Bridging the generation gap in Higher Education: Intergenerational student challenge and support within families

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the

Doctorate in Professional Practice in Education (EdD)

November 2020

School of Humanities, Languages and Global Studies

University of Central Lancashire

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own and was produced to fulfil the needs of the EdD course regulations. Where I have acknowledged the work of others, I have ensured it has been fully referenced.

I declare that while registered as a candidate for the research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution.

I am also fully aware of the University's rules and regulations and the consequences assigned.

No proof-reading service was used in the compilation of this thesis.

Signature of Candidate:

Type of Award: **Doctorate in Professional Practice in Education (EdD)**

School: **School of Humanities, Languages and Global Studies**

University of Central Lancashire

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all who have helped me to complete this thesis in their own different ways.

To Dr Vikki Summers & Professor Candice Satchwell, my supervisors, for their positive reassurance and practical support throughout.

To the participants who agreed to take part and willingly allowed me a little insight into their complex and fascinating lives.

To Paula for taking time to read my drafts and providing me with valuable and critical comments and suggestions.

To Noel for his enduring patience and encouragement.

Thank you!

Abstract

As UK universities continue to attract students of all ages and numbers of older mature students increase year on year (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2020), the situation of parents entering higher education as non-traditional students at a time when their children are also studying at university is likely to increase. An extensive body of literature considers non-traditional students in higher education, yet little attention is paid to the experiences of older, student parents and less still to the specific dynamic of parents and children from the same family studying simultaneously at university.

This qualitative, narrative case study aims to identify what influences a group of ten non-traditional, student parents, aged 39-55, to study at the time that their children are attending university and how they are motivated and challenged during this period. This provides context for the consideration of whether having a child at university supports the parents' university experience or presents an additional challenge that could lead to lack of academic success or even attrition.

The findings suggest that having children at university influences the student parents in this case to study in higher education both directly and indirectly. Additionally, they are influenced and motivated by a desire to leave the past behind, particularly in relation to work, and for increased self-fulfilment and development. Differences are apparent between younger and older participants in the study suggesting that a more nuanced approach to research on older mature students is needed. Their motivations are, however, challenged by fear, guilt and age-related issues that may be specific to those in a mid-life stage, yet which do not currently appear to be recognised or supported by higher education institutions. Those who have been able to adapt their relationships with their children to include mutual support and engagement as students and to develop shared constructs of capital have been more likely to achieve their goals and manage challenge. Conversely, a reluctance to engage as students between the student parents and their children can add to the challenges already faced and impact negatively on educational achievements. Consideration of the relationships between the parents and their children and their engagement as students led to the development of a theoretical framework of positive (ISSA+) and negative (ISSA-) intergenerational student support and achievement founded on elements of Bourdieu's theory of practice. Overall, these findings contribute towards a theory of intergenerational student support within families.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

The organisation of the education system in the United Kingdom (UK) has undergone a series of significant changes in the last four decades that have 'fundamentally altered most aspects of education' (Bolton, 2012, p.1). In higher education, the number of students achieving first degrees increased from 68,150 in 1980 (Bolton, 2012) to 1,652,675 in the academic year of 2018/2019, with a further 145,560 achieving undergraduate courses such as foundation degrees or Higher National Diplomas (Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA], 2020). The Department for Education's widening participation strategy has contributed to this increase in student numbers in recent years (Connell-Smith & Hubble, 2018). The strategy aims to attract participation in higher education from groups that would not traditionally attend university (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). The umbrella definition of this group as non-traditional students includes mature-aged students, those from a minority background or from areas of multiple deprivation, which are typically areas with low participation in higher education, and early school leavers who have had an extended period of time out of education, amongst others (Chung et al., 2014). Although mature student enrolments have dropped slightly in recent years while the general trend for younger students in higher education has increased, mature students still represent a significant cohort with HESA (2020) reporting that 469,985 mature students aged 30 years and over were enrolled on higher education courses in the academic year of 2018/2019 and Bolton and Hubble (2020) reporting that 36% of undergraduate entrants at UK universities were mature students, aged over 21 years. While widening participation data is not fully available for all categories of non-traditional students, there is a steady increase in students joining university from non-managerial or professional occupations, including the long-term unemployed, and from neighbourhoods with typically low participation in higher education (HESA, 2020). Students from non-traditional groups provide a key contribution to higher education institutions, therefore, their academic engagement, retention and success are of concern to providers of higher education (Kahu and Nelson, 2018) and, as such, are the focus of this research.

1.2 The Context of the Study

This doctoral research project presents a qualitative, case study of ten non-traditional, student parents aged 39-55 in higher education. The study explores their influences, motivations and challenges as they study at the time that their traditional-age offspring are simultaneously

studying at university. It then considers the impact of having a child at university in relation to academic achievement and success.

1.2.1 Non-traditional students

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that the term 'non-traditional' is problematic and warrants discussion. Chung et al. (2014) undertook a systematic review of 45 studies that defined non-traditional students in mental health research and found 13 categories of meaning used to describe them. These categories included: age, ethnicity, disability, roles outside education, mode of study and disadvantage. They found the most common distinction between non-traditional and traditional students to be based on age, with students above a certain age defined as 'mature'. This is generally reflected in the literature on non-traditional students (Busher and James, 2019; Hayden et al., 2016; Stevenson and Clegg, 2013). Distinction between non-traditional and traditional learners based on age is highly relevant to this study as the participants have children who could be classified as 'traditional-aged' students (Chung et al., 2017). Chung et al. (2014) also found a significant number of studies in their review referred to non-traditional students as those with multiple roles, such as spouse, parent or employee. Students studying part-time or those who had had an extended period out of full-time education were also widely considered to be non-traditional, according to their review. In addition to the ambiguity surrounding the definition of the term 'non-traditional', it is recognized that the term could have negative connotations, perhaps implying lower status than that of 'traditional' students; however, as it is widely adopted in the field of educational research it will be used in this study for purposes of definition.

The participants in this study are a relatively homogenous group and fulfil many of the categories that would classify them as non-traditional learners. Indeed, they could be defined as highly non-traditional (Stevens, 2003). All of them are women, albeit more by chance than by the design of the study, which tends to reflect the demographic of older students at university, indeed the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS)(2018) reports that over 70% of mature students over the age of 31 applying for full-time undergraduate degrees are women, most of whom will continue to live at home. As parents of children who are attending university, they hold multiple roles in addition to the role of student. Some are spouses and employees in addition to their parental responsibilities; some have grandchildren or have caring responsibilities for aging parents. Given the age of their children they are certainly mature-age students and could be defined as older mature students or very mature students (Hayden et al., 2016). All the participants left full-time education aged 16 with few, if

any, formal qualifications and could be classified as coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Their journeys from this starting point to higher education and how they have been influenced to study at this stage in their life course form part of this investigation. Additionally, all are studying at a small university campus in the Pennine region of East Lancashire, which is close to where they reside. This is, overall, an area of low participation in higher education (HESA, 2020; Office for Students, 2020). Their ethnic and cultural origins are mixed, reflecting the demographic of the local area. A definition of the participants and their children for the purposes of this study is, therefore, not straightforward. The term 'non-traditional, student parents' is often used to describe the participants throughout this paper; however, on occasion it may be more appropriate to use the terms 'non-traditional', 'older', 'mature' or 'student parents', alone or in combination. It is recognised that their children could be classified as non-traditional based on their sociocultural origins or residence in areas of low participation. In this study, however, they will be described as 'traditional' or 'traditional-age' students due to their age and learning trajectories as they have entered university in a relatively linear path directly from school or further education (Dill and Henley, 1998; McCune et al., 2010), unlike their parents.

1.2.2 Location of the study

The main campus of the University where this study took place was founded in 1828 and is based in a cathedral city in the North West of England. Over 600 courses are offered to around 23,000 students from across the UK and overseas at the main campus (HESA, 2020). In contrast, the University's satellite campus, 25 miles away in a small town steeped in the history of the cotton-weaving industry of the 19th century, hosted fewer than 450 students during the academic year 2018-2019, when data was collected for this study. The satellite campus was established in 2010 to serve the local area. Students are mainly recruited from the local area and many are enrolled on courses relating to healthcare, social work and community leadership. The course offer intends to attract students from the nearby vicinity and many of the students at the campus are from non-traditional backgrounds, indeed the 2020 prospectus dedicates a page to mature students stating that around 60% of students starting a degree at the campus are over 21 years of age. This represents a significantly higher number than the reported overall UK figure of 36% (Bolton and Hubble, 2020).

The location of the University campus is defined as the 8th most deprived local authority area in England based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, with 12% of its neighbourhoods considered to be highly deprived (Lancashire County Council, 2019; Ministry of Housing,

Communities and Local Government, 2019). Lower than average numbers of students from the town attend university. The level of adult learners in higher education in the central area of the town is currently assigned the rating of POLAR4 Quintile1 by the Office for Students (2020), indicating the lowest possible area of deprivation, with little participation in education in the local area. However, the atmosphere at the University campus is collegial and supportive. Classes take place in modern, well-equipped buildings and students have access to leisure facilities and pastoral support. There are ambitious plans to extend the higher education provision at the site. Student numbers for the academic year 2019-2020 were around 900, a 100% increase on the previous year with projected figures of around 4,500 anticipated by 2025. Therefore, it is anticipated that the results of this study will be of benefit to the University in its endeavours to support future cohorts.

1.2.3 Participation in the study

The participants in this study were enrolled at the satellite campus of the main University as students during the course of the project, where I, the researcher, am employed as a lecturer. Ten students agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. These were non-traditional student parents who were not known to me prior to taking part in the research. The participants were enrolled on a range of degree courses and were at different stages of their programme of study. Their children, who are all studying in higher education at other universities, did not take part in the study, as the aim of this research project is to explore the experiences of the student parents.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This study aims to explore and promote further understanding of the experiences of a group of non-traditional student parents when studying in higher education at the same time as their traditional-age children, as there is a lack of research relating to this specific cohort. The initial aim is to identify what influenced these student parents to enter university in the period when their children were studying in higher education. A further aim is to investigate how the student parents are motivated and challenged during this period. These aims provide context for the final research aim, which is to critically evaluate in what way having a child at university impacts on the experiences of the student parents. In particular, the study is interested in whether this parent/child interaction impacts positively on motivation and areas identified in

the literature as problematic for non-traditional and mature students, or whether it represents an additional challenge that could lead to lack of academic success or even attrition.

The aims of the study have led to the following research questions:

- What influences some non-traditional student parents to undertake a course at university at the same time as their traditional-age student children?
- How are a particular group of non-traditional student parents motivated or challenged when studying in higher education at this time?
- In what ways does having children simultaneously studying at university impact on the experiences and achievement of this group of non-traditional student parents in higher education?

To meet these aims and effectively answer the research questions, the study commences with a critical synthesis of literature on non-traditional student experience to identify the need for this research. This includes research related to reasons for study (McCune et al. 2010; Swain and Hammond, 2011), mature student experience (Chapman, 2017; Waller, 2006), and challenges and risks to external relationships (Baxter and Britton, 2001). As the aim of the research is to consider the experiences of a specific group of individuals within a bounded situation, epistemologically, the study is located within the interpretivist paradigm with narrative case study as the methodological strategy of inquiry.

1.4 Rationale

There are a variety of motives for studying the experiences of non-traditional students in the context of this study. One of which is to allow providers of higher education a deeper understanding of a key group of university students. An area of concern for universities in the UK is the engagement, retention and achievement of students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds (Christie et al., 2005) or older students with parenting responsibilities (Bergman et al., 2014; Green Lister, 2003).

An extensive body of literature on non-traditional students suggests that, although they often bring high levels of motivation to learn and valuable past experience to the learning environment (McCune et al., 2010), they tend to face significant challenges during their time at university (Biesta et al., 2011; Chapman, 2017; Murray and Klinger, 2012; Waller, 2006).

Among these challenges are issues associated with the process of becoming a student, including stigmatisation by younger learners (Mallman and Lee, 2016), 'imposter syndrome' (Chapman, 2017) or anxieties about academic skills (Bohl et al., 2017; Shanahan, 2000). Overcoming or coping with these issues is essential for successful transition to higher education (Chapman, 2017), academic success, and retention (Cavallaro Johnson and Watson, 2004; Thomas, 2002). It has been suggested that higher education institutions do not always recognise or support these challenges (Bohl et al., 2017; David, 2011), which could lead to student demotivation, lack of achievement or even student withdrawal. Family support has been identified as being positively correlated to success and attrition rates among non-traditional and mature students (Webber, 2017). However, there appears to be little research into the nature and outcome of family support, particularly in relation to support from children, and how this may impact on academic achievement and success.

While the literature on non-traditional students is extensive, research on students in the age group of the participants in this study, who are older mature students aged 39 to 55, is generally overlooked. Statistical information on the numbers of students in this age group in higher education in the UK is not widely available. HESA (2020) classifies students into three age groups, under 21, 21-29 and over 30 but makes no reference to upper age groups. In 1996, Morley and Walsh suggested that although universities celebrated differentiation of thought and critical reflection, older women were underrepresented in certain areas. In the same volume, Maguire (1996) commented on the invisibility and marginalisation of older women in institutes of higher education, both as employees and as students, suggesting that literature on women in education at the time was largely concerned with ageism concerning the statutory working age and biopsychosocial aspects of aging. Almost 25 years later, this still appears to hold true to some extent as there are significant gaps in the literature relating to the experiences of students in this age group, and specifically on the influences, motivations and challenges of older, female, student parents which suggests a need for research in these areas.

The Pension Acts of 2011 and 2014 increased UK state pension age from 60 to 67 for women, with the prospect of further increase projected (Department for Work and Pensions, 2017b). This has had some impact on expected retirement age and provision for retirement (Kanabar and Kalwij, 2019). The UK Government has confirmed that the employment gap between women and men over 50 years of age is decreasing as women are staying in employment or searching for employment opportunities at a later age (Department for Work and Pensions, 2017a). It is feasible then that older female students, having seen a greater change in their state pension age than men, will increasingly attend university to gain skills for extended time

in employment. An increase in older students at university may well contribute to the, comparatively recent, phenomenon of parents and children simultaneously studying at university. As long as widening participation strategies increase access to higher education (Bolton, 2012; Connell-Smith and Hubble, 2018) and expected retirement age increases this trend looks likely to continue. Therefore, this study presents a relatively timely observation of what influences older, non-traditional students to enter university, and their motivations and challenges, particularly in relation to having children simultaneously studying in higher education.

From a more personal point of view, upon taking up a post as a lecturer at the University, I observed that a number of older, mature students from non-traditional backgrounds were parents of children who were also attending university. From a socio-psychological perspective, my interest in this dynamic was piqued. However, I became interested in the implications of this familial situation in relation to educational achievement when I noticed that the ongoing motivation and academic success of these students was unstable, with some achieving significantly better than others and some appearing to be challenged by their situation. As a lecturer in academic skills development providing a campus-wide service, my professional focus is to improve student motivation, engagement and achievement. I am, therefore, keen to expand my understanding of why some students achieve better than others in the context of my workplace. I am also aware that a greater understanding of the challenges and possible barriers to learning that students face will allow higher education providers to implement appropriate support mechanisms. This led me to consider whether this intergenerational student dynamic played a part in the motivation and success of the student parents or whether it represented an additional challenge. Review of literature on non-traditional students highlighted little acknowledgement of this situation, with no research specifically attending to this phenomenon. The literature review revealed only three brief allusions to this issue. In their study on mature student identity, challenges and risks to external relationships, Baxter and Britton (2001) mentioned that, for one of their participants, having a child at university at the same time presented a 'main strain' on the family dynamic (Baxter and Britton, 2001 p.93). While this suggested a negative experience, they stopped short of exploring why this may be the case or detailing the outcome of the situation. In contrast, Fragoso et al., (2013) and Webber (2017), mentioned that having a child at university impacted positively on the experience of the non-traditional, student parents in their studies. The paucity of information regarding this phenomenon and the desire to gain a deeper understanding of student achievement to fulfil my professional role provided the impetus for this study.

Overall, given the important contribution of non-traditional students to higher education in general, but more specifically in the context of this University and other universities with a strong commitment to widening participation, research that highlights issues relating to achievement and academic success can only be beneficial. It is envisaged that this study will offer a useful and judicious analysis that moves towards a theory of intergenerational student support and achievement for non-traditional, student parents and enhances the existing body of literature.

1.5 Significance of the Study

There are some potential significances of this study that contribute to increased knowledge of non-traditional, student parents. Firstly, this research addresses a number of gaps in the literature on non-traditional students in higher education. While there are numerous examples of research into the lived experiences of non-traditional student groups and their motivations to study (Busher and James, 2019; Swain and Hammond, 2011) and challenges (Baxtor and Britton, 2001), there are no examples, to my knowledge, that relate directly to student parents who are studying at the same time as their children and the effects of this intergenerational dynamic on the motivations and challenges of the parents. There is also a lack of investigation into what influences non-traditional students to enter higher education at a later stage in their life course. Overall, research on older, mature students tends to be lacking and this particular age group is overlooked. Given this dearth of information, the analysis of the experiences of the students in this study will extend knowledge in these areas.

In addition to addressing current gaps in the literature, a narrative case study approach will allow the analysis of rich data to uncover the experiences of non-traditional, student parent participants, which have not been researched previously. It is anticipated that this will generate a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the issues within this research. These insights could provide a significant contribution to critically developed targeted support, based on engagement with students and acknowledgement of specific concerns and possible barriers to learning, ultimately leading to better achievement and retention. While this small-scale case study does not intend to generalise across wider populations, it is envisaged that the theoretical frameworks developed from this research could be applied more widely to continue to generate knowledge and understanding of non-traditional students.

1.6 Outline of the Study

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. In addition to this introduction, which outlines the aims of the study and presents the context, rationale and significance of the study, six further chapters are provided.

Chapter 2 reviews and synthesizes literature on non-traditional students and their motivations and challenges and considers gaps that are relevant to this study. Chapter 3 clarifies the design of the study, including its limitations and ethical considerations. The ontological and epistemological concerns that provide the foundation for this interpretive, qualitative study are defined here. In addition, the use of narrative case study as a strategy of inquiry is justified. Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the techniques used to collect and analyse data and a rationale for their use. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study in relation to the first two research questions. It incorporates an interpretation and critical discussion of these findings in relation to the literature. Chapter 6 considers the interactions of the student parents and their children and presents conceptual models of positive and negative intergenerational student support and achievement that have been produced from the analysis of the data and that are framed within the lens of Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of practice and constructs of capital. Variations between individuals and reasons for positive or negative engagement are evaluated as the discussion moves towards a theory of intergenerational student support and achievement. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the study by presenting the contributions of the study and discussing the implications of the findings for higher education providers before making recommendations for further research in this area.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is, with reference to the literature, to provide background to this study of non-traditional student parents in higher education and demonstrate its importance. The literature will be presented according to themes and concepts that are considered relevant. An outline of some of the main theoretical concepts relating to non-traditional student experience is initially presented. The motivations and influences that non-traditional students may have for entering university are then examined, along with a comparison to those of traditional students. As the children of the non-traditional, student parents in this study have entered university directly from school or college and are, therefore, considered to be traditional students in terms of age and life stage pathway this comparison is considered to be appropriate to this study. Next, is an analysis of the recognised challenges that non-traditional students face, reasons why they may occur, and factors that may be specific to older non-traditional students. As the final aim of this study considers intergenerational student support within families, the impact of family support on wellbeing and achievement will then be discussed.

The French social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu has theorised widely on topics including education, the arts, culture and language (Grenfell, 2014; Wacquant, 2002), mainly to consider social structure, agency and transformation (Asimaki and Koustourakis, 2014). Bourdieu (1986) maintained, though, that his work is not only a theoretical lens but a methodological lens from which to consider social action and, as such, it has been applied widely to educational research settings (Costa et al., 2019; Grenfell and James, 1998). This study does not focus on the philosophical direction of Bourdieu's work and as a qualitative, inductive study does not use a theoretical framework to consider a hypothesis, rather, it draws on Bourdieu's concepts as an analytical lens at the data analysis stage of the research project. Consequently, to conclude this chapter, an outline of Bourdieu's theory of practice and how his concept of capital can be extended is presented.

This literature review does not provide an exhaustive appraisal of literature on non-traditional students due to the large body of work in this area, rather a range of key sources that relate appropriately to the study have been selected and synthesized. Current sources from a variety of contexts are included in this review, as are some earlier studies, which are considered relevant as my participants would have been school-leavers around the time of those studies, in the 1980s and 1990s.

It is recognised that an important element of this study is the dynamic of intergenerational students within the same family. Overall, however, there appears to be little mention of this in the literature and no specific research into this context. This and other relevant gaps in the literature will be highlighted throughout the chapter.

2.2 The Non-Traditional Student Experience

Based on a preliminary review of the literature, two of the main discourses that feature around non-traditional students entering higher education are that of motivation and that of challenge, which are pivotal to the aims of this study. Parallel to these discourses are the notions of self and identity. As the process of entering higher education and becoming a student impacts on constructs of self and identity and is often mentioned in the literature on non-traditional students (Christie et al., 2008; Kasworm, 2004; Mercer, 2007; Smith, 2017), a brief consideration of the use of the terms, 'self' and 'identity' as used in this literature review and throughout this paper is presented here. This is followed by a short identification of some key theoretical terms and concepts relating to student experience, in particular motivation and challenge, that are mentioned in this literature review.

2.2.1 Self vs. identity

The subject of self has been of philosophical interest since ancient times, not only in terms of metaphysics and ontology but also in terms of ethical issues and 'the natural sociability of human beings' (Remes and Sihvola, 2008, p.4). It continues to be of enduring interest in the fields of psychology and the social sciences (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012), as well as in education (Mercer, 2007; O'Boyle, 2014). Theorising on self and identity in the mid-20th century led to a flux of independently studied 'self-processes', such as 'self-awareness', 'self-reflection' or 'self-knowledge' and their impact on behaviour (Kroger, 2007). Although it is not the intention of this study to focus on specific elements of the various self-processes, the salience of the overarching concepts of self and identity in a socio-psychological sense, as motivational tools for change and achievement, is recognised.

The constructs of 'self' and 'identity' remain somewhat elusive, complex and abstract. At times the terms are used synonymously in the literature (Oyserman et al., 2012; Swann and Bosson, 2010), while at others, distinctions between the two are generated. Distinctions commonly

relate to the notions of self-concept and social identity (Baron and Byrne, 1997), which may equally be defined as personal or social identity (Hitlin, 2003; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), or individual versus relational self (Brewer and Gardner, 1996).

The first of these set of terms, relating to self-concept, personal or individual 'self', are predominantly considered to refer to what we know about ourselves (Smith and Mackie, 2000). This provides a set of distinctive beliefs and feelings that relate to one's personal individuality (Baron and Byrne, 1997). The cognitive structures of the self-concept may be used to make sense of an individual's surroundings or to set personal goals and motivations (Baumeister, 1986; Oyserman et al., 2012).

Conversely, it is social interaction with others, the membership of different groups, and the significance of personal relationships that lead to what could be defined as 'identity'. Group membership is generally considered to impact greatly on the individual's self-concept by guiding opinions, beliefs, judgements and actions about the self and others (Hitlin, 2003; Smith and Mackie, 2000).

For clarity, this paper will follow Baron and Byrne (1997) and use the term 'self' in connection with personal concepts, schemas, preferences and goals that relate to beliefs and feelings that an individual may have about him or herself. The term 'identity' will be used to express attitudes and traits that are generally connected to relationships with others, whether personally or socially constructed. It is acknowledged, however, that at times this distinction may not be appropriate and that the overarching term 'self and identity' may be more fitting.

In addition to the terms 'self' and 'identity', the concept of 'identity-development' in the context of becoming a student in higher education, (Baxtor and Britton, 2001) and the role of 'self-esteem' in the maintenance of motivation, achievement and success are key elements of this study. Self-esteem being the term most often used to describe how we feel about ourselves, with positive self-esteem generally considered to arise from affirmative feedback or favourable social interactions with others, leading to motivation and achievement (Oyserman et al., 2012; Smith and Mackie, 2000).

2.2.2 Theoretical concepts of motivation or challenge in education

The roles of self and identity as motivating forces for the individual are oft cited in theories of motivation. These theories have been widely applied to attempt to explain why students enter higher education, maintain motivation and achieve well or poorly.

Influential concepts, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are referred to extensively within the literature on education. Ryan and Deci (2000a) suggest that it is a human's natural curiosity and vitality that leads to self-motivation. For them, motivational forces are neither dispositional nor biological. They suggest that either 'people can be motivated into action because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion' (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, p.69). This dichotomy is represented in the seminal classification of motivation as two essential elements, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation respectively (Deci, 1971; Ryan and Deci, 1985). There is some suggestion that high levels of intrinsic motivation lead to increased self-esteem, sustained motivation and achievement, (Murphy and Roopchand, 2003), while extrinsic motivation, particularly in the sense of coercion or obligation rather than external rewards, may fail to engage individuals (Walker et al., 2006), or lead to reduced intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971), although most studies on individual motivation suggest combinations of the two are highly possible.

Ryan and Deci's (1985, 2000b) self-determination theory builds on the importance of intrinsic motivation in an attempt to explain why autonomously motivated students thrive (Reeve, 2002). Self-determination theory considers that three inherent needs, competence, autonomy and relatedness, must be met in order to provide individuals with intrinsic choices that lead to motivation. In self-determination theory motivation is categorised as autonomous, (learning for pleasure, according to one's own choices), and controlled, (learning due to pressure from others), with autonomous learning considered to be more rewarding and motivating than controlled (Rothes et al., 2017).

An alternative lens through which to consider motivation is that of the orientation towards future, possible selves as a strong motivator of action (Hoyle and Sherrill, 2006; Markus and Nurius, 1986). These imagined, future selves represent what individuals would like to be, or become, as a motivational force. Negative past experiences may provide an individual with an image of an undesirable, or even feared, self, thus signifying a strong motivation to avoid that becoming reality. However, the individual nature of these orientations renders them 'particularly sensitive to those situations that communicate new or inconsistent information about the self' (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p.956). This suggests that, although individual incentive-based motivators provide the drive to succeed, transition and its impact on self, the actions of others or lack of support can challenge and weaken them. Recent considerations of how students can be encouraged to enter higher education suggest that aspiration to succeed is not enough as a motivating factor, an expectation to succeed or a probable future self is equally as important (Harrison, 2018; Harrison and Waller, 2018). The notion of future, possible or ideal selves builds on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Rogers' (1959) self-

actualization theories (McLeod, 2007). These theories purport that where a person's ideal self is congruent with their actual behaviour, this ideal self-concept leads to positive wellbeing and achievement. Conversely, incongruence between the actual and ideal self can lead to challenge and pressure.

Throughout the life course, individuals are often considered to be influenced by significant stages, life events and transitions that provide motivation for action (Jamieson, 2012). A life course perspective allows a recognition of how developmental stages interlink with complex personal issues relating to social context and relationships, and how these impact on motivation and transition (Turner et al., 2004). Nurmi (1992) suggests that traditionally, educational goals tend to be associated with the young adult stage of life, whereas goals in middle age often relate to the lives of one's children. However, traditional constructs are increasingly challenged due to a changing social world. This has led to a rise in life events taking place at less usual stages than would be considered traditional (Wohlkinger et al., 2011). While transition can be a motivating experience, events that are 'out of synch' with the usual expectations of the life course may cause tensions that lead to alienation and exclusion (Christie et al., 2008).

The suggestion that periods of transition create challenge is discussed widely in Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical work on social action and this, along with further discussion of his theory of practice will be considered in greater detail in section 2.5.1. A principle element of Bourdieu's theory of practice is its intention to bridge the dichotomy of subjectivism and objectivism or whether action is driven by individual agency or institutional structure (Webb et al., 2010). Navarro (2006) suggests that for Bourdieu, human interaction is initially driven by self-interest but with the ultimate aim of being able to function within a specific social structure or field. However, while this may lead to motivated behaviour initially, power struggles and misrecognition of opportunities may challenge achievement.

Applying these and other motivational concepts to non-traditional students is a complex undertaking given that non-traditional students, as a group, are far from homogenous (Osborn et al., 2004) and a wide range of variables, including age, gender and socioeconomic status, could be said to influence the motivational stance of any individual student (Stevenson and Clegg, 2013). An extensive body of literature relating to non-traditional students aims to do this and numerous categories are attributed to them to define these variables. The participants in this study bridge various categories and could have several titles ascribed to them, as they are older, mature, working-class, female, student parents. These categories are discussed within this literature review and each of the terms may be used independently or in conjunction. However, most studies are defined as researching non-traditional and/or mature students, so

as an overarching term to describe the subjects of this review, I will mainly use non-traditional, mature students.

2.3 Motivations for Studying in Higher Education

There can be little doubt why motivation is highly valued as a construct of social action, given the positive outcomes it can lead to. In arenas ranging from sport and business to the field of education, active interest and energised participation leading to goal achievement is cherished (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009). Not only is a motivated individual likely to succeed in achieving tangible positive results but confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing are likely to be maintained or improved (Deci and Ryan, 1995). It is for these reasons that the concept of motivation, in innumerable contexts, continues to be highly researched. Examination of the complex range of influences and motivations that students have for entering higher education is considered to be key to understanding engagement and achievement (Rothes et al., 2017; Harrison, 2018; Harrison & Waller, 2018) and is, therefore, of enduring interest. A deeper understanding and recognition of what influences non-traditional, mature students to enter university and maintain motivation throughout their studies is essential if universities are to provide person-centred support to a diverse range of students to successfully achieve their goals and aims while studying alongside each other.

In the context of this study, a review of literature on the influences and motivations of non-traditional, mature students in general provides a setting for the understanding of non-traditional, student parents with traditional-aged children simultaneously studying at university. First, some of the diverse motivational influences that impact on non-traditional, mature students' reasons for entering higher education are considered before discussing differences between traditional and non-traditional students. A critical evaluation of studies that have been undertaken specifically on older mature students follows.

2.3.1 Motivational influences on non-traditional and mature students

Non-traditional students in UK higher education institutions are not uniform in terms of age, life experience and socioeconomic status, and their reasons for studying at university are, understandably, diverse and personal (McCune et al., 2010; Waller, 2006). Each of these variables has the potential to impact on motivation for entering higher education so it is hardly surprising that this heterogeneity has resulted in a wide body of literature, in a variety of

contexts, which examines the motivations and reasons for non-traditional students to enter higher education.

Non-traditional and mature students come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, which Busher and James (2019) suggest are influential on their motivations and choices when deciding to return to study. However, many originate from relatively poor, working-class backgrounds (Busher and James, 2019; McCune et al., 2010; Stevenson and Clegg, 2013). Personal circumstances often prevented these students from entering higher education as traditional students (Jamieson, 2007; McCune et al., 2010), with many actively discouraged by parents and teachers (Walters, 2000). This may have been due to a greater societal expectation for young people to leave school aged 16 (Jenkins, 2017). However, in their study of student motivations for entering higher education in the late 1990s, Britton and Baxtor (1999) suggest that opportunities for working class students were often denied due to class and gender stereotypes. The traditional expectations of the era being that young men were expected to follow in the footsteps of parents and grandparents and to undertake manual roles, while there was an expectation of marriage and children for women with little value placed on their education (Tett, 2000). In some cases, difficult upbringings in disadvantaged contexts affected attitudes towards learning at a younger age (Stevenson and Clegg, 2013) and confidence in the ability to continue learning (Brine and Waller, 2004; Busher and James, 2019). Young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds may not have been provided with an expectation to achieve beyond compulsory education, leaving them without a sense of possibility of further academic achievement (Harrison, 2018; Harrison and Waller, 2018). This sense of unfulfilled potential and denied opportunity is often carried within individuals as a sense of personal regret that leads to a return to education (Waller, 2006). This may be the culmination of a personal life goal that has been previously suppressed (O'Shea, 2015). The notion of working towards a different future through participation in higher education could, therefore, be linked to the idea of a better future possible self (Markus and Nurius, 1986), based on the imbalance between the person or situation an individual is currently experiencing and the one they would like to experience.

Many non-traditional, mature students, particularly those with low-level educational qualifications, express dissatisfaction with their current or previous employment and enter higher education to improve their prospects in terms of work satisfaction (Shanahan, 2000). Osborne et al. (2004) concur that non-traditional, mature students are not only extrinsically motivated to seek a degree or further qualifications to find better pay but to obtain more job satisfaction and reward from their professional life. Indeed, while increased qualifications may be seen as a route to improved chances of employment, these ambitions are often somewhat

vague for non-traditional, mature students (McCune et al., 2010; Osborne et al., 2004). The literature suggests that for most non-traditional, mature students their vision for the future relates to increased opportunity, fulfilment and security, as well as generally better working conditions, rather than specific professional ambition (Busher and James, 2019; O'Shea and Stone, 2011; Walters, 2000). This motivational desire for self-development and improvement is particularly salient amongst those who have endured difficulties and disadvantage at a younger age (Osborne et al., 2004; O'Shea, 2015; Stevenson and Clegg, 2013).

In contrast to younger students, mature students have been found to be more likely to state that an altruistic desire to help others or contribute to society has influenced their decision to study in higher education, (McCune et al., 2010; Reay et al., 2002). This is often reflected in their course choice with vocational or professional courses, such as teaching, nursing and social work, attracting relatively high numbers of non-traditional, mature students, in particular women (UCAS, 2018). Britton and Baxtor (1999) suggest that women who return to work after having children often experience downward mobility stemming from their re-entry to employment on a part-time basis or their acceptance of poorly paid occupations to fit around their children. This frequently seems to be the case when women take an extended period of leave from employment to raise children (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). Therefore, a combination of desire to improve their lives and those of others, is often a strong motivator for some women to enter higher education (McCune et al., 2010; Reay et al., 2002).

Two common themes emerge in research on the motivations of non-traditional student parents, particularly those with younger children, that of wanting a better life for themselves and their children (O'Shea, 2015; Stevenson and Clegg, 2013), and the desire to present a positive role model for their children (Osborne et al., 2004; Reay et al., 2002). Many link this to their own experience of having a parent with limited life experiences and opportunities, as well as the desire to do better and to encourage their children's ambitions (Osborne et al., 2004; Walters, 2000). They are often prepared to face financial sacrifice whilst studying in order to provide future financial stability for their children (O'Shea, 2015). Mercer and Saunders (2004) comment on how the incentive to study for one of their participants was for her children to see her do well and to show them what was available for their future options. It could be said, therefore, that student parents are inspired to study by their children, albeit often indirectly. While most research centres on the parents of younger children, a participant in Osborne et al.'s (2004) study mentioned that her children entering university had provided her with the impetus to study herself, "the children are in their late teens and doing well academically, so why can't I?" (Osborne et al., 2004, p.301). However, this was not a focus of their study and was only briefly mentioned. Indeed, the dynamic of parents entering university

at the same time as their children and whether this inspires them to enter higher education, in turn providing the motivation to achieve, does not appear to have been previously investigated.

Research that focuses on who inspires mature students to study is limited, usually warranting no more than a scant mention. Jamieson (2007) comments that inspiration often appears to come from peers and siblings, with a particularly strong desire to prove themselves to others who have already gained degrees. Her study of older, mature learners does not, however, take variables such as socio-economic background into account. This is considered by Ronnie (2016), who suggests that although for middle class students in South Africa inspiration does indeed appear to come from peers and family members, that does not appear to be the case for working class students. She proposes that students from a working class background may lack the social capital, or shared student status, provided for middle class students by their peers and family members, so their inspiration to study may be extrinsically provided through a desire for career development and social mobility, rather than inspired by significant others (Ronnie, 2016). This highlights the question of who or what influences and motivates non-traditional, mature students, which is considered within the context of this study.

The concept of change, both professional and personal, is woven into the literature that considers the motivations of non-traditional, mature students to return to learning (Britton and Baxtor, 1999; Osborne et al., 2004; Stevenson and Clegg, 2013). These students may display a desire for self-discovery (Mercer, 2007) or the chance to 'rewrite one's life story' (Shanahan, 2000, p.156). Gendered narratives feature strongly in this, with Shanahan (2000), in her phenomenological study of the lived experiences of five older female students finding evidence to suggest that the desire to move on from their ingrained identities as parents and spouses was an agent for change that led them to return to education (Shanahan, 2000, p.157). In many cases, a critical life event, such as divorce or bereavement, is the catalyst for such change (Gill et al., 2015; McCune et al., 2010; Waller, 2006). However, perhaps unsurprisingly given the tendency not to focus on older mature students in the literature, critical life stage events that could specifically affect older women, such as children transitioning from adolescence into adulthood and entering university, are often omitted from the literature. This results in a paucity of research on how these changes impact the decision-making processes of older mature students who decide to become students.

2.3.2 Traditional and non-traditional student motivations

A common distinction is made between traditional and non-traditional learners in higher education (Dill and Henley, 1998; McCune et al., 2010). This is generally based on the

principles of age difference and learning trajectories, with traditional learners defined as younger students entering university in a relatively linear path directly from school or further education, and non-traditional learners as adults returning to learning after a period of absence (Bye et al., 2007; Dill and Henley, 1998; McCune et al., 2010). The motivational stances of these, sometimes considerably different, types of learner have been intensely researched over the last three decades or so.

While both sets of students display intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for entering higher education, differences are apparent (Busher and James, 2019; McCune et al., 2010; Pugh, 2019). The extrinsic focus of entering university to improve future employment chances tends to be a more prevalent motivating force among traditional students than non-traditional students (Busher and James, 2019). Traditional students, however, frequently exhibit a great deal of uncertainty about their future roles in life or career pathways (Shafi and Rose, 2014). This would appear to indicate that they may have a less well-defined notion of their future selves (Markus and Nurius, 2016) than non-traditional students. While gaining a degree is a stage of employment progression for traditional students, they may still be considering the direction of their future career paths (Shafi and Rose, 2014). As adolescents who have not yet fully progressed to adulthood, they may still be finding their sense of direction in the process of self-development (Arnett, 2000). Harrison (2018, p.5) claims that current policy agendas on widening participation fail to recognise that younger students from disadvantaged backgrounds have low expectations in terms of what they believe they can achieve, leaving them with under-developed 'probable future selves' and lack of clarity on their possible developmental pathways. On the other hand, while professional development may play a part in enticing non-traditional, mature students back into the education system, this is not necessarily the principle reason for choosing to study in higher education. This may be linked to other motivations, such as personal self-development (Busher and James, 2019) or the provision of financial security for others (O'Shea, 2015).

Conversely, traditional students are thought to display fewer intrinsic reasons for studying than mature students in that they appear to have less interest in learning for learning's sake (Jamieson, 2007; Novotny et al., 2019). Research indicates, however, that non-traditional students are highly likely to cite a love of learning and a search for new knowledge as intrinsic reasons for studying at university (McCune et al., 2010; Reay et al., 2002; Silverstein et al., 2002) and to 'display enthusiasm for learning' (Mallman and Lee, 2016 p.691). In fact, Novotny et al. (2019) found that not only did traditional students have lower levels of intrinsic motivation than non-traditional students, but an absence of motivation to study, or amotivation, was more common in traditional students, although their quantitative study failed to identify specifically

why this may be. It has been suggested that since the rise in tuition fees in 2012, some students may be more likely to identify as customers than learners, leading to less interest in what is being taught and less responsibility for learning and a higher expectation of attainment in return for fees (Tomlinson, 2016; Woodall et al., 2014). In their relatively large-scale survey of students studying at 35 universities across the UK, Bunce et al., (2017) found a correlation between higher consumer identity and lower learner identity, with mature students more likely to have a lower consumer identity than traditional-aged students, leading to increased intrinsic motivation.

Theories of emerging adulthood as a life stage have emerged in recent years, based on the high proportion of young people entering tertiary education and, consequently, 'relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations', such as marriage and parenthood (Arnett, 2000, p.469; 2011). Not surprisingly then, perhaps, traditional students are much more likely to state that having an active social life and living away from home are key reasons for choosing to go to university (McCune et al., 2010; Waller, 2006). A desire to widen their circle of friends and enjoy the experience of going to university itself is often a central motivating factor for traditional students, unlike non-traditional students (McCune et al., 2010; Swain and Hammond, 2011).

In addition to the social element of attending university, an increasingly popular phenomenon among young students is to delay entry to university, which may be to take a gap year. The gap year option, which usually provides younger students with travel or casual work experience, delays entrance to higher education by at least a year, thereby increasing the age range of traditional students (Curtis, 2014; Vogt, 2018). Current statistics for students entering university following a gap year are difficult to obtain but, according to the Department of Education (2012) rose from 29.5% of students in 2005 to 34.1% in 2010, suggesting that this phenomenon is now common. In UK university settings, students aged 21 and over are considered to be mature students based on the age that traditional-age students usually graduate (Jamieson, 2007). Many studies on the motivations and journeys of mature students often follow this distinction, setting a lower age limit at 21 or perhaps 23 years, to account for delayed entry due to gap year participation or similar (Britton and Baxter, 1999; Busher and James, 2019; Stevenson and Clegg, 2013). A problematic issue raised by this classification is the lack of differentiation between younger and older mature students.

Chung et al. (2014) found age to be the most common defining category during their systematic review into definitions of non-traditional students in research on tertiary students, with 83% of their reviewed studies identifying traditional students as 24 years and under. While, during their systematic review of literature to consider factors affecting the success of

mature students, a major finding of Hayden et al. (2016, p.129) was that of ambiguity in definition of mature age, with some studies classifying over 25s as 'older mature students' and classification of those aged 35 and over as 'very mature students'. Even researchers who set the lower age limit in their studies relatively high, such as Shafi and Rose (2014) or Bohl et al. (2017), who studied participants aged 27 to 57 and 28 to 56 respectively, present their findings on non-traditional students' motivations and challenges collectively with no consideration given to possible distinctions between younger and older non-traditional students. As Mallman and Lee (2014, p.685) point out, 'the term "mature age" is not nuanced enough to account for the varying experiences of older entry students'. There appears to be, in fact, little or no consideration throughout the literature that younger 'mature students' may have more in common with traditional students, particularly those that have delayed entry to university for a short time.

The few studies that provide some distinction between younger and older mature students, tend not to specifically consider older age groups. Swain and Hammond (2011) considered the motivations and outcomes of two groups of part-time university students based on age. Their younger participants were aged 21-30 and under while their older group were aged 31-46. They found overlapping similarities in motivations to study, which may have been due to the part-time nature of their studies or, indeed, the clear limitation of having a sample size of only 6 in their upper age group. They did, however, find evidence to suggest differences based on life stage trajectories between younger and older students, which may warrant further investigation. This scarcity of literature that considers differentiation between younger and older mature students suggests a need not only for research on the differing motivations of traditional and non-traditional students, but for a more nuanced investigation into older non-traditional students and their motivations for entering higher education.

2.3.3 Older mature students' motivations to enter higher education

Research that is dedicated to older mature students is, to date, sparse and has tended to focus on post-graduate students from middle-class backgrounds, who have already achieved first degrees (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2013; Silverstein et al., 2002), or on part-time or distance learners (Jamieson, 2007). There are some studies where a distinction is made between 'middle-aged' (39-59 years old) and 'older' (60+ years) students (Jamieson, 2007, 2012; Silverstein et al., 2002). They report differences between the two age groups in terms of motivation to study. While participants aged 60 or over may enter higher education as a retirement activity, keen on learning for intrinsic reasons, such as personal interest or cognitive

development, those aged 39-59 years old may remain invested in employment opportunities and career development (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2017; Jamieson, 2007; Silverstein et al., 2002).

Isopahkala-Bouret's (2017) participants in their 40s and 50s undertaking a master's degree in Finland, where education in middle-age is encouraged, cited employment benefits and career advancement as the principle agent for engagement and learning. However, all were working in a professional capacity where a master's degree was highly valued and would lead to development within their professional field. The same motivations may not be the case for participants in this study, who are entering higher education without previous engagement in tertiary education. These motivations could be said to correspond to the notion of 'active ageing' in association with policies developed in areas of demographically older populations to encourage later employment and retirement (Boudiny and Mortelmans, 2011; Davey, 2002).

In many cases, older student motivations and experiences are explored through the lens of active ageing (Davey, 2002; Jamieson, 2012) and the subjective wellbeing of older learners (Jenkins and Mostafa, 2015). This concept focuses on older student participation as a means of maintaining health and purpose through mental stimulation and social interaction, thus leading to successful ageing (Davey, 2002; Hardy et al., 2018).

McAllister's (2010) small-scale exploratory study on older, working class students in Scotland, set within a critical realism paradigm, argued against the consideration of their education purely from an active ageing perspective. Along with other critical social gerontologists, he suggests that active ageing discourses are often too narrow, perpetuating negative stereotypes of ageing and failing to account for individual life trajectories (McAllister, 2010; Phillipson, 2000). He proposes that learning in later life offers possibilities to empower and transform older, working-class learners. Recognizing their disadvantaged position, he suggests a critical educational gerontology to evaluate their experiences and promote greater equality of educational opportunity. The motivations of his participants to enter higher education were multiple and complex, as has been observed throughout the literature, only partially relating to principles of active ageing relating to health or employment.

Additionally, older learners in contemporary society may not consider themselves old. Borzumato-Gainey et al., (2009) found the disparity between subjective age and chronological age widened for the women in their study as they got older. This suggests that the lens of active ageing is too limiting from which to consider the circumstances of highly non-traditional, older students, particularly those in a pre-retirement situation.

A common theme embedded in the research on mature students, prevalent in current research on older mature students, is that of significant life events, such as bereavement or forced

unemployment, providing the momentum to enter higher education (Jamieson, 2007; McAllister, 2010; Silverstein, 2002). Jamieson's (2012) research on how life transitions can lead to engagement in formal study found that disruption to routine and self-reflection, leading to a desire for personal development, were most often cited as motivations for older mature students entering higher education. If this is the case, rather than having clear intrinsic or extrinsic motivations, these less well-defined reasons for entering higher education may not only motivate but contribute to the various challenges that have been identified within the literature in relation to non-traditional, older mature students.

2.4 Challenges

While motivational forces provide the impetus for entering higher education and working towards the achievement of educational goals, these concepts are not fixed entities. They have the possibility to be 'diminished and crushed, and even sometimes rejected' (Ryan and Deci, 2000a, p.68). Demotivation may bring about challenges and risks that lead to lack of educational success, anxiety or, even, discontinuation of study. The challenges and risks faced by individuals when encountering new social experiences that lead to periods of transitional self-development are well-documented, as well as the correlation between maintaining a positive sense of self and wellbeing during these experiences through constructive and supportive interactions with others (Johnson and Robson, 1999; O'Shea and Stone, 2011). Taylor and House (2010) categorised types of challenge according to learner status. They found mature students more likely to cite lack of academic ability as a challenge than, for example, students of low socioeconomic background, who reported more financial challenges, whereas parents reported more issues with role conflict. Additionally, mature students often see late educational opportunities as the last chance to succeed academically where they have not before, thus increasing personal pressures and anxiety about academic success (Shanahan, 2000). For highly non-traditional students, such as those in this study, it is likely that they face a myriad of complex challenges that may relate to academic skills and ability, difficulties brought about by transition and development of self and identity, or constraints due to the multiple demands of external commitments, each of which will be discussed in more detail in this section.

2.4.1 The student environment

Entering the student environment itself can be challenging for non-traditional and mature students. For many, the concept of moving from familiar habitus and surroundings, where their experience and position may have been well-respected, into an environment where they are suddenly 'a little fish in a big sea' presents difficulties (Johnson and Robson, 1999, p.281).

Non-traditional and mature students are often viewed favourably by academic staff due to their willingness to participate in lectures and learn (McCune et al., 2010). However, this motivation to learn for the sake of learning, or desire for personal development, can present a challenge if it conflicts with the motivations of younger students. Older students may be viewed negatively by traditional students for their eagerness to participate and learn, prompting stigmatisation and marginalisation from younger learners for being too keen, creating an 'us and them' mentality, at least on university campuses that attract large numbers of traditional-aged learners (Mallman and Lee, 2016). The older participants in Mallman and Lee's (2016) study on how mature students negotiate university culture, felt they had to tone down their enthusiasm to avoid 'snide comments and glances' (Mallman and Lee, 2016, p.691), leaving them unwilling to ask questions in class and feeling isolated.

Age is often cited as an issue for mature students. Bohl et al., (2017) suggest that a generation gap was a specific challenge for the participants in their study, who felt alienated and disregarded on the basis of age, not only by younger students but by academics. While their study may not be generalisable due to the small number of participants and singular context, it echoes the comments of Stone and O'Shea (2019) that older students are often considered somehow deficient due to their late entry into higher education. The concept of age as an issue is a common thread throughout much of the literature on mature students, with the start of a course identified as a particularly problematic period when older students may be wary of younger students (Kasworm, 2004). Some mature students have been identified as isolating themselves initially (O'Boyle, 2014), perhaps due to a tendency to compare themselves negatively to younger students (Stevens, 2003). This appeared to be the situation for 'Ewan', a 34-year-old male student in Cavallaro Johnson and Watson's (2004) case study. His initial unease and concerns about how he would fit in were evident as he described himself as feeling adrift in a 'sea of young faces' and referred to himself as an 'old bloke' (p.478), highlighting his personal concerns regarding age, and possibly gender as the younger students on his course were predominantly female. These concerns abated later in the year as a situation of mutual respect and learning developed between the mature and younger students on his course. Simon et al., (2020) also found experience sharing to be an important element of age friendly universities. In their study, younger learners felt they benefited from the shared

experiences and perspectives of older learners and older learners felt this was something they could give to the university. This highlights the positive aspects of promoting intergenerational understanding and shared experience, which is a concern of this study.

Age is, however, not the only challenge for non-traditional students of low socioeconomic origins. Entry into the environment of higher education may lead to disjuncture between their working-class background and perceived status in a higher education setting (Reay, 2003; Ronnie, 2016; Simon et al., 2020). A common outcome being 'imposter syndrome', where students may 'feel like a fraud' (O'Shea, 2015, p.251) or not good enough to be there (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Ewan's comments from Cavallaro Johnson and Watson's study (2004) indicate that he was experiencing imposter syndrome. Levels of imposter syndrome may vary depending on the type of higher education institute (Reay et al., 2010) although social inequality is more likely to be felt by working-class students, particularly at elite establishments (Reay et al., 2009) with perceived class disjuncture leading to attrition (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Lack of confidence in academic ability

Understandably perhaps, given that older, non-traditional students may have had a long absence from academic studies or have a low level of previous academic achievement, difficulty with the academic component of higher education courses is often reported in the literature (Bohl et al., 2017; O'Brien et al., 2009). This is predominant at the start of a course of academic study, when non-traditional or mature learners may have low self-esteem, or low confidence in their academic ability (Busher and James, 2019; Kasworm, 2004), leading to fear of judgement from others (Chapman, 2017).

While lack of confidence or low self-esteem is a prevalent theme in the literature there is a tendency to either consider these traits as individual characteristics, or to accept them as part of the process of entering higher education as a non-traditional student. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) argue that this is not the case, that they are a product of working-class constructs based on long-term poverty and inequalities. Negative previous achievement-related experiences, perhaps affected by sociocultural issues or lack of availability of opportunity, may impact on expectancy-related and task-value beliefs leading to low self-esteem or belief in personal or academic competence (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002; Harrison, 2018; Harrison and Waller, 2018). It seems likely that this habitus is particularly ingrained in older students of low socioeconomic background. Stone and O'Shea (2019) propose that older learners are often 'framed in a narrative of disadvantage' or considered to be somewhat

'deficient' in comparison to traditional students as they may not have up-to-date academic skills (Stone and O'Shea, 2019, p.59). They suggest that, often valuable, life skills or work experience go unrecognised or are disregarded. Indeed, it is possible that what is considered to be lack of academic ability by students, or faculty, is merely lack of academic experience that could be improved with appropriate acknowledgement and support.

Mature students often have considerable life or professional experience upon entry into university (Smith, 2017). Professional experience may, however, be a double-edged sword; a valuable source of practical knowledge on one hand, but a source of tension and conflict on the other. Murray and Klinger (2012) considered the case of 'Judy', a mature student on an Early Childhood Education degree programme with child-rearing experience of her own seven children in addition to many years' experience of working with young children. This highly relevant experience led Judy to report a sense of superiority over younger students and, even lecturers, who she felt that she could 'run rings round' (Murray and Klinger, 2012, p.127). She further reported boredom, irritation with organisational systems and disagreement with theory. Murray and Klinger (2012) suggest that this apparent overconfidence in her practical experience may have been the result of deeper insecurities about her academic ability, leading them to question whether higher education institutions are adequately supporting experienced older learners and managing their expectations and skills. While a single case study cannot be considered to generalise to other highly experienced mature students, this example brings to light some of the, currently under-acknowledged, challenges non-traditional and mature students may face. However, the suggestion that these difficulties in adjusting to the student experience are based on underlying insecurities about academic ability may be only part of the picture. Murray and Klinger (2012) fail to mention the possibility that Judy's existing identity, based on her considerable life and professional experience, may be threatened by the experience of transitioning to becoming a student and the ensuing development of student identity.

2.4.3 Threatened identity and risk to relationships

Non-traditional and mature students frequently choose to enter higher education with the aim of personal development, however, the difficulties presented by the development of self and identity during this time of transition are often underestimated (Shanahan, 2000). Transition can be defined as the process of passing between one fairly stable state to another fairly stable state, triggered by change and characterised by altered dynamics and milestones, (Meleis, 2010). While change can be considered positive, the process of transition may well

be a challenging event that triggers 'a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and requires a corresponding change in one's behaviour and relationships' (Schlossberg, 1981, p.5). These significant changes of life circumstances have the capacity to alter one's existing sense of self and identity, particularly during the early stages of disruption and re-evaluation (Tobell and Burton, 2015), leading to a 'loss of a part of oneself' (Brygola, 2011, p.76).

Initial excitement is often counteracted by a sense of loss and dislocation as students start to leave behind elements of their old identities and become accustomed to new communities of practice (Wenger, 1999). This can lead to a rollercoaster of emotions during the initial period of entry to higher education (Christie et al., 2008; Shanahan, 2000). Reported low levels of self-esteem among non-traditional and mature students during this time could make the process of transition and renegotiation of self and identity painful and protracted (Busher and James, 2019; Kasworm, 2004).

Stevens (2003) suggests that the sense of threat to self to highly non-traditional students and ensuing high levels of anxiety for non-traditional and mature students during their early experiences as students, may develop from feelings of shame at 'doing something so strange to sub-cultural expectations' (Stevens, 2003, p.241). The gradual development of student identity for his participants often led to strain on relationships, both external and within the university environment, along the way. Breakdown or threat to existing relationships due to incomprehension of the emerging norms associated with the new identity of the students was a concern, while negative self-comparison with younger students hindered development of student identity and created further anxiety (Stevens, 2003). This may be most problematic for working-class students, who lack the initial social and cultural capital required to ease transition into higher education (Reay et al., 2002; Ronnie, 2016; Tett, 2000). As working-class students construct and reconstruct identity, many gain the cultural capital required to succeed at university in the form of new knowledge and academic language (Baxtor and Britton, 2001; O'Boyle, 2015). However, this newly acquired 'university speak' (O'Boyle, 2015, p.93) may then become an unanticipated cause of strain, or even risk, to relationships with family members and friends, who themselves struggle to come to terms with the emerging identity of the student. Tensions between the development of new individual identity and the desire to maintain the status quo in external relationships and structures may lead, therefore, to contested identities (Chapman, 2017); a juggling, not only of roles, but of identity (Baxtor and Britton, 2001; O'Boyle, 2014).

2.4.4 Multiple roles and transitions

There is a wide consensus in the literature that non-traditional students, particularly parents, are likely to have competing demands in relation to home, work and study (Fairchild, 2003; Kahu et al., 2014; Lin, 2016; Smith, 2019). There is also a suggestion that, despite advances in feminist agendas in the last 30 years, stereotypically gendered roles for women as homemakers and principal care providers for children persist (Hope and Quinlan, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2009). Stone and O'Shea, (2013) argue that previous low educational levels and employment status may contribute to this for students of low socioeconomic background. Managing these demands often requires an element of adjustment (Brooks, 2013; Shanahan, 2000), such as studying at home when children are in bed or at school (Heagney and Benson, 2017; Stone and O'Shea, 2013), and managing limited space that is shared with family (Kahu et al., 2014).

Time constraints due to multiple demands may lead to role strain and feelings of guilt. Indeed, the concept of guilt features strongly in literature on non-traditional students with multiple roles and responsibilities (Fairchild, 2003; Ramsey et al., 2007; Shanahan, 2000; Smith, 2017; 2019). Shanahan (2000) suggests that for the mature students in her study who felt guilty about time spent on studies rather than other roles, this was often manifest as anxiety about academic capability. Stone and O'Shea (2013) propose, however, that gendered differences are apparent in dialogues surrounding guilt in their study of male and female mature students in Australia. The female participants in their research tended to report a negative impact on family relationships during their studies as quality time with family was compromised or adjustments were required from other family members. This led to an overriding feeling of guilt, often defined as 'selfishness' for spending less time with their families than previously and self-blame for any issues arising within the family. Many older female participants in their study mentioned the challenge of ageing parents and feelings of guilt and selfishness in relation to their 'abandonment' for their studies (Stone and O'Shea, 2013, p.104). The male participants, on the other hand, were more likely to state that their time for studying at home was not complicated by childcare responsibilities. They expressed a requirement to be selfish to achieve their goals as a sense of entitlement rather than guilt, perhaps based on their affiliation to their traditional role of breadwinner and provider.

In addition to managing multiple roles, literature on life stages and ageing highlights multiple transitions for women associated with the midlife stage of adult development. These include physical aspects, such as menopause and signs of ageing, and psychosocial issues, for instance, the impact of children growing up and leaving home, re-evaluation of or changes in relationship status, including divorce or widowhood, and experiencing the death of, or caring

for, ageing parents (Borzumato-Gainey et al., 2009; Dare, 2011). Traditionally, these transitions are portrayed as physically debilitating and emotionally challenging (Turner et al., 2004). Borzumato-Gainey et al. (2009) suggest that media representations of menopause and physical aging as problematic and undesirable may damage the self-esteem of women experiencing midlife transitions, leading to a decrease in life satisfaction. Additionally, normative constructs of motherhood as desirable may define 'empty nest syndrome', where children leave home to become independent, as an experience that leads to depression and loss (Turner et al., 2004). Dare (2011), however, reports that for some women this represents a liberating opportunity for personal growth as well as appreciation that their children are developing well and becoming more independent. Additionally, she found that menopause is more likely to be an irritation and discomfort than a cause for distress, while the participants in de Salis et al.'s (2018) study presented overlapping narratives of normality, struggle and liberation. This suggests that while these transitions may be challenging, they may not be likely to represent a barrier to learning at the midlife stage.

Dare (2011) goes on to suggest that women are more likely than men to shoulder the responsibility of caring for aging parents. The onset of this obligation and its inherent responsibilities are likely to present stress and challenge (Dare, 2011) and could lead to depression (Turner et al., 2004) yet, again, this appears not to feature in the literature on non-traditional students. For women who are experiencing divorce that has led to a breakdown of family and social networks during the midlife stage, these transitions may be particularly challenging as strong support networks have been found to positively correlate to successful midlife transitions (Borzumato-Gainey et al., 2009; Crowley, 2019; Sakraida, 2005).

Overall, within literature on non-traditional students focusing on multiple roles that need to be balanced or accommodated while studying, and the challenges associated with the transition to becoming a student, there is little mention of specific transitions associated with mid-life stages that may be occurring for older, female, non-traditional students. This represents additional gaps in the research on this under-represented group.

2.5 Family Support

The principal support network considered to counteract the challenges associated with non-traditional students studying at university and to minimise risk to relationships is generally specified in the literature as family support (Bohl et al., 2017; Fairchild, 2003; Kirby et al., 2004; Swain and Hammond, 2011; Webber, 2017). Conversely, a lack of family support is often cited as a reason for lack of achievement or attrition (Kahu et al., 2014; Kasworm, 2004; Lin, 2016;

Van Rhijn et al., 2016), with Hope and Quinlan (2020) recognising that mature students of low socioeconomic origin would not even be able to enter university without support from family. It appears evident then that a great deal of value is placed on family support by non-traditional students, yet Heagney and Benson (2017) suggest that universities remain largely unaware of this, recommending the need for a more student-centred approach to acknowledge this.

2.5.1 The nature of family support

The literature discussing family support identifies partners as most likely to provide emotional and social support (Heagney and Benson, 2017; Ramsey et al., 2007; Wong and Kwok, 1997). However, when they lack understanding of the requirements of university, this may be limited to relatively superficial encouragement (Hope and Quinlan, 2020; Webber, 2017). Financial and practical support may also be provided by partners (Webber, 2017). Webber (2015) found that when the husbands of the participants in her study changed their roles at home and spent more time with children in order to support their wives while they studied, feelings of guilt regarding family relationships were reduced and there was a positive impact on the achievement levels of the students. However, there are also suggestions in the literature that most students would appreciate more support (Ramsay et al., 2007) and that male partners may not participate equally in domestic roles in the home (Vaccaro and Lovell, 2010). Cultural and class differences may impact on levels of family support. Brooks (2013) considered the differences in the support patterns and family relationships between student parents in the UK and student parents in Denmark. She found more equality of domestic roles in Denmark and likelihood that both husband and wife had experience of attending university across all the age groups in her study. It is acknowledged, however, that this may be a changing situation in the UK as greater numbers of traditional-aged students, both male and female, attend university.

Other family members are mentioned in the literature as being supportive, usually relating to time and labour, such as grandparents caring for children (Heagney and Benson, 2017; Ramsay et al., 2007; Wong and Kwok, 1997). There is, however, little reference to support from older children, apart from the occasional mention of helping with household chores (Hope and Quinlan, 2020). There appears to be no specific research into children who are also university or college students supporting their student parents through mutual engagement and involvement in their studies, despite the possibility of reciprocal benefit as well as advantage for institutions of higher education.

2.5.2 Parental support and involvement

While support does not generally appear to come from children to parents, there is a burgeoning body of literature reporting on parental involvement and support for their children's studies in higher education (Buchanan and LeMoyne, 2020; Carney-Hall, 2008; Howard, Alexander and Dunn, 2020). More emotional and financial contribution to children's education as well as increased communication through technology has led to higher levels of parental involvement in recent years (Carney-Hall, 2008; Lamprianou et al., 2019). Additionally, for many female student parents, the parent identity remains stronger than the student identity, therefore, family commitments, including concerns about their children's studies come first (Brooks, 2013; Vaccaro and Lovell, 2010).

Supportive and appropriate parental involvement is viewed positively, leading to increased autonomy, wellbeing and achievement (Hwang and Jung, 2020; Kouros et al., 2017). There has been a recent surge in academic interest, however, in the possibility of parental over-involvement or 'helicopter parenting' as parents 'hover' over their children's lives and experiences (Buchanan and LeMoyne, 2020; Howard et al., 2020; Kouros et al., 2020). While there is no specific definition of helicopter parenting to date (Howard et al., 2020), it is widely accepted to be the act of over-involvement in children's lives in an age-inappropriate and restrictive way. Examples of this with children at university could include, speaking to faculty staff on their behalf or deciding which courses their children take. Kouros et al. (2017) suggest this may stem from the parents' struggle to identify the changing needs of their children as they transition from school to university, therefore, lacking the recognition of the need to modify behaviour. Carney-Hall (2008), on the other hand, suggests that higher financial investments lead to increased expectations relating to children's education.

Carney-Hall's (2008) systematic review of literature on parental involvement yielded mixed outcomes. Parental involvement seemed to be regarded as supportive or over-protective in relatively equal measures. Current research, however, while acknowledging the well-meaning nature of parents, tends to suggest that increased micromanagement of student affairs and unnecessary assistance with small tasks impacts negatively on anxiety and mental health (Buchanan and LeMoyne, 2020) as well as inhibiting adult development and instilling a sense of entitlement into their children (Kouros, et al., 2017). In a notable exception to this, Howard et al. (2020) argue that helicopter parenting is extreme and occurs infrequently. For them, it is low levels of positive parenting that lead to low levels of motivation and achievement. Their definition of low positive parenting, however, includes items that may be considered to be helicopter parenting, such as age-inappropriate parental involvement. This suggests that a clear consensus on definition of terms in relation to types of parental involvement is needed.

Studies on parental involvement are often grounded in Ryan and Deci's (1985; 2002) self-determination theory. This is due to the emphasis within this theory on constructs of autonomy and relatedness, where individuals control of their own actions and decisions, and a positive sense of attachment to others, impact well on intrinsic motivation (Howard et al., 2020; Hwang and Jung, 2020).

There is some suggestion of differences between a mother and a father's parental involvement within the literature. In their investigation of the association of parent-child relationships and perceived academic control and success, Hwang and Jung (2020) found that mothers were more likely to engage in emotionally supportive activities and fathers in more results orientated practices. They suggest that a mother's helicopter parenting style may be beneficial for the development of a parent-child relationship but not academic success, where it could have a negative impact. Their research was, however, limited to one private university in New York so may not be generalisable.

Extending this concept to single parent households, Buchanan and LeMoyne (2020) found that parental over-involvement in studies may have a more profound effect on sons than daughters. They hypothesise that this is due to children being raised within gender stereotypical schemas of females as devotees of family and males as breadwinners and providers within a family. If a single mother overcompensates for being both mother and father by excessive demands for participation and contribution, daughters may be able to accept this as concern for family wellbeing and achievement, while sons may find it overbearing and intrusive. This can result in negative self-efficacy and wellbeing for their sons based on status characteristics theory, which proposes negative outcomes for feelings of imbalance in relation to gendered roles.

Conversely, however, Kouros et al. (2017) suggest that it is daughters who are most greatly affected by helicopter parenting. They argue that parents are generally more controlling of female children than male, allowing sons a higher degree of independence outside the family in preparation for future gendered roles, thus perpetuating stereotypical gendered behaviour. Additionally, they suggest that girls may be more sensitive and consider parental over-involvement as a criticism.

The studies outlined above, like most current studies on parental involvement, are quantitative studies that largely rely on Likert style survey data. They are each relatively small-scale studies that have been carried out in the United States, which represent a limitation in terms of generalizability to wider contexts. Additionally, their conflicting findings and lack of clear definition of terms suggest that the topic of parental involvement and support would benefit

from further research using a wider range of research methods, such as qualitative methods, for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the phenomena. While this study does not focus on the involvement of the participants in their children's education as parents, it provides a critical evaluation of their engagement with their children who are also studying at university, which includes considerations of parental involvement.

2.6 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Pierre Bourdieu is considered to be one of the leading theorists on social structure of the 20th century. While Bourdieu has researched a wide range of subjects, a great deal of his work, and of others that apply his theory, is in the field of education. Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, utilises the terms 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus' as interrelated and interdependent constructs that provide the foundations of a model from which to study 'the infinitely varied ways that people relate to each other in a social setting' (Littleton, 1979, p.181). These terms and others are often applied to studies in education as a theoretical or methodological lens to reveal compelling insights and a complex evaluation of them is represented in Bourdieu's extensive and insightful work (Crossley, 2002). A full synthesis of Bourdieu's work and evaluation of the use of his terms is not possible within the scope of this paper. They are, however, outlined here in general terms and in relation to education along with other major elements of Bourdieu's theory, including the concepts of symbolic violence and cleft habitus. There then follows a brief consideration of contemporary constructs of class and examples of how Bourdieu's theoretical terms have been extended for use as an analytical lens in research. Like Reay (2000), this study uses the terms heuristically rather than as an overarching theoretical framework.

2.6.1 Field

Culture is central to Bourdieu (Grenfell and James, 1998), his term 'field' is sometimes referred to as a 'cultural field' (Webb et al., 2010) or network of relations within a culture (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). A field encompasses the interactions between the institutions, norms, views, titles and such, of which it is comprised (Webb et al., 2010). A field can be small or large and is flexible in that it can be affected by external influences (Webb et al., 2010). Rules and regulations are an important element of field that individuals concur with, although these may not be codified or even explicit (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Power is present within fields, often as areas of struggle as individuals within the field accept or oppose others

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Navarro, 2006). Mallman (2017, p.25) states that for Bourdieu family is the primary field and socialization within the family provides the individual with a sense of worth and social position as well as ingrained capital and habitus.

2.6.2 Capital

To enter a new field, such as higher education, certain types of 'capital' are required (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, Navarro, 2006). Capital can be defined as the goods, resources or assets needed to enhance power within a specific field (Webber, 2017) maintained by symbolic exchanges (O'Shea, 2016). The most commonly recognised notion of capital is that of economic capital, or capital based on financial resources. Bourdieu bridged economics with humanities and the social sciences (Beasley-Murray, 2000) by extending the concept of economic capital to include other forms of capital, largely to illuminate class inequalities (Webber, 2017). Firstly, and most notably, he introduced cultural and social capital, based on informational and relational resources respectively, to recognise the complexity of the social world beyond economic wealth (Bourdieu, 1986; O'Shea, 2016). Following this, he introduced symbolic capital, based on reputational resources such as honour, status and prestige. These different forms of capital are interconnected and can be transferred between individuals and fields (Reay, 2000; Webb et al., 2010). Their development led Bourdieu to invite researchers to further explore and advance the concept of capital as a methodological tool (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

The notion of cultural capital is widespread within the literature on education as Bourdieu (1986) developed this to explain inequalities in academic success. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that cultural capital takes various forms, embodied, objectified or institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital encompasses knowledge, skills and perceptions acquired through socialisation as opposed to the physical objects, including books, pictures or technology, that are present in objectified cultural capital. Institutionalized cultural capital, on the other hand, refers to educational qualifications or experience that may lead to institutionalized recognition. A student entering the educational field with a dearth of cultural capital is, therefore, likely to encounter challenges in relation to practice and achievement (Costa et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2010). For Bourdieu (1986), an individual's class position is directly related to the amount of cultural capital possessed, with family being central to its reproduction (O'Shea, 2016; Reay, 2000).

Closely connected to cultural capital, social capital is based on an individual's interactions within and between social groups and networks that can lead to advancement within a field

(Dean, 2015; Rudick et al., 2019). For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is linked to status and power, as it is attributed to social position. Social networks allow the production and reproduction of social capital and access to institutional resources. Dika and Singh (2002) suggest that there are two elements to Bourdieu's concept of social capital; relationships that allow the individual to claim social capital and the quantity and quality of those resources. Social capital can, therefore, be a means of replication of social status or it can enable individuals to move ahead (O'Shea, 2016).

Not all forms of capital are accepted in all fields, some may be valued more than others depending on the setting (Webb et al., 2010). Equally, individuals may orient towards certain forms of capital rather than others depending on their circumstances (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1986) proposes that an understanding of the construction of a field is required to identify the types of capital in play, which in turn require an understanding of the field, suggesting the need for a hermeneutic circle of reflection when considering the interplay between field and capital.

2.6.3 Habitus

Social standing or experience generates a complex schema of transferable values and dispositions based on ingrained functional practices within that experience (Bourdieu, 2000; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Webb et al., 2010). These social values and dispositions, or 'habitus', structure, generate and organise practice within a field and can be adapted to attain increased proficiency in other fields (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1990; Smith, 2017). The type and quality of capital that individuals possess depends on habitus, which may limit acquisition of new capital or otherwise.

Culture and social class play a significant part in the generation of habitus as one's cultural and socioeconomic trajectories predispose an individual towards certain attitudes or values (Bourdieu, 1986; Webb et al., 2010). Family socialisation, life experiences and education influence the development of an individual's habitus due to its socially constructed nature (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017; Reay, 1995; Smith, 2017). Also influential are past and present experiences (Maton, 2014), which may be based on gendered roles and expectations (Tett, 2000). Habitus may be conscious or unconscious (Webb et al., 2000), it not only includes attitudes and dispositions but unconscious embodied processes such as ways of eating, drinking or speaking (Charlesworth, 2000; Lee and Kramer, 2013; Paulson, 2017). Bourdieu (2000, p.142) suggests that the practices within habitus are so deeply entrenched that the individual wears them 'like a garment'. Indeed, the attitudes, rules

and values that comprise habitus seem so completely natural that the observation of an unfamiliar habitus may seem unpleasant, undesirable or even ridiculous (Webb et al., 2010). This 'socialised subjectivity' strongly influences the way individuals situate themselves and perform in fields such as education (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.126).

Habitus dictates whether individuals have enough knowledge of the rules and regulations of a field, or enough capital, to be able to function effectively within the structure of that field (Costa et al., 2019; Navarro, 2006). When an individual enters a field with the appropriate habitus and forms of capital to function effectively, he or she is a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.127). However, the opposite may also be true and non-traditional students entering higher education with a strongly defined working-class habitus and lack of cultural capital may need nurturing (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). This is not only the case for older students, as Reay et al. (2009) discovered in their study of largely traditional-aged, working-class students at an elite university in the UK who, although they fit well academically, required high levels of resilience, determination and motivation to reflexively manage and transform habitus, something which may go unrecognised by universities.

2.6.4 Misrecognition and symbolic violence

A significant element of Bourdieu's thinking on forms of capital that impact access to field or successful transition is that individuals are likely to adjust their level of expectation of capital depending on their social standing, experience or educational levels (Bourdieu, 1986; Harrison, 2018). This can lead to lost opportunities for individuals who do not perceive themselves to possess the level of status required to enter a new field. Bourdieu refers to this concept as misrecognition or the, largely unconscious, acceptance of status without question (James, 2015; Webb et al., 2010). The concepts of capital and habitus can, therefore, provide insight into advantage, disadvantage and domination.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) propose that this notion of misrecognition is the basis of symbolic violence, which arises when individuals or groups with unequal amounts of capital or power interact and oppression befalls those with less symbolic power or capital. Symbolic violence can be generated from a wide range of institutions and sources; however, the common denominator is misrecognition of power leading to complicity in the situation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In a contemporary study of university students who had taken out student loans in the UK, Harris et al., (2020) suggest that symbolic violence occurs against the students. They argue that the loans system impacts negatively on the students' psychological wellbeing in relation to repaying the loan and their ability to plan for the future

financially, particularly for those from a lower socio-economic background. This is despite the students' complicity in receiving the loan. Harris et al. (2020) claim this is due to dominant discourses that overstate the returns value of the loan and normalise the situation of becoming indebted as a student, thus highlighting the role that individuals, often unwittingly, play in their own subordination (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Nairz Wirth et al. (2017) reported evidence of symbolic violence in their study of non-traditional students in Austria who had dropped out of university. They highlighted the case of Adnan, a student from a relatively poor, migrant background whose deep-seated sense of identity and the ambivalence of his family towards his entry into university, led him to conclude that university was not suitable for those like him. For Adnan, and all the participants in the study, their reasons for attrition stemmed from feelings of inadequacy due to conflicts between their primary habitus and the perceived habitus of the university. They invariably blamed their feelings of alienation on themselves rather than the institutions or others, suggesting subordination to symbolic violence. A sense of painful dislocation and struggle when working-class students enter university, leaving them marginalised and ill at ease is apparently common (Reay, 2004; 2018; Reay et al., 2009; Watson and Widin, 2014) yet is often framed as disjuncture between habitus rather than symbolic violence. James (2015) argues that a limitation of the use of Bourdieu's theory is the frequent failure on the part of researchers to reflect deeply enough on the possibility of symbolic violence and inequality.

2.6.5 Social mobility and cleft habitus

In a simplistic way, Bourdieu's theory is sometimes seen as a theory of reproduction, whereby status and success depend on primary socialisation into class and capital (Atkinson, 2012), indeed, a criticism often levelled at Bourdieu's work is that it is overly deterministic (Jenkins, 1982). However, it has been argued that Bourdieu's intention in revealing unconscious tendencies is to enable individuals to take better control over their lives (Crossley, 2002), and to bridge the dichotomy of individual agency versus organisational structure (Costa et al., 2019; Reay, 2004). Despite disjuncture and symbolic violence, there is a possibility of transformation of habitus as individuals enter new fields and gain capital or social mobility (Mallman, 2017; Maton, 2014; Reay et al, 2009). Nevertheless, it is generally recognised that this transformation can only be partial due to constraints from preceding habitus (Jin and Ball, 2019).

Although generally represented positively, the transition to upward social mobility can still be problematic. Bourdieu's own far-reaching social mobility, from a poor rural background to a

leading academic, left him with a strongly divided and contradictory sense of self that he found difficult to accept (Friedman, 2016). Periods of rapid social change and mobility can lead to incongruities between embodied habitus and social requirements, while relatively lengthy transition periods that provide time for adaptation may ease the transition but often lead to divided habitus (Aarseth et al., 2016; Friedman, 2016). Paulson (2017) suggests that those who are upwardly mobile are likely to transform slowly and in ways that may be conflicting and discordant, sometimes leading to guilt and isolation from others based on the lack of full adaptation to multiple identities (Baxtor and Britton, 2001; Lee and Kramer, 2013).

Bourdieu (1986,1999) referred to divided habitus as habitus clivé or cleft habitus. The concept of cleft habitus is often applied to educational research, as social mobility may arise from educational opportunities. The notion of cleft habitus and compartmentalisation of identities and domains is well-documented in studies on working-class students as a coping mechanism (Jin and Ball, 2019; Reay et al, 2009); however, it can lead to loss of old networks or withdrawal from primary habitus (Lee and Kramer, 2013; Skeggs, 1997). Investigating the conflicting identity status of young working-class university students in Bristol who lived at home during their studies, Abrahams and Ingram (2013) found evidence of cleft habitus among the students. To deal with this, they tended to use adaptive strategies that, in some cases, could lead to distancing from either field or home rather than engagement. Their results were, however, unstable due to individual agency and experience and the study was limited in scale. Nevertheless, lack of engagement or distancing from a field may be a danger to achievement when support is not available, particularly from family members (Costa et al., 2019; O'Shea, 2015, 2016; Webber, 2017).

2.6.6 Contemporary constructs of class

A limitation of Bourdieu's work in relation to contemporary research could be said to be its focus on class as a relatively homogenous construct (Aarseth et al., 2016; Mallman, 2017). Many studies based on Bourdieu's theory stress the centrality of class within families and the lack of capital available to working-class students due to their ingrained habitus and socialised subjectivities (O'Shea, 2016; Reay, 2018; Reay et al., 2009; Tett, 2000). Aarseth et al. (2016), however, advocate that divided habitus within families is likely to be present in developing countries where significant change and mobility between generations is experienced. They provide the example of a longitudinal study in Norway where the trajectory of female members of a multi-generational family changed over time from the settled, rural existence of the grandmother to the cosmopolitan lifestyle of the highly educated and individualised

granddaughter. Each generation experienced cleft habitus and emotional conflict to some extent as they responded to new experiences. Whether these emotional conflicts were resolved depended on context and both conscious and unconscious acts of individual agency.

The idea of wide-scale divided habitus in today's society is reiterated by Mallman (2017), who claims that increased movement and opportunities has led to increased heterogeneity in families of low socioeconomic origin. Contrary to proposals in the literature that social mobility takes place later in life through educational or employment opportunities, he argues that it may now begin earlier with internal family narratives of possibility as the initiation of social mobility. This would go against a deterministic understanding of Bourdieu's theory of family as the primary field of social reproduction. The participants in this study are attending higher education at a later stage of their lives and following differing trajectories to their children, which may well lead to each having their own individual and nuanced class-based habitus. Whether the non-traditional, student parents and their traditional-aged student children experience shared or conflicting habitus in relation to their student status is, therefore, of interest to this study.

2.6.7 Extending Bourdieu's concept of capital

A number of studies have drawn on Bourdieu's theory and extended his concepts to suit contemporary situations, particularly that of capital. Swain and Hammond (2011) drew on Bourdieu's concept of capital to study the motivations and outcomes of mature students in higher education. Casting aside a discussion on class and the inheritance of cultural capital, they framed the experiences of the students in their study within the constructs of development of, not only economic and social capital, but to include professional and attitudinal constructs of capital that would be valued in the workplace and linked to motivational constructs such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 1985).

In another example, O'Shea (2016) combined Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital with Yosso's (2005) constructs of community capital, to consider 'first in family', mature working-class, student parents who had not inherited cultural capital from family members. Yosso's (2005) constructs of capital were originally developed to include communities of colour in discussions on cultural capital but provide a useful framework for other marginalised or non-traditional groups as they include constructs that are valued by less powerful groups. Among these are aspirational capital, the ability and desire to work towards goals and improved future selves, resistance capital that enables individuals to face the challenges associated with class and gender, and familial capital, cultural norms that are valued by

families. These constructs may be of interest to this study, given the background of the participants and the research aims. Their inclusion in O'Shea's (2016) analysis led her to argue that her participants had a wider range of capital resources available than Bourdieu's original theory would suggest, providing them with strengths and assets to succeed in higher education. The capital that they gained from attending university was then passed to their children in the form of cultural capital and encouragement to attend university themselves. In this study both parent and child are attending university and the 'first in family' phenomenon may be shared. While this is an interesting dynamic that does not appear to have been studied previously, it is not a specific focus of this research project, however, it may generate a useful consideration of how capital resources are transferred within the contemporary setting of this study.

Another extension of Bourdieu's capital as an analytical lens is the development of the term emotional capital. Reay (2000) builds on Nowotny's (1981 cited in Reay, 2000) initial identification of the term in her study on the emotional involvement of mothers of primary school children in the UK. For Reay (2000), emotional capital refers to resources, such as empathy, support and resilience, that can be passed from parent to child. While it could be surmised that working-class women who lack cultural capital may be able to provide emotional capital, she found that those with negative connotations of school may have little emotional capital to transfer to their children and that seemingly positive emotional involvement, such as high levels of praise, may have negative repercussions if it conflicts with feedback from teachers. This echoes recent research on parental involvement and over parenting (Kouros et al., 2017), and leads to lack of transfer of emotional capital.

Webber (2017) also employed the term emotional capital within her framework of family capital that outlined the support families provided to the mature, female, working-class university students in her study. Webber (2017) defines emotional capital as encouragement and empathy transferred from partners and children to help develop resilience and manage challenges, finding that lack of emotional capital is likely to lead to additional stress. However, although some of her participants had children simultaneously studying at university, there was no reference to their transfer of emotional capital in relation to studying in higher education, they were only briefly acknowledged as providing some cultural capital through their knowledge of university systems. This study considers the transfer of various types of capital, including emotional capital, between student parents and children to illuminate the role they each play in this transfer and the effects this may have on the experiences and achievements of non-traditional, student parents in higher education.

2.7 Summary of Literature Review

This synthesis of literature offers an insight into the large body of research on the influences, motivations and challenges experienced by non-traditional and mature students and how they compare to those of traditional-aged students. Multiple motivations and challenges are documented that remain relatively stable across the various groups of non-traditional and mature students, often linked to low confidence and lack of opportunity. It does, however, highlight a paucity of research on older mature students and lack of recognition of the differences between their experiences and those of younger non-traditional and students who are defined as mature. Although there are some current studies that consider older mature students, research on this age group tends to be sparse and the focus is often from an active ageing perspective.

Family support is considered to motivate students and counteract challenges; however, it is often reported to be relatively superficial for women from a low socio-economic background given the traditional expectations for them to continue to attend to gendered roles at home while studying. There is a lack of attention to whether children who are also studying at university support them, although as parents they may well still be invested in the support of their children. It is recognised, however, that constructs of class and role expectations within families are changing due to rapid change and development in contemporary society. This suggests the need for research that acknowledges learners in the age range of the participants in this study and starts to gain a better understanding of their current complexities. Careful consideration of research design is essential in order to allow this.

Chapter 3 – The Design of the Study

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the philosophical and methodological design of this study that explores non-traditional student parents who have children studying concurrently at university. Firstly, the aims of the research are restated to provide context. Next key philosophical perspectives are outlined before identifying the perspectives that underpin this study, based on my own ontological and epistemological perspectives. A rationale for choosing narrative case study as a strategy of inquiry is then provided before the reader is introduced to the participants and my position as a researcher, including issues relating to sensitivity and power. Challenges and limitations relating to design and procedural choices are recognised and highlighted throughout the chapter.

3.2 The Research Aims

As outlined in Chapter 1, this doctoral research project aims to provide an understanding of the experiences of non-traditional student parents when studying in higher education at the same time as their traditional-age children. This includes what influences the participants to enter university in the period when their children are studying and how they are motivated and challenged during this period. In addition, the study is interested in whether having a child at university simultaneously impacts positively on areas identified in the literature as problematic for non-traditional and mature students, or whether it represents a further challenge that could lead to lack of academic success or even attrition.

3.3 The Design of the Study

To answer the research questions the design of the study needs to be considered. Creswell (2009) suggests that the principle research approach is at the heart of the intersection of three components: philosophy, strategy and method. An adaptation of Creswell's (2009, p.5) framework provides a theoretical foundation for the consideration of the design of this study and is represented in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. A framework for research design: The interaction between philosophical perspectives, strategies of inquiry and research methods (adapted from Creswell, 2009, p.5).
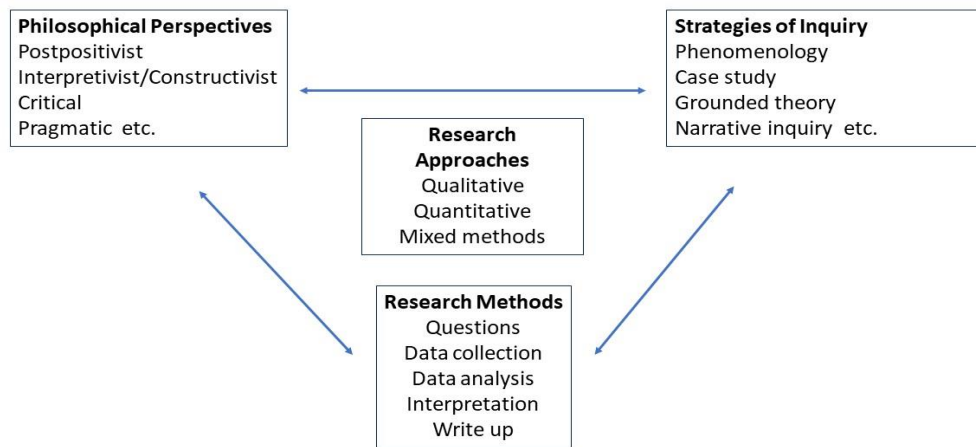
In this context, research is grounded within a qualitative or quantitative approach, or a combination of the two (Creswell, 2009). Differentiation between the two main approaches is often cited in the literature in relation to data collection methods, with quantitative research tending towards large-scale numerical datasets, objectively used to understand facts, and qualitative research tending towards smaller sets of written or spoken data, subjectively interested in phenomena (Cohen et al., 2009). It has been acknowledged, however, that such polarities are overly simplistic in terms of generation of theory and underlying philosophical positions (Blaxter et al., 2010; Crotty, 2009). To develop the research approach, therefore, the philosophical perspectives that underpin the design should first be considered.

3.3.1 Philosophical perspectives

Philosophical worldviews (Creswell, 2009), paradigms (Blaikie, 2007; Lincoln and Guba, 2000) or theoretical perspectives (Crotty, 1998), are considered to be overarching guiding philosophical beliefs. An initial challenge for the student researcher, such as myself, is the navigation of the various terms used in relation to the philosophy of research, which may not be consistent in the literature (Crotty, 1998) or, with increasing frequency, may be used interchangeably (Lincoln et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). For clarity, and following Creswell (2009), this paper shall refer to these beliefs as philosophical perspectives rather than worldviews or paradigms. Philosophical perspectives are typically defined in terms of ontology, the nature of reality or what exists, and epistemology, the nature of knowledge and how it is

generated (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 2000). As this paper focuses on educational research, and is limited in scope, deeper considerations of philosophical issues are not addressed here. However, although fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions may remain 'largely hidden in research' (Creswell, 2009, p. 5), implied rather than explicitly discussed, it is acknowledged that they are an integral part of the research process. As well as guiding philosophical perspectives, they lead to methodological strategies that centre on the nature of how knowledge is discovered (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017; Lincoln and Guba, 2000). A consideration of these elements gives rise to the methods used to collect data in a bid to answer research questions (Saunders et al., 2019).

Four common divisions between philosophical perspectives may be used by academics to guide and define research. These are defined here as positivist, interpretivist, critical and pragmatic, and a brief overview of each is presented. Each perspective encompasses specific epistemological assumptions and works towards distinct outcomes, which may be explanatory, exploratory, emancipatory or solution driven.

Founded in the physical and natural sciences, positivist, or scientific, research considers reality and knowledge to be based on observable truths which create law-like generalisations (Saunders et al., 2019) that are independent of the researcher (Snape and Spencer, 2003). Stemming from objectivist ontological and epistemological assumptions that consider reality to be external and based on universally ordered and observable structures (Blaikie, 2007), positivist research sets out to prove, disprove or explain theories or hypotheses. Interpretivism, on the other hand, based on constructivist (Crotty, 1998) or subjectivist (Saunders et al., 2019) assumptions, was developed to challenge the suggestion that social behaviour can be studied scientifically and objectively (Blaikie, 2007). Interpretivism explores knowledge generated by individual action and meaningful behaviour based on social interaction, rather than searching for scientific generalisations.

While the aim of positivist or interpretivist research is to understand, clarify and explore, critical inquiry, seeks to challenge oppression and conflict (Crotty, 1998) from an advocacy and participatory viewpoint (Creswell, 2009). The critical paradigm embodies emancipatory ideologies, such as postmodernism and feminist theories (Crotty, 1998), aiming to provide voice and transformative action for marginalised groups in society (Blaikie, 2007). For results-driven contemporary researchers, however, pragmatism represents a more fluid approach; its main focus being on problem solving and producing relevant, applied solutions. Considered to reject the ontological dichotomy of objectivism versus subjectivism, it considers theories, ideas and concepts in practical terms using multiple methods and strategies to achieve solutions (Saunders et al., 2019).

Also of importance to philosophical underpinnings are axiological assumptions, or the relation of the values and views of the researcher to the research process. While positivist research aims to take an objective, value-free approach (Blaxter et al., 2010), there is disagreement about whether it is possible to conduct truly value-free research (Lacey, 1999). Carter and Little (2007) suggest that axiology is inherent within philosophical perspectives as values implicitly lead to judgements about what is admissible in relation to knowledge; epistemologically, philosophical perspectives are themselves axiological. Additionally, they suggest that philosophical perspectives are surrounded by axiology in the values of researchers that inform their choices and justifications. The ontological and epistemological views of the researcher, therefore, guide choices in terms of approaches, strategies and outcomes, and as such should be given consideration.

3.3.2 Reflection on personal values and views

In my various professional roles, as an educator, a colleague and a manager, I have engaged in ongoing learning and the construction of meaning from multiple perspectives. Considering the multi-dimensional insights of those I have encountered along the way has helped to shape my attitudes and beliefs through reflection and interpretation. My significant experience of living and working in different countries has exposed me to a rich tapestry of cultures and traditions that have impacted on my personal, socially constructed, identities, not just passively but as an actively reflective participant. Overall, these 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world' (Crotty, 1998, p.67) have led me to position myself, ontologically and epistemologically speaking, broadly within the interpretivist paradigm or philosophical perspective. I value the social construction of realities and knowledge based on individual realities and shared experiences, as I seek to consider how the views and experiences of others 'create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts' (Saunders et al., 2019, p.149).

My personal values have led me to appreciate the perspectives of others. Listening to and reflecting on the stories of others has enabled me to gain an understanding of their issues and challenges and to adopt an empathetic stance throughout my life. As a language teacher and linguist, with an interest in social psychology, I am fascinated by the way individuals relate their views and perspectives. As a result, I am attracted to qualitative approaches as a means of enabling research participants to present their stories and perspectives through the provision of rich and meaningful data, whether that be spoken or written.

Overall, I have a desire for fairness and equality of opportunity for all and I acknowledge the importance of building the confidence of those I meet, both on a personal and a professional level. In my current work role, I support the academic development of university students to help to provide them with the tools they need for success. I believe that we thrive as human beings through increased mutual understanding. This strengthens my inclination towards interpretivism, while drawing on elements of critical and feminist values.

This reflection has allowed me to consider my personal values, viewpoints and ontological preferences in relation to research, however, I recognise that they alone do not provide a justifiable basis for the employment of methodological strategies and methods. As Crotty (1998) suggests, this process is dependent on the research questions, which strategies and methods need to be capable of answering. The exploratory nature of the research questions in this study and their basis in human interaction and social behaviour enables me to articulate a framework of theoretical concerns that anchor this study in qualitative, interpretive research.

3.3.3 Qualitative, interpretive research in the context of this study

To base this study within a qualitative approach allows meaningful, individual narratives to be collected from the participants and explored in depth, while encouraging the participants to reflect on their experiences and offer their own perspectives (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative approach aligns with an interpretivist perspective and allows the generation of knowledge to be created from human interaction, interpreted rather than discovered (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Crotty, 1998). Multiple realities and meanings can be constructed and reconstructed through the observation and interpretation of social interaction (Cohen et al., 2007, Saunders et al., 2019). This process of interpretation provides insight and exploration as individuals seek to make sense of these interactions (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998) and fits well with this study as I am seeking to generate an understanding of the experiences of individuals based on their interaction with others within a specific context.

The interpretivist perspective has its origins in the philosophies of hermeneutics, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism (Crotty, 1998). Although they present differences in direction and application when applied to research (Wright and Losekoot, 2012), they collectively provide a socially constructed understanding of knowledge (Pring, 2015). Freeman and Vagle (2013, p.725) suggest that a linguistic simplification is often presented in the research literature, in their view erroneously, of hermeneutics as 'interpretation' and phenomenology as 'lived experience'. As a qualitative research lens, however, the terms are often used interdependently to reveal meaning through the reflection on and interpretation of

lived experience. In sociological research based on the work of Heidegger (1927), hermeneutic, or interpretive, phenomenology, relies on a process of shared understandings and interpretation between the researcher and the researched (Crotty, 1998; Neubauer et al., 2019), always through what Heidegger referred to as *dasein,* being in the world of the researched (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016), but in the presence of the researcher (Wright and Losekoot, 2012).

I was initially drawn to a phenomenological approach for this study, as discussed in more detail in section 3.4.1. However, having reflected on the nature of the research and my past experiences, values and views, I consider symbolic interactionism to be a more appropriate philosophical lens. This is due to its strong focus on meaning making and interpretation of behaviour through social interaction, based on symbols, language and perspective (Charmaz, 2014; Charon, 2010; Crotty, 1998). Wright and Losekoot, (2012) suggest that, in contrast to hermeneutic phenomenology, symbolic interactionism focuses on why something happens rather than what happens. This interests me in the context of this study as I aim to understand how and why meaning and action are generated through interactions within symbolic roles. Symbolic interactionism is considered to have an important position within family studies as a framework for how human behaviour is shaped through the creation of symbolic roles (LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). This study considers the interaction of the participants within the symbolic roles of parent, child and student to gain an understanding of their perspectives on the influences, motivations and challenges within these roles and how they may impact on the educational experiences and achievement of the student parents.

Symbolic interactionism is also considered to have a strong focus on the dynamics of self and identity (Turner, 2013), particularly on the construction and reconstruction of self in relation to roles and social relationships (Serpe and Stryker, 2011; Stryker and Burke, 2000). This stems from the foundations of symbolic interactionism in Mead's (1934) understanding of 'I', the element of the self that is responsible for individual action, and 'me', the socialised self that identifies with others, to Goffman's (1959) consideration of the collaborative nature of self-development through social interaction (cited in Charon, 2010). As it is acknowledged that the participants in this study are likely to be undergoing some level of development of self and identity while transitioning to, and becoming, students in higher education, this further strengthens the case for symbolic interactionism as an overarching philosophical lens.

Symbolic interactionism is often linked to the philosophical perspective of pragmatism and its search for action-based solutions to problems. While this study generates interest in such considerations, the importance of detailed understanding of experience before the search for solutions can begin is recognised. This exploratory study focuses on an increased

understanding of individual experiences within a specific context in order to gain new insights, what Weber referred to as *verstehen* or 'the attempt to understand both the intention and the context of human action' (Chowdhury, 2014, p.435). Pragmatism as a philosophical perspective has, therefore, been rejected in favour of interpretivism underpinned by the tenets of symbolic interactionism.

Although the study is based in interpretivism, elements of feminism are interwoven throughout as a means of understanding of the participants' experiences of and location within social situations. Feminist theory advocates research on personal awareness and advocacy, particularly in relation to women (Ramsey and Bliesner, 2000). It is acknowledged that feminism pervades the study as a means of giving voice to the perspectives of the participants who, as non-traditional, student parents, are often overlooked. The development of lines of inquiry through feminist theory will not be the focus of this study, however, due to the limitation of the small-scale nature of the project.

3.4 Consideration of Strategies of Inquiry

The process of selecting an approach that is systematic and rigorous, yet which meets the requirements of the study, requires due consideration. This task is complicated by what Creswell et al., (2007, p.236) call 'a baffling array of options for conducting qualitative research'. This section outlines the process of choosing a methodological strategy of inquiry that permits a thorough investigation of the research questions.

A variety of methodological strategies lend themselves to qualitative, interpretivist research depending on the focus of the inquiry (Creswell, 2009). Researchers that aim to provide detailed accounts of events and experience may choose an ethnographic approach that places research within the field of observation (Baszanger and Dodier, (2004); a phenomenological approach to 'capture the essence of human experience' (Creswell, 2009, p.13) or a case study approach as a means of understanding specific events and experience in depth (Cohen et al., 2010). Alternatively, researchers with an interest in the analysis of linguistic accounts may choose narrative inquiry to focus on the story and the way it is told (Reissman, 2008); content analysis to consider the content and context of documents (Robson, 2002); conversation or structural analysis to highlight the structure of key linguistic items in interaction (Ritchie, 2003; Reissman, 2008) or discourse analysis to highlight how knowledge is shaped through the distinctive language of particular discourse communities (Spencer et al., 2003). While for those researchers whose principle aim is to develop plausible and useful theories based on the central phenomenon, grounded theory may be the strategy

of choice as a systematic method to collect and analyse qualitative data to construct theory (Charmaz, 2014; Holloway and Les Todres, 2003; Strauss and Corbin, 2008).

A grounded theory approach was considered for this study as exploration of the phenomenon studied leading to explanation and development of theory is desirable. Grounded theory presents a well-respected approach to the development of theory due to its commitment to inductive and systematic application of data analysis through thematic coding and iterative analytical practices (Charmaz, 2014). However, the rigidity of the analytical techniques in grounded theory felt too scientific for this interpretivist, exploratory study, particularly the highly systematic approaches of Strauss and Corbin (2008). Indeed, Charmaz (1990) recognises that grounded theory is often presented as rooted in positivism as well as phenomenology. Charmaz's (2014) constructivist approach to grounded theory is more appealing due to her emphasis on the stories and values of individuals and more flexible application of the analytical methods. However, I was keen for the principle focus of this research to be an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of the participants rather than the development of coding and theory from the researcher's perspective, therefore grounded theory as the main strategy of inquiry was rejected. That is not to say that some elements of grounded theory were not usefully applied to this study. This study was not framed within a pre-conceived hypothesis, rather the data was collected and analysed inductively in a somewhat iterative manner to allow themes to emerge from the data (Bowen, 2006). These emergent themes helped to shape and refine the data collection and the final research questions as would be the case with a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 1990). However, after an initial consideration of this and phenomenological inquiry, as outlined below, a decision was made to use case study in conjunction with narrative analysis.

3.4.1 Phenomenological inquiry

A preliminary review of literature to consider the value of this study, highlighted a great deal of research on the motivations and challenges of different types of non-traditional students. It did not, however, reveal research on the lived experiences of non-traditional, student parents with university age children simultaneously studying in higher education and the impact of this situation on their experiences. A phenomenological approach aims to explore the meaning of experience from the perspective of those involved (Neubauer et al., 2019) and to present a faithful and full description of their lived experience through reflection by the participants and the researcher (Holloway and Todres, 2003, Mapp, 2008). I had initially intended to investigate identity negotiation during lived experience and envisaged that the participants in

this study would be able to fully describe their experiences as student parents in an intergenerational student family and be keen to explore the meaning of these experiences. This led me to consider phenomenological inquiry as a methodological strategy for this study.

A pilot interview was conducted with one participant with phenomenological inquiry in mind. During the interview the participant was asked to speak about the experience of studying alongside her child and their engagement in this process. This student had, however, compartmentalised her roles as parent and student, focusing on the role of parent while she was at home with her family, and the role of student while at university. It soon became apparent that there had been little mutual engagement as students between her and her child. This was of interest in itself, however, given the phenomenological aim to gain insight from detailed narration of experience from the participants (Holloway and Todres, 2003), I was obliged to reflect further on the goals and nature of the research and to consider an alternative strategy of inquiry.

The initial literature review revealed only three brief references to the experiences of student parents with children simultaneously studying at university. In one study a participant had considered having a child at university to be a major cause of strain for her as a student due to conflicting role demands (Baxter and Britton, 2001). The other two suggested that older student parents benefitted from having a child at university in terms of improved relationships and the acquisition of cultural capital (Fragoso et al., 2013; Webber, 2017). These conflicting accounts and my pilot interview illuminated the multifaceted nature of this situation and established the need to re-evaluate the epistemological concerns and goals of my study. This reflection led to the recognition that, while seeking an understanding of the lived experiences of these student parents, their individual journeys, perspectives and interactions were likely to be complex. I recognised, therefore, that the methodological strategy of inquiry would have to be appropriate and flexible enough to capture this complexity, yet still provide a consistent and credible analytical approach (Holloway and Todres, 2003).

3.4.2 Case study

After consideration, I was drawn to the idea of case study as a means of holistically investigating complex social phenomena based on real life events (Yin, 2009). Indeed, Yin (2009) suggests that case study is particularly appropriate for research questions that aim to understand the 'how' or 'why' of phenomena, which suits this study. Unlike ethnographic research, which may require the researcher to spend prolonged periods of involvement with the group studied (Creswell, 2009) and intensive fieldwork, often based on participant

observation (Holloway and Todres, 2003), case study documents the exploration of an event that is bound by time, activity or context (Creswell et al., 2007; Stake, 1995, Yin, 2009). Case study allows for flexible, yet detailed study of phenomena within a case (Gerring, 2004; Liu, 2016; Stake, 1998). However, there is also the acknowledgment that truth is relative and dependent on individual perspective (Baxter and Jack, 2010) thus allowing for the development of 'nuanced views of reality' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.223).

The concept of the study of phenomena within a bounded context, rather than as a process, is an essential element of case study (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). These boundaries are considered to be necessary in order to determine the case (Baxter and Jack, 2010; Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the case is bound by the activity of a small group of non-traditional, student parents studying at the same time as their traditional-aged children within the context of a small university campus that has a strong widening participation agenda. There is, however, much discussion on issues of validity and generalization as limitations of case study, particularly given the bounded nature of the case, therefore close attention to the design, application and analysis of the study is essential (Baxter and Jack, 2010; Eisenhardt, 1989).

Three seminal authors expound the merits of case study and provide detailed individual insights on the design, application and analysis of case study, Stake, Merriam and Yin (Yazan, 2015). A consideration of their perspectives enables student researchers, such as I, to design the most appropriate case study for their research in terms of epistemological orientation and to ensure that outcomes are met (Yazan, 2015). Yin (2009) suggests that cases could be classified as descriptive, exploratory or explanatory depending on their focus. Stake (1995), however, categorizes cases as either intrinsic, where the case is dominant, or instrumental, where the issue to be explored is dominant; while Merriam (1998) chooses to define case study as particularist as it defines a particular case, descriptive, and heuristic in its illumination of understanding (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Classifications of case study research (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).
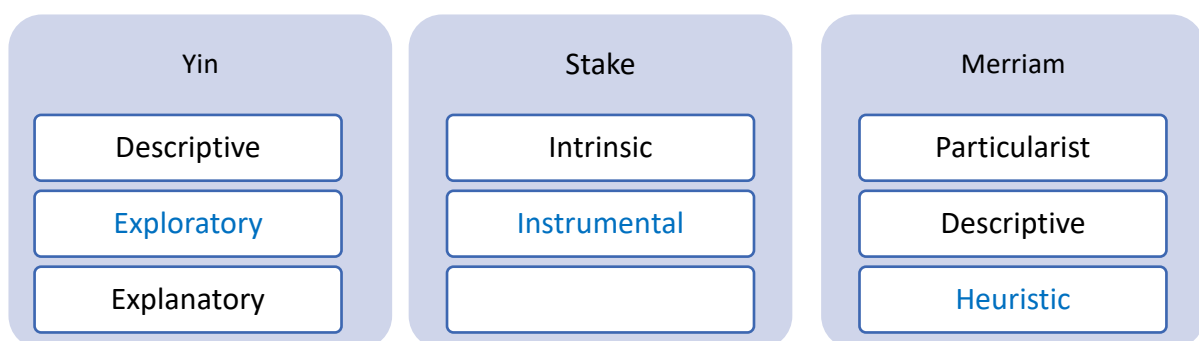
This study combines elements of each of these classifications. It could be considered to be exploratory (Yin, 2009), as the outcomes of the study were not apparent at the start and, therefore, need to be explored (Baxter and Jack, 2010). It could also be said to be instrumental and heuristic, as it seeks to illuminate understanding of the phenomenon of a group of non-traditional student parents and their experiences (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995).

Yin (2009) further suggests that case study is either holistic or embedded, dependent on whether there is one unit of analysis (holistic), or multiple units of analysis (embedded). Within this context, a single case may be explored or multiple cases. This study is best described as a multiple, holistic case as a number of participants, or units of analysis, are involved in the study of a single, bound case.

Yin (2009) is oft cited in the literature on case study as a strategy of inquiry. This may be due to his structured approach to the design of case study research and meticulous attention to data collection and analysis, leading to theory and purporting objectivity, generalizability and validity, which some suggest leans towards a positivist epistemological stance (Yazan, 2015). Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998), in contrast, consider case study from a constructivist stance and take a more flexible approach whereby researchers are interpreters of data (Stake, 1995) and reality is multiple and socially constructed through interaction (Merriam, 1998). This study is relatively flexible in design and includes a combination of structured data collection and analytical techniques that allow the emergence of socially constructed knowledge.

All three advocate the collection of data from multiple sources, which Yin (2009) extends to include both quantitative and qualitative sources, whereas Stake (1995) and Merriam (1998) suggest that data is limited to qualitative sources (Yazan, 2015). Data collected in this study is from qualitative sources and will be discussed in more detail in section 3.5. One common thread that emerges throughout the literature on case study research is that of narrative and storytelling as fundamental to the construction of cases (Ghauri, 2005) Indeed, Brandell and Varkas (2011, p.2) suggest that case study is sometimes considered to be 'a story told for the purpose of understanding and learning'. This led me to consider a combined approach of narrative inquiry within case study.

3.4.3 Narrative Inquiry

It has been argued that human beings are predisposed to think in a narrative form and are natural storytellers (Bruner, 2002; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, 2000; Reissman, 2008). Stories and narratives have a range of purposes including to argue, to justify, to persuade, to

entertain, even to mislead (Reissman, 2008). They are used to remember events and allow a revision of self and identity (Frank, 2015; Reissman, 2008).

Narrative provides an opportunity to reflect on experience, to make sense of that experience and to relate that sense to others (Bruner, 1986 cited in Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative inquiry acknowledges that the stories of others can be used to understand experience as lived and understood by the tellers (Savin-Baden and Van Niekirk, 2007). Insight can be gained into the sense and meaning of human experience as ascribed by individuals, thus enabling an understanding of both identity and experience (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, Brown, 2006) in a unique way that is richly and intensely personal (Fan and De Jong, 2019). Narrative inquiry can also provide a voice for those relating their experiences through narrative (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002; Richardson, 1988).

Both narrative and narrative inquiry have become widely used terms in research across a range of academic disciplines, including education (Cortazzi, 1994). Connelly and Clandinin, (1990) suggest that in educational research, narrative is equally appropriate as both phenomenon and method. For them, the distinction lies in the data that expresses the phenomenon to be analysed, which they refer to as 'stories', and the methods of investigation and analysis, which they call narrative inquiry. Reissman (2008) discusses the complexity of arriving at a definition of narrative and suggests three uses of the term within research, the practice of narrative, narrative as data and narrative analysis. This study utilises narrative as a combination of storied data collection and narrative analysis as a strategy of inquiry within case study. Terms used throughout this paper are 'stories' or 'narratives' when referring to data that relates to experience and phenomenon, and 'narrative inquiry' or 'narrative analysis' when referring to the strategy of inquiry or methods of data analysis.

Various approaches to narrative inquiry have been identified, depending on the focus on the research. Lieblich et al., (1998) categorize narrative inquiry as holistic or categorical and differentiate between a focus on content and a focus on form. They locate narrative research within case studies based on the schema outlined in Figure 3.3, offering four possible dimensions of narrative inquiry.

Figure 3.3. Possible approaches to narrative inquiry (adapted from Leiblich et al., 1998).
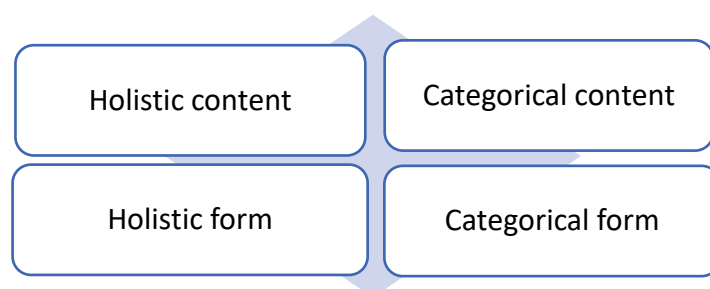
A holistic approach views the story or narrative as a whole, with all elements within the story as interrelated. This makes it appropriate for biographic narratives, where a sequence of events and plot is significant for the narrator and their audience (Denzin, 1989). A categorical approach, on the other hand, identifies themes and categories within the stories of a group of people (Leiblich et al., 1998; Beal, 2013). Researchers focusing on the content of narratives are largely interested in events and characters within the story; whereas those focusing on form are more likely to consider structure, linguistic features or how the story is told (Beal, 2013; Leiblich et al., 1998). Kaasila (2007), however, suggests these dichotomies are not necessarily clear cut and separation may not always be desirable or possible, indeed Leiblich et al. (1998) acknowledge that there may be overlap between these dimensions within research. Beal (2013), for example, focused on a holistic content approach to construct meaningful analysis from the stories of women seeking medical attention after experiencing stroke symptoms. Their stories of shared experience were enlightening yet, ultimately, she acknowledges the limitations of the holistic approach as a sole method of analysis and suggests a two-step approach that allows comparison of themes based on holistic content.

An alternative to holistic or thematic styles of narrative inquiry is a dialogical narrative approach (Frank, 2005, 2015). Dialogical narrative approach follows the philosophy of twentieth century Russian literary critic and scholar Mikhail Bahktin, in particular his conceptualisation of polyphony or the theory that individual voices are actually an amalgamation of multiple voices (Caddick et al., 2015; Frank, 2005, 2015). The concept that an individual's story never purely represents just the voice of the teller but is imbued with the voices of others, locates dialogical narrative analysis in shared dialogue that focuses on relationships (Caddick et al., 2015). Researchers taking a dialogical narrative approach search for what Richardson (1988) defines as collective stories that are developed through group identity. These stories are often considered in light of the effects of the events that they relay have on those involved. Caddick et al. (2015), for example, used a dialogical narrative approach to further understanding of how peer relationships improved the wellbeing of combat veterans and Toohey and Rock (2019) highlighted the economic and housing vulnerabilities of aging older adults wishing to stay in their homes with pets rather than move into supported living accommodation. This suggests that a dialogical narrative approach may be particularly appropriate for the study of groups that have a clear commonality or who are experiencing a specific event. Discourse analysis would provide an appropriate strategy of inquiry for dialogical narrative analysis. A dialogical narrative approach, however, is rejected for this

study as the aim is to holistically and thematically explore a range of events rather than a specific event.

Common characteristics of narrative inquiry have been identified as learning from participants in settings, learning from personal stories, and social stories that involve interaction with others (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). Temporality has also been identified as being 'at the heart of narrative inquiry' (Beal, 2013, p.701). These characteristics link to Clandinin and Connelly's (2004) conceptualization of narrative inquiry as a three-dimensional space located within temporality, interaction and situation, Their concept of three-dimensional space is philosophically rooted in Dewey's (1938) view of individual experience growing out of past experience then leading to future experience, all of which should be understood within a social context (cited in Clandinin, 2006). Dewey's view is that experience is continuous and ever evolving yet based on past experience (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). These elements could be considered as key features of both case study and narrative inquiry and, as they are used in this project, place this research within the context of narrative case study.

3.4.4 The narrative case study approach in this study

Having considered the design of the study (Figure 3.4), this doctoral research project is situated within a qualitative, inductive approach underpinned by an interpretivist philosophical perspective, influenced by the tenets of symbolic interactionism. A hybrid approach to strategies of inquiry that encompasses case study and narrative inquiry has been adopted in the form of narrative case study, as it is often suggested that 'narrative inquiry is a way of conducting case-centred research' Reissman (2008, p.11).

Figure 3.4. A framework for the design of this study
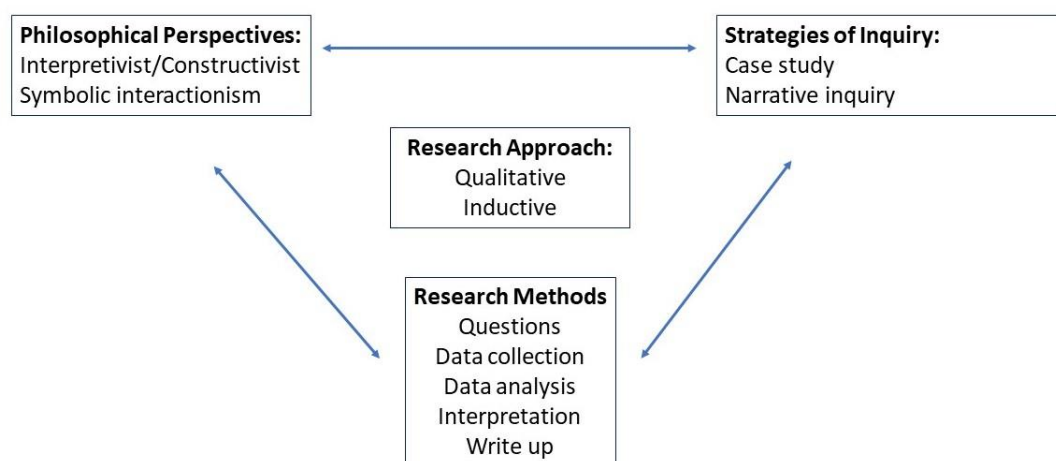
Both case study and narrative inquiry are used across a range of academic disciplines (Cortazzi, 1994) and lend themselves to educational research, which forms the basis of this study, although it could also be said to have elements of sociological research. The ontological and epistemological grounding of narrative case study within interpretivism fits with my personal epistemologies as well as those of the study.

Case study allows the investigation of 'how' and 'why' research questions that aim to explore phenomenon and develop theory (Yin, 2009). The research questions in this study consider why participants are influenced to study at a time when they have children studying at university, how they are motivated and challenged by their situation, and how their interactions with their children who are also students may impact on their academic success. They are, therefore, suited to investigation within a case study.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2004) three-dimensional space approach, temporality, interaction and situation underpins the case in this narrative case study. As Clandinin (2006) suggests, narrative researchers enter into stories located within these dimensions. In this case, temporality is maintained through the varied individual stories of past influences and experiences, journeys to becoming a student and future aspirations. Stories of the participants' interaction with their children who are university students and others, are also foregrounded, within their current situation as non-traditional student parents. These elements form the boundaries of the case, or situation, and the narratives of the participants. The three-dimensional space approach within narrative case study fits well with symbolic interactionism, which philosophically underpins this study, with its focuses on perspective, social interaction and language (Charon, 2010). Temporality is key to symbolic interactionism, acknowledging how past events inform the present, as is interaction and symbolic meaning (Charmaz, 2014).

Case study as a strategy of inquiry is often criticised as unreliable and not easily generalisable due to its bounded nature (Kohlbacker, 2006). Yin (2009, p.3) suggests 'following a rigorous methodological path' in case study research to counteract this. He advocates a range of analytical techniques, including matching patterns within data with pre-defined or predicted variables, explanation building, time-series and logic models. Yin (2009) places great emphasis on reliability and his techniques are relatively scientific, often relying on comparison to theory or statistical analysis. While I recognise the value of these strategies to increase reliability, I was reluctant to privilege my voice as the interpreter of data at the expense of the participants'. Narrative case study moves away from a scientific focus and allows the stories of the lived experiences of the participants to 'provide a unique example of real people in real situations' with a view to developing theory that will help others to understand similar cases or phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007, p.253). The emergence of the personal narratives in this

study, which are not singular stories but a chain of events, interactions and characters within this particular bounded case, provide intensely rich descriptions that form a basis to explore the research questions through detailed analysis. Narrative case study as a strategy of inquiry helps to gain a sense of the perspective of each individual within the case. It allows the narration of stories that provide a glimpse of each individual self, whilst highlighting embedded and emerging themes. Narrative case study, therefore, has the capacity to generate new and deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation in this study with a view to developing theory from the case.

As with all research methods and strategies of inquiry, the use of narrative case study has its limitations as well as advantages. The most prominent of these is the heavy reliance on anecdotal narratives provided by the participants rather than direct observation. The narrator may report selectively (Brandell and Varkas, 2001) and only partial stories emerge (Polkinghorne, 2007), sometimes affected by the presence of the researcher, resulting in what Labov (1972) terms the observer's paradox. Narratives are provided with a specific audience and purpose in mind, which may not be apparent to the listener (Brown, 2006). It is recognised, therefore, that these stories are imperfect reconstructions of actual events, presenting a version of events from their perspective that, in turn, are presented through my interpretation (Charon, 2010). As the sole researcher this could, by nature, be considered a limitation. Connelly and Clandinin (1998) suggest that equality in relationships helps to share narratives and the building of rapport is important. While there is not exact parity between me and the participants, which could be seen as a limitation, my status as an older, non-traditional student myself could be considered to balance that somewhat. Labov's (1997) reflections on how to limit the effects of the observer's paradox, suggest that the natural elicitation of narratives based on personal experience to be, at least partially, effective.

3.5 Participants

An appropriate sample maintains the reliability and validity of the research (Cohen et al., 2007). A number of key distinctions are made between types of samples, including probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling tends to be used for quantitative research due to its rigorous statistical nature, while non-probability sampling, where participants are selected for having particular characteristics, is well suited to small-scale qualitative studies, such as this one (Ritchie et al., 2003).

The participants in this study are students at the University where I am employed, however, they are not students that I teach. Although this could be described as a convenience sample

(Cohen et al., 2007) as the participants were easily accessible, the sample is best described as purposive, as their specific characteristics were relevant to this study and enabled the exploration of the research questions and themes (Ritchie et al., 2003). Purposive sampling of this nature was chosen to allow the investigation of a relatively homogenous group and provide the opportunity to research a particular subgroup in depth (Palinkas et al., 2015), in this case, non-traditional, student parents. Case study as a main strategy of inquiry stresses the importance of maintaining the boundaries of the case (Baxter and Jack, 2010). The study was not, therefore, extended to other universities. This was to preserve the boundaries of this case, which was within the setting of a specific small university campus in a particular location.

Students were asked to volunteer for the study. As the campus is small and personal, I was able to present the details of the study to whole class groups and ask for volunteers to contact me, in confidence, if they were interested in taking part. As a lecturer who supports students in their academic skills development, I do not teach a specific group of students. I did not, therefore, have my own class group to approach for participants and I was not known to the participants as a lecturer on their course. I may, however, have been familiar to the participants through my role at the university and they would recognise me as a member of staff as well as the researcher. The response was encouraging, and 10 students contacted me of their own volition. In order to engage appropriate students, classes that attracted a diverse range of students from different backgrounds including non-traditional, student parents were approached. Among these were courses in Health and Social Care, Community Leadership and Social Work. These courses have been found to be popular with non-traditional and mature students wishing to gain qualifications that relate to prior work experience (McCune et al., 2010) or who have highly developed career goals in these areas (Stevenson and Clegg, 2012). It was from these groups that the students were recruited. Some class groups were not approached, such as Sports and Football Coaching and Medical Sciences. At the time of recruitment of participants for the study, these cohorts consisted entirely of students under the age of 30, who would not have been eligible to take part in the study.

The students who volunteered to take part in the study were all female. It was not my intention to study a group of female students, the project was open to any students who had children studying at university, I would have welcomed male and female participants had male students volunteered to take part. It is recognised that this could be considered a limitation and, as such, could provide an interesting focus for a similar future study. An all-female sample, however, provides a more homogenous case study group. Although the sample is small, which may be considered an additional limitation, it represents a significant number of the non-traditional, student parents with children simultaneously studying at the University campus.

The participants were at different stages in their studies, from Foundation Entry level students to final year undergraduates. They represented a cross-section of non-traditional, student parents on different courses and levels of study.

Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym and to complete consent forms (see Appendix B), to conform with ethical approval. Demographic details of the students can be found in Table 3.1. below.

Table 3.1. Demographic details of participants

Name	Age	Marital status	Number and age of children	Children at university
Elsa	39	Divorced single parent	2 children: 20, 15	Son aged 20
Alice	43	Divorced, remarried	4 children: 3, 14, 19, 21	Son aged 21, son aged 19
Carla	54	Long term partner	2 children: 19, 24	Daughter aged 24
Freya	41	Divorced single parent	3 children: 21, 12, 6	Son aged 21
Maura	39	Divorced, partner	3 children: 21, 13, 5	Daughter aged 21
Grace	48	Married	3 children: 20, 18, 13	Daughter aged 20, son aged 18 at college
Miriam	50	Married	2 children 23, 21	Son aged 21
Tina	50	Married	6 children: 30, 24 (twins), 21, 20, 12	Daughter aged 20
Jani	42	Married	4 children: 25, 22, 20, 16	Sons aged 25, 22, 20
Wendy	52	Divorced, remarried	6 children: 36, 34, 32, 21, 19, 15	Daughter aged 21, son aged 19

3.6 My Position as a Researcher

The axiological assumption linked to interpretivist research is that the research will be bound by the views, values and experiences of the researcher (Carter and Little, 2007). While my views and values in relation to the choice of research approach have been outlined, my experience in relation to the research and its participants is also key, as is the issue of reflexivity (Attia and Edge, 2017; Etherington, 2007).

As a female researcher working with female participants, I am naturally drawn to elements of feminist theory. Feminist theory recognises that constructs of self for women lie within their relationship with others, which may be specifically with their children (Gilligan, 1993; Crotty, 1998). I hope that my analysis and interpretation of the narratives provide an ethical evaluation of these constructs, yet I acknowledge the view within feminist theory that a researcher cannot

be wholly neutral or objective (Morawski, 2001). Indeed, my position as a lecturer at the University where the study was conducted and as a researcher could lead to ethical issues relating to power. The process of reflexivity in research goes some way towards redressing this balance of power through the provision of ethical and transparent research (Etherington, 2007), as do processes of ethical approval, which are considered in Chapter 4.

To be a reflexive researcher entails sensitivity towards the personal, social and cultural conditions of our participants (Etherington, 2007). As a working-class female of similar age to the participants, from the geographical area where the research took place, I have some common ground with the individuals in my case study. This provided me with a certain level of insight and empathy with their situation and 'insider' status. Having insider status, or commonalities, with the research participants can help to foster trust and openness (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). There is, however, a danger of assumption of similarity or knowledge. To counter this, I kept detailed field notes after each interaction with a participant that noted my personal responses to their narratives or conversations, including surprise, disbelief, empathy and recognition, an approach based on reader response theory (Gilligan et al., 2003). This highlighted my personal views and biases allowing me to reflect upon and maintain an awareness of them, and to avoid focusing on them during the process of data analysis rather than the views of the participants. This also helped to consider how my views may shape the evaluation of the phenomena (Gergen, 2015).

Additionally, I remain outside the research for a number of reasons. My educational and professional background is different as I attended university at a younger age, and I have worked in management and academic positions. Furthermore, I have no children, therefore, I cannot claim to understand the concept of being a parent while studying at university and the inherent self-concepts associated with this. This was not explicitly discussed with the participants, although they were aware that I did not have children who were studying at university. I made it clear that my aim was to learn from their experiences. While issues relating to the impact of difference between participants and outsider researchers have been reported in the literature, particularly in circumstances where this was considered to be obvious, such as in studies of minority groups (Grove, 2017), this did not appear to be problematic in my study. The documentation of my responses to participants' narratives allowed me to reflect on and manage my shifting insider/outsider perspectives.

As a member of staff at the University where the participants are studying, this project could be what has been dubbed 'backyard' research (Creswell, 2009), or research that is based on those who are near to the researcher. While this is true, I feel that it is important for me to gain a deeper understanding of some of the students I work with. Reflection on my research project

will provide me with improved clarity on the influences, motivations and challenges of a specific group of students and why some non-traditional, student parents may achieve better than others. This will enable me to advise and support them better.

Also central to the research process is my development as a researcher. Continuous reflexivity, based on humility and openness, has been an essential element of this process (Attia and Edge, 2017). Humility has allowed me to recognise that my knowledge is limited, while openness and empathy towards the views of others has led me to recognise how they have contributed towards my development. This reflexivity has provided me with insights into the processes and methods of carrying out research and has helped to develop my self-concept to include a researcher identity (Attia and Edge, 2017). This will enable me to conduct research and to advise and supervise students who are taking their first steps towards becoming early career researchers.

Chapter 4. Data Collection and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Having identified the philosophical and methodological design of this research project and selected a narrative case study approach as the principle strategy of inquiry, careful consideration of the procedures involved in the management and analysis of data is critical. It is recognised that data collection and analysis is potentially sensitive, and that ethical standards must be met, therefore, ethical considerations and the process of ensuring validity open the chapter. The processes and stages of data collection and analysis used in the study, including an evaluation of their advantages and limitations are then presented.

4.2 Ethical Issues and Issues of Validity

A principle undertaking of this doctoral project is that it complies to ethical standards and reliably reports the narratives of the participants of the case study while adhering to general principles of ethics. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) provides guidelines and standards outlining the responsibilities of social science researchers. These guidelines include responsibility to participants, to stakeholders and to the wider educational community. Within these responsibilities lie concerns relating to consent, transparency and privacy. Similarly, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2021) promotes six key principles for ethical research including, respect for the rights and dignity of individuals and groups, independence of research, and accountability. Ethical approval was obtained prior to the start of this doctoral research project according to the standards of the University of Central Lancashire, which fall within BERA (2018), ESRC (2021) and other respected guidelines. To conform to general principles of ethics, informed consent to take part in the study voluntarily was sought from the participants. The participants were made aware of the format and content of the study, including outcomes, prior to agreeing to consent (Howitt and Cramer, 2016). A participant information sheet confirming that their participation is voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time and that their participation would have no impact on their university studies, including assessment was provided in conjunction with a consent form (see Appendix A and Appendix B). To comply with General Data Protection Regulations (2016) and ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018; ESRC, 2021), within these documents the participants were informed that data relating to the project would be stored on the university secure network and their confidentiality, including anonymity, would be maintained. As the participants in this study

were studying at a small university campus, there could be concerns regarding their identification. To avoid this, all participants were given pseudonyms that have not been shared by the researcher. In the case of those participants from outside the local area, their place of origin was changed to decrease the possibility of identification.

Qualitative research is based on human interaction and power inequalities are widely acknowledged as part of the research process (Bourdeau, 2000; Orb et al. 2001). The participants were not taught or assessed by me; they were largely unknown to me prior to the study. However, they were aware of the research process and of my role as the researcher and as a lecturer at the university. This may have led them to position and present themselves in a certain way and could lead to ethical issues relating to power. I aimed to minimise this through systematic transparency and ensuring the appropriacy of the research setting.

Interviews took place at the University, in my office. Unlike many offices of academic staff, mine incorporated a seated area with a sofa and comfortable chairs so students could speak to me in confidence about their academic skills concerns in a safe and welcoming setting. The participants had the option to be interviewed in a place of their preference, yet all chose my office at the University, suggesting that this was a practical choice and they were comfortable there. I hoped that a welcoming environment of the participants' choice would mitigate considerations of power imbalance that could arise from me holding the position of lecturer somewhat and comply to ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018). Every effort was made to make them comfortable and relaxed; they were seated in the informal setting described above and provided with refreshments. Punch (1994) suggests that positive interaction is an essential part of the research process, which is often determined by personality. As an experienced interviewer, including over ten years' experience as a language examiner, I am used to building rapport and encouraging participants to speak naturally, which I hope was beneficial in my role as a researcher and minimised the impact of the observer's paradox (Labov, 1972; 1997). Interviews were informal with a conversational feel to guarantee that participants felt comfortable and were in agreement with taking part. While it could be said that there was some sharing of sensitive information, the main concern relating to this was avoidance of harm (Etherington, 2007). The participants were assured that they only need share what they were comfortable with. The aim of this study was to collect data that would not cause distress or harm to the participants and that would, ultimately, be used beneficially, to support students (Bourdeau, 2000).

Interview data was transcribed accurately to maintain reliability and validity (Howitt and Cramer, 2016). It is recognised that the analysis of data and ultimate presentation of data is mine as the researcher yet, ethically, it is important to relay this to the participants where

possible. With this in mind, a series of second interviews and informal conversations were arranged that enabled the participants to reiterate their narratives and comment further on major themes that were emerging. This in turn helped to strengthen the validity of the research (Reissman, 2008).

Interpretivism, while valued for its provision of deep and unique understandings of particular situations is often criticised for issues of validity and reliability (Chowdhury, 2014). Creswell (2009) suggests that multiple strategies of validity are needed to ensure that the research is taken seriously. I have endeavoured to do this through compliance with dutiful ethical processes, rigorous analytical processes and depth of data analysis. Overall, the main focus was that the research process was a positive experience for the participants and the findings were interpreted sensitively and ethically.

4.3 Data Collection

Historically, criticism of case study research has centred around the fact that it may be too descriptive, or too context specific to be generalizable (Yin, 2009). This gives rise to concerns regarding validity and reliability in relation to data collection. Although these perceptions are changing and learning from a specific situation is increasingly considered to be an opportunity, robust data collection and analytical procedures that reflect on theory throughout and lead to theory development are considered to be essential (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Yin, 2009). Transferability to other settings and reflexivity of the researcher are central elements of this (Mays and Pope, 2000).

There is a consensus between case study researchers that data should be obtained from multiple sources (Liu, 2016; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). For this study, data was collected from mind maps, interviews and researcher notes or memos. This multiplicity of data sources is often applied to provide evidence of triangulation of data, which may be considered to promote validity (Mays and Pope, 2000). In this study, however, it is better seen as a comprehensive method of data collection that encourages reflexivity (Attia and Edge, 2017).

The principle means of data collection was through a series of interviews. While interviews as a data collection technique within narrative inquiry are advantageous in many ways, a limitation of them is that they are retrospective in nature so information and detail may be lost (Darlington and Scott, 2002). As such, they can only represent a reconstruction of information, which may be imperfectly remembered or constructed. Observation could give a more accurate picture of reality but in this study the opportunity for observation was limited, therefore

all participants took part in an initial narrative interview. Follow up interviews were then arranged, although not all participants were able to attend. One participant had left her course, while another was undergoing disruption to her personal life that impacted on her studies, a third chose not to attend due to an increase in work commitments around the time of the interview. As has been highlighted in the literature, challenges associated with balancing multiple roles and managing time impacted on their availability. 17 interviews were conducted in total, each lasting between 40 to 80 minutes, details of which are provided in Table 4.1 below. Although some respondents participated in longer interviews than others, they each contributed significantly to the depth and quality of the information collected.

Table 4.1 Interview Details

Participant	Times interviewed	Length of interview (minutes)
Elsa	2	41 & 68
Alice	1	43
Carla	2	56 & 61
Freya	1	42
Maura	2	51 & 44
Grace	1	58
Miriam	2	40 & 55
Tina	1	72
Jani	2	65 & 42
Wendy	2	63 & 57

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advise that narrative interviews should be unstructured in order to allow stories to emerge. However, Darlington and Scott (2002, p.56) refute the possibility of a fully unstructured interview as 'a myth', suggesting that 'the interview itself is a structured social interaction.' The interviews in this study are semi-structured, in order to maintain the boundaries of the case, yet flexible and informal enough to allow narratives to emerge. Open ended questions were used during the interviews to develop narratives, and stories were encouraged through prompts such as 'tell me about…' (Beal, 2013). An interview schedule is provided in Appendix C. As there was some overlap during the process of data collection and analysis, the interview format was relatively flexible. Interviews were considered to be an appropriate way to gain the perspective of the participants yet to allow both the interviewer and the interviewee to explore the topic (Darlington and Scott, 2002). They provided the opportunity for clarification and the expansion of points made by the participants.

Prior to starting the interviews and to initiate the process of narrative recall, the participants were asked to complete a mind map (see Appendix D). In this study, the mind map is used in its simplest form, as a diagram with words or statements around a central idea (Wheeldon, 2011). This was handed to the participants soon after their arrival at the interview setting and they were given time and space to consider the ideas on the mind map while sitting comfortably in a relaxed atmosphere. The instruction was to make a note of words or phrases that came to mind in relation to the ideas on the paper. The participants were not asked to supply visual images, such as photos or drawings, although the value of such visual methodologies is recognised to elicit narrative recall and as a means of eliciting depth of meaning (Glaw et al., 2017). Participants were told that detail was not necessary as the ideas would be discussed in detail during the interview. Although mind maps are increasingly used to generate data in qualitative research (Wheeldon and Ahlberg, 2019) or for the analysis of data (Burgess-Allen and Owen-Smith, 2010; Soukalova, 2016), this was not the foremost intention in this study, which was to generate narrative discussion. In a small-scale study that compared the depth of reflection on experience between groups of participants who used mind maps prior to speaking about their experiences and groups who did not, Wheeldon (2011) found that participants who had used mind maps were better able to recall, organize and relate detailed experience than those who had not. This provided the rationale to use mind maps in the context of this study. During the interviews, the mind maps helped to guide the narratives of the participants and I was able to use them as prompts to develop ideas where appropriate. While the chief concern of the mind maps was to generate ideas, some information detailed within them contributed to the overall narrative data collection.

As is often the case with inductive qualitative research, data collection and analysis in this study was somewhat cyclical to allow the researcher to become part of the process of telling and retelling a story (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Collaboration with the narrator is a key element of narrative inquiry, to confirm the story and, perhaps, investigate it further (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). While collaboration occurred during initial interviews, subsequent interviews or informal conversations allowed further collaboration. This provided the opportunity to review the stories of the participants with them, to share analyses and findings and to ask if they had any further comments, which served as a type of 'member check' or validation to strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the research (Mays and Pope, 2000; Reissman, 2008). The second interviews took place between two to three months after the initial interviews. Second interviews took a different format to first interviews in that themes and concepts that had emerged from an initial analysis of data, such as 'fear', 'guilt', or 'age as an issue', were presented on flash cards. The participants were asked to comment

on the themes further if they wished. Care was taken not to lead or direct the comments in any way. This took the form of an informal conversational interview.

Connelly and Clandinin (2000) suggest that equality in relationships helps to share narratives. An informal conversational style of interviewing is recommended for narrative inquiry that allows those being interviewed to consider themselves as narrators of their stories and experiences rather than respondents to questions (Chase, 2017; Reissman, 2008). As mentioned previously the interviews took place in a comfortable setting at the university. The aim of the setting was to build trust and rapport to encourage the participants to speak freely (Reissman, 2008). Interview data was recorded, and digital files were stored on the university secure network, which is password protected.

At times during the course of the project, informal discussions on the research with some of the participants took place at the university. Field notes in the form of memos were produced after informal discussions as they were not formally recorded, so their content did not contribute to data in the analysis. Memos are an important element of the qualitative research process (Birks et al., 2008). In grounded theory they are used as an analytical tool, providing a means of interacting with and analysing data (Charmaz, 2014), often according to stringent methodological guidelines (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). In this study, however, memos were not restricted to the analytical stage; rather, they were used as an aide memoire to note the content of meetings and conversations; to clarify my reflective thoughts and biases as well as to maintain momentum. They were produced in both informal and formal styles, depending on their function, their main use being to stimulate reflexivity throughout the research process (Birks et al., 2008).

4.4 Analysis of Data

A challenge of narrative case study is how to manage stories and narratives (Savin-Baden and Niekerk, 2007). Field texts, generated from data collected, must be converted into research texts. This forms data that researchers can analyse and restory into an appropriate sequence (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004; Reissman, 2008). Both case study and narrative inquiry present an array of possible analytical methods, such as Yin's (2009) techniques that focus on validity and reliability or structural analysis, focusing on language form (Reissman, 2008). Watts (2014), however, argues against the prescriptive use of research methods suggesting that researchers may become inhibited by reliance on the stringent application of processes and that dextrous and creative use of analytical methods is desirable in order to be interpretive and critical rather than just descriptive. This study benefits from a range of

analytical methods with a view to critically accomplishing the aims of the research while following rigorous, yet creative, analytical processes (Mays and Pope, 1995; Watts, 2014).

Starting with a holistic content analysis of narratives to provide a summarized overview of the individual stories of the participants, there then follows a process of thematic analysis to extract main codes and concepts. Within narrative inquiry, holistic content analysis looks at whole stories and the overall patterns that emerge from them (Iyengar, 2014). Thematic analysis still aims to keep the content of stories intact but pays less attention to overall content, instead looking more closely at detail (Reissman, 2008). From the analyses in this study, a conceptual framework of intergenerational student support and achievement (ISSA) started to emerge. However, this highlighted the need to explore the issues within the framework more deeply to gain further understanding of the interactions between parents and children and their impact on experience. With this in mind, Bourdieu's framework of habitus, capital and field was employed as a methodological lens to further evaluate data (Reay 2000). It could be said, therefore, that a three-level process of analysis was employed.

4.4.1 Holistic analysis of narratives

The first step in the analytical process was the holistic consideration of the content of the narratives produced during the interviews (Lieblich et al. 1998). The restorying, or retelling, of the events and stories within the data provides a link between ideas that emerge from the stories while maintaining individuality within the narratives (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). As a starting point in the restorying of events, the importance of careful listening to the stories of participants is often emphasised in narrative inquiry (Richardson, 1988; Connelly and Clandinin; 1990). To facilitate this, information presented on the mind maps and memos was collated and the interview data was transcribed verbatim. The process of transcription allowed detail to be preserved and provided initial engagement with the data (Charmaz, 2014). This engagement through transcription can be a highly interpretive process as the researcher considers the narrative and how best to represent it through transcription. To include the researcher's utterances within the transcription highlights the co-constructed nature of the story and acknowledges that this particular narrative has been delivered with a specific listener in mind (Reissman, 2008). While producing the transcripts I aimed to 'straddle a border between speech and writing' (Reissman, 2008, p.29), where speech was preserved and some linguistic elements such as pauses and intonation were noted, however, not all prosodic features were presented as it was not my intention to use the transcript for structural analysis of language. This information was then read multiple times with attention to detail.

To initiate the composition of holistic summaries, a framework based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2004) three-dimensional space approach was used to extract data from the transcripts. Temporally linked events and their contribution to the story (Polkinghorne, 2007), as well as inward, or self-reflective, interactions and outward interactions within the setting of these events (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002) were identified. This allowed the oral nature of narrative, with its idiosyncrasies and repetitions (Mello, 2002), to be presented in a more accessible format. These events were set out in the form of a table, an excerpt of which can be seen in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2 Notes for holistic analysis of narratives in a 3-dimensional space format

Temporality	Setting	Interaction
2 years ago	Applying to university	Self: asked herself whether she could do it, questioned her ability Family: chose not to tell them due to her fear of not being accepted on the course and appearing to be a failure
2 years ago	Acceptance on course	Self: felt anxious but excited. Had strong concerns about her ability as she reflected on difficulties in school Son: shows little interest. She excuses him by saying it is because his studies are different

From this information, the content of each individual story was reorganized and summarized and considered chronologically and holistically to retain the essence of each story and compare them in their entirety (Charmaz, 2011; Iyengar, 2014). This presented an initial interpretation and understanding of the lived experience of the participants (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). This holistic overview of the participants' stories allowed me to understand their current situation within the context of their past, providing narrative linkage (Polkinghorne, 1988; Beal, 2013). It also provided the opportunity to understand their stories and perceive similarities and differences across them. Abridged versions of the summaries of the stories are provided in Appendix E.

Stories collected through holistic content analysis may be intensive so narrative researchers often present two or three individual stories to represent findings (Smit et al., 2012). This study

rejects this method of presentation as the aim is not to relate intensely descriptive stories, but to provide authentic exploration and understanding of experience (Ghauri, 2005). This first step provided an understanding of individual stories and an overview of the patterns therein, however, a thematic analysis enabled a more detailed look at the content of their stories and allowed for further interpretation (Reissman, 2008).

4.4.2 Thematic analysis of narratives

As the focus of this investigation is on content rather than form (Leiblich et al., 1998), a thematic analysis was conducted to produce codes and themes that are explicit and transparent (Cohen et al., 2010). Thematic analysis and coding of information is consistently, yet flexibly, used to analyse qualitative data across both case study and narrative inquiry and there are various ways to carry this out (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Reissman, 2008; Yin, 2009). While the research questions were kept in mind in order to remain within the boundaries of the case, they did not lead the data analysis as this was inductive in nature.

In this study, a thematic analysis allows the categorisation of language and perspectives as symbols that allow codes to emerge (Charon, 2011, p.53). Following Reissman (2008, p.35), transcripts were 'organized into a series of thematic stanzas or meaning units', which were allocated a thematic title or code. These provided logical events that could be compared across narratives or what Charmaz (2014) might refer to as incident-to-incident coding, rather than word-by-word or line-by-line coding. Constant comparison between incidents both within and across narratives allows similarities or differences to be highlighted, and the generation of overarching themes or concepts (Charmaz, 2014). The term 'sensitizing concepts' was originated by the American sociologist Blumer as a means of identifying concepts that are not clearly defined yet provide a sense of direction (Bowen, 2006). They are often used in interpretive inquiry to empathetically draw attention to social interaction from the participant's perspectives when pre-conceived hypotheses are not used (Blaikie, 2000; Bowen, 2006). In this study they were used as a starting point for building analysis and, therefore, formed a conceptual framework for the analysis of data (Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 1996). This enabled a sensitive understanding of the viewpoint of the participants to be presented and organised (Charmaz, 1991; van den Hoonaard, 2013).

4.5 The Production of Codes and Concepts

Etherington (2007, p.600) suggests that our assumptions and beliefs 'might silently fill the gaps' when we read stories. To observe narrative data from a close, or relatively value free viewpoint, Watts (2014, p.4) suggests taking a 'first-person perspective', he supports the reading of narratives empathetically and closely in an attempt to understand the perspective of the narrator and advocates a 'what/how?' system of coding as a means of 'engaging confidently and consistently with the coding process' and to generate interpretive themes Watts (2014, p.5). Preliminary, descriptive, coding arises from engagement with the data guided by the questions, 'what's happening?' or 'what is the participant talking about?'. This is followed by an interpretive level of coding based on the questions, 'how does the participant seem to understand or relate to this?' or 'how does the participant seem to feel about this?'. This requires careful consideration of the perspective of the narrator while ensuring that the personal perspectives and assumptions of the researcher are not allowed to take precedence (Watts, 2014). It is acknowledged, however, that this cannot be done perfectly.

I initially applied the 'what' element of this coding system to the holistic narratives. This generated a group of overarching descriptive codes (see Appendix F). The same questioning technique was then applied to each stanza within the transcripts using the codes from the holistic narratives as an initial guide. This allowed me to descriptively code each utterance that related to a specific event. I was, however, conscious not to limit myself to the initial codes and new codes were produced as and when deemed necessary.

This was followed by the 'how' element of the coding system. Empathy is central to this stage of coding (Watts, 2014), in order to focus on the perspective of the narrator. This type of coding relies less on technology and method and more on the analytical skills of the researcher, whose perspectives should be replaced by a concerted effort to understand the point of view of the participants (Watts, 2014). This, to me, seemed appropriate for narrative inquiry, where it is desirable to retell a story as the narrator sees it, as far as is possible. To carry out this stage of coding, Watts (2014) suggests presenting the perspectives of the participants in the form of 'as structures'. Drawn from the work of Heidegger, who argues that the pragmatic dimension of the presentation of something as something, (*etwas als etwas),* provides meaningful structure to the perspectives of others, thereby disclosing their significance to the narrator (Doyon, 2015; Watts, 2014). The descriptively coded stanzas next to an 'as structure' provided an initial interpretation of the data, an example of this can be seen in Table 4.3 below where a participant is interpreted as defining a significant event, in this case divorce, as a catalyst for change, as a means of escape from her past situation, yet as something she may feel guilt for.

Table 4.3 Coding using 'as structures'

SIGNIFICANT EVENT (Divorce)	
Yes, so I basically, got divorced, separated, the year that I started studying. It made me… gave me, like that jump that I needed…	…as a catalyst for change …as enabling her to move forward
Yes, it was like a shot of freedom, as you might say… I know it sounds bad, yeah… a shot of freedom… but it was!	…as a means of escape from her past situation …as something liberating …as something that still makes her feel bad or guilty

It is acknowledged that my insider position as a working-class female of similar age to the participants allowed me access to some level of interpretation. However, this interpretive process was reviewed numerous times in an attempt to gain an understanding of the data from as close a view of the participants as possible and to reduce the possibility of my own ontological and epistemological viewpoints guiding the data analysis.

Further careful reading of the data was influenced by the Listening Guide (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan et al., 2003; 2011), a method originally developed as a reading guide within the field of psychology from Gilligan's observation of observation of female voices as differing from males due to cultural associations within them. Gilligan (2015, p.69) suggests that 'attending to voice and the interplay of voices within an interview transcript' provides a means of highlighting experience from dialogue. It provides a powerful method of understanding marginalised and little understood experience through the complexity and analysis of the multiple voices that lie within narratives. Its focus on voice, perspective and symbolism associate it with a hermeneutic symbolic interactionist framework, making it appropriate for use in this study. The Listening Guide was, however, not used in its entirety as an analytical approach in this study, rather elements of it were used to focus on voices within the participants' narratives and to extract 'as structures'.

The Listening Guide suggests that transcribed text be read four times, each time with a different focus (Gilligan, 2015; Hutton and Lyster, 2019). The first reading involves listening for plot to identify what is happening within the stories and for the reader to locate themselves

in relation to these stories. The second reading proposes listening for 'I' or how one speaks of him or herself. A third reading focuses on contrapuntal voices and relationships, while the fourth and final reading focuses on broader political and social structures (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan et al., 2003; Hutton and Lyster, 2019). As a holistic content analysis had been conducted to identify plot and similarities/differences across stories, the first suggested reading of the data was considered to have already been conducted. The final reading was also disregarded due to the bound context of the case in this study. This study, therefore, was guided by the proposed focuses for the second and third readings from the Listening Guide.

The data in this study was read multiple times, as has been outlined previously. However, a focus on the 'self-voice' of the participants, through listening for 'I' allowed a deeper understanding of how the participants spoke about themselves within a setting or interaction (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan et al., 2003). Gilligan's (2015, p.75) directive is to collect this list of statements from a transcript and to present them systematically as an 'I poem' as a means of discerning patterns through statements of assertion or negation. While this presents an interesting way to define associative logic through linguistic structures (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017), I chose to use the system of development of 'as structures' rather than I poems as a means of interpreting how the participants were speaking of an event in relation to themselves, as outlined previously. This was done by careful reading of statements where the participants talk about themselves using the pronouns 'I', 'me' or perhaps 'we' to gain an interpretive sense of first-person perspective.

Further readings followed that focused on contrapuntal voices. Focusing on contrapuntal voices reveals the shifting voices within a narrative and the nature of relationships and perceived difficulties within them (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017: Gilligan et al., 2003; Hutton and Lyster, 2019). This was a valuable way to consider the participants' sense of identity in relation to others, including their children, with a view to answering the research questions. These readings generated more 'as structures', which were then reviewed in relation to the research questions in order to develop sensitizing concepts and codes. The sensitizing concepts and the codes that led to their development are presented in tables 4.4 and 4.5 below. These sets of codes and concepts relate to the key points of the first two research questions, influences, motivations and challenges. There is some overlap in codes that relate to influences and motivations and the concepts are expressed as practical themes. The concepts relating to challenges, on the other hand, are expressed as the more abstract themes of 'fear', 'guilt', 'loss' and 'age' rather than practical themes, such as 'risk to relationship', 'lack of confidence', which are more usually considered in literature on non-traditional and mature students. The

abstract codes were developed in order to delve more deeply into the perspectives and feelings of the participants.

Table 4.4 Codes and sensitizing concepts relating to influences and motivations

Influences and Motivations	
CODES	SENSITIZING CONCEPTS
Poor background/disadvantage Lack of opportunity in the past Following tradition Lack of support from others Dissatisfaction with work Significant events	LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND
Desire for greater security/prestige at work Future goals and aspirations Longer working life The time is right Increasing confidence Feeling supported Something for me	SOMETHING FOR ME
Direct inspiration Desire to be a role model On the same wavelength	COMPETITION WITH THE KIDS

Table 4.5 Codes and sensitising concepts relating to challenges

Challenges	
CODES	SENSITIZING CONCEPTS
Facing demons Stepping into the unknown Feeling like a fraud Risk to relationships Fear of failure/what others might think	FEAR
Becoming someone else Finding time and space Support networks	GUILT AND LOSS
Being older Mid-life health transitions Dealing with older children	AGE AS AN ISSUE

4.6 Bourdieu's Theory as an Analytical Lens

The third research question moves on from a deliberation of the overall influences, motivations and challenges of the participants to specifically consider their interactions with their children who were also university students. The process of the development of 'as structures' was followed to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the participants. To explore this further, the data was reviewed drawing upon Bourdieu's theory of practice as an investigative device.

Bourdieu's theory offers 'a toolbox of extremely powerful and persuasive analytical concepts' (Crossley, 2002, p.187), providing a rigorous method that can be applied as a theoretical lens in which to ground research or as a methodological lens to aid the analysis of empirical data (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). There is, however, what James (2015, p.96) defines as 'great variability in what we might call "depth in use"' of Bourdieu's concepts in educational research, which may be due to confusion with similarly named academic concepts. This criticism is echoed by Maton (2014) who suggests that the theory is widely misunderstood and misapplied and Reay (2004, p.432) who bemoans the use of terms such as habitus 'sprayed through academic texts like intellectual hairspray'. James (2015, p.96) proposes that 'light usage' of Bourdieu's terms is of little value. I would, however, argue for the use of Bourdieu's theory and terms as a heuristic device (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Reay, 2000) to extend understanding of a particular case or issue. To avoid usage that is too 'light' requires a high degree of reflexivity, not just to ensure that my views and values do not alter or lead to misrepresentations of results but to reflect on the possibility of symbolic violence and inequalities, however unwittingly these may be carried out (James, 2015). In the case of this project, this was done through repeated readings and reflection to enable detailed interpretation of findings.

After the initial production of 'as structures', as previously described, further readings of the data were applied that focused on how the participants talked about their engagement with their children as students and their contrapuntal voices in relation to these relationships. After reflection on these readings, codes based on as structures were developed for further analysis and conceptual models of positive (ISSA+) and negative (ISSA-) intergenerational student support were formed. The development of these models led to the recognition that data relating to the third research question could be appropriately analysed through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of practice. Following Bourdieu's (1986) notion that cultural capital can be embodied through knowledge, skills and perceptions or institutionalized through qualifications

and specific experience, utterances relating to this were aligned with cultural capital. Narratives relating to interactions that could lead to advancement within a field through social interaction (Bourdieu, 1986; Dika and Singh, 2002) were considered to relate to social capital. Finally, to extend Bourdieu's theory of capital, as encouraged by Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), and following Reay (2000) and Webber (2017), the term emotional capital was employed to consider the transfer of empathy, support and resilience. The codes that were aligned with these constructs of capital can be seen in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 Constructs of Capital

As shared student goals As shared student status	SOCIAL CAPITAL
As shared experience As shared processes As shared resources As shared language	CULTURAL CAPITAL
As shared encouragement As shared understanding	EMOTIONAL CAPITAL

The interpretation of these codes and constructs highlighted patterns of engagement and non-engagement as students between the parents and their children that move towards a theory of intergenerational student support and achievement.

Chapter 5 – Influences, Motivations and Challenges

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 detailed my variation of narrative case study and methods of data collection and analysis. The findings and interpretation of that data, which are critically discussed in relation to the aims of the study, past research and previously highlighted gaps in the literature are now presented. The next two chapters are broadly organised according to the aims of the study. Firstly, the influences and motivations of the participants are considered in relation to attending university at the stage in their lives when their children are also university students. This is followed by an evaluation of their specific challenges. Chapter 6 then assesses the interaction between the non-traditional, student participants and their traditional-aged student children.

The findings of the study are presented through extracts from the participants' narratives. The content of the extracts is presented as transcribed. Pauses are shown as ellipsis and word stress as italics, to help gain a sense of intonation and meaning. Watts (2014, p.7) warns against a list of extracts without analysis and interpretation as these will only 'demonstrate the presence of a theme', therefore, I have attempted to articulate my interpretation of the meanings within the extracts.

Following the tenets of symbolic interactionism, the language and perspective of the participants is used to try to gain a sense of the meanings they ascribe to their socially constructed situations through interpretation (Charmaz, 1990). This allows me to be reflexive as a researcher while grounding the analysis within the narratives, and therefore voice, of the participants. Discussion of my interpretations in relation to the reviewed literature is then presented throughout. The discussions in this chapter are grounded in the sensitizing concepts that were developed from codes during the thematic analysis of data. These sensitizing concepts provide a sense of direction for interpretation (Bowen, 2006) and a sensitive and empathetic understanding of the participants' viewpoints (Charmaz, 1990; van den Hoonaard, 2013).

The past and the future feature strongly in the narratives of the participants, echoing the symbolic interactionist view that temporality is a key element of experience, with past events informing present action and leading to future goals (Charmaz, 2014; Clandinin and Connelly, 2004; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). While telling their stories, the participants were keen to relay their lack of opportunity in the past to provide context to their current situation. These

narratives open this section and are referred to throughout the discussion in relation to the influences, motivations and challenges of the participants.

5.2 Lack of Opportunity in the Past

All the participants in this study left school aged 16 or younger with few, if any, qualifications. They did not have the possibility of going on to further or higher education straight from school, due to sociocultural circumstances and expectations. For some this was framed in scenarios of disadvantage that excluded the option of further education.

> It wasn't… like… *spoke of…* in my family… I was brought up on benefits… *nobody* that I knew went to university… nobody in the community… I didn't even *think* of going to college or… you know, so, it was… it was something that *never entered my mind* (*Maura*)*.*

Neither encouraged nor discouraged, continuing in education after compulsory schooling appears to have been so far removed from Maura's upbringing that it was entirely absent, available for others but not those like her. This is a common theme in research on mature students from low socio-economic background (Busher and James, 2019).

Some participants were denied opportunities as others made decisions for them or failed to provide them with encouragement.

> My father didn't let us complete school properly, 'cos every couple of years he'd pack our bags and take us back to Pakistan and we'd live there for about a year. So, we'd miss out on our education. Then come back, go for two years, then go back again, so… But it was just the way he was (*Jani*).

> I wanted to go to… to have a good education but I never got the opportunity… not through any fault of *mine*… just… *family situations*, so I couldn't do it (*Jani*).

Jani's account paints a picture of instability and dislocation as well as commitment to familial norms that precluded education. However, while Jani feels that her father is responsible for her lack of opportunity rather than her, and states that she would have preferred to be educated*,* her resignation to the situation seems to be complete. This sense of resignation based on cultural expectations is echoed by others.

I've always wanted… I've *always really wanted* to be a nurse*, if I'm honest…
from being a little girl… I've never had the opportunity. *My parents didn't
push me* to seek… further education… when I left school... I went to do a
YTS in travel… erm… I stayed there for 20 years but *really* underneath…
yeah, well… *that's how it WAS* (*Grace*).

Here, Grace confides that she has held a strong career aspiration since childhood and appears to resent her lack of opportunity in the past. She seems to blame her parents for their lack of direction and ambition for her, perhaps feeling they should have been responsible for unearthing her potential as she was so young, ultimately though she accepts the situation as something unavoidable at that time. While Grace referred to her unfulfilled desire to become a nurse after she left school, this aspiration did not provide her with the personal motivation to study at this stage in her life. Unlike the other participants, Grace did not enter higher education by choice but was required to undertake her course within her current employment contract, which is not the nursing post she desired as a child but relates to her recent work experience.

Literature on non-traditional and mature students has highlighted personal circumstances at a young age as a barrier towards entering higher education according to the usual trajectory of traditional-aged university students (Busher and James, 2019; Jamieson, 2007, McCune et al., 2010). This mirrors the experiences of the participants in this study. Waller (2006) suggests that not having educational opportunities at a young age is often a long-term source of regret that influences mature students to enter higher education at a later stage in their lives. The participants in this study, however, did not cite lack of opportunity after leaving school, nor a life-long desire to study, as specifically influencing their decisions to enter higher education. Jenkins (2017) found that early school leavers who aspired to management positions in later life were more likely to hold deep-seated ambitions to enter university. The participants in this study did not hold such aspirations on leaving school, which may be why this is not cited as influential. Harrison (2018) and Harrison and Waller (2018) suggest that aspiration itself is not necessarily an appropriate measure of whether young people will enter higher education after school, rather expectation to succeed is a stronger driver. In the case of the participants in this study, there was some evidence of aspiration but little expectation to progress academically, leading to lack of entry into higher education at a young age.

There is no suggestion within the data that they had negative experiences at school, which has also been identified in the literature as a barrier to entry to further or higher education at a younger age (Stevenson and Clegg, 2013), rather they were held back by disadvantage and cultural norms, often imposed on them by others (Walters, 2010) and leading to the total

acceptance that education was not available to them. There does not appear to have been a struggle against this, they accepted their situations, despite the suggestion from some participants that they would have liked an education.

Lack of opportunity and encouragement, often combined with an expectation to follow tradition and cultural norms, led to early marriage and long-term commitment to family and work roles for all the participants in this study.

> I had a miserable child life, so I never really went into education. I got married at 16 and run off to Nelson, like you do… (*Wendy*).

> I followed that path and I thought that was the normal thing. That's how my mom was always, that's how I saw her marriage, because she's always been dependent of my dad. She's always been a housewife, taking care of the kids and everything. She never tried to go any further, so, it's what I was used to seeing… and we don't really try to go further because we think, 'right, this is what we have to do' (*Elsa*).

Whereas Wendy took refuge from her home life in marriage, Elsa followed in the footsteps of her mother due to a sense of duty and obligation that did not allow her to develop independently. She considers her mother to have been held back, either due to lack of independence or lack of ambition, thus providing a negative role model that leaves Elsa feeling limited and without options. Once again, the possibility of further education does not feature in Elsa's narratives of her past. Her husband's perceptions of the gendered expectations relating to her role as a housewife perpetuated the situation at the time and led to her feeling stagnated and unsupported.

> From his side, it wasn't that thing of getting me going forward, or being better, it was just being there, being better as a housewife, as a mother. Being better accomplished at that and I should be happy with it (*Elsa*).

Stereotypically gendered roles, where women are expected to take care of children, often appear in the narratives of the participants, as they do in the literature (Baxtor and Britton, 1999; Tett, 2000). Sometimes leading to a separation of roles and expectations between husband and wife.

> When we got married… because I am family orientated, my husband, kind of just accepted that… yeah, my family always came first and… then we had kids and we kind of went *in different directions* in a way. Whereas, I just

> looked after the kids, house and I worked, and he just did his business, you
> know… and in a way, he was a breadwinner (*Miriam*).

In Miriam's home, she took care of the family after marriage while her husband supported them. There is a clear description of them going their separate ways and of segregation of roles, with her husband accepting that Miriam had family priorities that did not always include him. While Miriam does not appear to be unhappy with her past situation, even suggesting that it was her choices that her husband had to comply with, the focus was on her children above all else with little indication of aspiration to return to education.

Even when responsibilities were shared, there is often a sense of separation, which may manifest itself as lack of opportunity to discuss and encourage personal aspiration on either side.

> I've always been a hard worker, always been a grafter. We both have, me
> and my husband but we've… generally we've worked, in the past… opposite
> shifts. So, then we've… 'cos we have a large family as well, we've 6 children.
> So, we'd hand over the children as crossover… (*Tina*).

A strong impression of shared commitment to work and family between Tina and her husband is apparent. However, the effort involved in managing their family commitments appears to have impacted greatly on their personal opportunities, both as a couple and as individuals, leaving little time for self-development in an academic context, should they have desired it.

This acceptance of past roles is likely to be due to deeply ingrained dispositions based on class and gendered norms and expectations of the time combined with passive misrecognition of power (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; James, 2015; Reay, 2002). Dedication to their roles as parents and wives for an extended length of time meant that a yearning for or expectation of further educational opportunities was not part of their past narratives.

To summarise, from the narratives of the participants in this case study it is evident that they did not have the opportunity or expectation to enter higher education in the past due to their personal circumstances and socioeconomic background (Harrison & Waller, 2018), however, this is not specifically stated as influencing their decision to enter higher education later in life. This contradicts research that suggests that denied opportunity and unfulfilled life goals may be major motivations to enter university (Britton and Baxtor, 1999; Osborne et al., 2014; O'Shea, 2015). This may, however, be age-related, as participants in studies citing this reason in the literature have tended to be younger.

5.3 Influences and Motivations

Lack of opportunity and expectation in the past provides the backdrop to the participants' narratives in this study. However, more current issues such as a desire for alternative employment opportunities or personal self-development are more likely to influence their decisions to enter university and provide ongoing motivation to achieve, with the catalyst for this change generally arising from significant life events.

The influences and motivations of the participants are framed within sensitizing concepts, or themes, that reflect the analysis of the data and allow an empathetic consideration of their narratives. These concepts are 'leaving the past behind', 'something for me' and 'competition with the kids', each of which are evaluated in this section.

5.3.1 Leaving the past behind

Nine of the ten participants in this study experienced a significant life event prior to entering higher education. For some, this was the loss of a job through redundancy or demotivation. For others, it was divorce, bereavement or children growing up and becoming independent. These events influenced their decision to study in some way and were notably rooted in the construct of loss, which naturally presents challenges. However, when the participants' initial feelings of anguish had subsided there was often a sense of liberation that ignited a desire to leave the past behind. This is highlighted in the extracts below in Grace's comments after her children moved out to attend university and Miriam's after the death of her mother.

> Well, it's strange because you miss them and at first, it's *gut-wrenching!* But then you do get used to them *not* being around… (*Grace*).

> I think because I'd given so much to my mum… when I looked after my mum, best days ever, spending time with my mum… after she passed away… I thought there's a bit of a gap in my life now, and I thought, 'right, I need to look at *me* and do something for *me*'. I needed to give something back to myself, I think. (*Miriam*).

Although Miriam gained happiness from caring for her mother at the end of her life, her passing provided Miriam with the time for self-reflection and the recognition that she needed self-investment and personal progression after caring for others for so long.

In Elsa's case, divorce provided a means of escape from her past situation and the incentive to move forward. Having felt constricted by her marriage, Elsa had gained the independence to leave the past behind and do something for herself.

> I basically, got divorced, separated, the year that I started studying. It made me… gave me, like that jump that I needed… Yes, it was like a shot of freedom, as you might say… I know it sounds bad, yeah… a shot of freedom… but it was! (*Elsa*).

For some of the participants, divorce led to remarriage and supportive relationships that generated encouragement and feelings of security.

> …because of my ex, we didn't have a very good relationship, so I was… I was not *confident* in anything. So, my husband's very supportive and he, my new husband, and he gave me a kick up the bum and said, '*go and do it* if it's what you want to do…' he said, 'we'll manage' (*Alice*).

> I felt supported enough to be able to do it, you know, my partner… he was self-employed, he was always happy to provide for us. Like my eldest two children's dad… the relationship with him… you know, it was *troublesome* to say the least. Yeah, yeah and my partner, he's just like… you do what makes you happy… it's not about the money, it's about what makes you happy (*Maura*).

Maura and Alice's challenging previous relationships had tied them to obstructive past roles and situations, whereas new partners have agreed to provide for them and given them the confidence to follow their dreams and aspirations.

The notion of significant events as a catalyst for change is often cited in the literature (Gill et al., 2015; McCune et al., 2010; Shanahan, 2000). Entering higher education can present a positive and constructive way to move on from the negative effects of significant life events that involve loss or difficulty, particularly when supported by others (Heagney and Benson, 2017, Webber, 2017). In this study these significant events have motivated the participants to do something for themselves, both personally and in relation to improved future employment opportunities, providing the strong intrinsic motivation often associated with academic achievement (Murphy and Roopchand, 2003; Ryan and Deci, 2000a).

The main motivations for the participants in this study to attend higher education relate to work and personal self-development. Negative experiences and discontent at work are prevalent within their discourses. A desire to move on from these experiences provides a stronger

immediate influence in their motivations to enrol in higher education than lack of opportunity in the distant past, although the two are inextricably linked.

5.3.2 Moving on from work

Their past situations and lack of opportunity to enter higher education at a young age, led the majority of participants in this study to an extended period of employment. Descriptions of past roles, however, tend to be expressed as a sense of dissatisfaction.

> I did school cleaning, school dinner lady, worked in a sandwich shop, worked in a petrol… you know nothing like… just *basic* jobs really. Yeah, lots of different roles, yeah but none on them like… academic or anything… or like with *titles. (Maura).*

> So, I went off and did… *just menial jobs.* I did, like, *Morrison's* and all that type of thing… *(Wendy).*

> I spent a lot of time in a factory job, 13 years, I spent a lot of time in a retail job… I wasn't in and out of jobs… I spent a lot of years… *but…* I worked *hard* for very little money (*Tina*).

Within the narratives above there is emphasis on the perceived low status of their past jobs, even a sense of shame, in the description of them as 'basic', 'menial' or without 'titles'. Tina comments on how she was required to undertake a great deal of hard work for little reward, suggesting a lack of recognition for her time. This highlights their lack of contentment with their past roles.

As well as the desire to move on from poor pay and low status, improved working conditions play a part in providing motivation to study.

> I want to do a 9 to 5 job, my kids are suffering doing all nights, I'm tired 24/7, you know… I want 9 to 5 work. I can be there for the kids as well all the time rather than just working…(*Freya*).

Freya feels that her children are suffering due to her current work pattern. Additionally, the anguish she feels and the effects on her health are apparent. Despite the current demands on her time, particularly as a single parent with younger children as well as a son at university, Freya was motivated to study as a means of moving on from her current situation to create a better life for her and her children.

O'Shea (2015) found that a desire for better conditions for their children was evident in her study on non-traditional students, which is noticeable for those in this study who have younger children to care for, such as Freya, as they are still committed to their children's needs. However, while the participants in this study have accepted their dissatisfactory employment circumstances for many years, leading to long-term involvement in these positions, there is now evidence of a desire for increased status and improved circumstances. For many participants, the narratives suggest a craving for recognition and respectability through their participation in the employment market. This concurs with past research on the motivations of working-class students (Ronnie, 2016; Shanahan, 2000) and supports Busher and James' (2019, p.2) findings that further qualifications allowed the participants in their study to 'escape the socioeconomic peripherality of low-paid/long hours employment'.

For some, new workplace experiences encouraged the participants to seek qualifications, particularly when encouraged by others.

> I started working in a residential home and… it excited me a bit knowing all the health issues that was going on between the residents and being able to help them all. And, then I started investigating, since I was in… in an adventurous path of going a bit further…. and that's when people were telling me, 'yeah, you have help, you can do your degree, you can do [*course name*] and you can go and do more, basically (*Elsa*).

> The voluntary role helped me get my place at uni. because of all the experience I'd got. I went through a 10-week training programme with them and then I was let loose and that experience made me realise that I was… and, obviously, my education providers saw something in me, and they encouraged me (*Maura*).

Both Elsa and Maura suggest an awakening to opportunity and inspiration to learn more after training experiences in the workplace provided them with the confidence and liberation to go further. However, the opposite was true for Carla and Miriam as they recalled feeling demotivated and undervalued in their working environments.

> So, I *loved* that job… *I had a great job…* I really liked the role… I was my own, not my own boss, but it was very flexible. I could come in and go when I wanted, my bosses were *really* great… But then they lost their contract…

and I was transferred, 'TUPE'd[1]' along with the rest of them, like a piece of furniture I felt… and they put somebody as my manager who I felt wasn't skilled. He had no training, he had nothing… Erm, he had basically got a role that… erm, yeah… I don't think he should have got that role. Part of me feels like I should have fought it but instead, I handed my notice in (*Carla*).

The change in Carla's attitude towards her job is apparent as she goes from feeling valued and trusted to work autonomously to feeling overlooked. The transition to another organisation appears to have left her feeling dehumanised. While her age and experience are not mentioned in the narrative, there is a suggestion that she felt more experienced than her new manager, leading to a complete lack of engagement with a role she had previously loved.

Miriam also told the story of demotivation in the workplace after working as a bilingual teaching assistant 'forever' and taking pride in being a supportive and experienced team member from whom others sought advice. Miriam explains how her interest in her role was depleted after communication with the headteacher.

> …and I'd asked him can I train to be a HLTA, a higher level teaching assistant, so that you can take whole classes then, and he just said to me, 'Oh Miriam, why don't you just plod on, you know, that's what I'd do…' maybe because I was of a *mature age*… I don't know but… and the following year he'd asked three other youngsters to do their HLTA and all the other TAs who were my age were totally… *devastated* by it, because he'd told me to plod on and he'd never even asked them… so I gave it two years and then I left (*Miriam*).

Miriam's suspicions of her age going against her experience and skills is cemented when younger members of staff are provided with opportunities for promotion before her and other colleagues of her age. This marginalisation of older females in the workplace, who are experienced, fit to work and not yet ready to 'plod on', suggests an ageist agenda that directly contravenes political incentives that require women to work longer than in the past (Department for Work and Pensions, 2017a) and the changing expectations of older women in the workplace (Kanabar and Kalwij, 2019). In this case, it provided the incentive for Miriam

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[1] TUPE – Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (2006). This refers to UK Government legislation provided to protect employees should the business in which they are employed change hands.

not only to reject the proposal but to seek out new opportunities for herself through higher education.

There are evident differences between the encouraging experiences of Elsa and Maura, the youngest participants, who started their adult student journeys in their late 30s, and the feelings of demotivation and lack of recognition, possibly due to age, experienced by Carla and Miriam, yet both situations provided the impetus to enter university as older mature students. Carla and Miriam are in their 50s and among the oldest participants in the study. In a review of training practices for women over 50 in the workplace in nine countries in Europe, Lössbrock and Radl (2018) found slightly elevated age-related stereotyping in the UK in comparison to some other European countries and that women working with managers who held these stereotypes were overlooked for promotion and training opportunities in a way that men were not. While the scope of this study does not extend to a discussion on ageism in the workplace this, nevertheless, highlights how age-related differences in workplace treatment may impact on motivations for entry into further education even within the age range of the older, non-traditional students in this case study.

Despite their differing experiences and influences, it is clear that age is not a barrier to participation in the employment market for the participants in this case study. This presents a distinct motivation for entering higher education. Although age is sometimes mentioned in a negative context, by the older participants in particular, they all consider themselves to be fit and active. Longer working lives are cited as a reason for wanting to be competitive in the work market.

> People are expected to work longer! Now, we have to work until we're 67 so why shouldn't we study at 50… because you've got 17 years left to work (*Carla*).

> A lot of people say to me… 'why are you bothering now at this time? You're going to be too old to do anything with it' (laughs). Well, I just think I've got another 16 years to work, haven't I? If I'm lucky… so… I mean… we're not *OLD* grandmas, are we? (*Wendy*).

> I think it is that as well, the time of my life that I'm doing this… and it's something that came up on a menopause programme that I was watching, it was a doctor in… I think it's Denmark or somewhere… and he describes it as 'middle youth'… *we're at the middle youth now*! Yeah, I'm finding like I'm gonna start roller skating and things [*laughs*]… (*Miriam*).

While there is acknowledgement of their age and life stages, optimism and vision towards the future, as well as distance from discourses relating to ageing is apparent in the narratives of Carla, Wendy and Miriam above, who are all aged over 50. They do not seem to be fazed by a longer working life and are ready to approach it with zest.

Past research on middle-aged and older students has tended to focus on students from middle-class backgrounds and has implied that, while some students in this age group are seeking employment advancement, few are seeking a new direction in employment (Jamieson, 2007; Silverstein et al., 2002) and many are looking for interests to make retirement more meaningful, 'a kind of "life project" after other goals have been achieved' (Jamieson, 2007, p.381). This is not the case for the older, working-class participants in this study. They do not envisage themselves as old learners motivated by a desire to keep their brain active due to ageing (Hardy et al., 2018) thus challenging the consideration of older students from an anti-ageing perspective, in line with the arguments of McAllister (2010). It is clear that they see themselves as fully engaged in the employment market and entering higher education to gain qualifications to become professionalised or to enter a new career is a major influence.

This rejection of discourses based on ageing may be due to differences in perceptions of subjective age in relation to chronological age. For the 320 women surveyed by Borzumato-Gainey et al., (2009), the difference between chronological age and the age that women felt, increased with time. The mean discrepancy between chronological age and subjective age for women in their 39s in their study was 12 years and for women in their 50s it was 14 years, suggesting that the older one gets the younger one feels, boding well for the motivations of older non-traditional students in higher education.

Most participants in this case study were motivated to study by clear visions of future professional roles and career paths, as reflected in their choice of course. Many are enrolled on professional courses, such as Nursing or Social Work, indicating a definite future career goal. The path to achieving their goals was, however, not necessarily smooth. The strength of the participants' determination to achieve their educational and employment goals is apparent throughout the study, particularly when their arduous student journeys are considered.

> I got those grades, I applied to uni, didn't get an interview… so, I applied
> again the following year… didn't get an interview… So, this year then, on my
> third year applying… the grades had gone up – 45 distinctions, so there was
> no room for error! (long pause). So, then I went and took a second Access

course at [*Name*] College in Biosciences, and also alongside, I sat a GCE [*sic*] Science and a GCSE Biology, just to increase my chances… (*Tina*).

So, I started with GCSEs in English and Maths. I did maths, I'm going to say I'm very good in Maths. I didn't accomplish English for a few marks. But then I did the Access course at the same time I was doing, again, GCSEs in English. I didn't accomplish English but then I tried several other things, I tried to go for the IELTS but because of a few marks in the writing, I couldn't… whatever, it was just… It was the writing! Just by a few marks, the rest of it, I passed it. It's just for a few marks. Err, frustrating! (*Elsa*).

I spoke to the College and they were going to put me on an Access course and ring me back in May, they said. So, when I rang back, they said, I'd waited like 9 months for this… for this phone call, and when I rang back they said, 'oh you haven't got the qualifications from school, so sorry, you can't, you'll have to go and do your English and Maths again'. So, I that… I was devastated by that (*Miriam*).

These accounts highlight the time, effort and frustration of gaining the appropriate entry qualifications and securing a place on their desired course. Sometimes distress is apparent, however, their determination to achieve, strongly defined goals and visions of clear future selves provide strong motivation to succeed (Markus and Nurius, 1986), thus cementing their place as committed and valuable additions to a higher education student cohort.

A variety of reasons for moving on from work are evident. The literature on mature students often cites a love of learning for learning's sake or search for new knowledge (McCune et al., 2010; Reay et al., 2002; Mallman and Lee, 2016). This is not apparent in this case study, although they are interested in their studies, they are more concerned with personal and professional development. Their choice of course tending to be vocational, often in altruistic fields such as Nursing or Social Work, which mirrors literature that suggests that older learners often state the desire to contribute to society as an influential reason for studying in higher education (McCune et al., 2010; Reay et al., 2002). McCune et al. (2010) also state that a high proportion of participants in their study were seeking qualifications based on past experience, which may be the case for these students due to their ingrained experience and identities as carers.

Overall, the participants have a great deal of experience in the field of employment and display intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, relating to both job prospects and personal satisfaction (Ryan and Deci, 1985, 2000b) as well as strongly visualised future selves, which provide the

determination and motivation to succeed (Markus and Nurius, 1986). The literature review revealed a paucity of differentiation between younger and older mature students, therefore, failing to recognise their differing experiences (Bohl et al., 2017; Mallman and Lee, 2014; Shafi and Rose, 2014). The contrasting experiences in the workplace between the younger participants in this study, who were encouraged to progress, and the older participants, who were discouraged and overlooked may not be generalizable to wider contexts, nevertheless it suggests that there is not only a need for increased research on older learners, but for more detailed investigation into the nuanced experiences of non-traditional students in upper age ranges in future research.

5.3.3 Something for me

The over-riding motivation to study stated within the participants' narratives was the desire to do something for themselves, whether as the result of experiencing a significant life event or in relation to employment. As highlighted in Section 5.2.3, this desire for something better is not necessarily related to high financial rewards or aspirations but to security or prestige, particularly for those who had difficult beginnings.

> So… and I knew, I knew that… I'd always wanted to *do something* in my life,
> I'd always wanted to get a *proper* education and get a *proper* job (*Maura*).

Maura's comments suggest a desire to prove herself worthy of opportunities denied when she was younger due to her low socioeconomic background.

Not only is a desire for increased self-esteem prevalent, in some narratives there is a desire to prove themselves to others, such as family members who have achieved academically as mature students.

> I wanted to do something for myself because my brother, who's one year
> older than me, had done a degree (*Miriam*).

> To be equal to my partner… because he'd gone from being someone who…
> well, basically he'd gone from leaving school very early, and me being the
> more academic really, to being the one that had completed *a degree* and I
> hadn't, so I felt like a bit of a *failure*, I have to say (*Carla*).

Although Carla left school at 16 with relatively low qualifications, she reported her husband as having left school 'aged 13 or something' with no formal qualifications at all during the interviews. This appears to have led her to consider herself to be more capable academically,

perhaps with a sense of being more deserving of academic success, yet here she defines herself as being less than equal to him and something of a failure based on his achievement. This desire to re-establish herself and increase her confidence provided her with the incentive to study.

The participants' expressed desire to prove themselves, both personally and to others, again focuses on the sense that increased respectability plays a part in their decision to enter university (Skeggs, 1997). This was particularly noticeable for those from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds, as seen in Maura's emphatic wish for a proper job and to do something with her life. This is poignant given her earlier description of having been brought up 'on benefits', currently considered to be a culturally derogatory term due to negative popularist media depictions (van der Bom et al., 2018). This suggests a sense of marginalisation that Maura is keen to leave behind. In the UK, life on benefits, or government support, is generally associated with poverty, in Maura's case poverty of educational opportunity.

The participants' lack of opportunity in the past led to low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence when they were younger, as can be seen in the extract below where Miriam states that she had not previously allowed herself the opportunity to grow in confidence as she was focused on providing for others.

> I just didn't believe in myself. I was there for everybody else but never reflected on what I wanted or what I could achieve or anything like that (*Miriam*).

There is, however, a sense of having gained enough confidence through age and experience to take part in higher education. This increases during time spent at university.

> I think when you're a little bit older, you've got maybe some more knowledge to give and a different point of view on things… hopefully they find it interesting (*Wendy*).

> It definitely improves your confidence in the workplace. Absolutely! I mean, sometimes I say things at work and, they're all qualified, and they go, *'oh, I didn't know that'* and so you think '*oh, I've taught you something'* (*Grace*).

The desire for increased confidence is often cited in the literature as a reason for studying (McCune et al., 2010) with Taylor and House (2010) suggesting that feelings of confidence grow the longer non-traditional students are enrolled at university. In the case of the participants in this study, the seeds of increased confidence have been sown during their years

of successful child raising and steady employment. This suggests that, rather than searching for confidence, their age and experience has provided them with the confidence to move towards further opportunities for self-development.

Although age was seen positively in terms of experience and increasing confidence, it was also acknowledged in terms of time.

> I looked at it as my personal evaluation in life basically. Of wanting more. And I just thought, right if I don't do it now, I might not be able to do it later. And if the kids are in age where I can go forward with it, I'm just gonna go with it, basically (*Elsa*).

Elsa considers her personal situation and aspirations yet recognises that the chance provided as her children are becoming more independent may not come her way again due to limitations of time.

Grace is, however, more specific about the limits of time as an older student and makes a personal choice to become qualified to a certain level, then to enjoy the increased confidence studying will have brought without going further.

> I would probably have gone on… [*to study further*]… but… I *know* my limitations of time. Yeah, and I want to enjoy time (*Grace*).

There is a strong focus within the narratives of the participants on spending their adult lives caring for others, describing themselves as giving and putting others before themselves, both inside and outside the home. The extracts below display the long-term commitment of the participants to the needs of others and their propensity to put others first.

> I'd set up resources and things like that for the whole school to use. But I still didn't put myself up there (*Miriam*).

> I've always been *a giver*, always been a giver! I don't know if it's relevant or anything, it's just my background… I *have* been a surrogate mum! (*Tina*).

> Ever since I got married, it was always a case of… my husband needs this, his family need this and then my parents need me here and then my children, so I was always looking to do things for other people. So, this was for *me!* (*Jani*).

> It kind of hit home a couple of years ago when I went on holiday with just two of my friends and we sat there having breakfast in the sunshine and I thought, 'I actually feel like ME today!' Do you know what I mean? And

> there's nobody like wanting my attention or nobody demanding time, it's just
> ME! (*Miriam*).

Of all the influences and motivations cited by the participants in this study, most prevalent is the concept of 'something for me', which they all reported. It is often suggested in the literature that a desire to enter higher education stems from lack of opportunity in the past that is carried within individuals as life-long personal regret (Waller, 2006) and deep seated unfulfilled life goals (Tett, 2000), which does not appear to be the case for these older non-traditional, student parents. Their relatively recent awareness of possibility is based on increased support mechanisms, shifting demands on time as responsibilities change or improved financial stability. Increased confidence allows them to consider these possibilities. As children become more independent and circumstantial changes are brought about by significant events, the participants have finally found time to allow themselves to think about themselves rather than others. This concurs with Shanahan's (2000, p.157) observation that education presents the opportunity for some older female students to change their direction in life based on a redefinition of self and identity 'beyond that of wife and mother'.

5.3.4 Competition with the kids

There can be little doubt that the participants in this study were indirectly motivated by their children growing up and becoming more independent, thus providing them with time to re-evaluate their priorities. To promote further understanding of the situation of having children studying at university, participants were asked whether this had directly influenced their decision to study. While some participants claimed that there was no direct influence and that their personal motivation to enter higher education came from peers, job roles or family members who had taken degrees, others cited their children's entry into university as being directly inspirational. This can be seen in Miriam's narrative below as she speaks about attending an open day at University with her son.

> I was like 'go and talk to…', 'go and ask this question', so it probably did do…
> It probably did inspire me a bit, to see what was available (*Miriam*).

Other participants suggested that they were influenced by their children entering university as they want to be seen as a good role model for their children through their own personal ambitions.

> Yeah, I think it *did* motivate me, 'cos you know I'd always encouraged her to go to college, to go to uni… and then I thought… how can I *really* encourage and motivate if I'm not aspiring to do the same? *(Maura).*

Here Maura seems to be reflecting on the possibility that she may provide a negative role model for her daughter if she is not seen to have personal ambition and to be striving to achieve educational goals. The desire to provide a good role model for children by taking part in higher education and gaining qualifications is often cited in the literature (Reay et al., 2002; Osborne et al., 2004; O'Shea, 2015), although past studies tend to refer to the parents of younger children. Concerns of working-class women, who were denied educational opportunities in the past, perhaps those who were actively discouraged by parents and teachers (Walters, 2000), or whose parents presented a negative role model due to lack of opportunity or ambition, as has been reported by some participants in this study, is likely to lead to an inclination to do things differently for their children. This corresponds to Mallman's (2017) claim that social mobility through encouragement to enter further or higher education may be initiated by parents through narratives of aspiration that were not available to them when they were young.

A sense of competition or wishing to be on the same level as their children was apparent in a number of the participants' narratives, indicating a desire to share the student experience with their children as well as a strong sense of motivation to do as well, if not better, than their children.

> I thought 'well if they can do it, I can do the same'… (*Alice*).

> I said, 'oh, we'll graduate together', you know (*Miriam*).

> She [*her daughter*] achieved a *First* in hers… that's motivated me, 'cos I want… *I don't want anything less* than a First, so there's that competition, as well (*Maura*).

> It's a challenge now, I've *got* to get my BA(Hons) before them! (*laughs*) I'm gonna be the first! (*Wendy*).

Prior to taking part in interviews the participants completed a pre-drafted 'mind map', (see Appendix D). These documents were principally intended to guide the interview process. However, on reviewing them, the role of 'mother' was clearly foregrounded in the participants descriptions of themselves prior to becoming students, suggesting a strong sense of identity as a parent. In this light, these comments could be seen to stem from a desire to stay close to their children through continued shared experience. There is little reflection of this in the

literature due to the scarcity of research on this particular parent/child student dynamic, nevertheless, research suggests greater parental involvement and investment in children's education in developed nations (Carney-Hall, 2008), which may lead to an increase in the desire to take part in higher education alongside their children.

Additionally, the participants' personal ambition and aspirations to be on the same level as their offspring seems to have been aroused by seeing the educational progression of their children. Fragoso et al.'s (2013) study on how mature students in Portugal transition to higher education provides a snapshot of their two oldest participants, who were also studying at the same time as their children. They mention the strengthening of ties and development of healthy competition between their participants and their children, yet they stop short of any detailed discussion on this.

Overall, the narratives in this study present evidence that having children simultaneously studying at university influences and motivates non-traditional, student parents both directly and indirectly. It is, however, acknowledged that there is currently no specific discussion of this phenomenon in the literature on student parents, suggesting the need for further investigation.

5.4 Challenges

Having considered the influences and motivations of this group of non-traditional, student parents, the challenges they face relating to their decision to enter higher education at this stage in their lives are now defined. Challenges faced by non-traditional students have been widely researched and are often presented as practical themes, such as risks to relationships or lack of confidence in academic ability. In this study, the analysis of the narratives of the participants foregrounded the emotions underlying the challenges, therefore, they are defined by the sensitizing concepts of 'fear', 'guilt and loss' and 'age as an issue'.

5.4.1 Fear

Fear as a challenging concept features strongly in the language and perspectives of some of the participants in this study. This is most evident when the participants are speaking about their concerns at the start of their studies during the transition into higher education.

> I was scared of change or going to that next level. I think… *scared of the unknown*. Yeah. Yeah… the unknown really… (*Grace*).

Grace states that she was, perhaps understandably, intimidated at the thought of entering an unknown domain, she focuses on the process of change as something fearful and refers to being afraid of 'going to that next level', giving prominence to the strength of feeling created by moving away from her current, familiar, long-term commitments. She comments on her fear of the unknown, highlighting the unfamiliarity of the university setting for students who were unable to access education in their youth and may, therefore, lack in cultural capital (Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017). Additionally, the lack of expectation of further education for young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds suggests that entering university is not considered as a future possible self (Harrison, 2018; Harrison & Waller, 2018); therefore, when it becomes desired or possible it is seen as intimidating. It is likely that the length of time spent out of education have compounded these fears, resulting in a cause for concern for the participants.

> I want to make numbers… but I'm really scared! So… 25 years ago, 24, 24 years ago (*Elsa*).

Fear of failure was so strong that many participants were reluctant to tell others of their intention to study, even after they had applied for a course.

> I didn't think anyone would want to listen so… I'm quite a loud person so people think I'm quite confident... which is a bit… it's a good protection mechanism, but then people don't really realise what you're thinking a lot… I was scared… (*Alice*).

> I only mentioned it when I was already doing it basically. Well, when I was accepted to do things because, that thing… Because I might not be accepted... And, if wasn't accepted they would be like… well, you failed on that, so that wasn't great! So, before I have that face of 'Oh, you failed', I'd better just be sure that I'm actually able to go forward with it (*Elsa*).

Alice's lack of self-esteem, despite being outwardly confident, results in feelings of fear based on a belief that her needs are not of interest to others. Whereas Elsa's fear of failure and reluctance to confide in others, seems to stem from not wanting to go backwards having left her husband and family in Poland to start a new life in the UK following divorce. A sense of isolation is apparent within these narratives, despite having children undergoing the same experience. In fact, Grace commented on how having a child at university contributed to her fears.

> I knew how much work she was doing. So… that kind of like put the fear of God in me a bit… (*Grace*).

In addition to fear of failure and workload, there were voiced concerns about working with younger students and academic ability.

> I don't want to say anything that I don't know, so I'll try not to open my mouth, even though I *think* I might know something, it might be *wrong* and they're going to be young students and they're going to laugh at me, or something like that (*Jani*).

Jani's lack of confidence in her academic ability and sense of imposter syndrome based on age has led her to worry that she may be a source of ridicule for younger learners, leading to a reluctance to engage in class and fear of taking chances.

Anxiety upon entering university is widely reported in the literature, predominantly in relation to students of low socioeconomic origin, who are considered to be susceptible to low confidence due to perceptions of inability based on lack of opportunity (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; O'Brien et al., 2009; Reay et al., 2002), or to mature students, who may experience imposter syndrome when faced with unfamiliar surroundings (Johnson and Robson, 1999; O'Shea, 2015) and an environment that they feel to be the domain of younger students (Bohl et al., 2017; Mallman and Lee, 2016). There are numerous reports of a sense of discordance and challenge upon entering university due to habitus conflicts, particularly in studies on working-class students (Reay, 2004; 2018; Watson and Widin, 2014). This is often ascribed to lack of appropriate capital (Costa et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2010). While there is evidence of the usual anxieties associated with non-traditional students within the narratives of the participants in this case study, I would argue that the sense of fear expressed by some members of this group of non-traditional student parents goes beyond these usual anxieties due to the length of time spent out of education. It is compounded by feelings of isolation if they choose not to disclose their decision to study in higher education initially due to fear of being perceived a failure if unsuccessful or when support is not easily accessible. The paucity of research into students of this age group may account for the lack of focus on the concept of fear in the literature, thereby ignoring the strength of this feeling for older mature students.

Although narratives of fear were most apparent at the start of the course and many of the participants gained confidence as the course progressed, there is some evidence that lack of confidence can linger throughout a student's time at university.

> I still feel like *a fraud*! I still don't feel that I'm *good enough* to be *that person*...
> I feel like I'm *pretending,* and the academic side doesn't necessarily mean
> that I'm going to be good in practice, does it? so… (*Maura*).

Maura's deep-seated insecurities based on her lack of opportunity in the past have led to an enduring feeling of imposter syndrome and persistent fears and concerns about her professional abilities, despite being close to the completion of her degree and expected to achieve a first-class result.

There are also enduring issues relating to external circumstances that cause fear and concern throughout the students' studies.

> I'm still a bit scared because erm, my 15-year old she's still a bit dependent upon me. I still need to put her in school, I still need to pick her up and everything and if… I can't pick her up, I'm in stress because I need to find someone, and I don't like to ask people for that (*Elsa*).

> I was just running to work… I was just concentrating more on what I'm doing in the house life then leaving this for the last minute, so… and then *panic!* (*Freya*).

These issues appear to be particularly strong for Elsa and Freya as single parents who have recently moved into the local area and have to balance multiple roles with little immediate family support, which has been identified as a barrier to learning (Lin, 2016; Webber, 2017).

The sense of fear felt at the start of the course by some participants, especially in relation to working with younger students or lack of confidence in their academic ability is generally soon allayed, their imagined fears being worse than the realities that they experience. This is, in part, due to the environment at the University, a small campus with a relatively large proportion of older, non-traditional students and a welcoming atmosphere towards them, institutional support being considered essential for non-traditional students to achieve in higher education (Campbell and Narayan, 2017; Heagney and Benson, 2017). However, there is a strong example of how imposter syndrome can still persist for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds in the case of Maura and her concerns about leaving university. There is also evidence of lack of how external support contributes to lingering fears that may not be considered by providers of higher education.

5.4.2 Guilt and Loss

In addition to the emotion of fear, there is a significant sense of guilt relating to loss embedded within the participants' narratives. This largely concerns the multiple roles they have to balance and the resulting losses in terms of time spent with others or on tasks.

I do have a lot of guilt for not doing as much for my mum and my nan as I used to do but… they have to be understanding and they'll get me in the holidays (*Alice*).

I saved up some leave from the beginning of this year and I take three days leave to do an assignment and I do it in three days. I get up in the morning and work till night and I do that for three days… and then I can do it and it's not taking my weekends up, so *I don't feel guilty*! (*Grace*).

For Alice and Freya, forfeiting their leisure time provides a way to manage the challenge of poverty of time and trying to avoid guilt. Nevertheless, they convey feelings of anguish at the effect their studies have on those close to them. This is reflected in the narratives of other participants, who experience stress and anxiety as they try to cope with the loss of time they have for others.

I'm taking a lot of time away from them, you know. I mean, I decided I'll only do a few weekends now and then, so I spend the weekends with them, aside of doing the house chores and, you know… it never ends, so…. I think they're suffering because I'm not there all the time (*Freya*).

Yeah, 'cos my housework's took [*sic*] a backseat from *me*… it's took a backseat, 'cos I… I've always been *house proud,* but it has took a backseat from *me*. And, *I hate it! I hate it*! (*Tina*).

The desire for self-development is strong and motivates the participants to persevere, yet despite their personal sacrifices, is often expressed as selfishness.

I've never been a selfish person, NEVER! But I feel like I'm neglecting them a little bit. I've become a little bit selfish… but, I *HAVE TO* get through this, I *HAVE TO do it*! They *do* feel neglected… (*Tina*).

I DO feel a little bit *selfish* sometimes but… I just think, 'No*, I need my time!*' and I just go off and do my thing (*Miriam*).

During interview, Tina commented further on the friction the time spent on her studies had caused within her family and the guilt and blame she felt for this, something which was reiterated by other participants. In the extract below Grace comments on the pressures she feels as tries to balance her roles.

Then… you've got tea to cook and you've got ironing to do and then they're asking you things and I just *snap* sometimes. But I'm not the only one! When

> I talk to the other girls… and their children are a lot younger than mine. I was working all day Sunday and he *[her husband]* did make the tea… and he didn't actually need asking to do that… but that doesn't happen all the time (*Grace*).

There is a sense of guilt as she justifies her actions through comparison with others. There is also little sense of support with household tasks, despite her children being older, there is a continued expectation that they should fall on her, which is the case for many participants.

In addition to the loss of time spent with others to balance multiple roles, the participants in this study, like other non-traditional and mature students, experience transition of identity as they develop as students. While this is largely a positive experience, concerns are voiced about the loss of old selves and the effect this may have on their relationships with those around them.

> He always makes jokes, you know, about how much I've changed and stuff like that… and I think you're doing that naturally… the more you learn, the more you see different views, sort of… but I think you DO naturally change! I think that perhaps it is a *fear* that I'm like… I'm gonna run off with some other professional… I think he sort of feels a little bit… *less worthy* of me! (*Maura*).

While Maura does not expressly define her feelings in relation to her concerns about her relationship, there is an underlying sense of guilt as she puts space between her and her partner professionally and intellectually suggesting that she may be pulling away from her old identities (Lee and Kramer, 2013).

The concept of loss in relation to time spent with others features strongly in the literature on students with multiple roles and responsibilities (Fairchild, 2003; Ramsay et al., 2007; Shanahan, 2000) and the students in this study are no exception. If partners take a more equal share of domestic responsibilities, it is likely that non-traditional, student parents will feel less guilt about time spent on studying, according to past research (Brooks, 2013; Webber, 2015). However, despite their children becoming more independent, the participants in this study are still required to balance multiple commitments and to fulfil gendered expectations relating to home and caring responsibilities (Hope and Quinlan, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2009). If they feel these responsibilities are neglected, feelings of guilt and selfishness are generated, which they attempt to counterbalance by reducing their leisure time or time spent on certain tasks.

The participants in this study have demonstrated a strong determination to succeed and desire for self-development based on their motivation to leave the past behind and do something for

themselves. They are keen to develop new constructs of identity as students but having spent so much time giving to others in their roles as parents and caregivers, this can lead to strain on relationships resulting in guilt (Baxtor and Britton, 2001; Chapman, 2017; Stevens, 2003) or distancing from old identities that may place strain on relationships (Lee and Kramer, 2013). Unlike Shanahan's (2000) study, which suggests that guilt is usually manifest as anxiety about academic capability, these non-traditional, student parents are more likely to feel selfish, to self-blame and to add to their roles rather than impact on others. This concurs with Stone and O-Shea's (2013) research on gendered differences relating to guilt. There is a conflict of emotion as they feel the time to do something for themselves has arrived, yet they feel guilty about the loss of commitment to others that this entails.

An important element of the nature of the significant events that provided the catalyst to enter higher education is the concept of loss, which is embedded in the event. This is likely to present a noteworthy departure from the experiences and motivations of younger non-traditional learners, especially when the events correlate to lifestyle transitions more likely to be associated with ageing, such as bereavement, children leaving home or the end of childbearing. Two of the participants had recently divorced and chosen to move geographically to make a break with the past and do something for themselves, which provided the impetus to study. This led to a lack of social and support networks, which has been seen to negatively affect women who divorce in middle age (Bourzumato-Gainey et al., 2009; Crowley, 2019). In Freya's case, there was a high level of dependence on her eldest child, which resulted in strain and feelings of guilt.

These events feature strongly within the narratives of the participants and clearly had substantial effects that they carried within them. There is a recognition of significant effects as being pivotal in decisions to study at university in research on non-traditional and mature students (Jamieson, 2007; McAllister, 2010; Silverstein, 2002), yet there appears to be little research on or recognition of the ongoing impact and challenges these events may have on students who have undergone them or how providers of higher education can acknowledge and manage them.

5.4.3 Age as an issue

Although age has been identified as motivating students to study due to the confidence gained from experience that has developed over time, there is still a suggestion that physical age can impact on confidence, especially for participants at the upper end of the age range.

It is really hard… because everybody's a lot younger, aren't they? And they do sometimes double take when you walk past them, some of the younger ones, so I do find that (*Wendy*).

I sat with these 18-year olds and… they looked to me to guide them, probably because I was *a mum!* (*Miriam*).

I thought being *mature…* it's like trying to teach an old dog new tricks, I thought, '*Am I ever going to get this?'* (*Tina*).

Wendy and Miriam suggest that they are self-conscious about their age in the company of younger students, who they feel treat them differently than other students. Miriam defines herself by her long-standing role of 'mum' rather than acknowledging that she is also a student, indicating self-imposed distance between her and younger students and exclusion. Tina, on the other hand, attributes challenges relating to learning to her age, despite the fact that she has achieved well on her degree course. This suggests lack of self-esteem based on age.

In terms of physical aging, the participants in this study were active and well, not lacking in energy or motivation, yet conscious of their physical age in relation to younger students and learning. Studies in the literature that have reported this tend to focus on younger mature students than most of the participants in this study (Bohl et al., 2017). Cavallaro Johnson and Watson's (2004, p.478) case study, for example, considered the isolation and imposter syndrome experienced by their 34-year-old student, who considered himself 'an old bloke'. It is likely, from the comments of the participants in this study, that these issues increase with age. Indeed, Simon et al., (2020) indicate that older learners often do not have their own community of learners, which can impact the learning experience for them.

In addition to personal insecurities around age, there is evidence of issues relating to mid-life transitional events that may be associated with aging creating both physical and emotional challenge.

Menopause! The biggest challenge this time… has been the menopause…
You just can't concentrate… Yes, it's massive, because it really affects your
state of mind (*Carla*).

Carla considers menopause to have been the greatest challenge facing her at points during her course, largely due to the emotional and psychological effects that affected her cognitive ability to concentrate, yet this issue is not generally considered in the literature on mature students in higher education. A key word search for "menopause" AND "mature students" in a range of academic databases yields no results that consider menopause as a specific

challenge for mature students, indicating little or no recognition of these issues for older, non-traditional students by providers of higher education in either a research or a practical sense.

Non-physical issues that are more likely to affect older students than younger students include caring for aging parents and bereavement.

> I was *caring* for my dad, at the time. For my mum first, she passed away, and then my dad… so… that was hard as well because *they*… needed a lot of my time. So, I have felt pressured… I've definitely felt under pressure (*Tina*).

> I cared for my mum for three months from August to December so I couldn't do the presentation… (*Carla*).

> It was the final day, the second to last day of placement… my first placement… so, you know, that's obviously… and then this year… the same happened again… so… when I had to come out of my work to drive to Wales because my dad was like… dying… erm… the final last day of placement (*Maura*).

There is no doubt that these significant challenges have increased pressure on the participants who have to cope with them. Tina refers to the general burden of multiple responsibilities when studying, while Carla and Maura's assessed work was affected.

Mid-life transitional events are often reported in the literature as creating distress for women (Bourzumato-Gainey et al., 2009; Dare, 2011), although not in the context of this study. The participants were not asked to speak about the events specifically, yet they often referred to them during interviews and conversations, indicating their significance. All expressed these challenges in terms of hardship and difficulty. They create disruption and unsettle students. Past studies on mid-life transitional events report incidences of depression and loss (Turner et al., 2004), therefore, their challenging nature should be recognised for older students.

Dealing with aging parents is not the only challenge encountered by the participants. Having children who are older can also create additional pressures and add to challenges relating to time and space if they are present in the home.

> …with younger children it's easier… this might sound awful… yes, because when they're in bed, they're in bed… and you just kind of get on. Whereas now, I've got an adult daughter living at home. She's back from work so she'll be hanging about… or she's upstairs, she's downstairs… or they want to use the computer or…(*Carla*).

Yeah, when you're sat up all night worrying where they are! Or like when their Xbox is not working and they need you to go and do something… see the kids… put them to bed and you know that you've got a few hours then, don't you? (*Maura*).

Lin's (2016) systematic review of literature that considers the barriers and challenges facing adult learners in higher education highlights the widely reported challenge of caring for younger children while studying, yet the challenges related to having older children and meeting their demands is overlooked, possibly due to the general tendency to overlook older learners. The nature of this case study is such that the participants have older children, which they highlight as presenting its own challenges and pressures in relation to studying.

Overall, age is a double-edged sword for the participants in this study. On one hand, providing confidence and experience (Smith, 2017). On the other, permeating all the concepts relating to challenge, yet not taken into consideration within the literature or in practice.

Chapter 6 - Intergenerational Challenge and Support

6.1 Introduction

The final research aim of this project considers the interaction between the participants and their children who are also studying at university and its impact on the experiences and achievements of this group of non-traditional student parents, whether that be by adding to their challenges or by supporting their motivations. The holistic narratives of the participants in this study highlighted many similarities among them in terms of background, influences, motivations and challenges. Nevertheless, in terms of interaction with their children who are also students at university, there is some divergence. Some student parents have a high level of mutual engagement as students with their child at university, while for others engagement as students is lacking.

In this chapter, the contrapuntal voices (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan and Eddy, 2017) within the narratives of the participants relating to their engagement as students with their children are analysed through the lens of Bourdieu's (1977; 1986) theory of practice. Findings are then interpreted and discussed in relation to literature and theory. Firstly, the constructs of capital used in this study are defined then outlined within the context of positive (ISSA+) and negative (ISSA-) models of intergenerational student support and achievement that were generated from the analysis of data collected in the study. These models move towards a theory of intergenerational student support and achievement (ISSA) that could be used to frame future studies on parent-child student engagement. Variations between individuals and factors that may explain the generation of either ISSA+ or ISSA- intergenerational student support and achievement are then presented and discussed.

6.2 Social, cultural and emotional capital

The concepts of social, cultural and emotional capital have been selected to frame the interactions of the students, as introduced in Chapter 4 in Table 4.5. Those participants and their children who engaged well together as students were found to transfer these types of capital between each other.

Social capital, which Bourdieu (1986) links to status and social position, refers to shared academic goals and university student status in this study. Participants who experienced this

commented on improved communication and strengthening of bonds with their children. There was a sense of healthy competition between them that benefitted both as students.

> *We get on better.* yeah! But our communication's usually always about study… Cos we've something in common, yeah! (*Tina*).

> We spent a year together to-ing and fro-ing to college together. It was good! I enjoyed it! (*Maura*).

> So, at the moment there's a challenge between myself and my son… who becomes a lawyer first (*Jani*).

Cultural capital, on the other hand, refers to shared experiences, procedures, resources and language in this study. Engagement with these issues provided mutual support in relation to academic matters, helping both parent and child to improve these skills.

> We *did* discuss like the academic things… the theories, you know and *referencing* and… you know, things like that… Yeah, and we look over each other's work as well (*Maura*).

> Well, my son number 2, he's great! So… he's been doing all my proof reading. My son would read it for me and say, 'it flows… you're too descriptive here… you need to get… move away from the description…' (*Jani*).

> I understand what he's saying now, so I think he feels that he can talk a little bit more to me. Like I say, he's helped me with Blackboard… and stuff like that (*Wendy*).

> When it comes to paraphrasing… she seems to *GET IT*, I need to *think* about it… if I need to paraphrase something, I just send her something and say, 'can you rephrase this for me?' and she'll just get it! Then she'll say, 'Mum, will you just research this a bit, while I concentrate on this side', so, I end up doing a bit of research and sending her some information across… (*Tina*).

Emotional capital follows previous studies that extend Bourdieu's (1986) concepts to include shared understanding, encouragement and empathy in relation to the student experience (Reay, 2000; Webber, 2017).

> Sometimes she feels under pressure, when that deadline date's coming for submission. That's when… she contacts me *more* than anything… because she's feeling the pressures of this submission date looming… (*Tina*).

> I mean obviously we have, like, the mother, daughter conversations as well but a lot of the time, especially around deadlines, you know, I'll be like… I'll either be moaning at her about what I've got to do or asking her for support, asking her if she's got any, like, materials that would benefit this and, vice versa, you know, anything she's unsure of, she can ask me (*Maura*).

There is little doubt that this mutual engagement as students and the development and transfer of shared capital have impacted positively on the student journey of the participants. Those who have experienced it achieved well academically. Their grades during their studies have been high and those who graduated during the course of this project achieved First Class degrees and moved on to either graduate study or employment in areas of their choice. Additionally, their relationships with their children have strengthened as their individual habitus has developed, not only to include the ability to function in higher education but to engage with each other as more than parent and child. In the case of Tina, this improved significantly due to increased understanding between them. Speaking of their previous relationship she states:

> It was quite distant… because she spent a lot of time in her bedroom. *A lot*! And I would be forever shouting… to her… telling her that she's *lazy*… because… I know now that she loved her study… (*Tina*).

Support is considered to be crucial for success at university, in order to overcome challenges. Support for mature students is mainly reported in the literature as coming from partners, largely in the form of emotional support (Heagney and Benson, 2017; Ramsay et al., 2007) or financial support (Webber, 2017). However, partners may lack understanding of what it means to study at university, leaving them only able to provide superficial support (Hope and Quinlan, 2020). In some cases, partners are absent. Intergenerational support between parents and children who are both students at university has not been considered previously, to my knowledge, and forms the critical element of support in this study. Shared experiences between younger and older students within student cohorts have been seen to be mutually beneficial (Simon et al., 2020) and the results of this study suggest the same to be true within families.

The acquisition of capital as a means of developing habitus and enabling success in a specific field underpins Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977, 1986). Bourdieu's theory that working-class students enter the field of higher education lacking in the cultural capital necessary to succeed due to lack of transfer through primary socialisation has been extensively researched, and there is a broad consensus of agreement with this (Costa et al., 2019; Nairz-Wirth et al., 2017; Reay, 2018; Reay et al., 2009; Tett, 2000). Lack of capital can leave individuals without

the appropriate habitus to function within field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In the case of these intergenerational students, although cultural capital relating to higher education has not been an element of the primary socialisation of either parent or child, given that they are sharing the experience of being first in family to study at university (O'Shea, 2016), there is evidence of its co-construction through mutual engagement as students. This, in turn, leads to positive habitus transformation as they transition from a parent-child relationship to a parent-student-child relationship based on narratives of shared status, experience and support.

While habitus is flexible and can be transformed (Mallman, 2017; Maton, 2014; Reay et al., 2009), in cases where it is not transformed the development of cleft or divided habitus may ensue. This can result in discord or less successful function within a field or it can lead to distancing from a field (Jin and Ball, 2019). Not all the non-traditional student, parents in this case study engaged positively with their children as students. In some cases, there was a lack of generation of shared social capital and a rejection of shared status as students, to the point of the children ridiculing their parents for being students.

> I think [*daughter*]'s a little bit embarrassed that I'm at university. I think so, I think she is… because she's, 'Oh God, are you not a bit old for all that?' (*Wendy*).

> My eldest is still, erm… he keeps saying to me, 'you know what mum, your course is nothing. I'll do better than you' (*Jani*).

This was also the case with cultural capital, despite a desire from the participants to share the academic experiences and processes of university, they experienced rejection from their children.

> He doesn't discuss his assignments. I'm always interested, like, 'what're you doing? Let me read your work'… 'What did you get?' He's just not giving you feedback… he doesn't really… I wish he'd tell me. If I read his work, I might learn something, but he doesn't… because he doesn't have hard copies and he doesn't want to *log in… blah blah*, that's how lazy he is… (*Freya*).

> I'm like, 'why won't you help me?' and she just said, ''cos it's your work, you've to do it yourself!' (*Wendy*).

> No!!! He wouldn't share anything with me. I asked him, but he wouldn't share anything with me, it was just, 'your course is different to mine' (*Miriam*).

He's very… I'm gonna say *selfish…* even if I ask my daughter, because she's very good in English actually, for some help, then ask him, he WON'T give me any help! (*Elsa*).

In addition to the lack of shared cultural capital, there is a suggestion of deterioration of relationship or conflict with their children within the extracts from Freya and Elsa when they refer to their children as 'lazy' or 'selfish'.

Where there was a lack of engagement as students this extends to emotional capital. Rather than encourage and support their parents as students there was a level of frustration and at times negative reaction to their situation.

I've had comments off *[son]*, who's 18, he's a bit more reactive than the others. He'll say something like '*well it isn't OUR fault YOU'RE doing this degree*!' (*Grace*).

He said, "do you know if I fail this assignment, 'cos I have to deliver it tomorrow at 4 o'clock, it's gonna be *all your fault'* (*Elsa*).

In Elsa's extract, her son not only refuses to support her as a student but blames her for lack of support, despite her supporting him to achieve as a student financially and emotionally.

Lack of family support has been seen to endanger academic achievement and may lead to distancing from the field of education (Costa et al., 2019; O'Shea, 2015, 2016, Webber, 2017). During this study, the parents with the least engagement with their children as students had more difficulties adapting to the field of education based on their grades, which were generally lower, and other issues that impacted on their achievement. They tended to ask for extensions on assignment deadlines and two participants had interruptions to their studies after their initial interviews for this research project. One participant left her programme of study and did not complete her degree. In each case, I had conversations with the participants regarding these issues where they cited problems relating to their student children that they needed to deal with. In the case of the student parents who interrupted their studies, their children had decided to leave their programme of study to join a different course and they chose to take time out of their studies to assist their children with this. In the case of the participant who did not complete her programme of study, her son moved out of the family home leaving her with no help with younger children, which she needed to complete her degree. As a single parent who had relocated after her divorce, she was dependent on her son for childcare and had few support networks. This corresponds to research findings on the effect of divorce on older women, who

often encounter severe difficulties when family and social networks break down after divorce (Bouzumato-Gainey et al., 2009; Crowley, 2019; Sakraida, 2005).

Needless to say, there was no evidence of development of shared capital or transformation of primary habitus among these students, rather there was evidence of cleft habitus as the student parents compartmentalised their parent/student identities. Research has suggested that this brings with it a greater likelihood of withdrawal from secondary habitus, particularly if support is not available (O'Shea, 2016; Webb, 2017), which corresponds to the situation of these participants.

6.3 Towards a theory of intergenerational student support and achievement

From these initial observations of engagement and support, positive (ISSA+) and negative (ISSA-) models of intergenerational student support and achievement have been developed from the detailed analysis of the data, as befits inductive research. These models originated from a conceptual framework that I produced in order to explain my findings. This led to a realisation that my findings fit well with Bourdieu's theory of practice as the contrapuntal voices within the narratives of my participants indicated that some students had extended their habitus to include student voices when dealing with their children while others had not. This,in turn, led to the development of ISSA+ and ISSA- models. The ISSA+ and ISSA- models are represented in Figure 6.1a and Figure 6.1b below (see also Appendix G).

These models move towards a theory of intergenerational student support and achievement. In an interpretivist sense, theories consider patterns and connections that may be replicated, rather than causality, and are defined by Charmaz (2014) as aiming for deeper understanding or explanation of an issue by stating relationships between abstract concepts. In this case positive or negative patterns of engagement between parents and children who are simultaneously studying at university lead to either positive or negative outcomes in relation to co-construction of social, cultural and emotional capital, and performance within the field of higher education. The models should not, however, be viewed as solely dichotomous. As befits the multiple realities of individuals, there is evidence of flexibility and movement between the two.

Figure 6.1a Positive Model of Intergenerational Student Support and Achievement (ISSA+)

Intergenerational Student Support & Achievement +

Shared primary habitus

Parent   Child

Secondary habitus   Shared secondary habitus   Secondary habitus
Non-traditional student → Student ← Traditional-age student

Social capital   Cultural capital   Emotional capital

Shared student status   Shared experience   Shared encouragement
Shared student goals   Shared processes   Shared understanding
                          Shared resources
                          Shared language

Likely outcomes at University

Confidence   Motivation   Achievement   Wellbeing   Self-esteem

Figure 6.1b Negative Model of Intergenerational Student Support and Achievement (ISSA-)

Intergenerational Student Support & Achievement -

Shared primary habitus

Parent   Child

Secondary habitus   Secondary habitus
Non-traditional student   Traditional-age student

Lack of capital

Lack of engagement
Lack of shared goals
Lack of mutual understanding
Lack of support
Possible role conflict

Possible outcomes at University

Pressure   De-motivation   Stress or anxiety   Threatened identity   Lack of achievement

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6.4 Variations between individuals

Within this case study, some participants showed clear signs of positive or negative relationships. Tina and Maura had strong ISSA+ relationships with their daughters. There was consistent evidence of shared goals, experience and support between them and they developed a shared secondary habitus as students that added an additional dimension to their primary habitus and relationship as parent and child. Both remained motivated throughout their course and achieved high grades, despite finding their academic work and some external issues challenging. At the other end of the spectrum, Freya and Alice showed little positive interaction with their children as students, only ISSA- relationships that created stress and led to lack of achievement.

A clear propensity towards either ISSA+ or ISSA- was not always displayed, however. At the start of this project, Carla did not show patterns of ISSA+ with her daughter. Carla's daughter was reluctant to engage with her mother as a student and did not initially settle into her university studies, leading to Carla suspending her studies to help her to deal with this. As this project developed Carla and her daughter began to reflect on the situation and re-evaluate their relationship as students. ISSA+ engagement between them started to develop. Carla started to achieve much better results at university and to gain confidence, with increased support from her daughter.

Miriam and Elsa also showed signs of ISSA- relationships with their children at university. Their sons refused to engage with their mothers as students, which resulted in additional stresses and anxiety for them as students. Despite a desire for engagement with their child at university, they respected their sons' wishes and attitudes. However, both had daughters who were not at university but who were in education. Elsa's daughter was preparing for GCSEs at school and Miriam's was undergoing an extensive programme of training while in employment. In direct contrast to their sons, their daughters were keen to engage with their mothers as students and ISSA+ started to develop. Social capital became apparent in their shared status as students, meanwhile, cultural capital started to develop as they proofread each other's work and shared ideas and discussion around the topics they were studying. Emotional capital was constructed through their understanding of the pressures of being a student and through mutual support.

> She'll leave me little notes and things saying, 'you're an ace student' and
> 'well done!' and motivate me like that, and things like that … she'll say, 'mum,
> do you want me to listen to your presentation?' When I was doing an

assignment, she'd come with snacks for me and drinks and things like that, just to keep me going, whereas [*son*] didn't! (*Miriam*).

In Elsa's case, she initially achieved poor grades at university and had issues with her English language skills. Her son provided no support even when asked. As her daughter started to mature, she took an interest in helping her mother with her English language skills and became interested in her as a student.

It's exciting for her, *it's a new challenge!* She's *teacher!* That's it! She's teaching me! She's trying to *improve me*, she likes that thing! yeah, it helped. It's a learning path, isn't it? For the both of us! It's good! (*Elsa*).

The rise in Elsa's grades and her increased confidence due to this support quickly became apparent. Additionally, her daughter started to achieve better at school after shared dialogue about her subjects with her mother. Current research suggests that the development of motivated future selves based on expectation to achieve academically can be improved through interventions at a young age (Harrison, 2018; Harrison and Waller, 2018). The development of ISSA+ between Elsa and her daughter appears to have increased her daughter's expectation to enter higher education and envisage her future self as a university student. Both Elsa and Miriam's daughters are now keen to enter university as students with evidence of cultural capital gained from their ISSA+ engagement, supporting Elsa and Miriam's motivation to be good role models to their children.

There is some evidence within the narratives that it is the children who steer the student parent child relationships and whether the ISSA+ or ISSA- model is formed. In the case of Jani and Wendy, who each had more than one child studying in higher education at the time they were students, the ISSA relationship is shown to depend on the child. Both Jani and Wendy had a child who engaged well with them as students and formed a strong ISSA+ relationship. In addition, they both had children who rejected student engagement and formed ISSA- relationships. Encouragingly, the ISSA+ model appears to dominate as both have developed strong parent-student-child relationships with their ISSA+ child and have achieved well in the field of higher education. When speaking about how she may have fared as a student had the ISSA- model prevailed with both children, Wendy states:

Oh… I'd have struggled! I probably wouldn't have been as encouraged. I mean, I made this decision myself but *[son]* really supported it (*Wendy*).

There was an exception to the possible negative outcomes of ISSA- in Grace, who had little or no engagement with her children as students yet achieved well in her studies. As mentioned previously, Grace's family members, including her children, appeared to provide little support

to her as a student and she was required to continue with her multiple roles and commitments within the home, which led to pressure on her as a student. Nevertheless, unlike other participants who showed clear evidence of ISSA-, Grace achieved well in terms of grades, despite some academic challenges. Grace's situation differed from the other participants, as she had entered higher education as a condition of her current employment role, rather than of her own will. Others on her course, who were also mature, non-traditional students, were in the same position and there was strong evidence of peer support between them.

> The girls, the team, *our little team*… and as soon as we all got… we bonded
> on the first day and… we've got each other through it… (*Grace*).

Peer support has long been considered to be an effective support system (Heagney and Benson, 2017; Wong and Kwok, 1997) with insufficient support from both family and peers presenting a barrier to achievement (Lin, 2016). Grace's experience concurs with research that suggests that students achieve as long as they have some significant system of support, whether this comes from within their family structure or not (Kahu et al., 2014; Kasworm, 2004).

6.5 Generating positive intergenerational student support and achievement

Whether ISSA+ or ISSA- is generated could depend on one or more factors relating to the attitudes and actions of either parents or children. Examples of ISSA+ were observed in situations where the non-traditional, student parents had a profound personal motivation to achieve their goals and were prepared to take a step back from parenting roles. In Maura's case, there was a strong desire for respectability and improved employment prospects, while Tina had a yearning to achieve a specific future employment role.

> I'm *excited* for the end goal! If I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna be a *[job role]*,
> how *fantastic* is that! (*Tina*).

Both were unswervingly motivated by the prospect of their ideal future selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986) and exhibited high levels of intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci, 1985; 2000a) and social mobility (Ronnie, 2016), consistent with Yosso's (2005) concept of aspirational capital.

ISSA+ was, however, most likely to be observed in families where student children showed a love of studying and were happy to encourage their parents and engage with them as

students. Those children were identified by their parents as having had an enduring love of learning since childhood.

> She loves books, she's a reader, she loves studying… the rest of 'em weren't. She was the studier, of any of 'em. That was always her *goal*! To go to uni. She's the only child that's gone to uni (*Tina*).

> He said, 'I'm going to do my GCSEs, do my 'A' Levels and then go to uni', he's *always* said that. He's the one who's totally focused on his academic… kind of, success… if you like. (*Wendy*).

> The second one, he was always… he was very bright and a very special child. He wanted to prove himself… at the age of 7… 8 he'd read an encyclopaedia for children… I bought that for the eldest, but he was never interested. (*Jani*).

Their children who enjoyed studying were seen to have corresponding strongly defined visions of their future selves, whether that was in post-graduate education or in future employment roles. As young people with a positive attitude towards learning, who have had a long-term expectation to enter university, it is likely that they have achieved cultural capital through their ongoing educational experiences. These student children are happy to extend their habitus to include shared student experiences with their parents. Their ingrained positive dispositions towards studying, enable them to adapt well to the field of higher education and to generate ISSA+ relationships with their student parents. This suggests a contemporary family construct that moves beyond traditional class-based models, such as Bourdieu's (1977, 1986). Mallman (2017) proposes that internal family narratives may initiate social mobility. I would argue that these narratives, in relation to studying in higher education, may be multi-directional and are dependent on the attitudes and experiences of individuals within the family, particularly the children.

Overall, it could be said that when non-traditional, student parents have a strong personal focus on achievement and motivation for self-development, which is coupled with student children who have a positive disposition towards studying and learning, it is highly likely that ISSA+ will be generated. This leads to confidence, achievement and improved wellbeing whilst at university.

6.6 Generating negative intergenerational student support and achievement

The literature review suggests that many traditional-aged students show little evidence of entering university to learn for learning's sake (Jamieson, 2007 Novotny et al., 2019) and there was evidence of this among some of the children in the study, who displayed a lack of intrinsic motivation (Reeve, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 1986; 2000a) and poorly defined future selves (Harrison, 2018; Harrison and Waller, 2018; Markus and Nurius, 1986). Their parents described university study as an obligation for them.

> They just want to get on with their thing, just get it out of the way. It's like an *obstacle*! Looking at their lifestyle and what they want to achieve and how they want to live a luxurious lifestyle, this is something they *need* to do… to have a good job… to be able to pay for those things. Other than that, I don't think they'd bother (*Jani*).

> She's doing it all airy fairy, yeah. She's only doing it… she never wanted to do it but she's only doing it because there's better opportunities when she's got the degree… (*Wendy*).

Although Jani and Wendy's children have entered university with an extrinsic focus of improving future employment chances, as has been seen as a prevailing motivation for traditional-aged students in the literature (Busher and James, 2019; McCune et al., 2010; Pugh, 2019), like other student children in this study who have less interest in learning, they display little certainty about future career pathways (Shafi and Rose, 2014). There is a sense of them as consumers, entering university for a better future, yet with little focus on learning, which corresponds to Bunce et al.'s (2017) argument that high consumer identity correlates to low student identity. There is little engagement with their mothers as students, indeed a desire for them to maintain their roles as caregivers and parents rather than independent, self-developing beings is often indicated.

> When I talk to them, they say, 'Can we leave uni Alice at uni and can we just have mum back'? (*Alice*).

Despite the student parents in this study having a strong individual motivation for self-development, the attitudes of their children can challenge this and weaken their resolve. This conforms to Markus and Nurius' (1986) seminal study on motivation based on ideal, imagined

selves, which observed that motivation can be weakened by the actions of others as emerging constructs of self are challenged.

The participants in a situation of ISSA- state that they would like to engage with their children as students and to generate social and cultural capital, yet they are accepting of the lack of engagement as students between them and their children and maintain their parent-child status rather than extending this to include a parent-student-child habitus.

> I'm still… she doesn't look at me as a student, she looks at me as a mum…
> which is probably the way it should be (*Grace*).

This appears to contravene their initial motivation to enter higher education as a means of self-fulfilment and development and could be construed as misrecognition of power (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passaron, 1977), as they accept their children's status as students but forgo theirs (James, 2015; Webb et al., 2010). Acceptance of their situation leads to lost opportunity and could be described as an act of symbolic violence by their children, based on their inflexible habitus and ambivalence towards their parents' studies, in much the same way as observed by Nairz-Wirth et al. (2017), where the class-based ambivalence of the family towards the university education of the participant in their case study led to his decision that university was not for him. The student children do not appear to recognise the changing constructs of the social world around them as they feel their parents entering university does not comply with their expectations of life course events, a situation that Christie et al., (2008) suggest can lead to alienation and exclusion.

While lack of engagement tends to stem from the children in this study, there is also evidence of unwillingness for some participants to transition from their deeply ingrained parent identities (Stevens, 2003) and to lack the inclination towards habitus adaptation. Cleft habitus or roles and compartmentalisation of identities can be observed (Bourdieu, 1986; 2000). Cleft habitus has been documented as a coping mechanism during periods of transition (Jin and Ball, 2019; Reay et al., 2019); however, there is a danger of distancing from one field, particularly when family support is not strong (Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; Costa et al., 2019). In this case study, for those non-traditional student parents who develop cleft habitus, there appears to be a stronger focus on their role of parent than of student. At times, evidence of over-parenting is apparent as the parents make decisions relating to education on behalf of their children or indulge their children in age-inappropriate ways.

> I suggested she did psychology… I said, 'why don't you do psychology?' She
> wants to work with animals, and I said, 'do psychology and you may be able

> to transfer to animal behaviour or animal psychology…' So, she did, that's what she did (*Carla*).

> He commuted for the first year... so, I'd have to get him up every day and make him go and get the bus (*Alice*).

Alice and Carla's children, as well as others with a less well-defined sense of student identity, often had issues with their studies that impacted on the studies of their non-traditional, student parents.

> He had lots of assignments due and he said, 'Mum, I just can't do it any more so… I didn't go to uni for the day, we sat down, and we wrote a list of what he needed to do… it's just being a mum. If he was at school and he was flustered, I'd just do the same thing… (*Alice*).

In some cases, the children withdrew from their courses or transferred between universities. At times when this was happening the student parents were unable to meet their deadlines and experienced increased stress and anxiety due to their involvement with their children's issues. This occurs more where there is evidence that the parent identity remains stronger than emerging student identity, which has been seen to be particularly strong for female parents in past research (Brooks, 2013; Vaccaro and Lovell, 2010).

In summary, if non-traditional student, parents have a strongly defined motivation to achieve, yet little interaction with their children as students due to an unwillingness to engage from their children, ISSA- is likely to be generated. This is also likely to be the case when non-traditional student, parents are highly invested in their previous parenting roles. There is a strong likelihood that ISSA- will lead to negative outcomes including stress, demotivation and, ultimately, lack of achievement, unless support is available elsewhere, such as from peers or other family members.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes and summarises this study of non-traditional student parents in higher education. It clarifies the outcome of the research questions and considers the contribution the study has made to knowledge before suggesting implications of the outcomes for providers of higher education. It is recognised that there are limitations to the research, and these are evaluated and presented. Finally, possibilities for further study to extend this initial exploration are suggested.

7.2 Summary of Findings

This doctoral research project explores the influences, motivations and challenges of a small group of non-traditional, student aged 39-55 years old. The participants are studying in higher education at the same time as their traditional aged student children. Their interaction as students and the impact of this on the student parents provides a further topic of exploration. A synthesis of literature has reviewed the wide range of issues that relate to non-traditional students and provides a contextual background for the study. The literature review also highlights a number of gaps in current research on older, non-traditional students, in particular those with children simultaneously studying at university. A qualitative, interpretive approach allows an exploration of human interaction and social behaviour, while narrative inquiry foregrounds the voice and stories of the participants within the boundaries of a case study.

Three research questions were considered:

- What influences some non-traditional, student parents to undertake a course at university at the same time as their traditional-age student children?
- How are a particular group of non-traditional, student parents motivated or challenged when studying in higher education at this time?
- In what ways does having children simultaneously attending university impact on the experiences and achievement of this group of non-traditional, student parents in higher education?

The first of these asks what influences the participants to study at the time of their lives that their children are simultaneously studying at university. The low socioeconomic background

of the participants in this study had led to lack of opportunity and expectation to enter further or higher education after leaving school. While this formed a significant element of their stories and individual identities, it was not identified as a specific reason for entering higher education. There was acceptance that this was not available for them at the time and there was no evidence of long-held, deep-seated desires to study at university. Their past situations led to an extended period out of education, commitment to jobs that were often dissatisfactory, and strongly defined identities and dispositions as wives, parents and caregivers.

The decision to enter higher education for the group of learners in this case study was largely based on extrinsic goals relating to improved employment prospects and intrinsic goals relating to personal self-fulfilment. There was increased independence as children were getting older and partners were generally supportive of their goals. There is an expectation in the UK for women to work longer than previously due to a rise in the state pension age, which was cited by some as influencing their decision to enter university. The catalyst for change was, however, usually a significant event, often associated with loss, such as divorce, bereavement or children growing up and becoming more independent. There was evidence of differing trajectories for some participants based on age. At the lower end of the age range within the study, participants were more likely to be influenced to study following divorce or after introduction to training opportunities and encouragement from others, while some at the higher end of the age range entered university following bereavement or as a means to move on from demotivation in current work roles, possibly due to marginalisation due to age.

All have children attending university yet only a small number of participants directly cited the incidence of their children entering university as influencing them to become university students themselves. They felt that having children at university did, however, influence them indirectly as they wanted to be seen as good role models and, for some of the participants, there was evidence of wanting to prove themselves to others, either siblings who had gained a degree as mature students or their children. There was also a strong element of competition or desire to be on a par with their offspring who were studying at university.

Arguably the strongest influence to enter university for the participants in this case study is that of personal self-development. The participants stated that they felt this was the right time to move in a different direction, usually after a significant event. Some related this to age, feeling it was now or never, but most felt it was time to give something to themselves after a long period of giving to others, their confidence and experience finally allowing this. Their strong sense of determination and will to succeed signifies that the participants are valuable students who will bring strength, experience and resilience to any academic cohort.

The second research question considered the participants' motivations and challenges while studying at university. Their ongoing motivations to achieve are linked to what influenced them to enter university in terms of a desire for self-fulfilment and increased respectability. They are strongly motivated by their personal aspirations and goals. Many envisage their future selves in specific vocational roles that they feel will lead to increased respectability and have enrolled on courses that reflect this. The past features heavily in their narratives as they seek to leave behind poor pay and conditions and to prove themselves to be capable in a professional field. There is a lack of research on this age group in higher education and some suggestion in the literature that future employment roles are not a major motivating factor for older, mature students (Davey, 2002; Hardy et al., 2018). However, the findings of this study suggest that the students are committed to education as a means of improving employment opportunities, particularly as their student journeys have been arduous; a strong sense of determination to achieve motivates them at this stage in their lives. There is no evidence in this study of the participants considering themselves to be nearing the end of their working lives.

Although the participants are motivated to achieve, studying at university is not without its challenges for them. At the start of their studies fear was a significant challenge, perhaps understandably given the length of time they have been out of education. Initially they feared they may not be of the calibre required for university study in terms of academic skills and achievements, as is often reported in the literature on mature students (Busher and James, 2019; Bohl et al., 2017; Chapman, 2017). In some cases, fear of failure was so strong that prior to enrolment they were reluctant to reveal their ambitions to be students to those close to them leaving them isolated and without support.

There is a strong sense of fear of the unknown within their narratives, particularly as the field of higher education is so far removed from their social cultural backgrounds and they have not received cultural capital relating to education in the past. These fears abate after enrolment, particularly as they find the University campus to be a supportive environment for non-traditional and mature students and that the small, welcoming campus atmosphere suits them. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that fear and imposter syndrome may endure.

Guilt is also a prevalent emotion, often linked to loss. This is largely in relation to the management of multiple roles and transition from old self-identities. Although the participants wish to leave their past roles behind, they form part of their deeply ingrained identities and dispositions, and they are strongly committed to them. Some maintain these roles but in doing so, deprive themselves of leisure time. Others follow their determination for self-development and commit themselves to their studies. Each situation results in loss of time spent with those around them and feelings of selfishness, creating further feelings of guilt.

Age was sometimes reported as a challenge, despite impacting positively on confidence and experience. Some participants felt self-conscious around younger students, but many age-related issues centred on mid-life transitions associated with ageing, such as menopause, caring for aging parents or bereavement.

The final research question investigates the engagement between the non-traditional, student parents and their traditional-aged student children and how this may impact on achievement and well-being. Analysis of this engagement led to the development of positive (ISSA+) and negative (ISSA-) models of intergenerational student support and achievement. A framework of ISSA relationships was developed using Bourdieu's (1986, 1991) theory of practice as it became apparent during analysis that constructs of capital ISSA+ engagement led to positive habitus transformation as parent-student-child relationships formed and transfer of social, cultural and emotional capital between parent and child. This in turn led to positive outcomes in the field of higher education, evidenced by good grades, sustained motivation and increased self-esteem. On the other hand, ISSA- cases based on lack of engagement and capital transfer, led to negative outcomes. These outcomes were observed as inability to meet deadlines, demotivation, increased challenges and even attrition. The ISSA models should not, however, be viewed as a dichotomy. Variations within families and flexibility were observed during the study, and one student who experienced ISSA- at home, due to lack of engagement and support from her child at university, achieved well in the field of higher education following a high level of mutual support from her student peers, who were largely mature, non-traditional students too.

Findings suggest that whether positive or negative ISSA is generated could depend on one or more factors relating to the attitudes and actions of either parent, children or both. Student children with strongly positive dispositions towards studying and learning are likely to foster ISSA+ with their student parents, particularly when their parents have a strong personal focus on self-development and are willing to extend their relationship with their children beyond that of just parent and child. Conversely, when children are unwilling to engage with their parents as students and their parents remain heavily invested in past roles, it is likely that ISSA- will dominate. Overall, the ISSA+ and ISSA- models and the findings from this study comprise a theory of intergenerational student support and achievement.

7.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge within the field of education in both an academic and a practical sense. The findings offer deeper insight into the case of a specific group of non-

traditional students, older student parents, who are currently under-represented in academic research. There is a wide range of research into non-traditional and mature students but little that relates to the age range of the participants in this study, despite the fact that increases in state pension age may lead to increasing numbers of older students in higher education, particularly women. Specifically, there has been a gap in relation to what influences older, non-traditional students to study at this stage in their lives and what motivates and challenges them as students. This study aims to address this in the hope of increasing interest in this key group of students.

Family support is well-documented as positively correlating to non-traditional student success (Webber, 2017), however, previous research has tended to focus on support from partners. I believe this to be the first study of its kind to focus on engagement between older, female student parents who have children simultaneously studying at university and how this supports them in their achievement in higher education.

An original theory of intergenerational student support and achievement is presented as a framework to guide future research. This framework identifies positive and negative models of intergenerational student support through the lens of Bourdieu's (1986, 1991) theory of practice. This extends Bourdieu's theory to consider multi-directional transfer of social, cultural and emotional capital between parents and children.

7.4 Implications for Providers of Higher Education

In a practical sense, this study aims to afford providers of higher education a deeper understanding of a key group of university students and to recognise potential influences, motivations and challenges in order to provide targeted support and advice. A recognition and acknowledgement of the determination and motivation of older, non-traditional students will enable providers of higher education to better support students. Support is recognised as an important element of student achievement, whether it be from external sources such as family (Swain and Hammond, 2011, Webber, 2017) or from educational institutions (Stone and O'Shea, 2019). It has been suggested that providers of higher education do not always recognise or support challenges relating to non-traditional students (David, 2011; Bohl et al., 2017). This study extends this discussion to identify specific challenges for older learners that may not match those of younger learners. Potential issues connected to mid-life stages or significant events relating to loss, which are not currently considered by providers of higher education could, therefore, be recognised and identified. This would allow a more nuanced understanding of older students in order to promote and support their wellbeing and

achievement, perhaps by encouraging communities of older learners to provide mutual support during their studies.

Simon et al. (2020) suggest that fostering intergenerational communication between students of different ages, increases understandings of the benefits of older students' experience and perspectives and provides older learners with a stronger connection to university life. The intergenerational student support and achievement framework proposed in this study, allows institutions of higher education to recognise the potential of ISSA+ and, therefore, to encourage and offer guidance to older student parents in relation to the generation of positive student relationships with their children. It is, however, essential to recognise that the ISSA+ and ISSA- models should not be viewed dichotomously as variations and movement between the two models are possible. In addition to practical considerations, the ISSA theoretical model offers a framework for ongoing research on intergenerational student support and achievement as outlined further in section 7.6.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

As with all research projects, there are limitations to this study. Limitations that relate to methods and design are highlighted in Chapters 3 and 4. As a small-scale bounded case study the results may not be generalizable to wider populations. The location of the study is itself limiting due to the small number of students and courses offered and the type of student traditionally attracted to the campus. Additionally, it is acknowledged that inductive, narrative inquiry provides the participants with the opportunity to discuss their experiences as they recall them and as they choose to present them. While every effort is made to encourage depth within their narratives, they may have had further experiences that have not come to the fore in this investigation.

As a small-scale study there are obvious limitations regarding the number of participants. 10 non-traditional, student parents took part. It is possible that they representative a significant percentage of the older, female student parents at the University campus, as only around 450 students were enrolled in total during the year the study took place, however, 10 participants cannot be considered a large sample overall.

Only females have been observed and only the student parents. These are limitations that have been bound by the size and scope of the study. It was not my initial intention to study a female group, however, no male participants volunteered. This could be due to the limited number of students at the site overall, which limits the potential pool of older, non-traditional,

student parent participants. I chose to concentrate on the experiences of the student parents due to the scope and size of the project and to maintain the boundaries of the case. This allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives; however, it is recognised that not having the perspectives of the student children could be considered a limitation.

As an initial exploration of the aims of the study, topics have been raised that warrant further investigation that the limitations of size and scope of this project have not permitted.

7.6 Possible Future Research Directions

Due to its inductive nature and the paucity of previous research on the issues raised within, this study could be considered to raise as many questions as answers and, as such, provides a great deal of scope for future research.

Despite an extensive body of existing literature and research on non-traditional and mature students, there remains a dearth of research on students within the age range in this study. Further investigation into their influences, motivations and challenges would provide a deeper understanding of their experiences. My findings suggest that there are differences within the experiences of participants at the upper and lower end of the age range in this study. Further research within this age range would promote a more detailed, nuanced understanding of older student experiences.

The participants in this study experienced significant events relating to loss that provided the catalyst for entry into higher education. These events both motivated and challenged them, yet there is little research into the ongoing implications and effects of these significant events on students who are enrolled in courses of study in higher education. Similarly, the participants have been affected by transitional events related to mid-life stages, which are currently not considered in relation to students in higher education and warrant further investigation.

This study provides an initial exploration into engagement between female parents and children who are studying in higher education simultaneously. Insights from the perspective of student parents in a specific context are presented. Future research on this topic from the perspective of the student children and male parents, and in wider contexts are recommended to gain deeper understanding of the issue and to validate the findings from this study.

A theory of intergenerational student support and achievement is proposed that includes ISSA+/ISSA- models as a research framework. It is hoped that this will be used in a variety of contexts in future research to broaden understanding of the intergenerational student

experience. These contexts could include larger university campuses or colleges of further education.

I embarked on this project out of interest to gain a sense of the perspectives of a student cohort that I had little prior experience of working with. I soon recognised significant gaps in the literature on older, female students, particularly those with children simultaneously studying at university, and their specific motivations and challenges. As my study progressed, I became enthralled by the stories of the women who chose to take part, by their strength, their determination, their humour, their triumphs, their apprehensions and their sorrows. Their voices are too often overlooked. I hope, therefore, that this thesis will serve towards illuminating the value of their contribution and potential for achievement in the field of higher education.

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Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet

Identity Negotiation and the Lived Experience of Mature Students with Children Simultaneously Studying at University.

You are invited to take part in a research study that will inform the doctoral thesis of Adele Chadwick for the award of EdD (Doctor of Education). Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

The project aims to understand the motivations and experiences of mature students who have children simultaneously studying at university. A particular focus will be on whether having a child at university impacts positively on the experience of being a mature student or whether it presents an additional challenge that is currently overlooked by higher education providers, yet which may affect academic achievement.

You have been invited to study as you have been identified as having a child or children simultaneously studying at university. It is envisaged that around 10 other students will be asked to take part.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Whether you choose to take part in the research or not, this will have no impact on your marks, assessment or future studies at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan).

The research will involve taking part in an informal, semi-structured interview with the student researcher. This is likely to take around one hour. A further interview of around one hour may be undertaken later in the academic year. You will have the choice not to answer questions or to leave the interview at any time, if you so wish. The interview(s) will be digitally recorded following consent and stored on a UCLan secure network that is password protected. Interview data must be retained in accordance with the University's policy on academic integrity and stored securely for 5 years from the end of the project. Your personal details, including those of your family members, will not be collected and stored and you will not be identified either during the interview, the data analysis or in the doctoral thesis.

It is envisaged that this study will be beneficial to higher education providers as it will provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of mature students with children simultaneously studying at university. It is unlikely that there will be any risks involved in the participation of the study.

The results of the research will be used to inform the degree of EdD at the University of Central Lancashire. Access to a copy of this dissertation can be provided by Adele Chadwick on completion of the award. Adele Chadwick is a student researcher at UCLan who is also a member of staff in the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee.

If you are willing to take part in this study, please inform Adele Chadwick and complete the consent form.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Contact email of researcher(s): achadwick4@uclan.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact Adele Chadwick at the afore-mentioned email address.

04.10.18

Appendix B – Consent Form

Identity Negotiation and the Lived Experience of Mature Students with Children Simultaneously Studying at University.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project. The information provided by you during interview(s) will be used to inform a doctoral research project that will be submitted to the University of Central Lancashire.

The project aims to understand the motivations and experiences of mature students who have children studying at university simultaneously. Prior to the interview(s) the researcher will take time to explain the study fully and your role as a participant. She will answer any questions you may have regarding the nature of the interviews and how your information will be stored and used.

Your personal details, including those of your family members, will not be collected and stored and you will not be identified in the doctoral thesis.

Please could you sign this form to confirm your consent to the following? A copy will be provided to you for your information.

I agree that I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.
I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation without any type of penalty
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications
- if applicable, the information which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form
- all information I give will be treated as confidential
- the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.......................…………………………..   ....
(Signature of participant)   (Date)

…………………………………………………….
(Printed name of participant)

Contact email of researcher(s): achadwick4@uclan.ac.uk for concerns and questions about the project.

Appendix C – Interview Guide

Provide mind maps (A3), ask the participants to relax, take about 30-40 minutes to consider and complete them using their own notes (not complete sentences). Use the mind maps to guide the interview/story.

Possible prompts:

'What's your story?' 'Tell me about…'. 'Could you talk more about that?'

BEFORE YOU WERE A STUDENT
What roles did you have in your life? (family, work, social life, hobbies etc.)
How would you describe yourself then, as a person?
What was different then?   Did you FEEL different to now?
How would you describe your journey to becoming a student?
What was your family life like before you were a student?
WHEN YOU DECIDED TO BECOME A STUDENT
What motivated/influenced you to study?
Tell me about those reasons in a little more detail.
Did you mention or discuss these reasons to people in your family? (partner, children???)
Did having a child at university motivate you to study in any way? (How?)
How did your family feel/react to you becoming a student?   What did they say?   How did you feel?
Your child at university, how did he/she react when you first mentioned that you were going to be a student?

Why is NOW a good time to become a student?
Why not before?
Did you have any concerns or hopes (expectations) about being a student?
Did you talk to your child at university about what it might be like to be a student before you started university?
Before you started university, what did you expect it to be like?
How did you feel about starting university/becoming a student?

NOW YOU'RE A STUDENT (Your experience of being a student)
What roles do you have now? (family, work, social life, hobbies).
Describe yourself now, compared to before (you were a student).
Do you feel that you've changed since you became a student? (How?)
What motivates you to keep going?
Has your becoming a student impacted on your family in any way? (How?)
Have you had any challenges while at university?
Have you discussed this with anyone? (at university, home, with child at university?)
Who supports you?
Have your expectations been met?
How do you see yourself in the future? What part will your university studies played in that?
How do your family feel/react to that?

YOU AND YOUR CHILD AT UNIVERSITY
What do they study?
Why did they choose to study that course?
Describe what it's like to have a child at university while you're studying.
Has your child at university mentioned where they see themselves in the future?
Do you discuss your university work (assignments etc.) with each other?
How does having a child at university affect your student experience? (positive/negative???)
Would you say that having a child at university has facilitated or constrained your success as a student, (helped you or hindered you)?
Has the fact that you're both students had any effect on your roles/relationship?
In what way?
How do you think other members of your family feel about you both being students?

Appendix D - Mind Map

YOUR ROLES/LIFE BEFORE (Home, work, social life etc.)

DESCRIBE YOURSELF THEN (as a person)

BEFORE YOU WERE A STUDENT

YOU AND YOUR FAMILY THEN

THINGS THAT WERE DIFFERENT THEN

YOUR MOTIVATION/REASONS FOR BECOMING A STUDENT

YOUR CONCERNS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT BECOMING A STUDENT

WHEN YOU DECIDED TO BECOME A STUDENT

HOW YOUR FAMILY REACTED TO YOU BECOMING A STUDENT.

HOW YOU FELT

CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE SINCE YOU BECAME A STUDENT

CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS (Have they been supported/met?

NOW YOU ARE A STUDENT

DESCRIBE YOURSELF SINCE YOU BECAME A STUDENT

YOUR FAMILY AND NOW? (Any differences?)

YOUR FUTURE GOALS

YOUR RELATIONSHIP BEFORE YOU WERE A STUDENT

THEIR REACTION TO YOU BECOMING A STUDENT

YOU AND YOUR CHILD AT UNIVERSITY

HOW YOU INTERACT/ GET ON NOW YOU ARE BOTH STUDENTS (Any changes?)

THE POSITIVES OF HAVING A CHILD AT UNIVERSITY

THE NEGATIVES OF HAVING A CHILD AT UNIVERSITY

Appendix E - Abridged Participants' Stories

Alice's story

After leaving school, 19 years ago, Alice married her childhood sweetheart and had three children. She was a young mum and stayed married until she was 31. She describes her ex-husband as unsupportive. She has a young child with a new partner, who she married last year.

Before becoming a student, Alice worked in a school. She worked there for 8 years before deciding to leave and study. She describes her job as an 'unqualified teacher' providing cover for teachers who were off, which she found difficult and stressful as she had to work hard at home to 'swot up'. However, she also mentions that she only did this for a short time (2 terms) and was largely unchallenged by her work as a classroom supervisor at the school. After she fell pregnant with her last child, her roles at the school changed. This upset her as she felt unappreciated. She felt the school expected a lot from her and lacked confidence in some elements of this as she had no qualifications. Her daughter was starting at the school as a student and had stated that she did not want her mother to work there so Alice felt it was time to move on.

Alice decided to become a student to gain qualifications that would give her more confidence and allow her to do a better job, as well as to set a good example to her children. Her sons were already at university, which gave her the incentive to go. Initially, she did not tell anyone of her intentions due to lack of confidence and fear of failure. Her husband and children were supportive when she told them. She was anxious about her ability, managing study alongside family commitments and financial concerns but her husband encouraged her.

Going to university impacted on one of her friendships, which upset her. Her friend lacked understanding of her workload and financial situation, so they went their separate ways. She has, however, gained supportive friends at university. She had felt she would be the only mature student, which is not the case. She describes herself as the 'mummy' of the group despite not being the oldest.

There is little engagement between her and her sons as students. One has proofread an essay once when asked, otherwise there is no real engagement. Alice justifies this by saying their courses are different to hers. There may be some antagonism about her studying as they ask her to leave her studies at university and be mum at home. She seems to relish this lack of engagement as she is heavily invested in her role as 'mum'. She states that her second son is autistic, so she prompts him to do even basic tasks. She is heavily involved in his life, for example making sure he catches the bus, even though he is soon to live independently. She mentions that his writing is poor, and she helps him with this and with organisation of his essays. She says this is a task she would do if he were at school so there is no difference in doing this now, it is 'just being mum'. The elder son is more independent but has no engagement with her about her studies, even when requested to help.

Neither of her sons have a clear idea of what they will do when they finish studying. The eldest is now doing a PGCE but has stated that he has no intention of teaching. They appear to have little real interest in studying.

Alice feels that her relationship with her sons has improved in some ways as they now understand that pressures of studying. She felt that previously they were closer to their father as their interests matched his more closely than they matched hers.

Alice struggles with the academic work at university. She has asked for extensions and time off for extenuating circumstances (ECs) to help her younger child who has problems on his course. Her marks are below average.

Carla's story

Carla is 50 years old, from the local area and in a long-term relationship of over 30 years. She has two children, a daughter age 24 who graduated from university during the course of this research and a daughter age 18 who is in employment.

Carla left school aged 16 with no qualifications but spurred on by her sister, who is a teacher, briefly started a degree in 1998. Before she started that degree some significant events occurred that led to her decision to go to university. In 1995, a long overseas trip with her family was cut short after her father became seriously ill with a brain tumour. Carla cared for him when he left hospital, but he died three months later. This left her mother struggling to cope. Three years later her brother died, and she was unhappy in her job, so she decided to gain some qualifications. However, multiple roles and responsibilities led to her abandoning her studies.

Carla then worked for some years in youth work and found job she enjoyed as an advocate in care in 2006. During this time, her partner who had also left school with no qualifications, and also spurred on by her sister to whom education and academic achievements are important, entered university and graduated with a degree in Fine Art.

Around 2012, a change in management and a local restructure led to a feeling of a lack of recognition at work and Carla's job as an advocate came to an end. Her sister, by this time, was teaching in Thailand, which rekindled thoughts of overseas travel. In addition to this her husband, who she considered to be less academic than her, had completed a degree and her daughter was preparing to go to university, so she enrolled.

During the last four years, Carla has been continually enrolled at university but has not yet graduated due to interruptions. Carla has struggled with her academic work largely due to extenuating circumstances. Her mother has needed care and she has had some health issues relating to aging to contend with. Carla admits that she feels the pressures of being an older student in a variety of ways. She feels that younger students do not pull their weight and has found it difficult to make friends on the course. She feels lonely as she does not have work colleagues or a work environment to attend. She mentions the menopause as being particularly challenging, both physically and emotionally, she also mentions the challenges of having older children who require a different kind of attention to younger children. The stress of managing multiple roles and challenges has had some impact on the family but Carla's partner has supported her financially and emotionally, although he is keen for her to finish the course.

During this time Carla's eldest daughter has also been studying at university. This has not been unproblematic as she initially started a degree in Bournemouth that she was unhappy with. She felt other students were not as bright as her and became upset when her grades were low, claiming that the course tutors did not understand her. She appeared to have little direction or real interest in the course and eventually left. Carla supported her throughout this, often to the detriment of her own studies. Her daughter later started a different degree in Lancaster but struggled with the social element of being at university. Carla has travelled to see her often to provide emotional support. Carla also proofread some of her daughter's work, however, apart from this there has been little engagement as students between them during Carla's. Her daughter shows no interest in her mother's course apart from encouraging her to finish as 'a rubbish degree is better than no degree'.

Towards the end of this study, around the time of our second interview, Carla's daughter graduated with a first-class degree. This seems to have provided some kind of relief to Carla who appeared more relaxed. She then received a particularly high mark for an assignment and became motivated to finish with a good grade. Carla's daughter made a decision to continue in education and to take a master's degree. These events and reflection on this project have led to an increased level of interaction as students with Carla stating that she is more focused now that her daughter has finished her degree as 'she can be', indicating that she was putting her daughter's studies first before. She now looks set to gain a 2:1 or first-class degree at the end of the year.

Elsa's story

Elsa comes from a small town in Poland, where she lived until moving to the UK after a divorce seven years ago. Prior to coming to the UK, she worked part-time as a receptionist on a campsite and took care of her children. Elsa's divorce served as a catalyst for change, a 'shot of freedom', as she put it. Dissatisfied with the traditional expectations in Poland to be happy as a wife and mother, and seeing her mother as tied to her role and lacking in ambition, she took the opportunity to start a new life in the UK with her children. This came after a significant period of self-reflection that led to the realisation that she wanted more and wanted to do something for herself. Her husband, although not a bad person, was lacking in encouragement.

On arrival in the UK, Elsa started work in a residential care home where she enjoyed learning about the residents and about healthcare in general. Spurred on by her colleagues she later got a job in a hospital with a view to learning more about healthcare and in the hope of overcoming a deep-seated fear of hospitals that she had had since childhood. This provided her with the incentive to achieve more, to break through barriers based on past circumstances.

Life has been a struggle for Elsa since arriving in the UK as a single parent. The biggest challenge has been caring and providing for her children. However, she has pushed herself, motivated by a desire to improve their lives and to help others. Encouraged by her colleagues once again, she decided to train as a nurse and enrol as a student.

There had been a period of 24-25 years since she last studied at the age of 16 and Elsa's student journey has been long and hard, beset by failures, mainly relating to her English language skills and fear over her ability to achieve and study at her age. She chose not to tell her family initially for fear of failure to be accepted on the nursing degree course. She also reflected on her academic difficulties at school in Poland. However, the thought of achieving her goals and doing something for herself kept her going. She has a strong ambition to become a nurse and determination.

During her studies, Elsa has continued to work at the hospital, often on night shifts, and maintained her role as single parent to her two children. The exhaustion has been considerable, but her determination persists, although her confidence as a student is only building slowly. Her friends at university try to reassure her that they have similar difficulties.

Her son, aged 20 and also at university does not show any interest or engage with her as a student at all. She gives the excuse that his course is different, so he has no interest in hers. This situation has continued throughout her course. Despite her asking him to help and wanting to share the student experience, he shows no interest. She provides him with all the support he needs to succeed, but he does not reciprocate. This seems to upset her. She wonders if he struggles and does not want to admit it. She asks to see his work, but he refuses. He seems to have no clear focus on why he is studying or what he will do at the end of his degree.

At the second interview, a few months later, the situation with her son remained the same. She refers to him as selfish and accuses him of feeling that his mother should do everything for him, such as cooking and cleaning. Her father seems to perpetuate this when he visits from Poland. There is no mutual engagement as students. However, Elsa seems happier and more confident and attributes this to the fact that her daughter, who is 15, has started to show a great deal of interest in her studies. She is helping her with her English and reading through her assignments, taking an interest in them and making suggestions. Her daughter seems to love 'being teacher' to her mum and is doing well across all subjects at school. They seem to have developed a shared interest in being students together.

Elsa tells a story about switching off the Internet for a short time in a bid to get her son to help in the house. He became angry at this and told her that she would be responsible if he failed his degree. She states that this made her feel 'childish' for switching off the Internet but now feels he has to take more responsibility in the home and grow up.

Elsa struggled with her academic work initially and was frustrated by low grades. However, this has improved considerably since her relationship with her daughter has changed.

Freya's story

Freya is 41 and is of African origin she moved to the North West from the South of England three years ago, after separating from her husband six years ago. She describes the move as 'a moment of madness' and does not know many people in the local area. Freya has three children the eldest of which is a student at university.

Although Freya left school with no qualifications and describes herself as having some difficulty in learning, although she has not been specific about this. She has a nursing qualification, which she achieved 12 years ago, but has always wanted to be a social worker. She currently works nights at a nursing home and hopes another qualification will provide her with the skills to enable her to work 9 till 5 to spend more time with her family.

She finds her situation at the university challenging as she is often exhausted by work and her roles at home. She tries to keep weekends free for her children. The younger children are not too badly affected by this, but the eldest son has to babysit the younger ones rather than going out with his friends. She feels guilty about this. He was supportive of her at first but is becoming frustrated at not seeing his friends as much as he would like, although her course is only a year long.

Freya is struggling with the academic work particularly on top of her other responsibilities. She finds the course much harder than the nursing course. She finds the academic language and level of research hard as her computer skills are not strong. She's getting more used to it though and is enjoying learning new skills. She has passed some assignments.

Her son is studying Law but shows little engagement with his mother as a student or enthusiasm for her studies. She describes him as lazy as he never seems to be working on his course, he tells her that his work is done. She has asked him for help on the computer or to read her work and give her feedback, but he refuses and shows no interest. She asks to see his work, but he tells her that it is on the computer and he does not want to log on. He briefly showed her how an electronic referencing system works once he does not share his academic achievements, so she does not really know how he is progressing on his course. He appears to have little idea of what he wants to do in the future but hopes that a qualification in Law will give him the opportunity to travel.

Sometime after this interview Freya and I had a conversation where she was upset as her son was no longer helping her with the younger children and she was struggling to cope. She later left the course and did not complete her qualification with only a short time to go.

Grace's story

Grace is 48 years old, married with three children and lives locally. When she left school at 16, without qualifications, she harboured a desire to become a nurse but was not encouraged by her parents. Further education was not an option. She seems a little resentful about this but is resigned to the fact that this was the way it was at the time.

After leaving school she worked in travel for 20 years then as receptionist at the local hospital. In 2016 she was encouraged by a colleague to apply for a job with the stroke team, a condition of which was to do a foundation degree. This sets her apart from the other participants as she did not enter university of her own volition and may not have done so. She was anxious and afraid of the unknown at the time of entry to university.

On starting at university, Grace's biggest concern was her age as she is the oldest in her group, but she bonded well with her colleagues on the course and age has never been an issue in her dealings with them. She feels that her family were shocked when she told him that she would be doing a degree, in her mind because of her age, although they did not say that. Age seems to be a concern for her. The biggest concern of her children seemed to be whether they would have more work to do in the home.

Grace's life has changed as she is now working full-time as well as studying and has kept on all her roles at home. Her husband often works away so she has to manage her time, which is stressful. She feels that she has lost patience with the children and that it would be easier if they were younger. The family now have no time for holidays as she studies when she has annual leave. She tries to manage her assignments in short bursts so that she does not feel so guilty. Her son, who is 18 and at college, is sometimes resentful of the effect her studies have had on their lives.

She enjoys learning new things and meeting new challenges and her confidence has improved in the workplace. Her grades are fine, but she has struggled to cope with the workload, which she describes as 'massive'. This and her age put her off any future studies.

Her daughter is studying psychology but has no clear definition of what she will do in the future. She is just enjoying the social side university. They speak regularly but not as students. Her daughter does not engage with her studies and has never looked at her assignments. Her daughter found it funny when she said she was going to be a student, but she does understand the pressure of assessments and deadlines and they have a shared understanding of terminology. She feels it is better to keep their separate their student roles separate although this was not planned, it just evolved naturally.

Grace's son is at college. She describes him as a typical boy who hates studying and does not put any effort into his college work. He has no definite plans for the future and does not engage with her as a student. She hopes he will see the effort she makes with her studies and it will encourage him but so far it has not.

Although Grace has little engagement with her children as students, she is getting good grades and progressing well on her course. She attributes this to the strong peer support she has from other students.

Jani's story

Jani is 42 and of Pakistani origin. She is married with four children, three who are currently studying at university. Jani did not have the opportunity to complete her education as her father regularly took her out of school to go to Pakistan for a year or two. She left school with few qualifications as she had only completed two years of high school. Her father then took her to Pakistan to get married, age 16.

Three years after her marriage, her husband became disabled, so she became his carer. He has mobility problems and depression. She says she has always dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but her family responsibilities did not allow this. In addition to looking after her husband, she takes care of her children and is hostess to extended family members who visit often.

Her eldest son became a butcher in a family business after school as he was not interested in further education. He has a wife and a young child who live at home with Jani and her husband. This adds to her pressure as she has to care for them as well. She feels that his wife considers her to be mum to her as well as to her own children. Her eldest son is now studying history at university, having left his job as a butcher.

Jani describes her second son as very bright. A special child. She claims he read an encyclopaedia aged 8. He has always been good at school and interested in his studies. He gained a scholarship for grammar school and university. She feels that he wants to make her proud by studying so hard. He is studying philosophy and she hopes he will become a barrister.

Jani's youngest son had a lot of issues at school. He had to change schools three times due to his anger issues. He often got into fights, but he settled well when he went to college. He is now at university but did one year of an engineering course and then decided to leave. He is now starting a new course in Policing.

As her children started to grow up and became more independent, Jani started to think about studying to do something for herself as she felt that she had spent so much time providing for the needs of others. She got the opportunity through a community volunteer project. She would like to work as a lawyer in the future.

Initially her family did not take her seriously, although they were generally supportive and now want her to continue her studies. When she started studying, she had initial concerns regarding her age and academic ability. She was worried that she would be in a large class with a lot of younger students who may laugh at her lack of previous educational success. She was relieved to find that the university was so supportive.

Jani's second son is supportive of her studies. He helps with her academic work and gives her critical feedback on her assignments. They discuss their modules together and provide emotional support to each other as students. He also helps around the house to give her time to study.

Her other sons do not engage with her studies, they ridicule her by saying that their courses are more difficult and that they will do better than her, which she is yet to see. She says they are not really interested in studying but they want better future opportunities, such as well-paid jobs and cars, although they do not have any concrete ideas about what they want to do in the future. They see university as an obstacle that they have to get over in order to achieve those things.

Her second son is much more focused. He plans to be a barrister in three or four years time. This spurs her on as well. When she started studying, she lacked confidence and her grades were low. This has improved greatly with help from her second son and her grades are now better. She initially hoped for a foundation degree but is now working towards an honours degree and hoping to gain postgraduate qualifications in Law.

At home she still has multiple responsibilities, but her husband is more independent and enjoys playing with his grandson. Extended family have recognised that she has less time for them as she is studying.

Maura's story

Maura is almost 40 years old; she is originally from South Wales and now lives in North West of England with her partner and three children. She left school 25 years ago, aged 15. She describes her past life as being 'brought up on benefits', indicating that she is from a low social class. No one in her community attended university; she never even thought it was possible. Her past work experience includes working as a cleaner, a dinner lady, in a sandwich shop… jobs that she felt were basic and without any prestige or 'without titles' as she described them.

Becoming pregnant five years ago and coming to the end of her maternity leave made her think about doing something different in life. She felt that she wanted an education and 'proper' job. Initially she worked for a family support charity, colleagues suggested that she went through training and persuaded her to go into education. Initially she felt anxious and afraid, scared of not being able to work efficiently at university, but she became more confident as she started to learn new skills. She was encouraged by the motivation of others who expressed their belief in her.

Maura's partner works as a self-employed landscaper. Since she has been studying, their relationship has been more equal in terms of childcare and housework. He provides emotional support but he has not been to university. He recognises that she has developed as a person since she has been at university. This worries her a little as she feels he may be a little insecure as he feels is not worthy of her now that she has attended university. This puts a little pressure on their relationship, although they are happy with lots of future plans that seem to be working out well.

Maura initially went to college to do an access course. She was at college at the same time as her daughter. She enjoyed this because she felt it brought her closer to her daughter. She was also keen to motivate and encourage her daughter to attend university and believes that if she was not aspiring to do the same, she could not be a role model. Her daughter was pleased about this but maybe a little embarrassed that her mum was at college with her.

She has a strong relationship with her daughter especially as she endured a difficult and abusive relationship with her first husband. Her daughter started studying at university the year before her and is currently doing MRes on a full scholarship because she did so well in her BA and plans to continue with an academic career. There is good interaction between them as students, although they recognize that their expectations from life at university are different. She suggests that for her it's a milestone but for her daughter it's a stepping stone. Her daughter is more focused on social life at university, so they do not speak together much about university life, but they do discuss assignments, referencing, deadlines and academic work. They enjoy discussing theories and academic things and they're mutually proud of each other's work. They help each other to research and provide feedback on each other's work.

One of the greatest challenges for Maura was when her daughter moved into university halls and was no longer living at home; she found this she found this extremely difficult, but they kept in touch every day. She feels that conversations between her and her daughter have deepened. They are now more 'sensible and academic' as they have a shared understanding of what it's like to be a student. Obviously, she is still mum, but feels that she can support her daughter and help her not only as a mother but as a friend and as a student and vice versa.

Maura has done well on her course, although she found her last assignments very challenging and actually cried in front of her family. They found this very difficult, particularly her partner as he did not know how to make it better. Although her daughter was upset, she understood the pressure because she is a student herself and realises how overwhelming it can be. They provide a range of social and emotional support for each other as students.

Maura has a job offer with a domestic violence charity; however, she's chosen to take a lower paid job rather than full social work pay and conditions, despite now being trained as a social worker. She admits that she still feels like a fraud and perhaps not good enough based on her social background. She feels like she is pretending, she is holding herself back and she thinks that is because she does not believe in herself.

Miriam's story

Age 48 and from the local area, Miriam left school aged 16 with no formal qualifications. She felt like a failure at school and lacked the confidence to study. She met her husband at 18 years of age, while working in a local shop and has two children. She briefly started a business course at college 25 years ago but left when she got pregnant. When her children were young, she dedicated her time to her home and family, feeling like a single parent much of the time as her husband was busy at work.

Miriam has spent the last 15 years working as a teaching assistant in a primary school. She liked her job and was well respected by her colleagues who often went to her for advice as she is bilingual and experienced. However, she felt underappreciated when she asked the head teacher if she could train as a higher-level teaching assistant and he told her that she should just 'plod on' at her age he later promoted younger teaching assistants, which left her devastated. He retired soon after and the new head micro-managed the staff so, feeling undervalued, she left.

Prior to this she had been the primary carer for her mother who passed away three years ago. This and leaving her job left her with a gap in her life. Her husband asked her to work for him in their family business, breeding hens, which she enjoyed but felt that she needed to do something for herself, despite feeling a little selfish.

When her son was about to enter university. Miriam went with him to an open day and became excited by the opportunities she saw there. She reflected on her studies on the business course and how they had opened her mind and decided to start her student journey. She did not immediately explain her reasons to her family. Her brother encouraged her as he had recently done a degree. Her family were encouraging but her son did not engage with her as a student. She felt that he did not want to be a student at the same time as his mum. Her daughter was very supportive, however.

During his time at university her son has struggled academically. He left one course and joined another and at the time of the interviews had decided to drop out altogether. He has no clear aspirations for the future other than to travel and work with music. Miriam was keen to engage with him as a student. She asked to see his modules and if she could help him, but he refused despite the fact that they are generally close. He just tells her that there is no point as his course is different to hers.

Miriam's daughter, on the other hand, has developed an interest in studying and started a course herself. Miriam feels that she has been influenced by her. They work together in the evenings and provide advice and feedback on each other's work. Additionally, her daughter provides emotional support and motivation and helps around the house.

Miriam has progressed well on the course and achieved good grades. She has gained confidence although she is still fearful and worries with each assignment that she will not do well. She feels her age as many students are younger and tends to gravitate towards mature students. She started 'mummying' the younger ones but tries not to do that now. She mentions the menopause as a challenge but feels that it is easier to study now her children are less dependent. She is positive about her age, however, stating that middle age should be known as middle youth.

Miriam has future plans to work in community healthcare as her husband is selling the family business and she wants a career change that will suit her.

Tina's story

Tina left school 30 years ago with no qualifications and no expectation to get qualifications. She is married with six children aged between 12 and 30. Tina and her husband worked hard on opposite shifts to manage childcare responsibilities while the children were growing up. Tina worked in factories and retail doing long shifts for little money.

As the children grew up and became more independent, Tina felt she wanted to do something for herself. She describes herself as always being a giver. In addition to her six children she has been a surrogate mother, this has provided her with a strong interest in becoming a midwife.

In 2011, she started the student journey by taking GCSEs and an access course, but despite her efforts she did not gain a place on the midwifery course. Undeterred she took another access course until she was accepted. She started her course three years ago and is due to graduate this year.

Since becoming a student, she has gained confidence as she never felt good enough to study in the past. She has had to work hard she feels that this is because she is an older student and 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks'.

Only one of her six children studies at university and she describes her as being very different to the rest of her children. She has always been much quieter than the others, spending a lot of time in her room reading and studying. To her education matters and she enjoys achieving academically. Tina's other children work in jobs such as engineering and childcare and have not been to university. Her daughter at university is very supportive of her studies. They provide mutual academic support for each other; they help each other with research and feedback on assignments. She feels her daughter is better than her at paraphrasing and academic work probably because she is an avid reader. Their relationship has improved immensely. Prior to both being students, she found her daughter difficult to understand as she preferred to study in her room rather than taking part in family activities.

Studying has generated a considerable impact on her family. She spends a lot of time working on her laptop or on placements. She feels guilty as she knows she has withdrawn from her family. She has made good friends on her course and they support each other as they all find their studies difficult. When she is talking to them about her course in the evening, her partner and children feel left out. She feels that she is neglecting them, which makes her feel guilty and selfish. She has a very strong determination to succeed though and is determined to achieve her goal. Her daughter at university tries to smooth the waters by explaining the pressures and stresses of studying to her husband.

Tina has done well on her course and is achieving good grades. She feels her relationship with her daughter has helped with this although she has found the course hard. She would like to do a master's degree. Her husband is against this as he sees the impact on the family and their relationship. She has not mentioned this to her daughter yet, but she knows that she will support her.

Wendy's story

Wendy is aged 51 and from the local area. She left school at 16 and got married soon after. Although she took some O levels, she did not have any opportunity to continue in education. She describes herself as having been independent since the age of 13 and admits that she left school to get married and to escape her home life. She had three children with her first husband when she was very young and now has three more children with her current husband. One of these is her son aged 21, who is at university, and her daughter age 19, who is also at university. In addition, she has a son age 15.

Her jobs have been, according to her, 'menial jobs' in supermarkets and so on. A few years ago, she started working in a school, teaching forest school skills, this encouraged her to enrol at university.

She wants to set the bar for her younger children as she wants them to value education. She had concerns about entering university, such as managing the workload and being able to keep up with the academic work. She recognises that she is expected to work for the next 16 years and she feels her current job would be too physically demanding at that time in her life.

When she started university, her youngest son felt that she was too old to study, and her partner is not supportive at all. He does not understand why she is giving herself more work. However, the children are generally supportive.

Her son is studying geography at university. She describes him as always having enjoyed studying. When he was at school he planned to go to university. He has always been very keen to take part in education and his focus is on academic success. He enjoys all aspects of university. Her daughter is studying art, she's completely different from her son. She is studying for better job opportunities but takes little interest in it. She does not enjoy socialising with other students and does not take part in university life, in fact she recently had a baby.

Wendy's son spends a lot of time talking to her about University. He is very keen to share the experience with her. He helps her with referencing and technology, they also discuss their course work, which he gives her critical feedback on. They discussed their course work most days. Before being students, they had little contact just basic conversation. Now they have detailed conversations about assignments and critical analysis, she feels that university has brought them much closer together.

Her daughter, on the other hand, does not help her with any student work, although she is prepared to do some proofreading. She does not engage with her course. She says there is no point because they are taking different subjects. She leans on her mother for emotional support and help with her young baby and takes a lot of energy for from her but if she asks her about her studies, she is not interested in discussing them.

In the future, Wendy hopes that she can have a more interesting role where she will earn more money. She is currently on a low salary, which has not changed for the last 15 years. She is hoping to work in mental health education. Her son at university is keen to continue with his studies and to achieve post-graduate qualifications, while her daughter has no specific goal at the moment particularly since she had the baby.

Although Wendy finds academic work difficult her grades are fine, and she is progressing well. She feels that if both children had been like her daughter, her life at university would have been much more difficult, that she would have struggled with her course and she would not have been supported. She appreciates the help that she gets from her son.

Wendy is one of the oldest students on her course. Other people have asked her why she is bothering to study at her age, but she feels it is the right time, she is more financially stable and she has the right approach because she is more mature. However, she feels her age when she is around the college building, which is attached to the University. She feels that the younger students sometimes do a double take when they see her walking past because she is so much older. However, her experience has been an advantage. She feels, however, that it would be helpful if the university had an older mature student common room.

Appendix F – Initial Codes from Holistic Stories

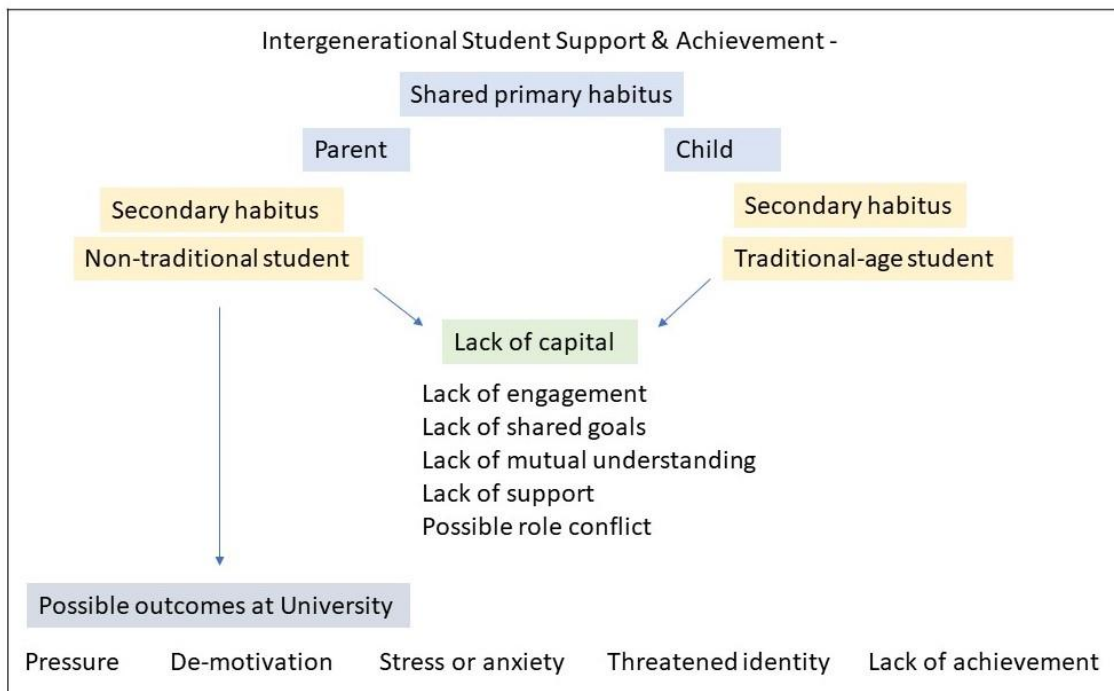Coding 1 from holistic narratives, based on Watt's (2014) question, 'What's happening…?'

Leaving school	life after school
Poor background	lack of opportunity
Following tradition	dissatisfaction with work
No parental support	life before studies
Desire for something better	caring for others
Becoming motivated to study	gaining confidence
Family reaction to studies	lack of confidence
Student journey	age
Family support (or lack of)	juggling roles
Engagement with child	lack of engagement with child
Child problem with studies	child future aspirations
Progression on course	future aspirations
Support from others	impact on family life
Something for her	something for children
Momentous events	the right time

This was applied to the data and initial 'as statements' were generated, to try to gain a sense of the participants' perspectives.

Appendix G - A Theory of Intergenerational Student Support and Achievement
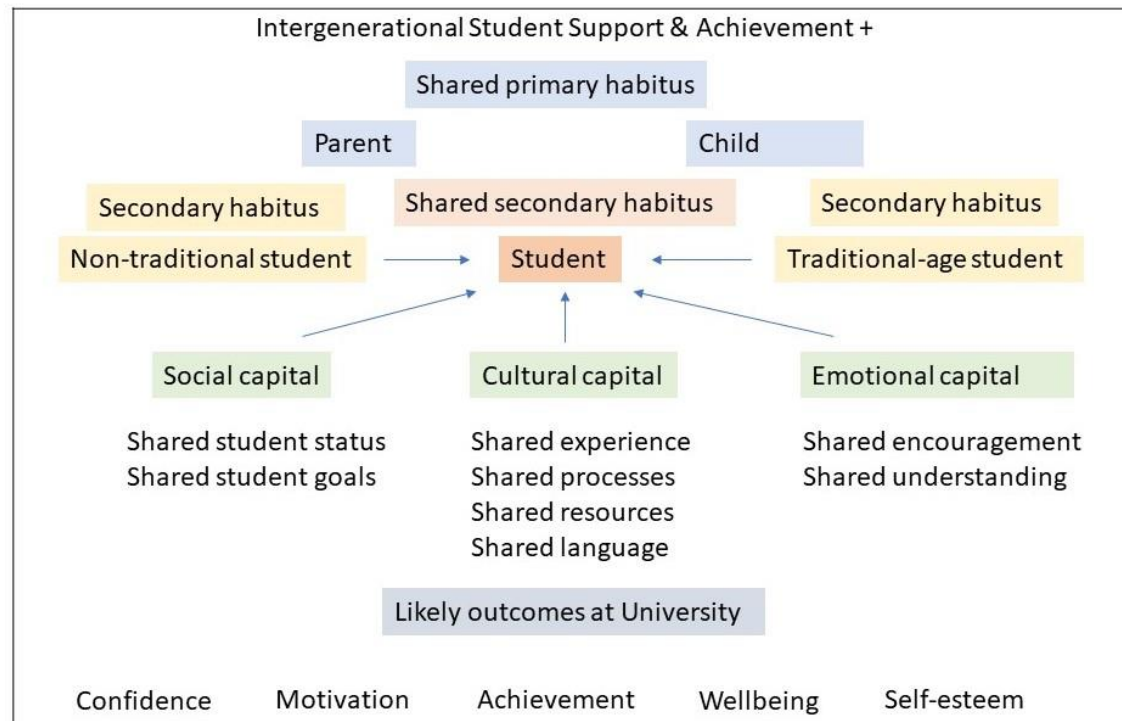
Positive Model of Intergenerational Student Support and Achievement

Negative Model of Intergenerational Student Support and Achievement