was the main dimension of the transition as it involved disruptions to continuity because of the new and unknown situation but continuities in terms of the women's life situation and sense of who they were. The participant's reasons and degrees of enthusiasm for taking the programme formed the theme of *a sense of excitement?* Issues associated with self-efficacy were linked to being concerned about being able to 'fit it all in' and threats to self-esteem were linked to self-efficacy in the concerns expressed about academic and professional ability, these formed the theme *Can I do it?* The identity 'principles' of distinctiveness and authenticity were brought together in the theme *Do I Belong?* which covered issues of perceived differences and mattering. These four themes form the content of the main findings chapters (Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9). The final findings chapter (Chapter 10) details the fifth key theme of *coping with the transition* and outlines how the participants coped and what limited and assisted coping.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have described the development of the methodological aspects of the study in detail and in a relatively 'unsanitised' way. The reader has been provided with a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the research process that, together with the research questions (see Chapter 2) and the theoretical framework (see Chapter 3), forms the backdrop against which the research was conceived and carried out.

CHAPTER 5

MATURE WOMEN STUDENTS' 'CAREERS'

In this chapter I detail objective characteristics of the students beginning the three programmes involved in the present study. Analysis of the data gained from the questionnaires, diaries and interviews provides this information. This is compared with University and programme statistics. I use the concept of 'career' to highlight similarities and differences in these characteristics. I argue that the women were not a homogeneous group but they did have certain common characteristics which could be grouped together. These are developed into four career types - young womanhood, young motherhood, older motherhood and older womanhood.

The Characteristics of Students

The University and programme statistics provided a certain amount of data on student characteristics but I considered that more detail was necessary in order to describe the students beginning the three programmes. The Life History Questionnaire (see appendix 6) was designed to collect information about whether the students felt they were going to be continuing in the same occupational career or begin a new one; whose idea it had been for them to take the course; their age; what qualifications they had; their marital status; whether they had children and if they did the ages of those children; details of the occupation of the main wage earner in their family when they were young and their ethnic origin. In the diaries, I asked participants to give details of their sex, age and ethnic origin. In the process of setting up and during the interviews I collected details from participants about how far they travelled to college; their subjective view of their social class; their educational experience; age; marital status; whether they had children and the age of them if they did. What follows is an analysis of this data.

Sex

University and programme statistics indicated that nearly 85 per cent of the students on the three programmes were women. This figure was reflected in the numbers of students who returned the questionnaires and diaries; 83 per cent of the diaries were completed by women (12 per cent men and 5 per cent not known) and 86.5 per cent of the questionnaires were filled in by women.

Age

University statistics of the age range of the students on the three programmes revealed that they were mainly in their late twenties, thirties and over forty, with the largest proportion being in their 30s. Those in the 20-24 age category were only on the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN) programme; the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE) and the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) student being 25 and over. The analysis of the questionnaires and diaries revealed a similar pattern. Additionally, the figures showed that very few students on these programmes were over 50 (only 1 out of 96 who returned the questionnaire and 3 out of 166 in the diaries). The age range of those interviewed was as follows: 20-24 = 3 (5 per cent), 25-29 = 6 (15 per cent), 30-39 = 18 (45 per cent), 40-49 = 14 (35 per cent) (see figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Age range of participants interviewed
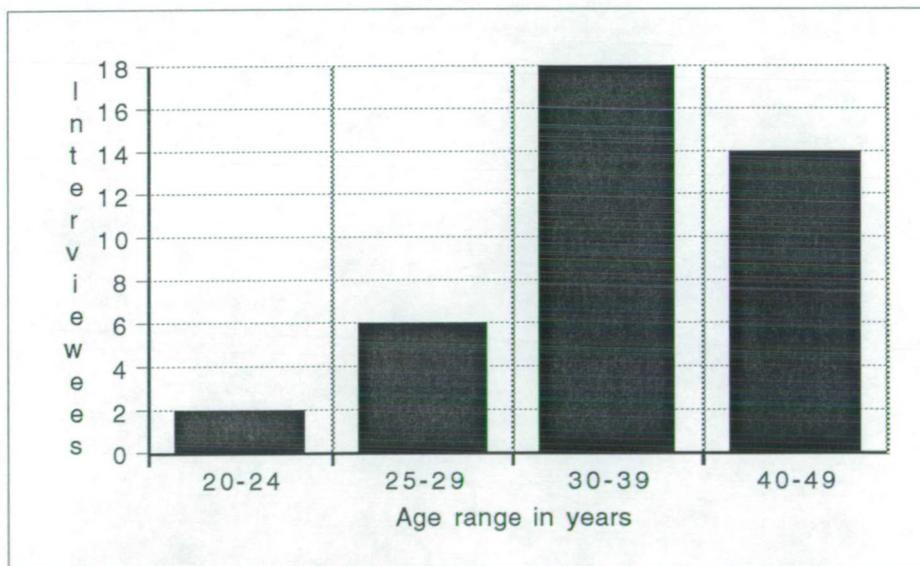
Total of 40 interviewees

Ethnic origin

University statistics indicated that the proportion of students from other than white ethnic groups on the three programmes was low, particularly on the health care programmes. The questionnaires and diaries reflected a similar picture. In the diaries 88.5 per cent described themselves in a way which I categorised as 'white'; just over 4 per cent were 'black'[1] and just over 7 per cent did not fill in these details. Of the 'white' participants one indicated she was from Northern Ireland, one was Irish/English, one Irish, one Scottish and one Welsh, which could have reflected a view that they were from a minority group. Of the 'white' participants 6 per cent indicated that they were European, which could be related to the recent European influences in Britain, in that, certain people of British origin may now consider themselves to be European. A few did, however, indicate that their origin was from a particular part of Europe. One said she was Eastern European, one Spanish and one Ukrainian.

The interview participants were mainly 'white' (38 out of 40, 95 per cent), only two (5 per cent) were 'black'. Of the 'white' participants one was of Spanish and two of Northern Irish origin. This lower participation rate of people from 'black' ethnic minority groups, particularly in the interviews, could be seen as reflecting their low participation in the programmes involved in this study, especially in the health care studies areas, but it could also be related to me being a white researcher (see Chapter 4, pp. 63-65 for a fuller discussion of my potential impact).

Educational experience

University statistics indicated that most of the students beginning the three programmes had non-standard entry qualifications. The questionnaire revealed that 38.5 per cent had CSEs, 76 per cent 'O' levels, 24 per cent GCSEs, 29 per cent 'A' or 'AS' levels, 5 per cent B/TEC and 2 per cent HND or HNC level qualifications. Six participants about to embark on the social work programme reported that they had a degree, one had an MA and another a PGCE. One DipSW student had done an Access course and another a Pre-DipSW (a further three indicated that they were doing an Access course at the time and a further five were studying for other qualifications). Eight (22 per cent) of the DipSW participants

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[1] As suggested by Mac an Ghaill (1988) I am referring to people from Asian and Afro Caribbean origin when using the term 'black' as he argues this term highlights their common experience of white racism in Britain (p. 156).

indicated they had a professional qualification. One of the DPSN students had a degree, one a City and Guilds teaching qualification and another a Nursery Nurse qualification. Many of the HPE students and a small number of the DPSN students (3) indicated that they also had other specialist professional qualifications. Over half the HPE students had 'A' or 'AS' levels, whereas just over a quarter of DipSW students and a quarter of DPSN students did. The HPE students, therefore, had a greater proportion of higher level qualifications.

The questionnaire data, however, gave very little indication as to how long it had been since the participants last studied. Those who had GCSEs (24 per cent) must have obtained them in the previous few years as this qualification was introduced relatively recently. Analysis of the interview data, however, revealed that 34 (85 per cent) participants had studied recently and 6 (15 per cent) had not. The indication from this analysis was that participants had studied at a variety of different academic levels but most of them relatively recently.

Distance travelled to the University

The majority of the students on the three programmes came from the local area, Yorkshire and Humberside, (82.5 per cent) according to University statistics. I calculated the distance the interview participants travelled to the University daily and divided this into four categories. Seven (17.5 per cent) lived *locally* (L), within a three mile radius of the University; eleven (27.5 per cent) lived *semi-locally* (SL), within a radius of three to ten miles; five (12.5 per cent) lived a *mid-distance* (MD) away from the University, within a radius of ten to twenty miles; and seventeen (42.5 per cent) lived a *long-distance* (LD) away, more than twenty miles (see figure 5.2). A substantial number, therefore, had a long journey to get to the University.

Figure 5.2 Distance travelled to the University by the interview participants
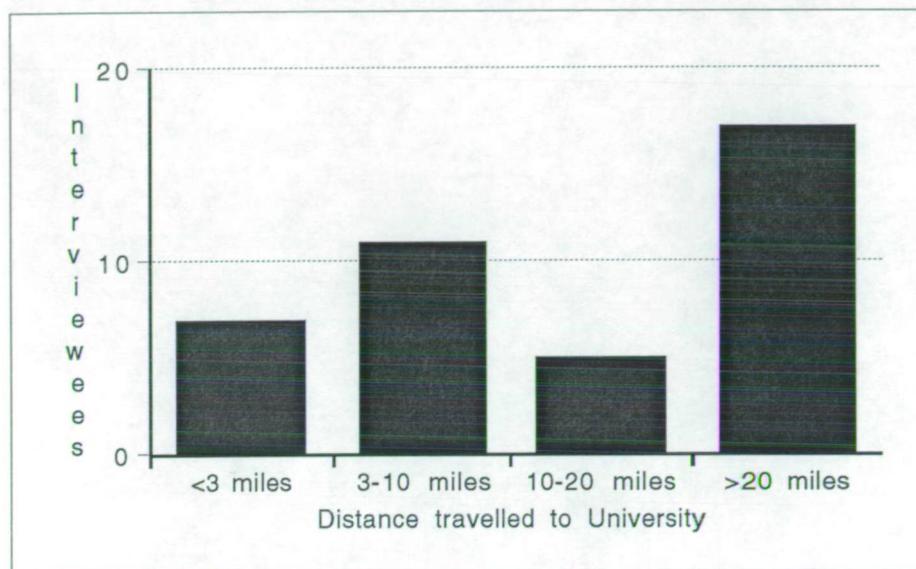
Total of 40 interviewees

Social class

In the questionnaire I asked the participants to give details of the occupation of the main wage earner in their family when they were a child. Based on an economic assessment of class these were grouped according to Reid's (1981) classification from one to six. Giddens (1989, pp. 219-220) states that the middle-classes are usually associated with white collar areas of work, the upper middle-class consisting of those in managerial or professional positions. This corresponds to Reid's one and two classifications. Just over 33 per cent of the questionnaire respondents were in this category. Giddens defines the lower middle-class as including office staff, sales representatives, teachers, nurses and others (p. 220). This corresponds with Reid's category three; intermediate non-manual workers. Nearly 9.5 per cent of participants were within this category. The working-classes are associated with manual blue collar work. The upper working-class he describes as consisting of skilled workers. This, together with the old middle-class, the owners of small businesses, the proprietors of local shops and small farmers (Giddens, 1989, pp. 220-221) corresponds to Reid's fourth category, manual and own account workers. 24 per cent fell within this category. Giddens describes the lower working-class as those in semi or unskilled work. This corresponds to Reid's classifications five and six, being personal service and unskilled manual workers. Just over 30 per cent of participants were within this

category. Over half (54.2 per cent) were, therefore, from what could be described as working-class origins.

This was reflected in the interviewees' descriptions of their class. Nearly half said they were working-class (19), a quarter said they were middle-class (10) and a just over a quarter said they were in-between the two (11). The students were from a range of different social class backgrounds, many coming from other than the middle-classes which in the past have been associated with higher education in Britain.

Marital status

Nearly 60 per cent of those who responded to the questionnaire were married and just over 7 per cent living with a partner. Just over 6 per cent were divorced (three of these had married again which brought the total married/living with partner to 70 per cent) and 5 per cent were separated. Nearly 21 per cent were single. The proportion of those interviewed who were married or living with a partner was higher, being 82.5 per cent (33 out of 40). Five of those interviewed were single parents and two lived alone. This difference in proportions could be related to the focus in the second phase of the study on issues specific to women; being married or having children being key areas of responsibility for women.

I asked the questionnaire respondents to give details about the length of their relationships, if they were married or living with a partner: 18 per cent in a relatively new relationship (2 years or less); 38 per cent in a medium-term relationship (3 to 15 years); and 44 per cent in a long-term relationship (over 15 years). The analysis of the interview data showed similar proportions, though half the values were missing (participants in the second phase were not directly asked about this). The data suggests that most participants were in medium or long term relationships with their partners.

Ages and numbers of children

The analysis of questionnaire data indicated that 40.6 per cent (39) of respondents had no children; 12.5 per cent (12) had one child; 36.5 per cent (35) had two children; 7.3 per cent (7) had three children; 1 per cent (1) had four children and 2.1 per cent (2) had five (see figure 5.3). The proportion of those interviewed without children was less (27.5 per cent, 11 out of 40). This could again reflect the focus of the second phase of the study on aspects which were specific to women; children being an important feature of women's lives. The

proportions of those with different numbers of children interviewed was similar to the questionnaire.

Figure 5.3 Numbers of children which the questionnaire respondents had
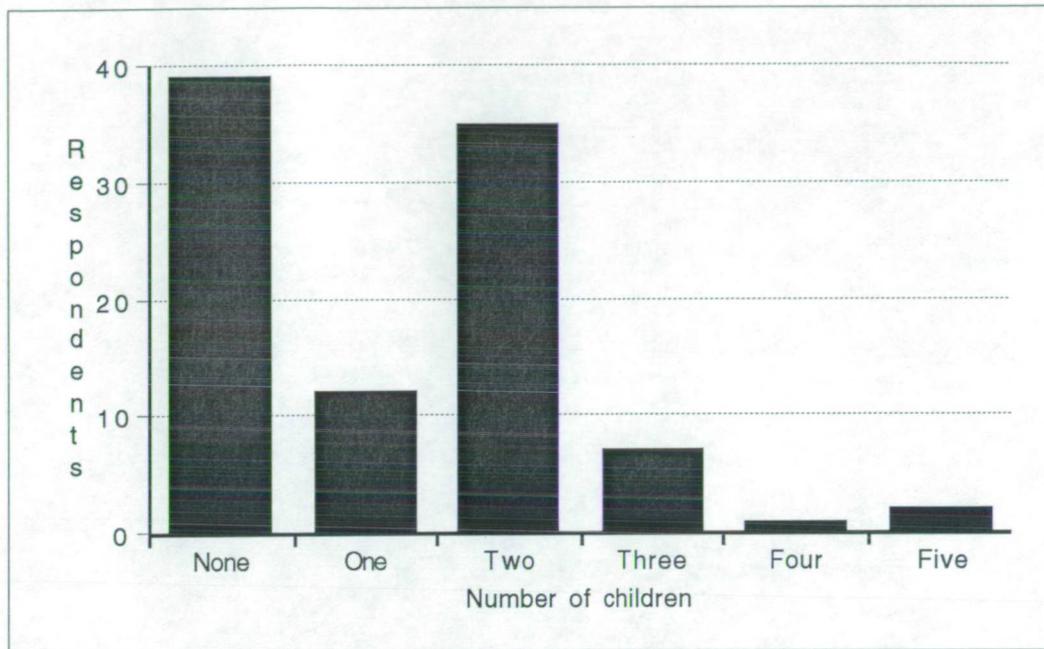
Total of 96 questionnaire respondents

I grouped the questionnaire respondents who had children into four categories depending on the age of their children. Just over 38 per cent (21) had children under 10; 31 per cent (17) had children between 11 and 20; 3.6 per cent (2) had children over 21 and 27.3 per cent (15) had children spanning the categories (see figure 5.4). Of those spanning the categories only two spanned all the categories, the remainder were almost evenly split between those having children below 20 and those having children from ten upwards. The majority of those with children therefore had children below the age of 21.

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Figure 5.4 Age of children of respondents to the questionnaire
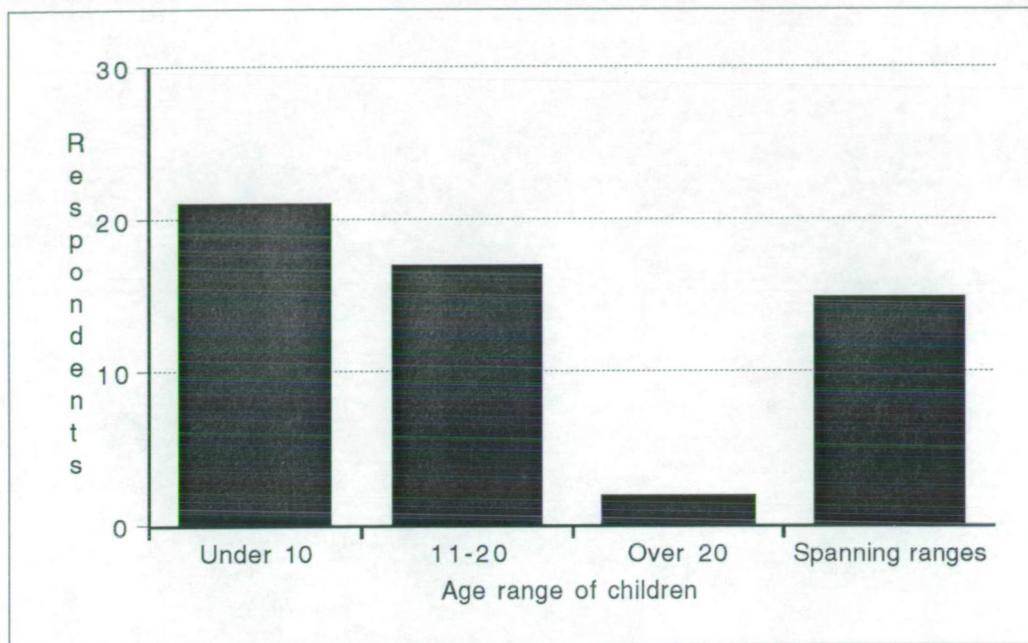
Total of 55 questionnaire respondents with children

Similarly, of those interviewed who had children, 12 had children under 10; 9 had children between 11 and 20; 1 had children over 21 and 7 had children spanning the categories; 3 of these had children below 21 and 4 had children of 10 and over.

A continuation of or a new occupational career ?

I defined a 'continuation of occupational career' as meaning that participants were going to continue to work in the same occupation after completing the programme even if they might hope to gain promotion or move within that occupation. Being new to a profession meant that the participant had no or little previous experience of that profession. Those between continuous and new had had some related or relevant experience of that profession but had not been directly involved in it. All the DPSN participants (except for three questionnaire respondents who indicated that they did not know what they would do after the programme) were classified as continuing in the same occupational career. The new/continuous dimension was therefore mainly relevant to the HPE and DipSW respondents. Of those who filled in the questionnaire roughly half indicated that they were embarking on a new career (25) and half were continuing (23). The proportions of those interviewed were similar. Nine participants were new, eight were continuing and three

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indicated that they were in-between being new and continuing in the profession (see figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 The programmes representing a continuation or new occupational career for the DipSW and HPE interviewees
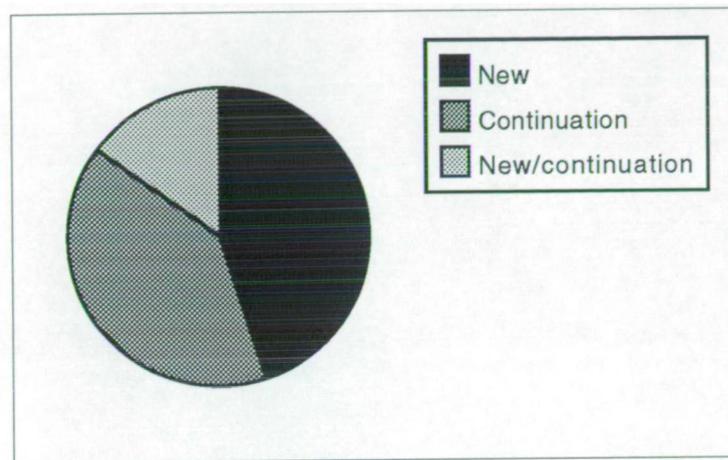
Total of 20 interviewees

What were the participants doing immediately prior to beginning the programme ?

The DPSN students had to be in professional practice in order to begin the programme. However, they spanned different nursing, midwifery and health visiting grades, from grade D and E (54 per cent - 26) being mainly staff nurses; grades F and G (31 per cent - 15) being mainly sisters or ward managers; to the most senior grades of H and I (10 per cent - 5) which included clinical specialists, senior sisters and ward managers. Two respondents worked in areas outside the NHS. Those beginning the DPSN were, therefore, from a broad range of nursing grades, representing different levels of seniority in their areas of work.

Nine (35 per cent) of the prospective Standard Route DipSW students were studying prior to beginning the programme. Thirteen (50 per cent) were in relatively senior occupational positions, mostly in social work; for instance, four were Educational Welfare Officers; three were in less senior but social work related areas and one was a bookbinder. Of the students on the Sandwich Route most were in relatively senior but unqualified social work positions; for instance, four were in residential social work. Three were in less senior but

social work related areas of work. These figures suggest that those beginning the DipSW had varying degrees of social work experience, many occupied relatively senior positions.

The prospective HPE students were mostly already involved in teaching health professionals. Taken with the figures for the 'new versus continuous aspect' this indicated that most of these students would have experience of teaching when they began their programme but a few would probably not.

Whose idea was it to embark on the programme?

The vast majority of questionnaire respondents reported that it was their own idea to take the programme (97 per cent) but there was some indication that their personal choice was not the only factor. Two of the DPSN stated that it was solely their employer's idea. A further 12 suggested that their employer had played a part (making a total of 15 per cent). These were mainly prospective students on the health care studies programmes. There was an indication that others also played a part in the prospective student's decision to do the programme. Seven recorded that their family had been involved (most of these were about to embark on the DipSW), three indicated that their work colleagues were involved and one reported that friends and a previous tutor had been an influence.

Summary

The prospective and actual students who began the three programmes had some distinctive characteristics. The majority were women. Most were in their late twenties, thirties and over forty; the largest proportion being in their thirties and very few were over 50. Few were from other than white ethnic origin groups, especially on the health care studies programmes. They had diversity of previous educational experience but most had studied recently. Most travelled daily with over 40 per cent travelling over 20 miles to the University. They were from a range of social class backgrounds; a large proportion being from other than the upper middle-classes traditionally associated with higher education. Around three quarters were married or living with a partner; many of these were in medium or long-term relationships. A substantial number had children, mostly below the age of 21. Approximately half of the DipSW and HPE students considered themselves to be embarking on a new career by taking the programme while the rest and almost all the DPSN students saw themselves as continuing in the same occupational area. Prospective students' position prior to embarking on the programmes reflected a diversity of seniority

of position and experience. Finally, for the vast majority, beginning the programme had been their own idea but there were influences from employers in the health care areas and the students' families.

The Diversity of and Similarities between Students

There is a tendency in the literature on mature women students to see their diversity as a problem in that they are seen as so different from each other that only broad similarities are examined (see, for example, Wisker, 1986 & 1988; NIACE REPLAN, 1991). As Wisker (1988) puts it:

> 'Mature women students are a heterogeneous group ranging from those who have no formal qualifications at all, who need basic education and training as well as confidence building before they can enter higher education, to well qualified women managing a career break and wishing to update or retrain before returning to work after, perhaps bringing up a family' (p. 68).

If mature women students are conceptualised as varying widely only broad conclusions about them, in relation to beginning a programme in higher education, can be drawn which may not be of specific use in facilitating such a transition. Every woman beginning a programme of higher education is different. Schlossberg et al. (1989, p. 13), drawing on Neugarten (1979), make the point that as people get older they become less similar because the choices and commitments which they are involved in escalate. The implication is that there is generally more diversity in mature women students' previous experience and present circumstances as compared with traditional entry students.

Wisker (1988) goes on to argue that what unites mature women students is 'their gender and their age' (p. 68). The demographic data, detailed in the first part of this chapter, indicates that these mature women students had other things in common, for example, whether they were married or not, whether they had children or not, or the age of their children. Lie (1990) argues that variables associated with the life course such as age, marital status and children's age can impede women's occupational progression (p. 109). By highlighting similarities and differences it may be it possible to develop a typology which enables distinctions to be made in how women manage the transition to professional programmes of higher education. In order to do this I drew upon the notion of 'careers' as a means of describing discernible patterns in mature women students' lives.

The concept of career

Several researchers have used the concept of a person's career, career path or trajectory to group common objective elements of peoples' movement through different 'identities', statuses or structures (see, for instance, Banks, et al. 1992; Emler and Reicher, 1995; Thorpe, 1991). The concept of 'career' is argued to be a well established notion in sociology (Britton and Baxter 1994, p. 4). Earwaker (1992, pp. 30-31) suggests it is a useful concept because it is based on Goffman's (1968) notion of a clear thread of personal identity which accommodates change and discontinuity. This concept of 'career' differs from that used in the study of occupations. Thorpe (1991) argues that ' "careers" consist of the sequential development of distinct "official identities" ' (p. 3).

According to Goffman (1968) a person's career can have an 'objective dimension', the official institutional processing of a person, and a 'subjective dimension', the person's experiences. In this chapter I seek to establish the objective dimension of the mature students' 'careers'. The questionnaire sent to prospective students on the three programmes aimed to ascertain this information. Analysis of the questionnaires initially revealed four main groupings. The first three included students who were continuing in the profession in which they were at the time. *Group one* (20) represented people who had always been in their particular profession and saw themselves as continuing in the same job or gaining promotion; these were mainly the DPSN students and therefore on a part-time programme; most did not have children. *Group two* (24) were people who had always been in their particular profession but had had breaks, usually to have and look after children. They saw themselves as continuing in the same job or gaining promotion. Again these were mainly the DPSN students who were beginning a part-time programme. Approximately half had children under ten and half children over ten. The *third group* (27) had more mixed previous careers but most wished to continue in the same job or gain promotion. These included an equal mixture of DPSN and DipSW students. Approximately half had children. The *fourth group* (25) had either multiple previous careers or one main career but were new to the profession to which the programme related. These were DipSW and HPE students. There was a combination of those with and without children. I rearranged these groupings slightly by combining the first two as the only difference between these was whether or not they had children. The new groupings were the *one career person* (44) the *multi-career person* (27) and the *new career person* (25).

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I used these groupings to select the sample for the informal semi-structured interviews in the first phase of the study. At this stage I felt these groupings might represent important differences in the participants' previous work experience, whether they were new or continuing in their area of work and their present life situation with regard to whether they had children and the age of those children.

Development of the career types concept

My analysis of first phase data revealed four main themes in the transition to programmes of higher education (see Chapter 4 p. 83). It became clear that there were important similarities and differences between people's 'careers' in relation to these themes. These could be described in objective terms but were informed by the participants' accounts of their subjective experience. In other words, the qualitative data provided the more salient dimensions of different 'careers'. For instance, many with little recent educational experience, or little experience of the profession they were entering, expressed concerns about this (see Chapter 8). The participants' perceptions of their previous educational and work experience was one vital aspect that I had underestimated in the questionnaires. Whether they had one main previous occupation or multiple careers, however, was not seen by them as important in relation to the transition. The qualitative data reinforced the importance of the participants' domestic situation and variables associated with the life course. Many felt demands from their family responsibilities and these tended to be more intense if they had children and the age of their children led to different sorts of demands (see Chapter 8). Aspects of participants' objective careers therefore informed their subjective experience of the transition to professional higher education.

So far I have detailed broad similarities and differences between certain characteristics of students but this does not give any depth to the description of the kinds of students involved. To examine each individual career would make analysis and generalisation difficult therefore I now use the concept of 'ideal types' and apply it to different 'careers'. Giddens (1989, p. 741) describes an ideal type as a 'pure type' put together by emphasising certain traits of a particular social phenomenon. These may not necessarily exist in reality but allow for a more detailed description which amalgamates the main aspects of the 'careers' of the mature women students in the present study. I draw together the characteristics of students to create four career types. I now outline each of the four career types and show how the objective dimensions of the forty interviewees' careers fits in with these.

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1. Young womanhood (n=5) - this student is in her twenties and has not long since qualified if she is beginning a health care studies programme or has studied recently if beginning a social work programme, therefore she is not really out of studying. She is just married or living with a partner and therefore in a relatively new relationship but has no children.

20 per cent (8) participants were in their twenties but only 12.5 per cent (5) fell into this category as they had no children. Three were over 25, two between 20 - 24. All but one were on the DPSN. Four fitted well within this category, the other one met all the criteria except she lived on her own.

2. Young motherhood (n=15) - this student can be in her late twenties but is usually in her thirties; she is usually in a stable medium term relationship (of about 12 years duration) but might be a single parent. She has between one and three children under the age of ten and usually at least one of them is of pre-school age. She has usually studied relatively recently although this would be short work related courses for the DPSN student. The social work student might have completed an Access course recently or she might have been out of education for some time but be in a responsible job. The HPE student has usually studied recently.

60 per cent (24) of participants were in their late 20s or 30s, but only 37.5 per cent (15) had young children and were therefore within this category. Three interviewees were in their late twenties while the other 12 were in their thirties. Nearly all (13) had studied recently.

All but one were married or living with a partner, the other being a single parent. The indication was that most of these relationships were of medium term duration. In the first phase this information was gathered through the questionnaires and the six participants to whom this applied had been married for between nine and 16 years (mean 12.67 years, median 12.5 years). In the second phase I did not collect data relating to the length of relationships with partners but there were indications that most had been in these for some time. For example, one woman said she had been with her partner for eight years and another spoke about travelling abroad with her husband before the birth of their first child who was at the time aged ten.

Five of the participants had one child. These children were all of pre-school age, ranging from seven months to three years. Five participants had two children with two of them having two pre-school aged children. The other five participants had three children. Thirteen out of the fifteen participants had children of pre-school age. Four of these children were babies (under one). One woman was on maternity leave when she began the DPSN and was still breast-feeding and another had come straight onto the DipSW after taking maternity leave. Three interviewees who I included in this career type did not quite fit as they had children who spanned the younger and older age groups. I included them in this type as they gravitate more towards this than older motherhood. This was either because they had a young teenager or there was more than one other sibling who fell into the under ten category. However, certain issues which related to both younger and older motherhood career types might be pertinent to these students.

This type of student differs to those generally identified in literature who are mainly portrayed as older women returning to education after bringing up their children, as illustrated in Wisker's (1988) quote earlier. These 'young motherhood' women were continuing with their education and career while bringing up young children.

It is interesting to note that nearly all the HPE participants fell within this category (4 out of 5) while a much smaller proportion of social work and DPSN students did (6 out of 20 DPSN students and 5 out of 15 DipSW). Perhaps this reflects a difference between the ages and life situations of women begin programmes within the different professions. More participants fell within this career type in the second phase of the study (six in the first phase and nine in the second phase). This could be related to the difference in sampling methods used in the two phases. In phase one a proportion of women with younger children were selected in relation to the overall sample. In phase two women were chosen if they mentioned issues more specific to women in their diary. If this were the case it would be expected that a larger number would also fall within the next career type - older motherhood which they did not in fact there was a considerably smaller number in this group in the second phase (nine in the first phase and four in the second). These differences might suggest that those with younger children have more immediate problems in the early part of the transition (as this what was recorded in the diaries) whereas issues to do with older children are ongoing.

3. Older motherhood (n=13) - she is sometimes in her late thirties but usually in her forties. She is often in a long term relationship (of about 21 years) with her husband, but more

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likely than those in young motherhood to be a single parent. She has children living at home who are over the age of ten but usually these are older teenagers who are studying or going through important life transitions themselves. She may sometimes also have a dependent relative. She was very involved in bringing up her children when they were younger and has more recently returned to study with the aim of getting on in her public domain career. Some in this group may be on the verge of moving into the older womanhood career type as their children are on the brink of leaving home.

45 per cent (18) of the total participants were in their 40s and 27.5 per cent (11) of them fell within the older motherhood career type. Only two out of the 13 in this group were in their thirties. Four out of the thirteen were single parents. The other nine were in long term marriages. I had collected data for six of these and they ranged in duration from 14 to 23 years (with a mean of 20.16 years and a median of 21.5 years). Going by the age of the children in the other three marriages and that the interviewees did not talk about being divorced, I estimated that they were in relationships of a similar duration. Three participants had one child, six had two and four had three. The age range of children was between ten and 21 (the mean age of children was 17.22, the median 17 and the mode 18). The women who fell within this career type therefore generally had older teenage children. This implies that their children were likely to be studying for key qualifications or going through important life transitions themselves. Two women had responsibilities for ageing or ill friends or relatives (one of the women in the young motherhood career type also had this responsibility).

All but two participants had studied recently. Most of the social work participants had left school with few qualifications and returned to study much later. The DPSN participants were similar in that most of them had not done much studying since their initial training until more recently. The only HPE student in this career type fitted in with this pattern.

The exception (n=1) - One interviewee fell between the young and older motherhood career types. She was in her late thirties and had two younger and two older children (aged 4, 7, 16 and 18). She was in a long term relationship with her husband. She had not done well at school but returned to education when her first two children were young and had done 'A' levels, a degree, followed by a teacher training course. She then decided that she wanted more children and had stayed at home again for a few years. Recently she had started to think about returning to work and a career in social work. This meant that she might face the problems and issues associated with both young and older motherhood career types.

Her youngest child was of pre-school age and her eldest two would be going through important life transitions themselves. Though this exception presented a problem in the analysis of the career types it provides an interesting illustration of the issues which might be involved for a woman in such a situation.

4. Older womanhood (n=6) - this student is usually in her thirties or forties and has no or few family commitments. She is usually married or living with her partner but may live on her own. She usually has no children but if she does have children they will have left home. Her previous educational experience can be very varied - from not studying for many years to always being involved in some sort of study.

Three who were within this career type were in their thirties and three were in their forties. Five were married or lived with their partner but the duration of their relationship varied enormously and ranged from 2.5 years to 28 years. One woman had been married twice and lived with her second husband. Five had no children and one had two children of 21 and 24 who had both left home.

All had not done particularly well at school. Two had been involved in studying for most of their adult life, two had returned to study after a break of several years and two had not studied for many years.

Dewar et al. (1995), in a study of DPSN students in another institution of higher education, identified two main groups. They describe younger mature students, many with pre-school children who want a career and a family and older students whose children are growing up. These correspond to the second and third career types described here which account for the majority of the students in the present study, however, as the other career types developed show, a few do not fit in with this, or the picture painted in the literature of mature women students in higher education being older women returning to education as their children are growing up (see Chapter 2).

Conclusions

Certain aspects of the characteristics of students, discussed in the first part of this chapter, have no obvious links with the different career types developed in the second part of the chapter but were still deemed to be relevant to the transition early on in the present study. These are ethnic origin, social background, distance travelled daily to the University, a

'new' versus a 'continuation' of career, what they were doing prior to beginning the programme and whose idea it had been to embark on the programme. Other aspects are loosely linked to the career types developed, for instance, previous educational experience. The description of characteristics of students and subsequent development of the four student career types outlined in this chapter highlights objective similarities and differences between the students embarking on the three professional programmes in the present study. The main characteristics of students thought to be relevant to the analysis of the transition are depicted in figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 Characteristics of students

Career Types:
Young Womanhood Young Motherhood Older Motherhood Older Womanhood
Other Characteristics:
Ethnic Origin Social Class Distance Travelled Daily Continuation vs New What doing previously Whose Decision?
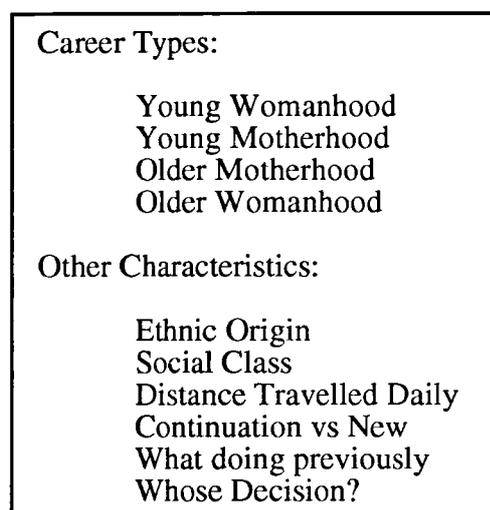
In the following chapters I use these four career types as well as the other key characteristics of the students identified in this chapter in the analysis of the new students' accounts of their subjective experience of the transition.

CHAPTER 6

EXCITEMENT AND ANXIETY

'I am feeling apprehensive yet aware that the next three years will be challenging, offering new opportunities for growth.'

This woman's diary entry on beginning the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) demonstrates, in common with other studies (for instance, Leonard, 1994), a sense of anxiety yet excitement at beginning a programme of education. In this chapter I discuss the reasons the women in the present study gave for embarking on their professional programme. Their reasons suggest that the impetus for taking their programme was particularly strong but not all were excited. Despite having strong motivations many experienced anxieties on beginning their programme. I use Breakwell's (1986) theory of threatened identity to explain these emotions.

A Sense of Excitement ?

When I asked Susan what she was looking forward to about beginning the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN) a few weeks before she started, this was her reply:

'I'm quite looking forward to going on the first day, I can't wait. I'm all excited, I'm like a big kid waiting to go to school. I really can't wait. I can get my brain into gear and say I'm doing something positive with my life.'

Nearly all those who took part in the interviews (and many of the comments made in the diaries and during the participant observation) conveyed a sense of excitement, enjoyment or enthusiasm for taking the programme. For a substantial number this excitement was considerable, however, others, though still saying they were excited, were not as euphoric.

By the time I interviewed the second phase participants, a few weeks after they began their programme, the majority still expressed excitement. Only a small number gave the impression that their initial excitement had diminished (though a longer term assessment was outside the scope of the study), as Barbara put it:

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'I was excited for the first couple of weeks but we are there for two years and it will fly by.'

Pascall and Cox (1993a, p. 90) and Leonard (1994, p. 169) also note the enthusiasm that the women in their studies expressed about being involved in higher education.

Only a small minority of participants indicated a more negative view of beginning the programme, describing a sense of pressure which had led to an obligation to obtain the qualification. For instance, Sarah said:

'I just see it as something I have to do....'

In the transitions I have made to programmes of higher education I have felt varying degrees of excitement. For instance, when I began as an undergraduate in Behavioural Sciences I felt a tremendous sense of excitement which lasted for most of the first term. I felt that I was beginning something which I was really interested in and particularly wanted to do. However, when I made the transition to becoming a postgraduate research student my enthusiasm was less intense, as this represented a 'second choice' in terms of the area I wished to research for a PhD. This suggests that the degree of excitement experienced in beginning a programme of higher education can vary and is related to the individual reasons and circumstances involved.

What was all the excitement about?

The reasons given by the women in the study for this sense of excitement at beginning their programme were many and complex but were linked to what they perceived they would gain. Most gave a combination of what could be termed self-fulfilment and instrumental reasons. Pascall and Cox (1993a, p. 60) argue that for the women in their study the elements which related to their reasons for being involved in higher education merged together and both they and Edwards (1993a, pp. 56-57) report that the women in their studies gave both kinds of reason.

The sense of excitement that the participants expressed at beginning the programme was linked to the enthusiasm of being involved in education generally and the possibilities it might provide to achieving their potential. These kinds of expressions can be seen as relating to the desire for self-fulfilment. A few indicated that they found studying to be

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'addictive', that they had 'got the bug' for learning or it was part of their sense of who they were. Stella said:

'Once you get the studying bug you want to keep doing it... I enjoy doing courses, I really do.'

A few women, who were taking part-time programmes, said they enjoyed studying so much that they would do so full-time if they had the opportunity. For instance, Annie, who was in a senior nursing position said that she had seriously considered giving it up and taking a cleaning job to enable her to study full-time. Pascall and Cox (1993a, pp. 82-83) state that a small number of the mature women students in their study saw education as a 'need' that was at the very 'core' of their sense of who they were and recognised its 'addictive' nature. The strength of feeling provoked by asking their participants if education was simply a hobby indicated that it was 'an impetus that became difficult to resist' (pp. 82-83). For others in the present study beginning the programme was less centrally important. For instance, a few simply spoke of the enjoyment of reading or enjoying the chance to think about broader issues.

Nearly half of those interviewed spoke of self-fulfilment reasons as a motivating factor in taking the programme. This theme was further supported by comments made during the participant observation and recorded in diaries. Carol said that taking the DPSN was:

'a way to move myself forwards and stretch myself really... move my thinking really.... Not particularly move up the ladder, just to think, keep my brain ticking over because you can stall can't you?'

This expression of taking the programme for self-fulfilment reasons is supported by the findings of Pascall and Cox's (1993a) and Edwards' (1993a) studies of mature women students. Self-fulfilment motivation can be linked to the desire for self-esteem.

Taking the programme was seen by a few women as a way of changing their career or getting away from a particularly negative work environment. For instance, Judy said that she had felt 'very abused' and 'very isolated' in the management job she had been doing prior to beginning the DipSW. She felt she had not gained any recognition for what she had achieved and, as she put it:

'My way of rebelling against that was saying right I'm going to get out and I'm going to do something for myself instead of doing it for people who don't appreciate it.'

She said that she knew she would have to do the DipSW in order to progress careerwise but that there were also personal reasons associated with her bad work experience:

'I need to build up my own self-esteem. It's been battered and bruised and pushed all over the place for the last three years so I need to prove myself...'

For a few it was seen more as a way of getting out of a 'rut' as Mary put it. Participants' motivations had their origins in a dissatisfaction with their work environment or an undesirable climate in the culture of their profession. The threats to their identity which this resulted in were negotiated by initiating a change within the social matrix by choosing to take their particular programme.

More instrumentally, nearly half of the interview participants spoke of taking the programme as a means of assisting in their career or professional development. For example, Annie who was on the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE) programme said:

'I've always wanted to be a lecturer/practitioner..... that's why I embarked on my first degree.... That really is the way I want to go. So this course appeared and as I said, when I read the outline, I thought that's where I want to be...'

Reasons associated with career development ambitions though instrumental were also closely linked to self-fulfilment motivators. The women sought to enhance their self-esteem by taking the qualification to have a valued professional career.

Reasons were also associated with being a woman and/or mother. There appeared to be links between specific reasons and the career types of young womanhood, young motherhood, older motherhood and older womanhood (developed in the previous chapter). A quarter of those who were in the young motherhood career type (that is, with children under ten, usually with at least one pre-school aged child) talked about their children in relation to the decision to take the programme. These women spoke of wanting a career as well as children. For instance, Trudy said she had made a choice between staying at home and looking after her child and pursuing a career. She decided she would rather do the latter as she felt ultimately she would not be satisfied with staying at home. While only a small

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number in this career type spoke of these sort of issues directly, it could be assumed that because the others were involved in, or were seeking to be involved in, a professional career they were probably seeking fulfilment via that career. I would therefore argue that being involved in a profession was an important source of self-esteem for these women, which children and domesticity alone could not fulfill. Edwards (1993a) argues that the women in her study drew on the ideological constructs of the private sphere of domesticity and the family which is associated with women and is seen as of lower status to the public world of work, education, politics and culture associated with men (pp. 128-129). The women in the present study in younger motherhood appeared to take on board this dominant cultural representation and this led to the desire to be associated with the more positively perceived public domain social group.

Most of those in the older motherhood career type (that is, those with children over ten, usually older teenagers who are still living at home) conveyed the impression that beginning their particular programme, becoming involved in education more generally or pursuing a more rewarding career was part of a broader process of change in their lives. It was linked to the desire to have something for themselves which they felt they had not previously had because of the demands of being a mother or wife (or work) for many years. Most of these women talked about their children growing up and it being their 'turn' to do something for themselves. As Susan put it:

'The kids are grown up and they're at University so it's Mother's turn to do her own thing.'

For a small number of these women the issue of not being totally personally fulfilled through their domestic role was also linked to having been involved in menial or unrewarding jobs as a consequence of looking after their family. These women in the older motherhood career type most closely fitted Pascall and Cox's (1993a) and Edwards' (1993a) analysis of women's reasons for being involved in higher education. The women in these studies saw education as a way to improve their public world position and the desire to do this stemmed from their private world position of caring for the family and associated unrewarding and low-paid work. In a similar way to those in the young motherhood career type, but at a later stage in their lives, these women had taken on board the dominant social representation of the lower status private domain career which they had been involved in as wives and mothers, and, for some (but not all), associated low status work. Taking their particular programme was seen as a way to achieve a more socially valued public sphere career.

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All those in the young womanhood career type (that is, a woman in her twenties with no children) gave the impression that they were particularly keen to have a worthwhile occupational career. As Penny put it:

'I'm quite a career minded person, I'm not a family person, let's sit down and have babies, I'm not that sort. I want stimulating.'

In thinking of my own reasons for being involved in higher education I can identify similar reasons to those women in the young womanhood career type. Being in my later twenties and having no children when I first became involved in higher education I hoped to achieve a publicly valued career because I felt that I would not find motherhood and domesticity a sufficient source of self-esteem. I became a mother while undertaking my PhD, thus moving into the young motherhood career type and though I find motherhood extremely rewarding, for me, on its own, it would still not be a sufficient source of self-esteem.

Those in the older womanhood career type (that is, with few or no family commitments) similarly valued their occupational career and only a third gave reasons related to family or others as part of their motivation for taking the programme or being involved in learning. A publicly valued career was, therefore, also important to those in young and older womanhood. A few of these women appeared to have taken on the dominant social representation of the private and public domains with their associated imbalances of status in the same way as those who were mothers. This indicated that, although they did not have responsibility for children, education was seen as an 'escape' from the lower status private sphere.

In relation to motherhood and womanhood many in the present study drew upon the dominant social representation of the lower status private sphere which created the desire for a more publicly valued identity. This operated differently, however, for women of different ages and with different family responsibilities. Those in young motherhood and young womanhood (and a few in older motherhood) indicated that their career (of which taking the programme was a part) had always been important to them, could be seen as representing the cultural form of 'personalised organic solidarity', as outlined by Pascall and Cox, based on Bernstein (1993a, pp. 92-93). They were intent on being themselves and doing their own thing. Those in older motherhood also expressed 'personalised organic solidarity' but most had previously taken on the cultural form of 'individualized organic solidarity' (including a few of those in older womanhood). They subscribed to

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unambiguous and what can be seen as traditional roles, for women as carers, wives, housewives and/or mothers.

Pascall and Cox (1993a, pp. 14, 79) allude to different influences on women depending on their age by drawing on Hopper and Osborn's theory of role discontinuity. Younger women (those under 30) feel discontent with the satisfaction which can be gained from a private domain identity as this has been eroded in the latter part of this century. Pascall and Cox conclude, however, that the women in their study were brought up in a culture where self-esteem was expected to come from the private domain. While their conclusions applied to most of the women in the older motherhood career type (and a few in older womanhood), they did not apply to those in young womanhood or young motherhood. Those in these career types (and a few in older womanhood) had always expressed a discontent with the self-esteem which could be derived from the private sphere alone.

A sense of pressure

Other reasons were related to professional pressure and/or credibility. For instance, at the start of Pam's interview I asked her if anything had helped to ease her into the DPSN, she replied 'pressure' and went on to explain:

> 'It's a case that in this hospital... I presume it's in others... you are obliged to do further education and a lot of us don't really want to but you've got to do it to stand still. There's so many people done it in this place now that it wasn't a case of being eased into it, it was a case of being pressurised into it. You've got to do it to stand still. You're getting all these students or you'll be getting all these P2000 students.... They're going to be sort of a lot more academically into things, if you like, than we are.'

What Pam was referring to was the pressure she felt because of the radically new approach to basic nurse training recently adopted under Project 2000; this being at a higher level to previous basic training. Dewar et al. (1995) highlight the pressure on nurses and other health professionals to upgrade to diploma level because these health professionals only hold 'traditional' qualifications and may therefore not have the credentials to apply for fewer available jobs (p. 1).

Claire gave a graphic example of how her professional credibility had been severely put into question because she did not have a social work qualification. She had worked in a

social work related area for several years and had wanted to take a social work qualification ten years earlier but, for various reasons, had not been able to. Six years previously she had set up and now ran a residential home. She said:

'and then all of a sudden I was 35 and thought "oh shit I haven't even qualified yet" and I was in court last August... I was called as a expert witness and all the barrister had to say to me was "are you qualified?" All my training I'd done, and I'd done a tremendous amount, it was like that was it! I felt totally destroyed, it really upset me, my ego at any rate.... I thought that's it, that is it. Come hell or high water I'm going to apply for that course.'

Pascall and Cox (1993a, p. 146) argue that the women in their study used higher education for social and economic reasons and that it allowed them to travel some considerable social distance but many women in the present study appeared to be taking the programme in order to, as Pam put it, 'stand still'.

Reasons of professional pressure or credibility, it could be argued, originated from social change. Breakwell (1986) argues that social change occurs independently of the individual and therefore the meaning of the position occupied changes (p. 40). The external pressure to attain a professionally credible qualification could, therefore, be interpreted as a threat to identity 'principles'. Continuity over time and situation was threatened by these social changes, as was self-esteem as these participants feelings of personal and social value had been challenged. Additionally, their distinctiveness or sense of uniqueness as a credible practitioner was potentially under threat. The way these women dealt with these externally imposed professional pressures was to seek a move within the social matrix. They chose to take their professional programme to lessen these threats to identity. This kind of move is explained by Breakwell (1986, p. 39) in terms of social identity theory, in that, seeking such a change can be seen as the search for self-esteem in a positively valued social identity. This is achieved by associating with a group which is seen in a positive light, in this case those embarking on programmes, which will lead to the appropriate professional qualification.

One eighth of the women interviewed said that one of the reasons they were taking their programme was to enable them to get a job where they could earn a reasonable salary. Three of these women were single parents (there were only five single parents involved in the interviews) and their reasons for earning a reasonable salary were linked to having to support themselves and/or their children in the future. For example, Hilary said she had to

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be able to earn enough to provide for herself later on in life. She was a single parent in the older motherhood career type (with children between ten and twenty and still living at home) and said that as her children were growing up the maintenance paid by her ex-husband would eventually stop. She therefore needed to work full-time but could not do so in her present job. She said:

'I may not have been doing this if I was married with a husband to pay the mortgage.'

She went on to say that if she had had a husband's financial support:

'the urgency wouldn't have been there. I could have carried on with my part-time job. My circumstances mean I need to [take the programme].'

Another of the women related earning a reasonable salary in the future to the fact that her husband had been seriously ill and that she may need to be the main wage earner in the future. These women's reasons appeared therefore to be mainly related to the necessity of having to earn a reasonable salary. This was the only reason which could be seen as not being linked to self-esteem or the need to achieve a positive social identity. Although financial remuneration might be tenuously linked to attaining a positive social identity because earning a reasonable salary is often linked to obtaining a socially valued public world position, in this case these women had a real financial need because of their life situation, most notably due to being a single parent.

Initial Anxieties

A particularly prevalent phenomenon associated with beginning the programme was the expression of anxiety. As one of the social work students on the first day of the DipSW described it, she felt like 'a child going to school for the first time with no mum'. Many of those who I spoke to, comments written in the diaries and other observations indicated the existence of this anxiety. For instance, I observed that the new students seemed particularly quiet initially but there was more interaction as time went on. A few mentioned physiological indications of anxiety, such as feeling sick or not being able to eat properly just before they began their programme. It was also interesting to note that I did not request that the students report their feelings in the first phase diaries, yet many recorded quite intimate expressions of their anxieties and concerns, which gave an indication of the strength of these feelings.

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The first seminar session for the DPSN in phase one of the study provided an illustration of the manifestation of these initial anxieties. The group of new students had been gathered together as a whole for the initial introductory session. The students were then split up into four smaller seminar groups of around 20 people. I joined one group and noted that they were quiet initially. The tutor suggested going round each member of the group in turn. Each person was to say their name and tell the rest of the group a little about themselves. This was done briefly and in a formal fashion. Later the tutor asked the new students how they were feeling so far. This one question changed the atmosphere completely and suddenly several of the students began the reveal their concerns and worries about beginning the programme. One woman said she had been unable to eat her dinner the night before because she was 'that worried about coming.' She said she did not know why this was because she was used to studying. The tutor admitted that she also felt nervous before a new course started. Others spoke of similar worries, one woman commenting that:

'It was a good job we've had plenty to do or I would have turned around and gone home.'

The comments which students recorded in their diaries during both phases of the study supported my observations of these initial anxieties. There were many recordings about feeling 'apprehensive', 'nervous', 'overwhelmed', 'anxious', 'daunted', 'stressed', 'worried', 'fear', 'trepidation' and 'lonely'. For instance, one person wrote:

'Felt very uneasy at first.'

Nearly half of those who I interviewed prior to beginning the programme expressed concerns about actually starting, saying that they felt nervous or apprehensive. For instance, when I asked Carol if she had any particular worries or fears about beginning the DPSN, despite being on the ENB870 research programme at the University the previous year, she replied:

'I never like the first days..... it's meeting new people, and some people you take to and some people it takes a while for you to take to them and you don't know anybody in the room. You know you're all in the same boat, eyeing each other up and finding out who's the one you want to sit with.'

In the second phase interviews, which were conducted over the first few weeks of the programmes, the participants made various comments which indicated they had been

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anxious initially. For instance, Annie who had just began the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE) said:

'I didn't come to the interviews when everyone else came so that again added to my anxiety... and I didn't know whether I would sink or swim or understand a word they said on the first day.'

I recorded that I was anxious about beginning to be involved with the programmes. On the day I became a participant observer I recorded in my research diary:

'I began being a participant observer with the postgraduate students. I felt nervous myself, it was a transition in my research for me. I was anxious, nervous and excited.'

This represented moving into a new situation and getting to know new people which evoked particular emotions in me. The method meant that I was forever having to initiate new social encounters which I found to be stressful and gave an insight into how the new students might feel as they were involved in a similar activity. When I spoke informally to teaching staff during the course of the research a few expressed similar initial anxieties about the beginning of a new programme. Anxieties in the new situation were therefore prevalent but apparently not felt by a small minority, for instance, Penny said:-

'I don't see any particular worries, I'll get essays and I'll sit down and do them, I'll make friends.'

Others recorded in their diaries that they were not particularly anxious, but these were in a minority. A few wrote comments such as 'felt quite relaxed, no major hang-ups or anxieties' or 'felt good in spite of having a cold, not overawed by anything'.

In part the expression of these initial anxieties appeared to be related to the unknown and unfamiliar - not knowing people, not being familiar with the situation, place or procedures, the new journey to the University and finding a place to park (which was difficult close to the town centre campus). Given the newness of the situation, this anxiety can be explained in terms of a threat to the identity 'principle' of continuity (Breakwell, 1986, p. 24). Continuity over time and situation had been disrupted. The data suggested that the majority did appear to get over these initial anxieties relatively quickly (see Chapter 10).

This initial anxiety is a feature noted in other studies of the transition to higher education in relation to mature women students (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a, p. 57; Leonard, 1994, p. 169); mature students generally (see, for instance, King, 1993, p. 10); students beginning the DPSN in another institution (Dewar et al., 1994, p. 253) and traditional age students (see, for example, Fisher and Hood, 1987). I would therefore argue that a certain amount of anxiety is usual, understandable and to be expected in such a transition and many new students in higher education will feel such anxieties.

In the present study, however, the expression of initial anxieties was a complex phenomenon and in distinguishing the factors associated with short-term anxieties an arbitrary distinction has been made between several interlocking concerns. It was evident that for the mature women students in the present study these anxieties were also linked to strong continuities in their lives and the sense of who they were. The central theme of the present study is this continuity which is discussed at length in the following chapters.

Conclusions

A significant proportion of women in this study spoke particularly enthusiastically about taking their professional programme implying, as Pascall and Cox (1993a) suggest, that the impetus for being involved in higher education was strong and hard to resist (p. 83). However, the evidence suggests that many did not experience such an extreme sense of enthusiasm and it was clear that a small minority was not enthusiastic at all and felt they had to take the programme in order to 'stand still'.

These findings extend the study of the experience of mature women students in relation to their decisions to be involved in higher education as they highlight differences but also similarities between women based on their membership of particular social groups. Pascall and Cox, (1993a) recognise some of this diversity but argue (as does Edwards, 1993a) that the main reasons why the women in their study returned to education was to escape from the 'housewife role' and the low-paid work which goes with this (Pascall and Cox, 1993a, p. 76). Thus they depict women as a homogeneous group. In the present study, however, this only reflected the experiences of those mainly belonging to one group; older motherhood. This difference in the findings could be linked to the different samples involved and areas of education in which women were involved. For instance, Pascall and Cox (1993a) indicate that most of the women in their study had children but that these were not of pre-school age. They argue that their sample (which appears to be similar to that of Edwards) reflects the general pattern of mature students in higher education (p. 62).

However, this part of their study was carried out with women returning to higher education in the late 1970s/early 1980s and patterns of participation in higher education (particularly with the inclusion of health care education in higher education recently) have changed since then (Birchenall, 1995; Duke, 1994; McNair, 1993).

I would argue that whether the women were enthusiastic or not their motivation was strong because of their desire to maintain or attain the identity 'principles' of continuity, self-esteem, distinctiveness and authenticity due to their social and professional position. Psychologists have argued that identity 'principles' such as self-esteem have motivational qualities (see, for instance, Argyle, 1983; Gecas and Mortimer, 1987).

Despite having strong motivations many experienced anxieties on beginning their programme. Other studies have similarly noted this mixture of excitement and apprehension (see, for instance, Leonard, 1994, p. 169). Breakwell (1986) argues that when a person seeks to change their position in the social matrix to enhance one particular 'principle' of identity others may be threatened (Breakwell, 1986, p. 47). This would explain why many reported anxieties in the transition to their programme.

CHAPTER 7

CONTINUITY

The central theme of the present study is the importance of continuity. There were continuities in the participants' sense of who they were as wives, mothers, women, and continuing responsibilities associated with these, as adults, as well as related to their social, educational and professional background. In this Chapter I consider the way these continuities interacted with the new educational environment, impeding or assisting the transition and how the environment threatened or enhanced continuity. I conclude that certain psychological theories highlight the centrality of certain aspects of the women's continuing sense of who they are but these do not take into account continuities associated with the social structure.

The Continuities of Motherhood, Wifehood and Womanhood

Continued responsibilities

By and large the women in the present study continued to take the main responsibility for domestic arrangements, the family and children, once they began their programme. This has been noted in other studies of mature women students (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Leonard, 1994; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Roberts, 1994). A comment made by one of the male Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) students during the participant observation in relation to my interest in mature women students was particularly poignant. He told me that some of the women he had been talking to seemed to be having childcare problems. He suggested I might not pick this up because women seemed to take it for granted that it was part of their role. In the second phase interviews when I focused particularly on issues associated with being a woman, half of the interviewees said or implied that being a women meant extra and continuing demands for them. For example, Jackie thought that being involved in education was more difficult for her than it would have been for her husband because she had the main responsibility for looking after their children, she said:

'If my husband was doing it, it would be easier for him, I'm sure.... It's more difficult for women to do it just because'

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Rose said that her children were her responsibility. It was she who had to get the children ready for school in the mornings:

'Having a family I have to think of the time it's going to take to get there [to the University] of a morning because I have to organise the kiddies as well. I'm not saying [husband] doesn't help but I have to organise things...'

A few others said that because they got support from their husbands or families the domestic demands were not such a problem. These women saw themselves as fortunate though to have this support. For instance, Aileen said:

'I do count myself lucky, if I didn't have that side of it it would be really difficult.'

A small number of the women in the study spoke about having or negotiating more equal relationships with their husbands or partners. For instance, Barbara spoke of 'swapped roles' with her husband a few months before beginning the DipSW. He was responsible for the children and the home. There was continuity for most women in the study therefore in terms of the social structural expectations of how women's domestic work is organised in British society. For instance, David, et al. (1993) argue that in all Western industrial societies it is still mainly women who are responsible for young children (p. 2).

The continuities of motherhood

During the third week of the DipSW in the second phase of the study at break time during a teaching session I started a conversation with Gwen (a single parent with three teenage children) to whom I had not previously spoken. I asked her how she was getting on. She told me that she had not got off to a very good start. The previous week she had had problems with her oldest child who she said was depressed and hearing voices. While at home the previous Wednesday (the study day for the programme) they had had an argument and she had 'chucked' him out of the house. They had resolved their differences since but she was still very concerned about him. In her interview with me a few weeks later Gwen said that she felt well prepared academically and her previous work experience had helped her tremendously in the transition to the programme. She commented 'I'm not out of my depth in any way' and 'I've felt very at ease with it all'. She appeared to be having no problems with the actual programme but she said 'my home life has been horrendous'. She talked again about her son again and how:

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'All of a sudden he appeared to be mentally ill and he got progressively worse, didn't sleep during the night which disturbed me. Frightened my other two children enormously and just dominated home life for a couple of weeks.'

She had taken him to a psychiatrist and he was diagnosed as having schizophrenia potentially triggered by taking LSD. The drugs the psychiatrist prescribed had resolved the problem to a large extent but Gwen said:

'The worry was huge but the disruption and the chaos which it caused me at the time when I thought I had planned everything. I got myself into a situation where I felt as though it was my time and then lo and behold he... I was resentful of the intrusion.'

When I asked her later on in the interview how she felt about being involved in my research she replied:

'I think my experience with [son] has been an exception but also it has happened and it has been difficult for me at the beginning of a course so it's very valid and it gives me a chance to record that, a warning to other people that it can happen.'

I replied 'things like that do happen to mature students' and she said:

'That's it, you don't just come as a separate unit, you come with all the baggage which you have accumulated...and if you have children their needs always come first, you are not separate from them even though the course may look upon you as an individual, you're not... the demands of home still take precedence often and more so for single parents.'

This comment summed up the continuity of being a mother and sense of connectedness expressed by many of the women in the study. For instance, two fifths of the   women who filled in the second phase diaries mentioned continuing demands, responsibilities and other issues associated with their life outside the University, whereas only one out of the ten men who filled in these diaries did. Of these women, nearly three quarters mentioned issues directly related to their families, whereas none of the men did. The relevance of this aspect of women's lives is emphasised by the fact that I did not specifically request the participants to give details about this in the diaries. This was reinforced by the impression I

gained during the participant observation. There were many instances where, particularly women, talked about their families without any prompting. For example, on the first day of the DipSW I was sat next to a woman who said that:

'Sorting out everything before I came was hard, especially the children. There is so much to get sorted out. I saw them off on the bus this morning for the first time ever and that was hard.'

She asked me if I had a family, I said 'not yet' but told her that I was pregnant. We discussed having children for a while and it was obvious that her children were a particularly important aspect of her life and one which she was continually considering in relation to beginning her programme.

The main issues and concerns associated with the continuities of having children were different depending on the ages of children and were broadly related to the two motherhood career types. Nearly all those who were interviewed in the young motherhood career type (that is, those with children under the age of ten and usually with at least one pre-school age child) mentioned childcare as an issue in the transition to the programmes. Most of these spoke of the importance of having good and flexible childcare or support with childcare. For a few childcare was one of the major concerns when beginning the programme as it involved making new arrangements. For instance, Jackie who had three children under ten had written in her diary, on the first day of the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN) programme, that she felt confident about undertaking the programme as she had done the ENB870 research course at the University the previous year and she was familiar with the surroundings, however, she then wrote:

'Overriding worry - had left new babysitter picking up children from school and looking after them, would she cope? (one has diabetes). Rang at 5.00 p.m., no reply, panic! Back home at 7.00 p.m. to find three kids and babysitter standing outside with vicar who is a neighbour - further panic! Power cut for hours. Actually they had coped very well! What could go wrong next week!!'

When I asked her about this in her interview she said:

'The main thing really has been organising the family and that's been a problem and it's been a worry while I've been there [at the University], wondering if they'll all be all right.'

For a few with pre-school aged children in the young motherhood career type beginning the programme meant leaving their child for the first significant length of time. This could lead to feelings which challenged the continuity of their sense of who they were as a mother. In her diary Caroline had written several comments about the difficulties of weaning her baby off the breast and onto a bottle in order to come on the DPSN. When I spoke to her a few weeks later, during her interview, she told me she was still on maternity leave. The first time she had left her baby was the first day of the programme which she said was:

'Dreadful, it was really horrible...'

She was worried about leaving her child and concerned that she might not take a bottle. This continuation of her life outside was particularly strong and made beginning the programme difficult. One of the biggest transitions which I have experienced whilst in higher education was when I became a mother towards the end of collecting data for my PhD. I found returning to studying after having a baby extremely hard (and still find it so, though it has got easier). A month and a half after returning from maternity leave I wrote in my research diary:

'When I first returned my confidence had gone, how would I cope? My work didn't seem as important any more. I was not sure if I could do it or wanted to do it anymore [the academic work]. My mind seemed somewhere else.'

The issues associated with older motherhood (those with children between ten and twenty still living at home) were slightly different from those in young motherhood. There was more ambiguity about the demands which their children could impose. A few saw their children as more independent but others implied that they needed considerable support and could pose potentially serious demands upon them (these issues are discussed further in Chapter 8).

Rose's comments about combining motherhood and study summed up concerns about the continuities of motherhood:

'It sort of cuts you in two, you've got to be two different people, you've got to be a student and you've got to be a mother and sometimes bringing the two together is hard work.'

The continuity of wifehood

In diaries and during the participant observation little information came to light about the participants' relationships with husbands, wives or partners probably because this issue is of a personal and intimate nature. However, most of the women I interviewed did talk to me about their relationship with their husband or partner. Over a quarter who had husbands or lived with a partner spoke of effects or worries about the potential effects that being involved in education might have on their relationship. In anticipating the transition women spoke of being worried that beginning the programme might put a 'strain' on their relationship. For instance, Phyllis, said:

'I'm worried about my husband, he feels I will be leaving him behind because there'll be other people to talk to.'

As soon as I arrived at Jeanette's house to interview her she told me of how she and her husband had separated for a few months earlier because both of them were undertaking courses of education. I asked her later on, during the interview, if the problems they had been having were due to her being involved in education. She said:

'It was more due to him following his interests because he was working full-time and doing a part-time course. The whole idea was for me to go back to college and for him to help me and I was left with the housework and things like that. That's what it was all about really, feeling that I was being taken for granted, I was second class and his job was more important than mine... we split up for five months and it was the best thing we could have done.'

She told me that their separation had helped them to 'redefine' their relationship and now it was 'much more equal'. Though she was not as concerned about the effects of her forthcoming programme on her relationship, she was worried about how her husband would cope with beginning a new job and undertaking another course at the same time she began the DipSW.

Of those who spoke of effects on their relationships once they had began the programme only two of these expressed what could be conceived as more serious problems. For instance, Barbara's husband had not been enthusiastic about her taking the DipSW but she had given him the ultimatum:

'I'm going to college or we can get divorced, and I'm going to college.'

Though Barbara's husband now looked after the home and their children she told me that in the past he had not been supportive of her studying, giving the example that he would not babysit for her when she had taken an evening class a few years earlier. Their differences had led to them separating at one point. She indicated that there were continuing problems relating to her being on the DipSW, saying:

'He likes to be out a lot, my husband, and I suppose he's finding it very hard and this is study week and at the beginning of the week I was working [studying] and I think he saw I was messing about because I wasn't at college this week..... and when I came back in he was sulking. He's gone to Holland for the weekend. I think he thinks I'm laying it on a bit thick. Normally I'd rush back from college, bring the shopping in and stuff like that and for once I haven't been doing that because I don't want to take it on...'

There was a sense of a shift of power in their relationship but one which was still creating tensions. When talking about the freedom she felt she now had because of their 'swap of roles' Barbara said:

'I don't have to rush home. If I feel like going for a coffee with somebody or I meet somebody down at the shops. I've never been in a position to do that, I've never had the power to do that. My husband used to expect me to come rushing back, I could go to work but I could never go out with a friend. He could but I couldn't.'

She felt she 'had to be careful to hold onto that' though. It appeared that there was a precarious balance of power between Barbara and her husband which could give way.

Fiona, who had just got married as she began the DPSN, told me that one of the hardest things about starting the programme had been establishing new 'boundaries' with her

husband. She said her husband had wanted her to take the programme and was supportive but had not realised how much time this would take up. She said:

'He did find it hard at first because he does like a lot of my attention and we only got married in September.'

She said 'the first month [of the DPSN] was terrible', she had found it hard to study at home and that her husband was constantly interrupting her but then they had come up with the solution of using their bedroom for her to study, instead of them both being in their one living room, Fiona told me that:

'Since we've done that it's worked out wonderfully well and he respects that the bedroom's my study room...so he knows not to come in.'

Over half of the women interviewed who had a husband or partner did not perceive that beginning their programme would lead to or had led to relationship problems. Most of these spoke about their husband or partner being supportive and, in the majority of cases, this was linked to them being sympathetic towards studying or because they were in the same profession.

It appeared that there might be serious repercussions on relationships with husbands or partners because of involvement in higher education but this was only the case for a small number in the present research and there was no indication that being involved in their present programme would end relationships. Positive effects on relationships were also reported. However, it was beyond the scope of the present study to assess the long term effects of the programme on the participants' relationships. The literature suggests more serious effects on these relationships than appeared to be the case in the present study. For instance, Edwards (1993a, p. 134) reports the ending of a quarter of the mainly long term relationships for the women in her study because of their involvement in higher education. Leonard (1994) states that in a third of cases the women in her study met with considerable resistance from partners and a quarter experienced domestic violence (p. 173).

Edwards (1993a) relates the effects on relationships to power arguing that men can feel threatened in various ways by women's involvement in higher education. Women could exert power by leaving relationships or renegotiating relationships but if they were not able to do this the only option was to keep strict boundaries between education and family (pp.

104-127). There was evidence in the present study of women exerting power through being able to renegotiate their relationship, or being subjected to the power of their husband or partner. I would argue that the women in the present study were different from those in Edwards' (1993a) and Leonard's (1994) studies because they were undertaking professional as opposed to social sciences education and many were part-time as opposed to full-time and continuing in their professional area. There were also professional pressures to take their particular programme. A few husbands or partners were in similar professional areas and were sympathetic to these pressures and in similar positions themselves. The women's involvement in higher education may therefore have been easier to justify as, for many, it was not as major change of direction but a continuation of their occupational career.

The support of husbands or partners was valued by many in the present study and they said that they had this support. In the literature, however, it is suggested that the importance of gaining support from husbands/partners may be the expression of a desire rather than a reality (see Chapter 2, p. 13). This finding should therefore be viewed with caution. However, I would argue that as the relationships problems of the women in the present study appeared to be less acute than suggested in other studies the discourse of support might have been realistic.

The continuities of womanhood

In certain ways the continuities of being a women were evident in the accounts of the participants in the present study. An aspect of this was that women could be carer or support to friends and relations which could put additional demands on them. A small number of the women in their forties had continuing responsibilities of caring for elderly relatives which put additional demands upon them.

Another aspect of womanhood was related to perceptions about biological events. For instance, a few women spoke of the difficulties of deciding when to have a baby in relation to being involved in a programme of higher education. For example, Nichola who had one child (aged two) told me that she would like to have another in the near future but was unsure if she would be able to do this and continue with the DPSN. She raised questions about whether she could take a baby into the University so as to be able to continue with breastfeeding. It was being able to continue breastfeeding rather than leaving the child which was the main issue for her. Flexibility in attending lectures would help to resolve the

issue to some extent. Another example of a biological concern was expressed by Yvonne who was 46 and on Hormone Replacement Therapy. She told me that she knew from her experience HRT had eased the symptoms of the menopause. She said that if it had not for this she would find the programme more difficult to cope with.

Concerns about safety were another aspect of womanhood. Several of the DPSN participants mentioned being worried about their safety in relation to parking when attending the programme. There was nowhere within the University for them to park and as the DPSN finished after 7.00 p.m. having a well lit, close and safe parking area was an issue. There had been attacks on women in the area around the time of the study so their worries were based on an assessment of potential risks.

Being involved in professional areas and programmes which were women dominated was seen as assisting the transition. When I asked the women in the second phase interviews if they felt that anything related to being a woman had helped to ease them into their programme a small number beginning the DipSW thought that it was beneficial that issues of relevance to women were dealt with as part of the curriculum. For instance, Belinda said that sexism was covered and Jenny said:

'Generally speaking I think being a woman is something which the tutors do regard as a serious issue.'

Over a quarter on the range of programmes commented that the fact that they were entering or were in a female dominated profession made it easier. Nichola, who was on the DPSN, said:

'I suppose because it's a women's.... well this diploma anyway. In health women predominate don't they, so it's easier for them. If I was doing something like chemistry or something like engineering which is male dominated maybe you'd be a bit more... All the tutors are women aren't they... I suppose it's easier because it's nearly all female.'

Edwards (1993a), drawing upon Elshtain, argues that for women being a wife and/or mother are not roles that can easily be split off from the rest of themselves but are integrated aspects of their whole personas (p. 12). She criticises role theory for not taking into account the material and structural dimensions of women's lives and underestimating the

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importance of women's sense of who they are in these terms. The predominant 'voice' of the women in the present study was that motherhood, wifehood and womanhood were important to their continuing sense of who they were. The women's accounts of these continuities suggests that they saw themselves as strongly emotionally connected to their families. Gilligan (1982) argues that being connected and relational are part of women's psyche. However, Edwards (1993a, pp. 156-157) is sceptical about these being inherent psychological characteristics of women but argues women do draw upon these constructions of reality. For many continuity was not only in terms of their sense of who they were as wives, mothers or women but there were continued commitments and responsibilities associated with this. Certain aspects of these continuities hindered women in the transition to higher education though there were a few related issues which assisted coping.

The Continuities of Social Background and Race

Just over a third of the interview participants in the present study spoke of the effects of taking the programme on friendships and other relations. There were indications of class and race differences in the effects of being involved in education on these relationships. Those from working-class backgrounds reported more mixed reactions from friends and relations with regard to responses to them being involved in education than those who were middle-class. For those from working-class backgrounds the views of their friends and relations about them being involved in higher education ranged from being ostracised to others being proud and pleased for them. For instance, when I asked Carol, who saw herself as 'definitely' working class and 'proud of it', what her family (parents, siblings, etc.) thought about her beginning the DPSN, she said:

'They don't say much really...they always say it'll not be long before she's studying again.'

I asked her if she thought they approved and she replied:

'Yes they think it's nice. I'm the only one in the family who's studied, they're please for me...'

Rose spoke at length about the reaction of others to her being involved in education. Throughout the interview I noted that she talked frequently about being working-class, it

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seemed to be an important part of her sense of who she was. I interviewed her in her own home and observed that she lived on what I would describe as a run down working-class estate. Rose said:

'Generally I like the feeling of saying that I'm going to university... but some people say "what being a student at your age?".'

and later in the interview she said:

'Oh I've copped for it from my own family, "oh yes we're pleased for you" but they change the subject right away.'

I asked her if she felt she was seen as different from them because she was involved in education and she replied:

'Yes, in the family, yes, because they know I'm a working-class person...'

She spoke of the effect that learning could have in that it could change the way you spoke and she said that with friends who were also involved in education it was not a problem but with others she had to be more careful about what she said. She had 'lost' her best friend because of returning to education. She talked at length about the attitudes of her friends and relations to her going to university. Her father was proud of her but her mother had reacted rather like the friend she had 'lost' and it was something you did not mention. Her other relations had had similar mixed reactions. She added:

'I think you can take it that from our backgrounds because we're both [her and her husband] from working-class families where going on to university, for people our age... for our children it's more acceptable... but for people like me having to go on to a university then was more middle-class really.'

She also said:

'And on an estate like this as well, it's a very run down, very poor estate. There are one or two of them who are really pleased that you're doing something and there are some of them who think "oh God, she's so far up herself she doesn't know where she's coming from...." because many a night we get eggs thrown at the windows. In a way I feel sorry for them and I don't mean that in a patronising way...'

I was so shocked by what she said that I was not sure if I had heard her correctly, so I asked:

'Eggs thrown at your windows because of what you're doing or is it general round here?'

She replied:

'No, it's because of what we're doing' [because both her and her husband were involved in education].

I asked her if she thought it was due to others resenting her and she said:

'It could be. We once got called posh because we planted a rose bush.... I mean if you were on a private estate nobody would bat an eyelid about what you're doing but when you're on an estate like this where a lot of the children beg off from school and parents don't bother sending them to school then they think it's wrong that you should be doing something like this....'

Though Rose's account represented the extreme of those I spoke to, it highlights some of the mixed reactions which those from working-class origins experienced. Only a small number from middle or working to middle-class origins spoke about the reactions of friends and relations, and their experience was positive. The lack of comment from those from more middle-class origins could be interpreted as the reaction of others not being an issue for them.

I was involved in a DipSW 'getting to know each other' session in the first phase of the study. I joined one of the small groups of students (around six people) and they were to

discuss how they felt about beginning the programme. Two of the black women in the group appeared to be adamant that their friendships outside college would not be altered, whereas the white women in the group seemed to accept that they would. Both of the black women I interviewed said or implied that their sense of who they were as a black person was centrally important to them, more so than being a women. Women's involvement in higher education, it has been argued, can give them status and prestige (Edwards, 1993a; Pascall and Cox, 1993a) but this, Pascall and Cox (1993a, p. 88) argue, can lead to concerns about the way the 'self' is presented to people who are important and significant to them. However, Pascall and Cox fail to explore this issue or highlight that this sense of difference from significant others could be more acute for women from different social groups. This difference, Edwards (1993a) argues, can be more acute for those from other than the white middle-classes. Especially black but also white working-class women were worried that education would set them apart from their peers in an 'elitist way' (p. 141). Dicker (1992) reports mixed reactions from black women's relatives about their involvement in higher education (pp. 78-79). Breakwell (1986) states that distinctiveness can only be achieved by being willing to reject standard orthodoxies and expectations (p. 113). Therefore, by being involved in higher education working-class women, and black women in particular, risk being seen as different from those important to them. Phoenix argues that for children:

'Moving between home, school and other contexts provides children who are other than white and middle-class with contradictions which lead them to the understanding that they and their parents are outside the social construction of gender, and they are relatively powerless' (1987, p. 60).

Working-class and black women moving between home and higher education could have a similar experience which could further account for difficulties experienced in the transition to their programme.

The Continuities of and Changes from Work

Appropriate previous professional and work experience provided a degree of continuity. In the analysis of the first phase data there were indications that having been on work related courses or having a job with some responsibility had helped ease the transition. In the second phase interviews I asked a question directly about the relationships between work experience and the transition. Nearly a quarter of those interviewed said their work

experience had helped in the transition. The reasons given for this ranged from the current pressure in their profession of staying 'up to date' being helpful; the work they were doing giving them an insight into some of the issues which would be involved; having a lot of responsibility being perceived as useful; the realisation that work experience had provided relevant knowledge and skills; experience of the particular professions was seen as an advantage; to already working in an educational environment was seen as easing the transition. Conversely, a fifth of the second phase interviewees indicated that their lack of experience of the profession they were entering was a concern to them. However, the role of previous work and professional experience in providing continuity in the transition was not necessarily straightforward. A few, who were well experienced professionally, expressed considerable anxieties in relation to feeling that aspects of the programme might challenge that experience (see Chapter 8).

The majority of those involved in the present study were taking their programme part-time and also working, many full-time. The continuity of work raised various issues and concerns at and around the point of beginning the programmes. While I was a participant observer, during the first DPSN introductory seminar in the first phase of the study, the tutor said to the new students that people at work could be envious of them coming to the University and that this was something that they might have to deal with. One of the students said:

'But you can feel guilty if it is busy at work and you are coming away to college.'

A fifth of the interview participants mentioned this aspect of the continuities of work and people treating them differently or not fully understanding what they were doing. The main issue associated with the continuity of work, however, was in terms of the demands which combining it with education imposed (see Chapter 8).

Issues of the difficulties of adjusting to the educational environment as opposed to the work situation were mentioned. For instance, one woman wrote in her diary:

'Having worked shifts or evenings for the last eight years I am finding it hard and very tiring to actually have to get up each morning and get my act together to come to college.'

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The change of pace from work to study was particularly an issue amongst the DPSN students. In the phase two diaries a fifth of those who completed them made very similar comments to this:

'Find slower pace at college hard to get used to and have guilt pangs about the long breaks having been used to rushing around.'

The continuities of being a person used to a particular working environment could therefore be experienced as being disrupted by the new educational setting.

The Continuities of Adulthood

Certain aspects of the University's procedures did not consider mature students needs. One example was the Freshers' Conference and Fayre. The Conference involved several talks, including one by a senior member of the institution and others by various members of the Students' Union Executive. Freshers' Fayre was an event where stalls were set up to advertise and recruit to the various student societies. Only the social work students attended these as part of their induction. Comments recorded in the diaries and others made during the participant observation about these sessions were overwhelmingly negative. The majority of these comments were related to the Conference not addressing issues of relevance to mature students; it being more focused on the traditional student population. As one person put it:

'Freshers conference aimed at 18 year olds, found some bits quite insulting.'

The Fayre was mainly considered to not be relevant because, as mature students, they would not be joining any of the societies as they did not live locally or did not have the time because of other commitments.

There were incidents which indicated that the new students did not have the amount of control which they would have liked or were used to. For instance, the University's registration procedure involved centralised enrolment. This usually meant that students had to queue for a long period of time which was reported to be a particularly negative experience. For instance, in the first phase of the study over four fifths of the DipSW students who completed the diaries wrote comments which indicated that they found registration time consuming and frustrating. For example, one wrote:

'As useful as it was the afternoon was awful. Registration took forever - stood in queue for ages.'

The new students found what could be conceived as the uncontrollable aspects of their environment, such as heat, difficult. For instance, having control over being able to make a drink was raised as an issue. This was illustrated by a series of events which occurred in relation to the new students on the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE) programmes in the first phase of the study. Early on it was brought to the tutor's attention by Katie that she wanted to be able to make a hot drink when she arrived at the University and having facilities to do this was particularly important to her. The tutor said that he was prepared to arrange this despite the School's regulations on not eating or drinking in classrooms. There was a notice placed on the doors of all classrooms in the building which was endorsed by the Dean, it read:

'Please note that eating, drinking and smoking in classrooms is against the School's Health and Safety Policy and must not be broken. [sic]'

The tutor entered into negations with the Dean about students on health studies programmes being allowed to eat and drink in classrooms. Previously the Dean had indicated that the no eating/drinking policy had been enforced because some students had been leaving the classrooms in an untidy state. In a memorandum to the Dean the tutor stated that:

'All our students are mature professionals and I'm sure would respond to requests to keep their rooms clean of cups, food, etc.'

Special dispensation for the students 'to be allowed to eat/drink in class' was requested. This memorandum, together with the Dean's reply, was posted on the HPE noticeboard. The Dean's reply read:

'The School's Health and Safety policy is clear in that there shall be no eating/drinking and smoking in non designated areas. I therefore cannot make exceptions to the rules. If students' activities are not brought to my attention, I will be unaware of rules being broken!'

In my interview with Lola I told her about the issues of not being able to make your own drinks which the HPE students had raised the previous year and she said:

'That's something you can do in the work setting.'

A further related issue was that of smoking. The School had a no-smoking policy but one part of the Students' Common Room was designated for smoking. This was suddenly withdrawn because the room was needed for another purpose, leaving nowhere in the building for students to smoke. When I asked Lola in her interview if anything the staff or college had done had made the transition to the University worse, she said:

'Yes. No-smoking in the whole building.... I think it's disgraceful, there's nowhere.'

She talked about people smoking in a corridor instead; actually standing in front of the 'no-smoking' signs there. She said of this:

'I mean at least it gives people an area. That's what happens doesn't it people start acting like children. Whatever's taken away from them they start acting like children.'

Many of the new students who drove to the University, especially initially, spoke of concerns about finding somewhere to park. As the University was a town centre campus parking close by was difficult and expensive. These issues clearly raised strong emotions which could be linked to the sense of continuity of these students as 'mature' and 'professional' people.

During the second phase interviews a small number of women reported particularly disturbing and upsetting incidents involving male University personnel which challenged their sense of who they were as an adult and were potentially sexist in nature. Two of the incidents involved seeking help from the University's computing services and the other was to do with gaining support from a personal tutor (I have not used their pseudonyms to further protect anonymity). During her interview I asked one woman if she had found anything difficult about the transition to the programme and after it had been clarified that I meant anything at all, she said:

'Oh I had an awful time on Friday.'

She had been directed to computer services for advice. She arrived just after it had closed but had not realised this and it was one of the few times she had available as she was only at the University on Fridays and lived over 20 miles away. She said:

'This extremely rude man...was very abrupt with me and I wasn't sure if I was in the right place, I was trying to be ever so diplomatic and explain what I wanted and he was just very curt which put my back up to begin with and then he sort of said to me, again very curtly, that it shut at four o'clock and I was just about to say to him what was an appropriate time to come back and he actually grabbed me by the arm and.... I went absolutely wild.... the feeling as if you're like a school child who's in the headmaster's office because you've done something. I just went wild and told him he was a rude and arrogant man and how dare he come in like that... I just went mad. I felt so frustrated, I was venting my anger at him and he was just walking away.... I suddenly wished I'd asked for his name.... and things like that are actually very upsetting because at 31, or any age for that matter, you don't expect... it's a long time since anybody treated me like that. I was shocked and really quite upset, I had to control myself from bursting into tears and making a fool of myself but it was so unexpected.... so people like that make it difficult but that's the only thing I've found....'

This incident appeared to leave her feeling powerless. I could tell she was extremely upset because as she related it I noticed that red patches appeared on her neck. Later in the interview I asked her whether she thought that being a woman had had any effect on her transition to the programme. She said:

'That thing on Friday, [a fellow student] seemed to think that it was probably a sexist thing... in the way that he dealt with it... if I had been a man he might have got hold of my arm and dragged me in and I don't think he probably would....'

She then went on to talk about women not always being assertive enough which indicated to me that, in some ways, she blamed herself for not doing more in the situation which she had described. Another woman related a similar incident to do with seeking advice from computing services. The man she had spoken to talked to her as if she was an 'idiot' and she said she 'found him totally ignorant'.

During my interview with another woman she told me that she felt she was having problems with her personal tutor. When she approached him about a particular issue she said she found him to be 'mocking' and that 'he looked at me as if I was dirt'. She also found him to be not particularly sympathetic to the demands of her life outside the University as she related that he had commented that:

> *'Lots of other women do it.... haven't you talked to other students on the course who are single parents and have to do it all by themselves?'*

and she then told me:

> *'And I was thinking "I have been there" but I didn't say anything... but I was thinking don't tell me about women's problems.'*

This woman felt that having this man as a personal tutor was 'not going to work' and that she wanted to ask for a female tutor. She had lost confidence in him commenting that:

> *'I'm not going to go in there and say anything to him now...'*

These women were treated in such a way as to be discontinuous with their sense of who they were. One incident appeared to amount to discrimination on the grounds of gender and another related to a lack of understanding of the importance of issues associated with the continuity of commitments and demands for mature woman students. These incidents could be seen as representing how male power over women is subtly exerted within the context of higher education. It could not be said in this case that the institution of higher education, as suggested in the literature, was a unified patriarchal structure (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Karach, 1992; Roberts 1994; Sperling 1991; Thompson, 1983; Wisker, 1988), as aspects of it were reported to be particularly 'women friendly'. However, these incidents suggest that male power within the institution was evident. It is not women who need assertiveness training in order to deal with this, as Trudy suggested, but wider attitudes and practices towards women which need to change and this needs to be part of the institution's policy. Aitken et al. (1995) argue that assertiveness training for women implies that they should accommodate their environment without the assumptions and practices operating within that environment being challenged (p. 7).

Continuity as a Learner

Four fifths of those interviewed in the first phase had had curtailed experiences of initial education which they described in terms of 'struggling', not doing well, not liking, rebelling against or not having the opportunities at school. Despite this most of those interviewed overall had studied and gained further qualifications more recently. All the participants in the first phase interviews said that they expected a mixture of teaching and learning methods on their programme and appeared to have a realistic view of what would be involved. They realised they would have to take responsibility for their learning. Weil (1988) similarly notes that the non-traditional students in her study, prior to entering higher education, had participated in education which introduced them to 'new conceptions of learning'. These students' more recent experience appeared to have improved their self-esteem as learners and for some encouraged their beliefs in their abilities as a learner (pp. 28-29). Commonly, in the present study, participants reported that their previous educational experience had been helpful in assisting the transition to the programme (for example, a third of the first phase interviewees said that they felt prepared for the new programme because of their recent educational experience and three quarters of the second phase interview participants said it was helpful). For instance, Gail had done various courses since her initial nurse training, including one at a polytechnic. She said of this:

'....and that was awful because it was so different from the type of education that I'd been used to in the past. I found it really hard at first but then things have gone that way, it's more of self-directed anyway so that things I have done since then, I did a Management Certificate, and it was much more self-directed so... I was used to sitting in the classroom being talked to most of them aren't like that now.'

She had found it difficult to get used to this 'different' style of teaching initially but she had got used to it and concluded:

'I mean if I'd come to the diploma and not done anything else I think I would have found it quite difficult.'

A few did feel ill at ease with these 'new' approaches to teaching and learning and found the more traditional methods 'comforting'. As Kay put it:

'There seems a lot of help there if you actually need it, although I think it's hard getting used to the fact that you've got to go for that help because when you were at school, when I did my nurse training, you were told what to do... but it's very much if you want help you go for it, so I think that's a hard idea to get used to.'

A small number of new students indicated that they preferred to find out information independently; for instance, they appreciated the suggested self-directed tour of the Library but many felt they would have preferred to have been shown around the Library initially.

The link between participants' educational experience and how this assisted them to settle into the new programme was, however, complex and there were contradictions. A small number indicated that despite having recent educational experience, even at a similar level, they were still worried. Conversely others without recent educational experience were not particularly concerned (see Chapter 8). On the whole, though, previous recent educational experience provided a degree of continuity which assisted the transition to the programme.

Seminars, tutorials and small group work were seen as a preferable way of learning and gaining support, being better for discussion and the ability to make a contribution. For instance, I noted in participant observation fieldnotes that there was a lot of discussion in the smaller group sessions and that students appeared to enjoy the interactive style of these. This was confirmed by students' comments in the diaries on these sessions. They were overwhelmingly positive. Leonard (1994) similarly notes that the mature women students in her study found tutorials manageable and enjoyable as there was opportunity for discussion (p. 169). Edwards (1993a, p. 84) states that, in her study of mature women students, the women, though lacking in confidence in their ability in certain educational situations, were not lacking in confidence in seminars. This suggests that this is one area where mature women students feel confident and which meets their needs as learners.

Certain lectures, on the other hand, were seen as 'regimented' or 'boring'. Concerns about not understanding what was said and about having little opportunity to make a contribution were expressed. It was important to participants that they 'see the relevance' of the topic of the lecture to professional practice and were able to build on existing knowledge and experience. The time of day was an issue. On the DPSN the physiology lecture was at the end of the day in the evening and many students commented that having a 'heavy going' lecture at this time was difficult to cope with. The approach of the tutors was also seen as important with positive comments made about tutors who 'spoke' to them in a such a way

that showed they were interested in their perspective and enthusiastic about what they were teaching.

The programmes involved in the study put considerable emphasis on using students' previous professional knowledge and experience. Additionally, on the DipSW, students' personal and private world knowledge was extensively drawn upon. This can been seen as reflecting, in part, what is described as the evolving post-technocratic model of professional education which aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Bines and Watson, 1992, pp. 14-17). Many of the participants commented positively about being able to relate their previous professional and personal experience in the educational environment. For instance, one of the new DipSW students told me during the participant observation that she was 'glad' the programme made use of previous experience. She had been concerned that it might not do and thought it would be 'boring' if it started from 'scratch'. Discontinuity was experienced in certain ways by a significant proportion of the participants, however. For instance, the Core Values in Social Work module, the first module to be undertaken by the new students, aimed to explore the students' own values. Though many welcomed the opportunity to do this, a few found it particularly challenging. It raised difficult personal issues for them (see Chapter 9). In addition, many others were concerned about not having the appropriate professional or life experience required in some of the exercises. For example, Jenny, who lived on her own and did not have children, told me that she felt it was quite difficult for those without children because many of the exercises on the DipSW explored the students' experiences of family life.

Nearly half of the DipSW students interviewed after they had begun their programme reported being disappointed in the lack of discussion, debate and exploration of certain topics which they felt were relevant to social work and their own experience. Judy in particular spoke at length about this in her interview. She felt that certain aspects were too theoretical and the students had a wealth of experience which was not drawn upon. Judy was black and used the example of what she felt to be the inadequate coverage of the issue of racism in the Core Values module. She said:

'I just don't think you can approach a subject such as racism under a heading of racism in a theoretical way.'

Judy was concerned that expectations of the programme which were raised in the course handbook had not been met. This was in terms of the amount of time and discussion spent

on what she saw as issues of relevance to social workers. She described it as 'tokenism'; issues being dealt with but not in enough 'depth'. Edwards (1993a) notes that the images and discourse of higher education apparently welcome life experience but the reality can be different and integration of personal experience not possible (pp. 82, 102). To the credit of social work educators, in order to address some of the weaknesses and criticisms of social work education raised from the late 1970s onwards, the need for a three year programme was emphasised by them in the mid 1980s. However, this proposal was rejected by the government. The planned programmes thus had to be delivered in two rather than three years which could account for brief coverage of some issues. Nevertheless, this indicates that a few of the students in this study did not feel there was adequate time for discussion of issues relevant to them, based on their previous experience.

Weil (1988, pp. 27-28) reports that a recurring theme for the non-traditional students in her study was that they wanted the boundaries between life and academia to be more permeable. Many of the women in the present study did not appear to suffer the kind of discontinuity between their 'ways of knowing' and the 'separate' knowledge of the institution which is reported in the literature on mature women students entering formal educational settings (see, for instance, Belenky, et al. 1986; Edwards, 1990a & 1993a; Karach, 1992). This could have been due to their personal and professional knowledge being admissible on the programmes in which they were involved. These programmes made use of what has been described as 'women's ways of knowing'. They valued connected procedural knowledge, where subject and object are linked (Belenky, et al., 1986, pp. 112-123) and constructed knowledge, where knowledge which is intuitively important is integrated with knowledge from others (ibid., pp. 131-152). The problem for a few was that they did not have the kind of personal or professional knowledge which was drawn upon in the programmes or found it too threatening to explore their personal knowledge.

Familiarity with the University, people, the town or a particular subject was seen as helpful by many of the participants in allaying anxieties about beginning their particular professional programme. For instance Belinda told me, on the first day of the DipSW, that she had undertaken her degree within the School a few years earlier so she knew 'where things were'. She said she found this helpful and that it was also 'nice' to see some familiar faces. A few weeks later I interviewed Belinda and she talked about this further. I asked her if anything had helped to ease her into beginning the programme she replied:

'I think knowing what to expect. Initially I wasn't too bothered because I knew that I knew the layout and I knew where I was going to go to lectures. It seemed a lot less daunting really.'

Others who had some degree of familiarity said that this had been helpful and comments from those who were not familiar substantiated that familiarity was helpful. One group of students on the DPSN had attended the ENB870 research programme at the University the previous year. Their comments in the diaries indicated that most of them felt that this familiarity helped them to settle in. For instance, there were several comments similar to this one:

'Having undertaken the ENB870 I was familiar with most of the "domestic" arrangements.'

Familiarity, however, could create certain expectations, the reality of a new programme being discontinuous with these. For instance, the ENB870 students had been used to being in a relatively small group previously and two thirds of them found the size of the new, much larger group a surprise and overwhelming initially. Other comparisons were also made and in some cases negatively evaluated against their experience at the University the previous year. In reply to the diary question 'Do you feel prepared for your course?', one person summed up this ambivalence about being familiar by writing:

'Not sure really, thought I would have been with undertaking the ENB870 last year; but the style, presentation and work load demands appear very different.'

Because of their previous educational experience students therefore experienced beginning the new programme as a threat to the identity 'principle' of continuity. Weil (1988, p. 29) argues that non-traditional students entering traditional higher education can experience significant disjunction because their more recent experience of education has contributed to particular expectations about what higher education might involve.

A Changing Sense of Self

In a classic study of the socialisation of medical students, Becker, et al. (1961) demonstrated how being involved in this kind of professional training could strongly affect changes in identity. A few participants in the present study recognised that change in this way was possible, some welcoming it but others were worried that the new programme might change aspects of themselves which they wished to retain. A few throughout the study spoke of how the programme, or education more generally, had changed them and was changing them. They spoke of becoming more critical and confident to question, questioning both themselves and their practice. There was, however, a worry expressed by a few that it might change them in a way they might not desire. For instance, Judy was clear that coming to the University would not change her way of working professionally. She said:

'I don't intend to allow college to affect anything that I was doing before.'

She said she was open to 'being convinced' that there were other ways of doing things but that she did not expect the programme to change her own professional standards.

Another aspect of change was the degree of change which being involved in the programme created. Based on the literature I had originally conceptualised beginning the programme in terms of a relatively major life transition for the women in the present study (see Chapter 3). Much of the literature on mature women students is based on women taking full-time degree programmes or returning to education. These kinds of mature women students appear to be making major changes in their lives (see, for instance Edwards, 1993a; Pascall and Cox, 1993a). Throughout this study, however, I got the impression that many of the women involved in these particular professional programmes did not fit this picture. Most were on part-time programmes and continuing in the same profession. Even those who appeared to be making relatively major changes, in that they were changing their career, did not always see it in this way. Conversely, others who apparently were making more minor changes could perceive embarking of the programme as a major change for them. The objective criteria for categorising the participants as being new to, or continuing in, their profession (see Chapter 5) did not necessarily relate to the participants' subjective conception of the degree of change involved. For instance, Trudy was taking the HPE part-time but this represented a change of career for her and I had categorised her as being new to teaching in the health care area but she said:

'It's not a huge change. I think in the last couple of years I've had such major life changes. When you think about the changes you have in your life. Things are far more stressful, like buying a house and deciding to live with somebody and then having a baby, than going to college to do a course. Although, as I said, the stress is combining everything, it is hard work.'

On the other hand Sarah was taking the same programme and had been a nurse teacher for three years and said that taking the course had been 'quite a big change'. I asked her in what sort of way and she replied:

'It's changed my working week. I didn't used to work on a Friday. I used to work at the beginning of the week.'

This involved changing the nursery arrangements for one of her children and she also said her husband had been used to her being at home on a Friday. It was her day for doing many of the domestic chores. This meant that there was not as much time at weekends to spend with the family. The main issue was that it had altered her routine in a major way. The degree of change for many of the women appeared to be related to how they would fit the demands of study in with their families and busy lives outside the University. A few who were new to their particular profession perceived embarking on the programme as a major change but clearly this was not felt by all. Continuities, such as family and work, could be more important in considering the degree of change involved. It cannot therefore necessarily be assumed that newness to a profession is the most important aspect in the degree of change experienced. Conversely, a tutor on the DPSN thought my conceptualisation of the study as a transition was strange as she thought that for the students beginning the DPSN, and particularly those who had previously taken the ENB870 research course at the University, the programme was part of their continuing professional development and therefore not a transition as such. However, many did see beginning the DPSN as a relatively major change. The term 'transition' can therefore only be used in a loose sense to indicate that the participants were beginning a programme which could potentially challenge continuity.

Conclusions

Continuity for the women in the present study is a major theme. Continuity in their sense of who they were as mothers, wives/partners and women and the continuing responsibilities associated with these; of race; social class; from their professional background; as adults; and as learners. In Breakwell's (1986) theory the content and value dimensions of identity relate to the way in which people define themselves. These are organised in terms of relative importance of aspects of identity to the person (pp. 12-20). Gecas and Mortimer (1987) conceptualise continuity in identity as the individual's biographical self and the configuration and sequence of experiences over time (p. 267). Breakwell (1986, p. 24) argues that people like continuity between past and present self-concepts over time and situation. Edwards has emphasised that being a mother, wife or student are more than merely doing these things but are 'core' identities (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 11-12). These theories support the centrality of the continuing aspects of the women's sense of who they were. However, the women in the present study had continuity whether they liked it or not in terms of continuing demands, responsibilities and relationships which relate to social structural demands associated with being a woman. It is this element of continuity which is absent in many of the psychological theories of transition (including Breakwell's theory) but which is particularly pertinent to women. The transition to programmes of higher education can disrupt the continuities of women's lives. The key issues are the recognition of these continuities and the need for institutional practices to meet and be sensitive to them.

In this chapter I have shown how objective characteristics of students and career types identified in Chapter 5 are experienced as important continuities which assist or impede coping with the transition to professional programmes of higher education; these being experienced as disjunction or integration (Weil, 1988). The subjective experience of these continuities is outlined further in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER 8

CAN I DO IT?

Concerns relating to ability to undertake a programme of professional higher education were frequently expressed by the participants in the present study. The main questions asked were - 'How am I going to fit it in with everything else I have to do?' 'Am I up to it in terms of academic or professional ability?' 'Can I afford to do it?' In this chapter I outline the concerns (and lack of concern) the participants expressed about their ability to manage the demands of study, together, for most, with the demands of family and work. These are linked to the theoretical concept of 'greedy institutions'. I then discuss their anxieties about academic and professional ability and link these to individual's interpretive frameworks which are based on their social, educational and professional background. Finally, I discuss the concerns about financial constraints which are linked to social inequalities. I conclude that though concerns about ability to manage are experienced psychologically they arise from continuities of the social context.

Can I Fit It All In?

In Chapter 6 I established that most (but not all) of the women in this study were enthusiastic about being involved in education and that their occupational career was important to them. It was also indicated, and is supported in the literature on mature women students (see, for example, Edwards, 1993a, p. 56; Pascall and Cox, 1993a, pp. 56-58), that children and family life are generally important to women. On the whole the women in the present study chose to be involved in the institutions of education, family and a professional occupation. A major concern expressed by the women in the present study was, however, how they would manage the demands of each of these. Anxiety about managing these aspects was expressed in the terminology which the participants frequently used, such as 'juggling', 'spinning plates', having to 'balance everything', having to 'divide' yourself between these aspects. For instance, in her interview, Sarah, who had just begun the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education programme (HPE), said that her main concern was how she would fit the demands of the programme into her already busy life. She had two young children, worked three days a week, was doing another course and had to travel a considerable distance to get to the University. She found the combination of these factors, together with taking an intense programme such as

the HPE, difficult. When I asked her if there was anything she was particularly anxious or concerned about at the beginning of the HPE programme she said:

'I was anxious about fitting it all in.... I was really anxious before I started, thinking "how am I going to fit this in?" It wasn't the work, it was just the fact that, would I have the time to fit in the work that was required?'

This reflected a concern about 'fitting it all in' expressed, to varying degrees, by many (but not all) of the participants at and around the point of beginning their programme. For a small number, like Sarah, this concern was paramount[1]. Most of the women led busy and demanding lives outside the University, having continuing responsibilities and commitments to their families and/or work. This, together with the demands of their particular programme, could lead to concerns about how they would 'fit it all in.'

'Balancing' the demands of education with domestic responsibilities

In Chapter 7 I established that demands from the private sphere were a continuing responsibility for the majority of the women in the present study. The continuities of the private domain were not only in terms of concrete duties and responsibilities but also in terms of continuities in the sense of who they were as a wife and/or mother. In the second phase interviews I asked women directly if they thought that being a woman had made beginning the programme easier or more difficult in any way. Nearly half said that they felt that being a woman created extra demands which they felt men did not have. Evelyn who had three children aged eight, nine and sixteen, said she thought that:

'Men perhaps haven't got the pressures of home like the washing and ironing or do a lot with the children, my husband does do a lot with the children, that's the women's role if you like, traditionally it's the woman's role, wash, iron and feed them.... My husband does tend to work long hours.... I do worry about... when the children are poorly, it's mum who's got to give up something, dad doesn't come home from work.'

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[1] In feedback I received from Sarah after sending her an early draft of the findings chapters (see Chapter 4) she said she recognised herself as the anxious Sarah in this chapter. It accurately reflected her experience at the time. Her hightened anxiety was a result of having to complete two courses at the same time in addition to domestic responsibilities. After successfully completing both courses she wrote 'life is so different' and 'was I really so anxious?'

A quarter of the women interviewed indicated that they did not find what they saw as potential demands for women a problem. This, they said, was due to having support from their families and/or husband or partner. For instance, Aileen who had two children, one of ten and one of fourteen, told me that her home situation made it easier for her. She said:

'I think I get more support than he [her husband] gets really. We both go out to work but he's the one who gets the children off in the morning... housewife role really... but when I come in from work. I finish on an early shift which is half past three, so I come in and I make the tea, so it's 50/50 really. I do count myself really lucky, if I didn't have that side of it, it would be really difficult.'

It occurred to me that those who had this sort of support found it easier and I put this to Aileen and she agreed. For a few, by virtue of the kind of relationship they had with their husband or partner, the demands of the private sphere were not excessive.

It was interesting to note that when I asked the question about whether the participants felt that any of the difficulties which they had encountered were related to them being a woman, most referred to 'women's work' in the private sphere as creating demands. They were drawing on the dominant ideological representation of the private domain and the social reality of the concrete demands which they recognised this could mean for women, whether it did or did not in their own individual situation.

Nearly all of those who spoke of such demands in the second phase interviews fell into one of the two motherhood career types (that is, with children still living at home), accounting for nearly all those in this phase interviewed in the motherhood career types. This implied that the demands of the private sphere were mainly associated with having children. Trudy's comments sum up the common worries about having children and taking a programme of education.

'My anxieties don't stem from the course as much as my homelife... it's the same old things that everybody with children complains about, it's just finding the time and it's thinking are you doing the right thing, who's going to suffer while you do it?'

Nearly all those in the young motherhood career type (a woman with children under ten, usually with at least one pre-school age child) commented about being concerned about

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having time to study because of the demands of young children. Just over a quarter of these said this was their main concern on beginning the programme. For example, Mary was a single parent and travelled a long distance (over 20 miles) to the University. She had to get her three young children ready in the morning and then take them to her mother's house before catching a bus then the train to Huddersfield. She said the difficult thing about this was 'time management', elaborating that:

'Before I can really get myself sorted out in a morning I've got to get the children sorted out, get them washed, get two of them ready for school, one of them ready to go to my mother... so once I've got the basics sorted out for them I can concentrate on myself....'

She told me she had to get up at six o'clock in order to get them ready to leave the house. When I asked her if there was anything else which had made beginning the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) difficult she replied:

'Apart from getting the train and organising the children, my main worry is the children.'

One exception was Claire who I spoke to before she began the DipSW. She was giving up a particularly demanding job which involved working long hours and unsociable shifts. For her beginning the DipSW meant that she would be able to spend more time with her young child and husband.

It might be assumed that because children are older they are more independent and therefore less demanding than younger children and many in the older motherhood career type (a woman usually with teenagers still living at home) thought the fact that their children were more independent would make studying easier. For instance, Denise who had a 13 year old child said that he did still 'need' her:

'but having said that he doesn't demand as much attention as a two or three year old would.'

However, over a third interviewed in the older motherhood career type expressed concerns about their children, some saying that they were more demanding now than they were younger. For instance, Yvonne, who had three teenage children, spoke to me about the

possibility that she might take a degree after she had completed the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN) but she had her reservations. She said:

'In fact it's very hard to think about working towards a degree as a mature student insofar as people will often say, "I've got young children, I couldn't possibly do that", and I would say to them "I've got teenagers and believe me I wish I'd done it when the children were young". You can put them to bed, because at midnight now I'm writing assignments, I'm worrying about where my daughters are, whereas children are just tucked up in bed.'

During the participant observation several other women also spoke of the demands of older children. I mentioned to Yvonne that other women had also said that they felt that their children could be more demanding when they are older and she replied:

'More so. All the time, it's a total thing.... you can't switch off with older children. You can't switch off...'

Whether or not the demands of older children are greater than those of younger children or people simply forget how demanding young children can be, there was evidence that older children could impose intense demands at specific times. For instance, one of Gwen's three teenage children had had serious mental health problems which coincided with her beginning the DipSW. She said:

'It has reverted to a much more demanding situation than when they were younger.'

A few women also spoke of their older children taking important qualifications at school and therefore needing their help and support, which put additional demands on their time. The comments of Annie (who had a 20 year old son) indicated that demands of older children can change over time; she said:

'When I was doing my first degree, to quote him [her son], he was going through an awkward phase... He still resembles a yeti and we still have a very turbulent relationship but if anything he's fairly supportive now.'

She said he was not demanding now and, in fact, helped her 'in his own way'. Annie's comments suggest that the demands older children can create are in a state of flux but have

the potential to impose an enormous strain. The demands of younger children, however, were seen as more constant. In a study of nurses and midwives undertaking the DPSN in another institution Dewar et al. (1995, p. 4) tentatively suggest that one of the main factors associated with being less successful on the programme was having teenage children. For most women with children in the present study there was the sense of, as Gwen put it, 'if you have children their needs always come first'.

The demands which having children can impose on mature women students was further highlighted by the fact that the vast majority of those who were in the young or older womanhood career types said that because they did not have the responsibility for children they felt meeting the demands of studying would be easier than for those who did. For example, Pam, whose children had left home, told me that because they were not living with her she had the time to study.

A small number of women made comparisons between studying in the past without children and beginning their programme now that they had children. For instance, Jackie, who I interviewed just after she began the DPSN, had three children under ten and said:

'I didn't realise how difficult it would be [returning to study], I think because when I did it last time I was on my own, I had no kids, I had no house or anything... It's terrible trying to find the time to do things now.'

As I became a mother for the first time while I was carrying out the present research I could empathise with the concerns of these women. On my first day back at work after maternity leave I wrote in my research diary:

'Officially back! Found quite hard in some ways because not enough sleep but also getting brain back into thinking - the theoretical and more difficult aspects are really difficult to get into again.'

Establishing a suitable environment in which to study was a problem for me initially, my office at the University was in turmoil as the annual summer maintenance was underway and studying at home was not the same peaceful environment it had been before. It took me at least five months to get back to feeling I was coping adequately with studying again (and being a mother). I still find it different and more difficult than before but have found ways of dealing with the demands of each, though this does not always work. Trudy (whose

child was 17 months old when I interviewed her a few weeks into the HPE programme) said that having a baby 'scrambles your brain'. Just before she began the programme she similarly noted the difficulties of going back to work after having a year off for maternity leave. She said it took her a while to get back into work and 'feel myself again'.

In reflecting on my own experience of becoming a mother and returning to higher education one of the most difficult aspects initially (and one which I still to some extent find difficult) was moving between what Edwards (1993a, pp. 80-81) describes as the 'local and particular'; the unstructuredness of looking after a small child and concerns of the home, and the 'conceptually ordered'; the intellectual thinking. These ongoing tensions and demands of being a mother and studying have been reported in other studies (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994) and are even reported by well established academic women who have become mothers (see, for example, Land, 1989). Though I was having to deal with the continuities of studying after becoming a mother, my situation was not that dissimilar to the women with children in my study, especially those with young children. These women were dealing with the continuities of motherhood as they became a student. My experience and the accounts of the women in the present study suggests that though the demands of combining motherhood and study are continuous, they are more extreme when one or other is new.

The women with responsibility for children, particularly those in the younger motherhood career type spoke of the problems of finding time and space to study, both in physical and emotional terms. Nearly all of those interviewed in the younger womanhood career type said this was a problem, whereas considerably fewer in older motherhood saw this as an issue. Caroline, who had two children aged three years and six months and was still on maternity leave when I interviewed her, told me she could only work at weekends when someone else looked after her children. She had had to adjust to doing her academic work at the last minute whereas before she had children she had been able to 'do a little bit every night.' She said, about having time when her children were not around:

'Then I can sit down and do it that day. Nobody's going to come and take my pen or my book or shove my paper around.'

I said I was going to ask her about this because she had written in her diary that she found it difficult studying at home with a baby and she replied:

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'Little hands coming across the table and somebody else wants feeding...you can't say "no I doing [college work]"... you can't push your children to one side.'

Similarly, in my experience I have found it virtually impossible to do any academic work if I am in the same room as my young child.

Gail who had two young children (aged three and seven), in anticipation of beginning the DPSN, said that she had not found finding time to study too difficult on a recent course. Her children both went to bed reasonably early and she said:

'The oldest one is in bed for eight at the latest so there's plenty of time. My husband works a week of days and a week of nights, so that works out quite well because I tend to do everything when he's on a late week because I don't see much of him anyway, so when I'm on earlys I can't sit working all the time. In the past it's worked out quite well and if I'm off during the day now, you see they're at school everyday so it gives me a bit more time.... and the other thing is I'm the boss here [the ward of the hospital in which she worked], I can work my duty how I want it. I don't see that as being a big problem.'

Gail was the exception in terms of feeling she was able to find enough time and space to study in the young motherhood career type but she still had to fit her study in around the demand of her family and work and it was having enough time and space in which to study which had made it easier for her.

Those with older children reported finding time and space as less of a problem but, for a few, it could still create similar difficulties. For instance, Yvonne who had three teenage children told me that she wished she was off work when nobody knew she was so that she could have time to study. As well as her children a lot of other people (relations and friends) made demands on her time. She had been off sick from work for a couple of days the previous week and managed to complete her assignment because nobody had known that she was at home. She only had the dining table available to work on at home which was a constraint because there were constant interruptions. She sometimes read in the bath because that was the only place that was 'private'. Several women, in both motherhood career types, spoke of having to study late at night or early in the morning in order to get some time to themselves to study.

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Despite the recognition by those in the young and older womanhood career types (those with no or few responsibilities for children) that they were 'lucky' they did not have the demands of children as well as studying, concerns were still expressed about 'fitting it all in'. Over a quarter in the womanhood career types spoke of the demands of running a home. For instance, Fiona said:

'I think it's stressful trying to balance work, coming to university and your homelife.'

She felt she had had no 'personal space' since she had began the DPSN, saying that her work, husband, family (parents and other relatives) 'demanded something' of her and then there was 'always the housework'. Most who expressed concerns were in young womanhood and recently married and possibly there was an issue that beginning the programme coinciding with establishing new domestic arrangements and a relationship with their husband.

A small number of women in the womanhood career types spoke of the difficulties of having time and space away from their husbands. For different reasons these women's husbands were at home for most of the time. For instance, Fiona spoke of the difficulties she had when she first began the DPSN of trying to study in her living room. Her husband had had an accident and was off work and often wanted to watch the television in there. Her studying in the same room was a distraction for both of them. She had therefore had to make their bedroom into a study and this arrangement was now working well.

Issues of establishing space and a place to study were therefore particularly to the fore for many of the women, but especially for those in young motherhood in the transition to their programme.

The care of an elderly relative or friend was the responsibility of a small number in the study and this created extra demands on their time. For instance, a woman beginning the DipSW wrote in her diary:

'Could not attend session today, had to accompany father on out-patients appointment, feel a little panicky that aged parents may need more help over the next couple of years and the implications of that to giving the best to the course.'

The women who expressed concerns about caring for ageing relatives were nearly all in the older motherhood career type. It is likely that this kind of responsibility is one which falls to women as they get older therefore it could also apply to those in the older womanhood career type. As Yvonne put it, if you take a course when you are older there is a greater possibility of looking after an elderly relative.

In general terms Drew and Paradice (1995) argue that women commonly report a lack of personal time, particularly if they have families (p. 29). Edwards (1993a) reports that women are regarded and regard themselves as responsible for their children and often for their relationship with their husband (p. 67). A common finding in the present research was a lack of what was considered to be personal time and space which would enable studying. It is argued that men dominate in both the public and private domains, explicitly in the public and more implicitly but not less powerfully in the private (Hearn & Parkin, 1987). In the private domain this is implicit for many women because they expect and are expected to take responsibility for children, domestic arrangements and relationships. This can partly explain why women experience problems of finding space and time within the private domain.

The specific demands of beginning the programme

In the initial transition to their programme participants commonly expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by new information and the environment and many reported being tired (this was especially evident in the diaries kept by participants over their induction period). However, obtaining a certain amount of clear but detailed information was important. For instance, on the third day of the social work induction week, over a period of nearly two hours, the first year modules were introduced by different members of the teaching staff. In the diaries for both phases of the study there were approximately twice as many positive to negative comments about this session. The positive comments mainly related to finding out more detailed information about the programme but the negative indicated that many found there was too much information to take in. The feeling of being initially overwhelmed was also related to issues associated with being introduced to the Library and the Information Technology there as well as getting bearings about the geography of the University campus and travelling to it.

There were physiological indications which were potentially related to the initial (and ongoing) pressures of coping with the demands of education and other outside demands,

such as illnesses, for instance colds, accidents, reports of being tired and in an extreme case one man died of a heart attack after his induction week.

A comparison between the DipSW and the HPE induction procedures revealed differences in the initial demands of these programmes. In both phases of the study by the end of the full and 'jammed packed' induction week of the DipSW though many felt positive about their introduction overall, almost as many felt negative and these comments mainly related to being tired and overwhelmed by the amount they had had to take in. Not being able to remember certain aspects was commonly reported. As one person put it:

'Overwhelming, a lot of information to absorb, a dream! mentally drained.'

I noted in my participant observation fieldnotes at the end of this week in the first phase of the study that some of the new students on the DipSW looked tired. I myself felt exhausted, falling asleep in front of the television early that evening, something I rarely do, and sleeping for much longer than usual that night.

In comparison, during the first phase of the study the HPE students had a full week's induction but two days of this were to prepare for a seminar presentation for the final day (they did not need to attend formal sessions during these two days). Comments indicated that this was useful as it gave time to reflect on the information given about the programme as well as time to catch up with the demands of home (and work). Katie wrote in her diary on the third day of the induction week:

'Preparation Day for Seminar - to be honest used it to catch up on jobs at home and get a lie-in - first time in a year! However, did a lot of thinking!!

On the next day she wrote:

'8.30 - 12.30 - Reading and Preparation work for Seminar - I feel quite pleased with what I've done and have learnt some things already as a result of it. 1.30 - 2 p.m. Catching up on some administration with things from work.'

Katie had three children (aged three, six and fourteen) and I knew from earlier discussions with her, in her interview, that she got up early in order to see to their needs before going to work. She began a full-time job a year earlier (previously she had worked part-time)

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which represented a change from nursing to nurse teaching. Having this time during the induction week had given her adequate time to prepare the work (and also learn something) but she had had the opportunity for some 'breathing space' in the midst of the demands of her family and full-time work. Others on the HPE commented that it was useful to have the time to reflect upon and digest the information which they had been given so far.

Comments from social work students indicated that time to reflect (and catch up on things at home) was useful (they did finish earlier on the final day) but that there was not enough of this. Diary comments and comments made during the participant observation indicated that too much time early on in the induction period was not seen as useful (and for many the two hour lunch break on the first day of the DipSW created anxieties as they did not know what to do with themselves and did not know other students well enough to feel comfortable spending much time with them) but as the amount of information built up it was seen as helpful to have time to reflect and catch up with other demands. Having spare time throughout the day was perceived as wasteful. Participants commented that they would rather have the time at either end of the day in order to meet the demands of their life outside the University. A few, particularly on the health care programmes, thought certain aspects of the induction or having spare time was a waste as they were used to being busy 'rushing' around on the ward. The change to a 'slower' pace, as they initially perceived the new educational experience, they said was hard to adapt to.

As the programmes got underway these initial feelings of being generally overwhelmed by the new gave way to expressions of a sense of anxieties at the actual volume of work which had to be done including, for the DipSW and HPE students, concerns about placements and teaching practice. On the first day of the DPSN Caroline reported that she was concerned about the first assignment which was due in in three weeks time. She then wrote in her diary:

'How am I going to find the time to do it? In fact how am I going to find the time to study with a two and a half year old and a four month old, neither of which go to bed before 10.00 p.m.! Looks like a lot of late nights/early mornings and I go back to work in December [she was on maternity leave].'

Similarly, at the end of her diary in response to being asked to complete the 'Approaches to Study Questionnaire', Stella wrote:

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*'Please don't ask for any more questionnaires Sally, at the moment I feel there's
enough to do without anything extra. No offense meant!'*

I got the impression through my ongoing involvement as a personal tutor to the Sandwich
Route students on the DipSW that, for many, though they were working as well, they felt
less pressurised than the Standard Route students because their programme was over three
years (rather than two for the Standard Route) and therefore they had more flexibility in
choosing when to do a few of their assignments and more time between assignments.

Family and education as 'greedy institutions'

Many women expressed feelings of guilt (for instance, around half of those interviewed in
the motherhood career types) especially in relation to perceiving that they did not spend
enough time with their children or family. Aileen had two children (aged ten and fourteen)
and had been on the DPSN for a few weeks. When I asked her if she had found anything
difficult about coming to college she said:

> *'Sometimes I just feel guilty about having the children. My world's based round the
> children but sometimes I feel I'm neglecting them.... I'm like studying when I could be
> spending time with them.... I don't know whether I'm trying to push myself to the limit.'*

Other studies of mature women students have noted the expression of feelings of guilt and
selfishness (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; McGivney, 1993; Morgan et al., 1981;
Pascall and Cox, 1993a; Roberts, 1994; Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986 &
1988). Edwards (1993a) argues that studying might be seen as closer to leisure than work
for women as the women in her study often spoke of their education as being 'for myself',
even if they were wanting to improve their families' prospects. However, Edwards argues
that 'education is not quite the same as leisure in that mature women students could feel
guilty about *not* studying' (p. 70). Additionally feelings of anxiety about 'balancing'
everything were commonly expressed in the present study and reported in other studies
(see, for example, Edwards 1993a, Dewar et al. 1994). This indicates that women entering
higher education felt these pressures at a psychological level. However, it has been argued
that these originate because of the social structure. Edwards (1993a, pp. 62-80) explains
these emotions in terms of the family and education being 'greedy institutions' for women
as each demands a woman's exclusive and undivided loyalty and seeks to weaken the ties
of the other. As Edwards notes in her study, and as was the case in the present study,

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'references to both physical and psychic time permeated the women's accounts of combining family and education' (p. 63). One of the ways greedy institutions evoke voluntary compliance, Edwards argues, is through guilt. The problems women encounter do not simply arise because of participation in two different activity spheres, they derive from the different value bases of each 'greedy institution'. Higher education demands separation and objectivity and the family, affiliation and subjectivity. Women are under pressure to succeed in each sphere and this causes problems because:

'They [the women] must show that their educational work is not affected by their family commitments, and that their family lives are not suffering because of their studies. Women cannot meet public world obligations without being accused of neglecting their duties in the private domain' (Edwards, 1993a, p. 63).

For many of the women in the present study the continuity of their responsibilities and sense of who they were as wives (partners) and/or mothers could not simply be set aside and these were challenged by the demands of the new educational programme.

The demands of continuing professional employment

A large proportion of the participants in the present study were involved in higher education on a part-time basis. These part-time students were also in employment, many of them full-time (a small number of full-time students involved in the study indicated that they were or might have to work in paid employment outside the University while taking their programme). The demands of work were an issue in combination with education, and often family. Dewar et al. (1994) also note that the nurses and midwives about to embark on the DPSN in another institution were worried about taking on additional professional activity which placed extra demands on their personal life (p. 253). Most of those interviewed in the present study who also worked in paid employment spoke of their concerns, to varying degrees, about fitting the demands of work in with study as well as, for those with family commitments, their family. This was supported by diary comments and through the participant observation. The DPSN students commonly mentioned having a demanding job and finding it hard to study when they were off duty; working in the morning before attending college; or, in some cases, having to go straight from college in the evening to work a night shift. For example, Kay who had just began the DPSN and was in the young womanhood career type said:

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'I'm quite lucky in that... I mean I've no children so I've no pressure there but still when you're working full-time I think it's really hard because you don't always feel like, on your days off, sitting there with a book, so that's been quite hard.'

A few students said that they were still expected to do the same amount at work in their job, despite having time off to take the programme. Additionally, others mentioned that they had had to miss sessions at the University because of work commitments.

Through my ongoing involvement as personal tutor to the Sandwich Route students I became aware of their initial concerns about fitting study in with their job. In the first phase of the study I brought up the issue for discussion in a group tutorial session five weeks into the programme. It had become an acute problem for one young woman (I could frequently tell from her physical demeanor that she was severely affected by the pressure) who was working full-time while taking a programme which was supposed to take up half the working week. Those with adequate time off and support from their employer said that this helped.

The same argument about the structural demands of 'greedy institutions', in this case women's continuing professional employment outside the University, could be applied as in the case of their family and educational involvement. However, Edwards (1993a, p. 67) argues that work is not a 'greedy institution' for women in the same way that the family and education are. Education intrudes on family time because of the requirements for some time and space for study at home. The kind of work the women in her study had previously been involved in (shop, clerical or secretarial work) did not require that they do this. Edwards also makes the comparison between combining work and family *or* education and family, not, as was the case for many of the women in the present study, combining all three. Combining education and family for the women in Edwards' study threw up different problems than combining work and family; work being seen as imposing physical not emotional demands. For the women in the present study, however, I would argue that work was also a 'greedy institution' because the women were in the 'caring' professions and often combining one or more of the institutions of work, family and education. A fifth of the women interviewed in the second phase of the study intimated that there was an emotional dimension to their professional work and this was linked to their sense of who they were. They spoke of finding or implied that they found it hard to say 'no' if they were asked to do extra at work and one spoke of 'giving out all the time' at work. For instance, Trudy, who was a Health Visitor and taking the HPE part-time, told me that there was the

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possibility that she would be offered work in a different area of the community but she felt that taking this on while studying on the HPE would be too demanding but she felt guilty about saying 'no'. She thought this was partly to do with her being a woman and partly because she was in the nursing profession, saying:

> *'It's your nature, it's the nature of the person that does this [nursing] and I'm sure women in general do... rather than recognise what limitations you have and being able to say "no I'm not ready to take on that", and because I work very well with the GP I'm attached to I feel pulled in two ways really. I feel guilty if I go.... yet I'd feel guilty if I don't.'*

A few also commented that they took work home in order to complete what they had to do. Another aspect of this was worrying or feeling guilty about factors related to work and this intruding on educational time. For instance, one women said she felt 'guilty' about coming to college and leaving her colleagues with extra work to do. A few wrote in their diaries that they had not had time to finish all their jobs at work and that they found it hard to concentrate while at the University because of worrying about this. These women were involved in the 'caring professions' which are closely allied to women's domestic concerns (White, 1989, p. 6). These professions rely on connected and relational qualities which, it has been argued, are more closely associated with women (see, for example, Gilligan 1977; 1982; 1993 & 1994; Edwards, 1993a). It is this sense of connectedness which can lead to difficulties of saying 'no' to the demands of professional employment and result in feelings of guilt; one of the means by which 'greedy institutions' evoke compliance (Edwards, 1993a, p. 70).

Summary

Anxieties about 'fitting it all in' were expressed by using terms such as 'balancing' or 'juggling'. Many of the women in the present study, especially at and around the point of beginning their programme, experienced threats to self-efficacy in that they questioned their ability to cope. The three 'greedy institutions', family, higher education and continuing professional employment made competing demands on many of the women. Edwards (1993a, p. 63) argues that it is the movement between the bounded public/private spheres of each 'greedy institution' with their different value bases, which causes conflicts and problems for women, thus highlighting the social structural influences on women's ability to cope.

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Am I Up To It?

The question of 'am I up to it?' was a commonly expressed anxiety in relation to both academic and professional abilities. Approximately half the interviewees indicated a worry about their academic ability and just under a quarter were concerned about their lack of experience of the profession they were entering. There were also indications that a few were concerned about their abilities despite having considerable professional experience. Comments in the diaries and the participant observation supported the existence of these concerns. A small number, however, indicated that they were not concerned about these issues.

These anxieties about professional or academic ability were expressed in a variety of ways. These included: considerable surprise at being offered a place on the programme; concerns about coming to a 'university' as it was perceived to be a place for 'bright' people; a sense of awe about academia and academics; a fear of failure; concerns about the appropriateness or lack of previous professional experience; worries about making presentations or going on placement; and anxieties about not being able to use the Library or Information Technology facilities[2]. For instance, Janice had told me earlier on in her interview that she was worried about finding the time to fit in taking the DPSN with her job and later I asked her if she had any other worries and she replied:

'Just reaching the academic level because I haven't got any 'A' levels...'

And one of the social work students wrote in her diary:

'I felt rather nervous and apprehensive about how I might cope with academic life after rather a long absence.'

Many of those beginning the HPE and DipSW expressed worries about their perceived lack of professional experience. One woman beginning the HPE wrote in her diary:

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[2] Brosnan and Davidson (1994) review the literature on computerphobia and argue that between a quarter and a third of people are 'computerphobic'. They say there is strong evidence that women are more likely to possess higher levels of computer anxiety and experience more negative attitudes towards computers than men (p. 77).

'Everyone appears to be a lecturer in a college of one form or another except one other person and myself. It is quite intimidating being with people who obviously have greater experience that me.'

Many of the social work students felt particularly threatened because of their perceived lack of social work experience despite being rigorously selected from a large pool of applicants; one of the key criteria being that they had relevant experience. For a few women this undervaluing of their experience seemed to be linked to them previously being mainly wives and mothers. For instance, one of the Sandwich Route students told me she was particularly worried about her lack of experience. She felt 'bad' after the session on the final day of the induction week which was aimed at examining the wealth of experience the students had and therefore giving it value. After this session she felt she had very little experience to offer. When I had asked her what she had been doing before she began the programme she replied 'just looking after [her] children'. When I probed further I found out that she also had a wealth of other relevant voluntary experience. This woman appeared to have taken on board the dominant view of the lower status work women carry out within and associated with the private sphere and this had influenced her perception of the value of her experience compared with others who she saw as having more highly valued public world experience.

For many their concern or lack of concern about ability appeared to be based on a relatively realistic evaluation of their previous academic and professional experience. For instance, those who were concerned indicated that they were worried because of a lack of recent appropriate experience. Others who were not concerned spoke of recent educational experience providing a realistic view of what to expect, giving confidence or providing a degree of familiarity (see Chapter 7). Those interviewees who were in the young womanhood career type (a woman in her twenties who had not long since qualified or had studied recently) appeared to be particularly confident about the role their previous educational experience had played in assisting them in the transition to the programme[3]. For example, Fiona who was 24 said that she had found beginning the DPSN easier than she expected:

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[3] Those in young womanhood were more likely to be younger than those in young motherhood therefore confidence in ability was not necessarily linked to having children or not but appeared to be related to length of time since they last studied but having children could have been a factor in this.

'I think because it's only two years since I've been out [since she qualified as a nurse]... it has been a lot easier for me than I thought because the other staff nurse who is doing the course [who she knew from the hospital she worked in], she's in the second year, she found the first year really hard. I don't think it's been quite as hard for me. I'm 24 and although I'm considered as a mature student I'm still young compared to a lot of the ladies on the course.... and the other staff nurse, she's in her 40s and she definitely says that she's found it a lot harder than I have because the way we're educated today is so different to when she was, whereas I've been used to modern methods.'

Despite these young womanhood students generally being more confident than those in the other career types there were exceptions. For instance, Kay indicated that she had found it hard to get used to the 'new' approaches to learning and the different level of the DPSN compared with her previous educational experience.

A worry about academic ability was also expressed by a few of those with considerable experience. For instance, it might be assumed that those beginning the HPE programme (a postgraduate programme), by virtue of it being necessary for them to have a degree, would not find the transition particularly difficult but Annie said:

'The first day I was absolutely terrified... I graduated in '89 [five years previously] and I've done the 730 course [City and Guilds 730 Teachers' Certificate] since then but nothing too challenging, so actually coming back into higher education, I thought that was quite a threat.'

Despite being used to higher education, having studied relatively recently and having undertaken a course of direct relevance to the one she was embarking on, Annie still found beginning the new programme threatening in terms of her academic ability. She appeared to see herself as not 'worthy' of being on the HPE programme and there was a sense that she had somehow not legitimately attained her degree. She said:

'When [HPE programme leader] rang me.... I genuinely thought he was ringing me to tell me I hadn't got an interview... 'I've always had that sort of perception that I'm not really worthy to be on a degree course... and I still do. At the end of my first degree I said to my friend, when I'd finished, even when I went through the graduation

ceremony, "do you feel as though you are a graduate?"... I still don't really see myself...'

A few others in the present study similarly perceived their academic ability in this way.

Conversely, a small number with little experience did not appear to be particularly worried about their academic ability. When I was interviewing Lola a few weeks into the DipSW she commented on the fact that academic experience did not necessarily help. She had not studied recently but had been in a particularly responsible job in social work. Early on in the interview she said her lack of academic experience had worried her at first:

'On the first day when you're talking to everyone and you're thinking "oh my God" these people know what they are doing.'

Towards the end of the interview I commented that she seemed very confident despite not having an academic background but that others had said they were worried about beginning the programme even though they had a degree and she replied:

'When we got the essay back [the trial essay they had been asked to submit] one woman who's got a degree, she asked me how I'd done and I said I'd got this and this. She said "can I borrow it?" and I said "why?", she said "I didn't [do particularly well] and just to compare". And I said to her "my God, I'm really shocked". She said "just because I've got a degree doesn't mean that...."'

A few felt threatened despite having considerable professional experience. During the HPE induction week the new students were asked to give a short presentation to the rest of the group. One woman, who had been a nurse teacher for the previous three years, said as she stood up to give her talk that she felt very worried about giving it. She felt particularly 'exposed' in the situation and would be happier giving a talk to a group of a hundred students. She felt 'very threatened'. I noted that she talked quite fast, probably because she was nervous. Perceptions about academic and professional ability were, therefore, not always based on a realistic assessment of ability.

The literature on mature women students reports that a lack of confidence in their abilities is an impeding factor for women returning to education (see, for instance, Dewar et al., 1994; Innes, 1992; Keen, 1990; Leonard, 1994; McGivney, 1993; Roberts, 1994; Spears, 1988;

Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986). I would argue that, for many in the present study, self-esteem was threatened because of worries about their academic or professional ability. There is a suggestion in the literature that for mature women students concerns about ability are heightened on entry to higher education. Edwards (1993a) notes the initial nervousness of the women in her study and related this to concerns about academic ability (p. 57) and Morgan et al. (1981) argue that a fear of failure for the women in their study lessened as time went on (p. 44).

There is not always a straightforward link between participants' perceptions about their abilities and their actual abilities. This led me to seek an explanation for this mismatch. Breakwell (1992a, pp. 35-36) argues that self-efficacy is associated with beliefs rather than actual outcomes. As the concern about ability is commonly reported in studies of mature women students there may be particular reasons why women's beliefs about their ability are not based on a realistic assessment. Weil (1988) argues that non-traditional students' individual interpretive frameworks can be influenced by their social and educational pasts which create a particular learner identity. This is demonstrated in the present study in Annie's account. When I asked her whether she thought her concern about her academic ability was linked to her past educational experience she said:

'I'm sure, I'm sure. I failed my eleven plus... and again when I'm in a room I automatically assume that everyone else is much more articulate and educated that I am....'

Her earlier educational experience of failure had been assimilated and accommodated (Breakwell, 1986, pp. 23-24) and she continued to interpret educational situations in these terms. I can identify these feeling in myself as I also failed my eleven plus and did not do particularly well in my initial education. This still influences my view of my academic abilities despite evidence to the contrary. In Chapter 7 I showed that many of the participants had experienced curtailed initial educational experience. Additionally, all those in the second phase interviews who said they were worried about their academic ability were from working or lower middle-class backgrounds. Certain literature links women's concerns about their ability to their educational and social pasts (see, for instance, Barnett, 1992; Keen, 1990; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988).

Concerns shown by those who were professionally experienced appeared to be associated with a worry about being judged by peers and potentially there being health professionals

varying in seniority on the programmes. For example, one woman wrote in her diary, about the presentations given by students during the HPE induction:

'Personally my teaching session I was very disappointed with. I tried to present a logical argument that I felt fell flat and had little support. Whilst teaching I felt very distant from the group and my communication skills were poor; it has been said that peer teaching is one of the most difficult areas to teach.'

I and other academic colleagues I have spoken to about this phenomenon recognise it. The fear of negative feedback could potentially threaten the identity 'principles' of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness (Breakwell, 1986), and authenticity (Gecas and Mortimer, 1987). These explanations could account for the mature women students' anxieties about their ability in the present study. Similarly, there were other related factors which could have contributed to the negative assessment of ability, such things as not seeing themselves as academics because of their professional background and feeling different from traditional students in higher education (see Chapter 9).

Social background, lack of recent experience, curtailed initial educational experience or other factors did, however, not necessarily lead to concerns about ability. Judy was not particularly anxious despite a lack of recent educational experience and she did not do particularly well at school. She appeared to have developed a way of coping which was linked to her being black. She coped by not putting too much emphasis on success (though she did not want to fail) and by being realistic about what she thought she could achieve. She talked about a confidence she felt she had developed in coping generally, especially in new situations, because of being black. Henry (1994) notes that coping strategies have always been a fundamental feature of how black women have survived racism and suggests this may provide insights into how they persevere in higher education (p. 51).

Other women indicated that they had developed particular ways of coping with their concerns about their abilities. For instance, determination was a strong theme in the women's accounts. The determination and resilience of mature women students has also been noted in other studies (see, for instance, Hart, 1991; Henry, 1994; Keen, 1990; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Roberts, 1994; Wisker, 1986 & 1988).

The Reality of Financial Constraints

Financial considerations were not a serious problem for most of the participants in the present study. However, for a small number there was a sense of real financial hardship. They felt on a 'knife's edge' of coping financially because of coming on the programme. This was especially an issue for those on low incomes, which included many of the single parents, and those whose husbands/partners were not working for whatever reason; though a small number did say they would be better off financially. Financial constraints were, therefore, linked to social factors. For instance, during the first week of the DipSW, Rose, whose husband had been off work with a long term illness and was therefore on a low income, told me that her grant was going straight to paying bills and she was immediately applying for a student loan.

For a small number in young motherhood the issue of concerns about finance were related to childcare costs. For example, Mary, who was a single parent responsible for three young children, said she would have been better off financially if she had been able to stay on Income Support Benefit. She was 'struggling' on her grant. She could not even consider paying the small amount (she quoted £16 a week to me) to use the crèche at the University and therefore had to rely on her ageing mother to look after her youngest child.

Finance was also a difficulty for Jenny on the DipSW who was aged 34, single and lived on her own and therefore in the older womanhood career type. Though Jenny's financial worries might be considered as similar to those of many traditional aged students in the current climate, being older meant that she had the added responsibilities of a mortgage and she needed to run a car. This suggests that though mature students may appear to be better off financially they may have additional costs to meet.

Financial hardship could mean undertaking extra paid work or taking out a student loan. Though outside the scope of this study the sense of struggling financially outlined could indicate that some women might not even be able to afford to come on programmes such as these because of their financial situation. This is supported in the literature on 'barriers' to women's participation in education. McGivney (1993) argues that lack of financial support is one of the key factors which impedes women's participation (p. 77).

Conclusions

Women in the present study experienced threats to self-efficacy; they were concerned about their ability to cope with the demands of family, education and work, academically, professionally and financially. Though experienced at the psychological level, concerns arose from the social context. The notion of 'greedy institutions' helps to explain why women find it hard to manage the competing demands of family, education and continuing professional employment. Edwards (1993a) has emphasised that mature women students can feel on a 'knife's edge' of coping and when they fail to cope they blame themselves. But their failure is more a reflection of the social structure (pp. 73, 80). Concerns about academic and professional ability are linked to the way the women interpreted beginning their programme but this can be based on their educational, social and professional backgrounds. It therefore follows that the institutions involved (education, work and the family) *must* take some responsibility for women's difficulties in coping.

CHAPTER 9

DO I BELONG ?

'Don't feel part of the University. Don't feel like a 'real' student, more of an interloper' [comment written in one of the participant's diaries].

The continuity of the women's sense of who they were was strong; their social, educational and professional background and the social structure playing a part in this (see Chapter 7 and 8). In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the new educational encounter impacted on these continuities, making many women feel different to other students and not legitimate students in higher education; the question 'Do I belong?' frequently being asked. I highlight key ways in which the participants felt different from what they perceived those in higher education to be like. Concerns were not only linked to comparisons with dominant images of those in higher education but worries about potential discrimination or not being 'visible' in the masses of students. Anxieties can be explained in terms of threats to the identity 'principles' of distinctiveness and authenticity but these arise from the social context.

The Experience of Difference

The quote at the beginning of the chapter sums up the experience of many of the participants in the present study at and around the point of entry to their professional programme. For a variety of reasons they felt they did not belong and were different to other students in higher education. Edwards (1993a), in her study of mature women students, examines the issue of feelings of difference. Within the context of the 'bachelor boy' environment of higher education, which implies white, middle-class, young and male, she argues women can feel they do not belong. They have a sense of deviance, tokenism and 'wrongness' (Edwards 1993a, pp. 86-88). In the literature on mature women students it has been noted that women are entering the 'male instrumental world' of higher education (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Pascall and Cox, 1993a; Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1983; The Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). Some note a generally hostile and unwelcoming environment (for instance, McGivney, 1993).

For the women in the present study being a woman in the new educational environment did not stand out as paramount in feelings of difference. This was potentially linked to the

participants being in women dominated professions and in an educational environment which was sympathetic to their needs. When I asked the second phase interviewees if being a women had made the transition to the programme easier or more difficult in any way many said that it had not been a problem because they were in a female dominated profession. It did not appear to be obviously the case that they were entering a hostile and unwelcoming environment. At the local level of the programme, on the whole, the women's accounts suggest they were entering a 'women friendly' environment. They were, however, also entering the wider educational context which was perceived and is socially represented in a particular way. It only appeared to be with regard to the wider University that being a woman lead to feelings of difference. For instance, at the Freshers' Conference issues of relevance to mature students, especially associated with the continuities of family commitments which, I have argued are key continuities for women, were not discussed. A few women also spoke of being treated in a way which was sexist (see Chapter 7). In the present study therefore, as Sperling (1991) argues, there were subtle structural and attitudinal barriers on the part of the institution of education. Sperling states that these arise from the reality of women's lives and argues that if these are not taken into account this amounts to discrimination on the part of the institution.

The difference of race

During the participant observation in both phases of the study I noticed that most of the new black students on the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) sat or congregated together at the beginning of the programme. In the first phase I particularly noticed the reluctance by some black students to get involved in the exercises aimed at 'getting to know each other' on the first day of the programme. I noted, for instance, that one of the men had paired up with and was talking to a black women as part of an exercise. She was not responding much to his attempts at conversation despite considerable effort on his part. Another example arose during a group exercise in which I was involved. There were three white and three black people in the group. The three black students appeared reluctant to participate initially whereas the white students were forthcoming. This could have been because of my presence in the group but I felt it was related to a reluctance to participate generally, as the other students in the group did not appear to be effected by my presence

(though the fact that I am white has to be acknowledged). It struck me that many of the black students already appeared to know each other and were 'sticking' together as a group. When I interviewed Mary, who was black, in the second phase of the study I asked her if this was the case. She told me that she only knew one of the other black women beforehand and that:

'Personally I think it's like a safety net...'

I asked her:

'You identify with those people?'

And she replied:

'...until you know other people it's like trust as well. Just for safety really. It's ignorance probably, a form of racism. There are certain things which you identify with another black student automatically but there is no way you can identify with anybody else in the group, apart from being a woman. Sometimes you get the feeling that you don't really know how they feel about that [black people] until you've heard them speak, until you've got to know them.'

She spoke of another course that she had done previously where she had got the impression that the people on it wanted to 'fight racism but they didn't actually like black people...'. Mary said that because of the risk of this kind of attitude:

'You sort of carry that with you and you feel your way around, it's just like a safety net.'

The implication of Mary's comments was that when entering a new situation black people can tend to identify with each other initially for 'safety' because of their previous experience of racism. Judy, the other black woman I interviewed, supported this view. She said that as a black person you were always going into 'unknown territory' and you were never sure how genuine people would be. Black people entering an institution such as a university are entering a white dominated domain. Edwards has argued that black women can see higher education institutions as white middle-class places (1990b, pp. 483-485; 1993c, p. 188) and thus perceive themselves as being different but in the actual initial

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encounter it was the reality of entering a mainly white environment which was the issue. When I put Edwards' reason for the reluctance of black women to be involved in her research to Judy she said:

'That's assuming, that's saying that... the black person had a problem...'

In the new educational environment (as with most of the public arenas in Britain) anyone of a different race or ethnic background is entering a potentially racist domain and it is this which is the key issue. Because of previous experience of racism, safety is achieved by being cautious and seeking out other black people. From the point of view of a white person, through my observations, this can manifest itself in a kind of 'standoffishness' which could be interpreted incorrectly and therefore perpetuate differences. In a similar way I observed other groups of students 'sticking' together, for instance, men with men and women with women. This, I would argue, served a similar purpose. Because of shared experiences they felt 'safer' with their own kind.

Mary spoke of certain factors which had helped her to feel a part of the new environment. The new social work students had been shown a video as part of the Core Values in Social Work Module. This video, 'The Tale of 'O'', was about exploring the experience of being different and therefore being discriminated against. It was compiled in such a way that the 'being different' was left up to the watcher to interpret, it being simply referred to as being an 'O' in a world of 'Xs'. Mary said that she had perceived that being an 'O' meant being black but in the discussion which followed she realised that others in the group had perceived themselves as different in other ways. She said:

'It was amazing the amount of different people, the gay members, just the women or people who thought they'd not had experience, even they felt like 'Os'. It was refreshing because everybody took it personally and it was really nice not to say "the black members of the group", for everybody to have the same feeling.'

Mary said that as she had began to find that people on the programme were more like her than she had initially thought she had felt she had settled in, saying:

'The more I get to know the group I think you've got a lot more in common.'

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Mary also told me that she had made use of the Black Student's Support Group, which had been organised for students on the DipSW. This met once a week for an hour. She said of this:

'It's nice to not keep on actually having to explain everything in the Black Support Group. When we talk about an issue it's unanimously understood.'

She felt that the group was useful for 'picking up' issues of relevance to black people and giving extra support on issues which might not be fully understood in a mixed group of students.

It was also important to students that needs associated with their particular cultural beliefs were met. Two Asian DipSW students, to whom I was personal tutor, asked me about facilities for them to pray as they were practicing Muslims. I found out that there was a room allocated for this purpose within the University. However, because one of them was a woman she needed somewhere separate from the men to pray, which I helped her to arrange. Differences such as religious beliefs due to race can therefore lead to specific needs for certain groups of students.

The difference of age

There was a mixture of feelings expressed about being an older or mature student. They ranged from feeling different to what was perceived as a student in higher education to not being concerned about age. Those who were not as concerned appeared to draw upon what they knew of the reality of the numbers of mature students in higher education or the concept of 'life-long learning'. Becoming a student at their age was seen as acceptable in the present climate of continuing education throughout life.

In the first phase interviews I asked students directly about how they felt about becoming a mature student. Half of the interviewees said they were not concerned about this. For instance, Rebecca, who was about to embark on the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN) programme, said:

'I'm not bothered about that, some of my friends are still students anyway, they're plodding along doing things....'

Others expressed worries about their age in relation to standing out as being different from what they perceived students to be like. These mainly fell into the older motherhood career type (women in their late thirties or forties with children over ten still living at home)[1]. They were therefore considerably older than traditional student in higher education. Their concerns related mainly to feeling that they would be out of place because of their age. For instance, Lesley who was in her forties and about to begin on the Sandwich Route of the DipSW said:

'I think if I was going full-time, I feel I might stick out like a sore thumb. I know you've got to be 25 [to be on the DipSW] haven't you? so there won't be 18 year olds but I think if I was going to be full-time then I would feel odd because there will be a lot of younger people [around the University in general].'

Leonard (1994) similarly notes that the mature women students in her study were particularly conscious about being older than the majority of their fellow students on their sociology degree programme (p. 169). In the present study the fact that the programmes were for mature students was an important factor. This helped a few students to feel they would not stand out because of their age. Later in her interview Lesley was talking about the time she visited the University for her selection interview. She said:

'There were all these people who, I could have been their mother, and they all had rucksacks, they all looked as if they knew what they were doing, they all looked like university students, what you think they look like. I wouldn't feel part of them... it's a shame, I'd love to be, I'll have a ring through my nose. I would like that but that's gone I can't do that, that was 20 years ago...'

A small number were worried that they might be considered as a 'mother figure' by younger students, which they saw as undesirable. In the self-characterisation which I asked the first phase interviewees to write prior to the interview (see Chapter 4), Maureen, who was in her forties wrote:

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[1] This appeared to be related to age rather than whether the participants had children or not. It also applied to a small number of students in the young motherhood career type who were in their thirties.

'The term 'mature student' conjures up a picture and begs questions that will be answered as the course begins; e.g. will Maureen be the oldest person on the course, how should she dress, and will younger students think of her as a mother figure.'

Maureen talked about these issues during the interview. She spoke of her children teasing her that she would have to go and buy a pair of 'Doc Martens' as she was going to become a student. Stella, who was 44, spoke of similar sorts of jibes from her teenage child and work colleagues. They had said things like she would be wearing 'jeans and bother boots' and 'beads' and mentioned things like involvement in Greenpeace. A few others spoke of images of what they thought students were like in a similar way.

The concerns about being different to traditional students was reflected once participants actually began their programme. For instance, one person who was beginning the DPSN wrote:

'Went to SU [Students' Union] - felt decidedly dated.'

The uncertainty about what a student was supposed to be like came out in a small number of cases as apparent confusion about how to dress initially. I noticed, for instance, that Stella arrived on the first day particularly dressed up and there was a strong smell of perfume about her, perhaps a reaction to the jibes of others that she would have to wear 'jeans', 'bother boots' and 'beads', whereas most other people were relatively casually dressed. She appeared to be asserting her sense of who she was and that she was different to the image portrayed of students.

The issue of age and feeling different because of this was not mentioned as much in the second phase interviews. This could have been because I did not ask directly about it but it was perhaps linked to age becoming less important as students settled into the programme and they realised they did not stand out as being different. A few said that they felt that the environment which they were in was 'kind' to mature students.

A further aspect of being older than traditional students was that many participants spoke of not getting as involved in student life and activities. This was related to having to travel a considerable distance to the University, being part-time but mainly to having family responsibilities. Lesley said:

'I don't feel I'll join in the social life. I think I'll go, do what I'm doing and come back home. Plus it's over there.. and it's not as if I can say oh I won't bother going back to night, I've got a son.... I've got to lead two lives because this is my life and I've got people who depend on me.'

This view was reflected in diary comments made in relation to the Freshers' Fayre, a session organised by the Students' Union during the induction week, aimed to recruit new students to a range of different societies. Many participants indicated that because they lived some distance away or had other commitments they would not have time to get involved in these sort of student activities.

Many in the present study (and others around them) were using dominant social representations of the image of a student in higher education; young, 'carefree' and with no family responsibilities. The representation was used in a variable way but what was conveyed was a sense that the new students might not belong because of their age. For many women restrictions related to their social position meant they could not join in with university social life which could accentuate their difference. Perceived differences in relation to age appeared to be more of a concern before participants began their programme. Once they were part of an environment where there were many students of a similar age to them age appeared to become less of an issue.

Academic and professional difference

Concerns about academic and professional abilities were expressed as participants began their programme (see Chapter 8) and were associated with a worry about standing out as being different because of their perceived deficits. Many saw themselves as not being 'real' or 'proper' academics or professionals.

A sense of awe about academia and academics was expressed by many participants which reflected a concern that they were not a 'proper' academic. One example of this was in relation the University taking the name 'university' because of the abolition of the binary system (it was previously a polytechnic and became called 'university' just before this study began). For instance, Evelyn who had just began the DPSN said:

'The only thing that worries me is perhaps now it's a University do they expect a different standard of work.'

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This awe of academia seemed particularly prevalent with participants on the DPSN which could be linked to nursing and other related health professional education only recently moving into the higher education sector (Birchenall, 1995). I noted several comments during the interviews and participant observation related to the university environment being different to students' nurse training. Many who had trained in the nursing professions had done so in a traditional nursing institution. In her interview a few weeks into the DPSN Nichola said she was not used to the university environment as her previous educational experience had been mainly based in nursing institutions. She was:

'worried slightly as to the way things are done differently, it's proper academia and you come to realise you sort of played at it a bit...'

and Aileen commented:

'Some of the language you use it sounds a bit schoolish rather than collegy.'

The concerns of the DPSN participants in particular were reflected in their awe and concern about using the University Library and Information Technology facilities. Several mentioned that they did not use the University Library, instead using Library facilities where they worked, not only because of the time factor but also because they found their local facilities familiar, easier to use and got more support in using them. Sandra, in the young womanhood career type, was 24 and only recently qualified as a nurse. She had to travel a considerable distance to the University. After she had been on the DPSN for a few weeks she told me she was still using her local Library facilities rather than the University Library. She found the University Library 'daunting' and 'confusing', saying:

'There's floors and floors and floors of it.'

Sandra said that not being computer literate, the system being different from what she was used to and not being able to get more specific help, had put her off using the Library at the University. A few participants mentioned that a friendly point of contact within the University Library was helpful. As previously noted, Brosnan and Davidson (1994), in a review of the literature, argue that between a quarter and a third of all people are computerphobic and that this is particularly an issue for women. In the present study most of the women who commented about using New Information Technology expressed

anxieties about this, whereas the small number of men who did were enthusiastic. Birchenall (1995) notes that it is easy to overlook those who find New Technology frightening and argues that universities need to recognise this and provide appropriate support (p. 237).

Pilammar-Anderson (1995) has used the concept of marginality to describe the educational experiences of student nurses being in both the academic/student situation and being in the professional/work context. This duality could explain why women from the health care professions felt particularly out of place in a university environment.

The difference of social background

In the second phase of the study I asked the interviewees directly if they thought their social class origins had affected them in the transition to the programme. A quarter said that they felt that their middle-class origins had been helpful in assisting them in higher education. For instance, Jackie felt that because she was middle-class she realised the importance of education and because her husband was also middle-class and held the same values, this meant that she felt he supported her, which might not be the case for someone who did not feel that way about education.

There was a more mixed response from those from working-class backgrounds. Just over half who spoke of this expressed a sense of pride and resilience gained because of their class origins. For example, Kay said:

> 'I think because we were always brought up with the attitude that you are yourself and nobody's worse off or better off than you, I'd never really thought "oh well there's going to be people better than me". I just decided I wanted to do it.'

A fifth of the women interviewed in the second phase said that coming from working-class origins had made no difference. Annie who was from working-class origins but now considered herself to be middle-class spoke of having access to higher education at this particular time of her life and therefore, at this stage, class did not made a difference. She said:

'I think if I'd been 18 years old and going to Oxford or Cambridge from the background I came from it would have made a fundamental difference but not in this setting, at this stage, no.'

A small number did indicate that their social class origins might have caused some problems in the transition; saying that they had been concerned that they might be disadvantaged or might not 'fit in' but once they had began their programme had realised that others were much the same as them. Evelyn told me of how her parents had not encouraged her in her initial education which she felt had put her at a disadvantage. Yvonne spoke of the financial aspects of being working-class in that she felt she could only just afford to take the DPSN. There was therefore a recognition and a concern expressed by a small number that their social class background may have been an issue when entering what was perceived as the middle-class domain of higher education.

Feeling different in other ways

Core Values in Social Work was the first module that the new social work students undertook. During the 1970s social work in Britain particularly suffered from what Schon (1983, pp. 3-20) describes as a 'crisis of confidence' in professional education. At the University involved features of what has been described as the 'post-technocratic' model of professional education which aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Bines and Watson, 1992, pp. 14-17) have been adopted as a way to improving professional training. As part of this, the Core Values Module particularly aims to use and explore students' past experience. For a few, this brought up sensitive issues of difference which on other kinds of programmes might be able to be kept 'private'. For instance, one woman (I have not disclosed her pseudonym to further protect her identity as the issues I will outline are of a sensitive nature) indicated in her diary that she was settling into the DipSW reasonably well. However, when I spoke to her during the participant observation in the third week of the programme she said she was glad she had not had to fill in the diary (which I had asked them to complete during the first week) the previous week (that was, the second week of the programme) as she felt 'awful' and 'lost'. She appeared to have been particularly unsettled and upset by something but she said felt better since the session on sexuality the previous day. I got the impression her worries were linked to her being a lesbian and this was confirmed when I interviewed her a few weeks later.

In her interview she skirted around several general issues which she had found difficult at the beginning of the programme before saying that it had been helpful to finding out that she had her sexuality in common with another student. It became clear to me at this point that she was talking about being a lesbian. Her difficulty about talking about this directly to me perhaps reflects concerns about 'coming out' to people in a new situation.

I asked her if her anxieties had been to do with her sexuality and she replied:

'I think it was something to do with it, yes definitely, because I came out, it might have been in week two when I came out actually. I had the problem in week two because I thought I was glad that I had come out, it was a room similar to this, about this size with these kind of tables and chairs and everything [a small seminar room with chairs arranged in a circle]. The environment is quite important isn't it and it's such a small room, I felt like I was coming out amongst that group of people but because I hadn't come out to the whole class I wondered what vibes and messages had come out to the rest of them.'

She said that 'coming out' had been difficult but it was something she did not want to 'keep back'. She also related the difficulties to being a feminist and how people in a new situation might perceive her. She had had experiences at work in the past where people had been hostile towards her because of her sexuality and views. Corin (1994) argues that 'coming out' in the higher education context can be difficult for lesbians. She states that one aspect of this is that:

'organizational culture within higher educational settings include the strong normalizing aspects of public and social spaces in terms of discussion of heterosexual lifestyles and interests. It is often here that issues of 'coming out' or not, and acceptance or non-acceptance of lesbian lives become apparent and problematic' (p. 59).

In a similar way another woman (I have also not disclosed her pseudonym so as to further protect her anonymity) had written in her diary about literally getting lost on the last day of the induction week. The first four days of the programme appeared to be going well but on the fifth day she wrote in her diary:

'Not so good today.'

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She had got lost after the first session that day and recorded that:

'Then Seminar work - looking at past experience - I'm worried about disclosure of some disturbing experiences.'

I interviewed this woman a few weeks later. She was having some doubts about doing the DipSW and becoming a social worker. I asked her what sort of doubts and she replied:

'.... something major has come up since I've been on the course. For four days that first week I was great but the fifth day threw me. We were talking about sexual abuse... it's like coming out. I can't hide things...'

She told me that on the last day of the induction week:

'I was panicking and thinking "oh God where am I supposed to be" and I wasn't laughing, I wasn't able to laugh because the thought that I'd left the students... I was in a panic, I was... because I was suddenly on my own...'

When she did find the other students again they had been organised into groups and she was unsure which group she was supposed to join. She had totally panicked and thought to herself:

'This isn't good for me. You can't function like this, you shouldn't be here if you're like this.'

Her anxieties were not just about literally getting lost and separated from the group but were linked to a concern about whether she should actually be on the programme because of the fear of disclosure of her experiences of being sexually abused as a child. She said:

'I woke up at six in the morning, worried but mainly about disclosure, mainly about what else would come up on the course that I didn't like, that I couldn't cope with, that I was uncomfortable with... to wake up upset!'

Though this woman's concern was extreme it does echo the sense of feeling 'lost' and out of place in the higher educational context which mature women students in this study felt because of perceived differences.

There were also other ways in which participants were worried that they might stand out as being different, for instance, because of potentially not agreeing with what was being taught, being particularly outspoken or speaking inappropriately at first. For instance, Claire was worried that because she knew about the realities of having to deal with difficult work situations, this might be out of line with more 'politically correct' ways of dealing with these; that she might stand out as being 'a right wing reactionary if I say something.'

Concerns about being different were related to the participants' sense of continuity of who they perceived themselves to be. In some instances this arose from an evaluation of what they thought students in higher education were like but could be related to the continuities of their previous experience of entering new environments and threats which the higher educational context presented.

The implications of difference

A particularly common theme early on in the transition to the programmes was the expression of a concern about 'standing out from the crowd' in what was perceived as a negative way. Many were initially worried that they might be the only one who did not know what they were doing or who was anxious. For instance, not long after she had began the DPSN Kay said:

> *'It's very easy when you start something new to think everybody is doing all right and I'm not doing that well.... or everybody else doesn't seem bothered about it and I'm really worried...'*

Nearly half of those interviewed a few weeks after beginning the programme mentioned these initial concerns. Breakwell (1986) argues that people like to feel unique and distinct from others but this has to be in a way which is positively valued (p. 72). Standing out from the crowd in the way these participants described could be termed as being visible in a negatively distinctive way which is therefore threatening.

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Edwards (1993a) and Leonard (1994) note the initial nervousness of the mature women students in their studies. Edwards (1993a) links this to concerns that other students were seen as more capable or worries that they alone could not cope (p. 57). These initial concerns about 'standing out from the crowd' in a negative way could be linked to being the only one who was anxious or did not know what they were doing but this implies that the women in the present study thought they were different in some way. There was evidence that these worries were related to the continuity of the participants' sense of who they were. For instance, in relation to concerns about being different in terms of perceptions of academic ability, one woman wrote in her diary:

'Relieved that the other students are so down to earth and that not all are from academic backgrounds.'

Not being distinct enough

Not only were the women in the present study concerned about being different, a few expressed concerns about being invisible within the masses of students and therefore not different enough. This was illustrated by anxieties expressed about the size of the group the new students were joining, mainly voiced by many of those embarking on the DPSN which was the largest of the groups in the study[2]. The first introductory session for this programme began with the new students gathering together as a whole. Out of the ten DPSN students interviewed once they had started the programme seven spoke about the numbers involved in such a way that indicated that they found this intimidating initially. For instance, when I asked Sandra if she had found anything difficult about beginning the DPSN she replied:

'I found the size of the group a bit awesome at first.'

In nearly a quarter of the diaries completed by the DPSN students similar comments made. One person wrote:

'Overwhelmed by the size of the class, concerned about, if needs arose, the availability of personal contact and tuition.'

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[2] There was an average over the two phases of the study of 86 students on the DPSN, 45 on the DipSW and 17 on the HPE programme.

A few social work students also expressed this worry. For instance Judy said that she had been 'shocked' by the size of the group. When she had undertaken training courses in the past she had been used to groups of 12 to 15 people. It had not 'registered' that she would 'be sat in a room with maybe 40 to 50 people all trying to get the same information.' Leonard (1994) similarly notes that the mature women students in her study initially felt intimidated by large numbers of students in 'huge' lecture theatres (p. 169).

The data suggests that many of the new students were happier in smaller group situations. Following the initial introduction to the programme on the first day of the DPSN the students were split into four smaller groups for a seminar. In both phases of the study this smaller group session was more positively received than the first larger group session. One person wrote:

'I found this small group much easier to deal with [than the initial larger group session] and found the methods of introducing us to each other and exploring our reasons for embarking on the course most helpful.'

Comments in the diaries were mainly related to the new students having a better chance to get to know people in a more informal setting. The smaller group therefore enhanced their distinctiveness. On the basis of this finding I made the suggestion, in the report at the end of the first phase of the study (see appendix 2), that students might benefit from 'the opportunity to be in smaller informal groups early on'. Though this was not taken up directly, a change in the DipSW induction programme in the second phase of the study gave the opportunity to evaluate this. The programme had been altered which meant that there was time earlier on in the week than the previous year for initial personal tutorials sessions. I took advantage of this and arranged a group tutorial for the Sandwich Route students, to whom I was personal tutor, on the second day of their induction. When I analysed their diary comments one person had written:

'I was so relieved to have met as a group today. To be with others who are working, and trying to balance study and work, was so helpful. The fact that we met early in the week was a relief.'

In fact all of the students who completed the diaries for this session made positive comments about it. Nearly all were related to it being an opportunity to meet other

impressions I got from the session itself. I noted that several said it was good to meet other Sandwich Route students, comments being made such as now feeling they were 'not alone'. Leonard (1994) also highlights that most of the mature women students in her study found tutorials manageable and enjoyable (p. 169).

A further example of how students felt indistinct in the new setting was in relation to the perceived size of the University's Library. Though many made positive comments about the Library and its facilities the more negative comments related to its size. Nearly a fifth of the DPSN students who filled in the diaries commented about perceiving the Library as large and overwhelming. For instance, one person commented:

'I felt a bit daunted by the Library. It seemed so big.'

Another aspect of distinctiveness was linked to what participants had previously been involved in. For a small number the change from a previously important occupational role to becoming a student led them to feel indistinct, insignificant and 'deskilled'. For instance, in her interview before she began the DipSW Claire told me of her worries about this. She was leaving a job which she felt might be important to her 'self-esteem'. She said:

'At the moment I can say "I'm Claire, leader of this project". In six weeks I'll be a student... it might be a bit worrying if I find out that's important to me. It might say something in quite a negative way.'

When I spoke to Claire on the first day of the programme she said she felt like 'a little fish in a big sea' rather than a 'big fish in a little one', which she had done in her job, thus confirming her worries about being indistinct in the new situation. Similarly, Lola felt 'deskilled' initially. There was evidence that as time went on these feeling of being indistinct diminished. This was summed up by one of the social work students' comments to me during the participant observation. She said that the group had seemed large to begin with but as she got to know people it did not seem so big. Thus it appeared that, for most, as they became familiar with, and became known in, the new situation, they felt more distinctive in a positive way. Breakwell (1986) argues that people like to feel unique and distinctive (p. 24). The concerns expressed by the participants could be explained in terms of a perceived threat to distinctiveness.

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Feeling 'Real' or 'False'

To a few in the present study being a student was an intrinsic part of their sense of who they were but many did not see themselves as students or saw being it as 'swapping' between roles. For instance, Katie saw it as a role she would 'slip into'. Those who did not see themselves as a student frequently related this to their age or being part-time. Thus they used the young, full-time dominant social representation of students in higher education. For instance, Sheila who was in her forties said:

'I don't think I am a student.... I'm only up there for half a day.'

and I said to her 'so what do you feel about being a mature student ?' and she replied:

'It's a funny concept to me. I suppose it's because I picture students as 18 to 20.'

Shirley who was about to begin the DPSN and had done a lot of part-time study in the past said:

'You can't really become part of the place because you are part-time... you're isolated. You're not actually a student at the University, you're just a goer inner for a few hours a week.'

The quote at the beginning of this chapter from one of the DPSN students sums up how participants could feel:

'Don't feel part of the University, don't feel like a student, more of an interloper.'

A few students wrote in their diary that registering with the University had made them feel more like a student. For instance, one wrote:

'I was pleased to enrol, it was a move forward into me believing I was part of something.'

A small minority felt particularly 'lost' in the new situation. An example of this came from two health studies students who approached me in the Students' Common Room of the School during the third week of their programme. These students were not directly

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involved in the study but had been in the first module session for the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE) students and therefore I had introduced myself and the research project in this session and given out a copy of the flyer (see appendix 10). Both these students had just began a full-time programme, having given up their full-time jobs as nurses. I did not recognise these women but they approached me saying they were interested in my study. One student told me, almost immediately, that she was feeling 'very strange' and went on to say she was wondering 'who am I now, am I a tutor or a student?' They thought it was 'odd' that, though they were full-time, they were only in college two days a week, being unsure of how to spend the rest of their time. As nurses they said they had been used to 'rushing around' and now felt guilty because they appeared to not have much to do. Beginning their programme was clearly a major change from what they were used to and there was a sense of the new situation being unreal to them.

Similarly, in the second phase interviews a small number of women indicated that they had felt particularly 'lost' initially. For instance, the woman who had been sexually abused as a child (discussed above, pp. 186-187) had written in her diary about getting lost on the last day of the induction week of the DipSW but her anxieties were not just about literally getting lost, they were linked to a concern about whether she should actually be on the programme. One women wrote in her diary:

'I still feel lost and I can't say I'm enjoying it.'

and another at the end of the first day:

'I felt bewildered and wondered what I was doing on my way back to the car.'

For many this sense of unreality in the new situation was linked to what they were leaving in terms of their previous job. For instance, one of the women beginning the DipSW full-time told me, during the participant observation, that she found it hard to believe that she had left her job of many years. She described the first week of the DipSW as like being on a training course and it had not really 'sunk in' yet that she had left work and was now taking the DipSW. Another wrote in her diary:

'Obviously the transition from work to student will take time.'

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One woman expressed this concern in terms of worrying about whether she 'really' wanted to become a social worker. In her diary she wrote:

'I still wonder if I've done the right thing. I keep reminding myself that I really want to be a social worker then I wonder if it is what I really want. Everything feels so strange and I feel totally lost.'

These feelings of being 'lost' in the new situation, could be interpreted as threats to authenticity; one's sense of self and what is real (Gecas and Mortimer, 1987, p. 268). Authenticity, Gecas and Mortimer (1987) argue, is evaluated based on a person's perception of what is 'real' and 'false' which is contingent on social meanings. These feelings of being 'lost' were linked to concerns about being different and not a legitimate student in higher education or not a 'proper' professional compared with their view of what professionals are supposed to be like. Therefore evaluations were made based on a comparison between perceptions of themselves and the images of 'proper' students or professionals, it being concluded that they were 'false'.

Perceptions of being a 'real' or 'false' student were also potentially linked to the participants' sense of who they were as a learner. For instance, it appeared that those who felt that being a student was 'part of them' had had positive and integrative experiences of education in the past which informed their current view of themselves as a legitimate and therefore 'real' student.

Conclusions

Concerns about difference or being a legitimate student can be explained in terms of threats to the identity 'principles' of distinctiveness and authenticity. This is linked to the social context in that participants evaluated themselves against perceived images of students in higher education. However, they drew in a varying way on images of the 'bachelor boy' student (Edwards 1993a, p. 86). The women in the present study mainly felt different in terms of their race and age but additionally because of their backgrounds, importantly because they were in professions which have not traditionally been associated with academia and higher education. There were also feelings of difference in other ways, for instance, because of concerns about disclosing sensitive personal details. At the programme level many of the women felt that they were in a 'women friendly' environment and therefore did not feel different. It therefore cannot be said the image they held of higher

education was that of the 'bachelor boy'. Another aspect in the experience of difference was that on entering the new environment certain women were concerned they might be discriminated against because of their previous experiences. These concerns about difference are therefore linked to the social context.

For whatever reason the women in the present study could feel marginal which was reinforced by wider institutional attitudes and practices (also see Chapter 7). This could potentially lead to what Breakwell (1992a, pp. 37-38) describes as 'psychological estrangement'; feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, self-estrangement and social isolation. The relevance of marginality in a higher educational environment has been highlighted by Schlossberg (1989). 'Marginality' is one pole and 'mattering' (feeling important to others) the other, Schlossberg arguing that institutions of education should clearly indicate to *all* students that they are important (p. 14). Creating this sense of mattering seemed particularly important initially, when concerns about 'fitting in' and 'standing out' were particularly to the fore. Though beyond the scope of the study, it would seem likely that this is also an ongoing need, which if not met could lead to psychological estrangement.

The importance of students feeling that they belong is also noted in an early British study relating to traditional age students in higher education (Miller, 1973), thus suggesting that it is important that, as Schlossberg (1989) has argued, *all* students feel they matter. Because of dominant images of students in higher education, however, many non-traditional students are likely to evaluate themselves as being different. This will be reinforced if they are not made to feel that they 'matter' in all areas of the institution. The wider higher education institution did not appear to be taking on board and addressing issues of relevance to the reality of recent trends in the student profile. At the time of the study national figures showed that the number of mature students had grown faster than those of younger students. Duke (1994, p. II) states that a typical higher education student is coming to be a mature student studying part-time, despite the enduring image of the traditional school leaver university entrant. If institutions of higher education are recruiting mature women students to professional programmes they must clearly indicate, at all levels of the institution, that women are important or else the institution risks disenfranchising this large proportion of the student population, which, I would argue, amounts to discrimination.

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CHAPTER 10

COPING WITH THE TRANSITION

Over the period of the research most of the participants appeared to become integrated into their programme of professional higher education. They coped, in various ways and to varying degrees, with a number of threats to the 'principles' of identity (Breakwell, 1986) which beginning their programme presented. In this chapter I firstly examine the evidence which suggested that there was a process of successful integration for most of the participants. I then outline how the threats to the different 'principles' of identity were ameliorated and how these link to Breakwell's (1986) theory of coping with threats to identity as well as other theoretical perspectives. Suggested solutions in assisting women entering educational environments in the literature (see Chapter 2) are developed raising issues for consideration in integrating mature women students into programmes of professional higher education.

Coping or Not Coping?

I carried out an analysis of changes in how the participants appeared to be coping over the first few weeks of their programme in the second phase of the present study. The diaries which the participants had been asked to complete during the introductory period were divided into three groups depending on an assessment of how the respondents appeared to be coping at the end of this period. Group A were those who expressed confidence and appeared to be coping well; group B were those who appeared to be coping well with certain aspects but not others; and group C those who still appeared to be anxious (see Chapter 4, p. 88 for more detail). The analysis indicated that out of the 83 diaries completed 18 respondents were judged to be in group A; 40 in group B; and 25 in the group C (see figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1 Assessment of coping after the introductory period
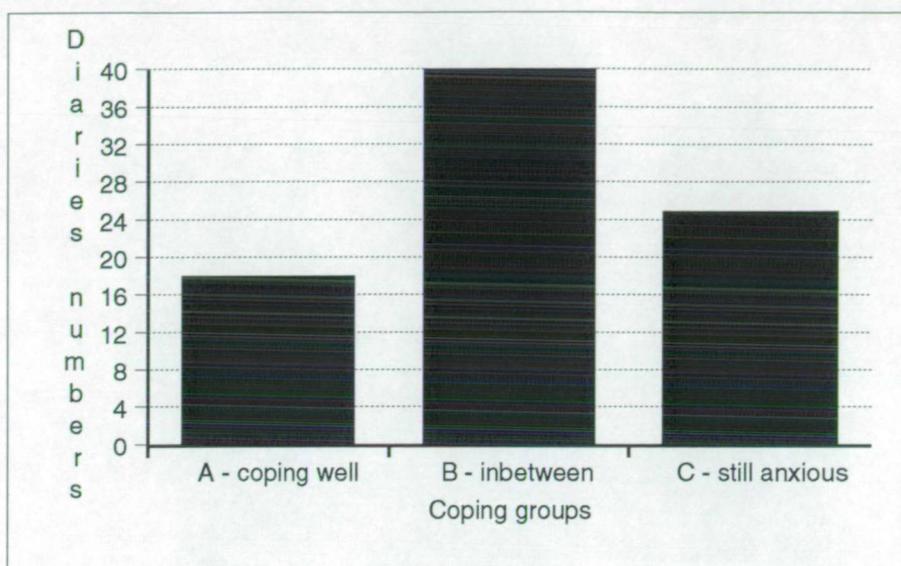
An analysis of the participants' own views about how they felt they were coping determined by the question in the diaries: 'How well do you feel you are coping so far?' revealed a more positive picture - 41 indicated that they were coping well, 36 were unsure and 6 were not coping well (see figure 10.2).

Figure 10.2 Respondents' views of coping at the end of the introductory period
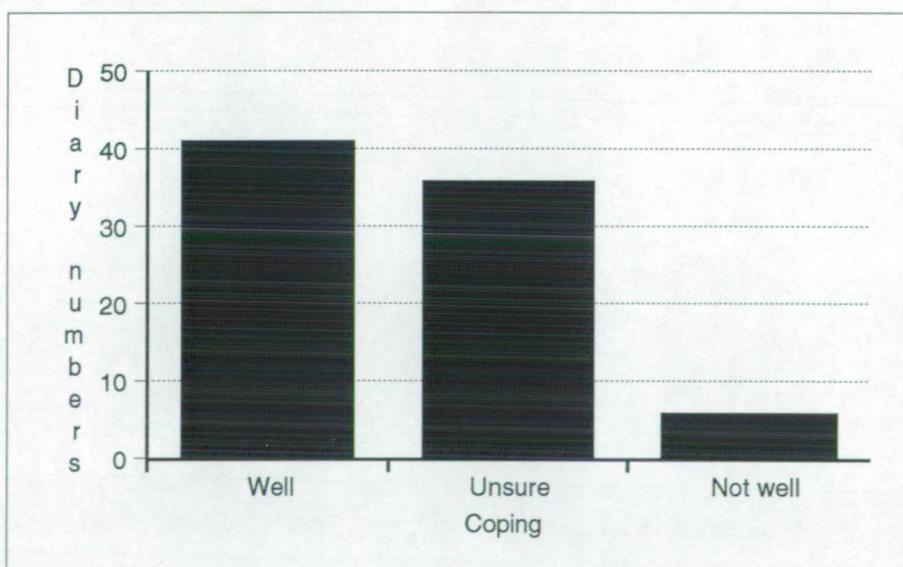
One of the aims in second phase interviews was to select roughly equal numbers from each of the coping/not coping groups. Because of the way the women responded to the request to be interviewed the 20 were not evenly divided between the three categories (A = 5; B = 8; C = 7). Part of the analysis of the interviews included a reassessment of how

the students were coping based on the criteria which I used initially. This was done as far as possible 'blindly', as the original classifications were not taken into account. This assessment of coping was then compared with the initial groupings which revealed that eleven women were coping better than when they first began the programme, four were the same and five were finding it harder. The boundaries between the three coping categories in this reassessment were more blurred. For example, in some cases someone who appeared to be relatively confident, expressed few worries and appeared to be coping well and might therefore be in the A group could still express some uncertainties therefore group A/B was created. Similarly, group B/C was created to account for participants who were between groups B and C. The reassessment after the interviews, a few week into the programmes, revealed that six participants were in group A, seven in A/B, four B and three into B/C (see figure 10.3). This appeared to indicate that most of the interview participants were coping better than when they first began their programme.

Figure 10.3 Assessment of coping a few weeks into the programmes
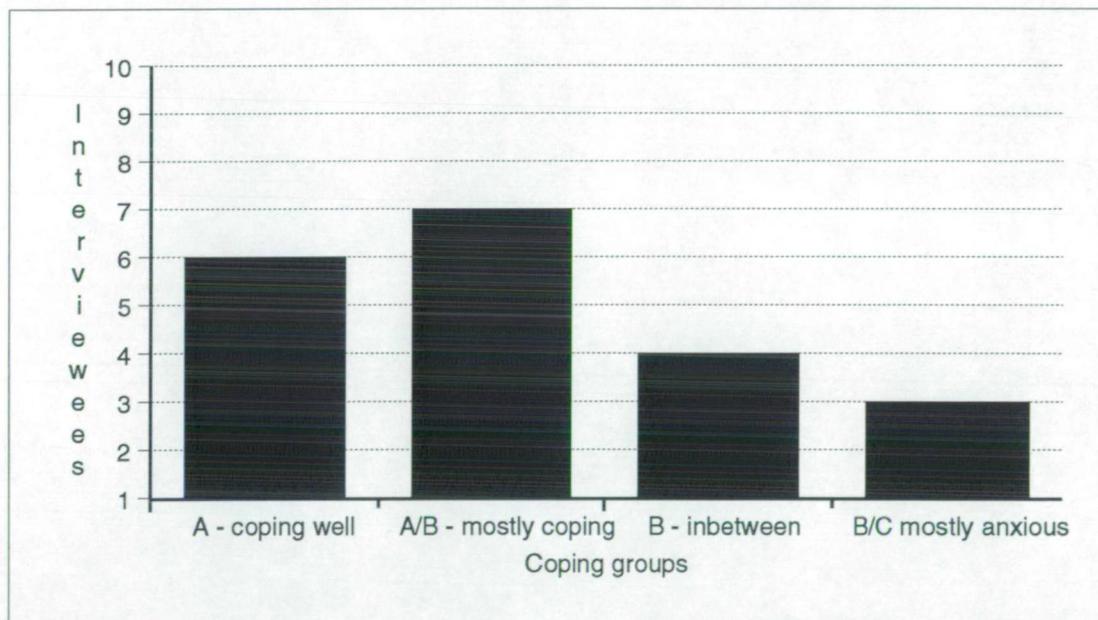
The assessment of these changes by the methods described above should, however, be treated with caution. For instance, in at least two (and potentially all) of the cases of those who appeared to get worse, this could have been due to differences in the data collection methods. The interviews give the opportunity to explore more sensitive issues which had not come to light in the briefer, less intimate, diary method. There were also so many different factors involved in coping or not coping, as the previous four chapters have highlighted, which meant that comparisons were difficult. I would also argue that the process of transition is in a constant state of flux and the assessment at different times could reveal that certain aspects were to the fore at that particular time. Additionally, my

assessment might not reflect the participants' perceptions of how they were coping. Despite these methodological problems there were indications of differences in coping and a trend towards initial threats subsiding, for most people, as time passed. This was supported by the way participants described the transition to the programme. For instance, Lola wrote in her diary that she was particularly anxious and apprehensive initially. On the first day of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) she wrote:

'Very apprehensive when I arrived; will I be able to cope! I've never attended college before.'

By the end of the week she recorded in response to the question - 'How well do you feel you are coping so far?'

'Very well, each day I have felt "lighter".'

In her interview she confirmed that she had felt particularly anxious initially. She said:

'I was basically terrified.... absolutely terrified arriving here on the first day.'

As time went on she described how her 'confidence' had 'grown'.

This process of 'settling in' was described by many of the participants throughout the study and was apparent in all the data collection methods. For instance, I noticed that many people seemed to become more at ease as time passed, as did one of the new Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN) students who commented in her diary in the third week of the programme:

'Noticed that people are talking more freely and there is a lot more noise.'

This coping was, however, to differing degrees, from coping well to barely managing, with a small minority appearing not to be coping or integrating particularly well into the programmes. For instance, one women on the DPSN wrote in her diary that she felt 'good' initially but had got worse. In her interview a few weeks into the DPSN Kay still appeared to be finding the programme difficult to cope with despite having studied recently. She was finding it hard to adapt to a different level of study and said she would need more feedback before she gained confidence, despite doing well in the practice essay. She found the focus on self-directed study hard. She was also finding it difficult to 'fit' studying in with full-time work and was glad that she had not got children, which she saw to be an added pressure for other women. She said:

'I think its been a shock, there's a lot of work involved, a lot of things I'm unsure about.'

The factors involved and individual differences in coping were important and need to be understood if coping is to be supported. I now re-evaluate, in the light of the findings of the present study, the strategies for improving women's entry and experience of higher education put forward in the literature (see Chapter 2).

How do Women Cope ?

Edwards (1993a) has strongly criticised the use of the term 'strategy' to depict how mature women students with families cope. It is based on the public world of male activities and understandings and one aspect of this is that because of the way women are represented in academic accounts they can fail to recognise themselves, which has the potential to undermine women's actual experiences (pp. 136-139). A few of the participants in the present study did not recognise the term 'coping strategy' but did use what psychologists would describe as coping strategies. This partially supports Edwards view that 'strategy' is not always within women's terms of reference. However, throughout the study the women described particular ways in which they coped psychologically and how aspects of the educational setting and institution assisted this. Breakwell (1986) uses the term 'coping strategy' in her theory of coping with threatened identities, however, she indicates that the 'strategies' she outlines are a range of possibilities available to a person experiencing threats and that there are personal and social limitations to coping (pp. 148-179).

The ways in which the participants in the present study spoke of how they had coped with the transition to their programme could be linked to several of the intra-psychic coping strategies which Breakwell (1986, pp. 77-108) outlines. For instance, she describes reconstrual and re-attribution 'strategies' as those where a person seeks to reconstrue a situation or its implications in order to eliminate the threat (p. 90). Reconstrual of the situation was used by participants in that they re-defined the properties of the position. This was illustrated by the use of comments like 'I'll take it as it comes' or 'I'll keep an open mind', or they spoke of lessening the importance of succeeding, being 'positive', 'putting it in perspective' or reassuring themselves that it would be 'all right'. Another strategy used could be linked to Breakwell's description of deflection strategies such as denial (pp. 81-86). For example, Lola spoke of 'packaging' things away which she was not happy with and of eating more chocolate when she was worried. These kinds of intra-psychic 'strategies' were not useful in making general suggestions for how to assist coping but there were others 'strategies' which were commonly used which could

be developed into issues for consideration in assisting women in the transition to professional higher education. I will highlight these throughout the rest of this chapter.

The introduction to the programme assisting coping

Certain aspects of the introductory elements of the programmes appeared to assist the new students in coping with initial anxieties. For instance, providing a drink and biscuit on arrival; having the opportunity to meet people - both staff and fellow students - early on and finding out that staff were friendly and approachable; having an informal welcome; the provision of directions around the campus; having name badges (though not all those who were asked to wear these appreciated it); being given information including information on where to park (parking and getting to the University were a major concern initially for many). However, there was much more to coping than a friendly welcome.

Being prepared for professional higher education

A key way in which many of the women in the present study said that they coped was by having a realistic view of what to expect. For instance, a few interviewed once they had started their programme (and a few of the diary comments) indicated that it had not been as bad as they expected. Janice said:

'I knew quite a lot of people who've gone through the course and actually knowing that people with the same commitments as myself have gone through it and managed to survive and come out the other end with a diploma was quite good.'

She knew that it would be hard work and that she had to make 'that commitment', but:

'It's been a little better than I thought because one or two of the comments from those who've done the course, "it's very much self-orientated", "you don't get much help from the tutors", "it's very much you go and do it" .... which it is in a way but as I say [programme leader] has always been quite open about any problems, go to her. I'm quite pleased about that, I didn't expect that.'

Gaining a realistic view was said to have come from several sources, from the participants' previous educational experience, through talking to others and, for a few, from the literature sent out in advance. For instance, Belinda said:

'I took a lot of note of what they said, that basically you have to bear in mind that you come into college and you've got a workload, you've got to sort out your own childcare. I think a lot really didn't think about it.... then it's a big shock.'

She particularly mentioned the letter sent to all the prospective social work students which detailed the realities of the demands of the programme and fitting it in with family commitments. This letter had to be signed and send back to finally accept a place on the DipSW. Belinda said about this letter:

'It actually made you think, well do I really want to do this...'

It had made her consider the reality of the commitment and demands involved. Providing realistic expectations appeared to assist self-efficacy beliefs.

Another way of coping, which many women spoke of, was based on resilience developed through having coped with difficult situations in the past. As Yvonne, who was in the older motherhood career type, put it:

'The way I work, as I've said twice this morning to separate people, I'm spinning plates and it's a case of which plate is going to drop because my life has so many tangents of its own but I've always functioned that way....'

She spoke of having many things 'on the go' when she was looking after her home and children years before saying that:

'I was spinning plates then and they all finished at tea time when we all sat down and had tea and then their daddy came home or whatever so everything was finished then.'

She thought that this had helped her to cope but she did wonder if trying to do many things had created additional demands for her and thought that she perhaps did take on extra things because she was a women (though she did say she enjoyed it and felt the need to 'nurture' her family). Reflecting on my own experience of combining motherhood with study I noted not long after I had returned to study after becoming a mother, that I began to do my university work, out of necessity, in a more efficient way.

These ways of coping can be seen as linking to intra-psychic coping strategy of anticipatory restructuring outlined by Breakwell (1986, p. 93-94). This means that the potential threat is evident in advance and the person can, therefore, restructure their identity in line with the threat. Anticipatory restructuring, therefore, involves

incorporating some aspects of the new anticipated situation into the identity structure so that discontinuity is not experienced.

Nicholson (1987a) argues that within the preparation phase of a transition the tasks and goals involve developing helpful expectations, motives and feelings (p. 181) and the strategies which can assist this include giving a realistic preview, advance contacts and self-appraisal (p. 185). This model has general applicability in that it highlights what needs to be done before a person encounters a transition. This view could be seen as the theoretical justification for the literature which suggests having contact/advice in advance of beginning an educational programme. There is seen to be a need to improve advice and guidance, inter-sectorial links, initial contacts and providing Open Days/'Taster' Days (see Chapter 2).

Familiarity also assisted the transition (see Chapter 7). One aspect which was particularly helpful was already knowing people who were also beginning the programme. The fact that the DPSN catered for local nurses, midwives and health visitors meant that networks between these new students were often already established through training and working together. These new students often knew or recognised others and frequently said this helped. For example, nearly all of the DPSN students interviewed in the second phase of the study said this had eased their initial anxieties. Fiona said:

> 'as soon as I saw these faces that I knew, there was a sea of faces, I thought, "oh this isn't as bad as I expected".'

Events such as Open Days, the 'Welcome Weekend' or coming to the University in advance enhanced continuity. Over a quarter of those interviewed in the second phase commented that these prior contacts were helpful. Similarly, for many, a tour of the School and/or the campus was seen as helpful in enhancing familiarity. The DipSW induction included a tour of the campus and School. This was received positively by many of the new students (just over two thirds of the comments made in the diaries about this tour in both phases of the study were positive) mainly because it helped to orientate them and provide some familiarity with the campus.

Aspects which enhanced familiarity and allowed for anticipatory restructuring were generally felt to be helpful. These included information about the programme, coming to the University, information on where to park and timetables and reading lists in advance. However, the women's beliefs in their abilities to cope appeared to be more strongly linked to the continuities of their previous experience and sense of who they were. Additionally, many of the aspects that the women reported as being useful in contacts

with the University before they began their programme were related to them having information which would allow them to plan because of the demands upon them from the 'greedy institutions' of the family, education and work. Advance contacts were also seen as useful in order to make connections between their family and education. For instance, a few spoke of the Welcome Weekend being useful in enabling their children to see where their mother would be studying. Prior contacts and information were therefore useful for women for various reasons; being given a realistic view was useful in terms of spelling out the kind of commitment involved which gave a clear indication of what would be required. Edwards (1993a) argues that students entering contemporary higher education with its business orientation should at least be given a realistic view of what they can expect (p. 150). Coping was about developing self-efficacy beliefs related to the realities of what had to be done, not just about providing information and the opportunity to have contact in advance.

Despite having a realistic view and plenty of advance information a few were still concerned about their ability to cope. For instance, Kay said that coming in advance was good because it provided her with a certain amount of familiarity and she knew what work was involved but she was still finding it hard to settle in. She described beginning the DPSN as:

'A shock. Yes I was prepared because like I said that day [when she came for a pre-course meeting] I thought was really useful because it gave us an insight.... it's the level and the amount of work that's involved.... don't get me wrong I didn't come thinking it was going to be easy because the actual title itself suggests it's going to be a lot of work. I actually think though until you start it I don't think anybody can....'

She spoke of having talked widely to others who had taken the programme previously and them giving her differing views of what to expect. She said:

'And when you say "what exactly do you do?", they'll tell you but I think your ideas are totally different until you've actually started it, so I think it has been a shock, there's a lot of work involved, a lot of things I'm unsure about. I think until I've had to do it, really experience that, I don't think anybody telling you or giving you leaflets or talks could have prepared me for that.'

She thought that her difficulties in coping were due to not having experienced this level of education before and not having much time in her busy life to do the work, therefore no amount of information or advanced contact or even being given a realistic view could have assisted her with the continuities of her concerns about her abilities to cope. These

continuities limited her ability to cope. For a few, concerns about their academic and professional ability were particularly deeply rooted; being an integral part of their interpretive frameworks (see chapter 8). This implies that the way people perceive events will strongly influence their experience of them. While good preparation and especially providing a realistic view of what to expect are important they are clearly not enough to assist women who have strong continuities from the demands of 'greedy institutions' and concerns, based on their previous experience, about their academic or professional abilities. For these few, sensitive and individual academic support would probably be necessary to enhance their self-efficacy beliefs.

Supporting abilities to cope with the 'greedy institutions'

The women's beliefs about their abilities to cope (self-efficacy) was challenged in that many found it difficult to manage the competing demands of the 'greedy institutions' of education, family and work; a precarious 'balance' between these was reported (see Chapter 8). One of the most common ways of coping was by being organised (nearly three quarters of the second phase interviewees spoke of issues to do with being or having to organise). This involved organising where, when and how to study. For instance, Yvonne (who had three teenage children and other friends and relatives who made demands on her time) said she had had to organise time to study on Sundays. In order to do this she avoided having a drink on Saturday nights so she could work better, she tried not cook a roast meal and delegated more domestic duties to members of her family. She said then:

'I might be able to sit from 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. without too many intrusions.'

This emphasis in Yvonne's quote was that despite being as organised as she could be she still only *might* be able to study. Edwards (1993a) emphasises the women in her study were:

'often teetering on a knife's edge with a finely-tuned structure of arrangements that
they had constructed for fitting family and education into their lives' (p. 73).

Being organised as a way of coping is not included in Breakwell's theory and thus highlights the social structural impact on women's ability to cope.

One way of coping with the demands of the 'greedy institutions' which was commonly commented on by the women in the present study was having support within each; a supportive family (including their immediate family, parents or other relative) and/or

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husband or partner, support in various ways at the University and support and empathy from colleagues at work (though a small number spoke of being determined whether they got support or not). As Caroline, who had two young children, put it:

'I couldn't do it if either my parents, husband's parents or husband didn't support me, I don't think I would do it... I couldn't do it.'

Several of those who attended the University part-time did not have much time to use the Library or other facilities and expressed a need for more help and support, for instance, in how to use the Library. Support was seen by the women as a way of giving them the time to satisfactorily meet the demands of each institution. The main factor which the participants mentioned as helping to ease the demands of paid employment in relation to the other 'greedy institutions' was having enough time off. This included being given the time off to come to the University or being part-time at work. Having details of the programme in advance helped with planning to fit study around work commitments.

Practical support

For those in the young motherhood career type (with children under ten, usually with at least one pre-school aged child) childcare was an issue to the fore on beginning the programme (see Chapter 7). Certain factors were seen as being helpful in assisting the transition in relation to responsibilities for looking after young children. For instance, Belinda who had a five month old baby when she began the DipSW said that having details of the timetable well in advance was particularly helpful in arranging childcare but it would also have been useful to have the timetable for the induction week in advance. Having good flexible childcare was vital for those with pre-school aged children. None of the participants I spoke to used the limited crèche facilities at the University; in fact, there was an indication that even if they could get a place for their child it might not be suitable because, for instance, they lived too far away to make transporting their child practical. For example, when I spoke to Mary (a single parent with three children, one of pre-school age) just after she began the DipSW she was considering using the crèche and actually asked me for details about it. When I saw her a few weeks later I asked her if she was going to use it and she told me she was not, partly because of the cost but also it would be difficult as she lived over 20 miles away from the University and travelled by bus and then train and thought it would be impractical with a young child, as she often had to rush.

Hours to suit the demands of children was also an issue for those in the motherhood groups. On the DipSW the morning sessions generally commenced at 9.15, which was a

problem for a few especially those who had to travel a considerable distance to the University. Belinda lived locally and had flexible childcare and therefore the 9.15 start was not a problem for her but she had noticed that though the hours of the programme had been considered to fit in with the demands of having children;

'for a lot of women who are picking children up and do live a distance away, some say it is still not early enough...'

It was suggested by a few women that a 9.30 a.m. start would have been better. I observed that a few were frequently late for the sessions which began at 9.15 a.m. Others had to leave early at the end of the day to pick up children. For instance, Sarah, on the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE), had to leave promptly at 3.30 p.m. to pick up one of her children from nursery in the town where she lived over 20 miles away from the University. Two of the DPSN students mentioned that having to attend the programme in the evening was inconvenient, one saying that she had to arrange childcare especially for the evening. A few others spoke of not 'wasting time' throughout the day or keeping to time in order that they could have this time at either end of the day to meet their domestic commitments. Programme times which take into account women's responsibilities were therefore important for those in the young motherhood career type particularly. Flexibility was asked for in relation to the continuities of motherhood in terms of more self-directed study and the option of attending formal sessions. This supports the literature in that flexibility of provision that takes account of demands on women is seen as vital (see, for instance, Barnett, 1992; Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Hart, 1991; Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Keen 1990; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988; Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1993) and more flexibility in modes of study, for instance, more part-time courses, a CATS system, modularisation and more independent study (Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986 & 1988).

The need for flexibility was an issue for many because of the commitments of continuing professional employment, however, rather than their part-time programme providing the flexibility for them to study (as is suggested in the literature), for many it increased the demands upon them.

Funding of childcare was also an issue for a small number. Belinda spent two thirds of her bursary on childcare and said that if she had been on an ordinary student grant she would not have been able to afford to come on the DipSW because of the cost of childcare.

Good, flexible and conveniently situated childcare, knowing details of the timetable in advance, flexibility in study and for a small number assistance with the cost of childcare would have assisted the transition. McGivney (1993) argues that lack of childcare is one of the major 'obstacles' for women becoming involved in higher education (p. 77). Many other studies also highlight the importance of childcare support for women (see, for instance, Barnett, 1992; Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Hart, 1991; Keen, 1990; Leonard, 1994; Morgan, et al., 1981; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988; Wisker, 1986 &1988; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). However, in the present study childcare was only an issue for one group of women; those in young motherhood (who made up less than half of the participants in the study) and it was only a major concern to a small number of these.

There is the suggestion in the literature that financial constraints are another major 'obstacle' for women returning to education (see, for instance, McGivney 1993, p. 77). It is argued that low cost provision or grants for part-time study would assist women (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Hart, 1991; Keen 1990; McGivney, 1993; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). These solutions would have assisted a small number of women in the present study but lack of finance was not a problem for most of them (see Chapter 8). In fact paying for the programme was said by a few to be a motivational factor to continue. Having to pay course fees is one of the key factors which Dewar et al. (1995, p. 4) tentatively link to being more successful on the DPSN in another institution. For women on the borderline of being able to cope financially there was the indication that the amount of additional money which would make a difference to them feeling they were coping was not great. For those who did have to pay for their programme such things as being able to pay in instalments, or having the money taken out of their wages monthly was seen as helpful.

Teaching and learning

With regard to teaching and learning, several suggestions have been made in the literature to improve the situation for women entering educational environments. Wisker (1986) suggests the need for study skills courses for women (p. 4). Most of the women in the present study, however, appeared to be well prepared and expected and wanted the types of teaching and learning styles used on the programmes (see Chapter 7). The conventional study skills programme arranged for the DipSW students at the beginning of their programme was not well attended (though this could have been related to the timing of it, on Friday afternoons) despite the expression of a need for this kind of course. A few did indicate that they felt they needed some support with how to approach

the academic work. For instance, Evelyn said she would have liked to have taken a study skills course before she began the DPSN but she had used a book which had been recommended as part of the pre-course reading and this had become her 'bible'. Brennan (1995) notes that some nurse students find the transition to essay writing in higher education difficult. There is criticism of the need for study skills courses for mature students. Richardson (1993) and Richardson and King (1994) state that in the literature on mature students there is often a stereotyped view of mature students as deficient in study skills. However, Richardson (1993) argues that there is a consistent suggestion in the literature on approaches to study of mature students that they show desirable approaches to academic learning. It is the kind of student therefore who is constructed as problematic.

Conventional study skills programmes would not provide the kind of support necessary for those who had particularly deeply rooted beliefs about their academic ability and would certainly not be an appropriate support for those who were concerned about their professional abilities (see Chapter 8). Therefore providing them with this kind of skills training amounts to offering the wrong kind of support. A report which assesses the quality of student services provision in the polytechnics and colleges sector emphasises the need for more diagnostic work in student induction in order to identify students' individual needs (DfE, 1993, pp. 5-6). Rather than providing universal study skills courses for mature (or potentially all) students, it might be better to assess individual concerns and support by giving feedback on 'real' tasks as they arise, thus providing information which will bolster their self-efficacy.

A DipSW seminar on the final day of indication week which examined the wealth of relevant work and life experience that the new students had was seen, by many, as alleviating concerns about lack of appropriate experience. However, for a small minority this served to highlight further their perceived professional deficits. The key way in which concerns about perceived lack of experience (professional or academic) were ameliorated was by finding out that others were in a similar situation or felt the same kinds of anxieties.

In terms of teaching and learning, changes in the curriculum are called for in much of the literature on mature women students (see Chapter 2). It is commonly argued that the curriculum should be 'women centred' and draw on 'women's ways of knowing'; enabling women to make connections between their own and formal knowledge (see, for instance, Belenky, et al., 1986). The curriculum of the programmes of professional education in the present study helped to make these connections in terms of linking both their personal and professional knowledge with formal knowledge (particularly the

DipSW). The problem was that a few did not have the appropriate personal or professional knowledge to be able to contribute in the way required. Additionally, a small number of the DipSW students found drawing on deeply personal issues particularly threatening. Despite the 'women friendly' curriculum, a few reported that they were not able to fully explore issues of relevance to them (see Chapter 9). It has been argued that black women can feel that issues of relevance to them are not dealt with (Dicker, 1992, p. 79) which was a concern expressed in the present study. Edwards (1993a) suggests flexibility in the curriculum is more appropriate for mature women students as this allows them the opportunity to go more 'deeply' into areas of concern to them, if they wish (p. 151). However, within the constraints and requirements of contemporary professional education, meeting the needs of all may prove difficult but more flexibility to include a wider range of experiences may be possible.

The findings of the present study broadly supported the literature on other issues related to teaching and learning, such as, demolishing disciplinary boundaries, using co-operative teaching methods and facilitatory as opposed to authoritarian teaching styles (see chapter 2). For instance, many of the participants said they preferred the 'new' approaches to teaching and learning; seminar and groupwork as opposed to lectures and the covering of issues relevant to them personally and their practice (see Chapter 7).

The literature on how to assess mature women students is contradictory, for example, Sperling (1991) argues for continual assessment while Wisker (1988) is in favour of examinations. What these differing views have in common is that they are based on the premise that mature women students have to 'fit' assessment in with their already busy lives. Only a few in the present study commented about their preferences for assessment methods and all of these said they preferred continual assessment to examinations. Examinations were seen as particularly anxiety provoking. Rose commented that on a previous course finding time to revise for examinations with two young children was difficult. The key concern expressed by the participants about assessment was having time to complete it in conjunction with the demands of the other 'greedy institutions'; work and family. The most important issue therefore is the need for flexibility and understanding because of these competing demands. For instance, Caroline, who had taken the ENB870 research course at the University the previous year was glad the tutor had made allowances for her situation by giving her extra time to complete her final two assignment which were supposed to be handed around the time her baby was due to be born (though she did complete them for the original hand in date).

The literature on mature women students calls for more women tutors (see, for instance, Wisker, 1988) or women only provision (see, for instance, NIACE REPLAN, 1991;

Sperling, 1991). A major theme in the present study was the expression of the need for staff to be approachable, friendly and sensitive to the new students' needs. Similarly, in a survey of social work students it was found that they expected tutors to give support whenever necessary (Coulshed, 1986). In the present study there was an issue about gender of staff in that participants found women tutors to be understanding of the issues they faced because of shared experience. When asked about whether being a women had assisted the transition in any way nearly half said that being in a woman dominated professional area had made it easier as it was seen as 'women friendly'. However, it was the qualities of approachability, friendliness and sensitivity which were of foremost importance rather than the gender of the member of staff. For instance, Trudy said of her male programme leader:

'[Programme leader] strikes me..... particularly as a man, seems very receptive to any problems whether they're large or small they seem to him to be important.... first impressions strikes me that he will endeavour to help in any way that he can.'

Conversely, Yvonne told me of a negative experience she had had with a female tutor on a previous similar level programme to the DPSN. When she began this programme the group she was in had encountered problems with their particular tutor. She said:

'as a group, had a tutor who we were not confident with and she left. She got a position elsewhere. She wasn't right for our group or we weren't right for her and a lot of us were in danger of leaving.'

Their problems could have been due to the 'intensive' nature of the programme and:

'that might have happened because a lot was expected of us too soon and we'd not enough support.'

Caroline said of beginning the DPSN:

'Our seminar leader, she's said what courses she's been on and what difficulties she's had because she's studied with a family, so that's nice to share.'

She found it encouraging that many of the lecturers had managed a job, studying and a family and were successful. The fact that they were women, who she perceived as having shared experiences with her, had given her confidence that she could also cope.

Within the present structure of higher education, where there are still issues of patriarchal power, mature women students are best supported by those with the qualities of approachability, friendliness and sensitivity. There is a greater possibility that women tutors will have more shared experience with mature women students than men but this cannot be assumed. In the present study it appeared to be important to many new students that they met the staff and found out that they were friendly and approachable early on. Sperling (1991, p. 206) also notes that the accessibility of staff is important and Roberts (1994, pp. 4-5) states that the women in her study reported that they gained valuable support from staff who were encouraging. Women lecturers also appeared to assist a few in enhancing their beliefs about their abilities to cope by finding out that they were in or had been in similar positions and had coped or were coping. The literature which suggests the need for facilitation rather than authoritarian approaches of tutors (see, for instance, Karach, 1992, NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Wisker, 1988) was supported by the views of many the participants in the present study.

Sharing concerns

Finding out that others had similar anxieties and concerns often ameliorated them. One person's comments in the diary summed up what was expressed by many:

'Feeling more settled after talking to other people. Realised that I'm not the only one to feel anxious.'

Kay told me she felt that it had been particularly useful to discuss her feeling with others on the DPSN or who had been on it in the past. This had helped her not to feel so 'isolated'. During the induction week of the DipSW there was an hour long session where several of the second year students came to talk to the new students about their experiences. Analysis of the comments made in the diaries showed that this session was particularly well received. Over three quarters of the comments recorded in both phases of the study were positive and related to the session being enjoyable and useful. Comments were commonly prefixed by such adjectives as 'very' or 'extremely' which emphasised the strength of feeling. In my participant observation fieldnotes I recorded that it was lively, relaxed and informal - 'a big contrast to the more formal induction sessions'. One of the reasons many of the new students gave for it being so useful was that the second year students were seen as reassuring as they had been 'in the same boat'. For instance, one of the new students wrote in her diary:

'This was useful because they told us how nervous they were when starting their first week.'

Breakwell (1986, pp. 130-135) argues that group support can provide a cure for isolation and a way to share experience which:

'permits the externalization of feelings and, in an atmosphere which is supportive, the discovery that these feelings are normal and shared by others. Where the feelings entail self-doubt, guilt or self-blame, the revelations that others do and feel the same can be cathartic' (p. 131).

Reflecting on the transition

The importance of talking about or reflecting on initial concerns was highlighted by a few comments made about my involvement with the new students. It was interesting to note the way I was used or perceived by participants. For instance, when I asked Jenny if anything could have been done to improve things when she had began the DipSW she said:

'I suppose something like this [the interview] could have been helpful, talking through the problem areas that we're having.'

A few others commented that filling in the diary had been useful in assisting them to reflect on the transition. During the participant observation the new students used me as a source of information or to complain to about things they were unhappy with. One interviewee asked for my advice on an essay she was having difficulty with. This suggests that having someone who is aware of their individual needs and problems or having a chance to reflect on the transition is important[1]. The fact that I influenced the research in this way could indicate that I effected it in other ways but the use of trustworthiness enhancing measures helps to validate the findings (see Chapter 4).

Relationships with partners

In the literature it is suggested that personal counselling is the solution for mature women students' relationship problems with husbands or partners (see Chapter 2). For a few women in the present study being involved in professional higher education could effect these relationships (see Chapter 7). Shifts in the balance of power between

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[1] In feedback which I received on an early draft of the findings chapters Barbara wrote 'And it's true I did hope to gain some (extra) initial personal support in meeting you'.

women and their partners can lead to problems (Edwards, 1993a, pp. 107-117). Personal counselling therefore might not be appropriate in 'solving' these problems. It might be more important to be able to recognise the degree of impact and ramifications on relationships and support women through any difficulties. It has been argued that first order change requires little adjustment within the family but second order change denotes major changes in the definition of relationships (Burnham, 1986, pp. 40-41) and it is therefore second order change which needs supporting.

Creating a sense of belonging

Concerns about 'standing out' as being distinctive in a negative way were linked to feelings of difference based on the continuities of race, class, age, sexuality, educational or professional background. For instance, many of the DPSN students perceived themselves as not being a 'proper' academic because the kinds of health care professions which they were in have not traditionally been associated with higher education. Perceived differences meant that authenticity was threatened. Many did not see themselves as 'real' or legitimate in the new educational environment (see Chapter 9). Certain issues were particularly sensitive, for instance, 'coming out' as being a lesbian or disclosing childhood sexual abuse. The lesbian woman in the present study who reported problems felt that initially meeting a small number of people (she had made friends with two other women), who understood the issues, had helped her to feel 'safe'. She then found it possible to move from this position of 'safety' to get to know others on the programme. She said:

> *'Maybe that's something that a lot of people need at first, to feel secure in a small group at first instead of remaining in the schoolgirl sort of phase... going round in twos or threes, then as an adult you break out of that and circulate more with others as well....'*

What eased these feelings of difference, in a similar way to the amelioration of negative distinctiveness, was having the chance to discuss these concerns in a 'safe' environment and find others in a similar situation. Breakwell (1986, p. 128) states that group interactions can be an important way of enhancing coping. The kind most relevant to the present study outlined by Breakwell is group support (pp. 130-135). Group support originates from individuals coming together with others when they share a threatening position. Breakwell's theory here relates to groups coming together for particular purposes. Firstly, she describes groups which provide social and informational networks. These can provide a cure to isolation and are concerned with the transmission of facts to members. Secondly, she describes consciousness-raising groups which are established to change members' understanding of issues. People who face the same threat can share

experiences in a supportive environment and discover that their feelings are normal and that others within the group also have them which can have particularly beneficial effect. Commonly, participants in the present study said that finding out that others were in the 'same boat' was reassuring. However, the implication was that though a few of the groups were formally established, for instance, the Black Students Support Group on the DipSW, much of what was gained through sharing anxieties with others was on an informal and ad hoc basis and did not necessarily have to be through the formation of a group. It could be two individuals who shared a similar concern for a brief period of time. The important function which assisted coping was therefore having the opportunity early on in the programme to find others in a similar position. This was assisted by letting students meet informally and the use of carefully structured 'getting to know each other' exercises. This support of other students is seen in the literature on mature women students (see, for instance, Roberts 1994; Sperling, 1991) as an important way of assisting coping. Edwards (1993a, p. 145) implies that support can be gained from those in a similar situation. Henry (1994) emphasises that black women in higher education see support networks, both inside and outside the institution, as important (p. 48).

Conclusions

Despite the concerns in many women's accounts they appeared to cope particularly well but this is no reason for complacency. I have become aware from the literature (see, Chapter 2) and a few tutors of a stereotyped view of mature women students. The view is that mature women students *can and do cope* and *do do well*. The problems they face are somehow cancelled out by their particular assets and attributes - resilience, enthusiasm and determination. This view, however, masks real problems which arise from women's social position. Sperling (1991) argues that the structural and attitudinal 'barriers' women face are seen as 'normal' parts of their lives and therefore not 'barriers'; 'a misconception that is continuously perpetuated by the patriarchal structure and content of the [higher] education system itself' (p. 200).

In a report which assessed the quality of student services provision in polytechnics and colleges it was found that in most of these institutions subject departments were responsible for providing their own induction programmes (DfE, 1993, p. 5). This provision is described as a series of activities aimed to familiarise the students with the institution's systems, services and sites as well as the organisation of the department and their actual programme of study. It is also said to give the opportunity to get to know fellow students and tutors. This appeared to be the main aim of the induction sessions on the programmes involved in the present study and all were organised by the individual programme leaders. While the evidence from the present study suggests that these aspects

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are beneficial and enhance continuity, the problems that certain continuities can mean for mature women students are not fully addressed in this type of approach. As in the DfE report it was generally found that there was too much emphasis in induction on giving information and too little on diagnostic work to identify students' needs (pp. 5-6). In this Chapter I have developed general solutions put forward in the literature (see Chapter 2) to assist women entering educational environments, raising more specific issues for consideration in integrating mature women students into programmes of professional higher education.

CHAPTER 11

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The aim of the present study was to investigate how women manage the transition to professional programmes of higher education and identify what assisted and hindered their coping. In this concluding chapter I return to the research questions presented in Chapter 2 and discuss the findings of the present study in relation to these. Firstly, I discuss how what women 'bring' from the private sphere and professional context outside higher education affected their coping. I reformulate the question about whether key differences and similarities between women affect their coping to ask whether a typology of 'careers' based on discernible differences and similarities in coping can be developed. Secondly, I discuss how features of the University affected their coping. Thirdly, I discuss how the process of coping can be understood. Fourthly, I consider how coping with the transition can be assisted and ask a further question about the possibility of developing specific issues for consideration in assisting the transition. Finally, I describe ways in which my thinking about the transition has developed as the study progressed.

What Women 'Bring' to Higher Education and Coping

The first research question I asked was 'How does what women 'bring' from the private sphere and professional context outside higher education affected their coping with the transition?' This consisted of four sub-questions:

Do women's reasons for taking their programme of professional higher education affect their coping?

Women's enthusiasm and determination in returning to education are highlighted in the literature (see, for instance, Innes, 1992; Hart, 1991; Keen, 1990; Pascall and Cox, 1993a & b; Wisker, 1986 & 1988). Studies of women's reasons suggest that they have much to gain through their involvement in higher education (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Pascall and Cox, 1993a & b) which could account for their determination and enthusiasm.

In Chapter 6 I reported a sense of enthusiasm of varying degrees reported by many (but not all) of the participants in the present study and suggest that this is related to the women's reasons for taking their professional programme of higher education. Reasons for taking their programme were many and complex but linked to what they perceived they would gain. Most gave a combination of what could be termed self-fulfilment and instrumental reasons which is supported by the more detailed literature on mature women students'

reasons to date (see, Edwards, 1993a; Pascall and Cox, 1993a & b). Motivations included self-fulfilment; education being seen as of central importance; an 'escape' from a particularly negative work environment; career development; an 'escape' from a less positively perceived private domain career to attain a more positively valued public domain career; and to earn a reasonable salary. Pascall and Cox (1993a, p. 146) argue that the women in their study used higher education for social and economic reasons and that it allowed them to travel some considerable social distance. However, other key reasons given by the women in the present study for taking their programme were linked to professional pressure and maintenance of professional credibility. They were taking the programme in order to 'stand still'.

Whatever the women's reasons and whether they were enthusiastic or not their motivation could, on the whole, be linked to attaining or maintaining identity 'principles', particularly self-esteem. It is argued by psychologists that these 'principles' have motivational qualities (see, for instance, Argyle, 1983; Breakwell, 1986; Gecas and Mortimer, 1987). This suggests that the impetus for taking their programme was particularly strong. However, though this could account for determination and enthusiasm, links between reasons and coping were not clear in the present study. There were other factors surrounding the continuities of what women 'bring' which were much more obviously linked to coping.

How does what women 'bring' personally and professionally affect their coping?

There were strong continuities in the women's sense of who they were from their social, educational and professional backgrounds which affected their coping with the transition to their programme.

Educationally

Four fifths of the interview participants had had curtailed early experiences of education but many had gained qualifications more recently. It was commonly reported that they expected the 'new' approaches to education and that their recent experience had helped them in the transition. However, a few said they felt uncomfortable with the 'new' approaches to teaching and learning. Familiarity with aspects of the University's environment helped to allay anxieties but it could not be assumed that this always assisted coping. For a few it created expectations which were different from the realities of the new programme. Concerns about academic ability were not always straightforward. A few who had little previous educational experience were not particularly concerned while others who had considerable experience were anxious about their educational ability. Perceptions about

previous educational experience were, therefore, important and the new students could experience threats to continuity in the new educational setting because of this.

Socially

Many of the women in the present study expressed a sense of connectedness associated with being wives and mothers. Women frequently mentioned their family during the research and there was a sense of strong emotional connections with them. There was a view expressed that being a mother and being involved in higher education could be at odds with each other and women could feel pulled in two different directions. A few spoke of concerns about relationships with their husbands or partners because of their involvement in higher education though this did not appear to represent as serious a problem as previous studies have suggested (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Leonard, 1994). This is potentially linked to the kind of education they were involved in. Being a women was seen as an issue as concerns were expressed about it being safe (as a women) to park some distance from the campus during the evening. Edwards (1993a), based on Elshtain, argues that being a wife and/or mother are not roles that can easily be 'split off' from (p. 12). They are central to women's sense of who they are. Being mothers, wives and women were strong and important continuities for the women in the present study.

In Chapter 7 I reported that working-class women spoke of more mixed reactions from friends and relations about their involvement in higher education than those from middle-class backgrounds. Coming from a middle-class background was seen as assisting coping. Those from working-class backgrounds spoke of a sense of pride and resilience because of this but a few felt it might have disadvantaged them or they may not 'fit in' to the higher educational context because of this. A small number were concerned about entering what was seen as a middle-class domain.

For black women race was centrally important to their sense of who they were, more so than being a women. The view was expressed that friendships outside the educational context would not be altered because of taking their programme. It is argued that higher education can confer status and prestige which can set women apart form others who are important to them and that they can be concerned about how they present themselves to others (Pascall and Cox, 1993a, p. 88). Edwards (1993a) similarly notes that working-class and especially black women are worried that education can set them apart from peers in an elitist way (p. 141). The black women in the study initially 'stuck' together as a form of 'safety net' because of concerns about racism related to previous experiences of this. They were entering a public arena which, in common with most public domain situations, is dominated by white people. Because of social class and racial background women can

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experience contradictions and conflicts by moving between their own and the higher education context, especially when they first begin a programme of higher education.

A sense of resilience which assisted coping was linked to the women's social background. For instance, Judy said that being black helped her to cope. Henry (1994) notes that coping is fundamental to black women because of their experience of racism and that this might give an insight into how they cope in higher education (p. 51). Having coped with difficult situations in the past was also linked to being a women as was having to manage several things at the same time. Determination was also a strong theme and is noted in other studies.

Biologically

Certain biological events for women were related to potential concerns about involvement in higher education. For instance, one woman spoke of debating when to have a second child and how this might disrupt her course of study.

Age

A concern was expressed about being different to what students were perceived to be like in higher education, that is, young. The participants therefore felt out of place. They drew on dominant images of students, concluding they were not 'real' students. It was mainly those who were older (in their forties) who were concerned. Those who were not concerned drew on what they knew about those now in higher education and the notion of 'life-long learning'. Concerns appeared to diminish once participants began their programme which suggests that as they found that there were others of a similar age they realised this was not an issue

Professionally or related to previous occupational situation

Being in women dominated professions was seen as assisting the transition. Appropriate professional and work experience was perceived as helpful with concerns expressed by those who did not feel they had much professional experience. However, there was not necessarily a straightforward relationship. A small number linked concerns about a perceived lack of appropriate experience to being wives and mothers previously and the undervaluing of this experience. The DPSN participants, in particular, expressed a sense of awe of academia and not being 'real' or 'proper' academics. This could be explained in terms of the recent reorganisation of health care education, the university sector being a new environment for the education of this group (Birchenall, 1995) and being perceived by

DPSN participants as very different to their initial professional training. Dewar et al. (1994, p. 253; 1995, p. 2) report that the nurses and midwives entering higher education in their study had little understanding of the requirements within higher education. A few who were professionally experienced reported anxieties about entering the educational context and I link this to a concern about being judged by peers (see Chapter 8). A few reported difficulties of adjusting from what they had been doing previously in their occupation to the educational environment.

Being visible in the new educational environment was an issue. The size of the group (particularly on the DPSN) and the Library were a concern. A few reported feeling 'deskilled' because they were leaving a previously perceived important occupational role to become a student. A small number felt particularly 'lost' in the new educational environment and this was linked to the job they were leaving.

The women's sense of who there were was strong and an integrated part of them but different aspects, depending on their educational, social and professional background as well as age, were important to different women and affected their coping with the transition.

How does women's current personal and professional situation affect their coping?

In Chapter 7 I reported that most of the women in the present study continued to have responsibilities for domestic arrangements. I discussed issues associated with these commitments more fully in Chapter 8. Most of those interviewed in the second phase of the study spoke of 'women's work' in the private domain being a potential impeding factor for women entering professional higher education. Half said that they thought that being a woman could create extra demands which they felt men did not have. A quarter did not see this as a problem but this was related to them having support within the private domain. The implication was that it was having children which was the major demand and responsibility which fell to women from the private domain. This was particularly an issue for those in the young motherhood career type (that is, those with children under ten and usually at least one pre-school aged child), though older children, particularly teenagers could place excessive demands on women. Additionally older women were more likely to be carers for elderly relatives which could place extra demands upon them.

Many of the women continued to work in their profession while they were on their programme, most of them full-time. This was reported as being demanding if they did not have enough time off work to study. In the literature more flexibility in modes of study, for

instance, more part-time courses is argued for (see, for instance, Hutchinson and Hutchinson, 1986; Sperling, 1991; Wisker, 1986 & 1988). Many of the women in the present study were on part-time programmes and continuing in their professional employment. Rather than their part-time programme providing the flexibility for them to study, for many it increased demands and problems because the students were combining the programme with work and family commitments.

The women's financial situations could impose real hardship. It was mainly those on low incomes because they were single parents or because their husbands were not working who experienced problems. One women spoke of only just being able to afford to take the programme because she was working-class and on a low income. The cost of childcare was also an issue for a small number. It was not only women with families who reported financial concerns. One single woman said that because she had a mortgage and had to run a car she might have to borrow money to finance herself.

Current constraints from the private domain and professional context as well as the women's situations affected coping with the transition.

Are there any key differences and similarities between women which affect their coping?

In the literature there is a tendency to ignore the diversity of mature women students, the exception is Edwards (1993a) who does highlight differences of race and class (see Chapter 2). In Chapter 5 I outlined differences and similarities in objective characteristics of the mature women students involved in the present study. These include their age, ethnic origin, educational experience, the distance they travelled daily to the University, their social class, marital status, whether they had children or not, the numbers and ages of their children if they had them, whether they were new to or continuing in their professional occupational career, what they had been doing prior to taking the programme and whose idea it had been for them to take the programme. This led me to consider whether a typology of 'careers' could be developed based on discernible patterns of objective characteristics. Four different 'ideal career types', young womanhood, young motherhood, older motherhood and older womanhood based on the age and life situation of the women in the present study are developed.

In subsequent chapters data suggest that in certain ways these career types and other objective characteristics were linked to differences in coping. Nearly all those who were concerned about the demands from the private domain had children. This implies that the demands of the private sphere are strongly linked to responsibilities for children. Childcare

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and concerns about leaving children for the first significant length of time were an issue for those in young motherhood. Concerns about having time and space to study were expressed by nearly all those in young motherhood and were a major worry to a few. The demands of younger children were constant. I also suggested that moving between the bounded spheres of the private domain of domesticity and the public domain of higher education with their differing requirements can be difficult when one or other of education or motherhood is new.

For those in older motherhood there was more ambiguity about the demands of older children, from seeing them as more independent to them presenting potentially more serious problems than younger children. There was evidence that older children could impose intense demands at particular times but that these were in a state of flux. Dewar et al. (1995) tentatively suggest that having a teenage child is linked to being less successful on the DPSN. Finding time and space were less of a concern for those in older motherhood than for those with young children.

Despite seeing themselves as 'lucky' that they did not have the demands of children to contend with, a quarter of those in the womanhood career types were concerned about the demands of running a home. Most of these were in young womanhood. The care of elderly relatives fell to a few women in the present study but this was more of an issue for older women. With regard to concerns about academic ability those in young womanhood appeared to be less worried than those in other groups. Subjective accounts, therefore, were linked to differences in coping depending on career type.

Other objective similarities and differences were also important such as race, social class, professional background or being an adult. For instance, a major reason for one woman experiencing difficulties in the transition was linked to her concerns about 'coming out' in the new situation as she was a lesbian and feminist. The black women interviewed in the study were concerned about being potentially treated in a racist way when entering the new environment because of their previous experience.

In Chapter 5 I identified the objective criteria of being 'new' to or 'continuing' in a particular professional area and assumed that this might affect coping. I thought that being new to the profession might represent a larger and therefore more difficult change. However, the women's subjective experiences of the degree of change involved did not necessarily reflect this objective assessment. In Chapter 7 I therefore questioned the use of the term transition which had originally influenced my thinking as it reflected the view in the literature that women were making a major life change through being involved in higher education. However, in the light of the findings of the present study I now use the term

more loosely to indicate potential challenges to continuity through being involved in professional higher education. The distinction between being 'new' or 'continuing' did not always reflect subjective views of the amount of change involved.

The concept of differing career types developed does not encapsulate all the relevant important continuities but does make it possible to highlight differences which is a useful starting point in being able to identify what assists and hinders mature women students' coping. The concept of differing career types is one of the main ways in which this study had contributed to the area of study of mature women students experience. I would suggest that identifying different career types, based on age and life circumstances or other emerging relevant differences, would be a useful direction for the analysis of mature women students' experience in future research.

What women 'bring' in terms of their personal and professional backgrounds and current situations is important in coping.

How do Features of the University affect Women's Coping?

The wider University

Certain University procedures and policies were not compatible with the women's continuing sense of who they were or their current situation. For instance, not being allowed to park on campus was a concern for a few related to the continuities of womanhood. There were worries about their safety as a women because they had to park some distance away from the campus for classes which finished after dark. Where to park generally was a concern to many early on in the transition. The Freshers' Conference ignored issues which were relevant to mature students, the focus being on 'traditional' aged students. This omission related particularly to the continuities which are central to mature women students' lives; their continuing commitments associated with the private domain. Joining Student Union Societies was out of the question for many women as they did not live locally or would not have time because of their other commitments. Queuing for long periods of time to register was perceived as particularly negative. There were a few incidents reported by women once they began their programme which were potentially sexist in nature.

The wider higher educational context which the women were entering was represented and perceived by women in a particular way. Elements of patriarchal power and discrimination were evident. The literature reports that when women enter higher education they are entering a male instrumental world which is hostile and unwelcoming to women; one

which holds a 'bachelor boy' image of students (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Edwards, 1993a; McGivney, 1993; Pascall and Cox, 1993a; Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1983; The Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). Subtle structural and attitudinal 'barriers' were evident on the part of the institution, which I argue amount to discrimination.

The School

Concerns associated with the uncontrollability of the local environment were expressed and associated with the participants' continuing sense of who they were as adults. For instance, the heat of the building, not being able to make a drink and having nowhere to smoke.

The programme

A major theme in the present study was the expression of the need for staff to be approachable, friendly and sensitive to the new students' needs. Being on programmes which involved women dominated professions was seen as assisting the transition by many. They saw them as 'women friendly'. At the local level of the programme the women did not appear to be entering a male instrumental world which was hostile and unwelcoming or which held of the 'bachelor boy' image of students reported in the literature (see, for instance, Berryman, 1987; Edwards, 1993a; McGivney, 1993; Pascall and Cox, 1993a; Sperling, 1991; Thompson, 1983; The Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). The fact that students on the programmes were all mature appeared to assist those who were worried about being older within the wider higher educational context.

Seminars, tutorials and small group work were seen as a preferable ways of learning. Edwards (1993a) reports that women are more confident in this learning context and Leonard (1994) that they prefer this to large lectures. The size of the group was an initial concern to many, particularly on the DPSN. Lectures were often seen as regimented and boring and it was important that the topic was related to professional practice. The time of the day was as issue with 'heavy going' lectures in the evenings being seen negatively. The approach of tutors was important. Those who 'spoke' to you being seen positively.

The emphasis in the programmes was on using students' previous experience which reflects the post-technocratic model of professional education (Bines & Watson, 1992). This was perceived positively by most. There was not a 'clash' between 'women's ways of knowing' and the 'separate' knowledge of the institutions reported in the literature (see, for instance, Belenky et al.; Edwards, 1990b & 1993a; Karach, 1992). However, for a

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few the Core Values module on the DipSW raised difficult personal issues or they did not have appropriate experience to contribute. For instance, for one women who was a lesbian (and feminist) when, where and how to 'come out' was a major concern. Corin (1994) argues that the culture of higher education reflects wider normalising aspects of public and social spaces in relation to discussions of heterosexuality and it is this which creates problems of 'coming out'. Another women was particularly threatened by the disclosure of her childhood sexual abuse. These concerns echoed those of a few others who felt particularly 'lost' and out of place in the higher education context. Additionally, half of the second phase DipSW students were concerned about the lack of discussion/debate about topics which were relevant to them. Edwards (1993a) argues that the discourse of higher education welcomes life experience but the reality can be different (pp. 82, 102).

Many women did not see themselves as students and this was commonly linked to being part-time. Comparisons were made between their situation and the dominant social representation of students in higher education being full-time. Participants concluded that they were not a 'real' or 'legitimate' student (see Chapter 9).

Early experiences of professional higher education

Certain aspects of the introductory elements of the programmes appeared to assist the new students in coping with initial anxieties, for instance, a welcoming reception. A key way in which many of the women in the present study said that they coped was by having a realistic view of what to expect.

Providing clear guidelines about what was expected in academic work, being successful in practice essays, successfully using the Library or computers and having support and advice readily available were the most important aspect of developing self-efficacy beliefs with regard to ability. Initial anxieties about 'standing out', for instance, because of perceived lack of experience were ameliorated by finding out that others were in a similar situation or felt the same kinds of anxieties. Breakwell (1986, pp. 130-135) argues that group support can provide a cure for isolation and a way to share experience.

Many reported finding the demands which the programme presented difficult. This was expressed in terms of feeling overwhelmed and tired. For instance, having too much information to be able to take in initially (though a certain amount was seen as helpful). A comparison between the induction procedures of two programmes revealed that time to reflect and catch up on the demands of home and work were important. This perhaps reflects the need for some 'breathing space' for women when starting something new. Having too much time early on in the induction procedures was not seen as helpful. Many

participants saw having 'spare' time throughout the day as wasteful when they had important commitments to meet outside the institution. These initial concerns gave way to anxieties about the amount of work that had to be done and worries about placements.

At the programme level the women appeared to feel, on the whole, that they were entering a 'women friendly' environment but they could still experience problems which perhaps reflect wider higher educational policies, practices, images of students and demands.

How Can the Process of Coping be Understood?

Breakwell's (1986) theory of coping with threats to identity provides an explanation of women's psychological experience in the transition to professional programmes of higher education. People are said to like continuity over time and situation, to feel unique and distinct from others and to feel personally and socially worthwhile (Breakwell, 1986, p. 24). These 'principles' were extended by drawing on other desirable states outlined in social psychological theory; having control and mastery over the environment (self-efficacy) and a sense of being 'real' (authenticity) (Gecas and Mortimer, 1987) (see Chapter 3). Participants commonly expressed excitement on beginning their programme of professional higher education and this was linked to a desire to attain or maintain self-esteem. However, anxiety was also a common phenomenon which has been interpreted as the expression of a threat to one or more of these 'principles' of identity. Breakwell (1986) argues that when a person seeks to change their position in the social matrix to enhance one principle of identity others may be threatened (see Chapter 6). For instance, in Chapter 8 I described how self-efficacy was threatened in terms of concerns about ability to manage the demands of the programme, the domestic domain and continuing professional employment. In Chapter 9 I outlined how authenticity and distinctiveness were challenged in the new educational environment.

Continuity was a major theme in the present study and important in coping. Psychological theory can explain the importance of continuities in a person's sense of who they are. The 'processes' of identity (assimilation, accommodation and evaluation) mean that the content and value dimension can be altered but these are hierarchical and depend on the value a person places on them (Breakwell, 1986). The implication is that people continue to interpret situations based on these and that some aspects are more centrally important than others. There is continuity to identity in that it is the configuration of experiences over time (Gecas & Mortimer, 1987, p. 267).

Breakwell's (1986) theory also makes it possible to examine cultural influences in relation to threats to identity because it incorporates social representation theory. Social representation theory can account for differences of culture and why particular groups might come to share a similar view (Potter, 1996, p. 147). There are strong criticisms of this theory particularly from discursive social psychology (see, for example, Marshall & Wetherell, 1989; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996). One criticism is that a representation is seen as a mental entity that resides within the cognitive processes of a person which ignores discourse and that representations are created in the social interactions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 145-146; Potter, 1996, p. 149). An important point made in discursive psychological criticism is that representations perform actions which lead to questions of 'what is being done through talk?' (Potter, 1996, p. 163). Despite criticisms of social representation theory the important point is that cultural influences were evident and relevant to how the women experienced the transition. In the present study the women used dominant social representations and these were linked to the way they experienced the transition to their programme. For instance, Gecas and Mortimer (1987p. 268) state that threats to authenticity are based on perceptions of what is 'real' or 'false' which are contingent on social meanings. This can be linked to concerns about being different; many compared themselves to dominant images of what students were perceived to be like and concluded they were not 'legitimate' students or 'proper' professionals. The women drew in various way on aspects of what could be called the 'bachelor boy' image of students in higher education.

Edwards' (1993a, pp. 17-27) reformulation of the notion of the public and private domain and associated psyches of men and women based on Gilligan (1982), as social constructions through which women experience themselves rather than factual descriptions or essential characteristics, makes it possible to explain how these enter into and are important parts of women's account. For instance, many women took on board dominant images of the more highly valued public domain of higher education and the lower valued private domain and evaluated their experience in these terms. They also saw themselves as strongly connected to their families and their 'caring' professional occupations.

What is not emphasised enough in both Breakwell's and the discursive approach is how structural influences which can limit coping. Parker (1992) states that the social structure can be a starting point for analysis. He argues:

> 'The notion that social structure is a precondition for discourse means that discourse analysis must draw upon other theoretical and empirical work which uncovers the material basis of oppression (capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy)' (p. 40).

He states that there is a danger that those fascinated by the 'power of discourse cut loose from any connection with real outside texts' and lose the desire to take 'underlying structures of oppression and resistance seriously' (pp. 40-41). Though I have argued that the private and public domains are social constructions they have the potential to impose real demands on women. The concept of 'greedy institutions', with their competing demands on women for undivided loyalty, highlights structural limitations to coping. In Chapter 8 I argued that education, the family and the continuing professional employment were 'greedy institutions' for the women in the present study. They evoked feelings of guilt because women felt they could not always meet the standards demanded by each but they were under pressure to be successful in each context. They impinge upon each other as the concerns and requirements of each crossed the boundaries of the others' contexts. They caused problems for women because of the different value bases of each. The higher education context is said to demand separateness and objectivity, the family affiliation and subjectivity (Edwards, 1993a, p. 63). The professions these women were involved in spanned the value bases of the public and private domains. They are in the public domain but appeal to the values of the private sphere as they are professions which are closely allied to women's domestic concerns. It is the movement between these bounded spheres, particularly initially, which caused problems and conflicts for the women; for example, moving between the local and particular aspects of dealing with young children and the conceptually ordered world of higher education (Edwards, pp. 80-81). Movement between the bounded spheres could also be difficult because of race, social class, sexual orientation and professional background. Despite being organised, the demands of one or more of the 'greedy institutions' can mean that the best laid plans could fall apart. Being organised was used as a 'strategy' for coping (see Chapter 10) but this is not a psychological strategy, it was one which is a direct result of social structural influences; the demands of the 'greedy institutions'. As Edwards (1993a) argues women can feel on a 'knife's edge' of coping and when they fail to do so they blame themselves but this is more a reflection of the social structure (pp. 73, 80).

Additionally for a few there were also real financial constraints which were linked to their social position as single parents or families on low incomes.

Pascall and Cox (1993a) view the role of higher education in women's lives as an 'escape' from domesticity and low-paid work. They criticise the reproduction thesis for its emphasis on educational institutions reproducing the structures which oppress them (p. 139), arguing that higher education has 'real potential for destabilizing traditional notions of femininity and the dependence they sustain' (p. 143). I would argue that this view is too optimistic and there are paradoxes for women. While some women in the present study saw their programme as an 'escape' others had to take the programme in order to 'stand

still' in their professional occupation and many still had overall domestic responsibility. The fact that mature women students still have overall domestic responsibility is supported by many other studies (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Leonard, 1994; Maynard and Pearsall, 1994; Roberts, 1994). While women's increased involvement in higher education might be seen as an indication that women are 'freer' than in the past to 'do their own thing' and 'be themselves', how far can this be said to be true? Walby (1990) argues that the notion of progress in these terms needs to be separated out from the notion of changes in the form of gender inequalities. She argues that 'while there have been changes which facilitate women's entry to the public sphere there are not so many which improve the position of women within it' (p. 171). Similarly, Cockburn (1991) highlights how, in her study of a High Street retail organisation, women were welcomed into management in a way they had not been in the past but the significance of the power associated with this position was 'melting away' (p. 48). This represents what Walby (1990) describes as a change in form of patriarchy over the last century from 'private patriarchy' to 'public patriarchy'. By not dispelling dominant images of students, higher education reinforces women's sense of marginality and difference because of age, being part-time, domestic responsibilities and professional background. Public forms of patriarchy are exerted in subtle ways. Universities are not unified patriarchal structures as aspects of the higher education were reported as 'women friendly'. However, these appeared to be related to the particular kinds of education involved and concerns of staff rather than overall institutional policy.

The development of the concept of different career paths based on age and family responsibilities shows how variables associated with the life span can impede women's coping. Women expect, and are expected, to take responsibilities for domestic arrangements. This was particularly visible in the motherhood career types, especially for those in young motherhood, and was reflected in concerns about having time and space in which to study away from the responsibilities of children. Women in young womanhood who were in new relationships could also experience problems potentially linked to establishing new domestic arrangements. The evidence from the present study and from other studies (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Leonard, 1994) suggests that women are still subjected to 'private' forms of patriarchy, though this is not the case for all. A few spoke of exerting power through negotiation with their husbands. However, this cannot be seen as an 'escape' as they will encounter 'public' forms of patriarchy. As Hearn and Parkin (1987) put it 'men tend to dominate explicitly in the public domain and more implicitly but not less powerfully in the private' (p. 6). Therefore patriarchal power limited women's ability to cope.

Though experienced at a psychological level mature women students' ability to cope with the transition to programmes of professional higher education can only be understood by a feminist exploration of the social context. This reformulation of Breakwell's theory develops a truly integrative framework which links the psychological experiences of transition to social factors. I have developed a framework which takes account of both continuity and change. This extension of Breakwell's integrative social psychological framework to include sociological perspectives demonstrates the benefits of looking outside the boundaries of psychology in order to provide fuller explanations of women's accounts of their experience[1]. This suggests that future research needs to take account of more sophisticated use of theory than has previously been the case in most studies of mature women students' experience.

How can Coping with the Transition be Assisted?

In Chapter 2 I argue that the solutions suggested in the literature to assist women entering and being in educational environments are general and not always linked to research. From the findings of the present study I considered that it might be possible to develop specific issues for consideration in introducing mature women students to programmes of professional higher education. In Chapter 9 I argued that it is important that *all* students are made to feel that they 'matter'. However, because of dominant images of students in higher education, non-traditional students are more likely to evaluate themselves as being different than traditional aged students. It is, therefore, important that, especially early on, it is made known to mature women students that they are an important part of the wider educational context. This could be assisted by appropriate pre-course literature and a University-wide welcome which is inclusive of the kinds of students on the programmes involved (see Chapter 10).

In Chapter 10 I discussed the students' introduction to their programme. A sense of belonging and amelioration of feelings of difference were enhanced by having a chance to discuss concerns in a 'safe' environment and finding others in a similar situation early on. This process was assisted by carefully structured 'getting to know each other' exercises and providing opportunities for students to meet in an informal but structured way. I argue that it is important to provide a friendly and informal welcome. It is also important that students are prepared by giving them a realistic view of what will be involved. This could help develop self-efficacy beliefs. Advanced contacts with the University were also seen as helpful, such as the Welcome Weekend and Open Days; being familiar with aspects of the

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[1] Others have recognised the benefits of linking psychology to other disciplines for a fuller understanding, for instance, Haste (1994) and Squire (1989).

new encounter assisted the transition. These elements of coping are supported by psychological theory; Breakwell (1986) arguing that one coping strategy is that of anticipatory restructuring where potential threats are evident in advance and the person can restructure their identity in line with the threat (pp. 93-94). This can be assisted by giving a realistic preview, advanced contacts and opportunities for self-appraisal in the preparation phase for a transition (Nicholson, 1987a, p. 185). However, there is more to mature women students coping than good preparation, a welcoming environment and getting to know others. Continuities from their present situation and a sense of who they were were also important factors in coping. For instance, many aspects which were reported as being useful in advanced contacts related to having information which allowed them to plan in advance because of the demands of the 'greedy institutions'. A few were also concerned about their academic and professional abilities. Despite plenty of information in advance participants were still concerned about their ability to do the programme.

Continuing professional commitments were an additional demand for many of the women in the present study. The demands imposed by each of the 'greedy institutions' (education, work and family) were assisted by flexibility and support within each. For instance, for those who were on part-time programmes at the University help and support in the Library was seen as important. Having enough time off work to study was also important in coping. Flexibility in assessment procedures was an issue.

In the present study I identify a number of differences between the women which means that certain solutions are only applicable to certain kinds of women. For instance, McGivney (1993) argues that lack of childcare is one of the major 'obstacles' to women becoming involved in higher education (p. 77) and many others highlight the importance of childcare support for women (see, for instance, Barnett, 1992; Berryman, 1987; Coats, 1994; Hart, 1991; Keen, 1990; Leonard, 1994; Morgan, et al., 1981; NIACE REPLAN, 1991; Spears, 1988; Wisker, 1986 &1988; Women's Education Policy Committee of NIACE, 1991). However, in the present study childcare was only an issue for one group of women, those in young motherhood (who made up less than half of the interview participants) and it was only a major concern to a small number of these. Having childcare on campus did not appear to be a specific need but having good, flexible childcare was important. For those in young motherhood particularly, hours to suit and the opportunity of more self-directed study because of their commitments were important. Assistance with the costs of childcare was an issue for a few.

Financial constraints are reported to be another major 'obstacle' for women returning to education (see, for instance, McGivney 1993, p. 77). A small amount of financial assistance would have helped a few of the women in the present study but lack of finance

was not a problem for most (see Chapter 8). In fact ,paying for the programme might have been a motivational factor. It was reported, though, that paying in installments or having course fees taken out of wages at source assisted those who did have to pay.

A further assumption made about mature women students' needs made in the literature is that they would benefit from study skills courses (see, for instance, Wisker, 1986). However, most of the women in the present study appeared to be well prepared. Study skills courses have been criticised (see, for instance, Richardson, 1993; Richardson and King, 1994) for stereotyping mature students as deficient when it has been argued that they often show more desirable approaches to learning than younger students (Richardson, 1993). Furthermore, I argue that study skills courses would not provide the support necessary for those who have particularly deeply rooted beliefs about their academic or professional abilities (see Chapter 10). Opportunities to value previous experience and share concerns with others were important. Having a chance to reflect on the transition and any problems areas was reported by a small number of participants as a factor that would assist. A few did indicate a need for support with academic work and the literature on nurses suggests they can find the transition to essay writing in higher education difficult (Brennan, 1995). I argue, therefore, that there is a need for more individual diagnostic work with students and that they should be given feedback on 'real' academic tasks.

It is argued that women want to, and can, connect personal with academic forms of knowledge (see, for instance, Belenky, et al., 1986). The programmes in the present study enabled this but a few of the participants did not have appropriate professional or personal knowledge to be able to do this and others (on the DipSW) found revealing personal details threatening. Conversely, a few said that they were not able to explore issues which they felt were relevant to them or their professional education. Edwards (1993a, p. 151) has suggested flexibility in the curriculum for mature women students to allow them to go more 'deeply' into areas of concern to them, if they wish. However, I recognise that this may be difficult within the constraints of contemporary professional education.

A common theme in the present study was that it helped if staff were friendly and approachable and that this was more important than the gender of staff. In Chapter 10, however, I argue that within the present structure of higher education where there are still issues of patriarchal power mature women students are best supported by those with the qualities of approachability and sensitivity and that there is a greater possibility that women tutors with have more shared experience with mature women students.

I argue that an awareness of students' needs and concerns is important. For instance, there is the potential for mature women students' involvement in higher education to have

repercussions on their relationships with their partners or husbands. Though this may not be as great for women in the professions involved in the present study as has been suggested in the literature on mature women students more generally (see, for instance, Edwards, 1993a; Leonard, 1994), an awareness of the differing degrees of impact and support with more serious repercussions might be appropriate. I argue, though, that counselling solutions are not appropriate in 'solving' relationship problems as they are brought about through shifts in power relationships because of women's involvement in higher education. An awareness of differing cultural needs is also important; for instance, the need for Muslim women to have a separate place from men to pray.

From the women's accounts I developed a list of specific issues for consideration to assist the transition to professional programmes of professional higher education (see box 11.1). This was sent to all the staff who were involved in the present study with the intention that this might contribute to one of the aims of the study, which is its transformatory or emancipatory goal (see Chapter 4).

Box 11.1 Issues of Importance in Introducing Women Students to Programmes

Issues for programme organisers to consider

Pre-course

- Run an informal pre-course event
- Send out details of the programme in advance, particularly timetables including details of induction procedures
- Give clear and realistic information in advance about the group size, the structure and content of the programme and the commitment involved
- Provide information on where to park near the University
- Provide reading lists in advance

On arrival

- Provide clear directions and pointers
- Organise a relatively informal and welcoming initial session
- Provide drinks/biscuits upon arrival
- Use name badges (though not all were keen on these so possible use removable badges)

Organisation of induction programme

- Provide the opportunity to be in smaller informal groups early on
- Organise structured but informal opportunities for students to talk to each other initially
- Provide opportunities to meet staff involved in the programme
- Give students a chance to meet second year students early on
- Organise a tour around the building/campus (but this can be overwhelming)

- Incorporate time to reflect on the information during the introductory period but towards the end of induction
- Provide time for individual diagnostic work to determine students' needs and concerns early on rather than providing universal study skills courses
- Provide opportunities for those who wish to focus on the meaning of the transition to them
- Have a friendly point of contact readily available to talk to about concerns and provide information/ advice

General course design

- Make sure there is not too much 'spare' time while the students are at the University. Time at either end of the day was seen as more helpful so as to be able to meet the demands of combining study with other commitments
- Ensure programme hours suit those with young children (for instance, a 9.30 a.m. start and 3.30 p.m. finish for daytime programmes)
- Consider the use of more flexible modes of learning such as more self-directed study
- Provide flexibility in the curriculum to allow students to go more 'deeply' into areas of interest to them if they wish
- Allow for integration between different disciplines
- Provide flexibility/ choice in assessment methods

Issues for staff involved with new students to consider

Environment

- Make sure rooms are a comfortable temperature

Support networks

- Assist those from minority groups to establish support networks
- Encourage students to gain support from each other
- Encourage students to seek support from work, family and friends

Induction

- Carefully structure 'getting to know each other' exercises, from the non-threatening to the more intimate
- Use exercises which value the students' previous experience (though these need to be carefully facilitated as they can raise anxieties about lack of experience)
- Give students a chance to reflect on what they are leaving/combining with study
- Make sure the students know help and support is available
- Do not assume that familiarity with the University, etc. is always helpful (though it is in many cases), it can create particular expectations

Personal/teaching approach

- Make yourself friendly and approachable
- Use co-operative and facilitatory teaching methods rather than an authoritarian style
- Be open about your own experiences in higher education (in relation to managing family, studying and working)
- Give information but in a way which is not overwhelming
- Explain to students what will be expected of them
- Give early feedback, support and guidance on initial assignments
- Provide initial support with how to approach studying but related and integrated with 'real' tasks
- Provide support in using the Library and Information Technology in conjunction with 'real' tasks

- Make sure lectures are relevant to professional practice and experience. Consider the timing of 'heavy going' lectures so that they are not at the end of the day
- Consider the use of seminar/group work as opposed to formal lectures
- Ensure thorough coverage and especially discussion of issues of particular relevance to students (for instance, racism on the DipSW)

Awareness of students needs/concerns

- Be aware that students may have particularly deeply rooted concerns about their academic ability or professional experience which might not necessarily be obvious
- Be aware that particularly older women who have not studied for some time might be concerned about their academic abilities
- Have an appreciation of the other demand on students, i.e. from family, work, friends, etc. and incorporate as much flexibility as possible to accommodate these demands
- Have an appreciation of childcare issues for those with young children
- Have an awareness that being involved in higher education can effect women's relationships with those outside (particularly their husband/partners). For more serious problems students might need specific support
- Have an awareness of issues of differences in professional background, educational background, class, culture and sexual orientation, and that these might lead to students feeling different from others in higher education
- Have an awareness of potential needs of those from various cultures
- Create a 'safe' environment (especially on the DipSW) where issues of a sensitive and personal nature might be disclosed

Issues for the School to consider

- Allow facilities within the School where students can prepare their own drinks

Issues for the institution to consider

Library/Information Technology

- Provide support, for those who need it (especially part-time students), in using the Library
- Have the option of a guided or self-directed tour for induction purposes
- Have a known friendly point of contact in the Library
- Provide sensitive and basic support for those who need it in using Information Technology

Enrolment

- Rethink registration procedures and consider alternative to avoid queuing, such as postal or decentralised enrolment

Freshers' Events

- Make sure the Freshers' Conference is relevant to all members of the student population

Senior management

- Ensure promotional literature gives a realistic view of what is involved and that claims in this literature are met
- Make sure that all students are welcomed/ included in the University's vision of students

- Enforce institutional practices/staff development which address issues of difference and discrimination
- Allow student parking on campus during the evenings

Financial assistance

- Provide additional financial support for those in most need and assistance with childcare costs
- Make arrangements for payment in installments for those who fund themselves

Issues for students to consider

Pre-course

- Negotiate enough time off from work commitments to study
- Think about organising where and when you will study
- Have a 'trial run'/ visit the University/ find out as much information as possible in advance
- Seek out others to talk to who have taken the programme
- For those with young children arrange childcare

On arrival

- Be aware that you and probably many others may be anxious or have similar concerns

Support networks

- Try to gain support in studying from others wherever possible

Financial arrangements

- If possible consider having course fees taken directly out of your wages

NB: The more general suggestions may be applicable to other student groups, though this was outside the scope of the present study.

For the mature women students in the present study coping with the transition was not just about being given information and becoming familiar with the new environment. Certain continuities are not fully addressed in this kind of approach to induction, therefore wider institutional policies and practices need to take these into account. With regard to solutions for assisting women entering education the present study has developed the existing literature in this area by suggesting more specific issues for consideration for women beginning programmes of professional higher education.

Reformulating My Thinking about how Mature Women Students Cope with Continuity and Change

The importance of continuity represents one of the main developments in my thinking about the transition of the mature women students in the present study to professional programmes of higher education. The transition is not simply a disruption in a person's life space which is adapted to. Factors arise socially and centrally impinge upon the women's sense of who they are and their current situation. These factors are emphasised by the concept of continuity. Major continuities in women's lives arising from their social position and the failure of higher education to recognise these continuities influences their coping. As Weil puts it:

> 'It is easy to be seduced in to thinking that the difficulties faced by non-traditional students are simply of the "Educating Rita" sort: threatened partners and friends, finding a place to study, inadequate study skills, insufficient childcare provision, and lack of confidence. It is important to ensure that the individual pieces of the jigsaw are not taken for the whole picture' (1988, p. 36)[2].

Though the suggestions I have put forward may assist mature women students coping I think broader social and institutional changes are necessary in order to make a substantial impact.

Towards the end of writing this thesis my thinking about the transition changed from seeing women as 'coping' with it to the emphasis being on women 'managing' it. The term 'coping' reflects a sense of personal responsibility for negotiating the transition. Managing, on the other hand, emphasises the major themes of the present research, in that, women manage the continuities and changes in many senses, and despite the difficulties they face.

Based on the findings and my changes in thinking I reformulated the initial conceptual framework (see figure 2.1, p. 31). The three bounded spheres or 'greedy institutions' of the women's private domain context, their professional context and the higher educational context interlock. The women's context and the professional context represent what women 'bring' to the transition. These are bounded spheres with specific value bases and associated continuities. Women's sense of who they are, arising from each of these two context is more integrated than I originally thought in the early conceptual framework. The

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[2] In Sarah's feedback on an early draft of the findings chapters of this thesis she wrote that she though that this quotation was 'extremely pertinent'.

context is more integrated than I originally thought in the early conceptual framework. The higher education context has its own value base and continuities which I have represented as being more separate than the other contexts. In the transition to programmes of professional higher education women find themselves at the intersection between these different domains with their differing value bases and competing demands. It is here they 'manage' the transition. There is very little room in which to operate because of the 'needs' of the 'greedy institutions'. The three different contexts are surrounded by the influences of patriarchy. I recognise that by conceptualisation the transition in this way I am simplifying what is a complex and diverse transition - the continuities and changes for women in the transition to professional programmes of higher education.

Figure 11.2 Reformulation of conceptual framework

Patriarchal power

THE WOMEN'S CONTEXT
Greedy institution and private bounded sphere
Value base: Connectedness

Continuities: Career type, educational and social background, race, sexual orientation, being an adult, biology, financial situation, reasons

PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT
Greedy institution and public bounded sphere
Value base: Connectedness and separateness

Continuities: professional background, previous occupational situation, current obligations, reasons

MANAGING

MANAGING

MANAGING

THE HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT
Greedy institution and public bounded sphere
Value base: Separateness

University Polices and Practices
- parking, publicity, Freshers' events, Registration, the Library and other services,
a 'bachelor boy' image of students

The School
Facilities for adults, environmental factors

The Programme - mode, advanced contacts

Induction - Welcome, amount of information, study skills courses

Early Experiences - Style/approach of teaching and tutors, post-technocratic professional education

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APPENDIX 1

Sketch of Participants Interviewed

Phase 1

Diploma in Social Work (DipSW)

Lesley - aged 40-49, white. A single parent (separated for nearly four years), with a relatively new boyfriend but he did not live with her. She has one child aged 15. She did 'O' levels at school then went on a teacher training course but dropped out in her final year. She had done various 'strange' jobs because of being a single parent from clerical, bar work, being a lollipop lady to being cook but more recently wanted to do social work. She felt that because her son was growing up she wanted more of a career. She had done various night classes since the mid-seventies as well as a few one or two day courses at work. She worked in the area of mental health and was going to continue with her job and take the Sandwich Route of the DipSW. She said she had middle-class origins but had to work hard for a living. She described herself as intelligent working-class, not basic working-class. Taking the programme represented a new dimension but also continuation of her occupational. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Jeanette - aged 40-49, white, Irish. She had been married for 22 years and had two children aged 17 and 21. She had almost got divorced when she returned to education but her marriage survived. She left school at fifteen with no qualification. Her mother stopped her doing her 11+ and she lost interest in school. She had spent ten years at home looking after her children then worked part-time doing all sort of 'not very stretching' jobs. She took a year off about three years earlier because she had not been happy with what she was doing and had become depressed. She then took a social care course; gaining 'O' and 'A' levels while on this. This is what she was doing prior to beginning the DipSW, along with some voluntary work in the mental health field. She felt that her children were growing up and she needed something for when they left home, she wanted her own career. She said she was from a working-class background and would always feel working-class. Taking the programme represented a new occupational career for her. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Denise - aged 30-39, white. She had been married for 14 years with one child of 13. She had worked in a variety of jobs from factory work, a nursing auxiliary to a pub manageress and more recently as a care assistant in a residential home. When her child was younger she had been at home full-time for three years. She said she had had a good education but met her husband when young. She left school at 16 with no qualifications. She had studied recently by taking a City and Guilds course and GCSEs and was on an Access course before beginning the DipSW. She definitely herself as working-class but said that her parents had been in business and they were therefore never short of money. She considered that she came from working-class origins and retained those values. Taking the programme represented a new occupational career for her. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Penny - aged 25-29, white. She had been married for 2 years and had no children. She did 'O' and 'A' levels at school followed by a Social Sciences degree. After completing this she worked with people with learning disabilities and then people with mental health problems which led her to want to be a social worker. She was continuing with her present job part-time while taking the Sandwich Route of the DipSW. She had done various training courses at work. She said she was from working-class origins but she saw gaining

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a degree and having a professional job as 'moving up the social ladder' but she felt she still had working-class values. Taking the programme represented a new aspect of her occupational career but she also considered that there was a continuation. She lived locally.

Claire - aged 35, white. She had been married for 14 years and had one child aged three. She obtained 'O' and 'A' levels at school and went to university at 18 to do a teacher training degree but decided it was not for her. Instead she went into residential social work and had been in it for several years. A few years earlier she set up a residential home and now ran it. She had done various in-service courses and training related to work but no assessed study since college. She was from a working-class background but because of her life style and aspirations she though her work colleagues would say she was middle-class. She described herself as Liberal working-class, a 'Greenpeace trendy'. Taking the programme represented new opportunities but was a continuation of her previous occupational career. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Rose - aged 30-39, white. She had been married for 16 years with two children of eight and twelve. She said she had to leave school because she was from large family and her income was needed to support them. She had wanted to go on to college but was not allowed to by her mother. She said she failed her 'O' levels on purpose because of this (but she did get one) but regretted this later. She had done various unrewarding part-time jobs in the past from being a Kiss-o-gram to factory work. She had returned to study when she was 24 to do 'O' levels but she said her child was too young at the time and she did not complete them. Her husband had been seriously ill recently and she got sacked from her job because she had been off sick from work. This led to a decision that she needed a reasonably well paid career as she may be main breadwinner in the future. She has done an Access courses before embarking on the DipSW and was also involved in Youth work. She said she was definitely working-class and appeared to be a central element in her sense of who she was. Taking the programme represented a new occupational career. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Hilary - aged 40-49, white. She was a single parent (separated six years earlier but only divorced the year before). She had three children aged 13, 18 and 21. She said she did not like school but obtained a few 'O' levels then went college to study a practical subject at HNC level. She had not studied at all since. She said she married when she was quite young and had children. She had then been involved in running a family business and bringing up the children which took up all her time. For the past six years has worked part-time with special needs children in a school. She was going to continue in the job while she took the Sandwich Route of the DipSW. She did not like the idea of defining herself as belonging to a particular social class but supposed she was middle-class. Taking the programme represented a new occupational career. She lived semi-locally to the University.

Maureen - aged 40-40, white. She had been married for 22 years and had two children aged 16 and 21. She said she rebelled at school and decided not to do very well, she only stayed on into fifth form because of the encouragement of a particular teacher. She did a few CSEs and went to college to do a vocational course. She married and had children when she was young and did a variety of jobs. She said she was happy to stay at home for 12 years but then decided there was more to life than being a mum. She began her present job as social work assistant nine years earlier. She had taken a Social Care Welfare course when she started the job. Since then she had done a lot of short work related courses in preparation for getting on the DipSW. She had wanted to take the DipSW four years earlier but could not because of her financial situation and she could not get a secondment. She said she was definitely working-class because of origins and her present lifestyle. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN)

Gail - aged 30-39, white. She had been married for 10 years and had two children aged three and seven. She said she did not do very well at school but obtained a few 'O' levels and a B/TEC qualification. She had done a few work related courses while she has been a nurse and was in a relatively senior position as a Senior Sister on grade G. She had had two lots of maternity leave to have her children. She said she was middle-class and from middle-class origins though her husband would say he was working-class as he was a train driver. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Rebecca - aged 25-29, white. She was single and lived on her own (though she had lived with somebody previously) but she had a boyfriend. She had no children. She said she had not done any formal study for the few years since her nurse training but attended many seminars and workshops to do with work. She was a G grade nurse working in Nursing Development Unit so was in a culture where looking at research and practice was important. She said she was definitely working-class and thought of herself as working-class. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Carol - aged 30-39, white. She had lived with her partner for two and a half years and had no children. She left school at 16 with a few CSEs and 'O' levels then went to a Technical College until she was 18 when she did her nurse training. She had always been involved in studying as an adult. She completed the ENB870 at the University the previous year. She was a Deputy Sister on G grade. She said she was definitely working-class. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Janice - aged 40-49, white. She had lived with her partner for sixteen years and had no children. She left school at 17 with a few CSEs but only at grade two. She felt she was not encouraged at school and annoyed she had not done 'O' levels. She did her nurse training when she left school and has done short work related courses ever since. She had recently completed a course at a similar level. She was a Clinical Nurse Advisor on grade H. She said she was middle-class because she was a professional but her questionnaire revealed her to be from lower middle-class origins. She lived semi-locally.

Susan - aged 40-49, white. She had been married for 23 years and had two children aged 17 and 20. She obtained two 'O' levels six years earlier but had not studied before or since then. She had taken five years out from nursing to look after her children when they were young. She had worked for the previous six years in an isolated branch of nursing outside the NHS as a Sister. Her children were now at university and she felt it was her 'turn' to do something for herself. She described her present situation as middle-class but was from working-class origins so considered herself somewhere between the two. She would have to travel a mid-distance in to the University.

Thelma - aged 30-39, white. She had been married for 11 years and had three children aged three, six and eight. She did her nurse training ten years earlier and had her children when she first qualified. She had worked part-time since having her children with some short breaks from work to look after them. Her youngest child would begin school the following year so she decided she wanted to 'get her career off the ground'. She had been on a few day courses related to work. Before she made the commitment to do the DPSN she decided to have a go at doing a GCSE in a subject she knew nothing about to see how she coped. She did the ENB870 at the University the previous year. She worked as an E grade nurse. She felt she was somewhere below middle-class but not working-class. She lived semi-locally.

Sheila - aged 40-49, white. She had been married for 28 years and had no children. She left school with no qualifications and did menial jobs for 18 years. She qualified as a nurse 15 years earlier. Since she became a nurse she has done several 'O' levels, the Community Practice Teaching course and an 'A' level recently. She said she got into studying late but once she did she had carried on. She worked as a District Nurse on H grade. She said she had working-class origins and values but financially she is quite well off. She lived semi-locally.

Stella - aged 40-49, white. She was a single parent, having got divorced 12 years earlier. She had two children aged 18 (who was engaged but still lived with her) and 21 (who lived abroad). She 'struggled' with 'O' levels at school but managed to get one. She said she felt she coped better with her nurse training and enjoyed it. She told me that up until to a couple of years earlier she could 'not be bothered' with education but then took a few GCSEs and various short work related courses. She worked as a Nursing Officer outside the NHS. She considered herself to be working-class. She lived locally.

Phyllis - aged 40-49, white. She had been married for 19 years and had two children of 17 and 18. She said she had to leave school at the age of 15 because she was from large family and her siblings had had to. She felt her mother had pressurised her into leaving. She said she had been bright at school but she left with no 'O' levels. She did her nurse training a year after she left school. She had a break of seven years from nursing to look after her children and she had been abroad with her husband for some of that time. She had recently done a nursing course and a GCSE. She was going to do the DPSN the previous year but had to defer for personal reasons. She said it was her 'turn' to do something now because the children were older. She was a Staff Nurse on E grade. She said she was middle-class but from working-class origins. She lived semi-locally.

Shirley - aged 30-39, white. She had been married for 21 years and had three children aged 16, 18 and 20. When she left school she did clerical work and then had her children. She stayed at home for several years to look after them and then did her enrolled nurse training. She had taken a registered nursing training conversion course and several other courses recently including a City and Guilds teaching course. She also did an Open University course when she was an enrolled nurse and she said she had always studied when the children were young. She had taken a year off studying before she did DPSN. She worked as a Staff Nurse on grade E. She said she was in the professional class because of her job but was from working-class origins and her husband was in manual work; she still felt working-class. She lived semi-locally.

Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE)

Katie - aged 38, white, Northern Irish. She had been married for 16 years and had three children aged three, six and fourteen. She obtained 'O' levels at school then went on to do her nursing qualification. Later she wanted to do a Health Visiting course but was not allowed to because she had young children. This made her determined to study to show people she could do it. She did the diploma when her children were younger and has studied ever since. She studied and worked part-time because of having a family. She had had short breaks from work to have her children. She made the move one year earlier from nursing to nursing education (and a full-time job). She said her origins were working-class but she and her husband were both professionals. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Anabelle - aged 33, white. She had been married for 9 years and had two children aged nine months and two years. She attained 9 'O' levels and 2 'A' levels at school and went

straight on to do her nurse training. She felt she had 'drifted' in to Health Visiting. She had worked as a Health Visitor/Fieldwork Teacher for four years but wished to move on. She completed an Open University degree two years earlier and then had children. Her husband was also studying for a degree at Huddersfield but was nearing the end of this. She thought she would probably say she was middle-class but found defining her social class hard but she did not consider herself to be working-class. Social class was not a particularly important aspect of her sense of who she was. Taking the programme represented an opportunity for embarking on a new occupational career. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Phase 2

DipSW

Belinda - aged 25-29, white British. She lived with her partner and had a baby of 5 months when she started the DipSW, (7 months when she was interviewed). She came to do the DipSW straight after being on maternity leave. She obtained a degree in Social Sciences when she was 21. She had worked in the mental health field for the 16 months prior to having her baby and had much responsibility in that job but said she had no experience of Social Services. She said she was middle-class because of origins, her parents live in the south of England in an affluent area. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career. She lived locally.

Barbara - aged 30-39, white UK. She had been married for a relatively long time and had four children aged 4, 7, 16 and 18. She left school at 18 having not done particularly well. She took 'A' levels when her first two children were young and a part-time degree at the local Polytechnic followed by a one year full-time teacher training course which she completed about ten years ago. She then decided she wanted more children and had her second two, staying at home to look after them. She had wanted more children but said this had not happened. She then began thinking about getting back to work and progressed towards this by doing Care work. She decided she wanted to do social work two years earlier. In the February before she started the DipSW she and her husband 'swapped' roles, he now looked after the children and domestic arrangements. He wanted her to work rather than go into education so she took on a management job in social work but found this particularly difficult and felt out of her depth, it shook her confidence in wanting to do social work. She gave the job up after three months and was suffering from depression but still decided to begin the DipSW. She had the summer to recover and she went back to doing Care work. She said she was definitely working-class, she felt she came from working-class origins and though she was taking a professional qualification she said she would always have working-class values. Taking the programme represented a new occupational career. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Lola - aged 36, white, European/Spanish. She had lived with her partner for 6 years and they have no children. She gained two CSE at grade one while at school and completed a nursing qualification when she left school but had not studied since. She had done a variety of jobs in the past including factory work but for the past 16 years had had a particularly responsible job in Residential Care. She described this work as 'very stressful' and had been off work for three months because of this prior to beginning the DipSW. She said she was definitely working-class because of her origins and she said her family were committed socialists. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career. She would have to travel a long distance to the University.

Judy - aged 29, Black UK. She was married with a one year old child. She obtained a few 'O' levels at school but has not studied since except for a few training courses related to

work but, she told me, not much which would help her study at higher education level. She has worked in various areas relevant to social work. She had worked in residential care, with the homeless and been in a management position related to the homeless for the previous three years. This last post she described as 'very isolating' and 'stressful', she told me she wanted to get out of it as she felt it was 'very destructive'. She said she was from a working-class background but did not agree with the class system and felt it was not particularly relevant to her; being black was more important. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career. She lived locally.

Mary - aged 30-39, Black. She was a single parent with three children aged two, four and ten. She had worked as a nursery nurse for ten years then had a year off to have her third child and decided she wanted a career in a different area. She did an Access course prior to beginning the DipSW but had done no other study since her initial education. She said she was definitely working-class and she came from a working-class background. Taking the programme represented a new occupational career. She travelled a long-distance to the University.

Gwen - aged 46, white, British/European. She was a single parent with three children aged 16, 17 and 18. She told me that she had been through a 'traumatic' divorce a few years earlier. She had recently done an Access course and a BA part-time for a year. She had decided to move from catering to social work five years earlier and built up her experience in this area. She had worked in a wide range of jobs relevant to social work and had had much responsibility. She enjoyed the post she held prior to beginning the DipSW, which she had been in for three years but felt there was no prospect of progression within it. She said she was from a working-class background but felt this was not applicable as she was moving into a professional area of work; social class was not important to her sense of who she was. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career. She lived semi-locally.

Jenny - aged 34, White western. She was single, living on own with a dog. She described herself as a lesbian. She had lost interest and did not do particularly well at school but had undertaken a range of courses over the previous few years and recently completed an Access course. She said she was from lower middle-class origins, her parents were 'comfortable' but not well off. Taking the programme represented a new occupational career. She lived a mid-distance from the University.

DPSN

Yvonne - aged 46, white, British. She was married with three children aged 15, 17 and 18 (two of whom were also studying). She had had a nine year break from nursing to bring up her children. She returned to nursing part-time but was offered no professional updating. She had taken several courses related to her present job but none of them to diploma level. She took the ENB870 research course at the University the previous year. She worked in an area of nursing outside the NHS. She said she was definitely working-class because of her origins, the area that she currently lived in and her values. She told me that her family 'struggled' for money and her husband was in low paid manual work. She lived a mid-distance from the University.

Nichola - aged 25-29, Caucasian. She was married with a child aged two. Her husband was also taking the DPSN. She had completed various work related courses recently, including a midwifery course which she said was supposedly diploma level. She said she was lower middle-class, adding that she worked but was in the professions. She said she came from a teaching and nursing family. She lived locally.

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Jackie - aged 30-39, British, white. She was married with three children aged three, seven and nine. The eldest has a medical condition which required a certain amount of expertise to deal with. She had not studied since her midwifery training 14 years earlier until she took the ENB870 at the University the previous year. She was a District Nurse. She said she was definitely middle-class. She lived a mid-distance from the University.

Kay - aged 25-29, white British. She had just got married in September as the course started and had no children. She had done various courses since leaving school and had also been on study days from work therefore she had not really got out of studying and she told me she had had to keep up to date at work. Social class was not that important to her but she had always thought of herself as working-class. She said this was based on her values and the way she was brought up. She lived locally.

Aileen - aged 40-49, white. She was married with two children aged ten and fourteen. She had just finished her nurse training and had also taken a few GCSEs over the previous few years at night-class. Before this though she had not studied since leaving school. She felt she was not 'pushed' at school though she enjoyed it. She had not studied at this level before but enjoyed studying. Her origins were working-class but this was not central to her sense of who she was. She lived semi-locally.

Caroline - aged 30-39, British, white. She was married with two children aged six months and three years. She was still on maternity leave (due to return to work that December) and breast-feeding. She took several 'O' and 'A' levels at school and worked for three years before commencing her nurse training. She had taken several work related courses recently. She gained the ENB870 at the University the previous year. She said she was from working-class origins but that she was now 'comfortably off', she described herself a lower middle-class through social mobility. She lived semi-locally.

Pam - aged 40-49, white, English. She had been married twice and lives with second husband. She had two children by her first marriage, aged 21 and 25, who had left home between four and five years earlier. Her husband was made redundant which coincided with her beginning the DPSN. She failed her nurse training initially and retrained 18 years ago. She had not done any studying since then and felt she was not particularly good at studying generally. She was on secondment at the time of the interview, working on developing a management information system in the hospital were she worked. The project had lasted for two and a half years and she was due to return to her usual job as a Staff Nurse, working nights, the following April. She said she was working-class but this was not centrally important to her. She lived a mid-distance from the University.

Evelyn - aged 30-39, British. She was married with three children aged eight, nine and sixteen. Her mother lived with them, she was 80 and Evelyn described her as 'failing'. Evelyn felt she did not have much educational experience. She took CSEs at school and two 'O' levels later but this was many years earlier. The previous year she had taken an ENB course (but not ENB870). She had qualified as a nurse in 1977. She was currently working part-time for three days a week as an E grade nurse. She described herself as lower middle-class. She said she came from a working-class family but her husband's family were teachers and accountants, she had been socially mobile and recognised that she had different aspirations for her children than her parents had had for her. She lived semi-locally.

Fiona - aged 20-24, white Yorkshire brought up in Africa. She got married in the September that she began DPSN. She did not have children. She had done 'A' levels at school and had only qualified as a nurse two years earlier. She had been on several study days related to her work and said she had also studied independently in order to keep up to

date. She told me that she had a lot of responsibility in her job. She said she was definitely middle-class because of her family background as they were in the professions and she had a good level of education. She lived semi-locally.

Sandra- aged 24, British. She was married and had no children. She had only qualified as a nurse a year before starting the DPSN. Since then she had been on various study days and seminars related to work and taken an NVQ course. She worked as a nurse in a private hospital. She said she was definitely working-class because of origins, her father was in manual work, but social class was not particularly important to her sense of who she was. She had to travel a long distance to the University.

HPE

Annie - aged 43, white. She was married with one child of 20. She had two ill relatives who were, to some extent, dependent upon her. She said she did not do particularly well at school. She had studied with the Open University before taking her degree. She had graduated five years earlier and since then had undertaken a City and Guilds teacher training course. She was a Clinical Nurse Adviser in Nursing Development Unit. She described her work situation is 'very stressful' and 'negative'. She wanted to become a lecturer/practitioner. She said she considered herself to be between working-class and middle-class. She was from working-class origins but her income and lifestyle now were middle-class but her working-class origins were still important to her and she was involved in the Labour party. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career/new. She lived locally.

Sarah - aged 30-39, British. She was married with two children aged four and six, one was at school and the other at nursery. She was coming on the course without having a gap in her education as she was also undertaking a course related to her personal interests outside work. She also said she had to keep up to date at work and was used to an educational environment as she worked as a nurse teacher. She worked part-time, three days a week, as a nurse teacher and had been doing this for the previous three years. She said she was from middle-class origins and her ideas and aspirations were still middle-class. Taking the programme represented a continuation of her occupational career. She travelled a long distance into the University.

Trudy - aged 31, white. She lived with her partner and they had a seventeen month old child. She had been on maternity leave for one year, returning to work in the May before she began the HPE programme. She took a nursing degree when she left school. She was a Health Visitor and had had some experience of teaching within this role. She was keen to keep up to date within her job and had been involved in various forums. She described herself as middle-class because she was in a profession but her origins were working-class. Taking the programme represented a potential departure from but also a continuation of her present career. She would have to travel a long distance into the University.

APPENDIX 2

Report Sent to Staff at the end of Phase One

Title: The Transition to Programmes of Higher Education: Project Report on the Main Themes and Issues of Relevance to Introducing Students to Professional Higher Education

Executive Summary

This report details the main themes which have emerged from my study of mature women in transition to professional programmes of education and training in higher education.

These themes are:-

- Anxieties and concerns upon transition

- Issues related to aspects of the institution

- Issues related to introductory aspects of programmes

- The impact of previous experience

- Identity issues

- The relationship between study and the rest of the student's life

These themes highlight issues particularly relevant to the introduction of students to programmes in higher education and the report contains key areas which are important in integrating new students

These include:-

- Providing pre-course information and running a pre-course event

- Welcoming new students relatively informally

- Giving students the opportunity to be in small groups early on and to be able to get to know each other

- Providing opportunities to meet staff and feel reassured that support is available

- Providing the right amount of information

- Suggestions for how to structure aspects of induction

- The use of exercises which will value students previous experience, give a chance for self-appraisal and the exploration of the meaning of learning

- An appreciation of other demands on students

- Providing initial support with particular aspects - assignments, how to approach study, the library and using computers

- Suggestions for rethinking certain procedures and events

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Introduction

Several interrelated themes have emerged from my research which highlight issues particularly relevant to the introduction of new students to programmes in higher education. The aim of this report is to outline these. This research was conducted with mature women students beginning programmes of professional education and training. I was involved with three courses in health studies and social work. Data was collected mainly by qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with participants prior to them beginning their programme, participant observation for approximately one month at the beginning of programmes and the completion of a diary by the students during the introductory period to their course.

The three courses involved approached the introductory aspects of their programmes in different ways. Two had their introductions over the first week. On one of these the third and fourth days were free for the students to prepare for seminar presentations on the final day, while the other programme consisted of five relatively full days. The other course is a part-time programme where students attend for one day a week. Over the first three weeks introductory elements were covered but the actual programme began on the first day.

The students involved in the research were mainly in their late 20s, 30s and 40s, with non-traditional entry qualifications and from a range of different social and class backgrounds. Most travelled daily and many had husbands or partners and children. Some were divorced and single parents. Though mainly women were involved, some of the findings also relate to men, but there seem to be specific aspects of the transition which are different for women. Some aspects of the finding relate directly to the type of professional education involved, the particular institution and the age of the students but other aspects are generalisable to other age groups, kinds of students and establishments.

Anxiety and concerns upon transition

Many people expressed anxieties. There seemed to be the more usual and expected anxieties associated with the immediate transition as well as understandable ongoing anxieties, for example, about assessment. There also seemed to be more debilitating and ongoing anxieties for some students. In this section I will discuss issues related to anxiety and factors which lessened these.

Initial Anxieties - many people expressed these to varying degrees, particularly in the initial stages of the transition - on the first day or over the first few days. People commonly described feeling nervous, apprehensive, anxious, having physical symptoms, for example, an upset stomach, being confused or feeling lost. It could be said that a certain amount of anxiety is usual and expected in this kind of encounter and for many, this subsided quite quickly and was helped by introductory aspects of programmes, but for others anxieties continued for some time. These anxieties seemed to be associated with the unknown, feelings of being the only one who did not know what you were doing or who was anxious, not knowing what was be expected of you, practicalities such as travelling, parking, finding things, childcare, and using the library and computers. Some students also felt overwhelmed initially.

Coping with these initial anxieties - These were helped by finding out others felt the same, meeting people - staff and students, finding out the staff were approachable and friendly, feeling welcomed in a relatively informal setting, being in smaller groups, getting information, being shown things and having them explained, knowing that support and help was available, meeting second year students, finding out what was expected and being able to understand. It was suggested that more information about parking in Huddersfield would be helpful.

Ongoing Anxieties - Some of the above anxieties continued for several students but there were also other ongoing anxieties expressed. Some of those who were new to their profession were worried about their lack of experience, while some of those with a lot of experience were concerned about being judged by peers. A significant number of people said they were anxious about their perceived lack of academic ability and there was a sense of awe expressed, by some, at coming to a university. Age was seen, by a few, as relating negatively to ability. Some felt unprepared academically despite recent experience of education or because of lack of recent experience. People seemed anxious if they could not understand as time went on.

The reality of what had to be done began to hit, particularly with regard to assessment, but for some this seemed more than a natural anxiety, and more related to worries about ability and failure. Some seemed particularly worried about a perceived lack of guidance with initial assessments. The consequences of having groups coming together for different aspects of the programme and of there being particular groups which stood out as being different caused concerns. Some students felt marginalised or inferior, or anxious about suddenly being with other student who they did not know. This is one of the consequences of modularisation or having different routes running alongside each other and careful consideration and thought is perhaps needed about how to bring groups together. This raises questions about whether students should get to know fellow students in certain groups or whether they should be encouraged to get used to mixing with different groups of students. For some, having a group identity and therefore support was important in dealing with these issues but this might serve to highlight differences between groups, therefore there seems no straightforward answer. Support from other students was something that students thought was particularly important though.

Some students (though not all who were in this situation) expressed worries about senior employers being involved in their programme, particularly if they knew them and worked for them. Perhaps this takes away the 'safe' environment expected in an educational setting. As programme providers are more and more involved in professional education, the way they are involved perhaps needs to be carefully considered.

A few expressed worries about their future, especially full-time students. They were worried about getting a job at the end of the course or the possibility of having to go back to the same job.

Coping with deeper rooted and ongoing anxieties - The issues related to coping with these are more complex than with initial anxieties. As time went on these also seem to subside for many but it is unclear, because of the scope of this research, how long they persisted. There may, however, be strategies which would help. Steltenpohl and Shipton (1986) argued that mature students feel inadequate, anxious and marginalised, which broadly supports my findings, and suggest they need an introduction to education which provides a chance for realistic self-appraisal. They put forward suggestions such as exercises which focus on the self and emphasis support and interaction with peers. Some elements of the introductory aspects of the programmes studied did address this and will be discussed later. Early feedback on how they were doing, more initial support and guidance with how to approach assessments were requested. This ties in with issues of previous experience and identity which will be discussed later. When students had a go at doing something they considered to be difficult initially and found they could do it this gave them confidence.

The participants interviewed prior to starting their programme seem to anticipate many of the worries and fears which were expressed upon transition. This could be a reason for running some form of pre-course event. It was suggested by one student that coming in informally for half a day might be helpful. This ties in with the finding that being familiar with the university or people involved is helpful (see Previous Experience later). It may also help to ease some of the initial anxieties, discussed earlier.

Issues related to aspects of the institution

A welcoming drink and drinks facilities - One of the introductory programmes began with coffee and biscuits which the students found welcoming, as it created an informal environment in which to 'mingle' with other students. On one of the others programmes students felt it was important to have the facilities to prepare their own drinks - but this went against the School's rules. Providing a drink or drinks facilities seems to serve an important initial and ongoing social function for students.

Heat - The temperature of rooms in the building was an issue for some groups. A warmer spell of weather when they began and the uncontrollability of the heat meant that, especially for the larger groups the heat was, at times, unbearable. Perhaps aspects such as temperature and refreshments are important to students as these are things which they are used to having under their control.

The Library - Though many found the first visit to the library useful and seemed at ease exploring on their own and using the tour handout provided, quite a large number were overwhelmed and expressed a lack of confidence in using the facilities, particularly those with no experience of large libraries. Some indicated that they would have preferred a tour and/or to be shown how to use the catalogue. Some seemed to have a fear of the library and the technology there. Having support in the library and a friendly point of contact were seen as positive and important. It also seemed to be important to have something 'real' to work on in exploring the facilities. A second session was attended by some students, which aimed to introduce them to different methods of searching for information. Some found this useful but others still seemed to be struggling or had not yet had reason to use the library. It was suggested that more time be spent on the library introduction for those who were having problems, but as library resources are stretched this might have to be done with tutorial support. Linked to this was a fear, expressed by several people, about using computers. Brosnan and Davidson (1994) argue that between a quarter and a third of people are 'computerphobic' and women are more likely than men to be anxious about using them. Perhaps this is another area where more support is needed.

Registration - was particularly negative for some of the students observed, who had to queue. Queuing often lasted a long time and was described as frustrating. There was also a misunderstanding involving a few students who were told, after queuing for some considerable time, that they should not be enrolling on that day, when in fact they should. This was sorted out but created some bad feeling. Suggestions were made which might help the present system of registering, such as decentralisation, registering by post or organising in a different way.

Freshers' Fayre and Conference - Most who attended the Conference found it was not particularly aimed at mature students and therefore not useful to them. Many did not attend the Fayre because they felt as mature students with other commitments and who lived some distance away, they would not be joining student societies. It seems then that these aspects of the University's introduction were not particularly relevant to mature students.

Issues related to introductory aspects of programmes

Initial anxieties - some of the introductory aspects of programmes helped in alleviating anxieties as they provided ways of coping, as discussed above. More positive comments were made about sessions which involved getting into smaller groups such as seminars and tutorials. There was a particularly marked distinction with one programme observed. Their first session involved being in a large group (80 students) and in the session which followed they were split into four groups, in a more informal setting. Although the first session was seen as good for getting information and meeting staff, the size of the group was perceived as threatening and many felt better in the smaller seminar session which followed, as they could share their initial worries.

Breaks - were seen as a good way of getting to know other students but there were some comments about them being too long initially on one particular introductory programme (there was a 2 hour break on the first day of this) - this created anxieties for some. Perhaps breaks need to be shorter at the beginning of the introduction but could be longer once students become more familiar and know more people. Other informal situations were seen as good for getting to know people, for example, queuing for registration! The main message seems to be that students need opportunities to meet and get to know other students early on and perhaps these need to be structure but not necessarily formal.

Second Year Student Advice Session - on one introductory programme four second year students came to talk to the new group, this was appreciated and well received as it was informal and the students felt it was reassuring as the second year students understood what they were going through. It was suggested, however, that this session might be better earlier on in the week (it was carried out on day four of the first week) and in smaller groups.

Getting to know each other - All the programmes used a variety of 'getting to know each other' exercises. Of these one session worked particularly well. It was structured in such a way that non-threatening 'games' were used first but gradually moved on to more intimate self-disclosure exercises. Some students found aspects of other sessions threatening. There are therefore implications for how to structure exercises aimed at getting to know other students. Students seem to need to feel safe and not threaten. There can also be overkill with these sort of exercises if they are used too frequently - which could be a danger with modularisation.

Valuing experience - on one introductory programme an exercise aimed at exploring and valuing students' pervious experience was used. This worked particularly well in relieving anxieties, for most. Perhaps this provides a chance to value experience and ability and look at the positive things a student brings. This perhaps enables the relief of anxieties about inadequacies which Steltenpohl and Shipton (1986) argue mature students need. There seemed to be a danger though as this increased anxieties about perceived lack of experience for a small minority.

How much to include in induction - the programme with the week long induction but will some days to prepare for a seminar seemed more relaxed than fuller week long introduction on one of the other programmes. Many students on the latter felt overwhelmed, tired and said they could not remember much by the end of the first week. Time to reflect and take in the new and also catch up with things which needed doing was appreciated by students. Some of the students involved in the former induction programme did, however, indicate that they would have liked more information about the structure and content of their programme. On the other two programme introductions students were given quite a lot of information about this and

this was appreciated by most. There are, however, issues about the amount of information which can be taken in and how it is presented as too much can be overwhelming but a certain amount is appreciated and seems to relieve some anxieties. Perhaps some aspects of introductory information need to be carried forward into the course, for example, more detailed information about modules. Someone suggested repeating certain aspects of the introduction later as they might be better able to take it in then.

Meeting staff - who would be involved with their programme was seen as important and on two of the programme introductions there were opportunities to do this. During the other programme introduction, however, there was not and someone commented that they would have liked to have done so. Receiving support and guidance from tutors was also seen as important, as was being treated, by them, as mature students.

Having pointers and directions - was an issue as many felt lost initially. Directions to rooms were appreciated. Suggestions were made about having a pocket sized map of the campus. One programme introduction involved wearing name stickers on the first day, this was felt to be a good idea by several people but they could only be worn on the first day and could not be removed. One person indicated she felt embarrassed walking about the campus with a name badge on - it highlighted the fact that she was new. Therefore perhaps removable badges would be more suitable. This is perhaps only applicable to larger groups, as the smaller group soon got to know each others names after their 'getting to know each other' session.

Structure of induction - there seemed to be no strong evidence that students preferred induction to integrated with the beginning of programmes or carried out separately before it started. Views were expressed for and against both of these. There are, however, issues about how much information student can take in (as discussed above) and how much can reasonably be achieved during the limited amount of time allocated for introductory aspects and this might well be a good enough reason to integrate some introductory elements.

My involvement - in this study illustrates certain points made so far. Several people commented that meeting me prior to coming to college provided them with a point of contact and a chance to talk about the transition. During the participant observation a couple said that talking to me about their anxieties was helpful, this perhaps indicates the need for support and concern being shown. People also asked me for information, which highlighted their need to know things.

Previous experience

Most people seemed well aware of the way education had changed in recent years and many had experienced the 'new' methods of teaching and learning and preferred these, though these were seen as difficult initially. People expected that they would have to do a lot of work by themselves. Perhaps mature students therefore do not need weaning off the traditional methods as many expect and have had experience of them but more support might be necessary, because as discussed earlier, there are anxieties about ability, etc. Several people felt that having recent educational experience, particularly of the 'new' methods was helpful and those without expressed concerns. Some said they felt deficient in particular skill, for example, note taking and essay writing.

It has been argued that mature students are often seen and see themselves as deficient in study skills when entering higher education (Richardson, 1993), but perhaps they bring more to the educational setting than is assumed. Richardson (1993) argues that mature students commonly take a 'deep' approach to study, which it is argued is more desirable than a 'surface' approach. From my findings they also seem to have realistic expectations with regard to teaching and learning methods and often have experienced and have a preference for these. As will be discussed later, many also are highly motivated and determined. Richardson argues that what mature students bring to higher education raises questions about the need for the usual study skill sessions.

On one programme the students were offered five three hour study skills sessions over the first few weeks of their programme. Despite the apparent need vocalised by the students, attendance rapidly tailed off. This could have been due to the session being last thing on a Friday but it could mean that support with skills and approaches to study might be better integrated in the form of feedback and guidance with assignments and guidance on how to approach study more generally, especially at the beginning of the programme.

Being familiar with any aspect of the new encounter was seen as helpful but familiarity and previous experience could also hinder as it created expectations. Many only had a vague idea of what the course would involve and those who had received more information seemed to have a better idea of what to expect. People felt, on the whole, that they would have liked more information about the content and structure of their course and clearer information might have allayed some preconceived notions, for example, about the large size of one of the courses, as this was a surprise for many. Nicholson (1990) conceptualises a transition as a cycle and argues that at the preparation phase, i.e. before the encounter, developing helpful expectations should be one of the goals, therefore realistic information might be useful in advance. Though this is only part of the story of the potential effects of previous experience and familiarity, it might help to give more realistic expectations about some aspects of programmes and the university.

Identity

From the interviews conducted prior to students beginning their programmes it was found that many came from non-traditional educational backgrounds. Often they had had negative experienced of education at school or had not had the opportunity to continue and therefore came out with few or no qualifications. There was a sense though that for many there had been a 'reawakening' to education. It was now seen more positively and they seemed highly motivated and determined to succeed. Considerable excitement was expressed by many. Doing their course was seen by most as necessary because of current pressures from their profession or because of the need to have the qualification in order to practice, but most also expressed strong internal reasons for undertaking it, to do with self-satisfaction and achievement. It was seen by many women as a way to do something for themselves, an escape from unrewarding work or a chance to gain promotion. It seems then that the women interviewed, on the whole, had strong motivation and reasons for taking their course which are linked to their identity.

Many did not see themselves as students, especially if they were part-time, they also seemed to feel marginalised and not particularly part of the university, but being a student seemed to be an important part of identity to a few. Being an older student was seen as having certain disadvantages related to perceived effects on ability and being different around the campus but it was also seen to have benefits related to having more experience and motivation. Concerns were expressed that the course might change aspects of themselves which the students wished to retain. Some were also worried about the course being a big change from what they were leaving or that it would change their roles. The transition can therefore represent threats to identity but aspects of identity had the potential to be enhanced by the transition.

The relationship between study and the rest of the student's life

Work - For many part-time students fitting work with study was a worry. This was a problem in varying degrees and seemed to depend upon support from work; the type, the amount and the organisation of work; and family responsibilities. For some there were also worries about the changes in roles and responsibilities at work and this caused problems for a few. Part-time students expressed particular worries about not having much time to use the library and other facilities. It was felt that they might need more support because of this.

Immediate Family - The relationship between study and the students immediate family was a major theme for many. Children and domestic responsibilities seemed to be largely women's domain and continued to be so once they began the course. Being a wife and/or a mother was an important part of their identity. Women expressed some guilt and concern about the effects on the family but were able to justify it better if their children were older. Some talked about the effects on their relationship with their husband or partner - though many said their partners saw their coming on the course positively and were supportive, worries were expressed about potential strains on their relationship. Support from the family was seen as important. Time management was an issue particularly for those with younger children, as was arranging childcare or getting children organised. Having emotional and physical space was a concern and consideration for women.

Friends and Relatives - People talked about the effect of coming to college on relationships with friends and other family members. For those from working class or working to middle class backgrounds there seemed to be more mixed reactions than for those from middle class backgrounds. At the extreme people talked about losing friends and being ostracised by some people, to people being proud and pleased for them. For a couple of black women it seemed important that their friendships outside college would not be effected where as white women seemed to accept that they would. Perhaps this reflects cultural differences. The people with whom a student identifies with outside college therefore will have some effect on how they experience the transition and there may be class and cultural differences.

The main theme here is that roles, relationships and responsibilities outside the university are important to students and have particular implications for women studying. Several used the metaphor of 'juggling' when describing these different aspects of their lives and perhaps this represents anxieties about the demands of these different elements. Edwards (1993), in her study of full-time mature women students, conceptualises the family and the educational establishment as two 'greedy institutions'. Both assume the right of the undivided loyalty of the woman. Being a student with a job could be conceptualised as another 'greedy institution' which means there are more balls with which to juggle. Not only this but the social structure and social representations can inhibit and have identity implications for women which make it difficult for them studying. Perhaps this has to be remembered and mechanisms which take this into account, such as flexibility in attendance times, hand in dates, etc., need to be considered. Positive comments were made when tutors appreciated that, as mature women, they had other commitments and demands upon them.

Key issues of importance in introducing students to programmes

Issues for programme organisers to consider

- Running an informal pre-course event

- Giving clear and realistic information in advance, about the group size, the structure and content of the programme, which other groups they will be involved with, etc.

- Providing information on where to park in Huddersfield

- Providing clear directions and pointers initially

- Organising a relatively informal and welcoming initial session

- Providing drinks upon arrival

- Making sure rooms are a comfortable temperature

- Providing pin on name badges for larger groups

- Providing the opportunity to be in smaller informal groups early on

- Organising structured but informal opportunities for students to talk to each other initially and later longer breaks where they can meet informally

- Providing opportunities to meet staff involved in the programme

- Giving students a chance to meet second year students early on

- Organising tours around the building/campus

- Incorporating time to reflect during the introductory period

- Careful consideration about the role and involvement of employers

- Consideration of how much students should 'get to know each other' in certain groups verses encouraging students to get used to mixing with a variety of other students

Issues for staff involved to consider

- Encouraging students to gain support from each other

- Encouraging students to seek support from work, family and friends

- Careful structuring of 'getting to know each other' exercises, from the non-threatening to the more intimate, when students are ready to move on to these

- Making sure there are not too many of the same sort of 'getting to know each other' exercises at each new introduction

- Making yourself friendly and approachable

- Making sure the students know help and support is available

- Encouraging and supporting students in doing things which they might consider to be difficult initially

- Giving information but in a way which is not overwhelming

- Recapping or elaborating on details once the programme begins

- Making sure things are as understandable as possible initially

- Explaining to students what will be expected of them

- Using exercises which value the student's previous experience, what they are leaving and where they are going

- Giving students a chance for realistic self-appraisal and to focus on the self, including issues about their age

- Give the opportunity to explore the meaning of being a student and learning

- Give early feedback, support and guidance on initial assignments

- Provide initial support with how to approach studying but perhaps related and integrated with 'real' tasks

- Providing support in using the library and computers in conjunction with 'real' tasks

- Have an appreciation of the other demand on students, i.e. from family, work, friends, etc. and incorporate as much flexibility as possible to accommodate these demands

- Have an awareness of class and cultural differences

Issues for the institution or School to consider

- Provide support, for those who need it (especially part-time students), in using the library

- Have a friendly point of contact in the library

- Providing support, for those who need it in using computers

- The rethinking registration procedures

- Making the Freshers' Conference more relevant to mature students

- Allowing facilities within the School where students can prepare their own drinks

Conclusions

Earwaker (1992) argues that students are particularly vulnerable at the beginning of their course, especially over the first few days, which are critical. This seems particularly relevant in today's climate and with the recent changes in higher education, for instance larger group sizes, more students and modularisation. It is important that students integrate well and feel supported but it is becoming increasingly difficult for staff to maintain interpersonal contacts and support all students.

Weil (1988) states that it is easy to "be seduced into thinking that the difficulties faced by non-traditional students are simply of the 'Educating Rita' sort: threatened partners and friends, finding a place to study, inadequate study skills, insufficient childcare provision, and lack of confidence. It is important to ensure that individual pieces of the jigsaw are not taken for the whole picture" (p. 36). These and the issues discussed above are part of a complex and interrelated picture which needs careful consideration if students are to be helped to integrating better into programmes of higher education.

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APPENDIX 3

Seminar Presentation - July 1996

Becoming a Mature Student: the Experiences of Women Beginning Professional Programmes of Higher Education

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I walk into the classroom, I'm feeling rather nervous. This is the first day of the course, the first time I've seen most of these people. I'm anxious because this is the first time I have been a participant observer. I wonder if I am doing it right. I feel different, I don't quite belong - I'm not a student the same sense that the new are or really a member of staff. I know from talking to a few women before they began their professional programme at Huddersfield University that, for various reasons, they feel different from the traditional student in higher education and that they are concerned that they might not fit in.

The new students are being offered coffee and biscuits - that's a nice touch, it seems to give them the opportunity to chat before the more formal introduction begins. I see a couple of students I know (from interviewing them a few weeks earlier) - what a relief, some familiar faces. One of them, Claire, seems rather anxious and tells me that feels like a 'little fish in a big sea' rather than a 'big fish in a little one' which she had done in the job she has just given up running a residential home. She says she would rather be in a case conference than here at this moment, which reveals to me the extent of her anxiety. I am aware through my conversations with women before they began their programme that they were looking forward to this moment but their excitement was tinged with apprehension.

After a while the students begin to sit down for the more formal introduction. I sit next to and speak to a women I have not met before. She tells me she came to the Welcome Weekend the day before. She said it was good for her children to see where 'mum was going to school', now they could visualise where she was. We chat for a while about her family. I know from talking to women beginning these programmes that the responsibility for the family and domestic duties is mainly theirs. There are worries about how they will fit it all in, not only their domestic responsibilities but also, for many, work. Will they be able to 'juggle' it all?

The woman I have been speaking to says she is rather concerned about the practice essay which she has been asked to write. She says she thinks this is a good idea but is worried that it might not be on the right lines. This reminds me of my anxieties about standing up in front of all these people soon. I will be telling about my research - which gives me a fluttering sensation in my tummy. What will the new students think of me, and even worse, what will the staff who I already know think? I know from speaking to several women that they are also worried about their abilities to perform not only academically but also in terms of their professional expertise. A few around me are talking about the difficulties of finding somewhere to park that morning and travelling to the University. There is a buzz of nervous anticipation and excitement. The course leader arrives and the formal proceedings begin.

This encounter represents some of the main themes which emerged from this study of mature women students beginning professional programmes of higher education. Though the way I have put the scenario together is rather contrived in order to highlight these it is based on my observations of the first day of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) programme in this School in 1993.

I have several reasons for presenting this seminar. It is a part of the reflexive ethnographic and feminist-standpoint approach which I have taken. That is, it is a means of feeding back the findings, checking out their relevance and letting the resulting comments inform the development of the study. It is hoped that this will enhance its credibility and it is part of the ethical responsibility of keeping people informed and taking note of their comments. I would therefore be most grateful for any comments you have. Perhaps you could bear this in mind and think of your own experience of students beginning programmes. An ulterior motive for the presentation is to assist me in the writing-up of this section of my PhD. Having to present the main findings in a coherent and succinct way has necessarily forced me to focus on the key factors and hopefully therefore will enable me to ultimately write this section of the thesis in a clearer manner.

Before I go on to discuss the findings in more detail I will briefly outline the methodological strategy which I adopted. The approach was a mainly qualitative case study. The main methods being participant observation, informal semi-structured interviews and the completing of a loosely structured diary by the new students. The study comprised of two phases over two consecutive years, each involving the new intake of students (see figure 1). The first phase was in the academic year 1993/94. Interviews were conducted with 20 women before they began their professional programme. These interviews focused on how they had arrived at the point of beginning the programme and their expectations of their forthcoming course. I then became a participant observer for approximately six weeks from the start of the programmes and asked all students on them to keep a loosely structured diary during their introductory period. The data from this exploratory phase was then analysed for emerging themes.

In the second phase, the academic year 1994/95, I became a participant observer and asked students to complete a diary in much the same but a more focused way than the first. I concentrated on issues of particular relevance to mature women students based on their responsibilities of caring for others. I was interested in elaborating further the themes which emerged in the first phase but also issues specifically relevant to women. Based on this I selected 20 women for interview. These interviews focused on how the participants felt they were coping with the transition to the programme and specific questions were asked about the effects of being a woman on this. Thus while the findings cover issues which are probably of relevance to other groups of students there is a bias toward what it means to be a mature woman student.

Figure 1 - Phases of the Study
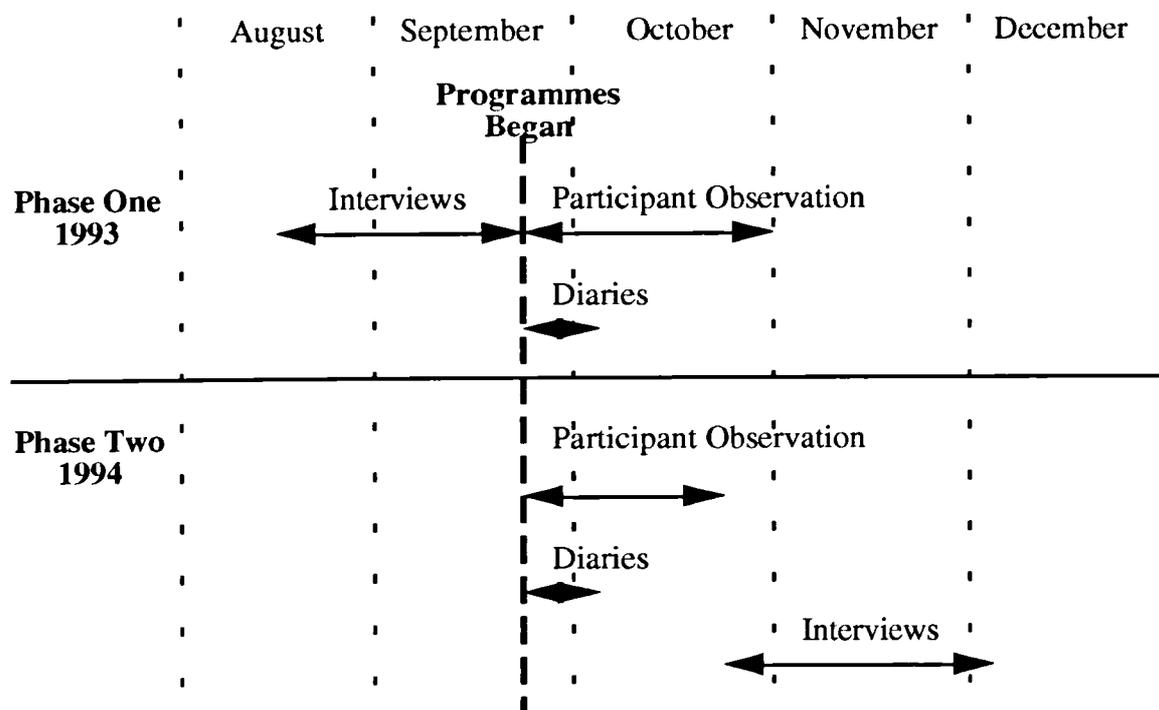
The study involved three programmes in the School Human and Health Sciences. The Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education (HPE). This was for health professionals who wished to teach and could be undertaken either full or part-time. There was an average of 17 students on this programme over the two phases. Another, the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing (DPSN), was a diploma level programme for health professional in practice who wished to upgrade to this level. This was part-time with students attending the University one afternoon and evening per week and had an average of 86 students, making it the largest of the programmes. The third, the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW), was for people who wished to qualify as social workers. The standard and sandwich routes of this were involved. The standard being full-time over two years and the sandwich part-time over three years. There was an average of 45 students on these routes (eight of these being on the sandwich route).

I will now discuss the overarching theme of continuity and change and I will then go on to outline the other three key themes, that is, the sense of excitement and the links between this and women's reasons for taking the programme; their concerns about ability to do the programme and issues about being part of the higher education environment.

Continuity and Change

Initial anxieties - A particularly prevalent phenomenon associated with actually beginning the programme was the expression of anxiety. Many of those who I spoke to, comments written in the diary and other observations indicated this (in the first phase diaries I had not requested that participants to record how they felt but, unexpectedly, many wrote about their concerns). One illustration of this was on the DPSN. After the initial introductory session, where the group of been gathered together as a whole, the new students split up into four smaller seminar groups of around 20 people. I joined one group, noting that they were quiet initially. The tutor suggested going round each member of the group in turn and that each person say their name and

tell the rest a little about themselves. This was done briefly and in a formal fashion. Later the tutor asked how they were feeling so far. This one question changed the atmosphere completely and suddenly several of the students began the reveal their concerns and worries about beginning the programme. One woman said she had not been able to eat her diner the night before because she was 'that worried about coming.' She said she didn't know why this was because she was used to studying. The tutor admitted that she also felt nervous before a new course started. Others spoke of similar worries, one woman commenting that:

'it was a good job we've had plenty to do or I would have turned around and gone home.'

Only a small proportion of participants indicated that they were not anxious about beginning their programme. The potential causes of these anxieties were complex and interrelated and in some ways I have made an arbitrary distinction between these initial anxieties which are potentially general to all new students given the new educational situation and other anxieties which were particularly related to being a mature women student and the professional areas studied. I will discuss the latter two later but initial anxieties appeared to be linked to the unknown and new situation. As Carol, who had already studied at the University the previous year, put it:

'I never like the first days.... it's meeting new people.'

This initial anxiety is understandable given that continuity is threatened. Other studies about the transition to higher education have reported such anxieties, and I know from my own experience, as highlighted above, that I can feel anxious in new situations. For many these initial anxieties appeared to subside relatively quickly and particular factors seemed to assist. For instance, an informal welcome - especially having a drink and biscuit on arrival; having the opportunity to meet staff and other students early on; finding out the staff were friendly and approachable; having clear directions and information on where to park (parking and getting there was a major concern for a few); being shown around (though a few found this overwhelming); coming over to the university in advance; and carefully structured 'getting to know each other' exercises.

Continuity and discontinuity of experience - Familiarity with the University, people, the town or a particular subject was seen by many as helpful. For instance, Fiona told me how knowing other students had helped her when she had walked into the large group of new students on the first day of the DPSN. She said:

'as soon as I saw these faces that I knew, there was a sea of faces, I thought, "oh this isn't as bad as I expected".'

Familiarity on the other hand could raise anxieties as it created certain expectations which were different from the reality encountered. For instance, on the DPSN there was a small group of students who had taken part of the diploma the previous year. They had been a relatively small group. Most of them expressed surprise and feelings of being overwhelmed by the greater numbers in the new group they were joining.

Those interviewed in the first phase were asked for an educational history. An analysis of this revealed that 80 per cent had experienced curtailed early experience of education. They had either not done well , not liked or not had the opportunity to stay on at school. The result was leaving school with few or no qualifications. A small minority had more extended and continuous educational experience either following a traditional educational progression to higher level qualifications or being involved in some sort of education for most of their adult life.

Despite many having curtailed early educational experiences most of those interviewed overall (34 out of 40) had studied and gained further qualifications more recently. Many

had a realistic view of what learning in higher education would involve. It was commonly reported that recent educational experience had helped in the transition to their programme but the links between educational experience and perceptions about academic ability were complex. Appropriate work or professional experience was also seen as an advantage but again there was not a straightforward link between this and perceptions about ability. I will return to this issue later in discussing concerns about ability. Previous relevant experience provided continuity but it could also threaten continuity. The assumption that previous experience is always helpful is therefore incorrect.

The continuities of life outside the University - I will begin this section with a striking example of the kind of continuity women can experience. Gwen had just began the DipSW when her eldest child was diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia which was potentially triggered by taking LSD. The events leading up to this had caused her great concern and made enormous demands on her as she began the programme. She told me that hers was an extreme case but that it had happened and that talking to me had given her the chance record it as a warning to others that it *can* happen. She went on to say:

> '*you don't just come as a separate unit, you come with all the baggage which you accumulate... and if you have children their needs always come first, you are not separate even though the course may look upon you as an individual, you're not.*'

Gwen's comments summed up the sense of connectedness to their family which many of the women in this study expressed. There was continuity in their sense of who they were as wives and/or mothers. Edwards (1993) argues that for women being wives and/or mothers are not a roles which can easily be 'split off from the rest of themselves but are integrated aspects of their whole personas' (p. 12). Not only was being a wife and/or mother a 'core' aspect of a woman's sense of who she was, it also meant, for many in the study, continued responsibilities for the home and/or children.

Husbands or partners - Over a quarter of the interview participants who had husbands or who lived with a partner (35 out of 40 were in this situation) spoke of effects or worries about the potential effects that being involved in education might have on their relationship. Only a small number of these appeared to be relatively serious and there was no indication that being involved in their present programme would end their relationship. Over half of those interviewed did not think that beginning the programme would lead to relationship problems. However, it was beyond the scope of this research to investigate the longer term effects on these relationships.

Children - For those with children (29 out of 40) the issues associated with being a mother were different depending on the age of the children. Four ideal career types were devised based on the age of the women and their family situation. These were *young womanhood* - those in their twenties without children; *young motherhood* - those in their late twenties and thirties with children under ten; *older motherhood* - those in their late thirties or forties with children over ten who were still living at home; and *older womanhood* - women in their thirties or forties with few or no responsibilities for children. For most in the young motherhood type continuities were associated with responsibility for arranging and concerns over childcare. For a small number this was their main concern as they began their programme. A couple of women mentioned that knowing the timetable for the programme, including the induction period, well in advance was useful in order to arrange childcare. For those in the older motherhood career type there was a mixture of seeing older children as more or less demanding than younger children.

Women as carers - Three women in the older motherhood career type spoke of continued responsibility of looking after aging relatives. This responsibility could just

as easily have fallen to those in the older womanhood as it is a responsibility which often falls to women as they and their relatives get older.

Friends and relations - Though only a few spoke of the effect taking the programme on friendships and other relations there were indications of class differences. Those from working-class background spoke of more mixed reactions from friends and relations about them being involved in higher education than those from middle-class origins. For those from working-class background the reactions of others ranged from being ostracised to others being proud of them.

Work - The majority of those involved in this study were part-time and also worked, many of them full-time but a few had given up work to begin their programme. A small number in the study mentioned issues associated with altered relationships with people at work because of them studying or changes in their work situation. Others spoke of the differences between work and coming to college and how they had had to adapt. There were therefore changes to manage associated with work. A small number said that beginning the programme represented a welcome relief from demanding or unsatisfying work.

A continuous sense of self - Certain factors associated with the University were experienced as being discontinuous with the new students' sense of who they were as adults. Such things as having to queue for a long time to register; the Freshers' Conference not being of relevance to mature students as it was aimed at the needs and concerns of traditional students; not being able to make a drink; and lack of control over environmental factors, for instance, the temperature in classrooms. A key example was the treatment of three new students by male members of staff. These three women reported at length incidents which had particularly upset them. Two were related to male staff in computing services and the other to a male tutor. For example, one woman went to computing services for advice. She arrived after it closed but did not realise this. She said the member of staff she had spoken to had been very 'rude' and 'abrupt' with her despite her attempts to be 'diplomatic'. The incident culminated in him 'grabbing' hold of her arm. She said:

'I went absolutely wild...the feeling as if you're like a school child who's in the headmasters office because you've done something... I told him he was a rude and arrogant man.'

Others there did offer her advice but this incident left her feeling upset and powerless. She said she did not expect to be treated like that especially at her age. This incident, it could be argued, amounted to sexual discrimination and one of the others was related to a lack of concern about the issues associated with the demands of family commitments which face many mature women students.

A few in the study spoke of concern that the programme might change aspects of themselves they wished to retain while other hoped it would change them. Being involved in education could disrupt women's sense of who they were as wives and mothers. One women spoke of having to 'sort out the boundaries' with her husband when she began her programme. Several with particularly young children found it hard to leave them for the first time. For instance, one woman was still breastfeeding her baby when she began the DPSN. She found the process of trying to get the child to take a bottle in her absence emotionally difficult. As Rose, who had children aged eight and 12 put it:

'It sort of cuts you in two, you've got to be two different people, you've got to be the student and you've got to be the mother...'

The fact that the women in this study were involved in mainly women dominated professions was seen as assisting the transition by many. A couple of social work

students also mentioned that they felt the programme took issues of relevance to women seriously.

Participants saw the degree of change which beginning the programme imposed differently and this was not necessarily linked to the programme being a complete change of direction in career terms or them continuing in the same professional area. I had anticipated that beginning their professional programme would be an important transition for these women. This assumption was gained from the literature on mature women students, much of it being based on women taking full-time degree programmes or returning to education; these kinds of mature women students appear to be making major changes in their lives. Throughout this study though I got the impression that many of the women involved in these particular professional programmes did not fit this picture. One of the new HPE students who was part-time but for whom taking the programme was a change of direction careerwize said:

> 'it's not a huge change. I think in the last couple of years I've had such major life changes. When you think about the changes you have in your life. Things are far more stressful, like buying a house and deciding to live with somebody and then having a baby, than going to college to do a course. Although, as I said, the stress is combining everything, it is hard work.'

There were also a few example of what one would expect to be a more minor change, in that, participants were taking the programme part-time while continuing in the same profession but this was perceived by them as a major change in their lives. The degree of change was therefore relative and depended on individual perceptions.

The main theme for these mature women students was that there were strong continuities in terms of their sense of who they were and continued responsibilities but there were changes and adaptions to be made and at a psychological level continuity was threatened. Perhaps it is the continuities which are the major issue and influence on becoming a mature women student on the kinds of professional programme involved in this study.

A Sense of excitement?

In her interview before she began the DPSN Susan said:

> 'I'm quite looking forward to going on the first day, I can't wait. I'm all excited, I'm like a big kid waiting to go to school. I really can't wait. I can get my brain into gear and say I'm doing something positive with my life.'

This quote conveys the theme of this section, that is, the sense of excitement which many but not all women in the study expressed about beginning their programme and the links between this and their reasons for taking the programme. There appeared to be three main reasons for this excitement:

1. Enthusiasm about being involved in education and learning. A few comments indicated a sense of being 'addicted' to learning, for instance, there was talk of getting the 'bug' for learning.

2. A means of achieving their potential.

3. The programme was seen as providing them with particular opportunities.

This excitement was therefore linked to what they perceived they would gain from being involved in higher education. This led to an examination of their reasons for being involved. Many, complex reasons were given. Initially I attempted to analyse these in terms of instrumental verses self-fulfilment motivations. Some of the literature

on mature women students' motivations suggests this dichotomy, though the findings are contradictory. Most women in this study, however, gave a combination of these reasons; the two poles being intrinsically linked. Only a few lay at the extremes of these poles. I concluded that this was a false dichotomy. For the vast majority in this study these aspects were not separate. Three main areas of reasons were, however, discernible.

1. Occupational career reasons which had several facets:

a. Reasons of professional pressures or to gain professional credibility. For example, the pressure on nurses and other health professionals to upgrade to diploma level in the light of the new P2000 qualification.

b. Career development ambitions.

c. As a change or escape from a difficult or unfulfilling work situation.

d. Being related to motherhood - strikingly most of those in the young motherhood saw having a career as an important source of self-esteem which having children alone could not fulfill. Most of those in the older motherhood career type spoke of taking the programme as a chance for them to do something for themselves now the demands of being a mother were diminishing, that is, they were searching for an alternative source of self-esteem. As Susan put it:

'The kids are grown up... so it's Mother's turn to do her own thing.'

2. Self-fulfilment reasons.

3. Financially motivated reasons - a few women said they were taking their programme to enable them to get a job where they could earn a reasonable salary.

The women's decisions also had to be seen in the light of limiting circumstances which surrounded their involvement in the programmes. Well over a third of the interview participants spoke of these, being able to take the programme was therefore in the context of what was and was not possible in their lives at a particular time. Whatever factors were involved the vast majority of the women's reasons were mainly, but not only, linked to their self-esteem, that is, that through taking the programme they would achieve or maintain a positive personal and social identity.

Can I do it?

The participants appeared to ask themselves several questions which related to concerns about their ability to do their programme. The key ones being - 'how am I going to fit it in ?' and 'am I up to it ?'

Can I fit it all in? - A major concern for many involved was related to whether they could fit the demands of study in with the other continuing aspects of their lives, that was mainly their family and work commitments. The anxiety about managing these aspect was expressed in the terminology which was frequently used. Terms like 'juggling', 'spinning plates', having to 'balance everything', having to 'divide' yourself between these aspects.

The demands of family were a concern especially, but not only, for those with children. For those with young children the main issue was having time and space away from the them to be able to study. For those in the older motherhood type a few said they found older children less demanding in terms of time but for others that they were more demanding than younger children. The example of Gwen's problems with her child's mental health illustrates this. Older children could be more demanding as they could

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have more serious problems or needed support as they were going through important life transitions themselves. Guilt was frequently expressed by those with children about not spending enough time with them. Additionally, a few women were responsible for elderly relatives which created extra demands on their time.

Having support from their family was mentioned as being important in coping with these demands by many, though a small number did indicated that they were determined to do their programme, no matter what. The factors which were seen as assisting women with the continuing demands of the family were; hours to suited their commitments to children (on the DipSW even the 9.15 a.m. start was seen as too early by a few, especially those who had to travel a considerable distance to Huddersfield); being given a realistic view of the demands of the course, seeing that others in a similar situation could manage and tutors taking account of the demands of their family.

The demands of work for those who were continuing with jobs was a concern when beginning their programme. The key factor which helped was having enough time to fit in the demands of study but also having sympathetic and supportive work colleagues was seen as important.

Finally, the demands of the programme raised anxieties. This was not only in terms of the realisation of the work that had to be done but also in terms of being able to take everything in, especially initially. One example of this was the contrast between DipSW and HPE induction weeks. The social work students were in every day for a full and demanding week and many commented about the amount of information they had to take in. Comments of feeling tired and overwhelmed were common. The HPE students, on the other hand, had two days away from the University to prepare a presentation for the final day of the induction week. This gave them the opportunity to reflect and they appeared less overwhelmed than the social work students.

The question 'Am I up to it?' frequently asked by many of the participants could be seen as the expression of anxieties related academic and/or professional ability. In some cases this was grounded in reality, for instance, many of those who were unsure of their academic ability said this was because they had not studied recently or not at this level before but for others their perceptions did not relate to a realistic evaluation of their academic or professional ability. For instance, Annie who was beginning the HPE and therefore already had a degree said:

'I've always had that sort of perception that I'm not really worthy to be on a degree course... and I still do.'

Whereas Judy who was beginning the DipSW with little educational experience was not particularly concerned. There appeared to be a link between people's perceptions about their academic and their social and educational backgrounds. Most interviewed who expressed this worry were working-class. Concerns about ability were also linked to previous educational experience, a sense of not belonging and perceptions about not being a 'proper' academic associated with not being involved in a higher educational setting previously. Worries about abilities were also expressed in terms of being able to use the library and especially the new technology there.

A few participants with much professional experience were concerned, this mainly appeared to be associated with a worry about being under scrutiny by peers (much the same sort of worry I have in presenting this !). Having positive feedback about their abilities appeared to be helpful to most, for instance undertaking and doing well in a trial essay. A social work seminar which examined the wealth of relevant work and life experience that students had was helpful in alleviating these concerns for most but for a small minority it served to highlight their perceived professional deficits further.

Despite concerns about ability many expressed a sense of determination to complete the programme and resilience due to having had to cope with competing demands or difficult situations in the past. As Pam quite bluntly put it:

'I've got to do it and I will do it, there's not way I am going to fail.'

The reality of financial constraints was an issue for a small number on low incomes, particularly single parents or women whose husbands or partners were off work due to long term illness. It was also problem for one single full-time student. Thus a few were on the borderline of coping financially.

Do I belong?

'Don't feel part of the University. Don't feel like a 'real' student, more of an interloper'

This comment sums up the concerns that many expressed, that, for various reasons, they did not feel part of the University. One example was feeling different because of ethnic origin. I noticed on the DipSW that the black students congregated together initially. I assumed they knew each other and asked Mary (who was black) if this was the case. She said she only knew one other black person initially and went on to say:

'I think it's like a safety net......until you know other people. There are certain things which you identify with another black student automatically but there is no way you can identify with anybody else in the group.'

Others expressed feeling of being different to their perceptions of other students, most commonly in terms of being older but also in terms of being working-class. Many, especially those on the DPSN saw University as a high-brow academic institution, one which their profession was not traditionally associated with, it being for 'real' academics. There were also examples of new students experiencing problems because of other concern about being different. For instance, one woman was worried 'coming out' as a lesbian and another about disclosing details of her childhood sexual abuse on the DipSW. Many said they did not see themselves as a student and being part-time accentuated this.

Concerns were frequently expressed about 'standing out from the crowd'. This standing out was in two ways which represented opposite ends of the spectrum:

1. Worries about standing out as being different in a negative way. Many of the new students were concerned they may stand out as being the only one who was anxious or did not know what they were doing. This was often quickly remedied by finding out others had similar anxieties.

2. Not being distinctive enough, that was, being invisible in the masses of new students. This worry was linked, by many, to the size of the group and was particularly expressed by the DPSN students. A small number spoke of feeling indistinct and deskilled because they were leaving a job where they had felt important. As Claire described it she now felt like a 'little fish in a big sea'.

These worries about not belonging were most commonly eased by having the opportunity to talk to other students and discovering similarities early on. Also such things as being welcomed and being made to feel part of the programme or University assisted.

References

EDWARDS, R. (1993) *Mature Women Students: Separating or Connecting Family and Education*, London, Taylor and Francis.

Questions

From your experience of students or your own transition to programmes of education does what I've said ring bells?

Does anything not ring true?

Are your experiences different?

APPENDIX 4

Summary of Phase One For Participants

The Transition of Mature Women Students to Professional Programmes of Education and Training from the Student Perspective

Between June and November 1993 I was involved with three courses in the School of Human and Health Sciences (social work and health studies), in the first exploratory phase of my investigation of mature women students at and around the point of entry to higher education. Though mainly women have been involved, some of the findings also relate to men, but there seem to be specific aspects which are different for women. Several interrelated themes have emerged:-

Identity - Most people described both internal and external reasons for wanting to do their course. External reasons related to professional pressures or because it was necessary to practice. Internal reasons related to doing the course for personal satisfaction and achievement. It was seen by many women as a opportunity to do something for themselves, an escape from unrewarding work and/or domesticity. The decision to do the course seemed to be linked to family responsibilities. For many of those with older children it was associated with the children growing up and the woman now wanting to do something for herself. For many of those with younger children it seemed important to fit a career in with having a family.

Many did not see themselves as students, especially if they were part-time, they also seemed to feel marginalised and not particularly part of the university, but the identity of student seemed to be an important part of identity to others. Being an older student was seen as having certain disadvantages related to perceived effects on ability and being different around the campus but it also had benefits related to having more experience and motivation. Concerns were expressed that the course might change aspects of themselves which the students wished to retain. Some were also worried about the course being a big change from what they were leaving or that it would change their roles.

Anxiety and concerns - many people expressed these to varying degrees, particularly in the initial stages of the transition. It could be said that a certain amount of anxiety is usual and expected in this kind of encounter. People commonly felt anxious about the unknown; meeting people; practicalities (travelling, parking, finding things, childcare); feeling they might be the only one who felt anxious or did not know what they were doing; and using the library and computers. These seemed to subside quite quickly for some and were helped by finding out others felt the same, meeting people, finding out the staff were approachable and friendly, feeling welcomed in a relatively informal setting, being in smaller groups, getting information, being shown things and having them explained, knowing that support and help was available, meeting second year students, getting to know what was expected of them and being able to understand.

For some, however, these sort of anxieties continued and seemed to be deeper rooted. There were also other ongoing anxieties expressed. Some of those who were new to their profession were worried about their lack of experience, while those with a lot of experience were concerned about being judged by peers. A significant number of people said they were anxieties about their perceived lack of academic ability. The reality of what had to be done began to hit, particularly the assessments, but for some

this seemed more than a natural anxiety, and more related to worries about ability and failure. The consequences of having different groups and them coming together for different aspects of the programmes caused concerns. Some students felt marginalised or inferior or anxious about suddenly being with other students who they did not know. After some time the majority of people seemed to cope with most of these ongoing anxieties. Support, encouragement and a chance to value themselves and their experience seemed to be helpful.

Previous experience - students seemed to have followed one of two paths through the education system in the past. The majority had had negative or disrupted early experiences of education and a few had had positive and continuous experiences. Most people seemed aware of the way education had changed in recent years and many had experienced the 'new' methods of teaching and learning - though these were seen as difficult initially. Several people felt that having recent educational experience was helpful and those without expressed concerns. Being familiar with any aspect of the new encounter was seen as helpful but familiarity and previous experience could also hinder as it created certain expectations. Many only had a vague idea of what the course would involve and those who had received more information seemed to have a better idea of what to expect. People felt on the whole that they would have liked more information about the content and structure of their course and clearer information might have allayed some preconceived notions, for example, about the large group size, as this was a surprise for many at the beginning of one course.

The relationship between study and the rest of the students life - For many part-time students fitting work with study was a worry. This was a problem in varying degrees and seemed to depend upon support from work; the type, organisation and amount of work; and family responsibilities. For some there were also worries about the changes in roles and responsibilities at work. The relationship between study and the students immediate family was a major theme for many. Children and domestic responsibilities seemed to be largely women's domain and continued to be so. Women expressed some guilt and concern about the effects on the family but were able to justify it better if their children were older. Some talked about the effects on their relationship with their husband or partner - though many said their partners saw them coming on the course positively and were supportive, worries were expressed about potential strains on their relationship. Support from the family was seen as important. Time management was an issue particularly for those with younger children, as was arranging childcare and getting children organised. Having emotional and physical space, in which to study, was a concern and consideration for women.

People talked about the effect of coming to college on relationships with friends and other family members. For those from working class or working to middle class backgrounds there seemed to be more mixed reactions than for those from middle class backgrounds. At the extreme people talked about losing friends and being ostracised by some people, to people being proud and pleased for them. A couple of black women seemed adamant that their friendships outside would not be altered. Therefore people with whom a student identifies with outside college will have some effect on how they experience the transition.

Future directions - In September I will be starting a second phase of data collection with the new intake of students and I will be focusing on how and why some women cope and integrate better than others.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your involvement in this study.

APPENDIX 5

Selected Data

Phase One - Interview

Rose - interviewed in her own home two weeks before she began the Diploma in Social Work

I: How did you find out about the course?

R: Oh that's a long story. [husband] went back into teaching but he did it after having a heart attack.... he went back to college to get his advanced City & Guilds to get all his abilities because he couldn't remember things and he couldn't speak and it made me stop and take a look at what I was doing because I'd more or less always worked but when [husband] wasn't able to go back to his job I thought if he's not going to be able to work or if this happens again I'm going to need some qualifications to fall back on so I went to [home town] College to get a couple of O levels, I thought English and Maths and perhaps Computers. They didn't have the ordinary English and Maths O levels, they only had what they call the pre-access so I joined the pre-access wondering what it was all about because all I wanted was two O levels. He said you have to take something else so I said do you do Computers thinking well these are the main things that everyone wants so he said yes so I signed up for that and while I was on the pre-access I found out about the access course leading on to university. At first I thought should I go in for teaching and I took a long look at myself and thought no I haven't got the patience to teach. I wanted to teach, like [husband] said, the perfect class and if they weren't perfect then I wasn't interested. The type of job I used to do was a finance place, I used to go and most of the time I used to have to listen to what people were saying because they'd have problems or they needed someone to talk to and I thought why not build on the skills that I've already got and I heard about it by going to [home town] College on the pre-access course and the access course, they put me on to the different courses ...... and I thought well.

I: Did you find that you actually wanted to do social work and then looked around?

R: Yes. At first I thought about being a welfare rights officer because we've been in some very tight situations - when he became out of work and when he became ill because he was self-employed and we couldn't get this and we couldn't get that, all sorts of different situations and I thought, I suppose it was the rebel in me, right I want to help people who are in my situation to get what they're entitled to and I enquired around quite a bit. I went to [home town] Careers and they said the majority of welfare rights officers are voluntary, well that was no good because if I was going to be the main bread winner then I want the sort of thing that's going to, I don't mean pay well meaning that is the main choice of work, I don't mean it like that but....

I: You want something reasonable.

R: Yes, so I thought well if I can't be a welfare rights officer the next best thing is a social work because social workers deal welfare rights and deal with all sorts of situations so.....

I: So you needed something that was going to be a substantial career but you were going to get a reasonable amount of money...

R: Yes part of it that way, it wasn't cold...

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I: Yes you weren't after the money.....

R: And I thought well the type of job that I was in, I had to go into hospital for a hysterectomy, because I was off work for three months they decided to fire me and I thought that's not fair, I want to carry on meeting people because that's what I'm good at and I can listen to people, and not so much tell them what to do, but listen and care enough to listen to what they've got to do and I thought right well build on that.

I: So you looked at what skills you'd got and what you wanted to do. I also wondered why you chose to go to Huddersfield as opposed to anywhere else?

R: Well I applied for lots of different places, Salford, Manchester, Liverpool. I applied for 13 places, I applied for Bradford as well and some I got rejected and some I got accepted but where I'm situated Huddersfield is really close to me because the way you came in is the long way round. You can go over the moors and it takes me 20/25 minutes to get there as opposed to going all the way through Manchester. Having a family I have to think of the time it's going to take to get there of a morning because I have to organise the kiddies as well. I'm not saying [husband] doesn't help but I have to organise things and when I went for the interview I looked round and there was, this is going to sound really corny, I like old buildings, part of my hobby is visiting old buildings and things like that, and I went down Manchester and it was new, plate glass windows, pre-fab type buildings and they don't impress me. I like things that are old and have got character, and it just seemed friendly when I walked in....

I: I know what you mean, you're not the first person to say that.

R: Plus the drive is much more pleasant going over the tops than fighting through city centers.

I: So there are the practical reasons for getting there and the kind of things you like when you get there such as the atmosphere....

R: Yes and in the interview, as well as social workers in the interview, the gentleman who interviewed me said....... they seemed friendly enough and I thought a nice warm welcome here.....

I: What did you think of the interview?

R: Nerve wracking. I saw two social workers, the first one feared me, she was very prim and proper, I mean she was very nice but she reminded me of a headmistress type and the other one, when I went in to see her she was very laid back, dressed in leggings and boots and she didn't seem as forbidding as the first one, she was more friendly. It was enjoyable but nerve wracking and that was only the second interview I'd ever gone to at university so I was very nervous.... but all round....

I: What about the group things you did, did you do any problem solving?

R: Oh yes, that problem solving.... I thought I'd failed it because they were asking about what would I do if some magistrate was found out he wasn't being charged with the crime and an innocent boy was and she was talking away and she said he was such a good boy this one and, well he can't be that good can he, he's done the crime, he can't be that much of an angel that you make him out to be and if he is the one that has done the crime and he's letting someone else take the punishment and I thought oh god no I shouldn't have said that.

I: You probably said the right thing.....

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R: I just said the first thing that came into my head instead of sitting there and thinking what do they want me to say or making sure you speak incorrectly and things like that.... I just came out with it oh he can't be that much of an angel can he if he is willing to let someone else take the rap for it....

I: So were you surprised when you got accepted?

R: Yes I was. I suppose it's not having confidence in yourself to think that you can do it and that somebody else did think you could do it. It was good... because when I wrote you that letter [the questionnaire] I forgot to put down the voluntary work that I did. Some years ago I went helping voluntary at this mother and baby group because I was expecting and I thought I'd get some knowledge of children and I ended up working in probation, and I came from the children's side to helping women on probation and I really enjoyed it. The only reason I stopped was because the group itself packed up and I did that for nearly three years and I was asked then why didn't I go in for it. I went back to college and I stuck it two months, I was only 24 or 25 and my son was 18 months. They only said those type of things because I was working with them and they wanted to keep me there, so when they actually accepted me on the course.... it was good, I mean I'm nervous as hell.....

I: Going back to why you chose the course, I wonder if you received any kind of guidance from anywhere?

R: You mean from Huddersfield or just about the social work?

I: Just about the social work......

R: [home town] Careers, they told me about different courses. That was another reason why I was surprised because they told me the competition was so fierce that I didn't expect to be able to get on without have worked in social work....

I: That could have put you off.

R: It could have done if I wasn't a determined sort of person but Careers helped me. I wrote for a reference from one of the probation officers I used to work with all those years ago and she helped, she built the confidence up in me and I have an aunty, I hadn't spoken to her for years, so I thought right...... and I had a chat with her.

I: Had she been a social worker?

R: Yes but she worked in residential care with children, nursery children.... so I had a chat with her to see if what I was feeling was it just I was gaining these qualifications and thought that I could go to social work or did she think that I could go to use them that way, so I had a chat quite a few people, people at college as well......

I: Did you find that you had to seek out people.....

R: Yes, I think again because I lacked confidence in actually going into it and I also talked to people because I help out at youth clubs, one voluntary and one paid, I sort of work with the children for a while and I thought can I cope if they come up to me with problems or can I cope if they throw a tantrum and things like that. I tried to put myself in a position of thinking perhaps of social work and deal with situations that come up and yes I got a lot of help from the leader in charge of the youth clubs.....

I: People are quite keen then.

R: Yes....

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I: Have you had any written contact with the University so far?

R: You mean what they've sent me? Very friendly, again it's all come through and it's Dear Rose which I liked straight away because when you get something which deals with ? or something like that.... but when you open a letter and you see Dear Rose it makes you automatically think they want to be friends with you. It's much more on an informal basis. It was clear, there was nothing too hard to understand. The only thing I had puzzled about, perhaps you might know, when they wrote to me they told me when I start, the 27th, but they haven't told me what time I start, so that's the only thing...

I: I got the timetable this morning, because I was asking about the induction week. I think it might have been 9.15 but if you want me to give you a ring sometime.

R: Yes, if you wouldn't mind. Perhaps they'll give you something towards it.

I: They probably will but I can do that anyway. I know that I got the information from [programme leader]......I'll give you a ring tomorrow, they should send you some information.....

R: I've got all.... when it starts, the 27th, and all the term times and finishing times and things like that.....

I: Are there any other kind of contacts you've had so far apart from your letters and your interview?

R: No. The letter where I applied I took that over because I didn't trust the post. I'd got this place and I didn't want to lose it so I actually took it over and handed it personally to the secretary and when I got there, once again, everybody was nice and friendly and helpful to me which was nice so everything with Huddersfield so far has been great. To me that is very important, I don't know if it's the same for people who have just left school going on to university but I think when you're a mature student and you've been away from it for so long you need to feel that nobody's going to be patronising you or looking down on you if you're not doing ......

I: You mean you're a mature student and they'll treat you in that way. I'm going to go on now to look a bit more at how you've arrived at this point and I wonder if there is anything else although we've covered it quite well really already

R: Well I suppose.. my children are growing up, one's 12 and one's 8. On the letter that I wrote to them they I was a bit of a wonder women. I knew I worded it so it was, you know......

I: Did you think you might not be accepted if they were younger?

R: If they were younger, yes, because when I was on the pre-access last year one particular place where one of the women went to for an interview, and what I couldn't understand it was a female interviewer, and she was saying well you're on your own and you've got young children how do you think you're going to cope with that and ? and this women, even though she did answer her question she did turn round and say you've no right to ask me that question, so I thought that even before [husband] was ill, I'd been sat pondering over where I was going and what I was going to be doing and I just sat there and thought, because I mean collecting was lovely, it was great you met people but you were out in all sorts of weather...

I: Collecting?

R: Yes, I worked for a finance company.

I: Oh yes, yes of course.

R: So you were out on the streets, you were driving round a lot but you were also out on the streets and sometimes when I was sat in my car soaked through to the skin, dripping wet through and shivering thinking is this where I'm going to be when I'm 50, when I retire so I think for some time I'd been wondering what I was going to do, then when [husband] became ill and then they fired me from work it gave me the push I needed, otherwise I might have carried on along a path or I might have changed a bit later because as I said I had been sat pondering, hearing about different people getting qualifications, going to university - God why didn't I do that.

I: So you regretted not doing it earlier.

R: Yes. I couldn't go on to university. When I was at school I wanted to be a chef and I was the eldest of seven so when I put this to my mum and dad that I wanted to go on to catering college it was a case of well we'd like you to it would be nice but we can't afford it. Because grants weren't as much then and I was needed to help support the family, it was such a nice family so when it came ? a chance to get more O levels I just sat there and wrote my name on the paper and thought what the heck I'm not going to need these because I'm going to be stuck in a factory or whatever so I just sort of lost hope.... and I have regretted that. One thing I drum into my own kids is that education is very important so...

I: But at the time that was the only option.

R: Yes that was the only way, so I suppose when I think about it along the way even going back to when I was 25 I think there has always been something there, this was just the right time, things happened at the right time and I was ready ...

I: Because of your circumstances changing and wanting to do it.

R: A lot of people have said to us about [husband] having his heart attack and strokes, oh that must have been awful, and I said well it was but we've benefited, we've turned a bad situation into a good situation and both of us are going to end up with more qualifications....

I: It's funny how something like that can change your life for the better which you don't think of at the time.

R: No you're devastated.

I: You mentioned earlier on that you had done some studying recently and you mentioned a bit about school. I wonder if you could fill that in a bit more.....how much studying you've done.

R: Since I've left school? As I said at 25 I went back to go and get my English and Maths O levels but I ended up going in for a hernia operation and missing that much, plus my little lad was too young so I gave that up then when I went back in 1991 I was thinking more in terms of getting office type work where you couldn't be hired and fired quite so easily as you could in the job I'd been in so I thought perhaps I'll get English and Maths and Computers which'll help me. Then as I got on the course I started enjoying what I was doing, really enjoyed it, and like I've said I like history and old buildings and things like that so I decided that I would take History. If I was taking English, Maths and Computers to get a better job, then I would take one that I enjoyed for myself so I took History..... then when I went on to the access course I'd already decided that I wanted to be a social worker so I took Sociology which I'm into that, I like that sort of thing. I've always been one for women's rights. I took European

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Studies because I thought it was more history, sort of Russian pre-war history and it turn out it wasn't. It was a lot to with Maastricht......it was all confused that I also took, besides the access course, I took Psychology O level and I also learned the language Urdu level 1 ..... Again I'm one for, you could say, the underdog. I know everybody's got prejudices in one way or another and if you can look at those prejudices and face them you can start to overcome them. I don't agree with a lot of racism that goes on and I thought if I can learn to speak their language at least perhaps I can help.... to meet them half way. I take the second level of Urdu this year and then next September I can do it for the next few years because I ought to not just get the diploma, I want to go on to the degree and get the degree in Social Work so for the next two years while I'm doing the second Urdu I ought to take sign language as well so I can help people, as I say I like to help the underdog...

I: And learn some skills along the way....

R: Yes, I can help people, not just because ? but because I genuinely want to help people.

I: Are those all the courses that you've done recently?

R: Yes, O level English, O level History, O level Psychology, O level Maths.....I did the Maths and Statistics on the Access course and I did the Access course Sociology and European Studies, and the Urdu but those are the only qualifications, oh I got a GCSE English when I was at school but that was the only exam. I like writing stories, I always did as a kid. The only exam I ever did, I sat there and I signed my name on the top and I started reading through the questions ? and all these pictures started dancing around in my head so ? but it was only GCSE level and those were the only exams I got...

I: They were all quite recent?

R: Yes, in the past two years.

I: What sort of teaching and learning methods did you have on those courses?

R: I was very disappointed in the Maths. I felt that I could have passed my Maths had I had better teaching methods because on the ? you were given a pile of coins it was called and you were sent away to do them and you brought them back and then you did an assessment at the end of about ten of them and you brought that home, you didn't do it in class and if you struggled a bit she'd show you once on the blackboard but that was all.

I: There wasn't a lot of support.

R: No there wasn't a lot of support and I thought, well I had to be quite good at Maths in the job that I did so I didn't think, if anything I thought I was going to fail English ? but as I carried on there were parts of it that I couldn't do and struggled on and there wasn't time to set it out on the blackboard and show you what to do.

I: ?

R: No it wasn't and I was very disappointed in that. Personally I feel that I've been let down with that, I could have passed had I had the proper support. The support in the English was fantastic. We were all mature students and she treated us as if we were mature students. The History was quite funny because I was in a class of 16, 17, 18 year olds and I was the only adult besides the tutor. At first the Head of the History Section didn't want me to go in because he said I was too old..... and I said to him this was supposed to be an equal opportunities college and you're supposed to encourage

mature students and when I walked in one day and saw all these kids, he'd agreed to let me go in, I thought oh god what have I .... I stuck the course out, I mean I got jeered at and laughed at a bit at the beginning but as the course went on I got to know some of the other students and ended up making friends with some. Mr. P..... the tutor there, he had to take on a bit of a different approach with me because he was used to teaching young ones and suddenly this mature student appeared in his class and he was nervous at first but it was quite good because in the end we were discussing things and if things came up about what I remembered and things like that, well don't they Rose, well yes, well come on tell everybody they don't believe me. That was nice...... In fact because you were at college and there were younger ones you had a Parents' Evening and he said don't forget to tell your parents what's happening, and one of the lads turned round and said what happens if you're already a parent, sir, do you bring your parents along or do you bring your kids along to look at it, and he looked straight over at me because I'd started having a laugh with this young man. He said well I'm sure Rose can find out what she wants to know without having to come to the Parents evening..... And then last year on the Access course, that turned me on my head because it was so different to the O levels I'd done.

I: Were the ??

R: Yes, but the Sociology, he was sitting here talking to us like we are now and you want to take notes from what he was doing, that's why I ended up buying a Dictaphone because I thought I don't know enough without having it on... it took an awful lot of time because I was playing the tapes back and re-writing so that was a difficult way. He kept saying, if you think this is hard wait till you get to university.... and then in European Studies that was totally different again because you ended up watching lots of television, lots of videos, it was like BBC2 Open University courses, Panorama on Maastricht and things like that. Then you might have old videos on if you touched on Hitler and concentrations camps, so that again was a whole different concept of working because it was something I hadn't come across, so it's been interesting learning new ways. At least I can talk to [husband] when he's talking about it.....

I: ?

R: There was in the Sociology, you were supposed to work in groups because you were supposed to put this project together. It was a very strange situation because there were three of us who had done the pre-access and moved on to the Access out of about a class of 30 and the rest of them had just come on to the Access course and apart from one or two of them they seemed to think that because we'd been there before that we were a cut above ourselves and we shouldn't be dealing in their group....it was a bit odd so there wasn't really much group work. I suppose it didn't help and the three of us walked in and we were chatting because we already knew each other and I mean people just sort of sat there saying ? I'm very friendly and I'll talk to everybody so I tried making new friends ?? but that didn't work out very well but in the Psychology that we had that again was different to how else we'd been taught because we didn't sit round in desk form, we sat round a great big table, we'd have cups of tea and there would have been an ashtray if the tutor could have smoked but you weren't allowed to smoke. It was up to you to read the book, he'd give you some notes but he didn't agree with giving you a file full of notes because we can't take it all in.... listen to what I'm saying and discuss it amongst yourselves and get the perspectives so we had the discussion with child psychologists and that was good again.......

I: I'm going to go on now as to what your expectations of the course are.

R: I know it's going to be hard work and as I've put in there [her self-characterisation] there'll be times when I'm wondering if I'm doing the right thing and feel like throwing it all in and forgetting it but I won't, I like to think I won't.... I don't mind hard work, I'm prepared to work hard and I know it's going to be time consuming and I'm going

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to be sometimes working all weekend to get something finished and the same in the evening. I've thought it's been brilliant these few weeks when I've been home because I've watched more telly in a few weeks than I did all year, so I do know it's going to be hard but I'm hoping it's going to be rewarding as well. I hope I'm going to learn enough where I can help people out in situations they've been in, I don't know any sort of situations...I know there's not always going to be an answer..... I'm hoping it's going to be friendly, it perhaps might teach me to stop talking too much, and perhaps listen a bit more. Generally to help people a bit more, I know I keep going on about that but that's what I feel a social worker does, she doesn't put people down, she tries to help whether it's the child or whether it's the parents, whatever, to help somebody and get some good results from it and that's what I'm hoping I can do..... and I know you can't do those things overnight and it's going to take all my time to do that..... I don't think you can do a course like that without changing. I did the child minding for six Saturdays. I didn't get on because I couldn't be what they wanted me to be, I couldn't change my way to what they wanted because .... even in this you've got to be yourself because if you're not yourself you can't help somebody because you're living a lie then so if you're going to try telling somebody else....does that make sense.

I: Yes you don't want to alter totally but retain yourself....

R: But you learn as you go along. I mean you might learn to be a better listener or you will learn skills that will help you to be able to talk to people, to communicate with people in different ways and at child minding they wanted you to be very quiet and I can't talk to somebody like that. If somebody starts talking to me like that I'd think they were being a bit patronising and I wanted to help the children at child minding without being patronising to all of them, like I do with the kids at the youth club...

I: So you've got all different opinions.....

R: I mean I didn't get on ??

I: ?

R: I don't want to lose myself as I go along, I want to be a better person.......

I: How do you feel about becoming a student again?

R: It was hard. At first.....

I: I mean in the future. If you talk about the past that would put it in perspective.

R: It was very difficult going back. Me and the lady next door, she was going to do it with me, went and enrolled because I didn't have the courage to go down on my own. I thought a mature student should in some respects you'd actually faced up to not having qualifications but also showed you were a failure because you didn't have the qualification, but since then, I've been there two years now, some people round here don't like it they think it's stupid going back but I think I didn't fail before, I didn't have the opportunity. The opportunity is there now and I'm taking it and I feel good about it. I feel good about myself........being a student in the past has meant a lot of hard work, it's meant neglecting the kids sometimes, you've got time to listen to their problems but not the silly stories they want to tell you because you've an essay to write or you only half listen or you ask them can they go and play instead of reading them a story.... so it sort of cuts you in two, you've got to be two different people, you've got to be the student and you've got to be the mother and bringing the two together is hard work. Sometimes you've got to be one or the other, you can't be both.

I: So you think that's going to be the same.

R: Yes I'm expecting that to be the same over there again.

I: ?

R: Yes because I suppose in a way I thought it was easy when I was at school. It wasn't too bad until it came up to revision time and you needed to put the time in to revise. That's one of the things I'm grateful about, Huddersfield has no exams because I'm a very nervous person under..... I know all people say that but I go to pieces in an exam. Even though I passed the access course all right, because I got good marks in the essays, at the end exams I failed them. I felt that was because I couldn't put the time in to revise. That I find is difficult. You can perhaps find time to read a book but to take it in and digest it how it's supposed to be, when you've got young children..... that's another thing at Huddersfield there weren't exams.... so I found that difficult, revising. Generally, I like the feeling of saying that I'm going to university..... but some people say what being a student at your age. At least I'm not going to be here doing the same old thing in another 30 years time, I'm going to feel as if I've achieved something at the end of it.

I: ?

R: Oh I've copped for it from my own family, oh yes we're pleased for you Rose but they change the subject right away.

I: Do they feel you're being a bit different?

R: In the family yes because they know I'm a working-class person and if I came home from school, when I was at school, and said book instead of booook, you don't talk like that, and I think at the beginning, and I'm always aware because I think as you become a student the more you study obviously the more you learn, and you end up watching the way you're speaking ?? to what I do because I've got some college friends who've gone to university so what I do when I go to her house and I've got to sort of split the two people in two.....

I: You adapt to the people you're with...

R: And on an estate like this as well, it's a very run down, very poor estate. There are one or two of them that ?? that you're doing something and there are some of them who think oh god she's so far up herself she doesn't know where she's coming from...... because many a night we get eggs thrown at the windows. In a way I feel sorry for them and I don't mean that in a patronising way....

I: Eggs thrown at your windows because of what you're doing or is it general round here?

R: No it's because of what we're doing and I think well if you only stopped and took a look at what you're doing. Don't get me wrong, I'm not knocking them, but you could be doing the same as us as well if you wanted to.

I: Do you think it's a bit of resentment?

R: It could be. We once got called posh because we planted a rose bush.

I: It must be difficult.....

R: I mean if you were on a private estate nobody would bat an eyelid about what you're doing but when you're on an estate like this where a lot of the children beg off from school and parents don't bother sending them to school then they think it's wrong that you should be doing something like this......

I: What do you expect the role of the tutors to be when you get to college?

R: Supportive. With us being mature students to remember that. I'm presuming we'll have a few different tutors teaching us different subjects. To work together and not two of them give us an essay and it needed to be handed in at the same time because when you've got a family you can't just throw everything on one side and work on these two essays. It would be better for one to give you an essay one week and the other to give you one another week.

I: So it has to be co-ordinated.

R: Yes that sort of thing......being mature students you need it.

I: You've got other responsibilities.

R: And especially if there are women on their own then they haven't got a partner to say take them to the park whilst they work. So that has to be taken into consideration.

I: They'd have to be well organised....

R: Yes that's what I think but again not in a selfish way but to remember that we're mature students.

I: What kind of teaching and learning methods do you expect?

R: Well it could be a mixture of all these things. I hope it's not going to be a lot like the Sociology because that was really hard work. I would end up coming home and listening to my tape all over again. He talked very fast. He was good, he para-phrased things but if it's the first time you're hearing them and you're not quite sure what they're talking about perhaps make sure that you are understood and talk a little slower and take things at a bit slower pace than the Sociology because all the class felt that he went too fast for us...

I: And you weren't used to taking notes....Would you record again?

R: Yes I would do that again, perhaps not .... because I used to listen to the tape and write practically what the tape said, so perhaps not do it like that but I would use a tape. I didn't use it in European Studies and I didn't use it in Psychology. I suppose I'll take it with me to every lesson to begin with to find out how the teaching methods are.

I: So you're going to adapt your style to theirs.

R: And I presume there'll be a lot reading and research.....again it's time consuming. I've been round ?Library ? or we've got to get into [home town] so perhaps bearing that in mind again....if you've got to research something give them plenty of time. I know there are going to be some other methods ? placements, so you'll be learning there and that will be hands-on experience I suppose. That will be very different again. I suppose there'll be a lot of difference.

I: It'll be quite different to sitting in the classroom.

R: Yes, but I can't see there being a lot of television involved in this one like the European Studies one......

I: I wonder if you expect any other support outside your tutors on the course or from the University in general?

R: I suppose they'll have a good reference libraries if you're doing research. From what I've read out of the literature from different universities and from I've read from Huddersfield, there are chaplains and people you can go and have a chat to if things are getting a bit heavy.... and I suppose you'll find out more as you get over there so perhaps it would be a good thing. I haven't needed it as yet but you never know. There might come a time when I might do.

I: So there are other things available besides the tutors. You talked earlier on about the family and I wondered what sort of effect it will have on you and them.

R: [husband] and I are very supportive of one another because we're both doing it so he understands. I mean while I was writing that [her self-characterisation], he was doing some of this..... he'd done his advanced City & Guilds and he'd finished it as I started ? because he couldn't get on to the teacher training till the year after and I'd be sat, oh you're not writing another essay are you.... because there wasn't much homework involved in the first course he did. Then when he started his teaching course he said oh I apologise for saying you've always got your head stuck in a book because I realise now what hard work it is. So we are supportive of one another. The lads not too bad, he's 12, he's older, he understands, he's got a good head of his shoulders... When I've got an essay he says right I'm going reading my book or watching telly. The little girl is a bit different because she demands a lot of attention so she can pull a face sometimes if I say I'm sorry love I can't read you this story now and at times I can get annoyed with her and I think don't be mean I've got stuff to do as well as you've got stuff to do. And there are other times I think oh you should really give her the attention so.......but all in all we work together as a team, we're not so bad. The bleakest time is December to about March because the nights have really set in and the kiddies can't play out. [Son] doesn't play out much but [daughter] does so she comes in from school and she gets bored easily because [son's] sat doing his homework as well....She hates school but [son] aims to go on to university himself so he understands that you've got to work hard. At times, like I say, it can be frustrating.

I: You'll have to give up a bit of your study time or sometimes you'll have to put your book down.

R: All in all it worked out the past two years...

I: ?

R: She's getting used to it a bit more now. What was it she said the other day, she said oh have you got an essay to write..... so she's coming round a bit now. But at the same time as I say that she goes and tells her teacher what I'm doing especially she went into Junior 1 last year, she got on really really well with that teacher and I got on well with her and we were chatting about what I was doing and when she went back to school the teacher went up to her and said how did your mum do. She said oh she failed her Maths I know that.... but I think she passed the other one because all she does is go on about her Maths.....

I: You've already talked about friends and people around you but what about their support.

R: I've lost a best friend from going back to college because she doesn't think what I'm doing is important, it's a waste of time. Because I've got so much studying to do I don't have the time to spend with her like I used to so she's found another friend......we get along fine which sometimes I think is a bit selfish because if you're truly friends with somebody you listen to them, to me it's like work I am doing it more or less full time, so she tells me about her nights out and working in the club and things like that so I think that sometimes she should, if I've got good marks or something, be

really pleased when I've struggled to do something, she should listen to me, but - do you understand what I mean.

I: Yes, it's a different sort of thing really a career...

R: And it's got an unspoken mutual agreement but I don't mention college. She'll say how are you doing and I'll say I'm doing all right and that's it but I've got a friend that I lost contact with, it must be five years, and I met up with her again last year and she's doing a part-time degree at B and if I'm struggling with an essay I'll phone her up and say oh I'm fed up, I can't do this essay and it's as if she's changed places with the other one because she understands now. I suppose I'm the same with my friend, the other girl, I suppose she thinks I'm not interested in what she's doing anymore. College does change you, it makes you look at people differently and makes you think that's it, nights out on the tiles now aren't important as they used to be because other things are important.

I: Things change a bit along the way. Some people can cope with that and others can't.

R: My dad's very proud of me. My mum's sort of, well she is but she's a bit like my friend, as long as you don't talk too much about it....My sister in law, my husband's sister, has often sat and said I don't know what you're wasting your time doing all this for and my brother in law will go er well if that's what she wants to do she doesn't say anything about what you do.... but that's not an unspoken rule, that was actually said, well as long as you don't talk to me about college because I don't understand it.

I: So people will either close it off or accept it....

R: But I suppose that comes, I think you can take that from our backgrounds because we're both from working-class families where going on to university, for people of our age, for our children it's more and more acceptable, but for people like me having to go on to a university then was more middle-class really. You went out and got a job.

I: ?

R: I don't think of it like that, some people do, I want to help people in my own class. That's how I look at it. I know what class I come from and I don't want to move out of it. I might want a nicer house and a nice car from it ? but I want to be able to help people like me.

I: So you still see yourself as working-class.

R: Oh I don't want to be anything else really. I mean it suits me sometimes if somebody's being a bit off-handed with me I can come out with a few big words and shut them up.....

I: Yes a little bit of knowledge helps...

R: Yes, if it comes out but generally no, I'm from a working-class family and that's where I want to stay but some people don't look at it like that....

I: No, they see education as middle-class ... Even now, people view people at university as middle class. I suppose a lot of 18 year olds usually are but mature students are more of a mixture. I wonder if you've got any more worries of fears that we've not talked about?

R: Whether I will make it as a social worker. That is one fear, that's why I want a degree and not just a diploma, so that if I don't think I can make it I have always got my degree to fall back on, to get a different job or if the social work people don't think

I'm good enough at it, once again I've got a degree to fall back on because one of the fears is that I might become too emotionally involved. Now somebody's said to me that that is a good thing because if you're not emotionally involved you're not doing your job properly. Others say that if you get too emotionally involved you can't do your job properly, you've got to be detached. So I don't know, especially if I'm working with children because I've found that working in the youth clubs, I work with two different age groups, I work with 7-11 and 11-21 year olds, and I find that sometimes they'll talk to me which I think is a good sign that I am good listener because they will tell me some of their problems. I bring them over and they have a talk to [husband] and I like pondering over it for a few days hoping I've got it sorted out and I wonder if I'm supposed to be doing that or whether I'm getting too involved... so that is my fear about the social work. I want to be involved but I ought to be able to do it in a caring enough way but hopefully not bringing everybody's problems home. I want to be able to leave them behind but I'm presuming that's something you would learn.....

I: What about any particular difficulties ?

R: Well, apart from thinking it's going to be hard work, I just hope the language isn't going to be above my head because I end up reading some of these books and I get the dictionary out and looking for what the word means before I can carry on with what is said...

I: Not too academic.

R: Yes that sort of thing because I know there are going to be people there who have worked in social work... who perhaps know the jargon for it because that's one of the problems that [husband]'s had, he's come home and said what does it mean, why isn't it written in plain English and then when you've got the dictionary out and sussed out these three words that you couldn't figure out......

I: What sort of things are you looking forward to?

R: Like I said I'm nervous but I'm looking forward to doing the whole course. I think one of the difficulties might be the travelling.

I: Yes I was going to ask you about that because you've got to go over the moors.

R: Well where we're situated right on the edge of the moors we tend to get snowed in a lot. There could be no snow in [home town] but there could be 6 foot up here so I'm hoping it's not going to be so bad like the last couple of mild winters. If we get a bad winter then it will be a struggle getting over so I'll have to go over to M and get a train.

I: Have you got your own car?

R: Yes I've got my own car.

I: So you can use that, so it will be the weather....

R: Yes the weather and hopefully as long as my car keeps running I should be all right.

I: What about when you get there, parking?

R: Oh that's one thing I did find difficult when I went for the interview because you can't park on campus can you? It's that big multi-storey car park and I'm hoping, again I can't remember because it's way back in February, from what I remember it wasn't expensive, and I just hope it's not going to be expensive. I'm going over there five days a week. Once I find somewhere fairly reasonable.... and hopefully where I do

park it's safe.... not like it is up here, you can go out to your car in the morning and find it's been vanadlised.

I: I think you've probably answered most of the things I've got down here. I've just got a few more questions. How will you cope financially with being a student ?

R: Well not really because when I was working we had my wage but we weren't getting any money because he was off work and the DSS didn't give him sick pay or anything like that, but when they fired me we had to go on to income support which they had to give us then because I wasn't earning any money then because he's had sick notes sent him for so long he gets a disability premium. He doesn't get disability allowance because he's only 50% sick and not 80% and I got word about my grant the other day and they'd only paid it for me so I got on to them and had a word about it and they got back on to the DSS and I got a very supportive woman, because you can get some who don't want to know, but she was a very supportive young woman and she said, no you just tell us about your grant and we'll knock it out of your husband's money, so that you've still got some money coming in every week as well as your grant. We were hoping that we'd both get grants but things don't look as if they're working round that way and from what they said we're going to be worse off and [husband] is continuing to send sick notes in. So I said what if the doctor decides that he's fit enough to go back to some sort of work, so she said just keep talking nicely to your doctor. She was really very nice and friendly so in a way we're not going to be any worse off than we are at the moment and we're not rich now, we're just poverty line, we'll just about break even, so if I've got loads and loads of books to buy it's going to be difficult at times.

I: Will you be able to cope day to day for extras...

R: Yes, I'm hoping to pick up a second hand book. That shocked me, that was £12.....and I thought once I get over to Huddersfield I keep hearing different people telling me about these second hand book shops and I'll be able to pick things like that up and hopefully I will be able to do it without buying books and use libraries. I'll have to keep renewing them. Generally, because we're more or less poverty line, it won't make much difference.

I: Is there anything you feel I've not covered in the questions I've asked you that you feel is important?

R: I can't. I'll probably think of a list of things when you've gone....

I: Well don't worry, you've covered a lot of things but obviously I've been asking in a certain direction so I just wondered if there is anything else you'd like to say.

R: I know you've covered it once at the beginning but I was a bit curious to, I know you've explained why you're doing it and I know you say it's confidential but to be a social worker you have to be a certain type of person with no criminal background and I wondered if you were coming along and assessing me before I went over there .....

I: Oh no, were you a bit nervous that I might be doing that ?

R: You know, that I would make a suitable social worker.

I: Perhaps I should make that a bit clearer in my letter...

R: Yes, I know you did say that but I still thought....

I: Perhaps one thing I should have said at the beginning ... I sent out all those questionnaires and I just picked at random, it wasn't for any particular reason, so I hope I've put your mind at rest, I'm not assessing you....

R: The youth work did that. I suppose they came to make sure the people they got working with the children, because I was working on a voluntary basis, and even though I had to have a police check, one night I was going to a meeting and they said I'll come and pick you up. I suppose they want to quickly look round your house. In a way I can understand it .....

I: No, I'm not. No, no I'm just interested in your views. I wondered if I could perhaps keep this [her self-characterisation] and I was thinking that perhaps towards Christmas I could talk to you again and just see how you're getting on and maybe compare this and what you've said this time....if that's OK with you. I mean I would get in touch with you anyway. I'm hopefully going to be around quite a lot anyway between the start of the course and Christmas to talk to people to get further information...The other thing I want to ask you briefly is how you feel about this sort of interview and the kind of research that I'm doing?

R: I don't mind. It doesn't bother me and because it's to do with, didn't you say it was to do with class background and things like that.

I: Yes I think it's like saying that nowadays there's a lot more variety of people coming into higher education and quite often I don't think those sort of things are taken into account.

R: Yes I think it's good because I think people should be made aware that they can fall back into education. It doesn't matter how old they are or what class. I think they should get rid of that class structure in education, we should stop classing people - you're working-class so you're never going to get anywhere and if you are like us going back then not make it such a big deal, education should be for everybody and not somebody taught differently according to....

I: Yes that's the sort of thing I'm interested in. Is that one reason you wanted to get involved?

R: No, but that's always been something with me. I think education is important regardless of what you come from and I don't like how they say, I mean I see it up at this school, the one my son went to - the Junior School. It deals with this estate and just across the road there's this big private estate and I watch the headmaster come out and he'll say good afternoon to some of the mums that live on here but he'll go up and shake hands with the people who live on the other estate because they can put more into the pockets of the school... and I don't think that's fair, I think give everybody a fair opportunity.

I: It's to do with equal opportunities really, no matter what your background...

R: No you should be given that education regardless of your background or what your mum does for a living and your dad does for a living or whether your mum's on her own or your dad's on his own.... because that's something that wasn't done with me at school. Have you seen that new thing they're advertising on the television for the railway. New books, you get a book - the first one is The Railway Children, they're all ? and you get a booklet with it that explains it much more fully which makes reading the book easier and [husband] said to me the other day did you read that, and I said come on I didn't do classic fairy tales I went to see the Secret Seven and things like that. He said didn't you read it at school and I was in next to the bottom class at school and we weren't allowed anywhere near the library at school so we weren't going to read it at school. They just sort of shoved you in that classroom and hoped you'd stay

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reasonably quiet, they didn't bother teaching because we were in that class and I've always resented that. I wasn't allowed to learn French.

I: Presuming that you can't do things.... Is that something to do with I'll show them kind of thing?

R: No I've started French last September as well as the Urdu and I thought to learn the French was to show them I can learn French but French was Tuesday afternoon and Urdu was Tuesday evening and by the time I got to Urdu I didn't know whether I was speaking French or Urdu and I thought Urdu would be more helpful in my job so ? and I only managed it for six weeks. I couldn't do the homework that they wanted me to do and I was getting confused ..... But that was a case of oh I'll show you, I will speak French at the end of it.

I: You're not so bothered now...

R: If we end up ever being able to go to France or I want to take it up I'd do it then.... to learn things like the sign language and Urdu which is much more important, to me it's more meaningful.

I: Well, that's all, it has been very helpful your talking to me.

END

How the Interview Went

Interviewee: Rose on 6.9.93   **Length of interview:** 1.5 hours

In her home

Contact before the interview:

Rang to ask direction and arrange interview. There was a muddle up with the days - my fault - rang back to rearrange. V. friendly on the phone.

Interaction at the interview:

V. relaxed - she was very happy to talk at length (1.5 hours). She did express a worry that I might be checking up on her to see if she'd be suitable to be a social worker.

She lived on a run down housing estate and talked about being working-class a lot - but this did not seem to effect the interview relationship.

Gave me a cup of tea at the beginning of the interview and asked if I wanted another before I left.

Initial feelings about what was said:

Lack of confidence but determined - seemed to be a theme.

Seemed to have a good idea what might be involved - 'nervous but excited!' Recent study important in giving her an insight into what it would entail.

Crisis had led her and her husband to reassess their lives and find a new direction - perhaps this to do with choice of a different career.

Any other comments:

She covered a lot of my questions without prompts.

Rose's Self-Characterisation

What I expect from this course is, firstly, a very important aspect, that is, that you are made to feel welcome. This involves both staff and students. This would entail them to be friendly, open and honest, while at the same time not patronising (especially if you don't grasp something first time).

I expect to learn a number of new and interesting ways of helping people. Yet, I imagine that I will also learn about some distressing situations.

Having been a student for the past two years (equivalent to full-time), I know the course will be hard work. And at times I could be doubtful of being able to complete the course. But with determination, the course will be rewarding and helpful. But it could also be frustrating and tiring as any course can be. Let alone one which will lead into the caring skills and qualities, which are essentially involved in social work.

This is not the type of course you will be able to bluff your way through. You will need to be contentious.

I want the course to help me deal with people's problems, and wherever possible solve them. I realise that there won't always be an easy solution, if there is a solution at all. Having said all that, I expect to benefit a great deal from this course.

Phase Two - Interview

Evelyn interviewed in her own home six weeks after beginning the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing

I: Is there anything which you have felt has eased you into the course?

R: We did have a meeting prior to deciding whether you wanted to enrol on the course That in some ways answered questions that I had and we went through a bit of the content, how many modules and points and things. That was helpful to know that they were in modules that you could actually enrol for a module get a number of points and then think again as to whether to go onto the next. I think most people do tend to do the course as a two year course but it's nice to know there was that option available especially funding wise as well I could pay, it's just sort of a certain amount up to February. I've time to find it next year.

I: Yes, you have to think about that don't you.... you could always stop and do it another year if you couldn't afford it.

R: Which is good. There were a lot of faces there that I knew but I didn't know they were doing the course...

I: Were they people you'd already worked with?

R: I knew their faces from the hospital but I didn't particularly know them well but it was a face that I knew.

I: Quite a lot of people say that, it's helpful if you know people especially in a big group.

R: That's right

I: Is there anything else that helped to ease you in?

R: I know quite a lot of people who've gone through the course and actually knowing that people with the same commitment as myself have gone through it and managed to survive and come out at the end with a diploma was quite good but there were negative reaction as well that it was hard work and you might have to alter your life style.

I: So you knew it would be hard but you could do it.

R: Yes that's it I knew you had to make that commitment. It was something on-going all the time which I'm finding ...

I: Is that coming true then?

R: That's coming true. I've just to finish the Person in Society Module and the assignments have got to be in next Wednesday and next Wednesday we get all the information on the next assignment ... you don't have a breathing space. I may as well finish this assignment a week before the deadline so that I do have a breathing space where I can think of my Christmas shopping. I've made it sort of on purpose that I do finish it the week before so I have time. Once I know I've been given the next assignment I can't leave it until the last minute. I've got to start thinking and rooting information out right at the beginning.

I: You like to get ahead so that you in case anything crops up.

R: I've got three children to think about.

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I: Rather than doing it at the last minute.

R: Especially round Christmas time because they've all got concerts and they expect mum to be there and I've got to work around duty.

I: Do you work full-time as well?

R: No. I did work full-time up to about 18 months ago and then really I thought.... my mum lives with is and my mums nearly 80 so it got to the stage where I thought well mums failing a bit now it's not fair to put her under pressure and I've always wanted to do this diploma so I thought well really I'll have to think about how I'm going to fit everything in so the opportunity came up to go part-time, on a different ward but in the same surgical area that I work so I did that.

I: So you had to plan a bit ahead to do the course. You've got quite a bit of responsibility outside college and work as well.

R: You find part-time I'm having do all these extra shifts because of sickness and holidays and people on the courses.

I: So it can build up?

R: It can, yes. You've got to be careful that I do say 'no'. It's so easy to say 'yes' because you want to be helpful plus moneywise it comes in useful but I've got to think well I'll have to say 'no' this time.

I: Do you do ??

R: Not frequently. I try to ... because it's usually last minute anyway ... sickness or long term I plan in advance if there is someone else on the course but if it's sickness.

I: You're put on the spot I suppose. Did you find any difficulties in starting the course?

R: I think it's knowing your own personality and how you work. If I'm at home I'm 100% in the home. If I'm at work I'm 100% into work. I'm a perfectionist in a way. I find it very difficult because I still don't really know the expectations, what they expect from this assignment. I mean I put in what I think and what I hope they expect from the assignment but I am a perfectionist. My husband actually had to put a stop to ... I wrote this assignment out and then I went what I call 'knit picking' looking through it I thought perhaps that just doesn't sound right, perhaps I can put it another way and so I think you can disjoint it can't you. He said look you've typed it up now, put it away now until you hand it in. Don't look through it anymore ... I think you can become too critical can't you. You can see the subject too ... until you need space to think about it.

I: Sometimes when you come back and look at it and think that's not too bad.

R: When you're at it 24 hours day in and day out.

I: Was it quite hard not fully knowing the expectations?

R: [programme leader]'s very good because [programme leader] is my seminar leader and she says come and see me if you've any problems or are not sure. Everybody else seems to be sailing through it on the surface and you don't want to appear a fool but you think am I on the right lines. I think with me being older as well, the expectations of yourself is that you should know what you are doing.

I: Yes. You should know how to do it because you're older

R: Yes the younger ones seem to go through it ...

I: Has anything made you particularly anxious or concerned?

R: Just one thing that made me a little bit anxious was that at some point there's a big chance that you're going to fail, lets put it that way, don't expect to pass every one, there are going to be times when you fail and I think how am I going to cope with that, is it going to knock all the confidence out of me. They keep wanting to ? Make it more difficult to pick myself up again.

I: So it's a bit worrying. Sort of in the background?

R: Yes, people will fail, I hope I won't be one of them, how am I going to cope if that does arise ?

I: It's a worry then' that fear of failure?

R: Mmm. I think as well that ... I'm an E grade, I'm not a sister at all. The higher up the scale you are in the workplace, the more pressure there is upon you.

I: You mean workload?

R: Yes. I know from where I work, there are newly qualified staff nurses are on E grade and they've just finished the course and is going on to the diploma and you being a sister If they sail through the diploma and you don't. Do you know what I mean?

I: You might lose respect ?

R: Yes that's the worry. I can see that and I'm an E grade so I'm actually quite friendly with the sister who is a G grade that's doing the course. So what will she's she so if she fails ?

I: So it's a compromising position ?

R: Yes, that's what is always at the back of my mind as well.

I: Do you feel you've got to keep your marks to yourself a bit?

R: Yes, yes and work that little bit extra

I: It motivates you as well ? It's a negative thing but makes you work that bit harder. When you first started the course, how did you feel at the beginning?

R: I felt quite well prepared from the information they sent me and we got a lot of written information as well from [programme leader], a map of the campus, where the course was, the times we were going to be there....

I: You got quite a lot of information that helped you to prepare yourself.

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: And did you find it all right when you first arrived?

R: Yes I did, yes. I always do a reccie before ... I'm one of these people that I don't wait until the day, I often do a bit of a ...

I: Did you drive over?

R: That's right. I found the building and actually wandered round before I started so I knew where I was going.

I: Did that help to allay any fears? You knew that on the day you would get there. A few people do that. It's probably quite a sensible idea really because if you arrive at ... if miss-time it or whatever...

R: I think the fear is that you get lost, so you're late when you arrive and you make an entrance and everyone is sat there, you're looking to where you can sit, make sure it's not at the front of the room because everybody goes towards the back.

I: So it's being familiar with it so you can mingle in better and not stand out

R: You don't want to make a big entrance ... you just want to be one of the group ...

I: Do you think your educational experience in the past has helped you?

R: Well I'm afraid I've not got a lot of educational experience. I did CSEs which I managed to get all at reasonable grades and then I did two O levels after I left, at college, which gave me the qualifications to go into nursing. The end of last year I did and ENB course which whet my appetite, I quite enjoyed the course. I had to go to Huddersfield, to the hospital, to do it and I enjoyed the course. I did quite well ... the response I got from the tutors was that I managed quite all right. It did me the world of good gave me confidence but I've been quite apprehensive with not having many qualifications and not doing much since I left school to come on to this diploma. It's been in the background for quite a number of years but I've always put is aside but then I did the 998 and I enjoyed it. It did me good.

I: It gave you confidence ?

R: Mmm. As I say I'm very conscious of the fact that I only have two O levels and other people have got I don't know how many O levels ...

I: So you feel that could be a disadvantage?

R: Yes.

I: ?

R: Yes, that 998 boosted me. It's always been in the back of my mind for a while I mean it's my own fault because I could have done O levels since I got married and had children and that.

I: Its hard to fit it in.

R: Yes

I: Do you find that that's disadvantaging you in some way knowing what level to work at?

R: Plus the fact that I qualified in 1977 it was very very different, it was like the medical model and it's all signs and symptoms and observations then in nursing but it was very much a structured paper. You had to draw diagrams and things whereas nowadays I think it's more tailored for the.... assignments that we do in the diploma it is an essay that you have to write with referencing in and things like that and that kind of work I've never ever done before.

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I: So that's different?

R: Yes, I found that very difficult. I mean we've got books on referencing... yet I haven't got the practice of doing it.

I: Yes, it's all new to you.

R: Yes it's all new to me. So again that makes me a bit conscious of you know, am I doing it right, is this the right level I need to be at. I mean we did do the holistic care essay and [programme leader] said that was what we wanted, carry on doing it but it's still at the back of my mind that I haven't done this type of thing before whereas people have.

I: So do you think it will take a while longer and to get more essays back before you know that you're at the right level?

R: Yes that's right and I feel it takes me ages whereas others can do essays in a shorter length of time because they're used to doing the research for all the articles and things and then actually getting the structure down.

I: Have you sought any help at all about studying, study skills?

R: I got that ... there's a book actually recommended as pre-reading for the course, I've read it cover to cover. It's a bit like a bible to me at the moment. It actually goes through how to start an essay, from finding material. As I say, it's my bible. That's been very useful to me. I actually got it from the library at first and then I felt I needed this more than the allotted three weeks so I actually bought it. So I've got it there, plus the fact the ward sister she's done the diploma, she's actually done the degree and she's very good. She's very academic and she likes to help, I do bounce ideas off her.

I: That will be quite useful won't it to get some feedback on what you're doing ?

R: Yes, she's very helpful plus the fact that she's doing the degree. She's into me doing it.

I: You said earlier on that you felt prepared in some ways, from the information you got from [programme leader] but perhaps lack of educational experience you hadn't felt prepared ... you are prepared in some ways but not in others

R: That's right.

I: But you tried to prepare yourself. Has work experience helped?

R: At the moment I work on a ward where we've got a senior sister who's nearing retirement and she's very set in her ways but I find it very frustrating, not being able to try things out.

I: What more up to date ideas ?

R: The junior sister there I think she has got a lot of ideas but the senior sister has the final say in what we do. She's had to move with the times because that's legislation but it's a struggle, so I find it very frustrating.

I: It holds you back in some ways with things you might want to try out ?

R: Yes. I am learning from the diploma. I did pain as my assignment and actually writing a great deal about the topic even if you don't pass the assignment you've learnt

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a great deal from it ... it will be useful. It's made me think a great deal about my practice but as I say there are certain restrictions.

I: So you can back it up really.

R: I can back it up. Whether it gets me anywhere I don't know ...

I: You can argue.

R: I think it makes you a little bit more ... with the doctors, I think I wouldn't accept, what they say ...

I: So it's a bit more questioning...

R: Yes

I: A bit more analysing.

R: That's right, which a lot of nurses don't do. It giving the confidence to question doctors.

I: You were saying earlier on that you weren't particularly familiar with the University so you went to look round. Is there anything else about that ... were you familiar with Huddersfield?

R: Yes.

I: You drive in ?

R: Parking is a bit of a problem

I: Have you found somewhere?

R: Well what we're doing at the moment ... my husband comes home at lunchtime on a Wednesday. He takes me there and then he picks me up at 7.15 so that's how we've got round that but the times are changing.

I: It's quite expensive isn't it and there are parking problem in Huddersfield ? You mentioned earlier on that you've got three children and your mother lives here. How are you coping with things outside college?

R: I'm trying to set times aside every week if you like. On a Monday I look at my duty and I look at the commitments I've got at home and try and set areas aside where I can have a couple of hours free to actually do some studying I do have to plan quite a bit There are times when I've got an odd hour but I need at least two if not longer, I find I'm a morning person.

I: Right, you work better in the morning.

R: My husband, he's done an OU degree and he's a night time person and can study when everybody's in bed so I find mornings are best when I've taken the children to school. It can be a morning when I'm working a late shift because I don't start a late shift until half past twelve so fit some in. I've no need to just do it on mornings when I'm off.

I: Does that work in quite well ?

R: I quite like actually getting down to studying, it's going to the library which I find a bit daunting. I tend not to use the University library.

I: In what way do you find it daunting ?

R: Well it's such a large one it's always very busy. I find it quite difficult finding books there whereas if I go the ? library I know the librarian there, only through going up to her and saying can you help me find this and I find that they are very good. There's a resource room there it's a lot easier, it's all together articles and books whereas at Huddersfield, the resource room there and the magazines and journals are all in one area and the books are all in a separate area.

I: So it's not quite as user friendly ?

R: No and I know that they'll get articles for me.

I: So you're more familiar with that library ?

R: It's just that I'm more comfortable with it.

I: I suppose if you get the information you need it doesn't matter too much where it's from?

R: But then that's the task that I don't like, actually going to the library and gathering information.

I: It makes you a bit worried about getting the right information.

R: And sometimes I come home with half a dozen articles which I sit and read them and they're not what I want anyway.

I: It's difficult sometimes when you're ...

R: ... because I'm not familiar I think as well. I've not had the experience of actually searching through things and identifying what are useful and what aren't before I get them home.

I: ... Is there anything else about home life that's made it difficult or easy ?

R: My husband is very helpful because as I say he's done an OU course so he knows what it's like, so he's very helpful and actually he's not doing it, he's had to put the lid on his courses at the moment ... because we both couldn't do it, studying at the same time. My eldest is doing 'O' levels at the moment and she wants help if she's stuck with her Maths or Biology she comes to me. She can revise a lot better when you're sitting down doing it with her ... so at the moment I'm trying to do that as well. My younger two, they're actually at a school where there's a lot of parent participation where you sit and let them read to you, not the whole book, a lot of the books are getting longer and longer but actually a section from that.

I: That's quite time consuming ...

R: And at a weekend they do bring sheets home, each had sheets where they have to do some work ...

I: So that's quite a lot work outside school ?

R: Yes. Or come home and have to do a story, they have to write it but they do need some stimulation, putting in the right ideas. You've got to write about this, do you know what I mean? Sit with them and suggest 'could you...'

I: Yes, you've got to give them ideas.

R: Yes, so I do find that I've got to still do that ... I feel that that's my leisure time that goes.

I: Have you had to give up anything

R: I do step aerobics once a week. I've managed to continue to do that. I enjoy that, I get out of the house. I do it actually with my eldest daughter but she's doing her Duke of Edinburgh as well and they've got to do some sort of sporting activities every week, and I've found that quite good. I might go over there spending time with her just by myself and that's our time together. But I am a television addict and I'm afraid that's what's gone by the by. I don't spend as much time ...

I: You can't spend as much time doing that as you would do normally.

R: I tend to relax I think that way, I lose myself in the television. It's one way of forgetting about all that I've done at work and what I've got to do ... I just find that that's the way that I do unwind ...

I: It sounds as if you are managing keep the balance anyway, it's under control but it takes quite a bit of planning to get it like that. If you didn't have that it could get a bit out of control.

R: It could yes.

I: You mentioned earlier about being an older student. Is there anything else that makes it difficult or easier being a mature student?

R: Plenty of determination ... because I am older I don't want to fail I think that makes it a little bit easier in some respects. I'm determined one way or another, I'm going to do it. I think perhaps because I've paid for it I tend to think that if I don't do it it's been such a waste of money. Money that could have gone on other things

I: Yes that can be quite a motivating factor.

R: I don't know. It's something I want to prove to myself I can do because I haven't done anything for such a long time I need to prove I can do it.

I: It's personal satisfaction really as well as professional.

R: Mmm. It's something that I wanted to do, but it's something that I had to do as well it's a pressure.

I: Yes, professional as well.

R: Just really to keep ... not to develop ... go higher up in your career. Just to stay where I am.

I: Yes to stay where you are with P2000 it is a pressure isn't it?

R: It's helpful to know actually what they're doing as well, the type of assignments they're doing and what's expected of me. It gives you an insight do what they are

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doing because at first I think there was quite a lot of bad feeling about the P2000 nurses and the fact that they're actually trained to diploma level and what do they do.

I: But you'll be more on an equal footing.

R: That's what I like to think.

I: Where as if you weren't doing it it would be more difficult.

R: I think it's the knowledge as well of having to do it - I do know what they're going through.

I: It's not as easy as a lot of people think. It seems to have been quite a big change for you doing the course. Would you say that?

R: Yes. I think it's the continual need do something, do some work. There's no breaks.

I: Yes.

R: I've given myself a break but there's always something. You feel as if there is always something I should be doing I feel guilty if I do sit down and do nothing.

I: Yes that's a pressure then? Has the course matched your expectations, if you had any expectations?

R: It's been a little better than I thought because one or two of the comments from those who've done the course it's very much a self orientated course. You don't have much help from the tutors. It's very much you go and do it, come up with the goods sort of thing, which it is in a way but as I said [programme leader] has always been quite open about any problems, go to her. I'm quite pleased about that, I didn't expect that. I haven't used the opportunity, but I know it's there if I do get very desperate.

I: The supports there ?

R: Yes, if you need it which is very good because I was led to believe it wasn't going to be there.

I: Yes, you'd be stumbling around on your own ... You were saying that you had to pay for your course. I wonder if that's made it difficult financially for you?

R: Yes, it has really. The money is there but it's not buying the things it would have done. I find that I'm a great saver as well. I do like to have financial security and the money has been put aside for this, it would have been put aside for a better holiday.

I: You've got to perhaps do without a little bit of a luxury. It's more for the extras?

R: Yes, it was. I knew that I'd have to pay, Its never been on the cards that work would pay.

I: Some people seem to get the funding and others seem to get some of it, some people get none.

R: We can apply at work now for funding next year you can get a bit but one or two of the girls ??

I: It must help a bit.

R: Yes I think it's because [Health Authority] is such an ?? They've put quite a lot of pressure on you to do it, I'm an E grade but if they advertise an E grade post now they always want the diploma.

I: ?

R: Yes, and I think it because it's such a large amount of people wanting to do it. I did get an offer of actually I could do it in work's time but I only work three days I work three full shifts and I am a main nurse on the ward and I find that quite hard as it is three days as it is, keeping up with all the other responsibilities that I've got. I thought that if I drop another half a day which make two and half days that would make it harder at work, so I actually said that I would do it in my own time as long as I could get the Wednesday off every week which I have so far managed to do...

I: Are you happy with that situation?

R: Yes I thought if I did do it I would lose contact with the patients which would make it more difficult.

I: It's a lot easier in the long run really to ... even though you're doing more hours, to keep that contact with what's going on.

R: That's right, yes. There have been a lot of changes.

I: Have people at work been supportive ?

R: Oh yes.

I: It sounds as if quite a few are having to do it ?

R: Yes. There's a girl on nights doing it, the diploma, someone's doing the second year of the diploma, we've got the ward sister doing the degree so ...

I: So people are into you doing it and there's not a lot of opposition ?

R: No. I think the senior sister wonders why we're all doing it because we don't need to do anything. She knows it's something we've got to do. She's a bit tongue in cheek about it, the benefits there are going to be at the end when we've done it but ...

I: Is she older?

R: She's retiring ... we keep thinking, when is she going to retire and she just keeps battling on.

I: You might be able to change a few things when she goes ?

R: That's it. She's a very good resource, she's got a lot of knowledge. It's just that her opinions is that we've done it this way for 50 years why do we need to change ... it's worked so long why change a good thing now ?... she can't see that people's expectations are changing.

I: The outside rules have changed in the NHS. Is there anything else which has made it easier or more difficult in any way?

R: I don't really think so but basically I knew what I was letting myself in for and I had to plan my life to be able to accommodate it. I've had a lot of support from my family. The children say 'oh mum you're not studying again are you ?' ...I've got a big table in one of the bedrooms where I've got all the books.

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I: So you've got some space?

R: That's right, where I can leave things.

I: That's quite important.

R: So , sometimes it's, 'oh you're not studying again mum'.

I: Do you find you can go up there when they're in or is it more difficult when they're around?

R: It is difficult when they are around. The two young ones are fighting and make a lot of noise. One plays the clarinet and one's just learning to play the flute and they're either practicing playing that or they're arguing. They're very much, the two young ones, ... 'mum'. So there's always noise in the background.

I: So it's hard to switch off?

R: Yes I've always got an ear ... so I tend to try and do it when they're at school.

I: Yes ??

R: ? the Christmas holidays are coming up I'll have to plan that they're going to the pictures one day or someone takes them somewhere.

I: Are any of the difficult or easier aspects related to you being a woman in any way do you think?

R: Well I think men perhaps haven't got the pressures of home like the washing and the ironing or do a lot with the children, my husband does do a lot with the children. That's the woman's role if you like, traditionally it's the woman's role to wash, iron, bath and feed them.

I: They have the main responsibility in the house.

R: To actually work with the children. My husband does tend to work long hours. My mum, although she's nearly 80, she's quite good. She's always there to meet the children from school when I work or I'm at university and I've got knowledge that if they are poorly I have to bring them home.

I: So just having that extra bit, that helps.

R: I do worry about that when the children are poorly, it's mum who's got to give up something, dad doesn't come home from work.

I: Women's work is seen as not quite as important ?

R: Yes, that is it ,plus the fact that the children tend to want mum if they're not well.

I: Yes. There's extra pressure I suppose having that responsibility.

R: They're happy with their Grandma until I come home, this type of thing, they're sat on mum's knee perhaps until I walk through the door then it's 'oh mum' and then it's me that they want.

I: Instantly in demand. Have you used any, you mentioned planning and organisation... Are there any other personal strategies that you've used which have helped you?

R: No not really... I do talk a lot. I talk most things through with my husband, he's used to studying. He knows the stages that I'm going through because he's gone through it himself so I do talk to him about it.

I: Yes.

R: He's very helpful with the actual typing assignments, he works with computers? and he actually counts the words.

I: Have you any knowledge of computers.

R: Only what he's told me. I can at a pinch type them myself but it takes ages. Well I can actually type. I did RSAs or whatever it was when I was at school, so I can type but it's the ... I don't know ... it's the use of the computer more than anything. If I want to change anything ... you know the area they cut out and put it somewhere else or if I want spellings or things that facilitate... Check your spellings, check your grammar, things like that, it takes me absolutely ages to figure out how to do it whereas he just ...

I: So you tend to let him do it?

R: I tend to let him do it, yes and then he reads it back again and sees how it looks.

I: So he's quite supportive ?

R: Yes.

I: Is there anything which staff or college or anyone else has done which has made things better?

R: I do like the seminar groups, the smaller amount of people on the course. I think that's good because you're more likely to talk. I'm a reflector... I did this management course not long ago and we looked at personalities and what type of student you are and I reflect. I'm not very talkative in the lecture room, I sit back but I do find it easier in smaller groups. That's the area I like because I know that they're going to be there in smaller groups.

I: It's a chance to get more personal attention

R: Yes, it's quite a big group 90 odd. For the next assignment we have to do a presentation in front of the whole group.

I: In front of the whole group?

R: I think so yes. Half a dozen of us picked a topic which we want to discuss and we've got 5 minutes.

I: So doing it with a group but...

R: They've all got to say something individually and then give in the paper.

I: Is that a bit worrying then ?

R: Yes I'm not going to think about that yet I keep telling myself as long as I'm all prepared. I can always remember, we did a bit on presentations on this management course and said that 90% of the work is beforehand as long as you're well prepared it will be all right on the day sort of thing.

I: Is there anything which staff or college or anyone else has done that has made anything worse?

R: No I don't think so. [programme leader] said some fail and if it was me I don't know how I'd cope with that especially if I put as much effort as I have done into this one, I just hope perhaps when you do fail that you get a lot of constructive help, you do know how to rectify it so that you can actually present your assignment again (she talked about not having a lot of confidence to begin with - tape not very clear).

I: You hope that that support will be there?

R: That's all really We get quite a lot of support plus we get a lot of information. Like yesterday there was information about the next module which one or two people that had got different ideas and we weren't sure which ideas were right but she actually gave us all the information yesterday, earlier than she's going to so she could allay fears about what it was.

I: So she was responsive to peoples worries ?

R: Yes

I: Is there anything anyone could have done to make things better in any way?

R: I think only what I could have done to make it easier for myself was to do some sort of study skills course. I could have done one of those myself to get into it, yes. (would have benefited if I'd done it in advance - thinks you can do these (from interview notes as tape not very clear))

I: ?

R: Only thing that worries me is perhaps now it's a university do they expect a different standard of work.

I: It's that word university ?

R: Yes, people who did it when it was a college did they still expect the same standard as what they expect now or had the standard gone up now it's a university That just something's that's in the back of my mind.

I: Yes, it seems to put it on a different level.

R: I think that's the main thing. I think as the years go on they do the same course but they expect ... standards change don't they ?

I: Yes, I think standards do change. What social class do you consider yourself to belong to?

R: Myself or ...my husband ?

I: Yes. Your own ideas.

R: Lower middle, I think.

I: Is that from your origins?

R: I tend to think that perhaps I come from a working-class family. I would have thought but I tend to think that since I married, my husband's family are all teachers and accountants. He drives me, if you like, into a different level I think as well nursing my ideas have changed and my expectations for my children (working-class origin held her back at school (from interview notes as tape not very clear))

I: ? educationally and that sort of thing ?

R: Yes. Mum was quite old when she had me, I was an only child. Things like that ... mum and dad couldn't swim so I couldn't swim until I went to school and I'm still not happy in the water I just felt well you know I want my children to be able to do the things, ride a bike confidently, this kind of thing. I've actually gone out of my way to ensure that they do do what I didn't do.

I: Encourage them to do things that you didn't ?

R: Yes As a child I didn't have many friends, I just had one friend who was close I think perhaps that's why I don't like large groups and speaking out.

I: I wonder if there's anything else in your background which has made it easier or more difficult ?

R: I think it's my background that's held me back a bit rather than brought me forward. My mum didn't work, she's was there for me sort of thing. When I went into nursing I think they were quite surprised that I actually went into nursing ... I mean they've never held me back but then they've never actually encouraged it if you like. The encouragement I've had now is from my husband and pressure from work.

I: How do you feel about being part of this sort of research?

R: I'm quite ... I don't mind at all. I hope we've helped one another. It's fine, I don't mind at all. I think sometimes discussing them ... discussing a topic ... actually brings out ideas you'd never thought about yourself say things that you never really ... you never thought of ...I think it's quite good.

I: Is there anything else you want to ask me?

R: No, not really .

I: Some of the other students have asked to have a look at the results when I do them. If you want to ...

R: Oh yes, that would be interesting, yes.

I: Obviously I'll be doing a thesis. That probably won't be of interest but hopefully ...

R: Just to see if other people's ideas have been anything like my own or are they completely different ideas and reasons for doing...

I: There are certain things ... I think particularly seeing what people's reasons for doing the course was very much ... two things that you talked about, quite a few others said aboutwanting to do it for personal reasons as well as the professional pressures. Certainly I will get you the results but it could be a little while ... it could be about this time next year ...

(she asked me how I felt about travelling around to interview people. She noted some travelled from as far away as York)

END

How the Interview Went

Interviewee: Evelyn   **Length of interview:** 1 hour

In her home

Contact before the interview:

Rang to arrange. V. friendly on phone.

Interaction at the interview:

She offered me a drink as soon as I arrived. I told her I was pregnant straight away. We talked about it for a while - what it would be like having a child and how if might effect my life. She said it's hard to know how it will change it but it does.

Good - she seemed v. willing to talk though her body language was rather protective at times - I think this was perhaps more a lack of confidence - she did go into issues with quite a lot of depth and honesty, I felt.

Initial feelings about what was said:

She felt she had more responsibility as a women for children/house though she had help and support from own mother and husband - but if anything was wrong it was her the children wanted.

Seemed well organised as regards time to study and time for family. Worked part-time - three days per week. Mother lived with them - 80 but helped.

Because not much educational experience expressed a bit of a lack of confidence - fear of failure and not sure of expectations.

Any other comments:

Assessed as B - some insecurities about doing the course - fear of failure but quite well organised. Diary - assessed as A because she appeared to be coping well and prepared but I felt much more revealed in the interview.

Phase One - Diaries

Diploma in Social Work

Female/20-29/UK white

Day 1
9.30 Queuing to hand in photograph and receive name sticky label. Introduced to several members of staff.
10.30 [programme leader] gave a talk on the course and CCETSW Registration forms - useful information.
11.45 Taken on Guided Tour around the facilities of the University and Ramsden building where we are based.
12.15 - 2.15 Lunch break - spent some time in the common room trying to get to know people. 2 hours was too long for diner.
2.15 - 4.15 [programme leader] got us playing introduction type games to get to know each other a little. Embarrassing at first but interesting and good fun. The group's too big to get to know people easily, I keep seeing people I hadn't realised were part of the class.

Day 2
9.15 -12 noon - Discussing course handbook with [programme leader]. Not particularly that useful as it is fairly self explanatory. Other topics discussed were about notices, practicalities, etc. which was important to know. University Registration forms give out.
12 noon - 1.00 Spent lunchtime in common room. Filling in parts of enrollment form required.
1 p.m. [programme leader] signed our enrollment forms. Then we made our way to the Great Hall for registration. Had to queue for 1 and a half hours, luckily I had someone to chat and pass the time with. Gave me chance to talk to members of the class not spoken to before. Registered also with SU.
Went to library for introduction session. A waste of time, all we were given was 5 mins chat and a few leaflets. I thought we'd get a tour around showing us how to use the computers, photocopier, etc.

Day 3
9.15 am [a tutor] gave us an introduction chat about the university computer facilities which I found very interesting although I have had very little to do with computers in the past.
9.30 [programme leader] discussed problems and hold ups in enrollment from the day before.
9.45 [a tutor] gave a chat on Core Values module - sounds very interesting.
10 am [programme leader] gave a chat on Research Methods, not sure how I felt about that one.
10.15 Break time. Went to the resource centre for first time and borrowed an article suggested by [a tutor]. The spent the rest of time in common room. Too long break.
11.15 Back to class for a chat on HGB Core Knowledge by [a tutor] - she seemed very much at ease, witty and very interesting to listed to. Her module looked like my kind 'o' thing!
11.45 - 12 noon - chat on Interviewing by [a tutor] - only succeeded in absolutely terrifying me. Prefer not to know about his module yet!!

Day 4
9.15 - 10.15 [a tutor] gave a talk on assessment - criteria for marking assignments and mentioned placements. Succeeded in panicking my further.
10.15 - 11.15 Break. Got to talk to a few more people not spoken to before.

11.15 12.15 Second year students chatted to us about the course including placements. Found this extremely useful and made me feel a lot less stressed about everything.

Day 5
9.15 -10.00 - Given a talk on our profiles, expected to fill in the gaps and make any corrections.
10.15 -12.15 - Seminar with [programme leader]. Had to partner up with someone interview each other and record data. Then introduced each other to the class. Really interesting and useful. Spent 10 minutes at the end of the seminar discussing overall impressions of the week.
12.15 Tutorial with [a tutor]. Talked a little about ourselves.

Overall
Nerve wracking and stressful. Constant talk of pass/fail with regards to assignments was panicking. At first group appeared too large, difficult to know who was on the course there were so many. But by Thursday faces were familiar and it seemed a more relaxed atmosphere prevailed.

Prepared?
As well prepared as I'll ever be. It's do or die!!

Sandwich route/female/30-39/UK white

Day 1
On arrival nobody said what we should be doing, so I joined the queue at the front of the room, a little like the blind leading the blind. We were then issued with handbooks for the course and checked in. Coffee was a nice gesture - made for a more relaxing atmosphere.
Welcome by the Dean a little brief and not a great deal of help.
Registration forms were completed, perhaps this could have been done through the post to hand in on check-in.
Lunch 2 hours was a very long time to stumble about the campus continually lost and would have been much more adequate at 1 hour.
2.15 much of what happened in the afternoon a blur after a whole week of information. The day was heavy going and long for a first day. It left me drained and very tired, an unusual day.

Day 2
Appreciated being able to start at 9.30, made my travel/family arrangements easier. Going through the handbook was useful, pointing out the relevant pieces which we need to read further.
1.20 Registration, began queuing, didn't finish until 3.40. Surely there must be a better way to register. Particular problems with SWR registration - someone stated part-time registration was not until the following week causing anger for having queued so long only to find out later (and rejoining the queue) that the SWR course is classed as 'full-time' for the University purposes, pity no-one else terms it the same.
3.30 Library visit, late, due to registration but still went, only 4 turned up. All we were given was a work sheet to do on our own. I would have preferred a guided tour and someone to show me how to use the computer and catalogue, but obviously we can't have everything.

Day 3
9.15 Day should have commenced as stated but due to late comers didn't actually get underway till 9.30, felt a little cross that I'd managed to get there on time, so should others. Found the computer talk very interesting giving some useful information. Perhaps would have been nice to have had a visit.

Brief introduction to modules by lecturers informative, each one detailed the assessment that would be required, this began to put the pressure on a little, bringing further anxiety.
Freshers' Conference - of little use to the Mature students - most of what I stayed to listed to had already been covered in the classroom situation.
Didn't attend the Fayre.

Day 4
Assessment Issues informative. The marking sheets were well explained but don't really differ from grading in their appearance. Individuals will grade themselves according to where the tick is placed regard of a pass/fail mark.
MASH and Student advice - Advice given by 2nd year students was sound advice. Information on books, placements, modules, etc. Very informal, friendly chat. Very necessary.
Nice to have a short day - departed before lunch. Still tired.

Day 5
Personal profiles quite interesting. Constant reference to what should be done, if you are on the Standard route; seemed to constantly forget the SWR.
Seminar with [a tutor]. Introduced person next to you, through interviewing, highlighted paid work, vol. work and life experiences. I was quite surprised how much everyone else seemed to have done within the field both paid and vol., end even more surprised that I seemed to offer little, only life experience.
A shadow of self doubt swept across me, but soon passed as I realised I must be on a par with these people to have gained my place. But obviously need a lot more experience.
Tutorial - informal introduction to show purpose of sessions. Informative, hopefully would be more useful when a need arises to meet with a problem.
Home, need a rest to recover after a long hard week, time to absorb the information.

Overall
Very long week. Perhaps too much information, could be spread over a further week in conjunction with college based work.

Prepared?
Yes, ready and raring to go.

Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing

Female/30-39/Caucasian

Week 1
Introductory chat from [programme leader] - very clear and informative. Room v hot!
2 coffee breaks both very welcome.
Seminar groups. Ice breaking sessions not too threatening. However, I would like to see the use of badges for first names on the first few weeks.
Lecture from [a tutor]. Very well presented. Enough time to take notes between comments. Could hear clearly. Content of lecture surprisingly not too remote from my own previous knowledge.

Week 2
1.15 till 3.30 taken up with a 20 minute chat from the librarian. Plenty of time for a longer demonstration of computer or something else. A bit of a waste of time.
Seminar group good. Essay assignment given out before the library session would have been more useful.
Lecture from [a tutor]. Very clear. Good opportunity for feedback/questions from last week.

Week 3
First psychology lecture. Didn't enjoy this on <u>at all</u>. Speaker and I not on the same wavelength!
Seminar groups - referencing - Useful. Would have liked more guidance on writing the practice essay.
3rd Physiology lecture - very good. No problems

Overall
Still feel that the course leaders don't know me - I would like to use name badges - not popular but they work!

Prepared?
As ready as I'll every be.

Comments
I'm not keen on the building. Lots of litter; broken window catches, sticking doors, hard seats - Generally poor quality environment. Common room exceptionally tatty and dirty.

Female/30-39/European

Week 1
Introduction - Met some of the lecturers who gave a brief resume of their roles and expectations. A relaxed session with useful information and a friendly welcome to the course (Pathway!) only spoilt by a very warm temperature in the room which was quite crowded.
1st seminar with smaller group. Seminar leader [a tutor] gave us an outline of her background professionally and personally, followed by a brief introduction by each student. To be honest I don't remember much about what any one said as I was too worried about introducing myself! It would be useful to repeat the introductions in a few weeks time when we're all a bit more relaxed with each other. It was probably better however, than the whole group introducing themselves.
Missed the lecture in the evening, but have been provided with the notes to copy.

Week 2
Went to lecture room to enrol for the course. Quite straight forward, but the procedure which followed in the GH was lengthy due to queues of students partaking in the same. Visit to the library. Introduced to the library layout and procedures by one of the library staff responsible for H & H S department. The handouts proved useful when I visited the library later that week, however, the verbal introduction was not so useful when we were actually in a room attached to the library rather than in the library itself, it was difficult to relate the descriptions of equipment and locations, etc.
Physiology lecture - I personally found this interesting and easy to follow but it is very relevant to my clinical area. Others didn't find the lecture so clear. We had a 15 minute break which I didn't really feel was necessary, I would have rather gone home at 7 p.m.. The lecture has helped me to understand problems which were previously unexplained.

Week 3
Psychology lecture. Discussed different models of personality, I found this complex and not really relevant for my nursing practice as I feel we aren't 'there' to judge our patients or categorise them into 'types'. Many patients in my clinical area would object to nurses assuming it is their 'business' to assess their psychological needs in such depth. I am aware, however, of the need to be aware of psychological aspects of caring for the individual and hope to develop an understanding of some areas of the 'subject'.
3rd Seminar session. It is becoming clear that some members of the group are more reluctant than other to join in discussions. It may be useful to make the sessions more informal, at present they are very much 'teacher - student' orientated rather than group

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meetings with a group leader. I still feel unclear about some of the expectations for the assignments, despite having voiced such feelings myself and listened to the uncertainties of others.

Physiology lecture - 3rd lecture now and still discussing feedback mechanisms and similar physiology - I found it hard to remain interested and enthusiastic. I had just finished night duty, however, which didn't help. I don't know what would be useful but I know my previous learning on such subjects was a lot more rushed.

Overall
The introduction to the DPSN was generally very good initially. However 3 weeks later I feel that the seminar group (which I interpreted to be group sessions when we would develop an understanding of the expectations for assignments - as one of the functions), aren't as yet helping to prepare for the course.

Comments
It is early days and I do not really feel positive towards my studies and participation in the course.

Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education

Female/30-39/white

Day 1
Apprehensive about beginning a new course. Who will I meet? Will they be experienced teachers? Walking into the building brought back memories of the interview day. Hope I will be able to find my way - A sign to date the room, at least we are expected. Not a large room - therefore not a large group. Introduction session good - reflected on my own way that I started a course 5 months ago. Pathway overview useful - glad to be guided through it by tutor. Modular system - something I will have to get used to! Although needed the form filling was kept to a minimum. Went away from the day feeling more relaxed......will come again tomorrow.

Day 2
Group meeting getting to know people, so often during these games session people resent. A really enjoyable morning a good balance between quick recall activities and slower reflective sessions. Feel that I know many more of the people on the course. A session very well facilitated by the tutor - have gone away with some ideas for my own introductory sessions.

Library visit - initially went to the wrong conference room! but at least explored more of the campus. Talk by Librarian was short, then left to explore library - may have benefited from a 'guided' tour.

Style session, able to reflect on this....what is my writing style, not questioned before.

Day 3
Reflective day - planning for seminar session on Friday

Day 4
Library visit today

Day 5
Presenting Seminars. In a short space it would be difficult to go into details of my thoughts and feelings throughout all the different presentations. Overall I was impressed at the way people brought their own reflections into their teachings. People were honest, and there is a wide experience range amongst the group.

Personally my teaching session I was very disappointed with. I tried to present a logical argument that I felt fell flat and had little support. Whilst teaching I felt very distant from the group and my communication skills were poor; it has been said that peer teaching is one of the most difficult areas to teach.

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Overall
I have enjoyed the week. A slower pace than my normal working week.

Prepared?
Yes I am really looking forward to it. I feel that I have a great deal to gain.

Phase Two - Diaries

Diploma in Social Work

Female/25-29/White British

Day One
First day at University! [daughter] settled in straight away at nursery - didn't even cry when I left her. Made it to the University with time to spare and found the room OK. Today was mainly made up of introductions and a short tour of the campus. The course was discussed briefly but more to come tomorrow. Don't feel as much out of my depth as I thought I would - lecturers seem friendly and approachable and the students really down to earth - not really what I expected. Feel much more confident. I've done really well to get this far according to the tutors!!

Day Two
[daughter] screamed her head off when I left her this morning. I knew it wouldn't last! Was really looking forward to today - not nervous at all. This morning [programme leader] went into more details about the content of the course, the timetables, etc. This talk was very useful because the structure of the course and the subject matter became much clearer to me - it all seemed extremely complicated on paper but I now feel much more enlightened about what I am here to do! PM - myself and another six students met our tutor, [tutors name]. They are a very friendly group with a wide range of experience. Our tutor seems genuinely interested in us as individuals and I felt relaxed speaking out in such a small group which I didn't expect to! (hopefully a good sign). No criticisms yet!

Day Three
This morning we were bombarded with information regarding the various modules to be studied in year 1. Although it was interesting to know about the first module (in order to begin reading background information, etc.), the information coming in re: work we won't be starting for several months, was perhaps a little confusing, but at least we know what to expect! This afternoon was a complete waste of time. Queued for ages to get into Freshers' Fair in the rain. The queue didn't move at all so we decided to cut our losses and go home!

Day Four
This morning [a tutor] gave us a talk about assessments. The marking system seems pretty tough but there are chances to have work checked and to re-submit failed assignments. The system seems geared towards encouraging people to pass which cheered me up a bit (not having done this sort of work since school). Also had a talk from some really friendly 2nd year students. Lots of handy hints/recommended books, etc. Found this very useful and will probably go to them with questions in the future. Afternoon not worth mentioning. Queue after queue to enrol, join union etc. One good thing - finally got my grant!

Day Five
This morning we had a seminar where approx. half the people on the course told about their experiences and backgrounds, etc. I found the seminar fascinating and felt quite inadequate compared to some of the people who spoke! Very useful to know something

about everyone because we are such a big group and it's hard to strike up conversations with them all! Went home early, looking forward to starting the real work next week.

Overall
Relieved that the other students are so down to earth and that not all are from academic backgrounds. Lecturers seem approachable and really keen for us to succeed. Content of course looks very interesting and I feel extremely lucky to have my place on the course.

Coping
Coping well at mixing with other students and I'm surprised to find that I can contribute to discussions without feeling self conscious. I've still got to find out if I can cope with the written work because I'm very out of practiced.

Prepared
I feel prepared in that I am looking forward to getting started and find the course content extremely interesting. Not so sure about the essays, etc. The first assignment and the feedback I get will hopefully give me an idea of the standard expected.

Female/30-39/White European/Spanish

Day One
Welcome by Dean and staff. Introduction to the DipSW. Guided tour. Introduction to Experiential work. Very apprehensive when I arrived; will I be able to cope? I've never attended college before. The whole day is basically a blur apart from where places are. The introduction to DipSW was interesting but not essential to me, though I appreciate that some may not be aware. Still apprehensive about the assignments, as nothing has been discussed today in that area. More relaxed generally though!

Day Two
Came in late today, 10.30 p.m., so missed most of the morning sessions. Damn trains, I hope this isn't going to be a regular occurrence. Had a tutorial with [a tutor]; nice woman. Felt a lot more relaxed today. Bought my "young persons" rail card.

Day Three
Good day, but really over loaded, with information this morning much to much to take in. Finding my way round nicely. Good people on the course. Freshers conference was "different". I'm not very impressed with the student executive. Didn't stay for the Fayre as I couldn't get in until 4 p.m.. Too late, I wouldn't get home until 7ish.

Day Four
Assessment issues was daunting but at least I know where I stand re assignment deadlines etc. Good listening to 2nd year students. I hope I get a good placement, they seemed to have had problems. Interested in MASH but unfortunately I'm fed up of caring for people at the moment, it's "me" time, at least for the time being. God, I sound so selfish, but I deserve to be!!

Day Five
Introduction to personal profiles dragged on a bit, placements were more important to discuss, I felt. Seminar work was the usual expected sort of stuff as per SS training seminars, but enjoyable all the same. I don't understand why such a large package was given containing library leaflets, waste of money really, not the leaflets, just the folder. I'm shattered today, mostly because my neighbours had a domestic dispute and needed assistance (the woman). Consequently a very late night and all the anxiety. All the same I'm so relaxed since leaving work that I take it all in my stride!!!

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Overall
Too much info, too many overlong breaks which if reduced could mean that we have more time to digest. No one needs a two hour lunch as in day 1.

Coping
Very well, each day I have felt "lighter".

Prepared
No not in the slightest as far as my own emotional preparation, but I'll get there soon.

Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing

Female/30-39/British

Week One
Activity - Holism (Philosophy) - lecture by [a tutor]. Delivery was clear and concise. The lecture was interesting and information given was relevant. The manner in which it was given was friendly and the humour that was mixed with it helped the lecture to pass quickly. I felt as though I had understood the lecture as I had been apprehensive prior to this.

Week Two
Activity - Library Tour. I was unaware of all the facilities that were available. I thought from the title of the lecture that we would be taken as a group to look round the library, but after the lecture, when we looked round the library ourselves it was obvious that this would have been very difficult. I was pleased to know that the library is open at times that are offering easy access. I felt better when I came at the weekend to look round the library. I did not find it as overwhelming. All the staff were helpful.

Week Three
Psychology lecture by [a tutor] . Good lecture - clear and concise. I enjoyed the lecture more than I thought I would Information was relevant and held my interest. I was a little apprehensive as I thought this lecture would be 'high powered' but felt as though it was a level that was suitable to me.

Overall
Everyone was helpful and I felt that everyone was keen that we enjoy the course.

Coping
I feel that I am coping quite well but need to manage my time a little better.

Prepared
Yes

Female/30-39/British

Week One
Activity - general introduction at 1.15 p.m.. Tutors introduced. Information given re content of first model, time scale, assignments. General information regarding the University. Found it very useful but I felt there was a lot of 'spare' time. Seminar group at 3.30 p.m.. Very useful, smaller group, ice breaking, found [programme leader] very approachable. Lecture Holism at 5.15 p.m.. Hard going initially, but my attention was caught and was held for the remainder of the session. Overall good first day, I'll come back for more.

Week Two
Activity - Library at 1.15 p.m.. Librarian came and gave a handout on all aspects of the library service, backed it up with verbal communication. At first I was disappointed we

didn't have a conducted tour of the library, but on reflection it was much more enlightening actually going to the library myself and identifying areas and equipment. Seminar group at 3.30 p.m.. Reassuring to know other students had the same concerns as myself. Lecture - Physiology at 5.15 p.m.. Very dry, but informative. Short break half way through very welcome.

Week Three
Activity - Psychology lecture 1.15 p.m.. Really enjoyed the session. First introduction into psychology and it left me wanting to know more. Seminar group at 3.30 p.m.. Useful actually referencing books and articles. Also informed re: do's and don'ts of referencing. Physiology lecture at 5.15 p.m.. Useful to re-cap on what was said last week. Not as stimulating (I find) as psychology.

Overall
It appears a well constructed course. Tutors appear friendly and approachable.

Coping
Hard to tell. At this moment I feel fine, but I would like to get my first assignment back before I really commit myself.

Prepared
Yes

Postgraduate Diploma/MSc in Health Professional Education

Male/40-49/white

Day One
Involved in introduction to others in the group. I was glad to understand the background of others. It reduced my anxiety to be given information on the assessments to be undertaken as I now know what is expected. Some work was actually begun on the content of the curriculum. This was good as it again reduced anxiety simply because we had begun to do something. I would not alter the day.

Day Two
Sat in lectures. Apart from the content of the lecture it was useful because it gave a chance to get to know tutors in an informal way. Clarified the assessment criteria for the module. The initial information was confusing and it needed clarification. Perhaps it could have all been put in writing on one sheet of paper. I needed to get all of the demands made of me into clear focus. Visit to the library was useful.

Day Three
Lectures, talking in private with programme leader. This last enabled me to clarify individual focus for seminar - very useful. Wandered around library at leisure on Sunday afternoon. I am getting the feeling of 'engaging' with the University. Most part-time study makes you feel as if you are transient 'on the surface' kind of student - I am feeling a little more involved.

Overall
Good. I feel as if the course has a 'place' in the University - this is important.

Coping
OK - now that the requirements for assessment are clear.

Prepared
Not really - it is only now that I realise what it entails. However, perhaps it could not be done any other way.

Phase One - Participant Observation Fieldnotes

Day One Induction, DipSW, 27 Sept 1993, Morning

Room R1/33 for coffee from 9.30. People were given coffee by [a tutor] then queued to give in photographs, get a name badge and the course handbooks, they then sat on chairs in rows the length of the room instead of across. (People seemed to be chatting a lot, having coffee first gave a chance to talk which might have been good. I felt rather nervous about the fact I had to do a presentation on my research in front of staff and the new students. I was worried that students might not talk to me, I will have to approach them which I find a bit stressful - having to initiate new social encounters all the time. I'm worried because I am here for a different reason to most, what will people think of what I am doing?).

I saw a few people I knew from the interviews (this relieved my anxiety a bit - it's easier to approach and talk to those you already know). Some were nervous and apprehensive. J seemed very nervous, c. said she'd rather be in a case conference, she said she felt like 'a little fish in a big sea' rather than 'a big fish in a little one', as she had done in her job ([programme leader] said later on that students can feel deskilled when beginning a course, perhaps she feels like that). J said she had been to the Welcome Weekend, it had been a bit disappointing but it was a good chance for her family to see where she was going to be. Someone else said they'd feel OK after the first week or so.

Spoke to woman sat next to me quite a lot. She had been to Welcome Weekend and said it was good for her children to see where 'mum was going to school', now they could visualise where she was. She said she thought by Christmas she would feel really settled in. She was a bit concerned about the preliminary essay. She thought it was a good idea but was worried that it had been along the right lines. Quite a few people were talking about parking problems and finding somewhere to park. The woman I was sat next to had to nip out to renew her parking ticket as it would not last the morning. Spoke to the woman I was sitting next to quite a bit she had 2 young children and would perhaps like another but would have to see how it fitted in with her career. Her husband would be prepared to look after it if she had a good enough job, but she was a bit worried about her age, 36. For childcare now she got the children off to school and her husband worked nights so he could pick them up. If there were any problems in the morning he could stay up to sort them out (her arrangements seemed to be quite flexible).

[Programme leader] arrived about 10.15 and started off the session, she introduced herself. [A tutor] introduced himself and left then about 6 of the SW staff, followed by me. (from talking to people so far they do not seem as suspicious of me as the HPE last week, though some have been asking me questions about it and why I am interested in it).

[Programme leader] then gave the introduction to the course, she spoke about the CCETSW regulations. She apologised to the Sandwich Route student because there had been a misunderstanding an they thought that they only had to be in for half the week. She said no doubt there would be a post-mortem on it. She welcomed all the students and said they had done well to get on the course and went through the introduction week. She said they were not allowed to eat and drink in the rooms and this morning had been an exception. She told them about not smoking, only allowed in the student common room.

[Programme leader] started with a history of social work training and background to the DipSW. Possibilities in the future to go on studying beyond the DipSW and post basic

training - she said it 'could be years of studying ahead of you' - laughter from some, woman behind me pulled a face.

Question about if already working could you do your placement there. [programme leader] answered.

[Programme leader] reassured that if all seemed a bit daunting at the moment there was two years to get there.

[programme leader] went through other contextual and social factors which were effecting social work at the moment.

[Programme leader] stopped talking at 11.15 and then spoke about filling in the CCETSW registration forms. She gave some instruction, to carefully read page 4 first. She said enrollment with the University was tomorrow and they would need to take with them a letter from their seconding body, local authority or their fees and photo. If hadn't got these they would only be enrolled on a temporary basis. Someone said they still had not heard from their local authority. [Programme leader] said it might have been paid direct.

[Programme leader] gave out the CCETSW registration forms. People around me asked me a couple of questions. Two black women behind asked about ethnic origin question, they didn't fit in with any of the categories mentioned, I suggested filling in the other please specify, they did this with 'Black British'. The woman sat next to me was confused about what personal social services meant, as she was a nurse, she realised later there was a space to put this down so crossed it off from the place she had already put it.

[Programme leader] said that if there was a special case put for hardship the £60 CCETSW fee could be waived and she offered to help people to put a case forward.

[Programme leader] said next was the guided tour and they would be shown the pigeonholes, the notice board, the Great Hall, the library, refectory, SU and resource centre. She also told them about the secretary, who was very busy and that they encouraged students not to pester her. If there was an urgent message to be got to the student, however, relatives, etc. could ring up. She gave the information about how to do this.

Earlier staff had collected too many photographs from the students, [programme leader] pointed this out and handed them one back.

I went on guided tour with [a tutor] and a group of seven students, went round the School first, showed pigeonholes, office, staff pigeonholes, toilets, student common room. then outside to Great Hall, library, refectory and onto bridge to point out other things. On tour spoke to a few people in the group. Someone commented on feeling old when walking round the campus. Another that she wouldn't remember all this as we went round. She had come with a friend who was in the second year today but would be driving herself in future (she seemed nervous of driving herself on the first day). One said she didn't like the walking around, she said she felt she stood out like a swore thumb as a new-comer and she couldn't wait until she got more into it. Another woman asked [the tutor] where the phones were, I found out later she was concerned as she had a 7 month old child, which she had not left for long before and her mother was going to look after her, she wanted telephone to see if everything was OK. She said she felt quite strange about leaving the child, she had been on maternity leave but not gone back to work, this was the first thing she had done since then. Another women had done the Women into Technology course at the University so she knew her way round the library, etc. [The tutor] showed them places to eat and talked about the best places

to park (it seems to be realised by staff that it is a particular problems for mature students).

Session finished about 12.00.

Phase Two - Participant Observation Fieldnotes

Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing - Week 1, 28 Sept, 1994

Room - RG/09 at 1.15

The room was a pleasant temperature - not too hot and not too cold.

I noticed signs up to show the way to the room.

I arrived when most of the students had arrived - I don't know if they had to wait outside?? [Programme leader] and [module leader] were getting things ready. I gave out the diaries and flyers to anyone who hadn't got one (most had already been sent them). [Programme leader] and [module leader] were giving out things - handbook, safety policy, timetable for first module, module enrollment forms.

[Programme leader] introduced herself and told the new students briefly about seminar groups then the staff there introduced themselves (four of them) ([Programme leader] said that she had asked them to come along because my research suggested that the students liked to meet the staff early on - a change perhaps but last year she did the same thing but perhaps not with quite so many - check on this).

I introduced myself and my research

[Programme leader] had already written on a flip-chart common queries which students wanted to know. She then said she would answer these by going through the handbook which she did and by giving other relevant information.

The room was very formally set up with a platform at one end and rows of students - [Programme leader] apologised for the formality.

(Changes from last year - different room, room cooler, [the librarian] to come over next week instead of them going to the library. Many of the teaching staff are different)

[Programme leader] was very humorous at times and people seemed amused.

At one point [programme leader] talked about oral presentations there were some murmurs from students - appeared to indicate apprehension.

Question about resource centre and [programme leader] described this facility.

When [programme leader] mentioned parking there were murmurs - indicating concerns about this.

One student asked a question about parking in Sainsbury's car park

[Programme leader] asked everyone to fill in their blue module forms and those who hadn't enrolled to stay behind. The others she said were free to go and explore [it was 2.30] There was a lot of bustle and more noise than earlier at this point. About half the students left and [programme leader] gave enrollment forms out to the rest. They filled these in and started to queue for [programme leader] to sign. I briefly talked to 4 women all from same hospital in H, they knew each other. I left about 2.45.

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(I found it hard to go and follow any students, I didn't know where they would go and was worried about approaching them and recognising them in the common room. I will wait until later. It is really hard to do this with the DPSN students as there are so many of them and I don't know any yet.)

APPENDIX 6

Questionnaire

Life History Questionnaire

Please could you answer the following questions or **tick** the appropriate boxes

ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND

1. **Please could you briefly detail the main things which you have done since you left school, in chronological order** (not just paid employment).

LENGTH OF TIME (approx. in years and months)	BRIEF SUMMARY OF HOW YOU HAVE SPENT YOUR TIME (e.g. working full-time as an unqualified Social Worker, at home looking after children, voluntary work, working part-time as a Bar Assistant, unemployed)
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. **What are you currently doing?**
   (If you are in paid employment please give your job title and grade)

3. **Will undertaking this course be a change in your career or will you be continuing in the same one?**

New ☐

Continuation ☐ **P.T.O**

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4. Whose idea was it to embark on this course? (Tick all those which apply)

Mine ☐ My family's ☐ My work colleagues ☐ My employer ☐

Other please specify

ABOUT YOUR FUTURE

5. What do you hope to gain from this course personally?

6. What do you hope to do after completing this course professionally?

Not Known ☐ Continue in same job ☐ Get promotion ☐

Start a new job ☐ Other please specify

ABOUT YOURSELF

7. Age Group

Under 20 ☐ 20-24 ☐ 25-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐

40-49 ☐ Over 50 ☐

8. Which of the following qualifications do you have? (tick all those which apply)

CSEs ☐ 'O' Levels ☐ GCSEs ☐ A/As Levels ☐

B/TEC ☐ HND/HNC ☐ Professional Qualification ☐

Other please specify

9a. Are you - Married ☐ Living with someone as a partner ☐

Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Separated ☐

Single ☐ Other, please specify

b. How long have you been in the above situation? (approximate in years/ months)

10. If your marital situation has changed, what was it previously?

Married ☐ Living with someone as a partner ☐

Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐ Separated ☐

Single ☐ Other, please specify

11. How many children do you have?

0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

Or more ☐

12. If you have children how old are they?

13a. What was the occupation of the main wage earner in your family when you were a child?

b. What kind of work was this? (e.g. teaching, manual work, farm hand, civil engineer, managerial)

14. What is your ethnic origin?

White ☐ Black Caribbean ☐ Black African ☐ Black other ☐

Indian ☐ Pakistani ☐ Bangladeshi ☐ Chinese ☐

Other ☐ Not Known ☐

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION

PLEASE RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE PRE-PAID ENVELOPE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

APPENDIX 7

Letter Sent with Questionnaire

24th May 1993

Dear Prospective Student

I understand you have been offered a place on the [programme name] at the University of Huddersfield, so I am writing to ask for your cooperation in some research. My name is Sally Johnson and I am a Postgraduate Research Student within the School to which you will be coming in September. With the cooperation of your Course Leader, [name], I am conducting a study into people's experiences of being a student, particularly in the early stages of their course. This is the first stage in my investigation on transitions to Professional courses and I am hoping to talk to people more in-depth about their experiences, difficulties, problems, views, satisfaction, etc. in the near future. It is hoped that your involvement in this study will not only be helpful to you when you begin your course but will be of value to others making such a transition in the future.

It would be helpful to me, at this stage, to have some details about your personal and work history, your current situation and your future intentions. I am interested in trying to determine if there are broad similarities between different kinds of students. For example, certain students may have always been in the same career and be carrying on in that career, while taking their course to upgrade their qualifications. Others may be embarking on a new career, having spent a long time away from education, while, for instance, looking after children.

This will involve filling in the enclosed short questionnaire. There are not right or wrong answers and only brief responses are necessary. I have numbered the questionnaires so that I have a record of who they relate to but this information will be kept in the strictest confidence and only known to me. Your name will not be used in connection with any of the information which I produce.

Please could you complete of the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the pre-paid envelope by **7th June 1993.**

If you have any queries or require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me on (0484) 422288 ext: *.

I look forward to meeting you in September.

Yours sincerely

Sally Johnson

APPENDIX 8

Phase One Interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. I am interested in your expectations of your forthcoming course and being a student as well as why you wanted to take this course at this point in time.

Before we begin could I ask you if you would mind if I taped our conversation. This is purely to help me to recall what has been said and I can assure you that any information taken from it will not contain your name (if they do not wish it to be recorded on cassette, ask if notes can be taken).

I would also like to assure you that I am working independently from you tutors and I would not mention your name to them in relation to any information which comes to light.

I selected your name according to certain differences between the types of students who are coming on Social Work and Health Courses, for example, seeing the course as a continuation or new phase of your career. Within these differences however you were selected at random from those who filled in the questionnaire.

Firstly, I would like to ask you a few general questions about what you think of your contacts with the University so far.

General Evaluation of Prior Contacts with University

1. How did you find out about the course?

2. Why did you choose this particular course and to come to Huddersfield?

3. Did you receive any guidance?

4. What do you think about your contacts with the University so far?

> **Prompts**   - written
> - interview
> - other

How They Arrived

5. Tell me how you arrived at this point? That is coming on the course at Huddersfield University.

> **Prompts**   - Why do you want to do the course?
>
> - Why did you choose to do it now?

6. Tell me about your experience of education in the past.

> **Prompts**   - when did you last study?
> - what methods of teaching and learning have you experienced?

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Expectations/Anticipations

7. Do you have any expectations of what it will be like? (Discuss self characterisation).

Prompts - being a student, how do you feel about being an older student?
- the course
- the tutors
- teaching and learning methods, what will you prefer?
- support at college, what would be helpful?
- do you think your life outside the University be effected? (relationships with family, partner, friends, etc.) How?

8. Do you have any worries or fears?

9 Do you envisage any difficulties?

10. What are you looking forward to?

Other Details

11. Do you have any family or other responsibilities/commitments? If yes -How will you manage these when you are a student?

12. Do you have any other interests or involvement in other activities which will be effected when you become a student? If yes - what are these and how will they effect you?

13. Do you foresee any financial problems when you become a student? If yes -what?

14 Do you foresee any problems with travelling to college? If yes - what?

15. What social class do you consider yourself to be?

16. Is there anything else which has not been covered which you feel is important? If yes - what?

Closing Comments

Is there anything you'd like to ask me?

I'd like to thank you for talking to me and for your time and I look forward to seeing you when you begin your course.

I'm hoping to talk to people again once they start at the University and perhaps you would be interested in further discussions.

Can I keep the character sketch which you prepared? It might be interesting to compare it with how you feel once you begin your course.

APPENDIX 9

Letter Sent to Recruit Interview Participants in Phase One

July 1993

Dear

I wrote to you several weeks ago with regard to my research project on students beginning Professional courses within the School of Human and Health Sciences at the University of Huddersfield. Firstly, thank you for completing the questionnaire. I am writing again to ask you if you would be willing to participate further in my research.

This will involve talking to me before your course begins. I would like to arrange to meet you to discuss your expectations of your forthcoming course and becoming a student, as well as your reasons for wanting to do the course at this point in time. I would hope to make arrangements to visit you or, if this is not convenient, for you to visit the University, at a time to suit you. This meeting should take no longer than an hour. Once you begin your course at the University perhaps you would wish to be involved further in this project.

I am working independently from your course organisers and any information gained will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality. I selected your name at random for inclusion in this study, from those who completed the questionnaire which I sent to you earlier.

If you have any queries or would like further information please do not hesitate to contact me on **(0484) 422288 Ext: ***. You can also contact the School office and leave a message on Ext: *.

Please could you complete the enclosed acceptance slip and return it to me in the pre-paid envelope **as soon as possible.**

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely

Sally Johnson

Acceptance Slip

I ***would/would not** be interested in taking part in your research project.

If you wish to be involved please could you provide your telephone number so that I can arrange a time and date with you.

*Please delete as appropriate

APPENDIX 10

Flyer

My name is Sally Johnson. I am a Research Student in the School of Human and Health Sciences at the University of Huddersfield. My area of interest is mature women students beginning Social Work and Health courses. Women are in the majority on these courses but there is little information about their experience of higher education.

Becoming a student may involve particular worries, difficulties, achievements and satisfactions which are important, and perhaps different from those of traditional eighteen year old students. From this study I will gain information on issues which are of importance to students. I will be able to put forward suggestions to the University in order to provide better support for students such as yourself. Taking part in this project will give you a chance to put forward your views and experiences and help to highlight issues.

Something about myself

I came to the University of Huddersfield as an undergraduate four years ago, at the age of 30, and last year completed the BSc in Behavioural Sciences, an achievement I was proud of, having left school at sixteen with four 'O' levels. Prior to that I had spent about fourteen years in the catering industry in a variety of jobs from being a cook, to a junior catering manager, to teaching food preparation. I felt a tremendous satisfaction from completing a course in higher education but it was not always plain sailing.

If you would like any further information please contact me on (0484) 422288 Ext. 2712. Room RG/12A

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APPENDIX 11

Confirmation and Self-characterisation Letter

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me about becoming a student at the University of Huddersfield. I would like to confirm our meeting on [date, time and place].

In preparation for this it would be helpful if you could write a short piece about your expectations of your forthcoming course and being a student, which we could discuss at this meeting (if you do not wish to do this there is no obligation). You could write this sketch in the third person, from the point of view of someone who knows you intimately and sympathetically, perhaps better that anyone really could know you.

You could begin.......... What I expect my course and being a student will be like. Jane (use you own name) expects..........

If you wish to contact me please do not hesitate to do so on (0484) 422288 Ext: *.

I am looking forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely

Sally Johnson

APPENDIX 12

Post Interview Sheet

How the Interview Went

Interviewee: Length of interview:

Contact before the interview:

Interaction at the interview:

Initial feelings about what was said:

Any other comments:

APPENDIX 13

Statement of Intentions

MEMORANDUM

To: Colleagues in The Division of Health, Social Work and Community Studies

From: Sally Johnson   Date: September 1993

Subject: Statement of Research Intentions

As a Research Student in the School of Human and Health Sciences I am researching the experiences of mature women students beginning courses in Social Work and Health Studies, in particular, the DipSW - Standard and Sandwich Routes; students on the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing and the new Postgraduate Diploma in Health Professional Education. Further details about the aims and context of my research are attached.

This statement sets out my intentions for involvement with courses from the beginning of the semester in September until Christmas.

a) I am hoping to be involved intensively with the above courses during this period. This would mean me attending classes regularly, with your agreement, and becoming a non-participant observer. I will be working independently as a researcher but in consultation with you. I would aim to minimise my interference and participation would be voluntary.

b) Information would be gathered through observation, discussion, interview, questionnaires, analysis of background information and possibly through students keeping a brief diary during their induction period and group feedback sessions.

c) The focus of this study will be on good practice and constructive comments and not about passing judgment or inspection. It will be important to establish process involved in this transition and what is helpful to staff and students.

d) Through this intensive involvement I would seek to highlight the important elements of programmes, student characteristics and their interaction and progressively focus, trying to 'illuminate' what it is about these which helps students to integrate.

e) As this study involves a 'real world' setting, with many complexities which can not be altered, a case study approach will be used. Cases will be linked by a conceptual framework of transition which I am developing. A brief report of my findings will be available to colleagues, on request.

f) The anonymity of the students involved in this study is assured, but it will be difficult to fully anonymise all aspects of their courses, as it will sometimes be clear to which elements I am referring. Wherever possible however, every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of individual colleagues comments and views.

g) There is the intention that something of value to educators and students will come out of this study and I am aiming to put forward strategies which might help to integrate students better onto their courses. As cases will be linked by a conceptual framework, I hope that information capable of being generalised to other areas of education will be generated.

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Context and aims of this Research

In higher education there is a growing interest in the importance of taking seriously the student perspective of learning, particularly the influences of context and culture on learning (Boud 1992). While some students find the transition to programmes relatively easy, teaching colleagues have highlighted that some do not, especially in relation to the 'new' teaching and learning methods.

The general aims of this study are:-

1. To investigate the transition of mature women students onto professional programmes of higher education.

2. To identify what it is about the process of beginning courses which helps integration.

I have already sent all the students, on the courses involved, a questionnaire, which asked for details about their previous experience and current circumstances. From this I have selected a sample of people to interview, in-depth, before they begin their course. The attached 'flyer' was sent to these students. I am interested in how they came to be beginning their course and what their expectations of becoming a student are. I would like to interview the same students again once they have began their course about the reality of being a student.

References

Boud, D (1992) From Teaching Methods to Learning Methods, Keynote Address presented at the Annual Conference of the Society for Research into Higher Education, Nottingham Trent University, 15-17 December.

Sally Johnson, Room *, Ext: *

APPENDIX 14

The Main Elements of the Induction Diary

* Please keep this diary for the next week

* Only brief entries are necessary

* I will collect the diary on Thursday 30 September or Friday 1 October 1993

* This is not part of your course work and it will not be marked. It is part of a study of people beginning professional courses at the University

* I am working as an independent researcher

* Any information given will be treated in the strictest confidence

Instructions

I am interested in what you think about your first week at the University. For each day could you describe:

✓ what activities you have been involved in

✓ the time and place of these, in the order which they happened

✓ who was involved

✓ what was useful

✓ what was not useful

✓ what would have been useful

✓ Only brief accounts are necessary of the things you feel to be **most** important.

✓ don't forget to complete as soon as possible after an activity has occurred or at least on a daily basis.

An example of how to complete an entry

⇨

Day One

- ✓ what activities you have been involved in
- ✓ the time and place of these, in the order which they happened
- ✓ who was involved
- ✓ what was useful
- ✓ what was not useful
- ✓ what would have been useful

Reflections on the week

Please give a brief description of your overall impressions of the week.

Do you feel prepared for your course?

Any other comments

Please keep this diary for the next week and then complete the standard questionnaire overleaf

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Approaches to Studying Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions as quickly as possible, giving your immediate response. It may be difficult to answer some questions but as far as you can base your answers on your *previous* experience of studying.

Circle the appropriate number to show your general approach to studying.

4	(++)	means Definitely agree
3	(+)	means Agree with reservations
2	(?)	is only to be used if the item doesn't apply to you or you find it impossible to give a definite answer.
1	(-)	means Disagree with reservations
0	(--)	means Definitely disagree

                                ++ + ? - --

1. I try to relate ideas in one subject to those in others, wherever possible.   4 3 2 1 0

2. I usually set out to understand thoroughly the meaning of what I am asked to read.   4 3 2 1 0

3. Ideas in books often set me off on long chains of thought of my own, only tenuously related to what I was reading.   4 3 2 1 0

4. I like to be told precisely what to do in essays or other assignments.   4 3 2 1 0

5. I often find myself questioning things that I hear in lectures or read in books.   4 3 2 1 0

6. The continual pressure of work - assignments, deadlines and competition - often makes me tense and depressed.   4 3 2 1 0

7. I find it difficult to 'switch tracks' when working on a problem: I prefer to follow each line of thought as far as it will go.   4 3 2 1 0

8. Lecturers seem to delight in making the simple truth unnecessarily complicated.   4 3 2 1 0

9. I usually don't have time to think about the implications of what I have read.   4 3 2 1 0

10. In trying to understand a puzzling idea, I let my imagination wander freely to begin with, even if I don't seem to be much nearer a solution.   4 3 2 1 0

11. I generally put a lot of effort into trying to understand things which initially seem difficult.   4 3 2 1 0

12. I prefer courses to be clearly structured and highly organised.   4 3 2 1 0

13. A poor first answer in an exam makes me panic.

4　3　2　1　0 ⇨

14. In trying to understand new ideas, I often try to relate them to real life situations to which they might apply.

4　3　2　1　0

15. When I'm reading I try to memorise important facts which may come in useful later.

4　3　2　1　0

16. I like to play around with ideas of my own even if they don't get me very far.

4　3　2　1　0

17. I am usually cautious in drawing conclusions unless they are well supported by evidence.

4　3　2　1　0

18. When I'm tackling a new topic, I often ask myself questions about it which the new information should answer.

4　3　2　1　0

19. Often I find I have to read things without having a chance to really understand them.

4　3　2　1　0

20. In reporting practical work, I like to try to work out several alternative ways of interpreting findings.

4　3　2　1　0

21. I find I have to concentrate on memorising a good deal of what we have to learn.

4　3　2　1　0

22. Often when I'm reading books, the ideas produce vivid images which sometimes take on a life of their own.

4　3　2　1　0

23. The best way for me to understand what technical terms mean is to remember the textbook definitions.

4　3　2　1　0

24. I need to read around a subject pretty widely before I'm ready to put my ideas down on paper.

4　3　2　1　0

25. Although I generally remember facts and details, I find it difficult to fit them together into an overall picture.

4　3　2　1　0

26. I tend to read very little beyond what's required for completing assignments.

4　3　2　1　0

27. Having to speak in tutorials is quite an ordeal for me.

4　3　2　1　0

28. Puzzles or problems fascinate me, particularly when you have to work through the material to reach a logical conclusion.

4　3　2　1　0

29. I find it helpful to 'map out' a new topic for myself by seeing how ideas fit together.

4　3　2　1　0

30. I find I tend to remember things best if I concentrate on the order in which the lecturer presented them.

4　3　2　1　0

31. When I'm reading an article or research report, I generally examine the evidence carefully to decide whether the conclusion is justified.

4　3　2　1　0

32. Tutors seem to want me to be more adventurous in making use of my own ideas.

4　3　2　1　0 ⇨

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General Details (please tick the appropriate boxes)

1. Are you   female ☐

          male ☐

2. What is your age?

Under 20 ☐   20-24 ☐   25-29 ☐   30-39 ☐

40-49   ☐   Over 50   ☐

3. How would you describe your ethnic origin?

4. Your name? (this is so that comparisons can be made at a later date. It will not be used for any other purposes and any information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND CO-OPERATION

APPENDIX 15

First Level Codes

Concept	Code
TRANSITION	TR

TR: EFFECT	TR EFF
EMOTIONAL	TR EFF EMO
MAKING SENSE	TR EFF MS
CHANGE OF ROLES	TR EFF CHROL
ON RELATIONSHIPS	TR EFF RELS
ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES	TR EFF ORG
PRACTICAL	TR EFF PRAC
EASY/HARD	TR EFF E/H
REST OF LIFE	TR EFF LIFE
RELATED TO EXPERIENCE	TR EFF EXP
ON INTERACTION	TR EFF INT
QUESTIONS ASKED	TR EFF QS
ILLNESS/ACCIDENTS/SLIPS	TR EFF ILL
NECESSITY OF DOING THINGS	TR EFF NEC
FUTURE	TR EFF FUT
USEFUL/NOT USEFUL	TR EFF USE/NUSE
STUDY SKILLS	TR EFF STUDY SK
GROUP	TR EFF GR
HAVE A GO	TR EFF HG
SUGGESTION	TR EFF SUG
TACTIC	TR EFF TACT
FOR SELF	TR EFF SELF
STARTING	TR EFF START
MY EFFECT	TR EFF ME

TR: PROCESS	TR PRO
TR: TUTORS EXPERIENCE OF	TR TUTOR
TR: MY EXPERIENCE OF	TR ME

FEATURES OF COURSES	FOC
FOC: TYPE	FOC TYPE
FOC: FULL TIME	FOC FT
FOC: PART TIME	FOC PT
FOC: STRUCTURE	FOC STRUCT
FOC: TEACHING	FOC TEACH
FOC: TEACHER STYLE	FOC TEASTY
FOC: INDUCTION	FOC IND
FOC: FUNDING	FOC FUND
FOC: LIBRARY	FOC LIB
FOC: UNIVERSITY	FOC UNI
FOC: GROUP SIZE	FOC GR
FOC: INFORMATION	FOC INFO
FOC: EMPLOYERS	FOC EMP

CAREER PATH   CP

CP: FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES   CP FAMRESP
CP: NEW CAREER   CP NEW
CP: CONTINUATION OF CAREER   CP CONT
CP: FULL TIME   CP FT
CP: PART TIME   CP PT
CP: ETHNICITY   CP ETH
CP: FEMALE   CP F
CP: MALE   CP M
CP: AGE   CP AGE
CP: REASONS FOR DOING THE COURSE   CP REA
CP: TRAVEL   CP TRAV
CP: EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE   CP ED
CP: RECENT RECRUITS   CP REC
CP: DIFFERENT KINDS OF STUDENTS   CP STU
CP: KNOWING OTHER STUDENTS   CP KNO
CP: CLOTHING   CP CLO
CP: ASPECTS OF LIFE   CP LIFE
CP: DEGREE OF EXPERIENCE   CP EXP
CP: FINANCIAL   CP FIN

OTHER POSSIBLE CODES

EMERGING CAUSAL LINKS   CL

CL: RECURRENT PATTERNS OR THEMES   CL RECTH
CL: EXPLANATORY   CL EXPL

MY THOUGHT   ME

DEFINITIONS OF CODES

Code	**Definition**
TR	Transition - any event or issue associated with the transition to the course/pathway/University.
TR EFF	Transition effect - anything which is a result of the transition
TR EFF EMO	Any emotions or feelings or preferences expressed or implied which relate to the transition - anxious, worried, nervous, questioning why there, experienced as good or bad, tired, interesting, unhappy, happy, overwhelmed, challenged, confidence, tired, confusion, gone well, gone badly, relaxed, familiar with the University and therefore not that anxious, liked more support, something real to do, surprised, issues to do with settling in, hard to hear, holding back, needs, problems with.
TR EFF MS	Anyway the student seems to make sense of the new situation. e.g. relating it to past experience, coping strategies, how they use things and why.
TR EFF CHROL	Issues to do with the student feeling a change of role.
TR EFF RELS	The effect of the transition on relationships - with family, friends, at work.

TR EFF ORG	Organisational effects of the transition - getting to college, parking and transport, time management and getting self organised, getting family/ childminding organised, getting registered, how it fits in with rest of life organisationally.
TR EFF PRAC	Practical effects of the transition - getting lost/ couldn't remember way round/ finding way round, arriving late, asking for information, experienced as badly/well organised, drink facilities, poverty, confusion over rooming, room hot and uncomfortable, using /not using facilities, wouldn't get involved.
TR EFF E/H	Finding things easy or hard, really makes you question yourself, makes you think.
TR EFF LIFE	How the transition effects or fits in with other parts of their life, work, family, etc.
TR EFF EXP	How the transition fits in with their previous experience or expectations.
TR EFF INT	The effects of transition on interactions within groups with tutors, etc. e.g. talkativeness, liveliness, quietness, need for peer support, gestures/actions which indicate group cohesion or lack of it.
TR EFF QS	Questions asked during the transition - about assessment, placements, presentations, etc.
TR EFF ILL	Illness, accidents or absent mindedness which could be linked to the transition.
TR EFF NEC	The necessity of having or not having to do things.
TR EFF FUT	Looking to the future, what comes next.
TR EFF USE/NUSE	Very useful/not very useful.
TR EFF STUDY SK	Need for study skills.
TR EFF GR	Need to identify with a particular group.
TR EFF HG	Prepared to have a go though finding hard, can't wait to get started.
TR EFF SUG	Suggestions to improve the transition.
TR EFF TACT	Tactics used to get into studying.
TR EFF SELF	Doing the course represents doing something for yourself, perhaps tied up with women's sense of identity.
TR EFF START	Can't wait to get started/ feel like not really got going yet.
TR EFF ME	Questions asked of me during the transition or ways I effect the transition.
TR PRO	Anything related to the process involved in transition e.g. the kinds of questions asked at certain times, the kinds of

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	information requested at particular times, what happens at different times. When they feel more settled in, etc.
TR TUTOR	The tutors/other staffs experience of issues to do with the transition of new students.
TR ME	My experiences of the transition. Anything which I might notice or experience which might be relevant to the process or effects of transition.
FOC	Any features of the course/pathway or the University as a whole.
FOC TYPE	The type of course/pathway - DipSW, HPE, DPSN.
FOC FT	Whether it is full-time.
FOC PT	Whether it is part-time or Sandwich Route.
FOC STRUCT	Issues to do with the structure of the pathway/ course/ sessions, modularisation, placements, when assignments are due in, information to do with these, induction, facilities in the University.
FOC TEACH	Issues to do with the type of teaching/learning environment, the expectations of the students, the aims of the course/induction.
FOC TEASTY	The style/approach/personality of teachers and others.
FOC IND	Issues to do with how induction is carried out.
FOC FUND	Issues to do with funding of students, payment of fees.
FOC LIB	Issues to do with the library.
FOC UNI	Issues to do with admin., the School, the University, registration, parking, accessibility, fire regulations, rules, procedures, APEL, physical conditions - noise, heat, rooms, numbers and pressure of these, drinks, CCETSW, SU, etc.
FOC GR	Issues to do with the size of the group.
FOC INFO	Giving information about facilities.
FOC EMP	Anything to do with employers involvement in the programme.
CP	Career Paths - any characteristics of the students which might be relevant to how they experience the transition. **This code only to be used** when a particular characteristic seems relevant to the transition.
CP FAMRESP	Differing family responsibilities - single parents, having older (over 10)/younger children (babies and up to 10)/no children.
CP NEW	Does doing the course/pathway represent the start of a new career, linked to lack of direct experience.

CP CONT	Does doing the course/pathway represent the continuation of what they had previously been doing.
CP FT	Whether they are on the course/pathway full-time.
CP PT	Whether they are on the course/pathway part-time or on the Sandwich Route. They might also be working.
CP ETH	Issues to do with ethnic origins - specifically black students, possibly others, e.g. Irish.
CP F	Issues to do with being a woman.
CP M	Issues to do with being a man.
CP AGE	Issues to do with age/ mature students.
CP REA	Issues to do with reason and motives for coming on the course/pathway - personal development (possibly linked to identity), professional development or both, because they feel they have to, because paid for.
CP TRAV	Issues to do with travelling to college - distance, by what means, parking, living in the H of R because too far to travel home.
CP ED	Experience of education in the past - when studied, at what level, non-traditional entry, postgraduate, etc.
CP REC	Whether they had heard recently they were coming on the course or had known for along time, if they had to swap to a different course/route at the last minute.
CP STU	Any issues which relate to perceived differences in the types/kinds of students on the different courses/ pathways.
CP KNO	Whether the student knows other students or people or the University before they come.
CP CLO	What kind of clothing students wear.
CP LIFE	Aspects of the student's life.
CP EXP	Differing degrees of previous experience.
CP FIN	Financial situation of students.
CL	Any emerging causal links.
CL RECTH	Any recurrent themes or patterns that are noticed.
CL EXPL	Any links that might be causal.
ME	Any thoughts or involvements I might have had in the course of the fieldwork which could be relevant.

APPENDIX 16

Contact Summary Sheet

Who: What Event:

Where: Date: Date of Summary:

1. What were the main themes or issues in the contact?

2. What research Questions did these themes relate to?

3. What new hypotheses, speculations, or guesses about the field situation were suggested by the contact?

4. Where should most energy by placed during future contacts and what sort of information should be sought?

5. Reflective Remarks

Document Summary Form

Date Received: Where:

Name/Description of Document:

Event or Contact with which Document is Associated:

Significance or Importance of Document:

Brief Summary of Contents:

Reflective Remarks:

APPENDIX 17

Sub-categories for Diary Analysis

1. Positive comments

2. Negative comments

3. Any practical/environmental issues

4. Any comments related to the size of groups/numbers of students

5. Comments about knowing people/familiar with the subject

6. Suggestions for improvement of induction

7. Aspects which were expected or unexpected

8. Other places visited apart from any aspects included in the induction

9. Any other comments

APPENDIX 18

Interview Summary Sheet

Who: **Date of summary:**

General Evaluation of Prior Contacts with University

1. How found out about the course?

2. Why chose course and Huddersfield?

3. Did you receive any guidance?

4. What think about contacts with the University so far?

How They Arrived
5. How arrived at this point.

6. About experience of education in the past.

Expectations/Anticipations
7. Expectations

8. Do you have any worries or fears or difficulties?

10. What are you looking forward to?

Other Details

11. Family or other responsibilities/commitments?

12. Other interests or involvement in other activities which will be effected when you become a student?

13. Financial problems when you become a student?

14 Travelling to college?

15. Social class?

16. How felt about being involved in research?

17. Other?

18. Themes which these relate to?

19. Reflective Remarks

APPENDIX 19

Summary Matrix

Principles of Identity	Anxieties and Concerns	Experience	Life Outside	Identity
1. Continuity	Initial anxieties - about the unknown	Being familiar helped but could create certain anxieties Previous educational experience was relevant	Relationships with family, friends and work commitments continued	Aspects of identity as an older person did not fit in with some University procedures Changing identity
2. Self-esteem	Deeper rooted anxieties - about ability and lack of experience	What mature students bring - motivation and determination	Involvement of employers - some saw as a threat	Being older - positive and negative aspects The meaning of learning to identity - doing the course to enhance self-esteem
3. Distinctiveness	Didn't like to be negatively distinctive-stand out in negative way			What leaving an issue - becoming one of the masses
4. Self-efficacy	Unsure what expected Library and computers daunting Overwhelmed		Part-time students - time an issue Balancing study with other aspects of their lives	
5. Authenticity				Who am I now? - searching for a new identity as a student

APPENDIX 20

Contingency Plans

Instructions in case Sally Johnson is off during the period 26 September to 21 October

My room is * - Key number 1/1

Giving out and collecting diaries

In my room on top of the filing cabinet you will find two boxes containing diaries. These are to be given out to students as follows:-

Monday 26 September - 10.15 in R1/33 to Social Work students (SW). I have prepared a short talk (on a card in the box). You will probably not have to say too much. The most important part is the instructions regarding the diaries. There is also a flyer to give out which will explain to the students who I am and what I am doing. **Pink diaries** are for Sandwich Route students and **yellow** for Standard Route (they will all be in the same room) - don't worry if they all get yellow, that will be fine. Please could you ask them to complete them and hand them in on Monday 3 October at 2.15 (if I am still off then could you collect them - students will be in R1/33). Failing that to be handed in 9.15 Tuesday 10 October in R1/33. Please contact [programme leader] if there are any problems.

Wednesday 28 September - 1.15 in RG/09. These are the Diploma in Professional Studies in Nursing students (DPSN). Please give short talk (see above). These students have already had the flyer but you could take more along in case there are some who haven't - if there are enough left. Give out **white diaries**. Please ask them to complete these and I will collect on Wednesday 19 October (if I am still off please could you collect them at 1.15 on that date from RG/09 and you might need to do the same the following week - same room, same time). Please contact [programme leader] if there are any problems.

Friday 30 September - 10.00 in R2/25. These are the PG MSc in Health Professional Education students (HPE). Please give short talk and give out flyer (see above). Give out the **blue diaries**. Please ask them to complete these for as many days as they attend college over the next three weeks (there are a total of five days but some of the part-timers may only complete 3 days). I will collect them on Friday 21 October (if I am still off please could you collect them on that date at 10.15 in R2/25 or the following week in the same room). If there are any problems please contact [programme leader] or [module leader].

Instructions for Exercises to be carried out with students

Please could you carry out the attached exercises with the following students at the following times (you will have to see the programme or module leader to check when would be a convenient time and a different time might have to be arranged).

Week 2/3 Exercise - please take **sealed box** on top of my filing cabinet for students replies (please return it to my room after each session). Please could you read out 'my story' and then the instructions for the exercise. Give the students about 10 minutes top write their replies.

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SW - Monday 3 October at 2.15 in R1/33 (see [module leader])

HPE - Friday 7 October at 10.15 in R2/25 (see [module leader])

DPSN - Wednesday 12 October at 1.15 in RG/09 (see [programme leader] or [module leader])

Week 4 Exercise - please take the **sealed box** on top of my fining cabinet for student replies (please return it to my room after each session). Please could you read out my story and then the instructions for the exercise. Give the students about 10 minutes top write their replies.

SW - Monday 17 October at 1.15 in R1/33 (see [module leader])

DPSN - Wednesday 19 October at 1.15 in RG/09 (see [programme leader] or [module leader])

HPE - Friday 21 October at 10.15 in R2/25 (see [module leader])

My story

My name is Sally Johnson and I am a Research Student within the School of Human and Health Sciences. I was hoping to be involved with your course, as a participant observer for the first few weeks of your programme. This would have involved talking to you about your experiences of becoming a student and beginning your course. This was to form part of the second phase of my study about mature students beginning professional courses within the School. I am, however, not able to be with you at the moment as I am pregnant and not feeling well. I have therefore left instructions with colleagues for certain exercises to be carried out with you in my absence.

Exercises

Week 2/3

I would like you to write the story of you beginning this course so far. Write it from the point of view of someone who knows you very well, better than anyone else really could. I would like you to be as honest as you feel you can be about both positive and negative experiences. Begin with your full name (this will only be used to identify people for possible follow-up interviews, on a voluntary basis. It will not be used for any other purposes and any information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence. To ensure confidentiality please put your story into the sealed box which will only be opened by me (Sally Johnson)). For example, you could start Jane Bloggs is................

Week 4

You will recall that I recently asked you to write the story of beginning your course, would you please now continue that story - how is beginning your course turning out. As before write it from the point of view of someone who knows you very well, better than anyone else really could. I would like you to be as honest as you feel you can be about both positive and negative experiences. As before begin with your full name (I would like to remind you that this will only be used to identify people for possible follow-up interviews, on a voluntary basis. It will not be used for any other purposes and any information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence. To ensure confidentiality please put your story into the sealed box which will only be opened by me (Sally Johnson)). For example, you could begin Jane Bloggs is............

APPENDIX 21

Letter Sent to Recruit Interview Participants in Phase Two

October 1994

Dear

As you are probably aware I am a Research Student in the School of Human and Health Sciences interested in the experience of mature students beginning courses such as yours. I am writing to ask you if you would be willing to participate further in my research.

This will involve meeting with me for about an hour to discuss how you think you are coping with beginning your course. We could either meet in a private room within the University or I could make arrangements to visit you, at a time to suit you.

I am working independently from your course organisers and any information gained will be anonymised to ensure confidentiality. If you have any queries or would like further information please do not hesitate to contact me on **(0484) 422288 Ext: ***. You can also contact the School Office and leave a message on Ext: *.

Please could you complete the enclosed reply slip and return it to me via the School Office (R1/17) in the envelope provided **as soon as possible and at least by ...... October/November 1994.**

Yours sincerely

Sally Johnson

Reply Slip

I ***would/would not** be interested in talking to you.

If you wish to be involved please could you provide your telephone number so that I can arrange a time and date with you.

OR

Please tick here if you would rather I contact you via your pigeonhole ☐

*Please delete as appropriate

APPENDIX 22

Phase Two Interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. I am interested in talking to you about how you are coping with beginning your course.

Before we begin could I ask you if you would mind if I taped our conversation. This is purely to help me to recall what has been said and I can assure you that any information taken from it will not contain your name (if they do not wish it to be recorded on cassette, ask if notes can be taken).

I would also like to assure you that I am working independently from your tutors and I would not mention your name to them in relation to any information which comes to light.

1. I wondered if any aspects of coming to college have helped to ease you into your course and if so why?

2. I wondered if you were finding any aspects of coming to college difficult and if so why?
   - have you been anxious or concerned about anything?

3. Has it been easy or difficult because :-

   Prompts   - of your previous educational experience or lack of educational experience?

         - you felt properly prepared or did not feel prepared?

         - of your previous work experience?

         - of you being familiar or unfamiliar with the University?

         - of the rest of your life outside college? (ask here about marital situation, numbers and ages of children, other dependents) - family, children, husband/partner, friends, relationships at work.

         - you are used to using or not used to using the library or computers?

         - you are a mature student?

         - it is not or it is a big change for you?

         - it matches or does not match your expectations?

         - you are financially secure or because you have financial worries?

         - of travelling?

         - of anything else?

4. Do you think that any aspects which have made it easier are because you are a woman? (and black or other ethnic origin)

5. Do you think any of the difficulties are related to being a woman? (and black or other ethnic origin)

6. Have you used any personal strategies to help you to cope with coming to college?

7. How useful have any of these strategies been?

8. Is there anything which the staff, college or anyone else has done which has made things better?

9 Is there anything which the staff, college or anyone else has done which has made things worse?

10. Is there anything which the staff, college or anyone else could have done to help the situation?

General

1. What social class would you consider yourself to belong to?

2. Is this related to it being easier or more difficult beginning your course?

3. How do you feel about being involved in this sort of research?

4. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Closing Comments

I'd like to thank you for your time and for talking to me.

APPENDIX 23

Letter Sent to Phase Two Interview Participants with the Findings Chapters

Ext: 2269

29 October 1996

Dear *

Many thanks for participating in my research into the experiences of mature women students at and around the point of entry to professional programmes of higher education. I have now written up the findings and, as promised, enclose a copy. This is an early draft but I wanted to send it to you at this stage so that any comments you have can be incorporated into the final write up or, if you wish, give you the chance to withdraw your contribution. All the names used are fictitious.

I would be grateful if you could let me have any comment you wish to make. I have enclosed a sheet and prepaid envelope for this purpose. I have assigned a letter to the sheet so that I can identify you but others could not. If you wish your comments to be totally anonymous please write these on your own paper. **Please could you return any comments you wish to make as soon as possible and before Christmas at the latest.**

Once again thank you for your assistance.

Best wishes

Sally Johnson

APPENDIX 24

Codes for Phase Two

Pattern Codes

CONTINUITY

CONT   any continuous aspects involved in the transition
DISCONT   any discontinuous experiences involved in the transition

SELF-ESTEEM

SE   any aspects related to self-esteem, that is, feeling personally or socially worthwhile

DISTINCTIVENESS

DIST   any aspects linked to feeling distinctive or indistinctive because of the transition
NEGDIST   any concerns about standing out in a negative way

SELF-EFFICACY

SEFF   any aspects related to ability to cope

AUTHENTICITY

AUTH   any aspects related to feeling 'real' or 'false' in the transition

ANXIETY

ANX   expression of anxieties and concerns
ANXANT   anticipated anxieties
ANXINI   initial anxieties
ANXONG   ongoing anxieties

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

EXP   any aspects related to previous experience
EXPFAM   being familiar with any aspects of the transition
EXPED   previous educational experience
EXPWORK previous work experience
PREPARED any indication the participants were prepared for the transition

LIFE OUTSIDE

LO   any aspects related to the participants life outside of the educational setting

IDENTITY

ID   any aspect related to the participants sense of who they are

Sub-codes (any of these can be linked to the pattern codes)

COPING

COP	coping with aspects of the transition, what assisted coping
NOTCOP	not coping with aspects of the transition, what made it difficult
COPSTRAT	any way in which the participants coped with the transition
POS	any positive comments
NEG	any negative comments

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

WOM	any aspects related to being a woman
MAN	any aspects related to being a man
BLACK	any issues related to being black
SOCIALC	any issues related to social class
LES	any issues associated with being a lesbian

UNIVERSITY PERSONNEL

STAFF	anything to do with University personnel

CHANGE

CH	any changes made in induction or the programmes since phase one

ASPECTS OF THE UNIVERSITY

LIB	anything associated with the Library
COMP	any aspects associated with new technology or computers
COURSE	anything related to aspects of the programme

(aspects of the programme to be broken down for the diary analysis, e.g. programme introduction)

BEING A MATURE STUDENT

MATURE	anything in related to being a mature student

EXPECTATIONS

EXPECT	any met or unmet expectations

TRAVELLING TO THE UNIVERSITY

TRAVEL	any aspects related to travelling to the University
PARKING	anything related to parking while attending the University

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

SUGG	any suggestions made to assist the transition

ANYTHING RELATED TO ME

ME	my of my thoughts, influence, questions asked of me, etc.

METHODOLOGY

METH	any aspect of the data related to methodological concerns