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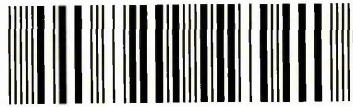
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IDENTITY CHANGE AND MATURE LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

VOLUME ONE

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences of mature students in higher education within the process of widening participation as part of the movement from an elite to a mass system. This process is viewed as a natural experiment in identity change as people who hitherto had no expectations of academic achievement are invited to see themselves in a very different light. The research was conducted in a Mixed Economy Group College in the north of England which specialises in 'return to study' provision for local students. The theoretical framework is existential phenomenological psychology which is deployed in describing the 'lifeworld' of the participants, especially in relation to selfhood. Such an approach is relatively underplayed in this substantive area and as such augments other research in providing a different in-depth analysis. The resultant description traces a journey from a generally disempowered existential baseline through to an emerging self-identity which is perceived as profoundly transformed. In a relatively short period of their life participants rapidly encounter a legion of hitherto unknown experiences: engagement with academics and academic discourse, division into home and college self-identities, epiphanies of self development, and shifts in relationships. A new but inchoate self-identity is perceived through a range of novel encounters with people and ideas. This embryonic stage of a new self-identity is characterised by new knowledge and skills, a sense of confidence and empowerment, hitherto unknown aspirations, successes and status. Overall there is a perspectival shift in their view of the world and themselves within it. The journey however is a difficult one with existential dilemmas and contradictions constantly presenting themselves. The description employs the metaphor of 'existential pioneer' to describe the mode of living that characterises the participants' lived reality in tackling the trials and tribulations they encounter. Commentaries on self-identity in the contemporary world are considered apropos their relevance to the consciousness of participants engaging with education as an 'expert system'. The implications of the findings for an educational praxis and philosophy in relation to mature studentship in higher education are also considered. It is argued that for true widening participation to be effected, the full import of the mature student experience on entering and moving through the system should be given greater emphasis in all areas of the educational praxis. This means to acknowledge that the process of widening participation begins and does not end when the mature student enters higher education.

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EXPLORING THE CONTEXT

1. INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognised that Britain has been, and remains to a large extent, a status stratified society (Reid 1982). Part of the process of modernisation has been to attempt to lessen the impediment which social class presents, preventing a sizeable proportion of the population from experiencing higher education. This has been a major transition and constitutes something of a natural experiment in identity change. People who hitherto have had no expectations of academic achievement, and have understood that it was not their place to have such expectations, are suddenly invited to see themselves in a very different light. The participation in Higher Education of the school-leaving cohort has hugely increased, but there has also been an increased effort to encourage people later in life to enter university (see Dearing 1997).

A major part of this transition over the last two decades has been a proliferation of programmes which provide a pathway for post 21 year olds to enter and progress through Higher Education (see for example DfEE 1997). Such students are referred to by various epithets; 'returners to study', 'mature students', 'adult learners', 'non-traditional entrants' etc., and these labels characterise the difference between students who progress directly from school to Higher Education and those who do not. The latter often apply for entry direct to the HE provider and are resident within the locale of the Higher Education Institution (HEI). These emergent pathways are now fully institutionalised within the concept of 'lifelong learning' and 'the learning society' (see DfEE 1988, Smith and Spurling 1999), and in more recent years have become part of the British Government's drive toward 'widening participation' i.e. greater inclusion of those social groups who were hitherto excluded from participating in HE (see for example Wailey and Simpson 1999; Bowl 2000; Poleo 2001; McLean 2002). This was seen as a further movement toward equality of educational opportunity. A process that began post Second World War, when the link of traditional post compulsory education to the class structure was highlighted through research which clearly delineated that

participation in HE was disproportionately low for the working class (see for example Robbins 1963; Reid 1977; Halsey; Heath and Ridge 1980). The HE provision, as part of this process, has extended beyond the universities and into local further education colleges, previously concerned with vocational and technical education at a less advanced level, who have developed a portfolio of HE programmes in response to the developing market for 'mature students' (Parry and Thompson 2002).

The Research Context

It is within this context that this thesis is located. The HE provision which provides the focus for the research is a relatively small degree programme (some 300 students – including 'access' students i.e. those partaking in a 'preparedness for HE' course), which has over some years specialised in 'return to study' for local people in a part industrial, part agricultural, South Yorkshire town. Consistent with the college policy on widening participation there is an open admissions policy whereby post 21-year-old students can enter the programme without any prior qualifications, providing that there are reasonably strong expectations that they can succeed. Degree awards are within the humanities and the social sciences. The vast majority of students are full time and complete their degree within three years (the normal length of time in most disciplines in England and Wales). The nature of the student group varies, but those recruited are mainly female and often have no previous qualifications (with an attendant unfulfilling experience of compulsory schooling). The individual students in this study are typically in a long-term relationship or have recently concluded one (often part of their reason for entering the programme). They often have children, lack satisfaction with their present occupation (often 'housewife' with additional paid work), and seek change of some sort (usually not clearly definable, but often associated with career development). Information about the work later taken up by students strongly suggests that the course is implicated in the change which is sought by its clientele. Many students, who in their pre-course life experienced dissatisfaction, have moved into occupations and life styles that provide challenge, interest and fulfilment. The programme has been dubbed 'the dream machine' by some members of the alumni, as they 'would never had dreamed it was possible' to have changed their lives so radically in a relatively short period of time. Officially this process is referred to as 'value added' – the value which is added between the level of qualification, skills and knowledge etc. on entry and that on exit.

Most students enter with no qualifications and from low status jobs. Many leave with aspirations (generally realised) to enter professional work.

Personal Background and the Research Imagination

The genesis of the research began with my experiences as a mature student myself. Having completed the first part of a B Ed degree and progressing into the school teaching profession I decided at the age of 26 to take my academic interests further and entered a BSc course in Applied Educational Studies. Here I could take my interests within the social psychology of education much further than the largely superficial treatment I had experienced in my earlier studies. The theoretical level was a far greater challenge than I had previously encountered and I particularly became aware that the level of analysis was having a profound effect upon my worldview and my whole sense of self. In short I was seeing everything in a new light and this impacted upon my very engagement with the world at large and the way I perceived myself within it. The heightened consciousness of a whole range of issues had led to a sense of agency that hitherto had been completely unknown to me, and this transformation of self had a series of ramifications for my life generally. Metaphorically there had been a reconstruction of Graham Stevens. He now could engage with complex ideas and could argue his case in all new environments, bolstered by his increased awareness of the nature of many things too numerous to mention. This reconstruction in phenomenological terms led to an enhancement of 'spatial expansion'. For example I entered and succeeded in postgraduate study and new positions in the job market become potentially accessible. My aspirations for the future took on a completely different form with imaginings of work in higher education myself.

Many years later, with a series of life's vicissitudes behind me, I now do indeed work in higher education with students on the course described above as an academic tutor in social psychology, and as a tutor/counsellor responsible for student support. Sensitised to the changes I had experienced I began to notice similar processes at work with my students. In my informal engagement with them on a non-theoretical and theoretical level I teased out the kind of notions which related to the contours of self-transformation I had in mind. My suspicions were partially confirmed that they were aware of radical change in themselves and how, for the most part, this had been a wondrous turn around in their existence.

At the same time as I superficially and tentatively explored this notion of change I was involved in a whole range of curriculum developments within social psychology for which I had prime responsibility. These related to the need to inject recent work on postmodernism within the social sciences and commentaries on identity were a significant part of this. This seemed a good starting point to concretise my interests on the idea of self-transformation and to adopt a theoretical framework to take things further. Having adopted a multi-perspective approach to the social psychology curriculum, which embraced numerous approaches to the knowledge creation process (experimental, sociobiological, psychodynamic, social constructionist etc.), I homed in on experiential approaches and phenomenology in particular. Existential phenomenology presented itself as an ideal epistemological position to adopt given that I was interested in the conceptualisation of identity and notions of postmodernity and how these related to this business of change experienced by mature students. This was the broad framework that provided the basis for my journey. I begin with a summation of the related literature and then assess the position of this thesis in relation to the present state of knowledge of mature studentship.

2. MATURE STUDENTSHIP IN THE LITERATURE AND HOW IT RELATES TO THIS THESIS.

Phasing of the Review

This review was conducted in two distinct phases, before and after the research process, commensurate with the adopted epistemological position and the research praxis in general. This was to ensure that the infiltration of presupposition was minimised as far as possible by reducing the potential influence of previous work (see chapter 4). The ‘before’ phase of the review located the position of the substantive area and provided a baseline on which to build this research. The ‘after’ phase then completed the review and located the position of this research within the substantive area of knowledge. In relation to the latter then there are illustrations within the following review where this thesis and its findings integrate within the research corpus as a whole. The contribution to knowledge is taken up in more detail in chapters 5 and 6.

It should also be noted that the contribution this thesis makes to the substantive area is with particular regard to the underpinning methodology and epistemology (see chapter 4) which in many ways contrasts with the position adopted by the majority of the research literature to date. The brevity of the coverage of some of the literature then is due to the elliptical relationship it has to this study. The purpose is to set the scene in which this particular approach makes an augmented contribution to the majority of approaches in the literature as it stands at present. To this end, in appropriate places, I have introduced a phenomenological orientation to the reporting of the literature. These points are detailed in the conclusion to this chapter.

‘Widening Participation’

With regard to the process of widening participation in higher education (and the concept of lifelong learning), which has initiated an increased emphasis on mature studentship (i.e. generally students over 25), there is an ever-increasing literature into its success or otherwise. There is a thorough research corpus on the effects of social background on both entry and success in higher education for mature students as a response to the continued under-representation of women, ethnic minority groups and the working class.

Although there is some overlap in the literature with regard to the analysis of traditional and non-traditional entrants into HE, especially with regard to social class, the focus of the following review is with regard to mature students. Also, although entry and success are dealt with separately, it must be understood that there is an experiential overlap between the two. Access does not end abruptly with gaining a place in HE and physically presenting one’s bodily self at the course induction session. From a social psychological perspective access also refers to the point at which there is experiential engagement with the course and all its features, and whether the mature student can successfully move past this particular stage in the process of HE study.

2 (a) REGARDING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Differential Access to Higher Education Provision

Despite the expansion of higher education, Halsey (1991) has argued that the outcome has been for disadvantaged groups to gain greater access *relatively* not necessarily absolutely in comparison with advantaged groups, because ascriptive forces such as class, continue to determine patterns of access to education among under-represented groups. With regard to differential experiences of HE along social class lines students entering the old 'elite' universities were twice as likely to come from middle or upper class families as those entering the 'new' universities i.e. post 1992 sector (HESA 1999). As Reay argues,

The advent of mass HE has created spaces within academia for working class students, but it has also led to the creation of new stigmatised universities and new stigmatised identities. This elitist, hierarchical and highly class-differentiated field presents working class students with a difficult conundrum. Entwined with desires for self-advancement for working class students are difficult impulses which raise the spectre of both denial and pathology: a pathology that implicates both self and others like oneself.

Reay 2003:58

Forsyth and Furlong (2000) for example report on the 'subtle, hidden disadvantage' suffered by students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who were denied access to more desirable courses. As Parry and Thompson (2002) point out it is the new universities and further education colleges (such as the context of this thesis) that are primarily the providers of provision to widen participation. This trend of differentiation for disadvantaged groups accessing the less prestigious provision is highlighted by Egerton (2001) who noted that although numbers of working class mature students were approaching those of middle class mature students they were more likely to attend less prestigious provision. Reay (1998) also concluded that mature students in their choice and subsequent entry into higher education were engaged in a highly differentiated, unequal process along the lines of social background. Hutchings and Archer (2001) in a qualitative, focus group study found that this pattern was also the *perception* of their

participants, with less desirable (and less prestigious) provision failing to facilitate successful career progression. Reay et al (2001) refer to 'institutional habitus' (as related to and developed from Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'habitus') as influencing the HE provision which students perceive as befitting their academic aspiration, i.e. what they see as their possible route through HE study, and what they see as inappropriate and inaccessible routes for themselves. Bufton (2003) also demonstrates how working class background influences prospective and active mature students' ideas on routes into and through educational experiences. In this thesis such a perspective refers to the mature student's reference to their 'roots' and the influence of the socio-cultural milieu on the individual's biographical trajectory and levels of academic aspiration.

The influence of the social environment and attempts at intervention points up the subtle processes affecting entry into HE, echoing Reay's comments above. Currently there are a number of initiatives that attempt to address the complex problem of entry into higher education for those groups hitherto excluded. These include a series of consortia across the UK that bring together several agencies with the aim of increasing participation in Higher Education for all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender and social class. They combine initiatives such as 'Pathways for Progression' and 'Aimhigher' (both government funded with the brief to make access to higher education easier for all) with Regional Development Agencies, Sector Skills Councils, employers, and HE providers (universities, colleges). Whether these organisations commit to widening participation in a 'pure' form – that is to embrace all of HE (including 'Russell Group'¹ Universities) or whether they are to follow the trend described above (i.e. more access but differentiated) is currently open for debate. With their emphasis on employability and the inclusion of large employers, and SMEs (Small to Medium Enterprises) representatives in their membership, they are clearly oriented towards the more vocational rather than academic. Whether this constitutes differentiation is currently a vigorously debated issue, as the relevance and prestige of some forms of HE have been questioned, with the assertion that vocational courses should be valued as least as highly as traditional academic courses (see Floud 2002; Hughes 2002; Lucas 2002;).

¹ A self-selected group of 19 research-led universities who are perceived as an elite within higher education provision and with their research intense positioning attempt to attract the best staff and students.

One such consortium has however highlighted in their commissioned research a number of factors that militate against the aim to widen participation. Such research has augmented the funding councils' findings on factors such as, economic status, age, gender, disability and geographic location that prevent access to HE (e.g. HEFCE 1999). The factors within the consortium research tend to be more specified and refer mainly to such things as low attainment (and/or unfulfilling experience) at school, lack of close friends or family to act as role models of HE achievements, low aspirations, finance, time, availability of resources and services, fear of failure, and concern about future rewards (Booth 2004). These micro findings are clearly reflected in both qualitative and large-scale quantitative research (Webb et al 1994; Benn and Burton 1995).

The practical issues such as finance and resources and ways to address them are relatively transparent to understand although not to solve. The student loan scheme has had the predictable result of increasing student debt and forcing more students to work during term time (although for many mature students this may have often been the case notwithstanding). Proposals for a graduate tax or student higher education contribution offer more progressive models, although they still leave unresolved the deterrent effect on prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds and hence an impediment for 'widening participation' (Commission on Social Justice, 1994).

The problem of changing perceptions such as 'low aspiration' is more complex and may be related to the culturally derived attitude that education is for other people (see McGivney 1990). Such an analysis also takes away attention from the role of the institution in creating and perpetuating inequalities and tends to 'blame the victim' (see Archer 2003). (This issue is taken up further with regard to student support and the role of the institution below.) The measures currently being taken to address this perception are not appearing to have the desired affect. In fact as Slack and Thomas (2002) report it may have exacerbated the gap in participation rates between different socio-economic groups, as those individuals that possess greater cultural capital gain more benefits from the same aspiration-raising activities. It could be argued then that one way forward is to make interventions later in individual biographies, following the adage that if you educate a parent, you educate a family (see Edwards 1993). Hence the emphasis within this thesis on higher education and late studentship.

Risk and Disadvantage.

Other empirical work which highlights reasons for the lack of working class take up of HE opportunities refer to the notion of risk. That unlike their middle class counterparts, working class mature students are caught up in a far greater amount of risk should they venture into HE. Archer and Hutchins for example argue that ‘the risks and benefits associated with participation are unequally distributed across social class and as such access to HE remains a more difficult and costly ‘choice’ for working class students’ (2000:555). Participants in this study were well aware of this issue of risk, especially with regard to the social-psychological consequences of failure given their position within their local community and the feelings of opprobrium which accompany the taking of steps (entry into HE) that are perceived to be a rejection of their sub-culture. As Reay and Ball conclude, ‘working class apathy and fatalism can be redefined as a refusal to engage in a game where the stakes are often too high for working class players’ (1997:96).

This reported negative perspective held by the working class on Higher Education and education in general terms has long been the focus of the sociology of education. In recent times the issue of the culture of non-participation has again received attention. For example McGivney (1996), Green and Webb (1997) and Tett (1999) report that amongst mature students there are subcultural beliefs that HE is not within reach of the working class and that employment is the only option. Furthermore there is an extensive literature on resistance to education amongst the working class, exemplified by analyses of the conflict between the culture of the student and that of the educational institution (see for example Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977; Reid 1978; Corrigan 1979) and it is beyond the parameters of this thesis to examine this in detail. However Warmington (2002:17), drawing on resistance theory, proposes several scenarios to account for the educational disaffection of mature students. These include feelings of ‘been failed’ at school through lack of support, and withdrawal as a response to an alienating curriculum. Participants in this study did reflect this literature and also to some extent exemplified recent work on attitudes toward knowledge and education. Examples of this in the literature include the work of Gorman (1998:22) who notes how working class respondents saw ‘common-sense knowledge’ just as important as a degree and Lutrell (1989) who reports on how, for working class participants,

‘common-sense’ is ‘real intelligence’, as it grows out of lived experience, and thus meets the main criterion of being able to inform action. Hence a rejection of higher education and the need for academic study. The friction between the ‘pre-course’ (life at home within their sedimented belief system) and the ‘on course’ (life as a HE student), referred to in terms of orbits and orbital differentiation, is a recurrent theme in this study where students experience ‘identity confusion’ in trying to reconcile the ‘common-sense’ and the ‘academic’.

Class and the Mature Student Experience

Although the major foci of this study refers to the in-depth experience of the mature student, and not specifically to the wider context (especially the relationship between social class and education) as much of the work into mature studentship has done, the latter is important in that it relates to the microcosmic dimensions of a mature student’s life. A particular significant aspect of this relationship is the mature student’s position within the social structure and their previous experience of education, commensurate with such a position, whether this has been one of disadvantage or otherwise, and how it impacts upon their experience on returning to study. This structural perspective then remains an important consideration, and it thereby features in the concluding comments in this chapter as it relates to the contextualisation of the research.

2 (b) REGARDING SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Briefly work within this area is mainly characterised by the problems encountered by mature students during their studies and the various obstacles to success. Early work tended to focus on practical issues, which then developed into more socio-psychological issues, particularly as the concept of the ‘mature learner’ itself developed. It is these latter issues that constituted the initial foci of the research and also were largely sustained throughout the research journey.

The ‘Mature Learner’

The defining of ‘mature learner’ (or ‘mature student’) in social psychological terms is also problematic. For the purposes of this research initially the position taken by

Wakeford (1994) was adopted. She refers to the 25-55 age group as 'mature learners'. Usually this is the stage in the life cycle where personal identity has been, to some extent, established beyond the 'identity versus role confusion' of adolescence (Erikson 1980). Nationally students within this bracket typically have life styles distinct from traditional entry students, e.g. relatively long-term partners, children, domestic commitments etc. Characteristically they are students who are returning to education, following a period of employment (paid or unpaid), rather than participating directly after leaving school (see Redpath and Nikki 1989). They may wish to recreate 'balance' in their lives (Dawson and Boulton 2000), which is to achieve a sense of personal stability following actual, perceived or anticipated change or transition in their lives and personal identities (e.g. to re-establish a sense of security, fulfilment etc., possibly brought about by such things as shifts in occupational status or change in domestic arrangements).

Osborne, Marks and Turner (2004:291) have described various typifications of mature students who contemplate entry into HE. These are; 'delayed traditional students'; 'late starters' (these two categories are classed by Woodley and Wilson (2002:344) as 'young mature' in their twenties); 'single parents'; 'careerists', who are currently in employment who seek to make progress in their existing careers; 'escapees', who are currently in employment and who want a qualification as a way out of unfulfilling and/or unrewarding jobs; 'personal growers', who pursue education for its own sake. According to Williams (1997) the process of deciding to become a student is a complex and extended business and specific factors assume salience at different times. Osborne et al agree with this conclusion, arguing that reasons for becoming a student may cut across their categories and may well interact. To describe the process in more detail they identify various phases.

Beginning as a 'non-participant', potential mature students move through an 'aspirant' phase when they start to explore the idea of HE. Next they pass through the decision making stage when they weigh the issues and become a 'decider'. Before becoming an 'applicant', however, they may need to upgrade qualifications as well as organise their financial and domestic

affairs. By the time they actually apply to an HEI several years may have elapsed since they first entered the 'aspirant' stage.

Osborne et al 2004:293.

It seems then that any attempted description of mature students must be made with the caveat that they are far from a homogenous group (see for example Baxter and Hatt 1999). Employing a social constructionist approach Wilson (1997) identifies the following affective and affective-related characteristics of mature studentship; they are marginal (i.e. in the minority amongst traditional entry students and treated as such with the attendant feelings of isolation), have made bigger leaps into the unknown (unclear biographical trajectory and/or entry into 'strangerhood' – see chapter 6.), suffer from the age gap, lack self confidence, burdened by family responsibilities, more likely than traditional entry/younger students to suffer financial hardship. However she emphasises that although these are useful pointers on the meaning of mature studentship, not one single participant in her study, or even half the total group, were likely to experience all of these negative feelings. Her most notable overall observation was that mature students in her study were to be seen as 'self constructing' (see discussion below on 'the self as a reflexive project' and for example Candy 1989). This is to say that although the aforementioned features are useful as a typification, individuals create their unique response to such experiences and their own individuality (see Waller 2004). Notwithstanding this caveat these kinds of experiences are salient in the literature and feature in the following discussion.

Non-Academic Problems

In comparison with traditional entry students, mature students are less likely to complete their programmes of study. The reasons for this are often attributed to external factors (Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998). These non-academic reasons for early withdrawal amongst mature learners are well documented in the literature (e.g. Woodley 1984; Smithers and Griffin 1986; Mills and Molloy 1989; Bryant 1995). They generally focus on domestic commitments and practical issues (e.g. study facilities, time structuring, financial constraints), and propose a gender dichotomy in the experiences of mature students. In the Australian context for example there has been particular concern on attrition rates amongst married women mature students with

children and the relationship, within this group, between discontinuity and social class (see Scott et al 1996)

Relationships

Other research has focussed on social psychological problems (although not always framed and described as such) associated with long term relationships. For example early work highlighted the negative effect of full time study on close relationships and the additional strain imposed upon domestic life (Gilbert 1982; Sutor 1987; Lodge 1992). Similarly, the increase in skills and knowledge of one's domestic partner as a result of HE study is perceived as a threat to relationship harmony (Johnston and Bailey 1984). Tynes (1990) notes how the woman's participation in HE may affect marital harmony, because she is exposed to a world of experiences which challenges traditional roles. (The literature currently refers to heterosexual relationships and this study was limited to these.) More radical influences of being a mature student with regard to expectations within relationships can lead to total breakdown (Roderick 1982; Pascal and Cox 1993; Brown 1996). Edwards (1993) highlights the pressure that female mature students with family commitments are under to ensure they do not neglect their domestic duties due to their studies and academic successes. Similarly Gerson (1985) found that there was greater role strain on housewives who had become mature students in comparison to their housewife neighbours. The whole business of studying as a mature student then for either partner can lead to domestic strife and eventual separation and divorce (Johnston and Bailey 1984, Maynard and Pearsall 1994).

The negotiation of relationships is also of prime importance in the mature student's success. Male mature students may for example see their studies as continuing their traditional role as the main wage earner enhancing job market potential, and that more family involvement by the male mature learner may have a positive effect on domestic coping as there may be a more symmetrical power balance between partners (Maynard and Pearsall 1994). On the other hand female mature students experience greater difficulty as they feel that they should continue their traditional role within the family and not allow their studies to impact upon this role (Maynard and Pearsall 1994). Furthermore their project is impaired by feelings of guilt when conflict arises between student life and home life (Edwards 1993). In sum Edwards (1993) reported on how her interviewees felt constrained by family responsibilities, and that 25% felt that their

relationships had suffered as a result of full time study. Similarly with regard to partner support, Green and Percy (1991) reported that women on access courses had to contend with considerable resistance from their partners, and those partners, who were initially supportive, became less so when the women's studying interfered with some aspect of their own lives. Conversely Johnson (1990), Marks and Elsdon (1991), Merriem and Cafferella (1991) all report on how informal support from family and friends helped to sustain participation (along with institutional factors). Radhika and Prakash (1987) argued that role overload and role interference, following the renegotiation of traditional gender roles in dual career families (as when one partner moves into HE), may lead to reduced marital satisfaction. This initial work into relationships then shows that they come under some considerable strain, particularly when the female partner becomes a mature student, and problems for studying arise in connection with ideas of traditional gender roles and responsibilities (Oakley 1974).

These earlier lines of enquiry into relationships have been followed up by a range of more recent studies. Norton, Thomas, Morgan and Tilley (1998), having reviewed work into mature studentship and domesticity, and then conducted their own follow up study, confirmed earlier work by Green and Percy (1991) and a range of other studies, concluding that,

Women are still expected in many British Families to put domestic and caring responsibilities first. Stress must inevitable arise when, as in all full time degree courses, the demands of studying must at times take precedence: it is then likely that role strain and work overload will ensue, particularly for women students who do not have supportive partners. For some, the pressure is too great and they terminate their studies.

Norton, Thomas, Morgan and Tilley. 1998:86

Adams (1996) reports on female mature students challenging the asymmetrical power within their relationships with partners and the tension and resentment which can build up when they are expected to continue their traditional roles in the home. Wilson (1997) has expressed the threat and feelings of exclusion that male partners experience when their female partners enter HE. These reported issues within the negotiation and renegotiation of relationships, together with the influence of the mature student project

in HE, are echoed within this research and thoroughly explored with regard to the participants' lives.

Relationships and Self-Identity

The exploration of relationships and (potential) relationship strain then became an emergent focus of this research (although the specific issues reported in the literature were 'bracketed' – see chapter 4). A correlate of this exploration was the issue of identity change of the mature student in HE, which emerged as a central focus. The tentative precursory presumptions, in keeping with the methodological framework, were oriented toward relationship problems, or even breakdown, and how this may be symptomatic of identity change experienced by one partner who is a mature student (both male and female). Also, that identity change may place strain on *social* relationships, such that the meaning of these relationships will change in varying degrees. Wakeford (1994) has referred to the 'social risk' to relationships of becoming a mature student, thereby clearly associating identity change with shifts in relationships. She also relates how mature students' presentation of self changes over time with the efforts to 'fit in' with different groups, student and non-student. In effect there are two distinct identities played out: the off course identity in the presence of 'old' friends and the on course identity with student friends. More importantly such strategies are related to student accomplishments. How well they do on the course is related to how well they cope with the potential dangers to social relationships. Similarly, Lynch and O'Riordan (1998) note how the mature student gradually becomes conscious of the shifting common ground of social relationships and how this movement has to be negotiated in order to succeed.

This research also (as a possible concomitant of relationship change) explored the *nature* of identity change as part of becoming a mature student. Pascal and Cox (1993) have shown how becoming a mature student causes adults to highlight worries about identity, and more importantly Maynard and Pearsall (1994) have noted that significant changes in identity are frequently seen to be the result of undertaking HE. This may lead to a sense of 'ontological insecurity', as described by Laing (1965) and developed by Giddens (1999). The mature student for example may experience a lack of consistent feeling of biographical continuity. The sense of self in this way becomes 'fractured or 'disabled' in that the individual finds engagement with the world a

difficult task as the past does not entirely inform the present. Karach has described how academic knowledge can lead students to experience a partial loss in their sense of self; a loss of their former knowledge and various identities – ‘a social and psychological separation of self’ (1992:316). In relation to Giddens’ commentary and the conclusions of Karach, findings reveal a significant impediment in the process of widening participation. These refer to identity change as experienced along social class lines. This is often expressed in terms of betrayal of one’s working class roots (a recurrent theme in this study) by those who achieve academic success, and acute feelings of ‘spatial incongruence’ (see chapter E and Mahoney and Zmroczek 1997; Charlesworth 2000). This incongruence is exemplified by Reay;

I suggest the female academic from a working-class background is unlikely ever to feel at home in academia. For many, socialisation, at least within the family, was into collective and community-based understandings of the social world, not the competitive individualism we now face in which social networks are about instrumentalism, not connection.

Reay, 1997: 21

However the work of Britton and Baxter (1999) is a particular influential development in the literature. Like others they reject assumptions in earlier work on the homogeneity of mature students, usually expressed in the literature in terms of differences from traditional entry students. They suggest that an approach that draws on the idea of the self as a reflexive project offers valuable insights into the processes of becoming a mature student. Employing a narrative analysis they make reference to ‘self-transformation’ (1999:188) as a catalyst for returning to education resulting from a life crisis (see ‘fateful moments’ below). Their participants saw self-transformation as a conceptualisation of self as a ‘new’ self which is the outcome of an active process of self-reflection. ‘This is the *reflexive self* which approximates the ideal type of self assumed to be characteristic of modern life’ (1999:189 their italics). Self-transformation expresses strongly the idea of agency: the actor as acting and not as acted upon. They conclude by stating that, ‘further research based on longitudinal data could usefully explore changes in self-identity, arising from the actual experience of being in HE and beyond’ (1999:192). This research takes a similar approach (albeit

within a shorter timescale), and is fully described in chapters 4 and 5. The central focus emerged as: an experiential study of being a mature learner in HE, with particular reference to the self and changes in identity: the ramifications of such change on relationships, both personal and social.

Academia and Identity.

There is then recognition within the ‘widening participation’ agenda (and reflected in the literature) that the business of greater inclusion in HE *begins* and does not end when the mature learner enters HE (Tett 2004:8). For example, Stephenson and Percy (1989) have argued that to successfully negotiate the mature student identity, there is a need to become an ‘insider to the educational enterprise’. That is to internalise an approach and attitude critical of both one’s own and other people’s opinions. They argue that without this, mature students are likely to be unable to cope with working in an academic fashion (often alienating themselves from the course culture and individuals within it) and ultimately withdraw. Participants in a study by Bamber, Tett, Hosie, and Ducklin (1997:22) saw this as ‘becoming more critical, analytical and questioning in relation to their work’. When this is encountered, in the early stages of HE, identity may be under particular threat. Weil (1989) has referred to this as ‘disjunction’. This is a sense of dislocation in the educational environment where the mature student may feel alienated and their sense of self-efficacy and worth is acutely undermined.

Arrival in higher education confronts [mature students] with a sense of powerlessness. Initially this takes the form of uncertainty about the goals and appropriate behaviour. Later it crystallises into concerns about the relationship with teaching and tutors and the kind of knowledge that the curriculum offers. The students [struggle] to find a link between their past and this educational experience.

MacDonald and Stratta 1998:9

This move into higher education however may not be confined to mature students with a hitherto impoverished experience of education (whether this be along the lines of social class or otherwise). It may well be an experience that all entrants to HE need to come to terms with to some extent.

Most students entering the new world of the academy are in an equivalent position to those crossing the borders of a new country - they have to deal with the bureaucracy of checkpoints, or matriculation, they may have limited knowledge of the local language and customs, and are alone. Furthermore, the student's position is akin to the colonised or the migrant from the colonised land, where the experience of alienation arises from being in a place where those in power have the potential to impose their particular ways of perceiving and understanding the world - in other words, a kind of colonising process.

Mann, 2001: 11

However, George et al (2004:120) take this further by arguing that for the working class mature student the experience of higher education can be 'an *alienating*, not merely an alien world'. The experience of alienation described within 'strangerhood' is picked out particularly by participants in this study, although there are certain qualifications for such an experience as delineated in the analysis (chapter 6).

Giddens relates this kind of phenomenon as symptomatic of self-identity in late modernity (more specifically here we are referring to the individual's encounter with 'expert systems' i.e. higher education), and argues that the result might be,

..to compromise a whole set of trust relations which has been built up. Basic trust is established...as part of the experiencing of a world that has coherence, continuity and dependability. Where such expectations are violated the result can be that trust is lost, not only in other persons, but in the coherence of the object world.

Giddens 1999:66

It is such losses which may initiate threat, and thereby may have wide implications for a mature student's early experience of HE and identity. In relation to this process there is evidence that the loss of control, which is experienced by mature students as they move into HE and forego their earlier power of self-determination in paid employment, occasions feelings of threat and biographical discontinuity (Macdonald and Stratta 1998). Men can employ techniques to resist the adoption of the student role thus

maintaining the sense of the control that pertained within their prior occupational status (Adams 1996). However the obverse of this was reported by Richardson (1994), who identified that mature students, rather than having negative experiences such as a sense of threat, did in fact develop positive approaches to their studies when compared to traditional entry students. Nevertheless there is evidence to support the case that dilemmas of identity are experienced by both men and women mature students on their entry into HE (Wakeford 1994).

Domesticity and Identity

For women identity problems arise due to the contradictory selves which are called into being as they cope with the different contexts of education and domesticity. This is aligned with a re-evaluation of self and a more resilient sense of identity can emerge (Adams 1996). HE presents an opportunity to institute change in identity beyond the level of personal efficacy accorded to them within their position at home. This however can present dilemmas as some women, whilst wanting to institute personal change, also wish to retain their existing sense of self (Pascall and Cox 1993). Changes in identity can again be linked to relationships and feelings of guilt and selfishness for absconding from the domestic scene (Maynard and Pearsall 1994). Contrastingly there is evidence to suggest that such feelings are counterpoised by women mature students seeing themselves as positive role models and attaining better parenting skills (Adams 1996).

Problems Related to Academic Study and the Higher Education Provider.

To view the position of the mature student holistically, commensurate with the research praxis herein, we need to attempt to view the complex network of the mature student's experience. As Bryant has expressed it,

For many mature students the return tohigher education represents an obstacle course of Grand National proportions. Self-confidence has to be developed, writing skills polished up or acquired, academic language demystified and personal and family relations re-ordered.

Bryant 1995:270

The latter of this network of concerns has been discussed above; the rest refer to the experience of the mature within the academic milieu. These will be dealt with employing an atomistic (tending toward a focus on isolated variables, a constellation of variables or pre-identified issues) approach, as much of the preceding discussion has done. (With some incongruence regarding the holistic approach of this thesis.) However the complex intertwining of issues needs to be emphasised as it is this which can best represent the overall experience of being a mature student. As one such student has described things,

Learning and retaining knowledge requires a high degree of concentration. Keeping one step in front of the bailiff requires time and skill. Whilst in an educational environment, the mix of the two has resulted in stunted academic attainment. Why does being a mature student have to be so painful?

Mature Ruskin College Student, quoted in Bryant 1995:270

Confidence, Anxiety and Mature Student Performance.

The literature presents a central concern with the issue of confidence, which appears to be correlated with the whole business of coping with academic work (and perhaps the 'pain' referred to above). Daines, Daines and Graham (1993) noted how adult learners are more likely than traditional learners in higher education to lack confidence and to underestimate their own abilities. Early problems, for example, arise through the lack of study skills in the broadest sense (techniques of handling theoretical material, writing skills, basic research skills etc. - see for example Lodge, Parry-Langdon and Fielder, 1992). Examinations also loom large as a fearsome hurdle to overcome for many mature students (Langridge 1993). Confidence, whilst not given any in-depth analysis of what such a phenomenon actually is, has featured strongly in the analysis of student anxiety and withdrawal. There is evidence to suggest that the struggle with academic knowledge as it contradicts the common-sense understanding of the world causes the mature student some anxiety (Edwards 1993). This is related again to biographical discontinuity, as there is a fissure in the temporal experience of the individual. Stephenson and Percy (1989) argue that for mature students confidence, as a capacity to express oneself in such a way as it co-exists with a fixed and unexploratory

outlook (e.g. not embracing the relativity and fragility of knowledge and its development), seems to herald failure. Confidence in this way is seen as a resolute defence of self-identity (and a successful rebuttal of potential threat). The authors argue that, whilst mature students wrestle to embrace the academic way of knowing, they should be supported throughout the process by the fostering of a positive self image, thereby being confident about themselves as they move into the world of academic ideas. This should be done through acquiring a series of personal successes however minor, and working toward an understanding that 'knowledge is not something out there, to be learned; it is to be created and debated' (ibid:40). They also warn against the tendency for mature students to adopt 'surface learning' approaches (learning for the garnering of marks without any thorough understanding) due to their perception of the finiteness of time and their position in the life cycle.

Adults returning to study often perceive themselves as in a hurry; they have, in their perception, wasted too much time; the danger may be the temptation to rush through the externals of the process of learning without internalising the meanings and uncertainties.

Stephenson and Percy 1989:40.

Conversely when comparing traditional entry students with their mature student counterparts the latter are more likely to adopt a meaning orientation and deep approach to their work and less likely to adopt a reproducing orientation or surface approach. The explanations for this are that mature students are more motivated by intrinsic goals, that their prior life experience promotes a deep approach and that they have not been influenced by the surface approaches of recent secondary school experience as traditional entry students have (Richardson 1995). Findings also suggest that such approaches amongst mature learners may pay dividends. Hartley (1994) for example concluded that mature students usually perform as well as or sometimes better than traditional entry ones, particularly in the arts and social sciences.

Worries about personal attainment when such concern is unfounded is a prime example of 'confidencelessness' (see chapter 6). Such things as tutors' comments on feedback and grades feature highly in the levels of anxiety experienced (see for example James

1995; Young 2000). Weil (1986) suggests that such anxieties could be related to feelings of inadequacy, attributed to the harmful experiences of past school life. In similar vein Crossan, Field, Gallagher and Merrill (2003) have related negative childhood experiences (including compulsory schooling) to hostility toward educational institutions later in life. It may be that the damage done at school influences the mature student's response to feedback such that guidance may be interpreted as trenchant and hurtful criticism.

Related to much of the preceding discussion, and certainly a prominent feature within this thesis, is the manner in which the experience of confidence, or lack of it, is related to the social sphere, such as interaction with authority figures or public speaking (e.g. making contributions in seminar discussion, doing assessed presentations to one's fellow students.) Crozier and Jones (1996) in their study of shyness amongst mature students make the connection between low self esteem, lack of confidence and shyness in novel situations and/or being evaluated. For the mature student these come together with a vengeance in the seminar situation. Here shyness and lack of confidence is due to attributional (negative) bias about self and low self-esteem. This is often experienced during the early stages of their course when they are presented with a novel scenario and where they feel as if they are being evaluated. As they socially compare self with younger students, the authors argue that mature students take on unrealistic high standards of themselves due to being mature people in the presence of younger more inexperienced students yet paradoxically feeling that younger students have the advantage of recent study experience at school. If shyness and lack of confidence is not overcome it may lead to premature withdrawal from their course. The authors suggest a number of measures to help mature students overcome these obstacles to success. These are; tutor sensitivity to shyness and lack of confidence, regular tutorial meetings to alleviate feelings of inferiority, and induction sessions with other successful and experienced mature students (Crozier and Jones 1996:197). Shanahan (2000) also reports on the tremendous value of peer support in dealing with stress (of which the lack of confidence can be seen as a major cause) – findings which are supported in this study.

Student Support within the 'Widening Participation' Agenda

Views reported in the literature on the need for effective support structures to address the whole range of problems (both academic and non-academic) encountered by non-traditional students in HE are extensive. These began as early as the 1960s (see Johnson and Riviera 1965) and gained currency as the concept of lifelong learning developed in the 1980s (see for example Darwald and Merriam 1982; Cross 1986; Brown 1988; Slowey 1988; Fulwood and Ellwood 1989). These writers argued for an explicit policy framework to effect inclusion such that the move to mass higher education leads to an decrease and not an increase in levels of educational inequality. This work was taken further in the 1990s (Brown and Brimrose 1993; Blair et al 1995; Woodrow 1996) with a resounding message that,

Our most significant finding for educators is the need to build supportive structures as part of a course culture, which encourages such determination [of non-traditional participants], within an avowedly socially critical approach.

Bamber et al 1997

However to what extent is this maxim being applied? Scott et al (1996) found that for female mature students with children the cited reasons for withdrawal included lack of academic support and staff hostility. It may still pertain in many institutions that people who have been hitherto excluded and are now being included under the 'widening participation' agenda are expected to fit into the existing system rather than the system changing to suit the newly included clientele (see Woodrow 1996). This again relates to the notion of risk introduced above. As Ball et al have argued '[in entering HE] the risks and reflexivity of the middle-classes are about staying as they are and who they are. Those of the working-classes are about being different people in different places, about who they might be and what they must give up' (2000:23). Bamber and Tett (2001) suggest an 'integrative learning experience' (learning which is characterised by students feeling valued for who they are and the experience they have) to counter this and facilitate true widening participation. As they argue,

The difference between an integrative and a disjunctive experience for mature, working class students.... depends upon successfully negotiating a

series of related challenges to their stance towards learning, which has its roots deep in the social context. It is unjust to expect that the burden of making such a change should fall only on the students themselves and providers must work hard to secure the necessary change and development. For lecturers this might mean critically examining and changing their own attitudes and practices and at collective levels it might mean changes to courses and to departmental, faculty and institutional procedures.

Bamber and Tett 2001:10

Unfortunately however such a *cri de coeur* comes in the context of a trend in HE towards greater efficiency through reducing costs per student, which militates against the kind of changes called for.

Where attempts to accommodate non-traditional participants have been evident the factors which have helped to sustain participation include the extent to which staff were encouraging and interesting; the quality of interaction with other students; the suitability of course content; and students' commitment to the course and institution (Blair, AcPake and Munn 1965; McGivney 1966; Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998).

Unfortunately there is evidence in which the obverse pertains where there are a number of institutional factors which militate against the success of non-traditional students. These factors include: admissions procedures which favour young traditional qualified candidates who can demonstrate in advance of entering that they have the capacity to benefit; inflexible course arrangements that disadvantage adults with varying domestic responsibilities; student loans and other central sources of finance that discriminate against older learners; individual members of staff with little sympathy toward the particular needs of adult students; assessment methods that favour students who have experienced academic success (Halsey 1991; Uden 1996; Williams 1997). In general such instances demonstrate an ethos that tends to reflect existing social inequalities and that 'mature students are useful when needed by the HE system but have no intrinsic merit' (Woodley and Wilson 2002:331). There is however some call for change. Clouder (1997) reports on family relationship/domestic strain and women's strategies to cope with unsupportive HE delivery arrangements. Reflecting on the withdrawal rate

due to such arrangements, and women mature students' inability to negotiate an accommodating learning contract with the provider, she concludes that,

It is vital that we use our capacity to intervene and transform the more traditional stance of higher education so that women are actively encouraged to negotiate their own learning needs, method and timing of assessment, dictating the pace of the whole course to fit in with domestic commitments.

Clouder 1997:148

With reference to the movements within vocationally oriented higher education referred to above the negotiation of the learning contract is becoming a central tenet of new provision within the development of foundation degrees. Within such degrees the delivery mode is set up in close consultation with the client group, indicating some realisation of the constraints of non-traditional learners. Whether this ethos will eventually be translated to standard full time degrees remains to be seen.

The contribution that mature students make to their courses is acknowledged by a number of writers (Boon 1980; Woodley 1984; Richardson 1994). According to these researchers, mature students generally have an exemplary approach to learning, which has a positive influence on other course members, especially traditional entry younger students. With regard to their pervasive positive contribution, Woodley concludes that 'universities should have few qualms about increasing their mature student intake' (1984:49). The issue then appears to be that firstly the positive influence mature students can have on the lived reality of course life is not translated into accommodating strategies to make their sustained participation easier. Secondly that mature students and their learning needs are inimical to the prestige of institutions and institutional identities. As Edwards (1991:96) puts it, 'different ideological conceptions of the learner produce practices which reflect and reproduce ideological positions which are part of the wider processes of social development and reproduction'. In other words providers, in their course delivery (e.g. teaching and assessment strategies) are agents in constructing the structural positions of their institutions, producing institutional identities that are socially distinctive. Whether recent government moves to arrive at designated quotas of students from disadvantaged backgrounds for high

prestige provision (e.g. Oxbridge) impacts upon the recruitment and success of mature learners is yet to be demonstrated. Currently the older pre-1992 universities tend to see the emphasis to widen participation on admissions (King 2003) whereas the post 1992 higher education providers (e.g. 'new' universities) tend to be seen as better at supporting the ongoing learning experience of non-traditional students (Reay et al 2002). They are also better at supporting students with particular issues of concern or need e.g. supported learning (McNicol 2004).

3. LEARNER IDENTITIES

A more holistic approach (at the level of the individual) in the literature has been in the deployment of the concept of 'learner identities', which identifies the learner careers of students and the process of the mature student identity in a constant state of (re) construction (see for example Bloomer and Hodgkinson 2000; Crossan et al 2003; Waller 2004). This kind of research again echoes the earlier observation that classifying mature students as a homogenous group is mistaken (Woodley and Wilson 2002). James (1995) argues that attempting to apply a 'species' approach to the study of mature students seems to be simply for the benefit of institutional convenience rather than trying to understand the *experience* of mature students. Unfortunately, as most of the preceding discussion identifies, it is the former that has taken precedence. It is at this point that the articulation between the majority of the research corpus and this thesis is presented. The research herein adopts an experiential approach looking at the lives of mature students in a holistic manner and not directly and atomistically at aspects such as inequality of access, domestic strife or barriers to learning. To this end an ideographic position is taken as with the 'learner identity' and 'learner career' approach, although there are important differences which are discussed in chapter 4.

Findings within this ambit of research identify the considerable risk which students can experience as they enter HE. 'This transitional phase is not a straightforward one of simply shedding old identities and donning unproblematic new ones, but is instead a period of reflexivity and risk, confusion and contradiction' (Brine and Waller 2004:97). The women participants in Brine and Waller's study anticipated certain risks which their entry into HE would entail, including the usual financial risks. More importantly,

through reflexivity they also anticipated changes in learner identity. The authors however are keen to point out that their participants, whilst actively seeking personal change, did not anticipate a range of other risks related to radical shifts in relationships with friends and family. These eventualities were taken into account as the women continually reassessed their position as their transformation ensued. This whole process, the authors conclude, 'is fluid, highly complex, and continually evolving throughout both the Access and degree courses, and probably beyond' (2004:111). The complexity of this process, which describes the range of anxieties related to confusion and risk (along with other correlates), is a central feature of this study. Similar work into risk is related to the level of potential damage to what may already be bruised (learner) identities should academic failure ensue (which in turn is a revisiting of earlier failure at school). The construction of the learner identity however can continue and the damage can be made good (Waller 2004). The risks then are not preventative and mature students do take them. Such action is seen as a response to the constructive processes of the learner identity i.e. the felt need and motivation of personal growth. These may include long held desires to achieve (loosely defined) academic success (Waller 2004:35), 'epiphanic' self-realisation (Barone 1995) or 'turning points' in life such as relationship break up, disillusionment at work (Bloomer and Hodkinson 1996).

This issue of risk can be linked to the general human condition of living in the contemporary world. For Giddens (1999), the whole business of 'going on' in social life is fraught with 'fateful moments' in a 'risk' society. What Giddens is referring to here is that, throughout a person's life a crossroads is reached and decisions have to be made, and actions taken, which are seen to have highly significant consequences for the future. The loss of coherence experienced in the examples above and referred to earlier in the discussion of self-identity and academia may be illustrative of our ongoing encounters with such 'fateful moments'. Indeed it is very possible that the whole process from moving into HE, through to taking a place in the job market as a graduate is punctuated with further 'fateful moments'. The nature of these 'fateful moments' became an important element of this research. Firstly with regard to the pre-entry to HE phase of participants' biographies, and secondly as implicated in the construction of self/learner identity from this pre-entry phase into the subsequent phases of self-transformation within the experience of HE study.

This in-depth approach to the construction of learner identities (rather than the more macro perspective work such as Osborne 2004 above) gives an insight into mature studentship as it is lived, although unlike this thesis it does not do so from a first person perspective (see chapter 4). Nevertheless as the work into student risk and construction of identity show there is much to inform practice in the conduct of provision for mature students. Johnson and Watson (2004) for example have conducted constructionist research into the 'fit' between the mature student's production of their identity and their perception of the successful student. Using a narrative/life history approach they have demonstrated the need for mature students to construct an identity which has better 'fit' with the institution of their choice leading to a reproduction of their identity. As Thomas (2002:431 notes 'if a student feels that they do not *fit* in, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued, they may be more inclined to withdraw early' (his italics). Johnson and Watson argue that to 'fit in' involves the participation in a series of activities including inter alia: computer literacy, realistic understanding of the workload required to learn effectively and complete assessment tasks; acceptance of the need to unlearn some skills gained in the past (a rejection of aspects of a past identity), and engaging positively with younger students in social and academic learning. Further one should be successful at these activities and seen to be successful at them. In agreement with other work (Tinto 1993; Kuh 2001; Thomas 2002) they conclude that the achievement of successful 'fit' is related to a more likely chance that students remain on course. They also advocate the use of interview narratives, as employed in their research, for practical use as an aid in retention.

...we recommend the use of interview narratives as opportunities for students not only to tell institutions who they are becoming, but also to articulate this shifting process for themselves. Hence it becomes a public and private enterprise. The practical outcome of such detailed analytical work is its potential to contribute more nuanced understandings for institutions engaged in the enduring problem of student retention.

Johnson and Watson 2004:485

The beneficent purpose of the research then is to better understand the lived experience of mature students, which may lead to improved practice in such things as course

design, teaching and learning strategies, and pastoral support. The latter is forcefully identified by David Wray (1996) who outlines some interesting proposals to address problems faced by mature students when posing the question ‘should higher education for adults carry a health warning for their relationships?’ These include practical help such as an accommodating timetable and crèche facilities to alleviate relationship strife brought about by the pressures of childcare. More importantly however the exposure of issues in the study of lived experience leads Wray to suggest a change in attitude by HE practitioners to not dismiss the level of disruption in mature students’ lives as simply part of everyday dilemmas we all face. An understanding of the pressure on relationships leads Wray to proffer the idea of induction sessions for partners alongside those of the mature students themselves. Within these sessions and follow up sessions it can then be made abundantly clear on the changes which are likely to ensue as a result of the impact that HE study can have on the individual and therefore their relationships. Furthermore his suggestion of the inauguration of a mature students society also seems to have its merits in regard to Wray’s concerns.

4. THE WIDER CONTEXT

Finally the research attempts to identify how the reported process of self-transformation, experienced by mature students in HE, is located within the notion of the ‘postmodern self’ or the self in ‘late modernity’ (see chapter 2 for a full discussion of this difference). This notion purports that, in contrast to traditional society, where individuals lived their lives according to custom and tradition, in late modernity the individual biography must be forged out of a range of possibilities. As Giddens observes ‘What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity’ (1999:70).

The research then explores how the experience of being a mature learner forges individual biography, and contributes to the making and remaking of self-identity; what Harré (1983) has earlier referred to as individual ‘identity projects’. Lea (1994), consistent with much of the foregoing discussion has highlighted this process in the way adult students redefine themselves as they negotiate the transition in their lives associated with studying in HE. This transition is characterised often by a change in

confidence and levels of assertiveness (Crozier and Garbert-Jones 1996; Maynard and Pearsall 1994); a theme which figures saliently in this study. Identity is fully explored in chapter 2 where its conceptualisation and the epistemological position taken in the research praxis are fully examined. Accompanying this there is also the discussion of postmodern notions of identity and how they relate to this thesis.

5. CONCLUSION

The broad aim of this research is to look closely at the experience of a group of mature students in higher education, within the context of the transition from an elite to a mass system. The dimensions of this transition are as follows. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the UK participation rate in higher education had reached 35% and is now greater than the U.S. (OCED 2000; Woodward 2000). A significant part of this expansion has been in further education colleges and the 'new' universities. The process began when mature students were seen as central to the Conservative Government's plan of 1987 for expansion and reform of higher education: *Higher Education: meeting the challenge* (DES 1987). The expansion of higher education in the 1990s was in part a result of this initiative. Mature student entry into higher education rose from approximately 10% in 1980 to 30% in 1990 (DfEE 1992). In 1994-95, 15.7% of first degree full time enrolments were 25 or over (DfEE 1996). In part time HE enrolments 80% were 25 or over and 60% of these were 30 or over.

Recently however there has been a consistent decline in the number of applications from mature students to enter HE (O'Leary 2000; UCAS 2000) and more recent statistics show a marked impact of the introduction of fees (Major 2000). This decline seems to have disproportionately affected disadvantaged students.

Analysis of 1997 to 1998 data highlights large decreases in accepted applicants within those age, socio-economic and ethnic groupings which were the primary focus of the widening participation initiative.

UCAS 1999:8

Accompanying this rather depressing trend for widening participation, there is also the indication in research that should mature students take up the challenge and enter higher education their progression is not without difficulty. As argued above there is now a recognition that for widening participation amongst mature students (and the impact this may have on families and communities to take up educational opportunities (Edwards 1993) to be fully effected we must see it as a *process*. This begins with the issue of differential access, wherein the provider may not embrace mature students as supporting their institutional identity, and this is reflected in their recruitment and admissions operation. Furthermore there is evidence that institutions have shifted their emphasis in any declared alignment with the widening participation agenda.

Whilst expressions of accessibility and flexibility are without exception highlighted in institutional statements, the reality in some institutions is that mature students are not a priority. Widening participation policy at national and institutional level in the UK has shifted to broader concerns associated with the situation of younger people in areas of socio-economic deprivation. For many institutions, mature students are now part of a much bigger picture. If they aid the meeting of enrolment targets, then this is a bonus for many institutions, but it is unlikely that special arrangements will be made to attract this group given the relative way of meeting widening participation targets through focussing on younger cohorts.

Osborne et al 2004:312-3

Despite this observation the mission statements of many further education colleges refer directly to providing educational opportunities for local people, and this does include enabling access to higher education, often as a priority. So whilst large institutions such as the 'new' universities may have shifted their emphasis to a more broader front as Osborne et al state, a large proportion of mature students continue to access higher education through their local further education college (around 11% of HE is delivered in further education colleges (HESA 1999)). The focal point of this thesis refers to such provision and the experiences of its mature studentship within the widening participation process.

A major issue of mature studentship that the literature highlights is the notion of risk. For many mature students, especially the working class, this is in need of some attention in order to bring about a more inclusive system. And risk has to be considered in all its various manifestations, not only financial, but also psychological. For many mature students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, the stakes are high when contemplating and then moving into higher education. Mature students approach the prospect of entering higher education with trepidation and uncertainty. The need to consider ways in which the arrangements for supporting mature students can be made more transparent to potential entrants would appear to be a major consideration. This is especially the case when the risks they take around the point of entry are further compounded by the problems that are encountered as their project progresses.

There is a range of obstacles to the successful accomplishment of the mature student's success in higher education. These have been fully discussed above in relation to the existent literature. These include non-academic problems, and issues related to the provision and academic study. Both of these areas embrace the issue of transition in self-identity and how this is related to other issues within the experience of mature studentship, not least of which is the *disjunctive* rather than *integrative* interface between the pre-course and the on-course lifeworlds of the individual.

It is at this level where abstract statistics do not reveal the constellation of variables that influence the attempts to widen participation. This lack of clear understanding is exacerbated by the heterogeneity of the mature student. A point which has only recently been fully acknowledged by the literature. Conversely the research has revealed an important commonality; that in the study of the phenomenon of late studentship there is a fruitful line of inquiry in focussing on the mature as a reflexive self-constructing being. This has been done by employing the concept of learner identity at an idiographic level. This is a recent development in response to the foregoing research corpus, which largely adopted a critical realist framework, with findings that were generally atomistic in nature (revealing variables that impacted upon the life of the mature student, especially on social class lines).

In contrast the 'learner identity' and 'learning career' approach employed a social constructionist framework to highlight the holistic experience of being a mature student

and how individuals responded to the social milieu (see Jenkins 1996) thereby (re)constructing self-identity (e.g. Johnson and Watson 2004). There has been a paucity of research which, whilst taking a constructionist approach, has employed a phenomenological framework.

This research is an attempt to redress the balance by augmenting idiographic studies using a life history/narrative/social constructionist approach with research that emphasises the agency of the individual i.e. existential phenomenology. The central concept within the research is the 'lifeworld' (see chapter 4 for a full discussion of this). This is deployed to fully explicate the existence of the mature student by revealing the essence of the higher education experience. It is a study of the consciousness of the individual as they engage with their world through the moment by moment living of higher education in all contexts and situations (physical and mental). It is asserted that this in-depth perspective and its findings make an original contribution to knowledge, not least because of the virtual non-existence of such an approach to this ambit of research in the literature. To make this assertion however is not to ignore the broader social context to which the great majority of research within this area relates. The social structure and commentaries on inherent inequalities are important insofar as mature students are 'situated' (see commentary on 'situated freedom' in chapter 3) with their 'situated knowledges' (Hammersley 1992). This is to assert that the position of the individual in the broad social context impacts upon their consciousness in significant ways.

Following the suggestion by Britton and Baxter (1999) above and the apparent lack of emphasis on the social psychological dimensions of the mature student experience (especially from a phenomenological perspective), the issue of transition with regard to self-identity is a central focus of this research. So emerging from this review the following *research foci* have been distilled from a range of issues that the research literature has revealed. As is made abundantly clear in chapter 4., these are viewed as *things within the lifeworld of participants which are studied from their perspective* and do not constitute hypotheses formation in any respect.

Within the context of participating in a taught higher education course at a further education college with a brief to widen access:

1. What is the nature and extent of factors that bring about identity change? (The role of teaching staff? The exposure to new knowledge and experiences? The identification with new groups?)
2. What is the nature and the extent of perceived threats to identity, and the implications for identity change?
3. What are the ramifications of identity change on relationships and relationship maintenance?
4. What is the nature of identity change per se with regard to self-image, values, opinions, aspirations, worldview etc.?

To reiterate, these are specifically *foci*, and not assumptions about what may be revealed by the findings. They are *tentative, precursory presumptions* and as such, in the research praxis, they were thoroughly and continuously scrutinised with regard their on-going relevance to the lifeworld of the participant. The process and its outcomes are described in chapters 4. and 5. respectively.

The research also seeks to consider the relationship between processes of identity change in HE and notions of postmodernity. The PhD element is specified initially as twofold.

- To make an original contribution to social psychological theory, concerning the influence of higher education upon the self.
- To contribute to the emerging notion of the postmodern self and dilemmas of identity in contemporary life (see Gergen 1991 and Giddens 1999).

As described in the final synthesis of the overall argument these broad foci became distilled in a contribution to knowledge which provides an in-depth examination of the mature student experience of higher education and augments other research in the substantive area. This is linked to the Postmodern and Late Modern commentaries of self-identity through the engagement of mature students with the expert system of education and the resultant uncertainties and rapidity of change in the lifeworld.

THEORISING IDENTITY

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the theoretical background on identity as it relates to the research foci. This will involve the examination of various conceptualisations of identity and an explication of the chosen position with regard to the epistemology and ontology. The former constitutes an exposition of the commentaries on self and identity, including self-identity (as relevant to these research aims), whilst the latter proposes that the approach of phenomenological psychology is the most fruitful avenue of investigation for this particular kind of research. I will also examine some of the postmodern commentaries on self-identity and how these relate to the phenomenological position. In sum how self-identity changes through the conscious experience of socio-cultural variants (the postmodern world) and the invariant human tendency to create meaning due to the anxiety created by experienced meaninglessness (the assertion of existential phenomenology). I begin with an exploration of the various understandings of identity and self.

2. CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF IDENTITY AND SELF

The Self

To conceptualise the self is a major task replete with philosophical argument and debate. Taylor (1989) for example has suggested that the value we attach to the self that has the capacity to lead, autonomously, an ordinary life, has multiple sources arising out of a 'theistic' notion that allocates humans a special place in the universe, a 'romantic' notion stressing the capacity of selves to create and recreate themselves, and a 'naturalistic' notion that regards the self as amenable to scientific reason, explicable in terms of biology, heredity, psychology, socialisation and the like. 'The Self' thus appears a much more contingent, heterogeneous, culturally relative notion than it

purports to be, dependent on a whole complex of other cultural beliefs, values and forms of life. Reference to other cultural systems for example, especially with regard to language, reveals the impermanent and transient nature of 'the self' (Benoit, 1959; Watts, 1957). However to do full justice to such a discussion is beyond the parameters of this thesis. It is however necessary to show how the various ideas and understandings of this central consideration and feature of the human condition has been developed in order to contextualise the manner in which identity and self are conceptualised in the research praxis.

Potter and Wetherell (1996) identify several conceptualisations of the self. 'Trait theory' for example presents the self as an 'honest soul', a personality with traits which provide sufficient explanation for actions. People have dispositions and identify completely (honestly) with them. It would therefore be meaningless to think of the 'honest soul' having an identity crisis as there is only one identity, not many, and there is no distance within the self to produce this kind of self-conflict. Arguments about whether a person is or is not being their authentic self are largely irrelevant, they are always that self. Such a view is highly asocial in its approach and ignores the inconsistency in human behaviour (Mischel 1968).

Alternatively role theory, sees the self as having characteristics denied the 'honest soul' self. Individuals make reference to the social context and play out their selves in accordance with social expectation. Goffman (1959) for example employs a dramaturgical analogy in that people are performers on life's stage and they may not express a stable personality, which presents a model of the person that is alien to trait theory. People are therefore interchangeable when it comes to role-playing. There is 'a kind of social insincerity and...a multiple set of discordant identities' (Potter and Wetherell 1996:98). Humanistic theories on the other hand declare more autonomy than the 'social dope' role theory model of the self², wherein people are viewed as victims of social circumstances. People here are the centre and source of their experience. They initiate action and try to realise themselves (their plans, their desires etc.) in the world.

² This characterisation is that of Potter and Wetherell and is not that of other authors commenting on Goffman. It should be noted that Goffman's position is in line with the position adopted in this thesis that there is no essence to the self (see chapter 3.) and the notion of personal agency to call self into being is not in harmony with Potter and Wetherell's descriptor (see for example Ashworth 1985). There may be more in common then between Goffman's view of selfhood and the Humanistic model than Potter and Wetherell suggest.

Humanistic models of the person emanated from the philosophical underpinnings of existentialism and phenomenology and to some extent share similar characteristics to the position held here with regard to the autonomy of the existent.

Whilst Potter and Wetherell acknowledge that one should not attempt to discern which model is the correct description of the self, and that they are simply equivalent ways of making sense of the self, they do go on to argue that these models have limitations which social constructionists can address. Wetherell and Maybin (1996) argue that many approaches to understanding the self (e.g. biological, cognitive-experimental) tend to emphasise the self-contained, independent, consistent, unitary notions of people. They argue that a more useful avenue of investigation into understanding the self is to view it as *distributed*. Here the self is essentially social, it is 'the sum and swarm of participations in social life'. Self then becomes multifaceted, not singular or unitary. As they explain,

There are a number of contextual selves, the people we are in different relational settings. To be sure, there must always be limits and constraints on this multiplicity. But our descriptions of people's identities will need to register the contradictions between their personalities, responses and actions in different situations. We will need to be sensitive to people's involvements in social life, and the possible distributions of self across social contexts.

Wetherell and Maybin 1996:223

Self and Identity

The interchangeability of the terms self and identity is problematic. Many writers such as Wetherell and Maybin above use them interchangeably as ways in which people link themselves to the social context and how they achieve some sense of coherence as a person. This way of understanding personhood, self and identity is further obfuscated by the social constructionist notion of the self as 'distributed' (Stevens 1996a:221). This model, as alluded to above, presents the person as continually 'spreading, changing, grouping and regrouping across a relational and social field' (Wetherell and Maybin 1996:222). In contrast to this, the 'trait', 'role' and humanistic models exemplified above view persons in the same way as the approaches of biological and cognitive/experimental social psychology i.e. self-

contained, unitary, consistent and private *to differing degrees*. The 'distributed self' is seen as *totally social*. So for the social constructionists both self and identity are the result of the dialectic between the person and the social milieu in which the person exists. Are then the self and identity to be seen as indistinguishable?

Jenkins (1996) offers some clarity on the distinction between what constitutes the self and what constitutes identity. He argues that 'the self can be thought of as a primary (that is, basic) social identity' (1996: 48) and further,

Selfhood is arguably the earliest identity into which an individual enters, and the most resistant to change (as well as the most vulnerable in its early period of formation). It can perhaps best be understood as offering a template for all subsequent identities, offering a stem stock on to which they are grafted.

Jenkins 1996:49

The emphasis here is that, it is the perception of who we are, that is central. And it is this perception of self that leads us to the realisation of identity or identities, which then links the self (our perceived self) to the social context. The self then constitutes a more fundamental aspect of who we are. For Jenkins one's self is generally experienced as a unitary phenomenon, although such consistency is complex. We may have several selves as we may have several identities, but the self we cling on to gives us control over who we are. There is however some need to have a sense of unity despite the level of multiplicity and fragmentation suggested by social constructionists. They themselves qualify their position. To be a set of infinite identities is to be seen as insane as we (and others) would have no sense of ourselves as a person. As Wetherell and Maybin explain,

People cannot choose to realise themselves in any way they fancy. Identities must be plausible in the light of what has gone before; in relation, that is, to the collective history of previous responses and reactions. Without that plausibility, individuals cannot be recognised as themselves or recognised as behaving in meaningful ways. The collection of identities which makes up the person must not be too fragmented; it must show some consistency

and the person must show some reflexivity or self awareness of how they appear to others. Otherwise the person is in danger of being seen, literally, as eccentric or mad.

Wetherell and Maybin 1996:227

As illustration of their position they refer to an anthropological case study in which an American woman experiences distraught multiplicity whilst staying in Japan; as she wrestles with her 'American self' and her 'Japanese self' (whilst being American she is of Japanese descent and *looked* Japanese). The intertwining of the self (especially her 'americanness') and the social context (the traditional Japanese construction of womanhood – deferring to the will of men, performing the 'tea ceremony' etc.) had led to a disturbing fragmentation of self, due to the various identities she projected. The *inconsistency* of self and identities was the source of her disturbance.

So the self is understood as consistent yet simultaneously complex as identities of the self can be multiple, but there are limits to this multiplicity. What then is the nature of this multiplicity?

3. ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

The 'False Permanence' of Identity

For Baumeister (1991) the self is an embodied entity which has with it a set of definitions taken from the socio-cultural context. This is one approach to understanding the multiplicity of self and identity. We can use the term identity to refer to these definitions. He states that 'a person's identity can be roughly defined as the totality of his or her answers to the question 'who are you?' (1991:93). For Baumeister the self is a combination of the two: the embodied and the cultural. He writes within the context of 'constructing the modern self', which is related to the notion of the postmodern self. For Baumeister our self and our identity are particularly important examples of the 'false permanence' which characterises contemporary life. This is to say that we experience identity as stable and consistent over time, whereas in fact it is constantly changing;

In actuality the body and its motivations and processes, as well as the social self, undergo continual change and adjustment. Identity imposes some stability and continuity on the self... Identity helps people keep in stable relationships, moving toward the same goals and making choices and decisions in a steady consistent fashion.

Baumeister 1991:94

Similarly when we experience other people, we do so in terms of fixed stable traits. Cognitive psychology (e.g. Jones and Nisbett 1971; Ross 1997) has indicated how we typically overestimate the consistency of people's actions. This is to say that as we see ourselves as stable over time we see others in the same way. This has severe implications for our relationships. For just as our identity is an example of false permanence so, according to Baumeister, is the most common of relationships, marriage. The meaning of this everyday institution is based on stability and permanence, but Baumeister argues forcibly that the lived reality of such human relationships (like identity) involves change, evolution and growth. So whereas we could say that identity is about being the same person across time, and as such allows us to enter into relationships with some consistency, secure in the notion that we 'know ourselves' (cf. Erikson 1980), in actuality the nature of selfhood and identity is such that we are ever-changing. The association between changes in identity and changes in relationships is an important area within the literature on the experience of mature studentship (see chapter 1.) and features in the findings of this study (see chapter 6.).

Identity and Group membership in the Contemporary World

The concept of multiplicity in understanding identity is further obfuscated within sociological social psychology where the question of identity has often been marked by issues of similarity and difference. This has usually been in relation to group memberships. For example, If I am working class, male and heterosexual, I am therefore not middle class, female and homosexual. There are many identities I can lay claim to based on notions of similarity and difference, between potential group memberships. For Woodward (2001) this view of identity gives us a location in the world and links us to the socio-cultural context. However here too there is the problem of 'false permanence'. Essentialist notions of identity linked to one's biology, where there is one fixed, clear, unified, authentic set of characteristics shared by the group give

way to non-essentialist notions of the socially constructed nature of identity, which is fluid, and involves both different *and* shared characteristics between people.³

Woodward suggests that in the contemporary world there may be a 'crisis of identity';

...where old certainties no longer obtain and social, political and economic changes both globally and locally have led to the breakdown of previously stable group membership. Identities in the contemporary world derive from a multiplicity of sources – from nationality, ethnicity, social class, community, gender, sexuality – sources which may conflict in the construction of identity positions and lead to contradictory fragmented identities.

Woodward 2001:1

Woodward illustrates this process with reference to a Serb militiaman during the conflict in former Yugoslavia, who is involved in a difficult negotiation of locating his identity by seeing Serbs and Croats as the same and yet different simultaneously. This is to highlight how there may be mismatches between identification at the collective and individual level. Traditional identities then can no longer be easily applied to others or ourselves in a world where identification – and establishing a sense of who we are – is fraught with complexities. The link our identity provides between ourselves and society can be taken from a kaleidoscope of possible identities.

One way of understanding this dilemma of personal identity formation is through the concept of 'globalisation' (Robins 1997). This involves an interaction between economic and cultural factors at different and disparate points across the globe whereby changes in production and consumption patterns can be seen to produce new, shared identities. Such identities, Robins believes, could have several outcomes: the detachment of identity from community and place, a reaffirmation of traditional identities or the emergence of new identities. This may be manifested in consumer behaviour and 'cultural convergence' or the migration of labour producing 'diaspora'

³ From an existentialist position this is not to commit to any dichotomy between biological essentialism and social constructionism. Sartre (1956) for example argued that we have no essential self and this emptiness and its attendant fundamental anxiety motivates a need to 'be a self', which is related to our 'fundamental project' of being. For Sartre biological tendencies *and* social circumstances are both part of our environment of choice of self. Such a decision is in awareness that *it is a decision* – that other choices are possible and this is avoidance of 'bad faith' (see 'Sartre' chapter 3.)

identities (those not located in one 'home' or untraceable to any singular source). Bauman (1991) has referred to this condition as 'homelessness' in which the search for community, a sense of home may be pursued by the individual anxious to gain some fixity to their identity. He suggests this search for community is a form of neo-tribalism, the search for which is doomed to failure due to the endemic ambivalence of the contemporary condition (see 'Commentaries on the Self and Identity' below).

But to what extent can this be seen as a 'crisis of identity'? For many generations North Americans have had to wrestle with questions of identity, not least during the Second World War when Italian, German and many other Americans, found themselves at war with whom they regarded as their 'mother countries'. In more recent times counsellors around the world have had to locate their 'diaspora' identities in terms of establishing 'different voices' within themselves, in order to understand their own values and belief systems, before taking up multicultural or transcultural counselling roles (see Katz 1985; Romero 1985; D'Ardenne and Mahtani 1989; Wright 1991). Berger (1963) makes many references to 1950s America, and its preoccupation with questions of identity and 'alternation' – how in an increasingly changing society individuals have to cope with the implications of social mobility and its effect on one's sense of identity. The question of maintaining or adjusting identity in a foreign land is clearly not new when one considers the extent of 'immigrant communities' who established themselves in industrial conurbations pre and post second world war in the UK. It would seem that individuals acted almost as bricoleurs, crafting their identity onto their new cultural landscape. Is it perhaps more likely then that any 'crisis of identity' in the contemporary world is more a matter of degree. Is it not the same task which many people have had to undertake for many years whether they have been subjected to extreme forms of cultural travelling or not? Could it perhaps be the case that in the contemporary world the influences on identity construction are greater and more complex, although the *process* is fundamentally the same? The increase in complexity for self-definition is certainly the view of postmodern theorists (see Gergen 1991 below). Kellner (1993) however asserts that the process is similar to that pertaining during modernity. He argues that any differentiation between modernity (the period which Berger (1963) for example makes reference to above) and postmodernity ignores the fact that identity was/is also a problem in modernity. For Kellner ever since pre-industrial 'traditional' society identity has been expanding with the opening up of new possibilities, requiring choices to be

made and therefore causing anxiety and uncertainty. The question of whether postmodernity is a distinct era or not is an extremely complex and widely debated issue, which is beyond the parameters of this thesis, as it enters into many, if not all other disciplines beyond psychology and the social sciences. However, the alleged distinction between ‘late modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’ in relation to identity, which is part of this debate, is discussed below.

Identity as a Process

What is being referred to here is the *processual* nature of identity and this offers some understanding of the notion of multiplicity. This is what Jenkins (1996) has identified as the ‘internal–external dialectic of self-identification’. For Jenkins self and identity are inextricably linked and intrinsically social.

It [the self] arises within social interaction. It is constructed within the internal-external dialectic of social identification. It draws upon the external social environment of people and things for its content. Even though it is the most individualised of identities – we might call it customised – selfhood is absolutely social. It depends, for its ongoing security, upon the validation of others, in its initial emergence and in the dialectic of continuing social identification.

Jenkins 1996:50

This is what Craib (1998) has classified as the ‘conventional’ sociological approach to understanding identity, and whilst going along with much of Jenkins’ argument he makes one fundamental criticism. For Craib such an approach does not present the full picture. He asserts that a full understanding of identity or self must explore what goes on inside the bearer of identity or identities and the process of internal negotiation that this involves. In essence Craib refers here to *experience*. Drawing on Bollas’ (1987) concept of the ‘normotic’ personality – the disinclination to entertain the subjective element in life, Craib argues that much of our understanding assumes that we live in a world of people who do not ‘have’ experience. As he explains,

A more readily understandable way of putting this is to say that we assume that cognition dominates people’s lives, that we only have ideas and those

ideas come to us from the outside, from the social world; we take them in and act on them. There are sometimes references to interpretive processes, but no real exploration of what they involve.

Craib 1998:2

This position contrasts markedly with Jenkins' 'conventional sociological' explanation of life as a series of social transitions from one identity to another. For him there is 'a relatively settled anthropological consensus' (1996:144) of this process, which operates as follows,

First separation from the present state or identity; then transition or liminality (a state of limbo which may draw upon a symbolised vocabulary or repertoire relating to death); then finally incorporation into, or aggregation with, the new state or identity.

Jenkins 1996:144

This seems to encapsulate much of what Craib is referring to in the underplaying of experience. There is a process identified, which may give great assistance to our understanding of the spatial and temporal aspects of identity transformation, but there is little by way of the nature of each of these identified stages. That in the 'internal-external dialectic of identification', we take in ideas from what happens around us and negotiate our identity accordingly, perhaps say as we cope with the implications of a career move (especially promotion), and we view the individual in this process as a *cognitive* being. We need more emphasis according to Craib on the subjective or inner experience. He goes on to argue that even where sociology does attempt to address these issues (e.g. in the sociology of the emotions), the understanding is somewhat limited (1998:105). Such limitations I want to propose can be addressed through adopting a phenomenological approach to understanding identity and identity transition.

4. COMMENTARIES ON THE SELF AND IDENTITY

Postmodernism and Identity

We now need to set this idea of the experiencing individual in the contemporary context; a context that has been described as postmodern. Whilst there are many differing analyses, which can be brought within the ambit of the 'postmodern', most (e.g. Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and Lyotard) if not all 'would present the subject as fragmented and decentred in the social field, undermining as a result the notion of identity as a fixed unified phenomenon' (Smart 1993:28). This point has been alluded to already with reference to identities in crisis. The earlier point however emphasised collective identities and the notion of diaspora. Although there is difficulty in separating out influences of the collective and group from the construction of individual identity, postmodern theorists have drawn attention to how individuals in the postmodern world are caught up in endless self-creation. Gergen has described this as, 'A multiphrenic condition...in which one swims in ever shifting, concatenating and contentious currents of being' (1991: 80).

Gergen's reasons for such a state lie in the process of 'social saturation'. In the development of technology and communication, such as the world has never seen before (TV, e mail, junk mail, mobile phone, confusion marketing, - all often on a global scale), there is a fostering of relationships that could never have previously occurred.

As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electronic speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility, to an intense degree.

McLuhan 1964:20

This was an early observation on the impact of technology and the mass media. Since then, toward the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, this immersion, according to Gergen, is propelling us toward a new self-consciousness – the postmodern. Here, as opposed to earlier eras, it is not just immediate friends, acquaintances and the local community which influence our way of being, but a

constantly changing cast of characters spread around the globe. Along with this we have the 'perseverance of the past', whereby relationships can be maintained long after geographical relocation, and 'acceleration of the future', where the pace of relationship development is increased. This leads to a greater 'populating of the self', which is a vast proliferation of possible selves and finally the effect is that as social saturation adds incrementally to this proliferation,

...each impulse toward well-formed identity is cast into increasing doubt, each is found, absurd, shallow, limited, or flawed by the onlooking audience of the interior.

Gergen 1991:73

Identity then is constantly evaluated through a barrage of new criteria – what Gergen calls 'the expansion of inadequacy' (i.e. we come to see ourselves as increasingly inadequate due to the increasing amount of influences upon us to evaluate ourselves), and committed identity becomes an increasingly arduous achievement. This is the condition that Gergen describes as 'multiphrenia'. He is not however the first in recent times to illuminate the enormity of this task of achieving a sense of security about self and identity. Berger, Berger and Kellner nearly 30 years ago, identified the 'pluralization of social life-worlds', and referred to the way that 'modern man (sic) is afflicted with a permanent identity crisis, a condition conducive to considerable nervousness' (1973:74). For Gergen however the nervousness has increased due to a greater number of potentialities or ways of being and the individual's awareness of these in the postmodern era.

Gergen's position is not untypical of other postmodernists. He goes on to argue that social saturation also undermines commitments to objectivity with ever widening possibilities for disagreements over established truths, and opinions continuously changing over time. This leads to a steadily accumulating sense of doubt in the objectivity of any position one holds, even presumably who one is supposed to be. For Derrida (1982) this is also manifest in the restlessness of language and the slipperiness of meaning. He refers to the 'Logocentrism' of western society, which supposes that speech is a transparent vehicle for the expression of the speaker's thoughts. Meaning is far more complex than such a position acknowledges. The multiple ways of being

equate with multiple universes of meaning expressed through language. Set in a historical context Baumeister (1991) has described the onset of greater multiplicity for being as follows;

As western society evolved from medieval to modern civilisation, its concept of selfhood was expanded and made more complicated. The reliable ways of defining each person's self in fixed, standard and stable terms ceased to be effective and adequate. Increased social mobility, the new multiplicity (and transience) of roles and relationships, the decline of the firmly religious view of human potential, and the emergence of value pluralism all made creating the self more difficult and ambiguous...Society stopped telling people who they were and instead it was left up to the individual to construct his or her own identity. This brought a welcome increase in freedom, but it also brought new strains and difficulties.

Baumeister 1991:95

Self-Identity

Baumeister's analysis echoes what Giddens (1999) essentially means by the term 'self-identity'. The self becomes a reflexive project, in that alterations to self have to be explored and constructed, as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change (which as Baumeister asserts is in contrast to past generations). He claims that,

Self-identity...is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography. Identity here still presumes continuity across time and space, but self-identity is such continuity as it is interpreted reflexively by the agent.

Giddens 1999:53

For Giddens (1999:70) this greater emphasis on existential questions (see the discussion of 'Late Modernity' below') is the result of the conditions of high modernity, late

capitalism and above all, the specialisation of labour. Accompanying these conditions there is the breakdown of the protective framework of such things as the community and religion (Giddens uses the term 'protective cocoon'), initiating the need for the existent to address the possibility of 'ontological insecurity'. (This concept Giddens borrows from Laing (1965), but uses it more to refer to the way an individual may begin to lack a consistent feeling of biographical continuity – an incapacity to sustain the 'protective cocoon'.) One does this through reference to the 'ontological reference points' (Kierkegaard 1944) in everyday life. This is to say that in 'doing' everyday life we 'answer' the question of being, and thus maintain the protective cocoon and ontological security. Self-identity in this way becomes 'a way of keeping a particular narrative going' (1991:54). It is what the individual is conscious of in the term 'self-consciousness'. One's self-identity is something, which is routinely created and sustained, in the reflexive activities as an individual. The following two examples illustrate this process. The first is taken from my personal lived experience.

I greet my colleagues at work as 'colleague-who-works-in-the-HE-office', and they usually greet that manifested identity with the congruence that I can expect. Should they not, this will have implications for my ontological security and in my reflexivity to this problem I will either sustain my self-identity, or not, as the case may be. The role of 'colleague-who-works-in-the-HE-office' is an organisational innovation, and as such is not yet institutionalised into the organisational framework (there was no such thing as 'the HE Office' and therefore no colleague working in it up to a short time ago!), thus ontological insecurity for me has a certain resonance at present. The symbolic display such as dress and even linguistic code - things which give external form to narratives of self-identity - have yet to be worked out as I go on in social life. Laing's description of ontological insecurity does not as yet apply to me, but without clinging on to the notion of how I have become 'the-colleague-who-works-in-the-HE-office', and of where I go from here, ontological insecurity, in the Laingian sense may be a possibility.

As a further illustration a composite depiction of the mature student's experience taken from this research is useful. This contrasts with the first example and is generated from a general overview of the research findings.

Tracey enters the seminar room for the first time. How should she present herself? She does not know. She looks around for clues. There are reminders of her school days; tables, chairs a spatial representation of group discussion. The lecturer enters. Should she smile at him, ignore him; respond as she did to her English teacher of long ago? She sits down positioning herself at a strategic angle in which she can simultaneously deindividuate and also carefully observe others. This is done in an effort to work out what to do, what to say, how to act – who to be⁴, whilst at the same time defending her increasingly brittle self-identity – who she reckons she is at this present moment. She feels very tense, anxious. This is not an easy process. She wishes she were back at work. There she knew who she was, how to act, what to do. Here it is an anxiety-ridden puzzle. The lecturer speaks. He behaves in a way that suggests friendliness, yet what he actually says is threatening – he explains that he would like everyone to introduce themselves to each other, then describe three aspects of themselves which best typify what they are like as a person. This information will then be shared with the 20 or so people in the room! She has never done this sort of thing before. How will she cope? She takes a large intake of breath and turns to her fellow student beside her. This student is about 10 years younger and seems very relaxed about the whole business, almost casual. Why did she ever decide to go ahead with this project? This whole business of being a student is going to be difficult, and she hasn't even started to attempt the main thing that worries her – the work! This experience may reflect the breakdown of the 'protective cocoon' and the need to reinstate it as soon as possible. Later on Tracey has melded with the other student. They share experiences of the first few days on campus. They laugh. Tracey however notices that she isn't quite being herself in this conversation. But what now is this self?

⁴ These are questions taken from Giddens (1999) who argues that life in Late Modernity (see discussion below) is bound up with such existential dilemmas.

As the research literature into mature studentship suggests (see chapter 1.) many individuals who change roles with any measure of fracture from earlier ways of being may have similar experiences. Change of status, career move, shifts in close relationships, an internalised idea (say a radical challenge to deep-seated beliefs as part of HE study) that initiates perspectival refocusing are examples of experiences which challenge our feelings of ontological security. This is related to the trust we have built up over time in the coherence of our world. This trust is broken when we encounter new worlds and new forms of life such as the seminar room in higher education. Here for the mature student the previously known coherence, continuity and dependability of their world may become corroded. Giddens quotes Lynd with reference to the possible eventuality arising when assumptions about other's views of self are interpreted as false. For example the mature student's interpretation that,

'the people in this seminar room do not assume that I am a mother of three children with 20 years experience of coping with domestic and financial strife and working in menial jobs, experiencing first hand the exploitation and sexism of the patriarchal workplace. Instead I am an inarticulate and rather limited individual who has no place in this context'.

When this happens,

...we have become strangers in a world where we thought we were at home. We experience anxiety in becoming aware that we cannot trust our answers to the questions, 'Who am I?' 'Where do I belong?'... with every recurrent violation of trust we become again children unsure of ourselves in an alien world.

Lynd 1958:46-7

Late Modernity

For Giddens this loss of coherence in the object world is symptomatic of contemporary life (which he refers to as 'late modernity'). We need to live every moment reflexively to build and rebuild a coherent and rewarding sense of identity. As he explains,

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which on one level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day to day social behaviour.

Giddens 1999:70

Giddens argues that the current emphasis in therapy on ‘who should the client become’, and the concept of ‘self therapy’ are indications of these focal questions (1999:198). A central problem for living in late modernity is that creating identity involves risk, because it means confronting a diversity of open possibilities. This has been starkly reported by Wakeford (1994) in the context of mature students in higher education and the risk to relationships (see chapter 1.). Giddens however argues that this process pervades life generally. ‘The world is full of potential ways of being and acting, in terms of experimental involvements [like entering higher education] which the individual is now able to initiate’ (1999:78). Concurring with Gergen and Baumeister he refers to the ‘collage effect of the mass media’ (1999:26) and the plurality of lifestyle it presents. However with such freedom and greater openness comes the need for greater control. This can be manifested in such things as greater control over the design of our own bodies. He typifies anorexia as a striving for security in that one is able to take control of the body, thus gaining an emblem of a safe existence in a world of risk (1999:103).

One important element of risk according to Giddens is that life in late modernity requires decisions that may have fateful consequences for one’s future life. These ‘fateful moments’ threaten one’s ontological security because the ‘business as usual’ attitude is inevitably challenged. It may mean embarking on a new relationship, initiating a dramatic change to the nature of the relationship, changing career, changing lifestyle or taking on a project with little insight into the consequences of such an endeavour. Whatever the decision it will necessitate that the ‘umwelt’ (the core of accomplished normalcy) will have to be established. This is done by generating increased mastery over the circumstances that the individual will confront as a result of the decision taken at ‘the fateful moment’. As Giddens explains,

There are points at which, no matter how reflexive an individual may be in the shaping of her self-identity, she has to sit up and take notice of new demands as well as new possibilities. At such moments, when life has to be seen anew, it is not surprising that endeavours at reskilling are likely to be particularly important and intensely pursued.

Giddens 1999:143

Giddens argues that this reskilling often involves reflexive encounters with expert systems (e.g. Higher Education), thus helping to reconstitute the self. However these expert systems may refer to therapeutic outcomes such that they represent some of the central dilemmas to which late modernity gives rise. In sum then,

Fateful moments are transition points which have major implications not just for the circumstances of an individual's future conduct, but for self identity. For consequential decisions, once taken, will reshape the reflexive project of identity through the lifestyle consequences which ensue.

Giddens 1999:143

We exist then in what Giddens has called 'a culture of constant readjustment' (1999:138). Our identity is open to a range of possibilities; whether this is due to changing socio-cultural milieux leading to diaspora identities, the burgeoning influence of the mass media and other forms of interpenetration which populate the self, the reflexivity of the individual as she copes with the demands of life in late modernity, or any combination of these elements.

Late Modern and Postmodern Identities

Thus far there has been reference to these two kinds of analyses of identity. What then are the distinguishing characteristics, if any, which sets one as different from the other. For Kellner (1993) the postmodern is an extension of the changes that went before. It is an extension of modernity, not a complete challenge to it and change from it.

Postmodernity starts where modernity left off, leading to even more uncertainty and fragmentation – but this was a condition of late modernity in the first place. The

distinction then is somewhat blurred, but it is necessary to pick out the more general and discernible differences despite the potential obfuscation of the central argument of this thesis.

The openness of identity construction identified by Giddens (1999) takes on a new dimension within descriptions of postmodernity.

The insecurity and anxiety of late modernity is overlaid and displaced by the possibilities for identity manifested through lifestyle and image. The proliferation and circulation of the latter through the media and their adoption are the means by which an identity, a self-image is constructed.

Edwards 1996:5

The cognitive reflexivity that marks Giddens' analysis then is displaced by an aesthetic reflexivity. Similar to the analysis of Gergen (1991) discussed above Edwards argues that there is a constant and unending play of images and,

...the possibility of excitement and disturbing pleasure in the investment of meaning in the consumption of images that never fully satisfy, and in the constant forming and re-forming of diverse and multiple identities.

Edwards 1996:5

For example adverts for trainers are not so much about their practical function, but more about the possession of a brand image – identity is something you shop for! The everyday quandary is what 'identity' to wear each day. Within existentialism (see chapter 3.) the self loses its substance and becomes the product of one's own search for authenticity, but for postmodernists lifestyle choices have pushed authenticity out of the equation. There is now no clear distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity or indeed between the public and private - the inner and outer self. Postmodernity is therefore a condition wherein the increased volatility of image results in an increased volatility and also fragility of identity (Kellner 1993). For the postmodernists then, identity is not an expression of essential self, but a relational expression of image. Thus, even as we are disembedded from place through the compression of space-time, we are re-embedded within globalised image systems. The compression and diversification

which characterises globalisation is echoed in the proliferation of world views, belief systems and styles. In the postmodern, this is seen to be something to be celebrated rather than regretted, a form of pleasure rather than a basis for anxiety. The aesthetic and not simply the cognitive becomes subject to reflexivity (Lash and Urry 1994).

Giddens' view of identity then in late modernity is shared partially by writers on postmodernity and he accepts that postmodernism is a cultural force in the contemporary period. It is the *strength and significance* of that force which distinguishes his analysis of the contemporary world as 'late modern' from those who reckon we are experiencing a *postmodern* moment.

Criticisms of the postmodern position however stress that it fails to take seriously the fact that for many people the supposedly postmodern attributes of subjectivity are experienced in a painful way. Glass (1993) for example has argued that contrary to the postmodernists' argument that free will is enhanced, in fact the breakdown of metanarratives, social codes, structures and the like leads to people losing control of their lives. Postmodernism fails to speak for the multiple forms of exploitation, oppression and misery that are inflicted on millions of selves the world over. These analyses of the contemporary world are deployed within the conclusion to this thesis in reference to the findings.

5. METHODOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE STUDY OF IDENTITY.

Experiencing Identity

According to Craib (1998) however these analyses are still to be found wanting. Both Gergen and Giddens as with 'conventional sociology' do not pay enough attention to experience. For Craib, Gergen's argument is no more than conventional role theory, whilst Giddens goes no further than presenting reflexivity as a cognitive feature. Furthermore other approaches which see identity as something constructed through various disciplines and discourses (e.g. Hall 1996) can be subjected to the same criticism. Craib summarises this as follows;

There are a number of problems with this way of thinking about the world, not least in the denial of the subjectivity that is responsible for the argument. We have here a peculiarly complex way of thinking of the normotic personality – it has an inner life, but that inner life is a product of the outer life and does not generate anything new.

Craib 1998:9

These criticisms have, to some extent, been addressed by Baumeister (1991) in his discussion of the existentialist issue of meaningfulness. He agrees with the postmodernist argument that there is a general lack of a coherent set of beliefs in contemporary western society, together with the destruction of traditional value bases. For Baumeister there is in effect a struggle to find value in life, giving rise to such things as the need for efficacy and self worth in a context where these are difficult to maintain. Baumeister in this way is giving consideration to the inner life and people's everyday experience and how living in contemporary society affects each of us experientially. This is exemplified by the recognition that many people may not have a life with a suitably grand meaning, which is often an unpleasant awakening. Baumeister's argument is that the breakdown of traditional morality has created a 'value gap', which has been filled by reference to the ongoing creation and recreation of self-identity. That is that the self itself becomes a source of value, and meaning.

One source of meaning that is powerful and abundant in modern society is the self. Notions of self and identity, definitions of self, ways of learning about and extending the self are widely available. The attempt to elaborate self-identity into a value base (and not incidentally into a model of fulfilment) is one of the great themes of the modern era.

Baumeister 1991:93

The self's own preferences then have to function as ultimately justified, for there is no other moral code to which the individual can submit. Anderson (1996) concurs with Baumeister in that there are no fixed and absolute moral standards and that we are able to be what we want to be and there are innumerable choices on offer. If a relationship for example ceases to be fulfilling or conducive to the development of self-identity, this is considered to be justification in itself for moving on. Identity then becomes a value

base and thus provides justification and legitimacy for various actions. One important action can be to initiate self-development, for example through education. Other examples may be to identify with new groups thus enhancing notions of self worth and efficacy.

On the face of it Baumeister's ideas on meaning do seem to address the concerns Craib has about inner life. Existentially, meaning is something someone experiences yet Baumeister does seem to present the location of meaning as external to the individual. He acknowledges the existentialist position on the business of creating one's own meaning, and how although this may be an impossible ideal, we should at least be aware of the choices we make when we obtain meaning from culture. Unfortunately he goes on to emphasise the external aspects of any internal-external dialectic which may exist. He states that,

..society can use the individual's need for meaning to its own advantage. By teaching people to interpret their lives in certain ways, society can steer them into roles that need to be filled and can prevent personal dissatisfactions from developing into social problems.

Baumeister 1991:9

Meaning then is imbued externally and not something which arises as internally negotiated or experienced. Even where Baumeister sees meaning as personal it is something that is a product of outer life and in Craib's terms does not generate anything anew internally. The autonomy of the individual is seen as impoverished. As Baumeister argues,

Although a life's meaning is quintessentially personal and individual, meaning itself is fundamentally social. Without culture – including language, value and interpersonal relationships – life could not have much in the way of meaning. People get their meanings of life from culture and even if they are allowed to choose, they are nonetheless dependent on the culture and society to give them their array of options.

Baumeister 1991:3

There is therefore some ambivalence in Baumeister's argument on the matter of meaning as personally generated. In places his analysis is highly deterministic in his references to the influence of environmental factors, whereas he also stresses the power of agency that the individual has to attain meaning and thus to create a sense of self-identity. The absence of any analysis or reference to individual experience or the uniqueness of the existent's interpretation of the meanings that are available and how these may influence self-identity construction is a departure from the phenomenological position, which is to be discussed later. Baumeister's ambivalence however does bring into focus the important issue of agency in the business of self-creation.

For Craib (1998) notions of an empowered individual who participates actively and autonomously into the construction of self-identity is questionable. Elsewhere Craib (1994) has argued that ideas about the 'powerful self' seem to have emerged just as the individual is becoming disempowered. For example individuals are being subjected to radical changes in the labour market, which means they must sell themselves by developing the capacity to survive change and readjust to new demands. This is what Giddens has referred to as the 'colonisation of the future' (1999:114). The individual participates in strategic life planning to survive the changes to which Craib refers. The problem arises in that the processual nature of self-identity, according to Craib, is arrested, as the individual, subjected to such changes, is now less able to adjust as the forces for change are beyond the individual's control or even understanding. Craib cites Kant's proposition that the market intrudes into relationships and suggests that now it intrudes into the very self. What we see from this perspective is a reworking of Marx's dialectic that people make history but not in circumstances of their own making. As Craib puts it,

On the one side we have our experience of the world, ourselves and other people, an experience which constantly seeks to articulate itself in thought and action and is more complex than we have yet discovered, and on the other side we have a social system, a set of social structures which increasingly distort and deny our subjectivity, our experiences of the life-world.

Craib 1998:47

The tension between the power of the individual to engage in ‘identity projects’ (Harré 1983) and the power of external forces to suppress them is another complex issue beyond the parameters of this discussion. Nevertheless the issue of ‘situated freedom’ (the constraints on personal choice determined by one’s perceived personal existence) which is related to this tension has to be considered. Phenomenologically, the influence of externality for the existent is again a matter of experience and to what degree the power of things such as the social system is felt.

Existential Phenomenology and Self-Identity

In order to explore this relationship between individual experience and the external system, what we may call ‘socio-cultural variants’, it is to the perspective of existential phenomenological psychology that I now turn. This is in order to explicate the epistemic features of the research and to address the charge that much of our understanding into identity has assumed that the world is peopled by ‘normotic personalities’. To do this I will attend to the primacy of the lifeworld in people’s experience, and the existential phenomenological position on human existence.

Chapters 3 and 4 sketch in the phenomenological background of this thesis. The aim of this chapter is to articulate how the perspective of existential phenomenology deals with the notion of self and identity and how such an approach augments others covered in the foregoing discussion. Furthermore it identifies how the phenomenological understanding of self and identity is deployed in the research praxis.

According to existential phenomenologists there is an invariant human tendency to create meaning from our experience, thus relieving the tension generated by meaninglessness. However the nature of each person’s experience of the world, whilst sharing common variables with others, due to being the same species and perhaps existing within the same culture, is in effect unique. Spinneli (1989) makes this assertion with reference to the study of perception, which clearly supports the view that there is intimate subjective involvement in the way we interpret the world. Thus each of us experiences a uniquely interpreted world. As Kant has observed ‘we see things not as they are, but as we are’ (quoted in Spinelli 1989:38). How then does this relate to selfhood and identity?

Firstly phenomenologists distinguish between the 'I' our experience of self and the 'not I' – the experience of things that are external to self. During straightforward experience the 'I' disappears as we are caught up in the experiencing, especially if the experience is particularly intense (e.g. the performing of a formal seminar presentation before one's peers). This is referred to in the research praxis as 'the pre-reflective' – the world as experienced at the moment of experiencing. The 'I' comes into focus when the experience ends and we reflect upon it and imbue it with meaning. It is at this point that any conscious sense of the 'I' (or 'the self') emerges. In each experience the 'I' and 'not I' interact and on reflection the 'I' emerges anew. In this process it is evident that the 'I' and 'not I' are experienced as inseparable, in that each is equally necessary for the definition of the other. This is to say that each of us requires the existence of others in order that we are to be able to define who we are. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) expresses it: 'Man (sic) is in the world and only in the world does he know himself'.

In relationships for example, especially intimate ones, we experience intersubjectivity - a complex interaction between two persons. Communication from this perspective is not just a matter of listening to words which, according to Craib (1998) is the assumption of many sociologists, but is an immediate reality of pre-reflective experience. For Merleau-Ponty (1974) for example the other's consciousness exists, as it were, not 'in' the other, but behind and around me. Craib explains it as follows,

Insofar as language is an object in my world as in his, we are joined together through it: when I listen to the other speak or read what he has written, I enter into his consciousness, discover his meanings through my meanings. After reading, listening, it is possible to say – Merleau-Ponty quotes Paulhan – in this light at least I have been you.

Craib 1998:39

For phenomenologists it is through the nature of such on-going engagements with 'not I' we define the 'I', who we are. Applying this to self-identity we see that with each experience and each attendant reflection we define and redefine ourselves. As Spinelli concludes,

..at each point of self-reflection, the self-concept that emerges is the result of the prior intentional act; but no one intentional act is entirely identical to any other since both the physical and perceptual variables will have altered on each occasion. As such 'the self' that we interpret and believe in at any given moment in time is both temporary and at best, a partial expression of an infinity of potential interpreted selves.

Spinelli 1989:84

Also as each of us experiences a unique and solitary phenomenal reality, this interpretation of who we are, and incidentally continue to become, is unique to ourselves. Hume (1739) argued that personal identity in this way is indeed a fiction. The phenomenological 'I' undergoes continual modification. As we reflect post-experience we bring meaning to who we are and as Baumeister (1991) has pointed out in his analysis of 'false permanence' (see above), although we may see ourselves at any moment as stable and consistent this is illusory. The 'I' who defined who I was when I began to write this thesis no longer exists. This is because the intentional variables (our interpretations of the experiences we have of the world) that give rise to the construction of 'I' have changed. In this way, contrary to other psychological approaches, the 'I' is not the cause of conscious experience but emerges through our conscious experience. This process is further obfuscated by memory.

The process of reflecting on 'straightforward experience' and thus interpreting, and reconstructing ourselves involves memory which is itself an interpretative construct arrived at through intentionality (see chapter 3 for a full discussion of intentionality and its noematic and noetic foci). This is to say that, far from being something that is static, memory is reconstructed. The noematic foci of the past may remain the same (what is remembered), but through noesis the way that they are interpreted means they emerge anew in our present consciousness (how we remember what we remember). As Spinelli explains, 'the raw matter' of memory may be finite or fixed, but what we make of that 'raw matter' is continually novel' (1989:102).

Phenomenologically then the past is not immutable. For although it cannot be regained or re-experienced it can be reconceptualised in the present and seen as something other than it appeared at the time. Spinelli (1989) notes that as we do this we further redefine

ourselves. As we look back at our self through diary events, photographs, and anecdotes it appears to us that the self in the past is different to the self now. The latter is thrown into stark relief as we again, through the interaction of the 'I' (looking back into the past) with the 'not I' (the diary, events, photographs and anecdotes – and the memories they evoke) experience the 'I' emerging anew. Anticipations of the future may also influence our awareness of the past as well as the present. As May has expressed it, 'what an individual seeks *to become* determines what he remembers of his *has been* (1958:69). An individual then within the phenomenological perspective is not a static entity but is a set of potentialities. (These issues are explored through the deployment of the concept 'lifeworld' which is full explained in chapter 4 and was central to the research praxis.)

As was alluded to earlier this has important implications for the continuing management of our relationships. As the self is constantly modified the 'I' that enters into a relationship is not the same 'I' at any subsequent point in time. This is true for both partners in any relationship. So as one partner changes (we may use the term 'growth') then the mutually created relationship will be effected, such that the other partner (through the noematic and noetic constituents of intentionality) may experience it differently and through intersubjectivity may 'grow' themselves. Each partner then 'grows' in this way. But it is not necessarily simply through intersubjectivity in their relationship which effects growth. There are an infinite series of variants, socio-cultural or otherwise, which each partner may experience, and undergo change as a result. With this continued modification of self, each partner has to manage the relationship accordingly. And whilst viewing the plasticity of self and relationships in this way, it is always unclear on the extent of growth which either partner goes through (to anyone even including themselves). For one the socio-cultural variants experienced may mean that little change in self is perceived (although of course change will have happened. As we have seen stability of self over time is illusory), whilst for the other partner great change and development may be perceived. This then may be expressed in terms of one 'not knowing' the other or both 'having to work at their relationship' in order to reconcile the perceived change. For Fromm (1957) this is the 'Art of Loving', wherein we should not deny the existential reality of our separateness in our intimate relationships – two beings become one yet remain two. For Fromm 'love' is the union of two people without the loss of their individuality. When such individuality is lost – as

when one partner seeks to dominate another - this constitutes 'neurotic love'. This kind of love denies the humanity of the other partner and is corrosive to a true, 'non-neurotic' love, relationship. This 'problem' is one of the central foci of the research as perceived identity change is implicated in shifts in relationships.

6. APPLYING THE NOTION OF IDENTITY

Individual Agency in 'Experiencing Identity' (see above)

Phenomenology then (especially existential phenomenology) refers to the fluidity of human existence and particularly to those aspects which allow human beings to continually change and develop i.e. to 'become'. This is taken from the Latin 'existere' (hence existential) which means 'to stand out, to become or to emerge'. Self-identity is existentially processual. But what is the individual's role in the business of becoming? In other words how do we exercise our individual agency to the process of modifying the self? For existential phenomenology this is dependent on our principal mode of being; whether to be authentic or inauthentic.

The inauthentic being is passive and reactive. He is marked by conventionality and conformity. As Warnock points out,

There is ambiguity in his [sic] dealings with reality. He partly knows what things are, but partly does not, because he is so entirely caught up in the way other people see them, the labels attached to them by the world at large. He cannot straightforwardly form any opinion, and his statements are partly his own, partly those of other people in general. If he seems to be interested in something, this is less because he is in pursuit of genuine understanding, than because of curiosity, a superficial and inconclusive motive.

Warnock 1970:57

Conversely the authentic individual acknowledges his or her own role in determining actions thoughts and beliefs. Spinelli describes the authentic mode of being as being characterised by 'openness, flexibility, co-operation and responsibility' (1989:110).

Spinelli asserts that (along with many other phenomenological oriented commentators), the common tendency is to be inauthentic. The reason for this is that the path to authenticity is an existentially painful one. To completely accept responsibility for what we do is to accept that there are no guidelines. Everything is up to us and this 'groundlessness' (Stevens 1996b:198), such as the experienced meaninglessness referred to in the opening paragraph of this chapter, is a fundamental source of existential anxiety. This is covered in more depth in chapter 3, however with regard to identity we can see that to take responsibility and accept our freedom to choose how we give meaning to our lives is much more difficult a task than having meaning determined for us through convention, external pressure or whatever (unless of course we choose to be conventional and acknowledge that we have done so). Existential psychotherapy has clearly identified how people will attempt to escape the possibility of accepting responsibility for their own lives (see Yalom 1980). Yet existentially there is no escape, for in the end we are choosing *not* to choose and to have our lives dictated by others. To live authentically then we need to accept our responsibilities and acknowledge this as our personal choice. This acceptance extends to all our experiences. We may not be able to choose them, but we can choose the significance and meaning we give to them, and thus take responsibility for the self-identity, to use Giddens' terms, we reflexively create.

An early commentary on the self-creation of identity by Harré (1983) referred to the individual's efforts to achieve self-directed development and expression of self, which seems to reflect notions of authenticity. These 'identity projects' may take the form of the pursuit of fame or status or recognition of some kind. Alternatively they may be concerned with more personal aspects of ourselves and the way we think about ourselves regardless of others opinions (and thereby avoiding being in 'bad faith' (Sartre 1956) – see chapter 3), which may involve developing our potentials to create and to relate to others, or enriching our experience and understanding. The notion of 'identity projects' is deployed in this research as it is deemed to concretise the position of mature students and their authenticity in their journey into the unknown experiential territory of higher education (see chapter 6).

This journey, beginning from the existential landscape of a life where the possibility of entering higher education is non-conscious and leading through a pioneering and

intrepid adventure to successful graduation, has parallels with Goffman's (1963) examination of stigma. The social career of the participants is characterised initially, in the existential baseline that is employed in the research praxis, by low levels of personal efficacy (the capacity of self-determination). The external moment of identification prevails as others impact upon the individual and produce a stigmatised identity – e.g. a worthless, powerless single parent.

We can have social careers, which are anything but those we would choose, thrust upon us as a consequence: others don't just perceive our identity, they actively constitute it. And they do so not only in terms of naming or categorising, but in terms of how they respond to or treat us. In the dialectic of individual identification the external moment can be enormously consequential.

Jenkins 1996:74

The participants in this study were subjected to similar experiences with regard to the power of others to influence their lived reality and sense of self-identity. Yet the parallels with Goffman's analysis of stigma can be taken further with regard to the existent's resistance to categorisation and dominance and a sense of 'spoiled' identity (i.e. a perception of self and a perception of others view of self as unworthy).

...identity can be 'spoiled': that identification particularly within institutions, can be heavily biased in favour of its external moment: and in both cases identification is often a matter of imposition and resistance, claim and counter-claim, rather than a consensual process of mutuality and negotiation

Jenkins 1996:75

Participants in their counter-claim to the external moment of identification then turn to higher education as resistance to the imposition of others to perpetuate what they perceive as their spoiled identity. (This is often related to the institutional attribution of identity during their school career, echoing the literature into mature studentship.) They body forth to a new self and a new-found status. Yet to do this they find that their personal authenticity and courage is tested to the limit. As Jenkins points out,

Everyday life is the site of the most mundane and possibly the most important resistance in terms of name and treatment, and in however modest a manner, human individuals assert themselves. Even the expression – asserting *themselves* – is telling. They may only do so ‘in their heads’, mindful of threat and constraint, waiting for a better day (even though that day may never come), but that is something. This is not to offer a naively idealised and utopian vision of the human spirit: it can be broken, and the body with it. But the point is not only that it has to be broken, *in extremis*, for complete domination but that the cost of doing so is generally high enough to frustrate the object of the activity.

Jenkins 1996:174-5 (his italics)

The strength of spirit of human resolve as the mature student frustrates ‘the external moment of identification’ and asserts ‘the internal moment of identification’ in their combative resistance to their assigned lot is a key feature within this research.

Agency and Higher Education

In articulating the question of authenticity to higher education, the educational philosophy of Broudy (1961) is useful. According to Vandenberg (2001), Harry Broudy was arguably the most important philosopher of education in the United States since John Dewey. Vandenberg argues that despite Broudy’s affiliation to classical realism his ideas are useful in the existential analysis of contemporary education, especially with regard to the educational development of personal identity. He echoes Broudy’s (1961b:232) maxim ‘to be human is to think existentially’ and goes on to demonstrate how this can be reflected in educational systems and programmes.

For Broudy ‘the self [and presumably its identities] can be thought of as made up of its envisioned possibilities’ (1961a:52). This is consistent with the existential position of temporality i.e. that dwelling in the world means extending ourselves simultaneously into the three temporal dimensions - I was my past, but I am my future as it opens up the present to me, dialectically. Broudy claims that the aims of education (including higher education) are self-determination – the free choice of one’s own possibilities

from those factually given in the social context; self-realisation – the concretion of oneself in the praxis of realising historically present possibilities; and self-integration – the harmonising of the freely chosen activities that constitute one's being-in-the-world with other people. This is in harmony with the existential phenomenological position of the existent and the world being co-constituted, and the process of becoming. Sartre (1956:25) for example declares that 'existence precedes essence' – we become what we freely make of ourselves - and it is the responsibility of the existent to call themselves into being. For the mature student in higher education this means to facilitate the realisation of envisioned possibilities, by providing the experiences to make good the three aims outlined by Broudy. Unfortunately there can be problems in the realisation of this process. There is for Broudy existential difficulties involved with self-realisation, because the possibilities in the world disclosed in one's education have to be understood as *one's own possibilities* to be meaningfully disclosed within one's diachronic project of being. One has to be comfortable with them, at home in the region of the world in which they appear, in order to choose and realise them, thereby choosing and becoming oneself. According to Meyrowitz (1985) becoming at home with the world will become increasingly important for education to counter the potential alienating effects of technology and other aspects associated with the postmodern. For Broudy then higher education can offset the dilemmas of identity formation within the contemporary world, whereas for Giddens, as highlighted above, engagement with higher education and other expert systems is fraught with existential dilemmas to do with choice. Whether the existent engages with higher education at the existential level suggested by Broudy again is bound up with questions of the existent's authenticity. The courage of the existent with regard to matters of authenticity lies at the heart of the analysis of this thesis as mature studentship is characterised by existential confrontations and contradictions.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although there are various approaches to the conceptualisation of self and identity, all of which have their respective merits and shortcomings (a full examination of this issue is beyond the remit of both this chapter and thesis), it is clearly evident, from the preceding discussion, that the emphasis is on identity and self as *processual*. The self

can be conceptualised as being 'distributed', (the social constructionist approach), or the self as a basic social identity on to which further identities are grafted in the 'internal-external dialectic of identification' (Jenkins' 1996), referred to by Craib (1998) as the 'conventional sociological approach'. The latter is augmented by sociological social psychology in an examination of similarity and difference and the influence of group membership.

For Craib however these approaches are found wanting with regard to one overriding issue; that they treat people as normotic. There is a lack of attention paid to 'inner being' and subjectivity. This charge is further directed at postmodern accounts of self and identity. That whilst Gergen (1991) seeks to understand the pluralization of social lifeworlds moving into the 21st century (as identified by Berger, Berger and Kellner, 1971), and Giddens (1999) proposes the notion of 'self-identity' as a reflexive rebuilding of self in late modernity, Craib still maintains that the model developed is largely cognitive and continues to deny 'experience'.

With these criticisms in mind I wish to propose the following approach. First we need not dismiss approaches outside the phenomenological. Viewing self-identity as a reflexive project, constructed through processes of reflexive awareness, can be applied phenomenologically. Similarly collective identities are not to be regarded as irrelevant. Identification to the group is important as the individual reflexively constructs identity. Again this can be approached phenomenologically by exploring the lifeworld of the individual.

Second, that despite the issues raised by Gergen and Giddens (and other commentators on postmodernity and late modernity) the central feature of the research is how individuals (all such presuppositions being bracketed in the research process incidentally) experience their worlds - commentaries of what the world is like for those commentators notwithstanding. The contemporary world is a noematic focus and through noesis is experienced uniquely, irrespective of experiences such as 'multiphrenia' which Gergen (1991) may be keen to emphasise.

Third this perspective can be extended to all other notions of the self and identity. Whether these refer to diaspora identities, the self as a value base in the light of

diminishing value bases and traditional ways of being, or dilemmas of self in late modernity ('What to do? How to act? Who to be? Giddens 1999:70), and the problem of ontological security. The 'postmodern self' or the self in 'late modernity' then is thus, if *experienced* as thus.

Finally existential phenomenological psychology, through allowing an opening up of the lifeworld to reveal unique personal reality and thus describing people's perception of who they are, can begin to address the concerns raised by Craib. We can gain insight into how self-identity is modified through the engagement of the phenomenological 'I' with the 'not I' or more particularly how mature students experience HE and how they experience themselves as a result of this experience.

THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL
PSYCHOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

Much reference has been made in chapter 2 to the conceptualisation of self-identity from a phenomenological perspective and how this approach is deployed in this thesis. This chapter sketches in the development of phenomenology both as a philosophy and as a psychology and in doing so presents the underpinning reasons for the adopted approach which runs throughout this thesis. Aligned to this discussion is a brief examination of the history of thought that has brought existential phenomenology to its present position and how this position is then applied to the research praxis. The latter is then taken up in more detail with regard to methodology and methods in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. This chapter explores three interrelated traditions; phenomenology, existentialism and qualitative psychology. It is argued that the latter has an optimum effectiveness for this thesis when informed by the former two (thereby rejecting positivist approaches), and hence the resultant Existential Phenomenological Psychological approach is the theoretical framework in which the thesis is located. At the outset then it is necessary to open out the exposition of qualitative psychology within these set parameters.

It is not the intention to give a historical narrative of the development of qualitative psychology, but to focus on the main issues within its development as relevant to this thesis. The fundamental point that is in need of a full examination is the conception of science as it informs psychological enquiry. There have been a number of writers who have addressed this issue e.g. Smith 1994; Kvale 1996; Ashworth 2003; Ashworth 2005, but one of the main advocates for a radical rethinking of what constitutes the psychological enterprise has been Amedeo Giorgi (see Giorgi 1970 & 2000). He has argued forcibly for over 30 years for a conceptual radicalisation of psychology – its epistemic underpinning and its research praxis. It is largely Giorgi's work that sets the scene of this chapter and presents an overview of the development and justification of

phenomenological psychology within the overall ambit of qualitative psychology. Within this overview is the defence of the methodology which is picked up in chapter 4. in practical detail.

2. AN ERRONEOUS CONCEPTION OF PSYCHOLOGY AS A SCIENCE.

For Giorgi (1970) the principal point that drives the development of a qualitative psychology is the overriding conclusion that, in its historical development through the myriad of temporal and cultural zeitgeists in Europe and North America since the late 19th century, psychology has adopted an erroneous conception of science. There is, possibly due to the infancy of its development, an identifiable flaw in its credentials.

Is it not possible psychology has not yet clarified its aims in its own terms?
At any rate should not psychology at least raise the question openly, and either respond in the negative or else admit that another conception of psychology is equally feasible or even preferable?

Giorgi 1970:3

Giorgi therefore sees within psychology a lack of philosophical reflexivity in evaluating progress, which reflects a conservative view of science. Psychology has adopted the stance that its world view and its way of knowing is a relatively settled affair, and what psychologists should do within this framework is simply to keep adding to the store of knowledge.

The world view that predominates is that of positivism. This transmutes into psychology in its way of knowing as a natural science, an approach that has been effectively employed in understanding the universe for things outside the human domain (e.g. chemistry). Its later development is typified by Allport's observation.

Eyesenck states [the world view of psychology] as follows; *To the scientist, the unique individual is simply the point of intersection of a number of quantitative variables...* The person is left as a mere 'point of intersection' with no internal structure, coherence or animation. I cannot agree with this view.

Mainstream psychology unfortunately was already embedded in the natural science approach and although Allport's position lay part of the foundation for dissent which as we shall see bore fruition later on, the model of the person which Eyesenk proffers prevailed. In this way psychology had gone from one style to another *already existing* style. Whilst this has been justified on many occasions for Giorgi it never followed a fully critical and reflective study of just what psychology needed to be as a science *sui generis*. Giorgi then poses the question on whether psychology is best served by the style of the natural sciences or whether it should create a style which is indigenous to itself (1970:51).

For Dilthey (1944) psychology as a natural science could say nothing of creative imagination, sense of value, self-sacrifice or religious devotion. It is such facets of the human condition that Giorgi and other critics of the natural science approach are keen to emphasise. Whereas natural science often deals with phenomena in a reductionist manner in seeking to isolate variables and establish cause and effect relationships this style does not allow for the understanding of the human condition in a holistic fashion, taking into account the whole web of meanings that constitute the humanness which Dilthey identifies. For Giorgi,

The real unit of mental life is not a sensation or a feeling or even an isolated intentional act with its content, but a total reaction of the whole self to a situation confronting it.

Giorgi 1970:26

For critics of psychology as a natural science, especially Giorgi, the discipline has lost its way somewhere in its evolutionary past, and in particular it has failed to assess its position within that evolution. Giorgi makes reference to William-James in contextualising the temporal context of the psychological enterprise. For James (albeit a position declared toward the end of the 19th century) the adherence to the style of natural science is mirrored by the condition of physics before Galileo and the laws of motion. Should the Galileos of psychology arrive the best way we can prepare for their coming is to understand, 'how great is the darkness in which we grope and never to

forget that *the natural science assumptions* with which we started *are provisional and revisable things*' (James 1882 quoted in Giorgi 1970:50 my italics). James' caveat however went unheeded. For Giorgi the reason for this lay in the motivation to create a distinct discipline away from philosophy, floundering under the misguided assumption that to achieve the status of science psychology had to embrace the natural science approach. This involved a distancing from the style of investigation characterised by speculative deduction and exclusive utilisation of reasoning and argumentative processes, and a movement towards a more careful and detached approach. This was to be cautious in the establishment of its facts and a position that would accept nothing that was not publicly verifiable. Hence psychology joined the natural sciences. However as Giorgi is keen to point out this was not a universally held position throughout psychology. The breaking away from philosophy meant only the rejection of *a certain kind* of philosophising. For those who wished to remain faithful to the subject matter of psychology this meant a turning away from the method of deduction and speculation within philosophy and turning towards the method of induction in establishing facts *based upon experience* (1970:45). This did not mean to adopt a naturalistic science throughout. However, eventually as Koch (1961) observes psychology's institutionalisation preceded its content. The development of its methods and the identification of its developmental problems reflected its greater commitment to science than to its subject matter – 'psychology was going to remain faithful to the [natural] scientific method at all costs' (Giorgi 1970:63).

Giorgi asserts that as a result of this commitment psychology does not adequately deal with the problems of everyday life. This is typified in the way natural science influenced Freudian psychology and the process of introspection, which although purveying a method of internal observation of oneself by oneself it does in fact assume an external viewpoint towards oneself. As Giorgi explains,

...it really means stating the facts about oneself as any other person would do if he could be observing what the introspector happens to be observing. This means that the introspector must ignore his personal viewpoint and his unique proximity to his own experiencing.

Giorgi 1970:87

Taking such an external attitude to oneself is completely contrary (if not anathema) to that which pertains within phenomenology and therein lies the fundamental criticism of the natural science approach to psychological investigation from a phenomenological viewpoint. For phenomenology then the subjective experience of the person is central. It is this underpinning axiom that leads Giorgi to his argument for psychology as a *human* science. Within this approach the belief is expressed that phenomena such as experience, consciousness, meaning, purpose etc. cannot be studied by the natural science approach. Giorgi asserts that everyday phenomena such as feelings, laughter, sadness, anxiety etc. should be studied *as they are experienced* and this requires conceptions, techniques and procedures that the natural scientific approach could not provide. Therefore ‘to be faithful to the phenomena of man (sic) a new type of science had to be invented or the meaning of science had to be broadened’ (1970:56). The meaning of science within the praxis of this thesis is fully discussed in Chapter 4 .

3. PSYCHOLOGY CONCEIVED AS A HUMAN SCIENCE.

The basic frame of reference to address the shortcomings within psychology as a natural science is that of the lifeworld (an update of this is discussed in detail in chapter 4 and its origins within the notion of ‘being-in-the-world’ is taken up below in the discussion of Heidegger’s work).

[Psychology] must develop its own specialised attitude, which also must be clarified, but it begins with life-world phenomena and must dialogue with them constantly so that it is not cut off from its source of raw data.

Giorgi 1970:178

Giorgi argues that the natural scientific psychology fails to deal with everyday (lifeworld) problems because it only does so on its own terms – translating the problem into scientific expression and then solving it. ‘A completely different attitude is called for, one that places more of a privileged position on ‘everyday problems’, rather than on the side of the [natural] scientific principles of psychology’ (Giorgi 1970:86). One set of such ‘everyday problems’ of course, is seen as in the mature student wrestling with the realities of academic life. How this phenomenological approach is put into

practice within this thesis, especially with regard to attitude towards and dialogue with everyday life (the lifeworld), is comprehensively explained in chapter 4.

As related to the traditions of phenomenology and existentialism then the subject matter of psychology conceived as a human science has as its main concern,

...to discover the actual, by means of description, in order to learn about *the structure of the situation as a whole*, which is done by revealing the context. The full psychological meaning of the event is also uncovered by this process.

Giorgi 1970:190-1 (my italics)

‘*Structure*’ is a central concern of the data analysis of this research. It is interwoven into the research praxis through the procedures outlined by Wertz (1983), Ashworth (2003a) and others (see chapters 4 and 5).

The rudimentary difference between psychology as a natural science and psychology as human science has been identified starkly by Merleau-Ponty (1962). He reasons that it is not the case that the natural scientific approach yields nothing or deals with phenomena which are non-existent. It deals with human behaviour at levels that are lower than most integrated functioning which relates to existing within, and part of, the world – ‘being-in-the-world’. Most of its theories, concepts, hypotheses, definitions etc. are derived from or refer to the vital (essentially elemental) level of integration and not yet to a more properly human structural level. He refers to traditional laboratory studies that only allow for a reduced level of human functioning to appear. Merleau-Ponty’s case lies at the heart of the human scientists’ argument. The vital level of humanness attended to by the natural science approach holds the notion that humans, because they are embodied, could be comprehended as things. ‘The object of study has to be in time and space, and determined by causality, which means primarily from an external perspective’ (Giorgi 2000:63). This is to deny the consciousness of the human being. Things do not possess consciousness nor do they have an interiority in the sense that consciousness brings an internal perspective for humans. Things do not have a perspective on the world or themselves.

There are however commonalities between psychology as a natural science and as a human science, particularly with regard to their respective broad aims. For both these are to observe, describe and to try to render intelligible all of the phenomena that humans experience or are capable of experiencing. The two radically separate on the issue of implementation.

Human scientific psychology must differ [from natural scientific psychology] because the way human phenomena reveal themselves also differs; the way man [sic] relates to the phenomena of the physical world [generally the focus of natural scientific psychology] and the way he relates to, *and is related to by*, the phenomena of man [generally the focus of human scientific psychology], is radically different in the life-world.

(Giorgi 1970: 200)

The model of the person for natural science approaches is generally passive with the researcher observing the effect of variables upon the subject. Within a human scientific approach the agency of the person is emphasised. Put more precisely the model of the person within psychology as a human science according to Giorgi is,

..an embodied being bearing a consciousness-spanning temporality that is capable of grasping the world in an intelligent way and of bestowing meaning upon it, and of entertaining and creating a network of relationships with others, the world, and itself and of manifesting spatial, temporal, symbolic, and value relationships as well.

Giorgi 200:65

This is the starting point for the research praxis as it declares the centrality of the lifeworld. The procedures (see chapters 4 and 5) which are deployed are closely guided by this model from data gathering through to data analysis and the concluding discussion within chapter 7.

The emphasis on meanings within the lifeworld embraces a conception of science that is in harmony with Kvale's definition; 'the methodological production of new, systematic knowledge' (1996:60). Firstly psychology as a human science is a

knowledge producing enterprise as it seeks to obtain the most precise understanding of humans and their relationships as possible (Giorgi 2000). Secondly, much of this relates to the discovery of meanings and interpretations, as Giorgi is keen to emphasise,

The most precise knowledge about psychological... meanings is sought: how they make their appearance, how they relate to one another, how it is possible to modify them, how to communicate them to other researchers, how to determine their authenticity, and so on. The approach is to be a systematic, methodical, and critical as possible for any given context.

Giorgi 2000:67

The debate on the scientific status of human scientific psychology and how this specifically relates to the research praxis is taken up in chapters 4 and 5. For the present discussion the case has been made for a new conception of psychology as a science, which recognises the nature of the human condition, particularly with regard to consciousness. The related model of the person then provides a steer for research methodologies to be developed. For the purpose of this thesis the transposition of this model and these basic principles are demonstrably evident in the research praxis, which details how the conception of science discussed here is both enacted, together with a transparent account of this enactment for the communication to the research community (and scientific community) at large.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Overview

Giorgi's argument then is for psychology to be a human science which has at its core the lifeworld of the individual. This entails the scientific study of the individual as located in a context that is subjectively experienced and to present that experience in the research praxis. There are many ways within the current ambit of qualitative psychology in which that can be done. The approach that reflects much of Giorgi's

argument is detailed within the research methodology (chapter 4). This section discusses the foregoing thought which has led to the formation of existential phenomenological psychology and which in turn, through the advocacy of this approach within psychology by Giorgi, has informed this thesis in toto.

In the ecology of the world, human beings play a unique and important part: we are – so far as we know – the only creatures to be aware of being aware. This is the miraculous quality of our subjectivity. From this gift (which can often seem a curse) come our capacities to have intentions, to reinterpret experience, to bring into being newness, and to create/discover meaning. The universe is not meaningless, for we are part of the universe and we are the meaning creators.

Bugental 1989:xi

How can we arrive at such an accolade of the human condition? The answer is to found in the philosophical thought that has preceded us and to understand how within existential phenomenological psychology we have a perspective for grasping the everyday life of human beings. One of the more fundamental aspects of understanding the capacity of being aware of being aware is the manner in which we can conceptualise human consciousness. I therefore begin the exposition of the underpinning framework for this thesis with what for phenomenologists is the basis to all mental experience – *intentionality*. Then employing a chronological structure I outline the development of phenomenology (only as it relates to this thesis – to complete such an exercise in full would be a major undertaking beyond the remit of this discussion) from the work of Husserl through to the present day. This account makes reference to the work of the foremost existentialists and their augmentation of Husserl's work, and finally the construction of the theoretical framework that informs this thesis and how it has been applied in the research praxis. These points are made as a basis on to which the subsequent discussion of methodology and methods is constructed.

Intentionality

As the methodology chapter (chapter 4.) underlines, a basic activity of phenomenological study is to accurately describe the lifeworld of the research

participants. The activity has its roots in descriptive psychology as developed by Franz Brentano (Moran 2000) and a basic notion within this approach is the manner in which the individual engages with the world, and the nature of human consciousness.

Brentano (1973) asserted that all consciousness is always directed towards the real world in order to interpret it in a meaningful manner. 'Intentionality is the fundamental action of the mind reaching out to the stimuli in the real world in order to translate them into its realm of meaningful experience' (Spinelli 2002:11). This declares our relatedness to the world and as Husserl (1931) argued our consciousness is always consciousness of something. For example, participants herein are seen as conscious of their alienating world when suffering 'existential discomfort' – they experience anxiety and this is anxiety of (say) the physical dimensions of the lecture theatre. They are conscious of the thrill when they make sense of ideas in their 'joy of study' – they experience joy and this is joy of their sense of academic progress (see chapter 6). For Brentano then consciousness was an action. The existent is active in linking 'inner' consciousness with the situation they are 'conscious of'. Therefore the role of interpretation lies at the heart of our mental experience.

Within any intentional act Husserl (1931) refers to two experiential foci; the 'noematic' focus (what we experience) and the 'noetic' focus (how we experience). For phenomenologists none of us can approach any experience in our life without instantaneously invoking both foci. They therefore have profound implications for how we intend the world and their application is fully discussed in chapter 4. For the present discussion there are several points about the foci of intentionality to be made. Firstly although there may be some shareability of an experience for different individuals with regard to the noematic focus, when the noetic focus is invoked along with the noematic focus shareability is not possible. This is because the noetic focus contains those referential elements dealing with the individual's own personal cognitive and affective biases which have been accumulated in all their previous individual intentional acts. As Spinelli explains,

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Shared biological and socio-cultural variables may well provide a partial similarity in separate individuals' experiences. Nevertheless, the foci (particularly the noetic focus) retain individually determined variables

which limit the extent to which any experience can be said to be shared between individuals.⁵

Spinelli 2002:14

However although distinguishing between noema and noesis in this way is useful for purposes of analysis (see the reprise discussion in chapter 4.), the distinction which Spinelli draws is not universally agreed upon. Husserl's position that consciousness is always consciousness of something is rather more enigmatic than Spinelli appears to make out.

...it should be well heeded that *here we are not speaking of a relation between some psychological occurrence – called a mental process – and another real factual existence – called an object – nor of a psychological connection taking place in Objective actuality* between one and the other.

Husserl 1983:73 (my italics)

Therefore the noematic/noetic structure of consciousness proposes that the noema is the thing in its appearing, but that it is 'in' awareness by virtue of the attentive processes Husserl labelled the noesis.

Heidegger radicalised this position by arguing that 'being-in-the-world' (Dasein – see section below on Heidegger),

...never finds *itself* otherwise than in the things themselves, and in fact in those things that daily surround it. It finds *itself* primarily and constantly *in things* because, tending them, distressed by them, it always somehow rests in things. Each of us is what he pursues and cares for. In everyday terms, we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of.

Heidegger 1927/1982:159 (his italics)

⁵ This is Spinelli's interpretation of Husserl's position. Alternative commentaries on shareability propose that according to Husserl the noema is too individual to characterise. This is a contentious issue and is returned to in chapter 4 and given some attention in the following discussion.

Intentionality then is more than simply a relationship between consciousness and the object of consciousness. The world is as it is as *my* world. Existentialists came to disregard the noematic/noetic structure entirely. There is not an external reality and an internal subjectivity.

In order to see this we must formulate more clearly what *thing* means in this context ... The *nearest things* that surround us we call equipment. ... What is given us primarily is the unity of an *equipmental whole*... The view in which the equipmental contexture stands at first, completely unobtrusive and unthought, is the view and sight of practical *circumspection*, of our practical everyday orientation.... But what are surrounding world and *world*? The surrounding world is different in a certain way for each of us, and notwithstanding that we move in a common world.

Heidegger 1927/1982:162-164 (his italics)

As is related in chapter 4. in detail, the lifeworld is a radicalisation of the notion of intentionality – it is subjective and relates to our projects. In the lifeworld of the mature learner this inextricable interrelatedness has an existential imperative. The self is as inchoate as the flux of their new world of mature studentship.

This is not to say that the whole range of nomothetic psychological studies that emphasise shared experiences is rendered valueless. Spinelli, amongst other phenomenologists, is keen to point out that the experimental psychological work (within the natural science approach) which stresses shared features of human experience should not be minimised. Many writers who argue for the increased salience of phenomenology refer to the coexistence of the different research traditions (e.g. Giorgi 1985; Stevens 1996; Meill and Dallos 1996; Spinelli 2002). Phenomenologists however strongly emphasise that, although there may be some degree of shareability in our experiences, there are still a variety of factors that show the *uniqueness* in each individual's experience.

The research methodology employs the interview as the main method of data gathering. This entails the participant temporalising (consciousness is drawn to a different

temporal dimension away from the present moment) from the interview situation to other temporal dimensions, often to past events and experiences. These memories within the phenomenological perspective involve a narrative of self. The noetic and noematic foci of intentionality have important implications for this narrative and how we construct ourselves through our past history into the present. The raw matter of memory and how we interpret that memory are in constant flux, so that at every moment of our experience of the world our memory and who we have become is reconstructed. The shy schoolgirl of before who was devastated by the treatment of her teachers, in the present reinterprets that memory as something which is not as devastating as the time and place of the initial experience. In reconstructing the past then we redefine ourselves. In this way we are beings with an infinity of pasts yet unless we re-evaluate our lives and detach ourselves in a reflective way, whether initiated by one of life's vicissitudes or not, we believe there only to be one past and one permanent self. As was highlighted in chapter 2 such permanence is false (Baumeister 1991). There are a number of applications of this principle within the biographical analyses of participants. These refer to their entry into higher education as they take stock of their existence and their interpretations of their past (although this is an interpretation at the time of interview on the interpretations of a past time!). The experience of their past selves in the present (during interview) also identifies the contours of their personal journey and their self-transformation – as they experience it in the moment by moment living through of the interview. This is to emphasise that the interviews themselves were often meaning making and reconstructive experiences as the participants related their lives in a deeply reflective and often dramatic manner.

Consistent with the phenomenological position on the uniqueness of each individual's experience of any 'thing', and any 'thing' in relation to any temporal dimension, this thesis then employs an idiographic methodology. This operates within an existential phenomenological framework, to reveal each individual participant's experience of his or her lived reality of higher education. Further the idiography here follows the first person account of experience in the manner of Giorgi (1985) and Wertz (1983). This is emphasised *in extremis* within this chapter, beginning with the contribution of Husserl, and the research praxis in the next chapter.

Husserlian principles and ideas are included in the methodology chapter to inform praxis at regular intervals. This discussion sketches in the background to phenomenology with reference to its founder Edmund Husserl and identifies those aspects of his phenomenology, which underpin this thesis. Hegel had used the term 'Phenomenology' to describe the science in which we come to know 'mind' as it is in itself through the study of the ways that it appears to us to us. Husserl however developed a distaste for Hegel's work seeing it as unscientific. With Husserl phenomenology became a fully-fledged descriptive method as well as a human science movement based on modes of reflection at the heart of philosophic and human science thought (Moran 2000). These issues are really within the ambit of pure philosophy and the wider contribution of Husserl's work, and as such are not part of the remit of this discussion. There is one important philosophical antecedent that does deserve mention however. Husserl drew on the work of Kant and his distinction between phenomenal and noumenal worlds - there are two realms of reality noumenon – being in reality itself and the phenomenon – the appearance of reality in our consciousness. Husserl eventually took an anti-Kantian position, dismissing the idea that there is a hidden noumenon, lying behind the experienced phenomenon. The task is to describe what appears (Ashworth 2005).

The single most important assumption about humans for phenomenology is that consciousness is the *sine qua non* of human life. Also in relation to consciousness our experiences are constituted holistically – there is no substantial difference between the subjective and the objective world. As the above discussion of intentionality indicates consciousness is always constituted in a reality that is not isolated from the experiential world. This position breaks with the dualism of dividing the objective and subjective realms.

It is indeed true that central to phenomenology, and indeed part of its continuing appeal, is its attempt to provide a rigorous defence of the fundamental role of subjectivity and consciousness in all knowledge and in descriptions of the world... ...Phenomenology's conception of objectivity

for subjectivity is arguably its major contribution to contemporary philosophy.

Moran 2000:15

Subjectivity then must always be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) maintained, the whole scientific edifice is built upon the world as directly perceived and that science is always a second order expression of that world. And as Arendt reminds us ‘the primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life which neither the scientist nor the philosopher can ever escape...’ (1978:24). The centrality of the subjective has already been alluded to and this remains the main feature of this thesis. This basic premise is now developed in more detail.

For many commentators phenomenology’s contribution to qualitative psychology has its roots in a number of places (e.g. the work of Brentano and Kantian philosophy), but one of the chief early proponents of the phenomenological *psychological perspective* was William James (see Ashworth 2003). James was particularly critical of atomism which was salient in psychology toward the end of the nineteenth century.

James described consciousness as an ongoing process, having its own themes within which the current foci of attention get their meaning. So the content of consciousness is, at a particular moment, a phase of personal ‘stream’. The significance of a particular object of consciousness is not just due to its reference to the external thing but it is also due to its relationship to the ongoing themes of my awareness – its personal relevance to me.

Ashworth 2003:7

There are two principles from James’ position, which are carried through Husserlian phenomenology and into this thesis. The first is the atomistic nature of a good deal of work within the research topic that has been conducted in recent years and the position of this thesis within that context. As is argued in chapter 1., the approach to understanding mature studentship has largely been with regard to various (isolated) aspects of the mature student experience; the effect of class, the influence of one’s

domestic partner, the relationship between age and retention, levels of confidence and shyness etc. This tends toward the atomism to which James refers. To augment this line of enquiry this thesis adopts a holistic approach to the research topic which addresses the various themes of consciousness within the lifeworld of the participant (this is detailed in chapter 4). The second refers to the already discussed notion of intentionality and the co-constitutionality of the individual to which James alludes in the reference to personal relevance and which Husserl then developed within the foci of intentionality. This is the starting point of the study of the lifeworld. Recent writers (especially Ashworth 2003, 2003a) have developed this notion and its study from Husserl's position on the web of meanings which was central to James' account. In rejection of the approach of atomism Husserl established that human experience is not a lawful response to any isolated variables (e.g. social class).

Rather, experience is of a system of interrelated meanings – a Gestalt – which is bound up in a totality termed the 'lifeworld'. In other words, the human realm essentially entails embodied, conscious relatedness to a personal world of experience. The natural scientific approach is inappropriate. Human meanings are the key to the study of lived experience, not causal variables.

Ashworth 2003:12-13

In order to understand this co-constitutionality of the person it was necessary to reject the (natural scientific) psychological way of knowing and its reference to atomism. Husserl saw such an approach as distancing itself from its subject matter and the realm of concrete experience and, as Giorgi (1970, 2000) also argues, tended to develop abstract notions of the person. As Ashworth points out,

Because the concepts [of psychology as a natural science] were not grounded in experience, they were seriously lacking in clarity and appropriateness to the subject-matter they were intended to reflect. What is the solution then? In the Husserlian slogan, it is a *return to the things themselves*, as experienced.

Ashworth 2003:12 (his italics)

In order to do this it was necessary *to describe the lifeworld in its appearing* which in turn meant the performance of the ‘epochē’. This entails the adoption of ‘the phenomenological attitude’ (to adopt a philosophical detachment from the world and to look at things in their evidencing) and the withholding of any presupposition in the ‘things which appear’ (e.g. reducing the influence of the researcher’s background in education when studying mature studentship). In *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl declared that ‘The phenomenologist must begin in absolute poverty, with an absolute lack of knowledge’ (Husserl 1967). This has since been qualified in that Husserl proposes that we do not need to transcend out everyday experience but that,

....we should not assume any philosophical or scientific theory and furthermore must avoid deductive reasoning [and] any other empirical science or speculative theory of psychology and philosophy, in order to concentrate on describing what is given directly in intuiting... Nothing must be taken for granted or assumed external to the lived experiences themselves as they are lived.

Moran 2000:126

This position was given further interpretation by Merleau-Ponty (see below). The process of reaching a totally presuppositionless state is therefore not necessary. Many writers (e.g. Moustakas 1994) however advocate that the phenomenological researcher should attempt to eradicate presupposition as far as possible and for any potential infiltration to be thoroughly examined. All features of performing the ‘epochē’ then involve a considerable amount of mental effort on behalf of the researcher. Such effort however should not detract attention from the business of description per se. The poet, Seamus Heaney, for example has referred to description as ‘revelation’, which for him means removing veils which obscure or disguise the realities of the world (1990:89). Description can sometimes be dismissed as a rather superficial activity within the social sciences. In contrast phenomenology contends that in fact attempting to get back to the things themselves and to set aside preconceptions and tendencies to analyse or generalise, and at the same time to unveil the lived reality of an experience is at the very least a challenging prospect. As Crotty points out:

The difficulty does not lie merely in seeing ‘what lies before our eyes’ (which Husserl saw as ‘hard demand’), or knowing ‘precisely what we see’ (Merleau-Ponty said there was nothing more difficult to know than that). We will also experience great difficulty in actually describing what we have succeeded in seeing and knowing. When we attempt to describe what we never had to describe before, language fails us. We find our descriptions incoherent, fragmentary, and not a little ‘mysterious’. We find ourselves lost for words, forced to invent words and bend existing words to bear the meanings we need them to carry for us. This has always been characteristic of phenomenological description. We may have to be quite inventive and creative in this respect.

Crotty 1996:280

The project then has an infinite end point in that description can never be absolutely achieved. For Willis (1999:101), ‘there will always be some kind of ‘hermeneutic’ – some kind of processing – involved in the choice of intuitive words and language in the very act of rejecting intermediate interpretative processes’. Such a position, whilst declaring the enormity and the problematic nature of the task, is counter to Husserl phenomenology. As we shall see the assertion that interpretation is inevitable is a hotly debated issue within existential phenomenology and it is where the positions of Husserl and Heidegger (who followed Husserl as the leader of this intellectual tradition) eventually diverge (Ashworth 2003:20). The way in which the tasks of bracketing presupposition and achieving descriptions of the lifeworld in its appearing is covered in detail in the exposition of the research methodology, which in particular contains a reflexive commentary on researcher positioning and the languaging of description.

Husserl added a further methodological move to reveal the essence of a phenomenon, which goes beyond describing it ‘in its appearing’. This is to provide an account of a phenomenon’s essential features e.g. the essence of the various experiences of the mature student in higher education (although within this project there are certain considerations which have had to be made and are fully explained in the methodology chapter). The essence then put simply is the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is, e.g. what are the essential features of depression, anxiety, victimhood. For this thesis examples within the experience of mature studentship

include, 'failure anxiety', 'strangerhood', and 'the joy of study'. Following Wertz (1983) and Moustakas (1994) these examples feature in the 'General Psychological Structure', which is a composite depiction of the mature student experience in higher education and seeks to describe the *eidos* (taken from Plato's term of 'Form') of this experience – what is essential (see chapter 6). A note of caution however is needed here in that we should not reify a 'thing' which is *cultural* as opposed to natural. Essence does not refer to the 'whatness' of a phenomenon as if we were say describing the properties of mercury. Essence for phenomenologists is a relational term that refers to our intentionalities of the world; possible ways of encountering and relating to things of our world before and while we understand or think them in language and poetic and conceptual thought. These three aspects of thought all enter into the analysis at various stages and in various forms.

How then are such essences arrived at within phenomenological research? The process is covered in detail in chapter 4. However there is one fundamental activity, which is key to the process of obtaining the essence of a phenomenon and is apposite to the current discussion. This is referred to as 'imaginative variation'. In this there is free play of fancy; any perspective is a possibility and is permitted to enter consciousness.

The Eidos, *the pure essence*, can be exemplified intuitively in the data of experience, data of perception, memory and so forth, but just as readily... in the play of fancy we bring spatial shapes of one sort or another to birth, melodies, social happenings, and so forth, or live through fictitious acts of everyday life. We find in fantasy the potential meaning of something that makes the invisible visible.

Husserl 1931:57 (his italics).

Through free imaginative variation then there is the understanding that there is no single inroad to truth, but that there are countless possibilities that can emerge that are intimately connected with the essences and meanings of the experience being described. The researcher is 'searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon' (Moustakas 1994:99). Herein lies the 'work in progress' nature of phenomenological enquiry in that essences of any experience are never totally

exhausted, but are representative of the temporality and spatiality of that experience. As Husserl concludes,

...every physical property draws us on into infinities of experience; and that every multiplicity of experience, however lengthily drawn out, still leaves the way open to closer and novel thing-determinations; and so on *ad infinitum*.

Husserl 1931:54-55

So there are two points to be made with regard to data analysis within a phenomenological study. The first is that any analysis is an engagement with a journey (see the ‘traveller metaphor’ (Kvale 1996) in chapter 4) in which all beings in the world (especially the participants) have moved on and indeed were moving on during and as part of the research process. The second refers to the position of the researcher who has also moved on, such that the descriptions and free fancy employed at a particular point are themselves particular to that point and not *now*. However even though those activities of the researcher at that past point are *in the past* their contribution is not declared moribund as their ‘particularness’ to space and time are acknowledged – here in this declaration, and reinforced in the research methodology. The position that free imaginative variation is infinite does not deny the validity of the conduct of the enterprise at any point in time, providing that its spatial and temporal parochialism is made clear.

What then has Husserl offered us in regard to qualitative psychology? Principally we have a praxis for understanding consciousness – that consciousness is always consciousness of something and qualitative psychology can describe the web of interrelated meanings which constitute individual experience. In relation to this we can, through Husserlian concepts, grasp the uniqueness of the individual, and through the concept of intentionality in particular reveal his or her co-constitutionality with the world. By engaging in the phenomenological reduction and performing the ‘epochē’ we can *return to the things themselves* and through free imaginative variation begin to grasp the contours of individual lifeworlds and the essence of experiences therein.

The interrelationship that phenomenology declares between the individual and his or her world however has practical applications beyond that of a methodology for qualitative psychology. The research topic of this thesis refers to the experience of the individual within education and application of Husserl's phenomenology offers direction here for an educational philosophy. Harry Broudy's experiential perspective on education has been introduced in chapter 2 with regard to the harmonising of educational programmes with the potentialities as envisaged by the individual and for the individual to have authentic ownership of their educational experience. The issue of inter-relatedness then is key. Individual and educational contexts have to be congruent for individual potentialities to be realised. Consistent with the notion of co-constitutionality then we cannot define ourselves without understanding those that surround us. Both our outer and inner conditions are important. Grumet stresses that art can be a metaphor for the person's interaction with the world and thereby with the educational context.

Just as art requires the imposition of subjectivity upon the objective stuff of the world, and is embodied in that stuff – in its materials, forms and limitations, so education requires a blending of objectivity with the unique subjectivity of the person, its infusion into the structures and shapes of the psyche.

Grumet 1992:29

These issues are expanded upon in the concluding chapter within the argument of disjunctive as opposed to integrative experiences at the interface of the worlds of higher education and the mature student.

Heidegger

From the work of Husserl and that of his intellectual antecedents it is evident that existential phenomenology has a long and significant history. According to Valle et al (1989) it is only in recent times that systematic attention has been given to its implications for psychology (a position which is supported by the work of Giorgi,

discussed at length above). To fully explore those implications there are a number of other important figures within this intellectual tradition whose contributions need some level of examination in order to demonstrate the development of existential phenomenological psychology and its deployment within this thesis. The first of these is Martin Heidegger who was a student of Husserl and also drew inspiration from the Danish philosopher, generally regarded as the founder of Existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard. In deference to the immensity of Kierkegaard's contribution a slight digression is necessary. Along with Nietzsche, Kierkegaard attempted to demonstrate the freedom of the individual in thought, belief and behaviour beyond that which many of us think possible.

Both authors rail against the collective, socially imposed morality in Western culture and invoke a utopian vision of man [sic] as conscious self generator of his beliefs and morality; for each, it is less important *what* we believe than *the manner* in which we believe.

Spinelli 2002:107

This position of agency lay at the foundation of Heidegger's work - although he had far more to say about the human condition than simply those issues which relate to this bald principle. For Kierkegaard it was imperative that philosophy addressed the concrete existence of individuals and the struggles which such existence presents. As discussed earlier, for phenomenologists the prime task was to understand human consciousness and experience through developing the appropriate methodologies. However with reference to phenomenology's aim to allow us to contact phenomena as we actually live them it was Heidegger who brought the two intellectual traditions together⁶.

Here then was an appropriate methodological approach to examine the content of existential philosophy. Phenomenology, therefore, became an almost perfect complement to existentialism (in many ways phenomenological methods underlie all existential philosophical enquiries...). Joined together in this fashion, existential phenomenology

⁶ Throughout this exposition on the contribution of Heidegger, discussion mainly refers to his early work.

can be viewed as the philosophical discipline which seeks to understand the event of human existence in a way that is free of the presuppositions of our cultural heritage, especially philosophical dualism and technologism, as much as possible.

Valle et al 1989:6

This project when applied to human psychological phenomena can be referred to as existential-phenomenological psychology and as such has become that psychological discipline;

....that seeks to explicate the *essence, structure, or form* of both human experience and human behaviour as revealed through essentially *descriptive* techniques including disciplined reflection.

Valle et al 1989:6

It is the assertion of this research that the thesis adopts this approach throughout and that such a descriptor accurately reflects the research praxis fully detailed in chapter 4. With reference to the work of Heidegger it is necessary to illustrate how the combination of the two great philosophical traditions are represented in his work, through the manner in which it has informed this thesis.

For Heidegger a human being is a 'Dasein', which has been translated into English as 'being-in-the-world'. This position declares that within our uniqueness we have the ability to be aware of our existence and this awareness reveals an inseparable relationship between existence and the world. Thus, our awareness is not solely subjective, it is really *intersubjective*. What he also emphasises in this term is that we can be reflective beings and thereby interpretative beings, 'making sense of the world in which we find ourselves, a world of spatiality, temporality, sociality and discourse' (Ashworth 2005:14). These four aspects of being-in-the-world have been supplemented by current phenomenological authors to support research into the lifeworld (see especially Ashworth 2003a) and these are fully deployed in the research praxis. Within the lifeworld Heidegger, through a rejection of Cartesian Dualism (the distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*) argued that the noema – the thing as experienced is never alone, but is part of a complex matrix of meanings in the experience of the

individual. The individual is not to be distinguished from the situation. There is not an internal subjectivity and an external reality (see discussion above on intentionality).

The temporality of existence also deserves further mention. Participants of this study were particularly illustrative of Heidegger's position on the 'ecstatic' nature of our experience. 'We are not locked into a solitary presence but stand out into the future and the past' (Sokolowski 2000). There are many instances of temporalising to the past and the future and as the analysis points out (see chapter 6) they lived in 'heightened temporal transcendence'. This involved an 'inertial drag' to a past life which helped sustain them in the pace of self-transformation that was experienced (amongst many other experiences), and a 'bodying forth' (Boss 1979) to future states of existential comfort (e.g. personal status, sense of fulfilment, financial and material security). With regard to temporality it was particularly noteworthy that as part of 'heightened temporal transcendence' participants were the embodiment of van den Berg's (1972:86) axiom 'the acts of life are rooted in the future'. Their living present was often a present of things to come.

Heidegger has presented the nature of existence as the existent being 'thrown' into the world and the inward, existential awareness of one's own being as a *fact* which has to be accepted – each of us is 'thrown' into our own particular existential situation. To exist factually is to be there – to occupy a particular situation and to see everything from the perspective of that situation. This perspective affects our primary relation to the world. As Macquarrie has explained, (1972:173) 'all existence is being-with-others; and furthermore, it is being-in-the-world, where the 'world' is understood in human terms, shall we say, the theatre in which the activities of the self are carried out'. This nature of existence was salient throughout the analysis of the existent's lifeworld, beginning with the establishment of 'an existential baseline' – their existence at a particular point from which the contours of the state of becoming could be established (Wertz 1983). This informed the examination of the existent's lifeworld and the subsequent becoming and existential dilemmas that presented themselves. Their 'thrownness' determined the levels of freedom that were open to them. This 'situated freedom' (Stevens 1996b:197) was manifest in the options that were available as they picked their way through dilemmas, with materials and under conditions which were not of their own choosing. Paradoxically however despite the situatedness of existence

the existential position is that choice is thrust upon us – even choosing not to choose is a choice. As Sartre (1956) has expressed it we are ‘condemned to be free’. Such freedom extends to how we choose to respond to dilemmas and whether to be authentic or inauthentic – a point which is returned to below.

Part of this ‘thrownness’ is the existent’s compulsion to exist in some sort of permanent relation to death (Boss 1979). This ‘being unto death’, Heidegger argues, should vitalise one’s existence in that there should be a realistic inclusion of the death-factor among our projects (Macquarrie 1972:153). The facticity of ‘being unto death’ enabled the analysis of the existent’s lifeworld with regard to the meaningfulness of their projects and the temporality fragment of the lifeworld. Their experience of time and the finite nature of existence were central themes within their consciousness of higher education – time was short for them to prove themselves.

As the discussion within the preceding chapter declares the mature student, faced with dilemmas of choice and the finiteness of life, adopts an authentic mode of being. The seizing responsibility of decisions; recognising their ‘chosenness’, and also taking on board the fact (Heidegger, 1927) of the ‘guiltiness’ of any decision because it is free and other possibilities were available. Always *mea culpa*. Every decision then is a decision against as well as a decision for; every decision limits the range of possibilities that will be open for future decision. This is particularly acute when ‘fateful moments’ (Giddens 1999) present themselves. This can be a severe test to the existent’s authenticity. Heidegger in the analysis of being-in-the-world identifies a fundamental paradox in our mode of being.

The existent can exist only in virtue of a world to which he [sic] is constantly related by the closest ties, yet the same world that enables him to exist also threatens to diminish his existence or even to take it from him.

Macquarrie 1972:59

It is the inauthentic collectivism of the ‘they’ – ‘das man’ (Heidegger 1962:163) – the indefinable ‘others’ who threaten to dominate our lives (into which we are ‘thrown’), and thus diminish our existence, from which Heidegger and other existentialists have stressed we should extricate ourselves in order to be fulfilled. For participants in this

study it is this paradox of their existence which presents the greatest dilemma. The pre-course world that has and continues to sustain them threatens to swallow them up and strip them of their individuality. Their response to this threat is to 'take arms against a sea of troubles (by turning toward higher education) and in opposing end them'. Existents, to maintain an 'authentic' mode of living then, live with a 'mindfulness of being' (Heidegger 1927). Rather than live in forgetful mode, which for Heidegger is so characteristic of everyday living, they are prepared to confront the unavoidable question of their personal happiness and fulfilment and again recognise their 'being unto death'. This is not the dress rehearsal, this is their *one* life and its living is their responsibility.

Perhaps then the greatest contribution of Heidegger's work to this study is the sensitisation to that feature of existence referred to as the 'question of being'.

...each of us is grazed at least once, perhaps more than once, by the hidden power of the question [of being]... The question looms in moments of great despair, when things tend to lose all their weight and all meaning becomes obscured.... It is present in moments of rejoicing, when all the things around us are transfigured and seem to be there for the first time, as if it might be easier to think that they are not than to understand that they are and as they are. The question is upon us in boredom, when we are equally removed from despair and joy, and everything about us seems so hopelessly commonplace that we no longer care whether anything is or is not.

Heidegger 1959:1

The question presents itself to existents within this study as almost an everyday occurrence, from the genesis of their transition when they first take the step toward higher education, and as an immanent feature of their intrepid journey into the unknown. It often begins with a disillusionment with the perceived mundane nature of their life and the perceived lack of personal dignity. These are characteristics that are similar to what Csikszentmihalyi (2002) has termed 'entropy', the wastage of millions of years of evolving human consciousness on patterns of stimulation which only mimic reality (e.g. passively watching television). We are in effect squandering our energy

which could be used to focus on complex goals associated with activities which bring about personal growth. Existents are particularly unfulfilled by their life's emphasis on 'having' rather than 'being'. According to Marcel (1949) to have something (e.g. 'nice house', 'nice car' etc.) is not just to stand in an external relationship to it. The very 'having' of something affects the person who has it. He becomes anxious about it and instead of 'having' it, it begins, so to speak, to 'have' him. One's existence is bound up by the superficial. One's being equates with one's material possessions. Although Marcel was making reference to the problems associated with an increasingly acquisitional society his argument resonates within the lifeworld of the participants herein. Existential meaningfulness is sought beyond that of the present moment and external to the meanings that are available from their present (pre-course) social milieu. (The existential position that life, due to the openness of interpretation, is ultimately meaningless notwithstanding.) Perhaps the most poignant example of when the question of being presents itself is when the existent is in celebratory mood of their project. This is paramount in their 'joy of study' when the despair of before (and when the care for life was minimal) is supplanted by the energy of the moment as a small but significant increment of their project is realised.

Heidegger's contribution to this thesis then has been in terms of the sensitisation which his philosophical position has provided for the analysis of the participants' lifeworlds. This sensitisation has also supported the construction of the 'General Psychological Structure' in providing an important part of the existential framework in which descriptions can be accurately formulated. These descriptions, in augmentation (if not in disagreement) to Husserl's contribution, both individual and general, are compiled with the existent as a free sense-maker of his or her 'being-in-the-world'.

Sartre

Despite the immense contribution made by Sartre to both philosophy and Western Civilisation as a whole, as acknowledged by many writers (e.g. Warnock 1970; Stevenson 1987; Moran 2000; Spinelli 2002), the contribution of Sartrean thought for this thesis is limited to his commentary on the human condition with regard to 'Bad

Faith'. As with much of the reference to Heidegger's work, Sartrean existentialism has operated as a sensitiser to the issues that arose during data analysis.

Sartre's approach to issues of existence reflects an absolute conviction to their practical importance for everyday living. For Sartre 'existence precedes essence'. This is to state as axiomatic that as human beings we have the responsibility to create ourselves. We simply find ourselves as existing and we have to *decide* what we make of life. This meaning-making is related to our projects which Sartre sees as a continuous process throughout our biography. As stated above his central assertion on human existence is that we are 'condemned to be free'; there is no limit to our freedom except that we are not free to cease being free. Human beings do not possess freedom, they *are* freedom, and our free being extends to our projects in the world in the process of self-creation. However many of us deny such freedom as it gives rise to anxiety (in Heideggerian terms 'angst'). Inauthenticity provides the comfort of not taking responsibility for our lives, but to abdicate it and for others to direct us.

In this way we vary our modes of being: when it suits us, we declare ourselves to be free, responsible, authentic agents in our experience of the world; but, equally, when that responsibility of the choices to be made, or the acts to be acknowledged, or the wider implications of such, is painful, frightening, tension-provoking, we seek the safety of denied responsibility, lack of choice, inauthenticity.

Spinelli 2002:115

For Sartre to deny our freedom of responsibility and choice is to live in 'bad faith'. This is to position ourselves as simply reactors to externally predetermined influences and Sartre is renowned for the vividness of his portrayals of 'bad faith' taken from everyday life. The problem for the existent is that to avoid being in bad faith means to deconstruct the ontological security we have built up around us. One has to deny a vast array of potentials, claiming that to take any action against social norms, parental upbringing, religious ideology etc., is simply not possible. The life we see as set out before us, that may give us comfort – a set script to be followed that presents a blueprint for living designed and written by others – is seen as an illusion. Hence avoiding bad faith is difficult and even if avoided it is easy to slip back into it. Sartre's

existentialism maintained that ultimately there was no blueprint for human existence, no framework which could be adopted to make life meaningful. 'Rather we must face up to the dizzying formlessness and groundlessness of our existence, an experience which provokes anxiety' (Moran 2000:362). For Sartre, this is the 'nausea' that is human existence.

Although Sartre's position can seem extreme it does aid analysis of our everyday lives and the existential quandaries that present themselves. It does for example highlight our moments of personal betrayal when we commit to iron necessity what in fact we are ourselves choosing to do.

Sartre is at his best in showing in detail that there are many situations in which people are more free than they realise, that many of what they take to be their in-born psychological traits are in fact affectations, reactions to the situation.

Moran 2000:390

And it is this point above all that aided the analysis of the participants' lives in this thesis. It is the freedom that the existent exercises which leads to levels of anxiety which have to be overcome. The avoidance of bad faith for the mature student is paramount when they embark upon their journey, leaving behind their predetermined biographical trajectory, and instead setting about a new project that raises a series of existential dilemmas. This is expressed as psychological toughness in their existential pioneerism (see chapter 6) – the intrepid journey of self-transition that characterises much of their identity project in the academic world. Sartre (1956) for example has referred to the bad faith of individuals as they commit self to a set role. They become that role in betrayal of their dignity as an individual. Bad faith then, with regard to the roles we allow ourselves to be altercast into, and in turn *cast ourselves* into, is an extended meditation on Heidegger's notion of inauthenticity. It means,

...being in flight from one's freedom, attempting to cover it by clinging to a persona. In 'bad faith', I am merely mimicking myself. A man is playing at being a waiter [one of Sartre's renowned and incisive observations] and

deliberately imitates the mechanical movements he associates with perfect serving.

Moran 2000:388

For example for participants herein, it is their role that leads them into bad faith as they allow their responsibility for being to be subsumed within the predetermined script for that role (housewife, mother, 'carer-of-the-men-folk', 'good-time-working-class-guy-down-the-pub', 'no-hoper-destined-to-work-at-menial-tasks-forever', etc.). Their response was to step out of bad faith, to release themselves from the traditions that dictated who they should be - their class or their gender or local expectations - and to enter the world of the unknown. To rise up out of the comfy confines of their illusory cave, and walk out alone into the night to the sound of the baying hyenas! Sartre's analysis of human existence then, as this illustration indicates, was directly responsible for revealing the full import of the mature student's actions, and as such was a major enabling factor in the accurate description of the lifeworld.

Merleau-Ponty

Unlike the work of Heidegger and Sartre which has elliptically (although sometimes directly in places) aided the construction of this thesis, the work of Merleau-Ponty has had a more pragmatic application. This is especially the case when considering the performance of the epochē. For Merleau-Ponty the phenomenological reduction avoids the idealist slant of Husserl, by recognising the irreducibility of the real world. Phenomenological description can play a vital role in reminding us what our pre-reflective experience is like against various philosophical and scientific distortions. It was,

...Merleau-Ponty who found it possible to interpret Husserl in an existentialist way and thus enabled the process of bracketing to refer, not to a turning away from the world and a concentration on a detached consciousness [as in Husserl's transcendental idealism], but to resolve to set aside theories, research presuppositions, ready-made interpretations etc., in order to reveal engaged, lived experience.

Ashworth 1996:1

The methodology was guided closely by this principle in reflecting upon the pre-reflective and thereby revealing the lifeworld of participants living through the experience of higher education.

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis is on the inseparability of self and world as he has stated in his often quoted epigram, 'man is in the world [sic] and only in the world does he know himself' (Merleau-Ponty 1962). His holistic view of the self totally rejects the natural science approach and is particularly critical of Behaviourism, which he refers to as 'feigned anaesthesia' i.e. to take a behaviourist perspective one must pretend that the subject feels nothing. In radical counter-position to behaviourism,

Merleau-Ponty's outlook.... sees human beings as integrated into the natural order, as fundamentally belonging to the world, though not merely objects of the world as their presence generates the social world of culture.[it] may be described as *dialectical* in that he sees the relations between humans and the world as so intertwined as if by a kind of 'pre-established harmony'.

Moran 2000:404-4 (his italics)

Human experience then is an immensely complex weave of consciousness, body and environment that is best studied in holistic fashion. That our whole understanding of the world is grounded in our corporeal nature is typified by Merleau-Ponty (1962) in his observation that intentionality extends to our whole bodily being; the way a person walks or carries himself or herself speaks to that person's continual relationship to his or her surroundings. One cannot then begin to understand human perception as long as we insist upon an absolute distinction between the perceiving subject and the object perceived.

Merleau-Ponty's position is utilised within this thesis intrinsically in the conceptualisation of the lifeworld and its study. The former is demonstrably evident in the steer provided by the 'fragments' of the lifeworld. These are drawn up with the utilisation of Ashworth's (2003a) guidelines, which are themselves derived directly from Merleau-Ponty's (1962) work *Phenomenology of Perception*. There are however

further dimensions to the inculcation of Merleau-Ponty in the development of this thesis.

An immanent signification of the living through of mature studentship is the accentuated level of conscious and unconscious self-improvisation. Participants are invited to become different people in various measures and in various ways. This is particularly prevalent during academic discussion when they in effect try out the being of another person, and as chapter 2 indicated the 'phenomenological I' undergoes a modification and as such identity is constructed. The zenith of this process (and the attendant anxiety) is the formally assessed seminar presentation, wherein participants take on a self-improvisation that involves a languaging of self, unknown and unknowable up to that moment. Merleau-Ponty's position of such expression of self is firstly that at all times expression is always an act of self-improvisation in which we borrow from the world, from others, and from our own past efforts (O'Neil 1974).

When I speak or understand, I experience that presence of others in myself or myself in others which is the stumbling block of the theory of intersubjectivity, I experience that presence of what is represented which is the stumbling block of the theory of time, and I finally understand what is meant by Husserl's enigmatic statement, 'Transcendental subjectivity is intersubjectivity.' To the extent that what I say has meaning, I am a different 'other' for myself when I am speaking; and to the extent that I understand, I no longer know who is speaking and who is listening.

Merleau-Ponty 1964:97

Secondly that this act of self-improvisation is interpenetrated by the language which serves to enact it. They are then, in effect, co-constituting themselves within a meaning system wherein the meaning of language is bound up by the lived value of the words which constitute it. To use the words is to live the language and the universe of meaning that increasingly co-join with the existent in the process of self-creation.

It is words and not phonemes which carry meaning. Furthermore words have meaning on their own account, especially such words as 'liberty' or 'love', but also as elements in a whole which is not just the phase or

sentence but the entire 'mother' language. To know the meaning of a word is not just a question of acquiring an appropriate phonetic motivation. It involves a familiarity with an entire universe of meaning where language and society interpenetrate the lived value of words.

O'Neil 1974:lvii

Through this analysis it became clear how the existent made sense of their situation in this moment of acute self-improvisation that was the seminar presentation or the contribution in academic seminar discussion. They had to begin to live the value of the words that they employed taken from the world of academia (fellow students, tutors, their efforts to engage with this world in their embeddedness in the literature) in self-improvisation - again illustrating Merleau-Ponty's position on the inseparability of self and world.

The influence of Merleau-Ponty's work in the construction of this thesis then has been to provide greater force to the notion of co-constitutionality of the existent and the world, and from this basis to provide a number of practical applications to the research praxis. His interpretation of Husserl's work in an existentialist way has reconstituted the performance of the epochē, enabling the researcher to reflect upon the pre-reflective and thus to describe the lifeworld in its appearing. Merleau-Ponty's position on the complexity of the interweaving of consciousness, body and the environment has specifically enabled the analysis of embodiment. For example, the feelings of the existent (e.g. the mature student cowering in metaphorical corners in an effort to deindividuate self both bodily and mentally), and with regard to spatiality (e.g. bodying forth to the feelings of another place; the material comfort of the future, the protective cocoon of the past). His analysis has also revealed the complexities of self-improvisation in reference to the unity of self and world – the living of language and words in the mature student's expression of who they are, and who they are becoming. All of these applications are fully explicated in the analyses, but these examples are particularly illustrative of the pervasive and strategic influence of Merleau-Ponty's work in this thesis.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has presented the underpinning principles on which this thesis is based. It has asserted that to study the experiences of mature students in higher education the existential phenomenological psychological approach is the most appropriate. The argument that supports this assertion has made reference to the limitations of psychology as natural science, and the applicability of psychology as a human science to the research foci in question. As consistent with the research methodology these foci were regarded as precursory and tentative, and as such were open to modification and/or deletion as the research journey progressed. The common principle apropos these foci however, in clear alignment with existential phenomenological psychology, is to engage with the lived experience of participants by recognising the interrelatedness of the person and the world and to reveal this from a first person, internal perspective.

This argument has traced the development of qualitative psychology and demonstrated how its basic tenets, within phenomenology and existentialism, and emphasising the uniqueness of the individual, provide a platform for the research praxis. The central notion is that of intentionality and its noematic and noetic foci, and how this is augmented by the work of the foremost thinkers within the phenomenological tradition (Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty). The illustrations of their work are, for the most part, taken directly from the data analysis of this research, and thereby demonstrate their influence and applicability to the research praxis. According to Ashworth (1996) it is Merleau-Ponty who tends to inform current phenomenologically based psychological research, although his position is a development of those of his forerunners. This means that fundamental principles such as the conceptualisation of the nature of consciousness and the methodological procedures for its study have not radically altered, but have been modified to produce the kind of research praxis which is fully detailed in the next chapter. The aim; to describe the lifeworld in its appearing of the mature student in higher education (initially steered by the research foci) and to reveal the essence of the higher education experience for such students.

CHAPTER 4.

METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to articulate the discussion of phenomenology and existentialism in the preceding chapter with the epistemic underpinning of the research process. It sets out how existential phenomenology drives the research and exactly how this in turn was enacted in the methods utilised. In sum this chapter provides the important link between the features of the chosen epistemology and how these are represented in the conduct of the research and the findings. In order to give full rein to this link, the methodological features will be articulated with regard to existential phenomenology psychology and how they are exemplified in the research method. Moreover this chapter demonstrates how, in the deployment of existential phenomenological psychology, it adds to the existing research corpus within the substantive area and thereby makes an original contribution to knowledge. Methodology and method then are treated as inextricable, and are articulated in such a way as to illustrate how the two come together in the conduct of the research. This will involve illustrations declaring this link between the epistemological considerations and the enactment of the research process. Chapter 5 then emanates from this discussion and provides a description of the methodological praxis with regard to the employed method and procedures.

Before doing this however it is necessary to make the epistemic position clear. I am concerned here with the study of *experience* in contrast to natural science approaches within psychology, which focus on behaviour. Within this position the philosophical foundation of Cartesian dualism is questioned i.e. the split between the observable accessible body and the unobservable inaccessible mind (see the discussion of this point and Merleau-Ponty's work in chapter 3, and the issue of co-constitutionality below). As Bugental poignantly observes;

Narrow scientific psychology has had to deny the reality of reflexive awareness. It simply would ruin most research designs. Similarly, the human 'organism' must usually be treated as though it is empty and inert until the experimenter 'stimulates' it

Bugental 1989:x

In contrast I attend to the person as subject rather than object and as not only aware, but aware of being aware and thus affirm as Bugental does that the human is 'a source of what is actual and not solely the receptacle of contingency' (Bugental 1989:x). The research praxis can be classed as idiographic, but a word of caution is needed here. Although I attend to the interlay of factors that may be quite specific to the individual, this attention is from a *first person internal* view rather than from an external view of the person by myself as the psychologist-observer. I therefore attempt to enter into the realm of the person that they (the participants) themselves perceive or construe. In sum then this research, and the methodology described within this chapter, aspires to make a contribution to the ever-increasing corpus of knowledge and research in affirming that,

....the human is a different order of phenomenon than any other...to understand why a stone rolls down a hill, we must look to see what force loosened it from its place at the top, but to see why a person climbs a hill, we must discover what the person seeks at the top. It is the contrast between causation and intention that distinguishes the subjective or experiential realm.

Bugental 1989:x

So then I am concerned with the legacy of Husserl for psychology as traced in the previous chapter. This established that human experience is not a matter of lawful response to the variables which operate upon the person. The focus is on *lived* experience and the attempt to communicate this as clearly as is possible to critical others.

2. QUALITATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The case for a move away from the traditional approach of the natural sciences in psychology and toward a methodology which is more appropriate to psychology as a human science has been well made (see for example Giorgi 1970; Giorgi 1995; Giorgi 1999; Moustakas 1994; Ashworth 2003; Valle et al 1989; Kvale 1996). It is beyond the parameters of this discussion to fully articulate this case and it has to some extent been sketched out in chapter 3. There are however some further salient points within it, which are relevant to this thesis, and need to be identified.

The critical question according to Giorgi (1999:5) is, 'does it ever make sense in psychology to pose a qualitative question?' He continues,

...is it meaningful to ask *why* a person is anxious as well as how often or how intensely? Is it meaningful to ask *why* learning took place and how, as well as how much more quickly? Is it important to know how suspicion is *qualitatively different* from paranoia so that we can distinguish the two? It seems to me that these questions make sense and that psychology could only be improved if there were a way to answer these questions systematically and rigorously... Now phenomenology is precisely the discipline that tries to discover and account for the presence of meanings in the stream of consciousness. It is the discipline that tries to sort out and systemise meanings and if a way could be found to do qualitative research perhaps it would be by exploring the phenomenological approach.

Giorgi 1999:5-6 (his italics)

Many authors including Giorgi and those listed above have been successful in developing qualitative psychology and this chapter embraces their ideas.

The Psychological Dilemma in Phenomenological Research

Firstly with regard to the studying of experience Giorgi (1995:25) has outlined how the phenomenological approach can resolve the 'psychological dilemma'. This refers to the

problem of studying those aspects of the human condition, which phenomenologists argue are beyond the remit of psychology as a natural science. These would include such things as love, creativity etc. *as experienced* and specific experiences referring to identifiable contexts (e.g. Hagan 1986). (Although phenomenologists argue that love and creativity are more suited to phenomenological study, they have been successfully researched from nomothetic and natural science approaches e.g. Collins 2005, Berscheid and Wallster 1978, Murstein 1971). The dilemma lies in the issue that in rejecting the natural science approach the researcher must adhere to the conventions of an alternative discipline such as those found in the humanities or arts. In doing so this excludes psychological phenomena from the framework of knowledge (i.e. science) that is considered to be most exact and prestigious. For Giorgi the solution is to move away from mainstream psychological study, which is underpinned by positivism, and toward a new conception of science as demonstrated within phenomenology.

Phenomenological thought...can help give us a better understanding of, and access to, psychological phenomena as spontaneously lived and it can help us to harmonise such phenomena with an expanded idea of science.

Giorgi 1995:25

Kvale (1996) is particularly forceful on this issue. He argues throughout that the dimensions of science as applied within the natural science approach do not need to be applied in such a narrow and prescriptive fashion in qualitative research. A much broader definition of science needs to be embraced: 'the methodological production of new, systematic knowledge' (Kvale 1996:60). He further argues that such a position is indicative of current psychological inquiry, which moves away from positivism and the model of the research participant as passive ('ahistorical, asocial and without meaning-giving attributes' (Giorgi 1999:34), and with the prediction and the control of the behaviour of others as its goal, toward the participant as active in 'the social construction of reality' (ibid. 1996:11). This model of the participant is reflected in the qualitative interview method and the traveller metaphor in research as outlined below. This postmodern approach emphasises 'the constructive nature of the knowledge created through the interaction of the partners in the interview conversation' (Kvale 1996:11).

The refutation of the implicit presuppositions within the natural science approach (and its concept of realism) is forcibly made by Moustakas.

Realism and objectivity presumably were the province of the natural sciences, yet ultimately the natural sciences operate from ideal principles in that they presuppose that objects that exist in time and space are real, that they actually exist, yet there is no evidence that the objects are real apart from our subjective experience of them.

Moustakas 1996:46

We shall see that from the perspective of existential phenomenological psychology, whether the object exists or not makes no difference at all.

3. EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND RESEARCH

It is our subjective experience of the world that is the domain of phenomenological enquiry: both that of the researcher and the researched. Although the former is seen to perceive *objective phenomenological reality* as the manifest presence of what appears and can be recognised subjectively by the person, i.e. the researcher, who is perceiving it (Husserl 1970:314). As Giorgi points out, two separate issues should not be confused. 'The world of the participant is subjective, but the means of capturing that world on the part of the scientist is intersubjective or objective' (Giorgi and Giorgi. 2003:45). Therefore myself as a person *enables* the research (my *self* being positioned as a resource), the intuitions which are key to the final outcomes are *role* based (see the discussion of validity and method below).

It is research then which 'explores, describes and empirically tests human behaviour while preserving a 'lived' relationship with it in the reality of life' (van Kaam 1969:27). This is in contrast to the natural science approach that is, 'irrelevant empirical research...produced by the totally detached, abstract and isolated investigation carried on by the neutral spectator of behaviour who is indifferent to the relationship between his abstract game and his life situation' (van Kaam 1969:26). The enactment of the

research then explores psychological phenomena through preserving a 'lived' relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee/participant and the knowledge thus constructed. 'There is an alternation between the knowers and the known, between the constructors of knowledge and the knowledge constructed' (Kvale 1996:15).

The epistemology however is not 'social constructionist'. Within existential phenomenological psychology the person is regarded as a sense maker and an interpreter in an interpreted world (Heidegger 1962, Spinelli 2002). The role of the interview researcher is to interpret the research participant's constructions of their world. (The debate on whether phenomenology is truly a description of experience or whether interpretation is inevitable continues within existential phenomenological psychology (Ashworth 2003)). But although such an approach has features which are similar to social constructionist approaches (e.g. discursive psychology and discourse analysis) there are important differences. For example whilst existential phenomenological psychology is very alive to the constructed and social nature of experience,

...it would reject the view that we are solely to be regarded as channels through which socially available discourses flow. For existential phenomenology, human beings are taken as free by virtue of being conscious (consciousness entailing the capacity to envisage alternatives to what currently is), and resources such as language are tools for thought rather than, primarily constraints on it.

Ashworth (2003:23).

Existential phenomenological psychology then retains emphatically the position that the person is a conscious agent who is '*intentionally* related to the world of experience, rather than a world of constructed discourse' (Ashworth 2005:27. his italics). The question of freedom within existential phenomenological psychology and its situated character is dealt with in more detail in chapter 3.

4. THE STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

This thesis then follows the increasingly substantive area of psychological research into consciousness. Polkinghorne (1989) argues the case for the deployment of phenomenological research into consciousness by identifying the shortcomings of traditional (positivistic) approaches. He presents the position held by phenomenologists that the general description of consciousness developed within phenomenological philosophy (see chapter 3) provides a firmer base from which to study consciousness and its flow of experiences. As alluded to above the aim is to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience by applying epistemological principles attuned to the special characteristics of such experience. In sum then phenomenologically informed research recognises that

...consciousness is different in essence from the objects of nature, it rejects the positivists' ideal of a single and unified scientific method that will be able to yield all knowledge. Phenomenological research holds that the unique characteristics of consciousness require a distinct kind of science, utilising data-gathering procedures and processes designed specifically for developing general descriptions of experiential processes.

Polkinghorne 1989:44

These procedures and processes and how they relate to the phenomenological position of 'human science' are outlined in detail below. However we see in the study of consciousness that the realm of traditional approaches is supplemented by the phenomenologist's position that consciousness is correlated with presences (that which enters consciousness - noemata) and not empirical objects. The field of presence is wider than the field of empirical givens since the latter is only one type of presence. 'That this is important for psychology is clearly evident from the fact that so many psychological phenomena have to do with 'presences' that are not real' (Giorgi 1995:33) e.g. dreams, hallucinations, images fantasies etc. The epistemological claim then refers to presence and not actual existence.

5. STRUCTURE

The significant concept in the research process especially during data analysis is that of 'Structure'. Following Wertz (1983) I analysed the interviews in terms of 'individual psychological structures' and then from these I derived a 'general psychological structure' to attempt to reveal the essence of the experience of the mature student studying higher education. Within existential phenomenological psychology the assertion is made that existence can be approached phenomenologically and studied as one phenomenon among others in its essential structures (Polkinghorne 1989).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that the phenomenal world is accessible in that the subjective has a structure that spreads across space and time and can be communicated to others through appropriate expression. Furthermore once subjective phenomenal data or meanings can be communicated they can enter the intersubjective realm (e.g. the interview) and therefore the world of science. As Giorgi points out,

...consciousness is essentially open to the world so that a 'phenomenal experience' traverses the relationship between subjectivity and the world, and consequently, is structured or organised in many specific ways and available to psychological researchers through expressions. It is open to being appropriated and understood by others.

Giorgi 1995:38.

Such appropriation and understanding is reflected in the 'Individual Psychological Structures' and the 'General Psychological Structure'. With regard to existential phenomenological psychology there is the move from the individual descriptions of the lifeworld and the individual experience of higher education to the experience of higher education for a designated group of mature students, thus attempting to identify the *essence* of the higher education experience for those mature students. The notion of 'essence' is controversial. For Cumming 'the claim conveyed by the term 'essence' is that [an] example exemplifies what it is an example of...' (1992:40). So that in 'imaginative variation' (see below) we can test for the essential features of experiences and in the end the issue of essence is simply what aspects of the instance described are part of the example of the experience. Or has Wertz has expressed it,

This achievement [in describing the essence] involves understanding diverse individual cases as individual instances of something more general and articulating this generality of which they are particular instances.

Wertz 1983:228

The issue of structure also points up the difference between phenomenology as a philosophy and phenomenology as a psychology. The structures which are investigated by the former are universal and required for the appearance of consciousness itself, whilst the latter investigates structures that are typical for groups of people (Polkinghorne 1989:43); in this case mature students in higher education. It should however be acknowledged that it is possible in a quite individual phenomenon to point to the essential.

... [I]t belongs to the sense of anything contingent to have an essence and therefore an Eidos which can be apprehended purely; and this Eidos comes under eidetic truths belonging to different levels of universality. An individual object is not merely an individual object as such, a "This here," an object never repeatable; as qualified "in itself" thus and so, it has its own specific character, its stock of essential predictables which must belong to it (as "an existent such as it is in itself")...

Husserl 1983:7

According to Giorgi (1999) the fundamental and valuable insights of philosophical phenomenology should be translated into psychological research such that 'it acknowledges the reality of the realm of meaningful experience as the fundamental locus of knowledge' (Polkinghorne 1989:43). The following distinction is useful.

To be phenomenological, in general, means to return to the phenomena themselves, to obtain a description of those phenomena, to submit them to imaginative variation, and then obtain an eidetic intuition of their structures. For phenomenological *psychology* however, the difference is that phenomena are selected for their relevance to psychology [e.g. being a mature student], the initial description is naïve and does not imply the

reduction (although the analysis of it does, and the descriptions of structures do), and the structures (or essences) sought are psychological and may be typical or general rather than universal.

Giorgi 1999:26 (his Italics)

Within *existential* phenomenological psychology the particular focus is on the experience of being human (see chapter 3 and ‘Fragments of the Lifeworld’ below).

6. THE RESEARCHER AS ‘TRAVELLER’

The research in toto is guided by the traveller metaphor advocated by Kvale (1996), that underpins conversational research methods and a phenomenological epistemology. The role of the interviewer within the traveller metaphor is described thus;

The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that leads subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as ‘wandering together with’.

(Kvale 1996:4)

The research participants equate with the ‘local inhabitants’, and the manner in which I wandered with them is described in the research method below. Kvale further points out how this metaphor refers to a postmodern constructive understanding that involves a conversational approach to social research and reflects the emergent nature of constructed knowledge in the interview encounter – the ‘InterView’. I employed this approach in the conduct of the ‘Lifeworld’ interview with participants, which Kvale defines as, ‘an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena’ (Kvale 1996:6).

7. LIFEWORLD

The topic of the research interviews refers to the central concept of the participant's lifeworld. This is their lived world and their relation to it. For Kvale (1996) the purpose of the lifeworld interview is to describe and understand the central themes the participants experience and live toward. He further argues that the qualitative research interview has a unique potential for obtaining access to and describing the lived everyday world. In contrast to 'the more abstract scientific studies of the social world' (see discussion of the natural science approach and positivism above) the qualitative interview is 'a research method that gives a privileged access to our basic experience of the lived world'. That is the lifeworld – 'the world as it is encountered in everyday life and given in direct and immediate experience' (Kvale 1996:54).

Co-constitutionality

The central issue in the exploration of the lifeworld is the existential-phenomenological position of the person as being totally interrelated with the world. The participant in this way is viewed as having no existence apart from the world and the world as having no existence apart from the participant. Each interviewee/participant and his or her world then are viewed as co-constituting each other.

It is through the world that the very meaning of the person's existence emerges both for himself or herself and for others. The converse is equally true. It is each individual's existence that gives his or her world its meaning. Without a person to reveal its sense and meaning, the world would not exist as it does.

Valle et al 1989:7

An illustration of the co-constitutionality would be the description of *bi-orbital existence* which participants experience, and which is asserted as an essence of the mature student (previously experiencing a disempowered existence) in higher education. Here the existent is *contextualised*. It is not possible to understand or describe such phenomena without recourse to person in the world/context. The existent's existence is characterised by an experiential straddling of two distinct spaces that can at times interpenetrate. Such a description can only be arrived at with reference

to the lifeworld, which is co-created in the ongoing dialogue between person and world. Within the existential-phenomenological perspective then existence always implies that being is actually 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger 1962).

Valle et al argue that to study the lifeworld within existential phenomenology it is necessary to enact Husserl's (1970) slogan 'back to the things themselves'. This is to take the focus away from the world as interpreted by scientific fact and theory and to be concerned with 'the world of everyday experience as expressed in everyday language, this is, with the world as given in direct and immediate experience' (Valle et al 1989:9). This is Husserl's domain of phenomena (see chapter 3). 'Pure phenomena independent of and prior to any reflective interpretation' (Valle et al 1989:9). In contrast to the approach of natural science and cause and effect thinking (see above), which views consciousness as having a creative function, the lifeworld is not a construction of consciousness but is, as described above, co-created between the existent and the world.

The pre-reflective nature of the lifeworld

The lifeworld refers to our experiences as lived through and not the business of reflecting on experience.

'It is because the life world is prior to and the foundation of reflective thought that the existential-phenomenological psychologist describes the lifeworld as being of a pre-reflective nature (as giving birth to our reflective awareness). In this way, then, the lebenswelt [lifeworld] is both independent of knowledge derived from reflective thought processes, and yet, being pre-reflective (*before*-reflective), it is also the indispensable ground or starting point for all knowledge'.

Valle et al (1989:10)

The scientific relevance of this assertion is supported by Arendt (1978) and is discussed with regard to the inadequacy of the natural science approach discussed above. She argues that,

The primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life which neither the scientist nor the philosopher can ever escape, to which they must always return from their laboratories and studies, and which shows its strength by never being in the least changed or deflected by whatever they may have discovered when they withdrew from it.

Arendt 1978:24.

It is the pre-reflective nature of the lifeworld which constitutes the focus of the research. To study the lifeworld of participants I reflected upon the pre-reflective and described their experience in its appearing without presupposition, thereby adopting the phenomenological reduction (see below). Thus I employed the hermeneutics of meaning recollection, which aims at a greater understanding of that which is being analysed *in its own terms*, as opposed to the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970). As Ashworth argues, within the existential phenomenological position the latter is entirely unwarranted.

For it is in the interrogation of the phenomenon in its appearing which allows us to recognise, to verbalise maybe for the first time, the taken-for-granted which always lay right there, unrecognised and unverballed, as part of the phenomenon, and without which the phenomenon would not be itself. Description of the phenomenon then, rather than interpretation in the sense of the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Ashworth 2003a:146

An example of this interrogation of the phenomenon in its appearing would refer to the *eidos* of confidence and its immanent significance in the lifeworld of the participant. The measure of its disabling power in its absence: confidencelessness as being metaphorically disease-laden. These were the features of its verbalisation by myself the researcher in attempting to describe the lifeworld in its appearing (see 'Confidence and its Correlates' chapter 6.).

'Fragments' of the Lifeworld

The lifeworld is seen as a human universal with essential features and as argued in the preceding chapter the task of existential phenomenology as developed by Merleau-Ponty (1962) is to describe actual, empirical lifeworlds. Unfortunately as Ashworth (2003a:147) comments the classic authors within existentialism and phenomenology have not provided a detailed account of the phenomenology of the lifeworld, although there are some useful pointers from the work of Husserl (1970); Heidegger (1962); Boss (1979); Merleau-Ponty (1962); Sartre (1956); van den Berg (1972). To address this shortfall and to aid the praxis of lifeworld description Ashworth proposes various 'fragments' of the lifeworld which enable,

..the detailed description of a given lifeworld to be undertaken in a thorough and phenomenological manner, though it is readily admitted that these fragments together do not yet constitute a full account of the essence of the lifeworld.

Ashworth (2003a:147)

Although the fragments may not provide as yet a detailed and full praxis, commensurate with the level of maturity of the approach (Giorgi 1985:45), they do represent the current state of thinking in lifeworld phenomenology and provide general guidance on the overall description and method in empathetically dwelling with interviewees' meanings.

...any study of the lifeworld can be enriched by analysis in terms of these parameters [the fragments]. Indeed, they can be a basic structure of elucidation of the lifeworld. We contend that the correct approach to 'something' as a feature of the *lifeworld* means that we address the phenomenon as a variant of the eidos 'lifeworld'. There is obviously an infinity of such possible variants, and the selection of a research focus depends on concerns extraneous to the phenomenological enterprise [here it is the mature student's experience of higher education]...Lifeworld has essential features and is a human universal, and it is through the evocation of this structure that a particular empirical lifeworld can be described.

Ashworth 2005:24 (his italics)

The following exposition of the fragments (following Ashworth 2003a:148-51 and Ashworth 1999:708) details the meaning employed by the research praxis (particularly post data collection and data analysis – the fragments treated in such a way as to minimise the infiltration of presupposition) together with an illustration of how this aided the research process.

1. Selfhood

What does the lived reality of studying in higher education mean for the social identity of participants? (see chapter 2.). Here I focussed on their sense of agency, presence and voice. Self-efficacy was seen to increase as they established a greater sense of control and empowerment in their lives, which led to being able to declare their continually emerging self-identity in an increasing array of situations.

2. Sociality

How does studying in higher education affect relations with others? This points up the shifting of the common ground on which relationships can be played out. The shift is inimical for some relationships and energising for others. The nature of intersubjectivities between participants and their fellows and participants and tutors was particularly revealing. The changes in social identity and shifts in relationships were correlated and immanently significant.

3. Embodiment

How does studying in higher education relate to feelings about their own body? Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out that intentionality (see chapter 3. and below) extends to our whole bodily being. For example the way participants carry themselves speaks to the continual relationship they have with their world. The psychological demeanour of pride and presence and the inner emotions that are correlated with this embodied quality are immanently significant for the existent during academic self-development. The existent for example moves from a position of ‘cowering in metaphorical corners’ during the existential discomfort of the early stages of their transition to feelings of personal strength and assertiveness when dealing with authority figures in subsequent stages. The central concept within the analysis of ‘existential pioneerism’ is bound up

with feelings of courage and fortitude. There is also an experienced ‘bodying forth’ to a professional life that interrelates with the temporality of their existence.

4. Temporality

How does the experience of studying in higher education affect the participants’ sense of time, duration and biography? This points up the ecstatic nature of existence and how participants are not locked into a solitary presence, but stand out into the future and the past. Living in a state of heightened temporal transcendence as participants encountered a ‘maelstrom of activity’ and an ‘existential dizziness of the vertigo of rapid change’, which involved a temporalising (i.e. consciousness is drawn to a different temporal dimension) to the past and the future. Here the existent sought the comfort of the past and the fantasised future at times of anxiety and anomie.

5. Spatiality

How is the mature HE student’s picture of the geography of the places they need to go to and act within affected by their situation? A related question would be; in which places can the mature student be a mature student? The aforementioned bi-orbital existence is a prime example of the spatiality fragment of the lifeworld. Existence is characterised by two distinct spaces in which there is a ‘juggling of roles’ and different self-identities are called into being. The fragment of spatiality also relates to temporality as the existent experiences self-transition. They are contextualised in different spaces. The declaration of their on-course (academic) identity in the pre-course (out of college) orbit signals the shift. This is in contrast to the ‘orbital differentiation’ of a previous time, when distinct self-identities were called into being dependent on context (see full analysis in ‘General Psychological Structure’ for the pervasiveness of this phenomenon).

6. Project

How does the experience of studying in higher education relate to the participant’s ability to carry out the activities they are committed to and which they regard as central to their life? Following Harré’s (1983) concept of ‘identity project’ and related also to the Sartrean (1943) notion of ‘project’ the existent continually constructs and reconstructs self in an experienced accelerated manner and undergoes continual

activities of self-improvisation in thought and deed, which is also implicated in the discourse employed.

7. Discourse

What sort of terms does the mature student employ to describe – and thence to live – their life during the experience of higher education? Merleau-Ponty (in O'Neill 1974) has highlighted how expression (including discourse employed) is always an act of self-improvisation in which we borrow from the world, from others and from our past efforts. The pervasiveness of self-development in the General Psychological Structure is signalled by the discourse employed, not only in the emergent change in self-identity, but also in cases where the existent seeks a palliative to the pain of insecurity as the rapidity of change is experienced. The languaging of the pre-course self-identity or the level of 'inertial drag' which is manifest in the employed discourse are examples of the palliatives injected when insecurity is suffered. The increasing landscape of discourse available to the existent however (through the world, others and self) does characterise the holistic horizon of self-identity transition, 'ontological insecurity' (Giddens 1999) notwithstanding.

The usefulness of the 'fragments' then is clearly manifest although the following caveat by Ashworth (2003a:151) was always present in the analysis. This is that 'the seven are all perspectives or analytical moments of a larger whole which is the situated embodiment of the human individual'. They are therefore only to be utilised heuristically in the manner, as Ashworth argues, of major writers such as Husserl and Sartre with 'noema/noesis' and 'en soi/pour soi' respectively, wherein such terms give direction to the researcher and can be of immense value in description.

Ashworth also signals the possibility that the utilisation of the 'fragments' may compromise the phenomenological attitude necessary for valid description and analysis.

It is equally important that the researcher, setting out to investigate a lifeworld, does not use this set of fragments as a kind of 'checklist' – such an approach would hazard the phenomenological attitude by presupposing a framework of investigation in advance of the things themselves.

Ashworth 2003a:156

These important points were at the heart of the analysis in the quest to stay true to the data and to the phenomenological research perspective. The potentially contaminating influence of presuppositions is dealt with in greater detail below. However it must be underlined that the ‘fragments’ were used as giving direction as part of the *holistic* perspective on each individual lifeworld, and were inculcated in the descriptions as each individual lifeworld dictated and not vice versa.

8. PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

Phenomenology aims to ‘remain as faithful as possible to the phenomenon and to the context in which it appears in the world’ (Giorgi and Giorgi 2003:26). The aim of this thesis then is to capture as closely as possible the way in which higher education is experienced within the context of participants’ lives. In order to do this it is necessary to adhere to the process of phenomenological description, which involves the researcher engaging in the ‘phenomenological reduction’.

The phenomenological reduction calls for a suspension of judgement as to the existence or non-existence of the content of an experience. The reduction can be pictured as a ‘bracketing,’ an attempt to place the common sense and scientific foreknowledge about the phenomena within parentheses in order to arrive at an unprejudiced description of the essence of the phenomenon. Phenomenological reduction does not involve an absolute absence of presuppositions, but rather a critical analysis of one’s own presuppositions.

Kvale 1996:54

In this reduction attention is reduced from that which pertains in the ‘natural attitude’ about the independent existence of what appears in experience to the concern with *a description of the appearance itself*. ‘The data of phenomenological research are descriptions of experience as it presents itself not descriptions of objects and actions as they are assumed to exist outside of experience’ (Polkinghorne 1989:49). I therefore analysed the interviews within the phenomenological reduction by taking the

participants' contributions as descriptions of *their* experience, not as statements about an independent reality.

As a result of bracketing 'the natural attitude', the world I attempt to describe becomes phenomenal in nature. 'It is no longer the objectified, physical world, but rather a world-for-consciousness' (Valle et al 1989:11). This echoes the co-creative nature of existence as described above i.e. that there is no world without a consciousness to perceive it and, similarly no consciousness without a world to be conscious of (see 'intentionality' in chapter 3. and below).

The Epochē

To engage with the data in such a presuppositionless way is referred to by Husserl (1970:557) as the 'epochē', in which the researcher sets aside prejudgement, biases and preconceived ideas about the world. He contrasted the phenomenological epochē with Cartesian Doubt (Husserl 1931:110) in that unlike the latter the former does not deny the reality of everything, eliminate everything and doubt everything – only the natural attitude i.e. the prejudgement of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality. Thereby what is doubted are scientific 'facts', knowing in advance (i.e. presuppositions) from an external perspective, rather than knowing from the perspective of internal reflection and meaning. Husserl asserts that,

All sciences which relate to this natural world....I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect.

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Husserl 1931:111

This position echoes two of the points made above. Firstly by Arendt in that all engagements in the world are related to the fact of the primacy of appearance in everyday life and secondly Husserl's slogan of 'back to the things themselves'. In my analysis I attempt to perform the epochē, but as phenomenologists are eager to point out this is not possible in its true state – to reduce my engagement to the transcendental ego, to be totally presuppositionless. However as Moustakas observes,

Although the epochē is rarely perfectly achieved, the energy, attention and work involved in reflection and self-dialogue, the intention that underlies the process, and the attitude and frame of reference, significantly reduce the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgements and biases.

Moustakas 1996:90

This self-reflection and my personal statement on the contaminating influence of presupposition are taken up in detail below (see ‘Positional Statement and Authorial Reflexivity’). It must be pointed out however that the praxis of phenomenology recognises that some aspects of one’s perspective are not ‘bracketable’. Examples of this would include life experiences which may be ingrained to the extent that clear openness is extremely difficult or impossible such that they demonstrably influence the appearance of things and hence the analysis of phenomenologically attained data. This again is addressed in authorial self-reflection below. The main problem however refers to the preordained nature of the research and to what extent this may influence the performing of the epochē and the determination of what should and should not be bracketed.

Performance of the Epochē, Existential Phenomenology and the Non-Bracketable.

The resolution of this issue lies in the adoption of an existential phenomenological perspective following Merleau-Ponty who found it possible to interpret Husserl’s later work in an existential manner.

..in so doing [Merleau-Ponty] enabled the process of bracketing to refer, not to a turning away from the world and a concentration on detached consciousness, but to resolve to set aside theories, research propositions, ready made interpretations etc., in order to reveal engaged lived experience.. Entry into the lifeworld is blocked, in particular by positivist science’s exclusive claims to describe reality.

Ashworth 1996:9.

Guided by this praxis and the conclusions of Ashworth (1999:719-720) bracketing did not include (amongst other similar assumptions):

The assumption of a shared topic: The interviewees/participants were fully briefed on the topic of the interview as being about their experiences during study, particularly with regard to any changes in themselves. However following Ashworth (1996:17) this was treated as a ‘tentative, precursory presumption’, and as such is was thoroughly and continuously scrutinised with regard to how it was relevant to the lifeworld of the participant. It was also held that there was no assumption of any hierarchical ordering of elements in the experience as a whole, thus remaining true to the phenomenological procedure of accessing the lifeworld (see for example Ablamowicz 1992:11)

The possibility of conversing: this refers to the assumption that the world of interaction is meaningful and there is ‘a stock of knowledge at hand’ (Schutz 1967) for it to happen. This and ‘the general thesis of the alter ego implies that other individuals exist, that they are minded beings like oneself, and that they perceive their world in a way very similar to our own’ (Ashworth 1999:720). Without this assumption my engagement with participants in interviews and otherwise would not be possible.

The assumption of reciprocity of perspectives: This is to take for granted that individuals in social interaction can reciprocate by being in empathy with each others’ perspectives on the world as directed by their ‘biographically determined situation’ (Schutz 1962). It was assumed then that interviewees’ perspective of ‘mature-student-doing-higher-education’ then was reciprocal to my perspective as ‘tutor-doing-research-into-mature-students’-lives’.

In sum then;

...certain assumptions are made which are certainly not at any stage to be bracketed. These include the belief that the research participant is a competent human being whose life-world is open to empathic understanding since it shares at least certain baseline meanings with our own life-world as investigators. What the participant in the research reports concerning his/her life-world will, we assume, be meaningful to us.

Ashworth 1999:720

And therefore, ‘what is to be bracketed must be seen in terms of facilitating entry into the life-world, not as a requirement that nothing be presupposed’ (Ashworth *ibid*:720).

Performance of the Epochē and Knowledge of the Literature

A pervasive problem in performing the epochē is the presuppositions that may arise from the researcher's embeddedness into the current state of the literature. Ashworth (1996) has given a comprehensive account of the different kinds of presuppositions that need to be considered when conducting psychological research within an existential phenomenological framework. Amongst them is the question of presuppositions arising from knowledge of previous findings. For this research the bracketing of previous work within the area was particularly significant. In order to assess the contribution to knowledge, reference to the related literature was necessary, despite the possibility that such action may be a prime source of presupposition. With regard to the issue of presupposition arising from knowledge of the related literature there were two main areas that needed to be bracketed. Firstly that the proposed impact on identity of influences in the post-modern world (see Gergen 1991 and chapter 2.) should also impact in any way upon research participants' 'being-in-the-world'. Secondly the levels of intervention into mature students biographical trajectory (as reported in the literature – see chapter 1.) precipitated by the experience of studying in higher education should in any way extend to participants within this research.

As an extra guard against the subtle infiltration of presupposition the literature review was conducted in two distinct phases. Initially the review explored the state of the literature and to see how it could be extended (and hence the contribution to the corpus of knowledge that this research could make). Subsequent to this, and post data collection and analysis, the final literature search explored how the knowledge production herein fits with the emerging literature on 'mature students' in higher education. The interim period when the research corpus was ignored made the bracketing of the research more achievable than if there had been a constant engagement with the literature. The maxim of grounded theory (see for example Straus and Corbin 1990:50) that all existing knowledge should be ignored until after the research has been done was rejected. The assertion to be made is that the influence of presupposition from the literature is extremely minor comparative to the possibility of presupposition from other quarters, not least of which is my experience within the discipline, and my relationship with the participants (see 'Positional Statement and

Authorial Reflexivity' below). In any event there were very few problems experienced with regard to my reading of the literature and the performance of the epochē in the process of being able to hear what the participant said and being able to converse in such a way as to elicit the lifeworld.

Application of the Findings and the Epochē

A related issue also refers to the application of the findings. The possibility that any knowledge produced by this thesis may be used in educational policy (especially with regard to the host organisation) was kept distinctly outside the research parameters (and thereby outside the phenomenological procedure in toto). As Polkinghorne (1989:58) advocates, these points are taken up in the concluding discussion (see chapter 7), but consistent with other issues related to presupposition they were put out of play in the research per se.

9. THE UTILISATION OF GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH AND ENGAGING IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

In further support of the process of constructing the phenomenological description of the lifeworld, within an existential phenomenological psychological framework, I adopted in part the guidelines set out by Wertz (1983). Along with the fragments of the lifeworld, this procedure gave further direction in compiling a comprehensive account. It also was demonstrably consistent with the pervading 'traveller metaphor' (Kvale 1996) outlined above and the phenomenological interview principles identified by van Kaam (1969), also outlined above, concerning the 'lived' relationship with the participant in the reality of life. The guidelines and their influence on the research praxis were as follows.

Features of the basic attitude of psychological reflection.

This 'basic attitude' is an extension of the phenomenological attitude adopted when moving away from the 'natural attitude' and engaging with the phenomenological reduction (including performance of the epochē) thus producing phenomenological description.

Empathic immersion in the world of description: This was done by making the participant's living of the situation my own. The 'joy of study' in the realisation of academic progress or the pain of 'existential discomfort' when first confronting the academic milieu I felt *with* my participants in my conversations and 'wandering with' them through their intrepid journey.

Slowing down and dwelling: This is to stay with each detail until its meaning becomes fully explicit. From an externally oriented and perfunctory perception that the decision to enter higher education may have been a significant, but not particularly portentous decision, by 'slowing down and dwelling' the enormity of the mature student's project becomes fully manifest. This conclusion and the description that accompanied it followed when I reflected at length on the level of risk involved and the potential damning of the individual within their pre-course world should they fail in their quest.

Magnification and amplification of the situation: In relation to slowing down and dwelling the significance of any detail can become magnified or amplified, often through attending to the emotional tone of the experience. From the participant's fear of failure, due to the fall from grace within their pre-course social circle should the worst happen, the far-reaching implications become, on reflection, much clearer. An overarching horizon of 'fear of bad outcomes' ensues and a 'failure anxiety' is experienced. I came to understand how criticism on marked work for example was highly anxiety provoking as it was viewed through the lens of 'failure anxiety'. Similarly the 'spectre of failure' should be kept at bay by ensuring that everything available to do this is recruited to the cause – every handout, every utterance of the lecturer, every reference should be garnered, nothing should slip through the net. Thus the issue of fear of failure is both magnified and amplified to reveal its full extent of immanent signification within the lifeworld.

Suspension of belief and employment of intense interest: 'The researcher must extricate himself from the subject's immediate experience to see its genesis, relations and overall individual structure' (Wertz 1983:206). This is to see the participant's world from their position as a mature student and the actual dimensions of the context in which they live. For example the participant's declaration that one 'doesn't want to lose sight of

their roots' yet at the same time denigrating members of that world where those roots are supposedly present, and further, the employment of an on-course academic discourse, demands a suspension of belief in what is declared. It is necessary to look further beyond the perspective of the participant to see that there is an 'inertial drag' that entails a pull toward that 'land of past content'. It is difficult to let go of the past because to do so is a source of immanent insecurity in the present, strange world of academia. The loyalty to one's 'roots' is not the full story and is in need of deeper analysis.

The turn from objects to their meanings: This is related to the research process throughout. That is to turn to the situation as experienced by the participant. For example to live in the world of the mature student is to be 'an existential pioneer', a tough and courageous being encountering unknown terrors at every turn. An experience that is epitomised by the public interrogation of the dreaded 'seminar presentation'. This is seen as the 'zenith of failure anxiety' as it is a crisis point in which the result is to move on with one's studies or to move out, back to the pre-course world where a devastating loss of face awaits. It is not simply a different assessment mode that addresses a set of specific communication skills. In the lifeworld of the participant the meaning of 'seminar presentation' is very different.

Activities to Aid Psychological Reflection

Wertz (1983:206-211) then extends these features with a series of possible activities to effect psychological reflection (and Phenomenological Description). These activities were employed in the attempt to present as full an account as possible (although it must be noted that any phenomenological description is always 'work in progress' as further analysis can always be brought into view). The activities selected with their deployment are as follows.

Utilisation of an 'existential baseline': 'A phenomenon is not an absolute entity but a difference from other phenomena. The researcher's active interrogation of this contrasting ground of the phenomenon informs him of its contours' (ibid:207). The distinction between the existent's orbits of pre-course and on-course and the related self-identities describes these contours. I worked from the baseline of self-identity

within the lifeworld *before* higher education entered the existential landscape. The transition of self-identity emerges into view as standing out from this ‘baseline’.

Penetration of implicit horizons: This is to reflect upon things not mentioned by the participant but demonstrably present, even if implicit, in the participant’s horizon. Here, through reflection, I addressed the participant’s network of immanent significations that made up his or her lived reality. The influence of the past and the unfulfilling and often embittering experiences of education/school on levels of confidence are revealed on reflection of such networks. The inner drive of the ‘existential pioneer’ and the movement away from the pre-course orbit, together with the conflicts which ensue in domesticity and social life as the existent calls into being a different self-identity, are also brought into this implicit network. The past ‘comfort zone’ of unchallenging predictability is thus penetrated by the arrival of higher education within the phenomenal field.

Seeing relations of constituents: Here I reflected on the correlations of phenomena within the lifeworld and any identifiable issue with the whole. This pointed up the relationship between such things as knowledge acquisition/critical awareness, the ‘joy of study’ and confidence levels and spatial freedom. The existent, buoyant with the on-course achievements, had a greater voice in an increasing array of arenas. Holistically such things were represented by a change in self-identity.

Thematisation of recurrent meanings or motifs: This is closely related to the previous procedure where I identified possible unity and consistency of diverse experiences. This reflection on the data revealed a series of themes that enriched the analysis. For example the ‘deferment to the dominant other’ (correlated with the ‘knowing generalised other’ – this is constituted by all others within the existential configuration) represented the voicelessness and disempowered nature of existence prior to entering higher education. The existent was unknowing and felt unworthy to hold an opinion. Similarly the theme of the ‘overarching horizon of fear of bad outcomes’ represents the relentlessness of embodied pressure felt by the existent throughout their higher education experience in that things will simply not work out well and one must therefore take all measures necessary to prevent ‘bad outcomes’. Such thematic analysis gives unity to both the ‘Individual Psychological Structures’ and ‘General

Psychological Structure'. These proposed structures contain several such thematic features.

Interrogation of opacity: There were some vague areas within the interview that were perplexing. Through special persistence in dwelling with these areas and interrogating their context I began to make sense of them. For example the psychological distancing by the participants from their project when they dismissed academia as lacking substance – 'a game' to be played out by unreflectively following the rules of engagement. Why was such vitriol expressed about something that has taken up so much emotional, cognitive and physical effort? Gradually I came to see that such a view was in the context of the level of risk that their project involved. Such a position eased the pain of 'failure anxiety' and by living this view, through the discourse employed (e.g. 'flannel', 'a load o' arse') – a resurgent declarative from a past self-identity – the existent has a palliative to comfort them when needed.

Imaginative variation and seeing the essence of the case: This activity is of prime importance in existential phenomenological psychological analysis. Here 'one asks all constituents, distinctions, phases, relations and themes if they could be different or even absent while still presenting the individual's psychological reality' (Wertz *ibid*:209). This is to ascertain the essential determinations of the instance's psychology. The thrust is away from facts and measurable entities and toward meanings and essences. Husserl emphasises that 'pure essential truths do not make the slightest assertion concerning facts; hence from them alone we are not able to infer the pettiest truth concerning the fact-world' (1931:57). In imaginative variation then 'free imaginative fancy is coupled with reflective explication giving body, detail, and descriptive fullness in the search for essences' (Moustakas 1994:99). I followed this procedure for both the 'Individual Psychological Structures' and the 'General Psychological Structure'. For example within both structures imaginative variation was practised concerning the experience of first moving into the socio-academic milieu. What was essential in this instance? A different language and unknowns of every kind; students/staff/people/biographies, protocols, norms, activities? Threat, fear, insecurities, a need to deindividuate as quickly as possible? At the same time what of the thrill, the challenge, the overriding sense of 'confronting the formidable'? These descriptions (taken much further in the analysis) were distilled from a range of imaginative fancies and thereby the result of

imaginative variation and the attempt to arrive at the psychological structure of 'strangerhood' (a descriptor itself borne out of imaginative variation).

Languageing: This is with reference to the language I employed to construct the phenomenological description per se. The aim is to be as revelatory as possible about the lifeworld through the use of terms which become in their utilisation psychological. These terms can be from the terminology within the psychological corpus or from everyday language. The basic criterion for use is to be as descriptively accurate as possible about the experiences under scrutiny, and to represent the experience as lived through by the participant. Examples are legion within the various structures (see chapter 6.) but particular illustrative ones are as follows.

- *Epiphanies:* the existent has a revelatory experience that heralds a new aspect of self-identity.
- *Temporal Phasing:* the experience (in the present) of various stages in one's biography as it relates to the higher education experience. From the 'existential discomfort' of the early experiences through to the 'congruence with context' at the time of the interviews.
- *Self-improvisation:* the activity of calling into being a self-identity previously unknown through self-expression. This involves the deployment of new skills and language use and is often associated with public arenas such as coping with perceived higher status social contexts or 'speaking up in class'.

Verification, modification and reformulation: Here I constantly referred back to the interview in order to ensure as tight a fit as possible between the originally constructed conversation (and reality) and my structural descriptions. In describing such instances as 'identity confusion', (when the transition of self-identity becomes palpable and the pre-course self-identity, and the on-course self-identity begin to conflict, and the existent becomes unclear on the question 'who am I?') I returned back to the interview to further explore this constituent. This then led to firstly a verification of the original idea and then to modification and reformulation by looking directly at the discourse to reveal how the confusion is lived through. The existent's oscillation between particularistic discourse of the local vernacular and the more universalistic discourse of

academia served to further enhance the description of the constituent of ‘identity confusion’.

Using existential-phenomenological concepts to guide reflection: The references to the ‘fragments’ of the lifeworld above are clear examples of this procedure. However other concepts were also deployed in the analysis. ‘Bodily forth’ (Boss 1979) was particularly useful in both seeing and describing the existent’s fantasising to future states in the present and providing meaning to their higher education experience.

Both the attitude of psychological reflection and the deployment of various activities to effect this reflection were therefore demonstrably useful in constructing all psychological structures. I reiterate however that these were not deployed as a kind of checklist. They gave direction (as with the ‘fragments’ of the lifeworld above) as part of the holistic description within the ‘Individual Psychological Structures’ and in revealing and describing the essence (in the ‘General Psychological Structure’) of the higher education experience for the mature student, as those individual structures reflected, and not vice versa.

10. THE MOVEMENT FROM INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURES TO THE GENERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE.

For Moustakas (1994:100) the final step of the research process is the integration of individual structural descriptions into ‘a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole’. ‘Essence’ as Husserl (1931:43) employs it means that which is universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is. For many phenomenological studies (e.g., Aanstoos 1987; Palmieri 1990; Yoder 1990; Copen 1992) this approach and the conceptualisation of ‘essence’ is relatively straightforward. In these studies the aim is to elucidate the essential quality of an isolated experience (although this may be correlated with other experiences), e.g. guilt, insomnia, depression. The essence of ‘mature students’ experience of higher education’ is much broader. Within it there are a series of ‘experiences’ which contribute to the overall ‘experience’ and could be studied in isolation as with the above examples. ‘Confidence’, ‘speaking up in class’, ‘shyness’, ‘feeling

psychologically threatened', 'the joy of study', 'domestic conflict', 'being humiliated', 'feeling confused about who you are', 'feeling out of place', 'learning new skills', 'grasping difficult ideas', 'losing interest in your relationships', 'feeling a sense of achievement'. All of these appear in the general structure yet all could be studied in isolation. However the aim of this research is to achieve a composite depiction (i.e. the 'essence') of a mature student entering higher education and moving through the ensuing experience. The research praxis then has to capture all the experiences within the 'higher education experience' of the participants and to establish, through imaginative variation (along with all other activities related above) a structure which identifies the essence of the experience. I prefer however, in order to do justice to the complexity of the described experiences of participants, to use the plural 'essences'. The universality of the 'essences' and each individual 'essence' then is proposed with some degree of flexibility. The search for 'essence' is mainly to specify in detail what is 'definitively significant' or rather 'essential' of the mature student experience and to specify the generality of individual instances should they become apparent in the analysis. In this way for example we may see that 'identity confusion' (or a similar descriptor) as a description of the essence of the whole experience will relate to the individual psychological structure of each participant in differing degrees. Yet 'identity confusion' is present throughout. An illustration of exercising flexibility in the elucidation of essence and 'identity confusion' is as follows. 'Tom' has a profound feeling of dislocation in his living through of life in the pub as a student of criminology and of living through life in a criminology seminar with a past history of 'engagements' with the law. 'Olive' on the other hand has a more benign disturbance to her self-perception, which is manifested in the occasional epiphany of who she has become, yet lived through without the anomie and alarming confusion felt by others. Despite exercising flexibility however the data gathered from participants did reveal the invariants of the overarching experience, and the contributory experiences which make it what it is.

It must also be reiterated that the elucidation of the essences of any experience – in this case the constructions about the phenomena that my participants and I co-joined in describing are never totally exhausted. The synthesis and syntheses arrived at herein represent 'the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher' (Moustakas 1994:100). Husserl concludes that,

...every physical property draws us on into infinities of experience; and that every multiplicity of experience, however lengthily drawn out, still leaves the way open to closer and novel thing-determinations; and so on, in infinitum.

Husserl (1931:54-55)

The structures delineated herein therefore are ‘work in progress’, which could be subjected to further delineation and indeed have already been subjected to a series of previous delineations. Having made this point however the assertion on validity and reliability of the research findings is that another researcher, working within the same framework and following the same praxis, would arrive at a not dissimilar set of findings (Kvale 1996:209). This stated, within postmodern modes of understanding unequivocality is not a requirement, as this position allows for a legitimate plurality of interpretations (Kvale 1996:210).

11. THE CRAFT OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER

Following Giorgi and Giorgi (2003:49) I ensured that I assumed a ‘psychological attitude, the researcher’s role’, which is to be ‘constantly conscious of the fact that a critical other will be reviewing the intuitions being described’. In this way the structures were arrived at through being *role* based rather than *person* based (although myself as a person enabled data collection – see ‘Positional Statement and Authorial Reflexivity’ below). Hence the foregoing detailed description of how this role was accomplished by invoking the fragments of the lifeworld, the basic attitude of psychological reflection and the activities to effect that reflection. These details thereby allow for the transformations in the structural analyses to be verifiable by other researchers to the extent that the transformed expression does describe a psychological process that is in fact contained in the original expression of the participant. This thesis and the research praxis it represents attempts to follow the level of craftsmanship advocated by Kvale (1996), which in its accomplishment renders the findings valid.

Ideally, the quality of the craftsmanship results in products with knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they, so to say, carry the validation with them, like a strong piece of art. In such cases, the research procedures would be transparent and the results evident, and the conclusions of a study intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful and good. Appeals to external certification, or official validity stamps of approval, then become secondary. Valid research would in this sense be research that makes questions of validity superfluous.

(Kvale 1996:252)

This research whilst falling short of this ideal makes a sincere attempt to get as close to it as possible. To do this the various perspectives on validity of interview research as delineated by Kvale (1996:235-252) were invoked, particularly the continual activities of validating the total research praxis through checking, questioning and theorising.

The researcher adopts a critical outlook on the analysis, states explicitly his or her perspective on the subject matter studied and the controls applied to counter selective perceptions and biased interpretations, and in general plays devil's advocate toward his or her own findings.

(Kvale 1996:242)

Through the exposition of the philosophic underpinnings and the epistemological considerations, the details of the research praxis and the explicitness of the reflective positioning (see below) I assert that this critical outlook which Kvale stipulates as central to valid research is achieved.

The extensive exposition of details involved in the research praxis (use of the 'fragments', activities to effect psychological reflection etc.) relate to the conception of knowledge generation within postmodern approaches and how knowledge is conceived, as opposed to the natural science approach and the epistemic underpinning of logical positivism. As Kvale points out,

The conception of knowledge as a mirror of reality is replaced by knowledge as a social construction of reality. Truth is constituted through

dialogue; valid knowledge claims emerge as conflicting interpretations and action possibilities are discussed and negotiated among the members of a community.

(Kvale 1996:239)

12. REFLECTIONS ON THE PURPOSE AND CLAIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Similarly on the issues of generalisability and reliability, these are generally held to be part of a realist perspective on knowledge and the knowledge creation process. As the position presented here is within a postmodern framework and the social construction of reality, these terms are generally rendered moribund. However within the parameters of those set by Kvale (1996: 232-235) some level of generalisability is possible (e.g. through assertational logic as in law) although not necessarily desirable. The emphasis is on the heterogeneity and contextuality of knowledge, and not on notions of universality. This is reflected in the sampling procedure (see below) where the issue of representativeness for potential generalisability was not considered. The sample is chosen as being prototypical of those to whom the findings are said to hold. That is mature students in higher education whose existential baseline, before higher education entered the existential landscape, is characterised by a perceived low level of personal efficacy and a perceived general lack of personal agency and voice. (See 'Lack of Agency as Essence of the Existential Baseline' in the 'General Psychological Structure' for a full description of this prototypicality.) The emphasis was on identifying *exemplars* i.e. examples of what human beings of a particular biographical background 'go through' as a result of doing higher education. It must be noted however that this was done with the overarching aim of *describing the structure of the experience* and not to describe the characteristics of a group who have had that experience. More specifically the purpose of the research was to 'produce clear, precise and systematic descriptions of the meaning that constitutes the activity of consciousness' (Polkinghorne 1989:45).

13. INTENTIONALITY.

Central to this discussion of consciousness is the concept of intentionality. Within existential phenomenological psychology consciousness is regarded as a 'making present'. It is, 'that forum in which phenomena show themselves or are revealed' (Valle et al 1989:11). Consciousness then always has an object (that is not consciousness itself) and is said to be intentional in nature or to be characterised by *intentionality*.

Intentionality is the essence of consciousness...and it means that consciousness is always directed toward some world or other (the real world, an imaginary world, the dream world etc.). Strictly intentionality means that all acts of consciousness are directed to objects that transcend the acts themselves (a perceptual act perceives a perceptual object; loving is directed toward a loved object, etc.).

Giorgi and Giorgi 2003:31

Intentionality is made up of two experiential foci, noema and noesis. The noematic focus is the 'what' of the experience e.g. the seminar room. The noetic focus 'contains those referential elements dealing with how each individual's various affective and cognitive biases add further elements of meaning to the experience' (Spinelli 2002). For example, the influence of a mature student's perception of their own intellectual capacity as inadequate and the perception of the socio-academic milieu (along with the seminar room) as a threatening place. So the significance of any object of consciousness, as William James (1950) pointed out, is not just due to its reference to the external thing, but is also due to the ongoing themes of awareness i.e. its personal relevance to the existent/mature student. Also any object of awareness, according to Husserl, is 'affected intrinsically by the whole web of its meaningful connections within the world of experience' (Ashworth 2005:3). The seminar room for example has meaningful connections to participants in their whole cognitive and affective history of such a situation e.g. past school events, images of academia, public speaking etc. Translated to the research praxis then the researcher considers the participant's experience in two ways. Firstly what is the experience of? And secondly what is the manner in which it is experienced? The researcher examines 'how it is that the

experience is what it is, under what conditions it appears, from what frames of reference, and what its possible meanings are' (Moustakas 1994:60). It is necessary then that the two 'poles' of the intentional correlation must be described. 'A systematic phenomenology is not allowed to direct its aim one-sidedly at an analysis of what is really inherent in mental processes and specifically of intensive mental processes' (Husserl 1931:308 §128). This position is reflected in the methods described below. For example the conduct of the interview and the nature of the prompts, questions and issues that were raised. The resultant descriptions therefore embrace the whole process of existents' intentionality. The methods of other sciences (such as natural science informed by logical positivism) produce information about objects and human activities as they are supposed to exist in themselves, outside of human experience. The methods within this research thesis investigate another realm of reality, that which 'comes into being at the intersection of consciousness and the world – human experience' (Polkinghorne 1989:58).

It is important to distinguish between Husserl's identification of 'intentionality of act' and 'operational intentionality'. The former refers to the reflective level where we voluntarily take up a position toward an object. The latter is more relevant to this research as it refers to the prereflective. This entails taking a position toward an event that is discoverable only in being lived through since it manifests 'a pre-predictive unity of our life and world' (Giorgi 1999:44). I therefore attend to the operational intentionality of mature students as they take a stand with respect to higher education (e.g. the seminar room, the lecture, the terminology, the dreams of the future, the memories of their past life etc.). Husserl (1977) acknowledges that investigation such as this is a difficult business hence the foregoing discussion of the research attitude and the mental positioning this involves. The above consideration of the Existential Phenomenological Psychological approach is now applied to the practicalities of the research process.

METHODS

1. INTRODUCTION

The following discussion sets out the enactment of the research process from the early stages of the research journey through to data analysis. It should be noted that the pragmatics consistent with the nature of the existential phenomenological research also evolved such that each stage was emergent and thereby informed the subsequent stage. I begin with the first stage criteria of the selection of participants and how this process evolved with second stage criteria being invoked before giving a transparent account of the following stages. The results of this process are then presented in chapter 6.

2. THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The context in which the research was conducted is described in the introduction (chapter 1.). The sample of research participants is related to the kind of research procedure followed. The purpose of phenomenological research is to elucidate the structure of the experience under consideration (taking into account the above discussion on the need to exercise flexibility). In order to achieve this, the selection of participants aims to generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analysing the phenomena under scrutiny. Commensurate with the aims of the research then participants were selected to effect maximum variation, as practicalities would allow.

To fully capture the higher education experience it was necessary for the research design to have some longitudinal elements. This is with particular regard to the lifeworld fragments of temporality and project. The existent's experience of time and sequence in their developmental experience of higher education was a research focus, and necessitated that the research would span an externally designated period of time

(i.e. culturally identified and quantified), along with an internal experiential designated period of time (i.e. the existent's experience of time). (This resulted in the emergence of the journey metaphor and 'existential pioneering' at the data analysis stage.) With reference to sampling, this means that the availability of participants in the long term, or at least medium term had to be addressed by the sampling rationale. Consistent with the performance of 'the epochē', the 'voyage of discovery' philosophy also guided the research. This meant in effect that 'theoretical sampling' (Mason 1996:93) was employed. In this way the sample could be subject to longitudinal analysis, and still be open to change as the research evolved.

In order for participants to have longitudinal involvement, sample selection was initially based on those participants who were most likely to complete their course of study. Theoretical sampling dictated that they *might* provide the data required and if not then a change of participants or of approach may be required. The research diary carefully delineated how and why such decisions were taken – along with the accumulation of other data compiled by the researcher outside the interview method. Such data were gathered by myself as an insider researcher and involved on-going participant, overt and covert observation (see researcher-participant relationship below). The emphasis however was almost completely on the data acquired from the interviews, although other data played a not insignificant role in the research (see for example the poem submitted to the researcher at the conclusion of 'the General Psychological Structure').

To ascertain the capacity of participants to complete their course and thereby to select the sample was a difficult process. The only guide at this first stage (for there are many variables influencing participants' progression) was my own experience of who *appear* likely candidates to complete the course. Seeing into the future is not possible, but past experience gave some guidance. It was noted however that should participants not complete, it would not necessarily mean that their involvement up to their departure would lack relevance. In terms of the research foci at the planning stage (e.g. broadly threats to identity and the effect of identity change on relationships), their contribution to the research would be just as important as participants who did complete. The rationale was that their reasons for leaving may be as rich a source of data as that generated from continuing participants.

Predicted completion however was not the only criterion for sampling. Other criteria were identified that effected 'maximum variation', including 'outliers', (Miles and Huberman 1994), The most important criterion here was that of age. This refers to the initial setting of the 25 to 45 range as the most significant in relation to the literature. The chief steer refers to identity change, as the literature highlights that from young adulthood to mid-life is the period in the life cycle where identity is most susceptible to dramatic change, within higher educational experiences (e.g. Wakeford 1994). However the earlier caveat of the emergent nature of the research remained influential. As things evolved participants were included outside this range. (Indeed Silverman (2000:108) argues that such flexibility, present throughout the research, is one of the great strengths of qualitative research design.)

With reference to 'maximum variation' both genders and various ages (including a 20 year-old traditional entrant) were selected (see table A). Discussion groups were held as a brainstorming session to introduce the research and to gather areas of inquiry loosely related to the research foci. An aide memoire was then constructed on the basis of these discussions, although this was not a strictly defining instrument of conversational direction (see conduct of interviews below). Some potential participants decided to opt out at this stage. Finally 12 participants were chosen to participate in the decisive interviews, through invoking 'maximum variation' and the foci of the research. There was some representation of the various socio-economic backgrounds and students from the two chief curriculum areas (Humanities and Social Sciences) were selected.

Although generalisation to a population is not to be attempted here, the 'essences' of the mature student experience in higher education, which can be revealed by this research praxis, can be usefully applied outside the research domain. As Alasuutari has argued:

Generalisation is ... [a] word ...that should be reserved for surveys only. What can be analysed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand ...

Alasuutari (1995:156)

The concluding discussion (see chapter 7.) that remains outside the research praxis makes reference to how the research findings can inform policy. Such considerations may go some way to providing explanations, and establishing a wider resonance - an enterprise that Mason (1996) argues should be increasingly the aim of qualitative research. This is to conjecture that the analytical themes that are revealed by this research might raise questions worthy of fuller enquiry among larger populations.

Further criteria directly involved pragmatics. Given the research foci it was clear from the outset that there would be intimate engagement with the public and private lives of participants. Much depended then on the quality of the relationship between researcher and participant - a parallel of the tutor and tutee relationship (see full discussion of this relationship below). Within this model the researcher's self is seen as a crucial resource to *enable* the research. Trust and personal compatibility are therefore important elements within this relationship, given the levels of self-disclosure involved and the power imbalance between the researcher/tutor and the participant/tutee. This crucial issue was borne in mind when entering into a contract with potential participants.

Finally consideration was given to the skills of the participant and their capacity to enter into the research process in such a way as to generate the required data. My prior knowledge of the participants went some way in ensuring that they had the required capabilities and to do this the proposals made by van Kaam (1969) were invoked, which were as follows.

The ability to express themselves linguistically with relative ease. All chosen participants could employ a variety of styles of discourse both from their local accent and dialect and from an emerging language learnt as part of their studies.

The ability to sense and to express inner feelings and emotions without shame and inhibition. The relationship and rapport I had nurtured with the participants made this possible and participants themselves were extremely forthcoming in this sensitive area. The individual psychological structures and transcripts are testament to this.

The ability to sense and express the organic experiences that accompany these feelings. Participants were keen and able to relate many such experiences along with the emotions that they went through often reliving them in dramatic fashion in the interviews.

The experience of the situation under investigation at a relatively recent date. The situation was being experienced as we spoke. Participants were in the midst of the experience as the research was carried out.

A spontaneous interest in their experience. There was assiduous engagement with the topic and how it related to them.

The ability to report what was going on within themselves. There were some difficulties here which we worked through in the interviews. The difficulties themselves and our exploration of them were in fact an additional source of data.

The position taken then at the outset, with regard to sampling, was that the research was to be emergent and sequential and therefore decisions regarding the sample were to be made as findings evolved. This may have even meant accessing participants who had graduated, although as things evolved this was not necessary. The guiding criteria for sampling at the first stage then were; maximum variation, predictable completion of course, socio-emotive compatibility (a trusting and sustainable bond between researcher/tutor and participant/tutee, with features similar to those described by Rogers (1951) of non-possessive warmth, genuineness and empathy), and possession of the skills required to generate data. These were generic criteria however that embraced all participants. There were more specific reasons for selection however and these are detailed below.

The Emergent Nature of the Research and the Choice of Participants

With regard to the research foci participants were selected for their particular life situation as the following list demonstrates. These decisions were made due to my knowledge of the individuals prior to the in-depth interviews and as a result of data gathering in participant observation and/or in the group discussions. I reiterate however that although selection was driven by the reasons given, this reasoning was assiduously bracketed during the research process, although it had already entered the research domain. This is to say that the reasons for their inclusion were not presupposed as immanently significant in the lifeworld.

Tom

Tom is a 45-year-old divorcee who lives with his current partner. His children are now grown and have left home. He left school at the first opportunity with no formal

qualifications, and up to entering the course had worked in the construction industry as a labourer. He also ran a part time DJ business, which continues on an ad hoc basis. He has a large group of friends, whom he has accumulated through his main pastime of drinking in pubs. Following his divorce pub drinking was the focus of his life. He has a criminal record for violent behaviour associated with football hooliganism. An injury sustained at work prompted him to re-evaluate his position in the job market with regard to his age and led to him enrolling on an Applied Social Studies degree course. To enter academic life then, especially studying criminological issues and to change time structuring and life trajectories in such a contrasting manner proposed a rich source of data.

Yvonne

Yvonne is a 20-year-old who lives at home with her parents and a younger brother. She enrolled on the course directly from school sixth form where she gained 4 'A' levels. She has a current boyfriend who has one young daughter, and he is very supportive of Yvonne's academic work - a variant on the experiences of other participants. She had a negative experience of school in that she struggled with self-esteem (attributed to school staff – see analysis) and as a result almost declined the opportunity to enter higher education. She is what is often referred to as a "traditional" entry student, having matriculated at "A" level and then gone straight into higher education. Her selection was due to the useful variation in that she had travelled some distance since her school experiences and yet was not classed as a mature student. This it seemed would be a useful comparator as she lay outside the age range reported in much of the literature.

Belinda

Belinda is a 28-year-old mature student, and now lives with her parents and her young son from her first and only marriage. She lives in a middle class area of town and commutes to college on most days. She married early and took on low status employment (shop work) in order to be able to live with her boyfriend, whom she subsequently married. The job was seen as a necessary evil in order to accomplish the aim of being with her chosen partner. This was viewed as inconsistent with the family history in higher education as many of her extended family and her sister had been to university. The marriage lasted around 2 years and shortly after her divorce she enrolled for an Access to HE course, which led to her present position. She is currently

studying for an English Language and Literature Degree. Her selection typified that invoked in the 'species' approach of the literature although her social background was a useful and interesting variant. The shift from 'shop work' identification to a trajectory of future professional status indicated a transition consistent with the research foci.

Tracey

Tracey is a single parent in her late twenties taking the social psychology pathway of an Applied Social Sciences Degree. She has a son of pre-school age by her first and only husband from whom she is now divorced. She is now a lone parent living with her son in rented accommodation. Prior to entering HE she had a job that was dissatisfying in that there was no expected development, and she felt isolated in a predominantly male environment. In order to institute change in this personal and professional inertia Tracey studied for 'A' levels at an open learning centre. Following some success in study, she decided to apply for her present degree course. I was particularly interested in her declared level of resolve and 'can do' attitude to life, and given her journey thus far she presented as someone who would be extremely useful in exploring transition.

Lilly

Lilly has been with her partner for 16 years and they have been married for about 12 years. She has 4 children including a ten-year old boy Leon. Other than for a short time in hairdressing most of her working life has been as a mother and housewife. She is currently taking a Criminological Studies Degree and although in her second year as a full time student, she has been studying for about three and a half years having taken HE "taster" courses (30 hours at level 4. i.e. 10 credits of the first level of a degree)) prior to commencing her degree. She began study in order to institute a change in her life although she was very unsure of the nature of change she wished to pursue. Study suggested some kind of development with the possibility of beginning a professional career. Lilly typified the research literature into mature studentship especially with reference to her perceived role prior to entering the academic world i.e. mother/housewife, and presented as someone who would be a rich source of data on identity change.

Hattie

Hattie is a recently divorced single woman in her early forties with 2 teenage daughters. In the past she has worked as a manager in industry. She has recently moved to Doncaster prior to her divorce and is having some difficulty in coping financially with her present position. She has taken work at the local pub to both ease her financial situation and also in an attempt to integrate into the local community. She has also taken part time work with a young offenders' agency, again for financial reasons, but also because this fits with her criminology degree studies. Prior to starting the course she did an Access to HE course. The pragmatic nature of her project I found particularly noteworthy in that unlike her fellow participants this was a means to an end at the outset, rather than a mission of self-fulfilment or psychological transition. I was interested in the existential concerns that might ensue from her initial business like approach.

Maureen

Maureen is a single woman in her early thirties. Since leaving school, where she only had moderate success, she made steady progression in a sales career, but ultimately found the job unrewarding, and further progress difficult, due to the male dominated culture. Following the end of a three and a half year relationship, and motivated by a long held wish to study, she enrolled as a mature student on a GCSE psychology course. Finding this extremely enjoyable she decided to do take matters further and considered doing a degree. Maureen lives some distance from the college in Hull and as there was no provision that could meet her needs locally, she enrolled at the college for a Criminological Studies Degree and commutes from home. Her position provided a useful variant to other participants in that she had a perceived successful career that was psychologically unfulfilling and came to this project with similar aspirations to others, but with a significantly different biography. Her lack of contentment was aligned to meaningfulness per se and not her perceived status.

Wendy

Wendy is in her late thirties, married with 4 children. She came into the course with no prior qualification and typifies the course's marketing approach and value added philosophy of "no prior knowledge assumed". It was for this reason that she was selected. What was the nature of the intellectual or cognitive shift and its correlates?

She lives in a local working class area, and her husband is a manual worker. She had previously been in part-time work, but her main occupation prior to entering higher education was that of housewife. Her sister had recently completed the course and it was through this link that she had decided to attempt the same project. Her involvement also presented the possibility of data related to relationships as reported in the literature.

Lucy

Lucy is divorced from her first and only husband and lives with her two children, who are both of school age. She has separated from her second partner shortly after starting the course. The split was acrimonious. Presently she is largely financially dependent upon her parents in that they own her house and she only has her student loan and state financial support for her children. Lucy is in her mid thirties and is studying for a degree in Applied Social Studies. Before entering the course she had completed an Access to HE course concentrating on psychology and sociology. She describes her pre degree life as being a mother and doing very little else. This self perception of a previous temporal dimension intimated a study of temporality which would be revealing by contrasting the past with the present – is she *now* a ‘mother’ and little else? Her position also echoed the literature with regard to a dependent working toward independence.

Nancy

Nancy is in her late twenties, single and in a long-term relationship of 9 years. She has 4 ‘A’ levels, and for the last few years prior to entering the course she was travelling with her partner in the Far East. During this time she was employed as an English language teacher, having done a TEFL qualification before leaving the UK. She came back home specifically to do an English Language and Literature degree and enrolled for this at the college. Her partner is doing a similar course at Sheffield University. Due to financial constraints she cannot live full time with her partner and therefore lives with her parents. She enjoys a positive relationship with them, despite the difficult circumstances. There are several family members involved in education, including her father and her boyfriend's mother who are lecturers. As well as following her course at the college, she is also employed by the college as a part-time language tutor. She therefore represented the embodiment of ‘maximum variation’ in that her biography

was a vast contrast to other participants and appeared to be an inverse process of independency to dependency.

Olive

Olive has two children by her first marriage and is currently living with her long-term partner who is studying with the Open University. She is in her mid-thirties and prior to entering higher education she had what she describes as a good job which was “never going to go anywhere”. Her financial situation is relatively comfortable in that she has strategically planned for the economic reality of at least three years on low income. There is a significant history of HE experience in her family. She is studying for a Criminological Studies Degree and the interview was conducted around half way through her course. Olive has a very pragmatic perspective to her project. It was this almost mechanistic approach that I found particularly interesting. What would the affective dimensions of her experience reveal? Would transition simply be seen as a skills acquisition exercise or would there be other significant horizons in her transcendence?

Doris

Doris is a 29-year-old divorcee who lives locally with her 2 children from a previous and now ended long-term relationship. She has worked in manual jobs for local firms and returned to education through an AS psychology course, and then an “Access to HE course”. She has been a single parent for about 4 years, and has had several relationships that have failed to last (she refers to them as her “Exes”). The father of her children is still in contact with her, although this has proved very stressful, as he can be intimidating. He has a criminal record for drug offences. She is studying for an Applied Social Sciences degree. Doris assumes a child ego state in her interactions. This presented a clear opportunity to study levels of agency within selfhood, as part of the notion of transition. Apparently adept at using this self-positioning (invoking parental style help from others) it was potentially a source of useful data in how Doris would move from it, or remain within it, in any perceived transition.

The final sample is tabled below.

Table A

NB Stage of study relates to a 6 semester course. 2 semesters per level, Graduation takes place following successful completion of all semesters

Pseudonym	course	age	Interview 1. Stage of study	Interview 2 Stage of study
Tom	Soc Science	45	Semester 4	
Yvonne	Humanities	20	Semester 4	
Belinda	Humanities	28	Semester 3	Semester 6
Tracey	Soc Science	28	Semester 4	
Lilly	Soc Science	36	Semester 4	Semester 6
Hattie	Soc Science	42	Semester 4	
Maureen	Soc Science	37	Semester 4	Semester 6
Wendy	Soc Science	36	Semester 4	Semester 6
Lucy	Soc Science	34	Semester 5	
Nancy	Humanities	27	Semester 5	
Olive	Soc Science	27	Semester 4	
Doris	Soc Science	26	Semester 4	

The criteria for conducting a second ‘follow up interview’ (see participants in bold above) were related to ‘theoretical sampling’ highlighted above, wherein I decided that these participants had provided rich data during the first interview which could be expanded upon to enhance the research. They had raised several issues that were worthy of revisiting and from information and data generated from the first session it was predicted that there would be further insight to be gained into the central notion of transition from further data gathering.

3. THE CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEWS.

All interviews were conducted as close to conversational style as possible (see Kvale 1996). However before arriving at the individual interview stage there were other tasks to be completed. Following Colaizzi (1978:58) I had undergone a long and involved self-reflection on the living through of higher education as a mature student myself and as a teacher of mature students. This process had revealed the research topic (see ‘Personal Background and the Research Imagination’ chapter 1. and positional statement below). Again as Colaizzi advocates, a pilot study was conducted and this

revealed that many students were only too ready to co-join in this project. It became clear that the benefits of the course and the perception of self-development as a result of studying higher education were issues that were very close to their heart. There was therefore very little encouragement needed when invitations to take part were announced. I was fortunate to have a ready and plentiful supply of participants.

The first step was to establish discussion groups to explore the general ideas of the research and then distil the broad range of potential topics down into a manageable set of foci. The groups were self-selected in response to a meeting of those interested. In the end there were five such groups who attended and as they were assembled by the potential participants themselves this assured that discussion would be forthcoming as the members were comfortable in each others' company. The potential participants were fully briefed on the envisaged course of the research design with special reference to the interview and the possible use of data obtained from other methods. The latter would include such things as observation, their own contributions through noted down thoughts and feelings, written messages to myself with information they would prefer to communicate in this way. A particularly poignant example of the latter concludes the 'General Psychological Structure'.

These group interviews were recorded and then subjected to a brief thematic analysis. From this analysis a series of potential foci were drawn up in the form of an aide memoire, which was then used as a prompt fail-safe measure rather than a semi-structured interview instrument. It was a useful tool to open up discussion and as a reminder to return to the research foci whenever discussion did wander away from the topic (in its broadest sense) or as a prompt when on the few isolated occasions conversation dwindled. However participants were already very much focused themselves on what they wished to talk about and befitting the emergent nature of the research this was welcomed and encouraged. They were aware of the research foci from the briefing and discussions in the group interviews and along with their emotional engagement with the research topic the generation of relevant data caused few problems. Consistent with the phenomenological approach however, although interviewees were aware that the interview was 'about something' – and they were aware of what this 'something' was – I took great care to remain open to the presence

of new and unexpected constituents in the description. I also endeavoured to ensure that the questions I posed were not framed in such a way to reflect ready made categories.

Rather than seeking general opinions, the interview focuses on specific situations and action sequences that are instances of the theme under investigation so that the essence [or essences] or structure of the theme will emerge and show itself.

Polkinghorne (1989:49)

The Researcher-Participant/Interviewer-Interviewee/Tutor-Tutee Relationship.

With regard to the sensitivity of the ground to be covered in the interviews as it relates to the research foci, it is important to consider the relationship between the interviewees and myself. This was pre-existent in that I was a tutor of all the interviewees, and the interviews were therefore based on a sustained relationship, which had given prior access to the ongoing lived experience of the participants as mature learners. Rapport then was very much in place. Clearly however there was a great power differential. According to Altheide and Johnson (1998) every setting is socially stratified, and this was particularly the case in our relationship, which was often compounded by the gender difference. These issues had to be resolved to some degree in order to validate findings. There are a number of factors that mitigated the influence of gender and hierarchy.

First, the relationship between the participants and myself had developed within the context of a course that had an informal and gregarious culture. The relationship per se mirrored that ethos. Second, prior to the interviews, and with these problems in mind, I made overtures to develop rapport and build up trust e.g. by engaging socially and sharing experiences of mature studentship and life generally. Third, the traits of sensitivity and emotionality (within an existentialist framework) are very much part of the foci of the research questions, and thus cut across traditional ideas of gender characteristics (see Oakley 1974). Fourth, in relation to this I have a background in counselling and consider myself to be skilful in displaying empathy when confronted with socio-emotional issues. In effect, as a tutor responsible for pastoral care, it was a role I played almost everyday – often with women (who finally constituted 11 out of the 12 participants), who formed around 80% of the client group. The important point

here, as argued earlier, is that my *self* was a crucial resource, and as such it was a strength rather than a limitation. It *enabled* the research. Fifth, I endeavoured to emphasise that the participants' role in the research was that of *co-researcher*. This attempt at equality was more than cosmetic as I asked them to consider all experiences which they saw as related to the research foci (for which they had been fully briefed) to count as data. Indeed, in the interview I stressed the point that the discussion could be led by the *qua*-interviewee explicitly by inviting them to lead the discussion, and implicitly, through my non-verbal style (see points on non-verbal communication below). As King observes,

...the relationship is part of the research process, not a distraction from it. The interviewee is seen as a 'participant' in the research, *actively shaping the course of the interview* rather than passively responding to the interviewer's pre-set questions

King 2004:11 (my italics)

Sixth, I endeavoured to maintain language which was accessible to both parties, encompassed in much of my self disclosure, which often was a reciprocation of co-researchers' disclosures. This follows Oakley's (1981) dictum 'no intimacy without reciprocity' and the attempt to minimise status differences to open up the human side of interactors, and to establish the freedom to explore intimate and sensitive issues.

Non-verbal aspects of the interview situation were attended to after Gorden (1980) to prevent any 'sanitisation' (see details below). Moreover this protected the interviews from becoming disembodied discourse, with the constant reminder that both parties are living persons suffering emotions as the talk developed. Throughout, the approach in the interview was directed by the theoretical focus on the interviewee's lifeworld. The craft of interviewing developed gradually as the interviews progressed supported by experience in active listening techniques e.g. the interviewer's counselling background. This was necessitated by the utilisation of the 'researcher as research instrument' orientation advocated by Kvale (1996:125).

This relationship and the related interviewing style effectively set in train an interaction where the interviewee felt safe enough to talk freely about many personal and often

painful experiences and feelings. For the most part this was successful in granting me, as the researching interviewer, access to the interviewee's lived meanings. These were not only communicated by words, but also by the tones of our voices, expressions and gestures in the natural flow of conversation (see for example 'Lilly', final comment in 'Individual Psychological Structure').

Pragmatics

As outlined above the interview was approached as a conversation, following Burgess (1984 chapter 5.), who argues that the interview as a conversation is seen to give greater depth than other research techniques (a main desideratum of this project). Moreover it was based (as Burgess advocates) on a sustained relationship between the participant and researcher. This is due to the pre-existent relationship between the two, fully described above, which in turn contributes to the 'sharedness of meanings' (Fontana and Frey 1998:68) in which both parties come to understand the contextual nature of the interview. There was a tension here however between the closeness of myself and the interviewees/co-researchers and the positioning of myself in a presuppositionless state. This is taken up in detail in 'authorial reflexivity' below. However for the present discussion, I was a largely a stranger to the private worlds which were opened up to me as the interviews progressed and I always endeavoured to hold a presuppositionless perspective even though this was not always achieved. This included a line of questioning which strove for examples and elucidation on points of interest. Sometimes these examples were to fully describe experiences which may have been glossed over in their living through (e.g. they didn't seem to matter at the time) but in the interview their significance became more apparent to both parties. Sometimes it was a case of relating concrete examples of a particular experience (feeling, anxiety, stressor). When I entered areas which may have seemed obvious due to my closeness to the situation the interviewees/co-researchers understood this positioning as part of the pre-research activity and followed the questions as far as possible as if I was unfamiliar with the situation. In the enactment of the research however their outpourings of data were energetic and fulsome. For the most part they were only too ready to relate their journey to me in all its richness.

As I already had some intimate knowledge of the ongoing lived experience of the participants as mature learners, albeit far from complete, rapport was very much in

place. Nevertheless I did pay close attention to such interview features as non-verbal communication, after Gorden's work (1980). Thus the following aspects were implemented:

Proxemic: spatial setting of the furniture and the use of an environment in which the participant was very familiar, and where conversations and counselling sessions had previously taken place.

Chronemics: attendance to the usual pacing in conversational style, characteristic of the usual everyday interaction between researcher/ tutor and participant/student.

Kinesic: the attempt to replicate body movements and posture as identified in successful counselling theory, and used by the researcher in establishing empathy in everyday lived experience with the participant.

Paralinguistic: continuing the use of the everyday voice patterns and endeavouring to maintain 'normal' pitch, volume, quality etc.

Other aspects of non-verbal behaviour were also considered, especially the presentation of self by both parties with regard to such things as dress – the 'normal' work/college attire.

Other attempts to establish rapport and indeed trust (although as outlined above, much pre-emptive work was evident here) involved levels of self-disclosure by the researcher. This included visits to the student bar to chat with participants involved in the wider project, and taking up invitations for pub-crawls around the local town. My presence thereby became naturalised and became 'the way things are', which along with building up rapport also gave me the opportunity to engage in more informal conversation and to gather data as a participant observer.

Within the 'interview as conversation' however a more planned technique was utilised. I opened up proceedings with a personal and genuine description of changes to self, particularly with reference to existential issues such as the ageing process, the experience of time, the quest for meaning in one's life (including being a mature student myself) and how these influence everyday life – sometimes on a *very* personal level. The objective here was to establish rapport through reciprocity, and to entrust the participant through the disclosure of personal information, simultaneously opening up a social psychological contract between interactors. It also was to ensure, as far as

possible, that the discussion would not become ‘sanitised’ (Burgess 1984:105) and deal with the ‘gritty realism’ at hand.

The formally arranged interviews as conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim using a consistent convention. They were then subjected to data analysis (see below).

4. FIELDWORK

The conduct of the fieldwork was essentially done as participant observation as described by writers such as Denscombe (1998:139). This was not only a useful source of data, but also helped in establishing rapport and indeed trust as it involved levels of self-disclosure by the researcher. The process included visits to the student bar to chat with participants, and taking up invitations for pub-crawls around the local town (an onerous task indeed!). The main context however was the participants’ course of study per se. Here I witnessed their everyday presentation of self and was intimately involved in their own experiences of their course life. We often engaged in conversations of the trials and tribulations of mature studentship with reference to the issues that now feature in both the individual psychological structures and the general psychological structure. All noteworthy points were recorded in the research diary to be returned to during data analysis and/or were related to the content of the interviews. Examples of this are legion but two main themes were confidence and relationships. The former was particularly salient at such times as assessment preparation (especially the assessed seminar presentation) and the latter was an ongoing theme as participants related their constant negotiations with domestic partners and friends on course related issues.

This aspect of the research praxis then had a pervasive influence upon the construction of the individual psychological structures. The data which emerged on an informal basis, such as during the normal everyday life of the course and in “off-course” contexts (student bar etc.) were reflected on in the research diary and influenced the data analysis as I came to know participants and their lives more intimately. The many times I revisited the arranged interview recordings and the insights this increasingly

presented into participants' lives also dovetailed into the information I acquired during participant observation.

5. ETHICS

At the initial stages of the research process the proposed rich and detailed character of the required data would mean intimate engagement with the public and private lives of individuals. Also the 'emergent and sequential' nature of the research was considered in that it may present unexpected ethical dilemmas. The following ethical procedures were therefore taken.

- Informed consent following a full briefing on their involvement and right to withdraw at any time.
- Use of pseudonyms for all people involved and referred to.
- Dissemination of findings and feedback
- On-going support for participants.

The latter needs further elaboration. This is with particular reference to codes of research ethics on beneficence and non-maleficence. What influence would a detailed conversation on personal change, which includes probing and the resultant consciousness raising, going to have on the lived experience of an individual? Holstein and Gubrium (1997:114) refer to interviews as 'interpretively active, meaning-making occasions'. I had therefore to carefully address the problem of meaning construction in the research enterprise.

Discussing postmodern interviewing Fontana and Frey (1998:62-63) refer to 'Interpretive Interactionism', which involves the element of *epiphanies*, described as, 'those interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives [and] have the potential for creating *transformational experiences* for the person' (Denzin 1998:15). I took the position that should the focus of the research fall on life experiences (epiphanies), which shape the meanings participants give to their lived experience (and undoubtedly it would here given the foci of the research topic), then this could have severe implications with regard to beneficence and non-maleficence. This would be especially so in the meaning-making cauldron of the open-ended conversational interview. It is of

course easy to hide behind educational philosophies of the empowering nature of self-realisation (e.g. personal growth, academic aspiration etc.) and that involvement in research on identity projects can lead to new 'freedoms', as people discover new aspects of themselves. At the same time however one should tread warily when dealing with sensitive issues such as relationships and future aspirations. From the transcripts and the individual psychological structures for example a recurrent theme is confidence. 'Belinda' has become a self-actualising, vibrant, independent, socialite, who made many references to relating to 'blokes'. This image was constructed as the interview progressed. Is this part of the identity project she sees for *herself* or is this joint construction, which I am now a party to, a result of this research? This is to say that although the cultural milieu (Higher Education) and 'Belinda' herself construct her identity, to what extent is this research culpable in the same construction? And does this image thus constructed become inimical to important aspects of 'Belinda's' life, and one that 'Belinda' herself may (as say a mother) unconsciously regret? This serves as an example of the possible outcomes of the meaning-making business of interviewing - a process interviewers must be ever mindful of. My reaction to this fundamental issue was to always endeavour to allow the participant to remain autonomous in their self-revelations through a line of questioning that did not lead in an overly zealous way, but sought to understand. This was in the quest to do some good e.g. to understand mature learner's experiences and thus provide greater support, and to prevent harm e.g. creating meanings related to self, which in turn create unwanted and unwarranted changes to self and lifeworld.

As a tutor with formal responsibility I was in a position to provide the necessary support should problems arise. I could do this either directly or indirectly by ensuring that participants were cared for through the college's support services. In hindsight fortunately this was not needed. At the time however the implications of the potential research effects were thoroughly thought through. All participants were fully briefed at the outset and following the research. They were also sent copies of publications that emanated from this thesis. Furthermore I continue my relationship with them, taking an active interest in their present lives and careers.

6. DATA ANALYSIS – A SUMMARY

Much of the preceding discussion is related to this process. Within existential phenomenological psychology the analysis of data refers to the transformation of the original descriptions given by participants into a statement using psychological terms to describe the phenomenon being investigated.

The transformation ‘goes through’ the everyday linguistic expressions to the reality they describe, and then it redescribes this reflective reality in the language appropriate to a phenomenologically based psychology.

Polkinghorne 1989:55

‘Going through’ concrete expressions in the interviews to the experience itself was accomplished by the range of activities detailed above. In summary this meant attending to the fragments of the lifeworld (Ashworth 2003a), adopting the attitude of psychological reflection and engaging the praxis to effect this reflection (Wertz 1983), emulating the interview research craftsmanship advocated by Kvale (1996), performance of the epochē (as far as possible) and pervasively working within the framework of existential phenomenological psychology (e.g. invoking the concept of intentionality to inform the descriptions). Ashworth (2005) in his discussion of contemporary phenomenological psychology conceives of an axis of methodological style between the approaches of Giorgi (1970, 1999) and van Maanen (1990, 1991).

Giorgi’s...is relatively tight methodologically and has something like ‘essences’ in view, aiming by empirical work to arrive at essential features of such things as anger, loneliness, and different modes of learning....Van Maanen....is more literary in style, less prescriptive methodologically, and arrives not at essences but lengthy and extremely illuminating accounts of particular kinds of human situation.

Ashworth 2005.

The research praxis here can be construed as lying between the two poles of this axis and erring toward the prescriptive when deemed necessary e.g. the invocation of Wertz’s (1983) procedure and the use of meaning units (see below), and erring on the

side of the literary when appropriate e.g. in metaphorical description and employing the words of literary/artistic figures to represent meaning e.g. Shakespeare, Houseman and Van Morrison. There are however further points to be made about the process of data analysis.

The first entails the treatment of the data gathered with regard to retrospective description. The participants were remembering what happened and attempted to describe this experience to me. How should this affect the transformation to the psychological structure? Firstly the manner in which situations stand out in memory is psychologically revealing and certainly the vigour with which participants entered into conversation about their past experiences highlighted the meanings that were significant. More importantly however the fact that participants were in memorial mode for much of their expressions has no bearing on the epistemological claims being made. These claims are, as underlined throughout this chapter, based solely on how situations were experienced or remembered by participants. Within the phenomenological reduction epistemological claims are made only for how things *presented themselves to participants* not for how they actually were. Data analysis and the transformations produced were the result of this epistemological position.

This stated, it is still problematic that the data collected is several times removed from the actual flow of experience. As Polkinghorne (1989:46) points out, 'the initial nonreflective engagement with the flow of experience (the object of study) is replaced by the self's relocation to a point of observation that is removed from that experience'. I am therefore left with the inevitability of the situation. However I reiterate that memorial mode still is a fair filter for significance when participants select out those experiences which are most near and dear to them, and this significance is represented in the emotional and cognitive depths of their report.

Secondly there is the issue regarding the treatment of the transcript itself and how it featured in the transformation. As Kvale points out transcriptions are 'artificial constructions from an oral to a written mode of communication' (1996:163) and as such are only to be used as a tool for a given purpose. This was as a record of what happened in the meaning-making cauldron of the interview-as-conversation. The status of the talk then is crucial. Ong (1982) outlines how thought and expression of a

primarily oral culture is close to the human lifeworld; situational, empathic, participatory, additive, aggregative, agonistic etc., whilst a written culture is characterised by analytic, abstract, and objectively distanced forms of thought and expression. In this way the transcripts were viewed as abstractions from their base in social interaction and during data analysis were treated as such. They were seen as 'detemporalised – a living, ongoing conversation frozen into a written text' (Kvale 1996:167). The emotional tone which made the interview data reflect how the interview was lived through was therefore supported by the recordings to which I returned on many occasions when producing the transformations. Significant non-verbal expression was also included in the transcripts. These activities and caveats then allowed me to relive the interviews and stay as close to the data as I possibly could, thus transforming participants' expressions into the individual and general psychological structures.

Finally accompanying the process detailed above (and summarised within this section), the procedure outlined by Kvale (1996:203) of 'Ad Hoc Meaning Generation' was invoked. This entailed, *inter alia*, diagrammatic representations of the lifeworld (see Boss 1979) that helped analyse spatiality and temporality e.g. 'the shifting common ground of relationships', and the deployment of 'meaning units' after Giorgi (1975) for some areas of the analysis as deemed necessary e.g. to unpack large sections of complex text and expression or when something appears which runs extremely counter to expectation. The use of techniques such as coding frames was rejected as it may have been inimical to the process of seeing what was there by unduly pre-determining observations.

Data analysis then again reflects the traveller metaphor and the postmodern approach introduced at the outset. I am not trying to discover a truth and a fixed meaning, but to engage in a process which 'emphasises descriptive nuances, differences and paradoxes' (Kvale 1996:226). The quest for 'the real meaning' then is rejected. The concept of truth is that it is *made* and not something to be found.

With a postmodern move away from knowledge as correspondence with an objective reality toward knowledge as a social construction of reality there is a change of emphasis from observation of, to conversation and interaction with, the social world.

Kvale 1996:289.

Producing the Transformations

To effect the transformations from the living through of the interview through the individual structures and then attempting to arrive at the eidetic in the 'General Psychological Structure' there has been a tussle between elucidating the descriptive detail, whilst trying to give an account of the essential in its purity. As the following exposition indicates important descriptive elements are not sacrificed in the attempt to reveal the eidetic yet at the same time the eidetic *is revealed* when this can be made apparent. This is in the quest to describe the lifeworld of the mature student and the eidos of the mature student experience, whilst acknowledging the tussle which can ensue when striving to explicate both. However to support the eidetic description the reader is directed to other references in the individual psychological structures.

To exemplify the transformation from the lived reality of the participants' contributions through to the emergence of those contributions in the individual and general psychological structures, the following pathways through the research journey illustrate the various stages in the analysis. The deployment of the 'fragments of the lifeworld' (see above under section 7. 'Lifeworld'), the 'features of the basic attitude of psychological reflection' and the 'activities to aid psychological reflection'; and thereby existential phenomenological description (see above under section 9., 'The Utilisation of Guidelines for Conducting the Research and Engaging in Phenomenological Description') are italicised to aid transparency of the process.

The analysis in concrete terms was conducted as follows. The whole transcript was read through in conjunction with the data gathered from the fieldwork to 'get a feel' for the lifeworld. (Although this connection was only made on some occasions, as the analysis evolved - the interview was taken as central, with other information 'filling in the gaps' as necessary. Also this other information often drove data gathering rather than remained as data per se e.g. an issue raised outside the interview was explored within it). The interview was then read through line by line summoning up the actual lived through interview as this was done. The meaning was then explicated through imaginative variation in the attempt to reveal the lifeworld in its appearing. The fragments were invoked as this happened as an aid to describe as accurately as possible the phenomena before me. What was existence like for this person? How did they

suffer in these situations? I listened repeatedly to every word and its nuance to empathetically immerse myself in their world constantly asking the question; ‘if I was this person in this situation saying these words then what would the world be like?’ This is not only to ‘walk with them’ (converse) but also to attempt to almost *be* them. This is consistent with the co-constitutional nature of existence as described by Merleau-Ponty (see chapter 3.) in that our sociality blurs the distinction between the ‘I’ and the ‘not I’.

This procedure in turn lead to a ‘magnification and amplification of the situation’ as described by Wertz (see chapter 4 section 9 above), which revealed immanently significant features of the lifeworld. For example the ‘fear of bad outcomes’ which was a nagging feeling of failure in tackling the seemingly inexhaustible supply of self-improvisation tasks which came one’s way – the existent nicely manages themselves through a piece of group work and feels reasonable comfortable with her performance - ‘I wasn’t a complete dunce there’. Next she is immediately confronted by a lecturer who asks her to lead a group in discussion and report back to the class at the end. If she doesn’t do it with enough credibility to feel at one with herself afterwards, that she belongs (that is not to feel out of place (spatiality), to feel strong enough (embodiment) to move on etc.), the outcome could be disastrous. So the crucial question ‘what if I fail’ resounds around the whole of existence in this roller coaster world of self-improvisation. I emphasise the descriptor ‘bad outcomes’ in that the existent almost precipitated a feeling of negativity that was correlated with their embodied anxiety. This is to say that despite never actually having ‘failed’ in any objectively defined way, this fear of failure remained as their perspective on performance. The outcome of any performative task, jaundiced by anxiety, was always a *bad* outcome at this stage in their journey (in the subsequent temporal phases this was altered as the overarching horizon of ‘the joy of study’ prevailed), and therefore the fear of the next outcome as being *bad* was maintained. As I read through the transcripts and immersed myself in this way the fear was almost tangible –, as was the sadness, the joy, the anger, the fun, the confusion, the warmth, as their journey was told to me.

The analyses in the pathways are examples of the first stage of the process. The second stage was to take these and craft them into the individual structures (see appendices). What is revealed here then is a written representation of the existential-

phenomenological construction of the structures at a first level which were then taken to a second level of written analysis – the individual psychological structures. It is in effect the interim level of thinking between the reading of the transcript/listening to the interviews/reflecting on all other data, and the written description of the lifeworld. It should also be noted that these isolated extracts of discourse are treated as relating to the *whole of the lifeworld in its appearing* and reference is made to other data as necessary.

PATHWAY 1.

Linguistic expression with described mood.

Doris reveals the following energetically and declaring frustration at a particular incident. She is however calm and almost dismissive of her new found voice in public speaking.

.in seminars yeah when I... think of a point. When I first started I wouldn't say it in case it sounded really stupid. Y'know and er nine times out of ten somebody else'd think of it and say it and everyone would say 'oo yeah'. And I'd think 'oh I should have said that' you know it dunt [doesn't] sound stupid. But I were that scared that it might sound stupid I never said anything... so I'd stay quiet, whereas now I'd say it anyway.

Doris (p.6. Lines 23-28)

Analysis: Individual Psychological Structure

What is the lifeworld in its appearing? Which fragments of the lifeworld assist this analysis? Firstly it is evident that within '*selfhood*' Doris has a greater sense of *presence* and *voice*. She can live conspicuously as opposed to a previous self-identity of cowering in metaphorical corners (i.e. with regard to '*spatiality*' and '*embodiment*' – she feels/used to feel safer in a deindividuated position). 'Whereas now I would say it anyway' still does not declare that she feels fully confident in her self-improvisations and the use of discourse which effects this (the '*discourse*' fragment – the engagement with seminar talk in her living through of the situation). However given the existential baseline ('*utilisation of an existential baseline*') of the before course stage as she

temporalises (*'temporality'* fragment) to a time when she 'wouldn't say it in case it sounded stupid' there is a sense of transformation here – a self-improvisation. With regard to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) position on self-improvisation there is a borrowing from the world (*'using existential-phenomenological concepts to guide reflection'*) as Doris lives through her transformation from deindividuated positioning to conspicuous positioning. The social milieu (*'sociality'*) in the co-constitutionality of the existent and the world (*'being-in-the-world' – using existential-phenomenological concepts to guide reflection'*) impacts upon her project as she intends (*'intentionality'*) academia in all its manifestations as she plays and *becomes (the state of becoming: 'existere' – using existential-concepts to guide reflection)* 'academic-student-using-academic-language' (*'languaging'*).

The saying of something which was not 'sayable' (*'languaging'*) in another temporal dimension also suggests that the living of discourse which allows one to speak as a different person now increasingly means that one becomes that different person. The previous alarm (suggests an embodied shock - 'I were that scared' - and a need to respond to danger to self – *magnification and amplification of the situation*) at speaking in seminars – as one does as a student, but cannot as the existent of the before course phase who does not do such things - is now severely reduced if not eradicated. There is no alarm raised in the face of this formidable ordeal involving threat to identity – as someone who potentially sounded stupid and therefore was stupid as one had publicly declared it as so (*'penetration of implicit horizons'*). This release engenders greater sense of *agency and voice ('selfhood')* which has significant implications in an overall horizon of 'the fear of bad outcomes' (*'languaging'*). The following is to employ the *'thematization of recurrent meanings and motifs'* in the analysis.

The zenith of this sense of threat – the overall horizon of 'the fear of bad outcomes' - a 'fateful moment' in the existent's *'project'* (fragment) and which typifies other similar occasions, and which Doris feels is implicated in her feelings of pride and to live proudly, is her living through of a particularly important seminar presentation. (It was assessed and video-taped). This *embodied* many facets of earlier "petrification" (the intense fear of her early self-improvisations – *'seeing relations of constituents'*). The glare of others as she publicly demonstrated her abilities and skills (or lack of). The possibility of failure both in formal assessment and in the more subtle realms of losing

face in the public arena (not being able to play “academic student” – ‘*empathic immersion in the world of description*’). The cumulative affect of feeling out of place (‘*spatiality*’). The implications of not bettering these facets would be devastating. The presentation was a crisis point (*suspension of belief and employment of intense interest*). The result, movement forward or move out and an end to her identity project (‘*project*’). This position of embattlement with her fear of failure and the potential hurt she could feel (‘*embodiment*’) at the actions of others is a driving force within her lifeworld. She has won many battles and this not only fills her with pride, but she also feels stronger (‘*embodiment*’). The extract then in sum (and in relation to the lifeworld as a whole) declares a confidence to be able ‘to do academia’ (*linguaging*) as opposed to a previous self-identity when she was unable ‘to do’ and as such presents greater *agency, voice* and *presence* and a palpable stage in her *project* of being.

PATHWAY 2

Linguistic expression with described mood.

Lilly is talking about change here and recounts one significant point when she became aware of a contrast to her previous self-identity. She is in buoyant mood as she describes the experience.

In my presentation... That was petrifying because I hate doing that. You know I thought Linda [fellow student] was much more confident at doing it than me. And when I went in I was hanging on to papers and normally my hands would be shaking but they weren’t. And I thought I can stand up and speak.

Lilly (p.4. Lines 44-48)

Analysis: Individual Psychological Structure

What is the lifeworld in its appearing? Which fragments of the lifeworld assist this analysis? A particularly significant experience within Lilly’s series of life changing events (‘*project*’) was the ordeal (‘*the turn from objects to their meanings*’ – as myself-as-a-tutor the extent of the ‘ordeal’ may not have revealed itself as such, perhaps merely seen as a irksome, anxious task) of doing a formally assessed presentation to other

students. Lilly was particularly reticent when contributing in a public forum (*'spatiality'*) because of her doubt in her ability to perform the task of public speaking credibly (*'use of an existential baseline'* – she doubted her ability before this experience, in her pre-course life). The experience however was something of an epiphany in the scripting (*'linguaging'* – 'scripting' is a metaphor suggesting that in the existential baseline the script was written for her – her life was pre-ordained by others, whereas now with greater agency she plays a part in the 'scripting' of her biography) of the college self (*'selfhood'*). *Embodiment* is particularly significant here in that she expected to be shaking with fear but the epiphany of the moment was that she was far more relaxed. This *embodied* moment revealed that she had moved on from a previous stage in her biography (*'temporality'*) to a greater sense of *agency, presence and voice* – she 'can stand up and speak' and previously she could not do this (*'empathic immersion in the world of description'*)

The reflection on the experience evolved the college self by one more step in a series of steps, many of which have left only a fleeting memory, yet cumulatively have instituted significant change (*'temporality', 'selfhood' and project*). Lilly is caught up in the process of self-improvisation (*'linguaging/use of existential concepts'*) here. It is an enactment of trying out being a different person (*'seeing relations of constituents'* - this enactment was present in other spaces e.g. change in parenting style). This is particularly the case in public speaking and displaying a self-identity of academic/professional presenter/speaker. This experience is immanently significant for her self-creation and illustrates the phenomenological position of the "I" as an impermanent construct (*using existential-phenomenological concepts to guide reflection*). The on-course Lilly has supplanted the pre-course Lilly (*'spatiality'* – the deployment of a differential space metaphor used throughout as 'pre-course and on-course orbits' – *'linguaging'*)

Transformation of Pathways 1 and 2 to the 'General Psychological Structure': An Illustration.

What is essential in both these cases? Can the *eidos* of the Mature Student Experience be described? These are two instances of self-improvisation and temporality that can be

located in the lifeworld of all participants (*'imaginative variation and seeing the essence of the case'*).

Self-improvisation: There is an ongoing calling into being of a different person as the existent intends the socio-academic milieu. The seminar presentation is a prime example of this as one employs the discourse to speak as a different person and *to become* that different person. (see also 'Belinda' p. x and xiv) The languaging⁷ of this new identity is also an anxiety ridden business requiring courage and openness to new demands made upon self. There are severe risks here which are correlated with potential failure and the attendant embodied and palpable fear (especially with regard to this particular piece of self-improvisation of public speaking). The risks relate to the lifeworld as this is a crisis point. The result either move on as a capable student or move out and back to the pre-course orbit and the immense loss of face before one's pre-course others who one has attempted to leave behind in a perceivably pretentious aspiration.

Temporality: Consciousness is drawn to another temporal dimension in making sense of the present living through of an experience. The self-identity called into being at any moment is contrasted with a previous self-identity. The existent has a tangible understanding that they have realised a change in themselves through their actions (see also 'Hattie' p. xxxi). They have moved forward in their project as manifesting a new and inchoate element of themselves (see also 'Lilly' p. xxxviii). In this case it is the capacity to play academic student through a discourse and demeanour previously unknown. At this moment they are now what they were not before.

PATHWAY 3

Linguistic expression with described mood.

Tom is in an excitable state as he, on the one hand enthuses about change, and then switches to a more sombre confused mood, exasperated by the inability to carefully tie down and relate the pace of transition that he has experienced.

⁷ Languaging here refers to the activity of the existent in living through an experience and not to languaging in the activity of analysis which is signified in italics.

....Well it were just a completely change in lifestyle. Because everything I know it's...it seems to be flyin' by. That first term seemed so compact with everything in and so much to do. Just changing. Just changing your whole life. Like we were sayin' earlier. Your whole attitude is changing. Everything were changin' but deep down inside I were tryin' to make out that it weren't if you know what I mean yeah? Like I say earlier when we mentioned it. 'have I changed'. You'd ave to ask somebody else I think. Cos I refuse to believe I have but I probably have. I probably have.

Tom (p.5. Lines 43-50)

Analysis: Individual Psychological Structure

What is the lifeworld in its appearing? Which fragments of the lifeworld assist this analysis? '*Slowing down and dwelling*' – the central feature of this extract refers to an acceleration of self-identity construction and an attendant disturbance to biographical narrative. This refers to the fragments of '*temporality, selfhood and embodiment*'. How can this be described in detail?

The construction of Tom's on-course identity here is declared with reference to the pre-course orbit ('*spatiality*') and is related to the rapidity of change ('*temporality*'). The speed at which his 'improvisation of self' is taking place adds to the problem of 'identity confusion' ('*linguaging*'). The whole pace of this period lived in the present is such that there is a blurring of his multifarious experiences into one tempestuous narrative. This acceleration of biography occasions the need for stability through clinging to an 'old self' – 'I were trying to make out [my self] weren't [changing]'. This confused state and the need for stability – the re-establishment of the 'protective cocoon' is an immanent signification of Tom's transition (*utilisation of an existential baseline* – transition from this baseline as experienced in the present moment).

The following is a '*magnification and amplification of the situation*'. The unsettling presence of the past in the present ('*temporality*'), where Tom feels a sense of rapid and holistic change ('*embodiment*'), means that he is confronted by many questions such as how to act? Who to be? (This is taken from related data – '*seeing relations of constituents*'.) To establish stability in this heady mixture and to maintain "the core of

accomplished normalcy” – the ‘Umwelt’ (Giddens 1999 – *‘using existential-phenomenological concepts to guide reflection’*), Tom languages his on-course experience through his ‘old’ self. He refers to his own work as ‘a crock of shit’ to be self-effacing with other students (*‘selfhood and sociality’*). His early experiences of engaging with academic perspectives are recalled as, ‘these arseholes actually believe what they are saying and it’s a load o’arse.’ (*‘Discourse’* - to live the situation.) This pre-course discourse helps cope with the confusion (*‘penetration of implicit horizons’* – there is a radical conflict between his celebration of course experiences, seen here in this extract and in other data, and these denunciations of them). It comforts Tom (*‘embodiment’*) in the confusing present (*‘suspension of belief and employment of intense interest’* – initially there could have been an interpretation of Tom’s remarks which relate to an open denigration of academia or I could have seen this as a comforting strategy. The latter would raise the issue of whether my own perspective as an academic tutor was effectively bracketed and not seeing the essence of the case i.e. academic/theoretical material viewed as verbiage. After invoking Wertz’s guidelines I concluded that it was in actuality the latter and not the former. The denigration expressed by Tom was a comforting palliative to the overarching horizon of confusion and anomie – *‘linguaging’*.) This reasoning then is a result of *‘verification, modification and reformulation’*.

PATHWAY 4

Linguistic expression with described mood

Doris begins calmly reflecting on her biographical position in the first extract but becomes increasingly more agitated as she attempts to resolve the conflict between a perceived allegiance to her ‘roots’ and her exploits within education, deemed to be exterior and antipathetic to those ‘roots’. This agitated state is more prevalent in the second extract. Also beyond this stage she becomes mildly aggressive as she becomes frustrated on being unable to resolve this perceived conflict. I put it to her that she continually employed her local vernacular in our conversation, distancing herself from the academic culture of her course of study (*penetration of implicit horizons*).

...we were talking about this yesterday you mean convergence and divergence. Yeah I've wrote it down.

Doris (p.10. Lines 21-22)

Analysis: Individual Psychological Structure

What is the lifeworld in its appearing? Which fragments of the lifeworld assist this analysis? Through '*suspension of belief and employment of intense interest*' reference here can be made to the '*discourse*' used to live the situation. But this needs to be framed in a wider context embracing other data ('*seeing relations of constituents*'). Holistically there is an order of confusion in her lifeworld. She defers to her pre-course orbit, desperately refusing to distance her self from her "roots" ('*spatiality*'). And "rooted" in this orbit she improvises her self within the on-course orbit. Declaring that she has changed and feeling a sense of pride in her successes, both formal (e.g. assessed work) and informal (e.g. making contributions in seminar discussion – a sense of '*voice and presence*'), yet adhering to her everyday discourse which thereby spans both orbits. She lives on-course as she lives pre-course. (This is a '*magnification and amplification of the situation*'.) How is this manifest in her discourse? The grammatically incorrect, "I've wrote it down" is from her local vernacular, yet it is co-joined with a point on socio-linguistic theory. The conflict is minimised through the rationale that she is in "professional mode" at college and "me at home" ('*spatiality*'). She effectively switches identities ('*selfhood and spatiality*'). But how does this switch operate? Even when she espouses on the "professional me" it is lived through within the security of the "me at home".

..I think that now I'm finding I can be more meself [myself], on the professional side [laughs] because am [I'm] used to it now. I'm used to getting education aren't a [I]. Am used to it now.

Doris (p.12. Lines 47-48)

'*Interrogation of opacity*' through a focus on '*discourse*': Paradoxically she links strongly here with "me at home" discourse, despite consciously exploring "the professional side". The exposition of being professional is referred to as "on the professional side" which is an expression located in the local vernacular ('*thematization of recurrent meanings and motifs*' – the drag towards her 'roots'). A local may say 'on

the plus side' (expressing an advantage) or 'it's a bit on the boring side' (it tends to be boring). The stress in amplitude on 'used' and the repetition of the phrase 'am used to it now' is also a particularistic technique to create emphasis and thus make a point. The reference to her course work ('getting education aren't a') is also firmly located in the local particularistic discourse. She does not refer to the process as 'studying' or 'higher education' or 'working at degree level'. Education, consistent with her particularistic perspective, is something that one 'gets', and not something that one 'does'. She ensures that her self-expression has the safety of her 'roots', her pre-course life, her pre-course orbit and self-identity. This discourse is prevalent throughout the interview, despite her interlocutor being a tutor ('sociality'), a member of the academic world. She chooses to diverge rather than converge (even displaying an understanding of this phenomenon), as for her, divergence is safer, even though accommodation to the interlocutor is the usual option (see 'Accommodation Theory', in Bourhis and Giles 1977). The 'big words' and the emergent academic, on-course self-identity are disturbing and confusing. In Spinnelli's (1989) terms she clings on to 'sedimented beliefs and view points' (lived through, and lived by, reference to her particularistic discourse) for security, yet conversely she has an openness to experience as she strives ('temporality and project') for change in her project of self-reliance ('project'). Ironically this project incrementally leads to identity confusion and feelings of misplacement and insecurity ('spatiality').

Transformation of Pathways 3 and 4 to the 'General Psychological Structure': An Illustration.

What is essential in both these cases? Can the eidos of the Mature Student Experience be described? Within both analyses there are three potentially describable features of the lifeworld which are essential in both instances. These are 'heightened temporal transcendence', 'identity confusion' and 'inertial drag' ('imaginative variation and seeing the essence of the case').

Heightened temporal transcendence: The existent temporalises to a different (mostly the past) temporal dimension in the moment of the experience in the interview and the beyond the instance recalled in memorial mode. This is with a

striving to cope in the present with the pace of change (see also 'Tom' p. lxxxvi) and the need to maintain or re-establish the protective cocoon or the core of accomplished normalcy needed to feel comfortable and to go on in everyday life. This is done with directing consciousness to a past self and the pre-course orbit.

Identity confusion: The pace of change, the heightened temporal transcendence and the temporalising to the past (in particular) presents a resounding existential question of 'who am I?' 'Who have I become and who am I becoming?' This is a source of embodied discomfort and insecurity (see also 'Doris' p. xxvi). The existent is thrown into disarray on this important existential question.

Inertial drag: The existent then attempts to cling on to the past at times of instability, presenting identity confusion in the present (see also 'Lucy' p. lii. on her oscillation from pre-course to on-course identities). Whereas at times in course experiences the past can have an unsettling presence in the present (tending toward the early stages, when guilt and shame plagues existence) at other times (tending toward the recent past i.e. well into the developmental journey) the past provides emotional comfort. The use of a past discourse (e.g. the local accent and dialect) to live through the present represents this ameliorative temporalising.

7. POSITIONAL STATEMENT AND AUTHORIAL REFLEXIVITY

As stated above the position I adopted as researcher is role based as opposed to person based. However I also claim that my self was used as a research instrument. The person I am enabled the research through the relationship I had with my research participants. The purpose of this section is to resolve these seemingly contradictory positions.

The basis of the resolution lies with one main feature of the research praxis: I played the role of a phenomenological researcher, engaging in the craftsmanship that the role required but I was also a friend and tutor. These came together as a positioning of 'insider researcher' in the interview and in the other situations of data gathering. Therefore whilst role based I was also *person oriented* during data collection. Within

the framework detailed throughout this chapter this positioning and the knowledge generated is strongly aligned. It is necessary however within the epistemological claims of the research to leave a complete track record for a critical other to follow. This, it is argued, addresses the charge of not being scientific due to the dependency on the subjectivity of the researcher (Giorgi and Giorgi 2003:48. Kvale 1996:285-289).

The relationship between researcher and researched has been dealt with, as have the various assumptions which lay outside the ambit of bracketing. Other assumptions that may have influenced findings therefore need some explication. Firstly the notion of 'subtle realism' (Hammersley 1992) which stresses that we must accept the position that whilst research investigates independent, knowable phenomena we cannot have direct access to those phenomena as we rely on cultural assumptions. The research is fraught with such cultural assumptions from the initial decision to even suppose there is a phenomenon of 'change in identity' (and perhaps going further than this, that there is such a thing as self-identity however conceptualised!) to the construction of the aide-memoire and the resultant interview. One particular example, which serves to make the point, is the assumed high status of academia, and of the desirability of high status knowledge - 'knowing' in 'Belinda's' terms. This assumption along with the notion that movement into academia is tantamount to 'self-fulfilment' is a central focus of the research. From the phenomenological perspective however, for both interviewer and interviewee this is their reality, their 'situated knowledges' (Hammersley 1992), expressed in the construction of the interview and here in this present commentary.

Reflections on the Praxis.

Reflections on assumption, presupposition and issues related to the positioning of researcher and the researched are categorised below into those relating to myself, and those relating to the participants. This categorisation is only for the purposes of explanation as in reality there may have been overlap.

Reflections related to myself

Myself as a mature student: Having studied for a degree at the age of 26 (followed by a higher degree) and having experienced the revelations that ensued with regard to my worldview, I was in empathy with my participants' academic journey. However it was necessary to set aside any assumptions that they would have similar experiences. My

own biography had partially informed the foci of the research, but these were taken as a set of tentative, precursory presumptions and broad flexibility was exercised in the process of allowing issues to emerge. Once I could relate to their experience through my own life experiences this had an energising effect on the research process and allowed me to enter into a warm and understanding relationship. This gave me access to some deeply emotional and personal information.

Myself as a tutor in a position of power: Power and gender issues are dealt with above with regard to the tutor-tutee/researcher-participant relationship. This explication however was 'before the fact'; in that the influence of power was to be minimised at the planning stage. The question here relates to the influence of power on the research findings 'after the fact'. How then did my position as a tutor, who had power over the participants as the assessor of their work, influence the research findings? How could I, as an establishment figure, who they possibly perceived as being able to impact on their academic project in many other more subtle ways (e.g. influencing other assessments, withholding supporting materials, generally underplaying the level of academic support that was given to other students), have influenced their responses and their contribution in the research journey. Was their involvement for example purely driven by self-promotion and/or responding in such a way as they perceived desirable. It was very possible that in the early stages of the research participants' involvement may well have been driven by their motivation to be seen as playing 'good student'. As we delved further into our journey however this ceased to be the case. Any involvement was driven by their interest in a project that they came to view as having merit of itself. Participants I believe did take on an intrinsic interest in the research. Their contributions however were probably, in many subtle and covert ways, influenced by the power dimension. They did for example single my work out in a positive light and never in a negative light e.g. recalling teaching sessions. They did appear to worry about making reference to my colleagues, despite the confidentiality of the situation. I believe I countered this to some extent in my overtures toward genuineness, and it is clear that there were a whole range of negative points made about their experiences, and how this was related to the course, and thereby indirectly to the work of colleagues and myself. Some were explicit in their dislike of some personnel. The level of social desirability then was effectively minimised, yet the power relationship, both structural and psychological, is likely to have had an impact with some respondents more than others. Certainly this would have been absent if I had been an outsider researcher, but

then the rapport and intimacy and access to participants' interiority would not, I feel, have been as extensive.

Myself as a tutor/educationalist: I had to be mindful that the purpose of the interviews was to enter the participant's lifeworld and bracket my values of education as a worthwhile activity. My own principles related to the philosophy of the educational enterprise (e.g. that learning is generally a good thing to enter into) were also taken into account in that they should not lead me to be judgmental and thereby prevent me from seeing what was there. Therefore as a tutor/educationalist any mental conflict that arose with regard to my professional *raison d'être* was to be resisted. This was particularly useful when we entered areas on their perceptions of the purpose and nature of higher education. There were times however when I railed against what I perceived as unjustified dismissal of staff efforts. No doubt such embeddedness in the educational culture will to some extent have coloured my perceptions and rendered some potentially revealing issues opaque.

Myself as a psychologist: The bracketing of existent theory and psychological knowledge in its broadest sense was extensively ensured, although at times this was a difficult task, particularly with the language that was at hand. To put out of play theoretical terms and the thinking that goes with them had to be resisted. At times however the 'psychologising' of issues did slip through, but this was not over-concerning. On reflection I did see what was there without any major prejudgement (e.g. jumping to a psychological, theoretical conclusion) of things that were presented to me.

Myself as a friend: The possibility of prejudgement here relates to my knowing of the individuals who were now participants. I knew them well and this was good for the rapport and trust that were essential ingredients in the doing of the research. I was however intimately embedded into a shared world with them and there was tension here when positioning myself as a naive stranger asking telling questions about their experiences which were sometimes part of the taken-for-granted knowledges of our world together ('why ask this surely that is known by all of us?'). Therefore as a friend I had to work at letting their stories be in their appearing and to bracket prior knowledge (as far as was possible given our sharedness) to see them in a new light. I tried hard for example to not assume or predict any hierarchical ordering of elements within their consciousness. This is illustrated by allowing the immanent signification of 'confidencelessness' to emerge as central to their world, whereas presuppositions may

have led me to focus more on such things as domestic strife and relationship breakdown. This stated, it is likely that our history of friendship will have led to some subtle assumptions being made, despite my best efforts. Although I was a friend I was not a close friend. This enabled sensitive issues to be discussed, but the professional frisson that was present (me as a tutor/researcher/psychologist) meant that the interaction, whilst being intimate as two friends conversing, was business-like to the required degree.

In sum then there was a range of potential pitfalls with regard to presupposition and in the end mistakes were made, and it is highly likely that presupposition did at times infiltrate the research process. Due to my social-psychological proximity to the context and to the participants' co-constitutionality of self and context, I had to work hard to retain a conceptual and critical distance from my co-authors' accounts. In relation to this, to be a person – an essential feature of the chosen research process - with habit and ingrained life experiences no doubt did influence all activities I undertook. This stated, useful data were generated and the analysis was completed following the process and activities outlined herein. Generally it was a painless and at times joyful process. As Husserl (1977) points out however, the most significant presupposition is that one can achieve a completely unbiased and presuppositionless state. The value of the epochē principle is that 'it inspires one to examine biases and enhances one's openness even if a perfect and pure state is not achieved' (Moustakas 1994:61).

Reflections related to participants.

In Husserl's (1977) contemplation of supposition in the phenomenological reduction there are two points that relate to the research participants. Firstly that what appears to be appearing is actually appearing and secondly that the appearing person is actually appearing. Linking these two points to the research I am supposing that the participant before me is presenting something approaching the kind of person she really is without role-playing, manufactured image and distortions and the emotion I experience before me that I call 'joy' is in fact 'joy'. In other words is the participant presenting her real self and am I seeing what is actually there within her or is this a deceit –she is really not as she presents - and what I see as 'joy' is in fact something entirely different.

Dealing with the first issue, I believe that I saw the genuine person in all interviews, and what they related to me was (for the most part) a true account of their experiences *as experienced*, and as accurately communicated to me as possible, such that these accounts could be transformed into an accurate description of the lifeworld. They had no reason to be deceitful, unless to conceal guilt, failure or embarrassment and yet these feelings and perceptions were explicitly explored in the talk anyway. However they were encountering a research situation led by a member of the educational establishment so there will have been instances of responding in a desirable manner. Conversely given the school history of some participants who suffered at the hands of 'educationalists' this may have caused some wariness and the need to hold back information and emotion. This is exemplified by 'Hattie' and this issue is identified in the introduction to the individual psychological structure. I was in any event sensitised to most attempts at any mild distortion because of my knowledge of each participating person. Also the attempted distortions themselves and the questions that arose from my sensing of them were a rich source of data. Lines of conversation sometimes went in the direction of trying to work through inconsistencies in narrative and reason. Distortion in some cases was not perceived until it emerged in our discussions. Some participants only became aware of their distortions through our joint analysis of 'how they felt about things' or 'how they saw things' or indeed who they were and who they had been and who they wished to become.

With regard to deceit and/or distortion it is safe to assert that these issues are not unique to phenomenological oriented research or even qualitative research in toto. As Giorgi and Giorgi point out,

The inevitable fact that all psychologists seeking a scientific pursuit of their subject matter is that 'neutral' total access to their subject matter is lacking. One may believe that one has full access to one's own experiential processes, but even if true, this access is not fully shareable with the critical other.... If one turns to the... experience of the other as subject matter, again total access of any type is lacking since experiences are not directly shareable.

Giorgi and Giorgi 2003:48

The problem of 'shareability' is related to the participant's discourse. It is not possible to be absolutely sure that the language used actually conveys the experience *as lived through*. Participants I found were in a way telling a story to themselves as well as to me and in so doing drew readily on available chunks of discourse (clichés, in-house terminology, local vernacular and sayings, popular sayings of the day etc., along with their standard everyday language use). They were also interpreting themselves to themselves as well as to me and it was difficult to always ascertain whether the discourse employed did mesh accurately with their lived experience. Also the verbal (and written) reporting of experience is described in language and, despite any level of participant eloquence, is therefore not a duplication of the experience, but simply 'a culturally conventional system of signs that indicates or points toward the prereflective reality' (Polkinghorne 1989:46). I have to assume then that we got as close as possible to revealing the lifeworld in the discourse between us. To counter this problem to some extent, I did seek clarity throughout the evolution of the conversation by probing and supporting expression and description of experiences, but the problem of accurate 'sharedness', and the reporting of the experiences *as experienced* remained. In the end as Ashworth points out,

...we have to rely on a shared understanding of the language being used by the research participant if we have to describe their life-world. Empathic care is central here [a care I am at pains to point out in this chapter], interpretative understanding is called for. It is especially here that phenomenological description and hermeneutics [interpretation] merge. We cannot assume that the person's life-world is easily and lucidly expressible, but we do assume reciprocity of perspectives. We cannot assume that a phenomenon of a person's life-world will give rise to propositions which can be directly related to certain well-established verbal formulations, but we do assume understandability.

Ashworth 1996:22

Reflections related to the researcher/participant relationship and its influence upon the findings

An important reflective issue is the extent to which our relationship, whilst serving the research process, was simultaneously and symbiotically involved in the transition the

relationship attempts to reveal. As I became a significant other in their sociality of the lifeworld, how did I influence the transition – both in the interview and in all other contexts? There were many occasions that could be deemed as meaning-making in the participants' journey that were directly related to my presence within their lifeworld. I was a symbol of their notion of transition. It is possible that much of our discussions and sharedness – our intersubjectivity - had a significant influence on their transition as reported in the research. We therefore have an interesting potential dilemma here. My research initiated the transition – at least in part - which it attempts to elucidate. The research process may have generated the research findings. Not in the way that has been reported in positivistic work, where subjects have been lead by the researcher, but the research having an influence that pervades the lifeworld and becomes part of the co-constituted existence of the participants. It is difficult to assess this influence, but it must be remembered that the epistemic framework employed here rejects the environmental determinism that this kind of analysis implies. Within existential phenomenological psychology the agency of the individual *to be a self* is emphasised. Yes participants may have been influenced by involvement in the research with regard to their creation of self-identity, but it is in the end, *their* creation and it is this that interests the existential phenomenological researcher. How *they decide* to live their mature studentship – whether they make any transition of self-identity or not. Nevertheless the influence of our relationship and their position within it has to be acknowledged and this discussion does just that.

8. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

These problems notwithstanding, the research praxis detailed herein, *a posteriori* to its enactment, together with this discussion of researcher position and reflexivity is an attempt to get as near to the subject matter as possible and to share this with any and all critical others.

I conclude this penultimate section with the words of Clark Moustakas that reflect the immanent humanness of this kind of research and describe what this thesis aspires to.

As I come to a closing place in this reflective and meditative journey I am alive with images and ideas, struck with the wonder of passionately discovering that the only way I can truly come to know things and people is to go out to them, to return again and again to them, to immerse myself completely in what is there before me, look, see, hear, touch, from many angles and perspectives and vantage points, each time freshly so that there will be continual openings and learnings that will connect with each other and with prior perceptions, understandings, and future possibilities. In other words, I must immerse myself totally and completely in my world, take in what is offered without bias or prejudgement.... This connectedness between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought and awareness, is in truth a wondrous thing of being human. But knowledge does not end with moments of connectedness, understanding and meaning...No experience is ever finished or exhausted. New and fresh meanings are forever in the world and in us. When the connection is made and the striving comes alive again, the process begins once more. There is no limit to our understanding or sense of fulfilment, no limit to our knowledge of any idea thing or person...The whole process of being within something, being within ourselves, being within others, and correlating these outer and inner experiences and meanings is infinite, endless eternal. This is the beauty of knowledge and discovery. It keeps us forever awake, alive, and connected with what is and with what matters in life.

Moustakas 1994:65

GENERAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE: Findings and Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Following Wertz (1983), as fully delineated in chapter 4, the 'General Psychological Structure' follows from the series of individual psychological structures (see Appendices) in an attempt to describe the essence of being a mature student in higher education. According to Wertz this approach:

...involves understanding diverse individual cases as individual instances of something more general and articulating this generality of which they are particular instances.

Wertz 1983:228

In order to do this there are some initial observations to be made. These set out the context in which this stage of the analysis takes place and clarify some general matters of terminology and phenomenological descriptors. The latter often employ terms which can seem arcane and obscure with regard to such things as Heideggerian terminology. However this language is needed to signify that the descriptions are within the epochē and it is important to signal this using 'transcendental alternatives' such as temporality for 'objective' terms like time.

Generally the description is presented in the present tense although the actual temporal dimension referred to may be in either the past or the future, unless there are specific descriptive reasons for describing in another (usually the past) tense. The perspective (and the talk which expresses it) of the individual cases is presentist as the existent transcends the immediate nowness of the interview situation and relives past events or temporalises (i.e. consciousness is drawn to a different temporal dimension) to future events.

Throughout the analysis the emphasis is to ensure that the holistic nature of the lifeworld and the essences of those lifeworlds are described. In several places this entails overlap (and what may seem at first sight repetition), but this strategy, to ensure relevant fragments and their manifestations are adequately covered, is taken in order to fully reveal the network of meanings in the experiences under examination. A linear description based on (say) a chronological theme is not suitable as the thematic structure and the identified themes within it embrace many single meanings within the web of interrelationships that constitute the complexity of the mature student experience. This also explains the ongoing linking references to other sections. The aim then is to arrive at a description, which at least adequately conveys the essences of the various experiences within a thematic analysis *in their totality*, and to do so by relating the full scope of the web of meanings. It should also be noted that the descriptions whilst appearing similar e.g. ‘inertial drag’ and ‘ameliorative temporalising’ have important differences as have the experiences they attempt to reveal.

Orbits and Orbital Differentiation

The first introductory observation to be made refers to the concept of orbit and orbital differentiation. This metaphor is utilised to describe how the existent copes with two distinct ways of being-in-the-world with regard to the experiences before the idea of higher education entered the existential landscape, and when it was an immanent signification in that landscape.

They are referred to respectively as the pre-course orbit and the on-course orbit. ‘Orbit’ as a metaphor is useful in that it presents the lifeworld as separated out into experientially distinct spaces. This distinction also points up difference. Life in one orbit is different to life in the other. This difference as lived through captures the essence of change that is experienced, as the lifeworld becomes a series of comparators: one orbit being set against the other.

...it’s [politics] not what they [friends within the pre-course orbit] want to hear. It’s not what we talk about really. I save that for people who are doin’ t’course...stuff like that. But I don’t know the relationship [with an old pre-course friend] has altered. I find sometimes that I’m thinking...

‘Oh get a life!’ which when we’re talking but I think that’s really hard for them but I never say anything to ‘em... it has altered...changed...⁸

Olive (p.4. Lines 19-26)

Olive then wrestles with her two orbits of experience: pre- course and on-course. This is represented in the two discourses that can be lived through. To handle this distinction Olive presents two self-identities: pre-course and on-course, and she separates out the two, according to who her interlocutor is.

This comparison is also done through the invitation in the interviews to relive past experiences in the present and to fantasise and body forth to a future temporal dimension, which is based on the perception of this immanently significant stage in one’s biography. As this biographical trajectory is revealed, in the nowness of the interview and described in the individual psychological structures, there emerges in the lifeworld a realisation of one’s ‘identity project’ (Harre 1983). Belinda’s account of speaking to her ex-husband’s partner captures this clearly.

....I had time to think... But now, nothing [no emotional bond to her ex-partner]. And she [ex-husband’s partner] was dead nice. And nothing, so, so I suppose that was a good thing.

G: Do you think doing HE has anything to do with that?

B: Yeah, ‘cos I’ve moved on. I feel like I’ve moved on. I’m progressing, and I’m growing erm, and I feel like he’s not as well. So that’s quite nice.

Belinda (p.20. Lines 27-39)

Project and Self-Improvisation

This project is related to the Sartrean notion of project (Sartre 1956) and is consistent with the phenomenological position of ‘I’ as an impermanent construct – we continually construct and reconstruct our selves (see Spinelli 1989). The utilisation of project here refers to the constant, on-going existent’s review of their dwelling in the world, as they live through this turbulent stage in their biography. Moment by moment

⁸ Transcript conventions follow Silverman (2000) and are listed in the Appendices page ii.

being-in-the-world changes. This is the existential phenomenological position. But for the existent this is salient in the pre-reflective experience, as self-identity is improvised on an everyday basis, and that this improvisation is often a consciously planned process and yet is simultaneously out of consciousness in the implications for self-identity. For example the 'formal presentation' (see also 'The Zenith of Failure Anxiety – The Formal Assessed Seminar Presentation' in 'Confidence and its Correlates below') for Doris remains as most central to her transition and looms large in the multifarious experiences that have contributed to it. As she explains,

..I were absolutely petrified. My hands were wet through. I were sweating and er but that's what I've learned to do now and if I had another presentation I'd do the same again... I'd think y'know whereas as before I'd a thought 'oh god I'm really scared' I'd just shrug my shoulders n that's it. I'll go for it. It's made me more brave y'know wha'a mean gave me more courage to do.. to do things like that.

Doris (p.3. Lines 13-18)

The lived through moment of *post* conscious self-improvisation impacts upon the existent in profound ways. For Tom, having to work with others was particularly significant.

...working with somebody else on something like that. That were an eye opener [a revelation]. I did have to change me own ways. I did have to change an ell of a lot.

Tom (p.8. Lines 29-30)

Merleau-Ponty (1962) has highlighted how the existent experiences their lifeworld in a manner which is never entirely comprehensible. For the existent the essence of their experience lies in an accentuated degree of incomprehensibility (there is a lack of 'at oneness' and the feeling that there is a non-specific gap between who they are and who they expected to be) of the lived, which in turn initiates an accentuated level of self-improvisation. Wendy muses on an incident where incomprehensibility led to her making a contribution in seminar discussion and perceives herself as making a dramatic gaff in her self-improvisation.

...and then came the realisation... I have never spoken to anybody but before this... never in a million years would I have spoken to a male about that incident beforehand [an unwanted sexual approach], let alone a room full of people who may well have been grossly offended at what I said and I got home that night and I thought, 'I cannot believe I said that, I really cannot believe I said that' ...I was mortified that I'd said it, ...and I thought 'I am not going to apologise for saying it, that was the way the conversation went, that was what I said, that's it, done it', ..., and from then on here and at home I have never been afraid to say what I think although I have adapted what I said to suit people.

Wendy (p.15-16 lines 47-14)

As the existent expresses self within the on-course orbit, true to Merleau-Ponty's argument, one enacts self-improvisation through language use and the whole gamut of media through which one declares self to the world. This involves a borrowing from the world (the socio-academic milieu), from others (tutors, fellow students etc.) and from their own past efforts (Merleau-Ponty in O'Neill 1974: xl). Thus self-improvisation involves temporalising to different temporal dimensions

In attempting to elucidate the essence of the lifeworld, it is asserted that part of this essence is that the mature-student-existent in the pre-reflective lives in *heightened temporal transcendence*. A clutching out into the past and the future in order to help make sense of the present.

....I am definitely not the Hattie I used to be, I am definitely a different Hattie and a better Hattie and I feel a lot better for it in terms of confidence and such self-development. I feel a lot better for it, but I also...I also know that I've lost part of me as well, you know.

Hattie (p.4. Lines 29-32)

The first section explores this aspect of the lifeworld by focussing on temporality and how the existent is not locked into a solitary presence, but stands out into the future and

the past. This is a very general description of the essence of being a mature HE student, which is then fleshed out in more detail in subsequent sections. The assertion remains however that transcending the present moment is a significant part of the essence of the experience being described.

2. TEMPORALITY AND TEMPORALISING

Life can only be understood backwards. But...it must be lived forwards.

Kierkegaard (1957)

Being a mature student involves transcending the immediate to the past and the future. In order to make sense of the present a temporal shift to the pre-course orbit helps to define their location in time and space. A past self helps to define the present self and a fantasy toward the future also helps to make sense of the present, as present acts are rooted in that imagined future. 'Why am I doing this?' initiates an increased biographical trajectory in comparison with that of the pre-course orbit. Imaginings of a professional career with a superior status from that of the past resonate throughout everyday living.

Achieving Congruence with Contexts

Temporalising to the past helps to inform the present (although not necessarily in a comforting way) especially with clues on how to solve the puzzles that present themselves in the on-course orbit (see 'existential discomfort' below). The past however lives on in the present, not only within memory – although what is made of past events is subject to a reconceptualisation (see 'Perspectival Shift and Attitudinal Change' below) – but also it is lived through *as the pre-course orbit in the present*. The existent continues to call into being that pre-course life in the present when they are away from the socio-academic milieu (e.g. at home, out with old friends, etc.). The lifeworld then entails shifting to some extent between orbits and the call into being of a self-identity that is perceived as most appropriate. This can be borne out in unusual circumstances wherein the existent oscillates between identities and (through different discourses) different intersubjectivities.

...but it makes me feel a bit (whispers) arrogant ...a bit patronising. To talk about things that they...it's like tonight.. we've got football...and we're stood there, and either I have a conversation with Jo (on-course friend), and I have a conversation with Tracey (pre-course friend), but they're totally different. We're all engaged in conversations..... it's like I've separate identi.. [laughs] ..ties – with people in different situations...it's like a step up and a step down...talk differently...to Jo than what I do to Tracey.

Lucy (p.2. Lines 7-13 & 23-24)

This I refer to as 'orbital differentiation' – a juggling of roles to achieve congruence with the orbit in play (see also 'temporal phasing' and the 'shifting common ground of relationships' below). Initially this involves various strategies such as 'slow it down and go into easy mode' (Wendy). That is to inhibit any enthusiastic celebration of course life (including language, ideas, reasoning skills, demonstration of knowledge on theoretical matters etc.) and make a conscious return to the pre-course self-identity and its presentation. The two orbits thereby take on a more defined distinctiveness. Wendy for example perceives her capacity for greater analysis of social issues as a cause of irresolvable friction between herself and some friends and in sum she attributes the shifts in interpersonal relationships to her college experiences and her student on-course identity in all its manifestations.

Epiphanies

Temporalising also involves the experiencing of epiphanies.

Then came a moment.....and I was thinking 'This is it!' 'This is where I should be, this is what I enjoy and this is what I should be doing, this is what it's all about' and from then I have never once questioned whether.. [this was the right thing to do]

Wendy (p.8. Lines 6-9)

Suddenly the notion of her, Wendy, studying for a degree was not so ridiculous. There had been movement from housewife to mature student and this seemed perfectly

acceptable, despite notions of local social expectations and the associated guilt for 'deserting' home and family. Epiphanies then are revelatory experiences when a new aspect of self-identity construction takes place, which is thrown into relief by temporalising to a past self-identity. The existent suddenly appreciates that in some way he or she is now a different person. One may also begin to see that they have a deep-seated anger unknown before or that one has an increased level of flexibility and tolerance toward others that was not previously present. A change in parenting style may be precipitated by such revelatory experiences. Hattie for example noticed a significant change in her parenting style associated with her own self-identity transition. Previous rigidity and traditional role-playing has been supplanted by a much more democratic approach. A greater understanding of her children's worlds and an empathy with their views is now prevalent above the previous domineering approach that Hattie associates with her own father. There is a distinct link between this aspect of transition and course content. As Hattie remembers:

I remember sitting in counselling psychology and...I'd be sitting there and I'd be thinking, or there'd be certain things that would be going off [happening in class] and I'd listen to [the tutor] giving examples of erm...certain scenarios and I could see myself and I would think 'gosh, that's me', you know and I would consciously go home and be completely opposite and the girls would take a step back and think, you know, 'is this my Mum? [laughs]. What's happened?', you know.

Hattie (p.7. Lines 28-33)

This initially was a cosmetic change, but over time and alongside other cosmetic (and conscious) changes the composite effect was one of fundamental change and radical perspectival shift. A new discourse was available to her and thereby she could language being a different kind of person, self-improvising a contrasting parenting style as part of her self-improvisation of her on-course self-identity. Hattie particularly perceives this in her languaging of reason when she makes demands on her children. The strict 'do as I say' discourse has been supplanted by a more rational and 'adult ego state' (Berne 1968) style in transactions. There is a palpable shift in her lived reality of parenthood.

Epiphanies can be experienced in a more gradually emergent manner with the overall realisation appearing as a final gestalt. Wendy for example feels that she has integrated into the student self-identity without any dramatic process taking place. As she explains,

The course itself, has made me think.... 'is it me? Is it what I want?'... and without actually forcing myself – yes, it's what I want and it has turned into what I want – very hard to explain, it's turned into what I want without me actually trying to make it do that.

Wendy (p.6. Lines 19-22)

She now experiences a belongingness, a sense of comfort within the on-course orbit. She feels more at home, more settled. The anxieties of guilt and sub-cultural expectations of the early stages have waned. So her being-in-the-world from a position in which the student identity was potentially incongruent to her self ('is it me?') and thereby unwanted, the college experience can be embraced willingly in the nascent creation of a new Wendy – Wendy the degree student.

The Preciousness of Time

With a bodying forth to a future state comes a series of concerns associated with 'being unto death' (Heidegger 1962).

Precious time is slippin' away. You know you're only king for a day
Don't matter to which god you pray. Precious time is slippin' away

Van Morrison

The existent becomes increasingly aware of the finiteness of time and that as a mature student this is the last chance to fulfil their dreams – those dreams which are associated with their project within higher education. To become a person of status with a life-style to match for themselves and those who are near and dear to them. 'I am going to look after me and my children and we're going to have everything that we need cos I provide it' (Lucy p.4. Lines 14-15).

Throughout Maureen's lifeworld there is the overarching horizon of the finiteness of her time, as she transcends to the future ('I can see.. faint glimmer at the end of the tunnel now') the passage of time takes on ever greater immanent significance. The vicissitudes of her student life are constantly with her as she relives the difficult and ecstatic times, but the general theme of her experience is the finality of this opportunity. Whether the experience is good or bad she must win through as this is the last chance – an increasingly evident 'fact' as she transcends to a future state. Maureen perceives this as typifying mature studenthood, using younger students as a comparator. As she explains.

...the whole process of being a student throughout the three years you're just on a curve. And an up and a down and an up and a down, but I think overall,.. the thing about being a student and being a mature student is that you don't have the time to fritter and you don't have the time to piss around.... because the clock is forever ticking. You know... you don't get a second chance when you get over 30 to do it again cos you don't have the time if you want to start a career and everything else.

Maureen (p.6. Lines 6-12)

I think when you're a mature student as I say you're more realistic about ... life... It's not 'if this fails I'll try something else'. Cos you don't have that luxury.

Maureen (p.6. Lines 22-24)

This time (any and all particular presents) then is very precious and therefore everything has to run smoothly. Any upset to the plan, any perceived chance that they may fail in any way is greeted with high anxiety. The overarching horizon of 'the fear of bad outcomes' haunts the existent's progression throughout their studies (see 'Existential Discomfort' below).

Fear of the Future

The prospect of the future however is not embraced entirely with glowing optimism. By reference to one's position in the present, and how the past experiences have

resulted in that position, the oncoming trials and tribulations associated with those already lived through are viewed with trepidation. Transcendence then is frightening. There are bold actions needed to handle the self-creation necessary. Continually there are potential terrors at every turn, as the existent takes on each step of this journey into the unknown. One is in effect an *existential pioneer* (see below in more detail) seeking to make the new territory of an academic self-identity one's own. Maureen remembers a contribution by a fellow student.

... the opiate for the masses, it's brilliant, I would not ever think of anything like that, and then I thought... the need to do well has always been within me anyway... I need to do well and I knew if I invested a lot of time, hope, money, everything in it, that I needed to succeed, so in a way that sort of spurred me on but the first week or two, probably three, were really hard and then you try to meet new people but you are trying to build up a relationship with people who are teaching you...you are trying to find your way around this new place... and you are trying to learn new subjects... difficult.

G: Did you find it intimidating?

M: Yes, very – yes... [but] once I decide something, I just thought 'This is it now, you are doing it, that's all there is to it'. I just thought 'Get on with it, learn, read and do whatever you can', but it was daunting, yes, very daunting.

Maureen (p.5. Lines 5-29)

3. PERSPECTIVAL SHIFT AND ATTITUDINAL CHANGE. -

As the existent relives their recent biography, through the movement into higher education, orbital difference is experienced through a stark contrast in their view of the world. Things are seen in a different light and one feels a different sense of contextualisation in that the positioning vis-à-vis others and the world in general takes

on a new configuration. In the present the contrast is felt with regard to a heightened sense of agency – an empowered, focussed purposefulness as opposed to a subservient, non-specific inertia of the past. This can be illuminated in a variety of ways.

A Non-Confrontable Reality and Deference to the 'Dominant Other'.

This is the essence of the experienced temporality as the past is lived in the present. Firstly the existent has moved out of the 'comfort zone' where one was 'floating along, 'drifting', a mere passenger in life's journey. One was simply taken along by a force outside oneself.

...there were nothing I did that were interesting apart from change nappies. That were interesting [sardonic tone]. That's all I did. Watch television....So y'know I could have thought 'great here's a bloke who's earnin' some money. Oo we'll ave a bit more money' and relied on 'im... Could easily have done that. That's what would've happened. I would have done that three years ago.

Doris (p.5. Lines 41-46)

Movement was perceived as possible, but within the largesse of others. Meanwhile one should continue with routine and hope. There was no way to take control of life, Doris was beholden to life's vicissitudes as they arose, and the world was a place where she was at the behest of others. Existence was generally boring. There was no challenge or opportunity to pursue challenge. Uninteresting 'entropy' (Csikszentmihalyi 2002) was the order of her existence, where intrusive events or thoughts 'disorder' consciousness and disrupt intentionality. Examples of 'entropy' include passive spectating of sport or watching television and the lack of intrinsic involvement in activities.

Collectively we are wasting each year the equivalent of millions of years of human consciousness. The energy that could be used to focus on complex goals, to provide for enjoyable growth, is squandered on patterns of stimulation that only mimic reality.

Csikszentmihalyi 2002:162-3

A correlate of this 'passengerhood' was a malleability wherein there was a tacit acceptance of the world and one's place within it – a non-confrontable, unchangeable reality. Lilly declares for example that, 'It never dawned on me then' [that she was totally dominated by her husband] (Lilly p. 2 lines 3-4). This points up the perspective that her husband was the powerful centre of her universe who could make demands, which were non-confrontable and non-contentious, to be handled as well as possible in order to continue the set script and the settled life (i.e. a regimen of daily similarity and ordinariness - an existence that seemed to be repetitious and mirrored by the lives of many others in Lilly's lifeworld). There was no escape it seemed from the castrating boundaries of husband and home. This is where she had to stay and cope. This was the way her life was to be. A major role within this script was the 'professional cleaner' (p.2. Line 40). Lilly's 'whole life centred around keeping the house clean and (her) kids clean' (p.2. Lines 37-38). The self-identity she called into being here was the traditional house-proud, housewife who focussed on the practicalities of domestic life: the predictable and the 'easy to follow' script with no deflections from the expected course. An existence planned out by local socio-cultural expectations.

The Existential Baseline

Within this reification then one was dominated by others. This was in broad terms the existential baseline on which the analyses are based. For example colleagues were viewed largely as superordinate on a perceived hierarchy. In intimate relationships the balance of power lay distinctly with the other partner, sometimes the existent could be so interpenetrated by the other that they felt totally subsumed by them.

..when it came to [her partner] applying for jobs and things like that, it was me that wrote the letters, it was me that went through what he'd say in the interview. Just, he would ask for my help and it was... if he ever had presentations to do it was me that was always doing the flipcharts and all this sort of thing and I was doing it for him. But I sort of... got lost somewhere. I just became... him if you like. I wasn't... me anymore. I just got lost.

Belinda (p.4. Lines 40-46)

Similarly siblings were altercast into paternal/maternal roles, and throughout the lifeworld there was the order of deference to 'the dominant other'. The existent was simply 'thick' or 'brain dead' i.e. of extremely low intelligence. Lucy refers to herself as being 'useless'. This is the meaning she now attributes to her previous pre-course existence. Apart from being a mother she was of *no use*. She was unable and insignificant with no direction or sense of self-efficacy. She had no worthy capacity in anything and as such was superficial and disengaged from any sense of purpose beyond being a mother. And this activity was itself uninteresting and mundane. The role was associated with 'being at home all't time doin' nuthing' (p.7. Line 35). Her sociality similarly centred on things superficial: daytime TV, chatting over coffee, routinized daily activities such as 'collecting the kids from school'. The cumulative affect was a lifeworld of easiness, comfort and inactivity, following a regimen of predictability from which there was no conceivable escape.

From this position all others constituted the 'knowing generalised other' – others had valid opinions based on knowledge of the world and the existent should defer to them. This position was correlated with feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy with a general incoherence of 'who one is' – almost identity-less. Belinda put it plainly, 'I stopped being me'. She saw herself as without identity, without a link to the 'out there' world. She had become 'a blob' (Belinda's term p.4. Line 21), an unidentifiable amorphous mass, without shape or form, something which did not fit within the 'out there' world.

The overarching horizon of powerlessness and lack of agency – an all-encompassing subordination, sometimes led to extreme measures to establish some sense of control and individualised self-identity away from being at the behest of others. This throws into relief the extent to which the existent feels disempowered. For example as embodied self could be controlled, and in order to end a relationship, Lucy attempted to make herself repulsive to her overbearing partner by amassing body weight.

From her position in the present she sees her self during the 'doormat' stage as being 'so stupid'. This refers to an accepting position to tolerate her partner's oppressive behaviour. So when she attempted to end the relationship this was through a strategy of bodily repulsion. She intentionally became overweight and unattractive in order to repel her partner both sexually and socially thus actioning a separation.

I worked it out I don't know if this'll be right but I started to put weight on when things started to go wrong. Because I thought if I put weight on he'd leave me. And that's why I do it. Cos I did it wi' Alec. I think that's what it is. It's my way of getting out.... I've to get out meself. If I find myself unattractive and horrible then they'll leave.

Lucy (p.8-9. Lines 45-2)

Her level of agency was solely embodied, within her. The boundaries of her control were at an interface of body and world. Beyond her body there was very little agency. Within her body lay her territory, her jurisdiction to do with as she may. External to it was largely under the control of others, especially her partner.

The 'Challengeable Other'

Such a state is starkly contrasted with the present on-course self-identity. The existent sees their experiences as a salvation from the previous existence. Tracey feels empowered by a perspectival shift; 'you know exactly what's going on' (p.7. Lines 25-26), particularly during social interaction. This is a power to be able to rationalise and repel threats to identity when the issue of her lone parenthood arises with others. There is a feeling of shame and degradation associated with her position as a single mother (p.7. Lines 21-23) and when this is felt Tracey is empowered to deflect such feelings and assert herself to a position of pride and status through her degree studies and her self-satisfaction in successfully bringing up a child. Similarly in sexual romantic relationships Tracey now has a greater sense of control. She contrasts her new self-identity with the old and experiences a new-found assertiveness to not yield to others perceived dominant position. The 'dominant other' which drove much of her earlier styles of relating, has now been replaced by the 'challengeable' other. Perturbed by the imbalance in a particular relationship she had the power to say 'no' where previously she would have yielded to the will of the 'dominant other'. Finally she took the initiative and ended the relationship secure in her own position, independence and coherent identity.

..another example of another person wanting me to be something that I'm not. I'm not going to be that somebody else. So it gave me the confidence to just keep saying 'no'.

Tracey (p.4. Lines 20-22).

Through intellectual and personal growth existents gradually come to see themselves as part of the 'knowing generalised other'. Far from being dominated the existential configuration is one of the 'challengeable other'. One feels empowered to argue, bolstered by evidence and reason from one's academic experiences.

This is a really silly example - ... my Dad's an absolutely wonderful, fella... and if he would tell me that the moon was square, I would have believed it was square...But now, I find myself listening to him, I have to sort of stop myself, and I think he doesn't know what he's talking about, he's talking rubbish, type of thing... and I find myself questioning him... whereas before I would have....just took somebody else's word for the gospel, type of thing...

Hattie (p.5. Lines 7-14)

The existent has broken out from a world order of entrapment within their domestic position, wherein there were feelings of castration, of being caged or being treated as a 'doormat'. One feels an increasing coherence to self-identity – an emerging gestalt of oneself as someone who is able to 'do' as opposed to someone who could not 'do'. One has 'learned to talk again', to connect with others as opposed to a position where one 'couldn't do it at all' (Belinda). Through this sense of voice and presence the existent is now a force to be reckoned with, and is prepared to take on the world with a new-found focus, purposefulness and decisiveness. An illustration of this overarching horizon of freedom is Lilly's attitudinal change to health. Previously uncaring about her health, and only concerned with ensuring she is around to see her children through to maturity, she now is extremely health conscious (e.g. giving up smoking) as she temporalises to a future of self-development.

One big thing [with regard to change] I think is that I didn't used to bother about my health. I wasn't really happy. I used to smoke a lot for example

but now I've cut back. I must admit that now I've got a future I'm much more bothered about my health. I'd always had my future mapped out [for her by others] I thought I've got the kids and I must see they're OK and get them out.....and once that's done then that's it....I wouldn't be bothered about dying.

Lilly (p.6. Lines 26-31)

Life then had a set script 'mapped out' with an end point to its meaning. The overarching horizon of the pre-course orbit was that of the family. Children were to be guided through their formative stage to adulthood and independence and then closure to life: its meaning and its physicality - as and when it came about. Physical health then was not really important, as the chances of survival to see the children through to adulthood were relatively good. This was represented in Lilly's attitude to smoking. Lilly acknowledges that it is inimical to health but only the relatively long-term state of personal health. And it is this long term that had little significance as it is at a time when life would have little meaning, as her children would be gone from the home into adulthood and be able to cope as such. Once that was done all could end satisfactorily. Except things weren't satisfactory. Lilly was not entirely contented with such an existence. There was a distinct sense of powerlessness. She looked to her future trajectory and realised an emptiness. A children-less world and thereby an identity-less world of purposelessness. Her current state could not influence such a future. She had to take steps to colonise that forthcoming epoch of her life.

The previous position of discontent then initiated the inevitable existential question of happiness.

'Ask yourself whether you are happy and you cease to be so'

J.S. Mill quoted in Csikszentmihalyi 2002:2.

A realisation of one's lot in turn initiated the changes described here (see also 'Temporal Phasing' below). From this position the existent now lives in celebratory mood. The past has been reconceptualised as described above, and one now can move forward with a greater sense of freedom (agency, presence and voice), optimism and

hope. This process is now more fully delineated in subsequent sections and in the next section in particular.

4. TEMPORAL PHASING: A DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIENCE

Part of the essence of being a mature student in higher education is the overarching horizon of development. With regard to temporality any lifeworld is arguably developmental, but for the mature student experiencing development is particularly salient in this period of their biography. What is common to all cases is that there is a distinct 'before', a distinct 'during' and a distinct 'after' – the latter being the present moment, the other two phases the past. Essentially and chronologically these refer respectively to life before entering higher education, life in the initial stages of their higher education experience, and life as experienced now. The metaphor of phasing refers to the experiential progression that has taken place from the pre-course orbit, through into the on-course orbit and the fantasising to the future temporal dimension. As the existent looks back over the recent past they distinguish between these temporal phases. The narrative of this period - their life story - helps to make sense of their present lifeworld. There is a progressive time line such as, 'This was what was happening... and so I did this... and as a result this happened'.

....it's part of a bigger journey really. When I split up wi' t'kid's dad that I were now going to have to look after myself and do it all for myself and I weren't prepared to go and work in some sodding chicken factory so it were education...for my way out... so it's just part of this.... I am going to look after me and my children and we're going to have everything that we need cos I provide it and this is part of that, whether it's going to be there at the end or not waiting for me to find I don't know, but-it's part of the bigger thing cos I want more... not just for me but for them. Like I lived in Calby... another part of the thing with Simon was that he was way out of Calby [undesirable area of residence]. I look back now it was a way out - a ticket out of Calby and I wanted Alison in Ridgeway [desired secondary school] y'see where I went...well we live in Yawnbrough [desirable area

of residence in the catchment area of desired school] now and she's definitely going to Ridgeway, but I think if I'm honest that were part of it as well.

Lucy (p.4. Lines 10-21)

With this defining phase in her life, Lucy shed her disempowered self-identity and with a greater sense of agency and voice took control of her destiny, which was going to culminate in a better life-style for herself and her children. This was to happen through her endeavours within education – a ticket to self and life improvement.

Such a train of events bolsters one's position and serves as an existential comfort with regard to being contextualised as an oddity within the local socio-cultural milieu ('mature student' is an oxymoron within local understanding to the extent that such students are themselves uncomfortable with it. One student for example prefers to refer to herself as 'a mature person who is doing a degree'). However the distinction between temporal phases is only itself to be seen as a metaphor. The whole temporal trajectory is experienced holistically. This is especially the case as the existent moves from one orbit to the other and whereas they differentiate, this differentiation is not complete. There is overlap or contamination of one orbit by the other (see 'Shifting Common Ground of Relationships' below). Phases also run into each other and one phase may remain with the existent although they may 'live' in another. For example Lilly who is living in the pre-course orbit at home with her partner declares that lived reality becomes increasingly problematic as she declares, 'I can't get away from my ideas now' (course content conflicts with her existence at home especially her relationship with her partner). Here Lilly is contextualised within the before HE phase and yet her knowledge of oppression of women by men (her on-course orbit) is with her in that moment as two phases interact or are experienced holistically. With this issue in mind I now examine each phase individually, whilst simultaneously attempting to elucidate the holistic experience of temporal phasing.

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them.

Hamlet Act III Scene i.

Dasein is an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue.

(Heidegger, 1962:236)

What factors within the lifeworld initiate entry into higher education? To answer this a description of the pre-course lifeworld is necessary. Agency as experienced in the present of past things has a resonance - the existent transcends the present and considers their level of agency in the pre-course phase when in comparison to the present it was radically diminished. In memorial mode of the pre-course phase there is an experienced sense of control in that many things were/are doable, but what there was/is to 'do' is set firmly between very narrow parameters. For Tom drinking and socialising with his entourage of friends and acquaintances were the central foci of life, with the adequate income from his labouring jobs to finance these activities. It was an enjoyable existence in its aimlessness. To 'cruise along' (live a carefree existence, steadily downing beer and soaking up the pub culture) as 'an idle get' (lazy, work-shy oaf of bad repute) was an anxiety free and comfortable reality. The immanent significations of such an existence were the pleasant support of familiar surroundings and people, and participating in activities that were predictably doable and easily managed. Any challenge was to be avoided. Offers of responsibility at work were declined. The place to be was in the comfort zone of the status quo. Cruise in calm waters and everything will be fine. There is therefore much that one is unable 'to do', such that one is *generally* unable 'to do', although one has a level of control over the few specific 'doables'. Whilst this phase can be described as 'the comfort zone', life is directionless. There is a sensed uselessness of 'doin' nuthin'' (Lucy). Living is a settled issue with a tacit acceptance of the role that the local subculture has ascribed. One is in short 'going nowhere', whether this is tied up with childcare and domesticity or in a

truncated career path in the workplace. One is tightly embedded within the prevailing context, and despite the security that is felt the world is a mundane, routinised, predictable, and often banal place. There is an overarching horizon of 'entropy'.

The Genesis of Transition

Impacting upon one's lifeworld in this phase is an *initiating event*. This is a 'fateful moment' (Giddens 1999), when a decision has to be made which has profound implications for the future. This initiating event is often of a socio-emotional nature. A relationship may have ended which heralds some sort of 'fresh start'. When Belinda's marriage ended abruptly her life positioning dramatically changed. The overarching horizon of entrapment rapidly dissipated and she felt free to move on to a new project. To emerge and improvise the construction of a new self-identity correlated with a past self-identity before marriage, and a fantasised self-identity. (The latter had been an immanent object in her imaging and fantasising of her lifeworld within her previous temporal dimension of entrapment). As she explains,

But all of a sudden within a month [after the separation] I was me again. It was unbelievable. I would go out and I was bubbly again, I had a personality and could talk to people, and I could 'pull' [attract men sexually]. It was just fantastic! It was great. I was just me again. I was just full of energy, full of life.

Belinda (p.5. Lines 8-15)

This was an immediate reaction to the new-found freedom, but Belinda really sought something more substantial. Her project was something far more profound. The 'bubbly' Belinda at this stage was something of pretence, yet it was the spark that set in train a redefinition of self.

Alternatively the *initiating event* may refer to a tolerance of some aspect within the lifeworld that may have finally broken and is rendered intolerable e.g. living standard. There may be a radical change to time structuring e.g. children leave the domestic scene presenting a void that needs filling. Accompanying the initiating event is an *irritant*. This may be a feeling of a general lack of fulfilment. Tom felt that he was capable of much more than his existence was demanding and did hanker after some

self-development ('part of a stalemate, just plodding along. Quite enjoying it, but maybe just searching for something'). He did fantasise about returning to education and changing his status in some definition-less manner ('I've always been gonna do this but it's always been a pipe dream'). He was also in a steady supportive relationship, and this initiated transcendence to future states ('had visions of being a counsellor and things like that'). Settled in a new domesticity the irritant within his 'stalemate' came to the fore. The *irritant* may be linked to a negative experience of school. Maureen feels residual expressions of school life where her potential was never fulfilled (an 'educational outsider'), and attributes this to being 'cooled out'⁹ (Goffman 1962) of the system due to her social background. Or it may be a rehearsal of a half-forgotten muse on wanting to return to education. The irritant involves a temporalising to a different future than the mundane one that seems mapped out. For Wendy there had been an immanent craving for some kind of change or movement from her current position.

[Thinking to herself] 'I have four children, I have got a car, I have got a house, I have got a job', but then when I started I thought, 'Oh, is that really all there is, or is there more?' And I think that was the reason for starting the course...that I had convinced myself that there must be something more, but that's not to belittle what I had already got.

Wendy (p.6. Lines 10-12)

The striving within Wendy's projective presence – to move forward - was directed by her sister's experience of studenthood. This was a prompt for her to transcend the immediate and make projections toward fulfilment of some indistinctive aspirations. She had to do something and to follow her sister's successful path was to *do something*.

There is then a fantasising to a future of personal security, independence and personal fulfilment. The future can be colonised (see Giddens 1999) and thereby a prevention of the potential existential isolation, which may happen for example when the children leave, or when a 'madness' finally ensues, due to the present regimen of predictability!

⁹ Goffman refers to a social-psychological process where individuals – the victims of con artists - are further conned into believing that failure is their fault. This has been applied to schooling systems where children from certain social backgrounds fail in school and perceive it to be their fault thus perpetuating the system. The process is extremely subtle and here Maureen only reflects upon her school career in this way as a result of her course experience and knowledge and deep reflection upon her past.

So what is one to do? Continue being subject to chance events beyond one's personal control ('outrageous fortune') and that things may or may not improve, or grasp the nettle and start making things happen oneself ('take arms against a sea of troubles')? 'To be, or not to be: that is the question.' That is to attempt to live authentically or to allow the pre-ordained script set out before you smother and destroy the present spark of ambition thus illuminated. The latter is rejected and in so doing steps are made toward the former.

Continuing the Transition

The striving within the lifeworld (one's project) begins with a process of 'starting to reconstruct'. For example Belinda's experiences on the Access to Higher Education course were a step toward making good the perceived shortfall of qualifications, which family and friends had achieved and expected of her. It was also a significant factor in her social rejuvenation. She could resurrect her social life and begin to incrementally reconstruct the identity that had been denied her (trapped within her metaphorical cage of her unsatisfying marriage). Once the irritant is confronted then, and the fateful decision is made, the existent temporalises to the future and in so doing takes stock of the present. What is needed to be done? Firstly a 'launching phase' which involves a return to education in some form. This is the initial stage of self-improvisation – trying out being a different person. This takes the form of tackling some academic challenge – an access to HE course (as with Belinda), an 'A' level, or ingenuously going straight into HE, within the brief of open access/widening participation. (Not realising at this stage the enormity of the task, and the kind of existential leaps that are needed).

Experientially the movement into higher education can be taken as the point at which the 'launching phase' terminates and the realisation that one is now *in* higher education. This is a period when, notwithstanding any previous experience of study (a recent 'A' level or access course), a biographical fissure is felt between life pre-course and life on-course. The order of 'unknown territory' is a constant theme here with threats to identity everywhere and the need to call into being an identity as each challenge, each potential pitfall presented itself. For Tracey walking into a classroom was previously a straightforward everyday experience, but now as a mature woman it was a daunting prospect. There was expectant anxiety aroused by feelings of potential strangerhood.

What were the others in the class to be like with her? Would they see her as strange or worse a stranger? What would they think of her? How would they look at her? They were after all much younger and brighter than her, having recently left school. Who was she to be? How would she cope with this existential void? How could she make herself *fit*? It was all very scary. It is a discontinuity that is highly confusing. The existent is thrown into identity disarray. This is manifest in a variety of ways. Previous perceived control (however minimal) is rendered moribund in this present context. The 'doability' and predictability of before is now replaced in this phase by a sense of unpredictability, and the possibility of an inability 'to do'. Tom's first assignment was a revelatory experience in that he was accosted with something that wasn't readily doable. It also exemplified the expectations that were to be placed upon him in living through the course and he was unsure about the outcome. Unpredictability was immanent in this world, and this was a frightening experience. As opposed to an existence in which he could 'do' now he was in a possibly dependent position of not being able to 'do'. As he explains,

... Y'know like Deejayng [working as a 'disc jockey'] I don't take to be a problem. Some people do. I just turn up and I do it because I can. I don't particularly enjoy it. I do it cos I can. I've done it for a long time. So it's like working on sites. I do it because I can, and I have. Suddenly then it weren't so clear cut as that. That I were doin' this cos I can.. it were... you've got to kick yourself up the arse a bit [motivate yourself] and do it and I weren't sure whether..(pause)...[he could do it].. I knew I wanted to do it.

Tom (p.6. Lines 31-38)

A decision was needed then; should he go back to the doable and predictable world - a place where he 'can', or should he move forward into this different world of challenge and exploration - a place where maybe he 'can't'. To go back to the place where he has presence and voice or go forward to a place where presence and voice have to be established in territory where he has to claim a place for himself from scratch. His dependence in this new place, the on-course orbit, was confirmed when he sought help from tutors. The affirmations of his inner feelings that he *was* capable led to his fateful decision to move forward. His on-course identity was beginning to emerge in this

acknowledgement of dependence. For Tom within this socio-academic milieu there is an overarching horizon of dependence on strangers (see 'strangerhood' in 'Existential Discomfort' below). In sum the existent is lacking in 'attunement to the stock of knowledge at hand' (Schutz 1967:1), which is felt spatially as being psychologically displaced. However this is also experienced as a not insurmountable problem, as these notions begin to wane. Initially however there is a mass of confusions associated with this fissure and non-attuned existence. For example the life, which was once repellent to Tom, is now one that is desired. The technophobe that was once within him for example is now expelled as he embraces the role of student.

...I'm finding it so strange that I can just sit down and ...spend all night on a computer is one thing. It's just amazing to me cos just in 2 years that whole thing's just changed. I'm on a computer...nearly every night. Just 2 years ago I'd ave never dreamed... in fact I were anti-computers. I used to say they stopped people from thinking...

Tom (p.2. Lines 40-44)

The present lifeworld is one of greater structure and focus. The drifter has been left behind, and Tom now has a greater sense of purpose. In Baumeister's (1991) terms he now embraces a 'high level' as opposed to a 'low level of meaning', which extends beyond 'everyday planning' to 'life planning'. The central focus of the pub culture, so immanently significant in the pre-course orbit, is now declared moribund - 'boring'. With regard to the pre-course orbit and the pre-course self-identity, having a sense of direction and purpose is 'completely alien'. Tom experiences a strange conflict within himself here. His present actions and project are an intense contrast to the aimless drifting of before. His favourite occupation of 'staring into space' has been replaced by feelings of duty to his nascent on-course self-identity, wherein he should not waste time and apply himself to his recently acquired work ethic. He expresses this purposefulness as 'more focussed on what I want to do and what I feel'. The trajectory of being and becoming has transcended from significations such as 'which pub and which group of friends tonight?' to a wider constellation of potentialities.

Furthermore a perceived worldliness about self jars against the coerced innocence of the present context.

G: What was it [the early stages] like?

O: daunting. All these young ones who had done essays..... I hadn't done anything for 10 years. All these young ones around. I mean I thought ' I can't write anymore'.

Olive (p.2. Lines 7-10)

For Olive initial experience of her studies was anxiety ridden. There was a big contrast to her previous social environment of similar age and background. Olive felt her identity under threat and generally disempowered by the whole process. Young and paradoxically more experienced (in the academic world) people prevailed. They knew what was going on. They were already engaged in this business of writing and in comparison Olive felt old and disabled.

Accompanying this sense of spatial incongruence shame, guilt and feelings of degradation abound (see 'existential discomfort' below, which details this experience) yet these eventually give way to feelings of socio-emotional support. At the same time as the existent feels intimidated and frightened about possible humiliation, the academic edifice before them is exciting. The 'joy of study' (see below) which is to be so important as one makes progress with one's project, has its genesis at this time. Terms, utterances, new ideas all bombard consciousness to energise the thinking about self and world.

Eventually the confusion begins to decrease, although it is always there in some form. This is predominantly a correlate of the rapidly changing existence. The whole pace of this period lived in the present is such that there is a blurring of the multifarious experiences into one tempestuous narrative. The pace of change paradoxically then becomes 'the way things are' and although an established constancy is experienced, and self-improvisation becomes a normal part of everyday life, it is a perturbing process in many instances, and the existent feels a sense of embattlement. The past is still with them as a contaminating influence in these early stages, and this institutes a threat to self-identity - a threat which must be repelled. One cannot keep up entirely with the pace perceived. The comfort blanket of the pre-course is needed to keep things in check.

A measure of psychological distance between one's past self-identity and this new context is therefore needed. Tasks which must be completed are complied with, but a useful scepticism embracing the past is employed ('it's not like it says in t'book'). Engaging the discourse of the pre-course entails a living through of the on-course in conjunction with the past. Tom for example declares that he has changed, but employs discourse which denounces his on-course life as bound up with verbiage and irrelevance. In conflict to this he engages with the project and does so with energy and enthusiasm. This again highlights experienced threat to identity which presenting the process in a simple and almost trivial way exposes. 'This academic stuff' for example is constructed within one's perceptual field as 'a game', Lucy at times dismisses academic discourse as 'flannel' (pretentious with an aggrandisement of terms which is unnecessary) yet she takes on aspects of academic discourse in her current presentation of self. Her life world is an integration of her past self, and her on-course self-identity, wherein she feels there is substance to her academic experiences. Her own version of this integration is manifest in her discourse. At one time she speaks in the local vernacular and at other times links in to more universalistic discourse (and the appropriate pronunciation).

(vernacular/particularistic)

...they don't turn up not in any o' t'lectures but they can produce the goods at t'end of it and when't essays 'ave got to be in

(universalistic)

..I'm really aware now, really aware that I do try to *compensate*.

.. I think from what we've learned and what I've seen... I now *aspire* to middle class than (whispers) working class. Not just the *material things*...but I want that...*status*.

..my grandma reads t'Sun. (vernacular/particularistic) I find that *most disconcerting* (universalistic)..

In this way Lucy has various socially available discourses to live through her life at this turbulent stage and access to two distinct rhetorics. With this oscillation from one form

of discourse to another she locks into two alternating self-identities. The local vernacular is the past speaking in the present and this is the pre-course identity, which is being lived in the present. The universalistic discourse is self-improvisation in expressing the emerging self-identity of the on-course orbit. The switch is also manifest in Lucy's paradoxical exploration of what the course has meant for her. On the one hand academia, as outlined above, is just a game. Something to be played out by following the rules and entering the appropriate discourse and responding as directed. There is anxiety here as the trivialising of her project is something of a disclaimer. She holds the position that, study is all very well but in the end there is no real substance to it. No substance to it that is, should she fail. On the other hand she enthuses on how she, as a result of her studies, can now 'understand people' (have some psychological insight) and 'see the bigger picture' (give a more thorough analysis of various issues e.g. a macro-perspective on political matters). These are the dimensions of the early battles and the business of self-improvisation is to win them (see 'existential discomfort' below).

Eventually the contamination felt within the pre-course orbit, as the on-course experiences begin to conflict (see 'shifting Common Ground of Relationships' below), invokes orbital differentiation. A 'juggling of roles' between living on-course and living pre-course attempts to impede any conflict arising. This is characteristic of life as the existent begins to normalise their life as a student.

Being Congruent with an Academic Context

Through a series of successes in the turbulence of the early course phase there arrives in the present an 'attunement to the stock of knowledge at hand' (Schutz 1967). The normalisation of the student identity now is secured in more profound terms as an academic identity. The living through of the early battles in the present cease to be perceived as battles, but transmute into a facilitation of a joyous transition. The existent spatially is far more congruent with context. All elements come together in a more coherent self-identity. The academic 'game', which was so summarily dismissed as such before, is now perceived to possess substance. The existent begins to believe in their project and themselves as 'one who studies'. Being-in-the-world has taken on a whole new frisson of belongingness. One is now an integral part of a perceived

‘academic set’: one ‘fits in’ manifested in the sense of voice and presence to language the ‘academic-set-self-identity’.

For example, when having to engage in public speaking Lilly finds that not only can she cope with the heightened level of self-awareness and individuation which such a situation presents, but also is empowered by her increased skills in discourse and vocabulary to deliver an appropriately gauged message. Lilly temporalises to a past self when such a prospect would be ‘petrifying’. She has ultimately joined a perceived ‘set’ who are characterised by their agency through language use – ‘key words’ which declare membership of an educated superordinate class above her past self-identity. This presentation of self-identity is contrasted with the past when Lilly temporalises to a time when agency was minimal, when the world was an oppressive place – particularly at school when she was reserved and ‘picked on’ (bullied). Her emergent on-course self-identity within her on-course orbit is a source of great comfort. This is her space. The place where she at last ‘fits in’. This transition above all is represented in the relaxed manner, as opposed to previous reticence, in speaking out in seminars (see ‘Confidence and its Correlates’ below).

There are a number of correlates to this spatial positioning. Firstly there is a marked shift in perception and way of relating to academic staff. The personally felt subordinatehood, comparative to the loftiness of tutors who were almost deified, transforms to a more democratised positioning (‘they’re only people after all’). The cognition that anyone with greater knowledge is simply further down the same road as the one on which the existent is travelling characterises this positioning.

....you become conscious that it is not anybody who’s looking down on you and saying ‘Oh yes, you are a student and you will do things our way’, that people [tutors and support staff] are there to facilitate what you are doing.

Wendy (p.8/9. Lines 50-3)

Secondly the personal agency to make desirable things happen reflects embodied feelings of strength and courage. This heightened sense of independence entails increased responsibility for one’s own destiny.

..I'd say it [doing the course] gave me more confidence. I'd always been so down about not doing any qualifications. I was really down on myself for that... I feel that not my mum and dad or my sister but my aunties and uncles and things everyone in our family had gone and done a degree I was the only one who had got married young. I got married when I was 19 so I did everything sort of wrong.....and at that point there [the point at which she felt comfortable as a student] it seemed as if I was making things right so my confidence came with that.

Belinda (p.11. Lines 6-12)

Study and its foci become more self-directed. No longer is one anxious to note down every word in lectures and clamour for every handout. One is now in charge and can attend, note down and seek help, as *one deems* necessary. Wendy for example takes outright responsibility for what she studies, including interests and foci. Her agency has reached such a point where she feels comfortable with only making lecture notes on foci she chooses, and to even absent herself from teaching sessions, taking decisions on the most effective use of her time. She temporalises to a past Wendy who noted everything and attended everything, unsure of the actual nature of her project. The set script, pre-ordained by others, of the pre-course life is now supplanted with a script that is open-ended, to be written by oneself. Thirdly this phase is characterised as a period of achieving an emergent status, wherein one can live conspicuously, proud and secure in one's project.

Bi-Orbital Existence

Such a position has important implications for coping with the conflict that the existent experiences in orbital contamination. A more detailed explanation of this bi-orbital existence is apposite at this point. The existent consciously differentiates between orbits and 'juggles roles'. Whilst this is the case at a conscious level – the appropriate self-identity is purposely called into being as each context demands, it is an oversimplification of a more complex lived reality. Each orbit lives on in all contexts. The appropriate self-identity is called into being as salient befitting one's interlocutors, but this does not mean that experiences and constructed self-identities from other

contexts stay, as it were, dormant. These can spring to life (predominantly the on-course self-identity) as the lived through context dictates. This I refer to as ‘contamination’, which is a useful metaphor as it represents an almost toxic influence on one’s experiences. The contamination can be both confusing and distressing.

...me mind’s more active and that’s what I’m used to now. And when me mind’s active in education y’see it’s active and I can feel meself more. I don’t feel meself any more with... just being me cos I’d be so bored if I were just me. D’y’get worra mean? And am used to it now. So does it sound as if I’ve just contradicted meself?

Doris (p.13. Lines 3-7)

‘I don’t feel meself any more with just being me’. ‘Just being me’ is the past Doris. There is a diminutive within this expression of self (just). The past Doris was metaphorically smaller on many dimensions (especially ‘strength, pride, courage and expanse’). Doris does not feel that this ‘me’ is her any more. She is now more intellectually active and she is becoming more settled with the transition to a new self-identity.

..I [speaks slowly] feel better at college. A feel meself more at college now. D’y’get worra mean. So if I’m at home. Am not saying I don’t like being meself at home I do but I ‘ave to keep busy. I need to keep reading. Am dragging college into me home life.

G: so there’s great change there isn’t there?

D: yeah but phew it’s that SUBTLE I can’t get it across to yer. I don’t feel as if I’ve changed but now I’m tellin’ yer now I think I ‘ave.

Doris (p.13. Lines 35-43)

Also contamination, in regard to sociality, is inimical to good relations with others (see ‘The Shifting Common Ground of Relationships’ below). Examples of this are legion in the individual psychological structures, but a particularly useful illustration is the

perceived mocking by close friends of the languaging of the on-course self-identity in the pre-course orbit

M: I think so, it comes from psychology, just reading more as well, yes, I think so and it embarrasses me a bit, you know because if you're talking to somebody, it does embarrass me, 'Oh what does that mean?' [She refers here to the mocking by friends and acquaintances when she uses academic language] – that embarrasses me

G: It's not a very nice thing to say

M: I don't know, I don't like that because then that makes me feel bad for them. I don't say it for show, I just say it because it's just in the.... I don't know...., conversation, that makes me feel uneasy...

Maureen (p.16. Lines 25-36)

As the existent becomes increasingly consumed by the on-course orbit, the salience of the on-course self-identity predominates. One perceives one's own developing transition in the response from others, in both orbits. One becomes aware of oneself through the awareness of others being aware of oneself. The transition gradually calls for greater orbital differentiation, but only for a finite time. Eventually as the on-course, academic-student-identity becomes more secure, the existent has the psychological strength, and presence to declare it to the world at large, existentially comfortable within the lifeworld.

There was a time when it [their relationship] had changed and we weren't comfortable.... and we've got over that. And it's a different sort of .. Tina and Wendy... and this is probably a change since then... I'm a lot happier with sayin' 'this is what I'm doin'' [studying] and.. because.. I'm not sayin' 'I wonder if it will be alright if I do this..?'

Wendy (p.1. Lines 20-26)

Inertial Drag

This security however is prone to bouts of exhaustion, as is its correlate, confidence (see 'confidence and its correlates' below). The past pre-course self-identity is at times lived out in the present, giving rise to stability when it is felt to be dwindling. There is a kind of magnetic pull to a past secure self-identity, an inertial drag toward the 'before', due to the existential dizziness of the vertigo of rapid change.

Doris for example embraces her self-improvisation through such things as reading each night, foregoing drinking in the pub with friends, feeling the joy of engagement with academic ideas, and revelling in the feelings of pride, strength, courage and expansion. She is also however striving for security and a sense of place and belonging. This is to be found in the pre-course Doris, which is lived out in the discourse she uses. The presentation of self through her language use is rooted in the pre-course orbit. 'I can't use big words, it's not in me nature'. Yet this sentiment is counterpoised by her joy of study and her emergent abilities to engage with academia.

The existent then attempts to cling on to the past at times of instability, presenting identity confusion in the present. Whereas at times in course experiences the past can have an unsettling presence in the present (tending toward the early stages, when guilt and shame plagues existence) at other times (tending toward the recent past i.e. well into the developmental journey) the past provides emotional comfort. The use of a past discourse (e.g. the local accent and dialect) to live through the present represents this ameliorative temporalising.

Temporalising to the Future.

The existent in the present phase, buoyant with independence and the capacity to live conspicuously, experiences a boundarilessness unknown before. One is empowered to go to places hitherto out of bounds.

The future.... well I want to do what I want to do. Before I would just be trudging along whereas now I'm heading somewhere. Don't really know where yet, but I'm more excited about the future.

Lilly (p.7. Lines 2-5)

This nascent stage of spatial expansion is accompanied by an upgrading of future expectations. Early worries of the ability to cope and the overarching horizon of fear of bad outcomes (e.g. that failure is a distinct possibility) is largely (but not entirely) supplanted by a bodying forth to fulfilment in a professional career e.g. teacher, writer, journalist, counsellor etc.

.....I would never have dreamed, if you'd had said to me 4 years ago you're going to be looking in the Guardian at a job based in Europe I would have said 'bollocks' it's just not going to happen, you know, it's not, but now...

Maureen (p.12. Lines 34-37)

At this phase temporality is cast predominantly toward the future rather than the past. Agency has reached a zenith in this present phase to the point where orbital differentiation can be discarded as belonging to the past whenever the existent chooses. This authentic positioning entails a handling of the perceived self-developments in one's negotiations with the world e.g. old friends are encountered authentically as the celebrated on-course, presentist, academic-student-self-identity. The subtext alludes to something like; 'yes I have changed and if you want to negotiate this relationship you need to take this into account or the deal's off'.

.....I'm still playing the role and she's still playing the role. So that's never changed. Erm... and she sees me more now as er... y'know cos she can see the affect of counselling and.... and learning different subjects and all the rest of it... And she's also changed. She's matured a lot and that's helped the relationship because if she was as she was then... the relationship wouldn't be...[tolerable]

Maureen, follow up interview (p.5. Lines 20-24)

Fantasising to future states however is not without its anxieties. The acceleration of self-identity construction has taken its toll on the existent with regard to the angst of increasing freedom in their trajectories of being and becoming. Possibilities can sometimes seem endless and ironically inimical to the 'Umwelt' (see Giddens 1999).

For Maureen distinct fear is involved in what she has become and is becoming, and how this impacts on her lifeworld in pervasive terms. How she knows herself within her new world.

I wanted to ask my friend actually last week [was there any dramatic change in me] ...and I thought, 'Would I really want to know the answer?' ... that's the other scary thing I don't know if I'm changing or if anyone else knows because of it, for the worse, I don't think I have.

Maureen (p.8. Lines14-21)

Change then whilst thrilling is also anxiety ridden. Her existence stands out into a not entirely psychologically secure future. This she experiences through her old relationships, from her pre-course orbit, where she is never quite at one with herself. For example; where will the journey end? It may be quite possible that she arrives at a position in which she eventually feels less at home than before, less settled, less happy. This is especially the case if valued relationships may begin to disappear.

There is then a sense of foreboding about the future with regard to 'where will it all end?' Things are not as they were. The strictures and directives of past existence, whilst radically inhibiting, were useful in attributing meaning to life – one did as one was told (both literally as well as metaphorically), this *was meaning*. In the present and the future the existent must take the absolute lead in attributing meaning to their life. This is the stark realisation of the present phase, as one transcends the immediate, looks at the distance travelled and toward the possibilities of the journey ahead. Conversely course experience has provided the psychological strength to handle this and the existent can press on, a sense of foreboding notwithstanding, with existential pioneering brio.

Lack of Agency as Essence of the Existential Baseline

Temporal phasing as essence of the HE experience is however a correlate of the existential baseline described herein (e.g. that of the disempowered malcontent), and is presented as the lifeworld of the 'before course' phase. In clear contrast to this, where

the existent feels already empowered, through previous successes, achievements expansive experiences etc., there is evidence to suggest that the temporal phases and existent's narrative are non-equal. Nancy for example came to higher education with a strong sense of personal efficacy following exciting travel experiences (living and working in various places in the Far East) and academic success at school (four 'A' levels). As someone who had a strong sense of presence and voice she experienced a biographical fissure that was the obverse to that of her existentially dependent, disempowered counterparts. She had acquired a trans-national perspective and phenomenologically she was not simply in a urban location in the north of England, but everywhere she had been, all at once, and yet also on this course, with these other students, who were at this same location - and it seemed *only* at this location. She felt an outsider unattuned to the surrounding social world. Out of step in time and space.

...I was more confident when I was away travelling and meeting lots of people all the time... and then suddenly I find myself back home with my parents and I came down with a bang I think...and like I say I had these high expectations and I felt really upset for a long time really like crying upset thinking 'oh god I'm not going to fit in here'. No one wanted to know about my... experiences and things... and that's all I knew..

Nancy (p.2. Lines 19-24)

Added to her sense of lost agency was the dramatically increased dependence upon others, especially her parents. Her situation had dramatically affected sociality within the lifeworld. She was situated firmly in this place of disempowered selfhood. From a position of free-floating social relations and freedom to enter many spaces of living with others she was now tied to an existence of tethered dependence. For example although she was not at odds with her parents, the business of resurrecting her positioning as a child at home was disturbingly disempowering. The independent traveller had been pinned down, and with this constraint to self-efficacy came a severe diminishment of her previous confidence. Course content impacted upon self as initiating intellectual development, but simultaneously a closing down of horizons comparative to the past and a world order of personal retrograding is experienced. Claims as to the essence of the HE experience then must be only made with the existential baseline of that described here as the 'before course' phase. Note also that

whilst most participants are operationally 'mature students' Yvonne is not and is classed as 'traditional entry'. In her case however the critical existential baseline of low self-efficacy applies. At school she had very little voice in all contexts wherein teachers dominated her actions, facilitated by the institutional framework. As she explains,

..when I was at 6th form and at school I was constantly put down by quite a few people ...and that kind of kept me in the shadows really.

Yvonne (p.2. Lines 23-24)

This existence 'in the shadows' left Yvonne feeling extremely insignificant and depressed. In comparison to others who were viewed by staff as achievers she felt excluded. Someone who did not count in the school's priorities. Someone who was to be ignored and 'cooled out' (Goffman 1962). The crucial issue with regard to essence then may well be that lack of agency within the lifeworld of the existent, as they begin to encounter returning to education (the 'launching phase' and before) is key, and not simply being a 'mature student' (although this may often be correlated with a lack of agency). The following commentary should be understood within this proviso.

5. EXISTENTIAL DISCOMFORT.

The purpose of this section is to highlight the levels of distress, which mature students experience as they pick their way through the lived reality of doing higher education. To do this it is necessary to revisit the 'before course' phase and then chronologically follow their journey into the unknown. It is this order of unknown territory that prevails during their early course experiences and to some extent remains with them throughout.

Level of Risk

Once the decision has been made 'to take arms against a sea of troubles', and thus to live in a mode erring toward the authentic, the magnitude of the project is felt through the element of risk. One is playing for high stakes. The existent is altercast into dismissing one's tradition and taking on a super-ordinate position comparative to significant others in the lifeworld. Failure would be devastating. One has assumed a

position of superiority not only by physically 'going to college' but by even contemplating such a notion in the first place. To position oneself above others and then 'to fall' would mean an excruciating loss of face to remain with one forever.

....when I first started then people wanted me to fall [fail in a general sense, both failure to cope and failure to succeed academically]. Expected me to fall. Wanted to see me fall and laugh.... they really did because they thought 'you'll never do it' you know wha'a mean 'she'll never do it. She's got enough on wi' two children and work. She's got enough on. She'll not do it'.

Doris (p.4. Lines 23-26)

To save face and avoid shame then is paramount. Doris' project has to be realised. The stakes are very high as failure, and the prospect of being seen to fail, is acutely intolerable, if not devastating. This underlying fear of failure does not go away. There is in the present a strong feeling of misplacement. That she is in the wrong place. That she doesn't belong and she will be found out. The anticipated level of opprobrium should one fail then would render one an outcast. Also by entering such space the existent is filled with negative emotions. For example guilt that one has betrayed those closest by abandoning their social shared meaning system and moving into space which is perceived as not for their kind. This is manifest in imaginings of the need to go back and support family and friends as before (domestic tasks, socio-emotional support).

.... Um, It's not me, this is not me, this is not where I should be right now, right down to at certain times through the day thinking 'I'm not doing this now if I wasn't here, I would be doing whatever... I shouldn't be here.'

Wendy (p.7. Lines 41-43)

Similarly through class-consciousness the existent may also feel shame in that one has betrayed one's roots and play down their project, presenting it as a simple everyday task without any personal significance, simultaneously emphasising their sub-cultural background in the form of discourse employed. Doris for example courts the conviviality of her pre-course friends by actively playing down the enormity of the task. She fears being branded a 'show off' and therefore consciously plays archetypal,

indigenous 'broad Yorkshire' (accentuated local dialect and accent) in social interaction.

Strangerhood

On entering the socio-academic milieu for the first time and for a time after, the existent is plunged into a strange, alien world. For Doris early experiences were characterised by intense fear. She was thrown into a world of hierarchical status in which she was at the bottom. Her expectations were full of images of gorgon-like others whose gaze would 'petrify' her. This was to be a scary world of knowledge and intellectualism, which was far above her, intensely threatening to her psychological well being and self-worth. She was a small weakling surrounded by intellectual heavyweights, who would intimidate and humiliate her.

Strangerhood resounds in these early stages. There may be a feeling of 'first day at school' as one cowers in metaphorical corners to avoid the composite confrontation of strange people and an unknown institutional edifice. The existent is in awe of staff to the extent that they are almost deified ('like demi-gods'). This place is daunting, impersonal, scary – a place where one is out of place.

However, an overarching horizon of confronting the formidable ensues as one 'takes arms against (this present) sea of troubles' so that 'by opposing end them'. The resolve of earlier lives on in this present. The overriding problem is the spatiality of living in an existential void. Anomie, not entirely dissimilar to the social dislocation which Durkheim (1970) describes (and which is implicated in suicide!) is experienced. Within this spatial incongruence between self-identity and context existential questions face the existent: How to act? Who to be? These constitute a disturbance of a high order and they are the first of many puzzles to be solved.

There is then a degree of ontological insecurity (Giddens 1999) which plagues the existent in these formative stages of their journey. Within the order of unknown territory there is in relation to ontological insecurity an operational void. The existent simply does not know how HE works. The truths of before no longer apply. Tracey found some ideas difficult to cope with, as there was an integral challenge to deep-seated beliefs and thereby a threat to her local sub-cultural identity. It was

disturbing to have long held truths be declared as untrue. There was the composite confrontation of strangerhood and an unknown institutional edifice with all its related unknowns: norms, language, roles etc. The project then is strongly characterised by risk and a journey into the unknown. 'I didn't know if I was going to get past the first week' (Maureen p.3. Line 49).

Questions abound for the existent such as, what protocols are to be followed in the construction of good relations? If I'm late for a session, what should I do? Go in or slink away? What does this foreign language of in-house terminology mean? As 'who I am' is incongruent with context who should I be? Previously individuality was ascribed; at school, and/or in the workplace, and/or at home; what happens here? Should I hang around to be told how to live this situation or do I need to claim my own individuality? Such questions illustrate the 'sea of troubles' into which the existent is thrown with a danger of drowning. They resonate around the lifeworld as the existent delves deeper into this strange world. Other more specific puzzles, yet related to these all-embracing questions, present themselves: What happens in a lecture? What part do I play? Sit and listen? Make copious notes? Rise and make erudite contributions to the proceedings? What happens in a seminar? Should I have read and digested with fully annotated text that book designated as 'essential reading' so that I can enter into energetic debate? What norms are in play when socialising in such a situation? Do we hold ourselves back protecting a pretence on who we really are amongst all these intellectuals? In sum how do I make this whole HE experience happen? And these are only the earlier puzzles to be worked out! Later on there is the adoption of the appropriate language, understanding concepts, terms and the academic way of doing things. The fragility of truth itself is hard to take. The existent has arrived as a 'metaphysician' and is encouraged to become an 'ironicist' (see Rorty 1996). That is to move from 'common sense' type thinking and embrace relativism. The existent then is locked into a world where they are intellectually disabled in the struggle to establish a meaningful universe.

Failure Anxiety

High anxiety then is unsurprisingly an everyday theme of being-in-the-world for the HE mature student in the early stages of their studies. A correlate of this, which remains throughout the HE experience, is the overarching horizon of fear of bad

outcomes. The risks of failure are ever present. Criticism on marked work is viewed as highly problematic through the lens of failure anxiety.

.....then I would find myself going home and I'd be thinking this is not what it's about, this is not how I want to feel, I don't want to feel like this, um....I felt bad about myself felt as if erm.....I wasn't going to achieve my goal, as if I couldn't cope, as if I was doomed to failure, um.....not very confident.

Hattie (p.11. Lines 2-5)

Negative feedback is seen as just that – negative, and not as guidance on what needs to be rectified. Failure anxiety determines that any and all material that is available must be garnered. One must note everything down, every handout and reference should be obtained. Nothing must slip one's attention in keeping the spectre of failure at bay. This psychological pressure makes heavy demands upon self-belief, and confidencelessness is the greatest of threats to the sense of project. Keeping it at bay is immanently significant. Simply the passing of time is itself a source of confidence (and preventative of confidencelessness) because as it passes and one is still on the course, one's presence for any unit of time passed means one is, with regard to time, a step nearer to completion of the project. Maureen sums up how feedback and time passing builds a sense of confidence:

...as each assignment goes in, as each lecture comes round, as each little point that you make is given some sort of consideration, on appraisal, your confidence builds..

Maureen (p.12. Lines 38-39)

And as confidence builds the academic-educational-insider-identity is intersubjectively being constructed.

Confidencelessness though is the all-powerful debilitating disease within the lifeworld. Social comparisons with other students (often with reference to the mature/traditional entry dichotomy), especially in the early stages infect one with confidencelessness, but its ubiquity is such that it can break out at any time (see 'Confidence and its Correlates'

below). When a bout of confidencelessness infects one, recourse to the past is a palliative. A languaging of the pre-course self identity within the on-course orbit, or taking on the position of generativity (see Erikson 1980) within the course community as one would in the local community (e.g. constructing a 'wise guru' self-identity as a mentor/counsellor of the less experienced) serves to ease the symptoms of confidencelessness. Tom for example in establishing presence and voice has constructed an avuncular relationship with his fellow students. In the 'moments of identification' (see Jenkins 1996) with others Tom feels his age, especially in relation to the younger students. He has become a source of advice and counsel. Partly this has been altercast and partly taken on and fostered by Tom himself. This again is a comfort in the identity confusion and the attendant potentiality of confidencelessness that signifies his on-course lived reality.

Similarly the dismissal of the whole process as some kind of game in which one simply has to follow the rules to succeed may temporarily ease the pain. Within such a position there are no extreme demands on one as there is no real substance to this game, other than some superficial gloss that is easily seen through to the real business of the easily doable. Such palliatives abound in the early stages, yet they are utilised when necessary throughout the experience.

Existential discomfort then is bound up with threats to self-identity. Whether this is to be seen in a bad light as someone who has ideas above their station (shamed within the pre-course orbit) or as a stranger who is a person of intellectual unworthiness ('a dunce' in the on-course orbit). The latter is felt particularly acutely in the early stages of the HE experience as almost an assault on oneself. Yet despite such an experienced embattlement there is no going back. The loss of face would be intolerable. So true to the ethic adopted at the (ever increasingly important) fateful moment of decision to take on this project, the existent presses on as the existential pioneer.

6. THE SHIFTING COMMON GROUND OF RELATIONSHIPS

That is the land of past content.
I see it shining plain.
The happy highways where I went,
And cannot come again.

A. E. Houseman

Before higher education arrived on the existential landscape the existent had relationships which were played out upon common ground. The purpose of this section is to describe the essence of their experience with regard to how perceived change in themselves as a person impacted upon those relationships. The metaphor of ‘common ground’ represents the place where those relationships could happen. What we see from this description is that this common ground shifts, such that relationships from the pre-course orbit remain with a past common ground. The present common ground has shifted to a new place where new relationships are played out. Pre-course relationships (e.g. old friends and colleagues) cannot enter this present common ground as it is for them ‘not common’ – it belongs to the existent and the on-course orbit and it is perceived that generally it is not a place where they want to go. This is the experience of the mature student in HE. In sum they have progressively less in common with their relations of the pre-course orbit. The following expands upon this trend.

Orbital Contamination

As course experiences impact upon the existent and the on-course self-identity emerges orbit differentiation ensues – the need to increasingly call into being a self-identity congruent with context. As this happens however the existent also experiences contamination of one orbit with another e.g. the on-course orbit conflicts with the pre-course orbit as perhaps illustrated by a domestic row over the imbalance of power or duties. This may happen in dramatic fashion such as the initiation of a divorce or the termination of a developing relationship once one’s project is declared. Doris relates her experiences of a first date with a local working class male.

... 'what do you do?' And er I said erm 'I'm doin' a degree at college and I'm wantin' to do an MA when I've done'. And erm at first he completely changed the subject. 'yeah well I don't like women who use big words..... I don't like women like that'. And I'm like ' well I'm not using any big words' cos I'd trip meself up if I did. And erm he said 'I just like down to earth women' and I said 'well I am down to earth'. [referring to other speaking] 'well I don't like women who use big words and things like that'. So erm he said to me 'what are you doin' t'morra?' and I said I had to read and he were.... totally disgusted with what I said and I never saw him again after that. [laughs nervously]

Doris (p.6. Lines 5-20)

Here the existent experiences the shifting of common ground. 'The blinkers have come off' (see Doris below) declares this shift as the existent views the pre-course existence as a parochial and narrow-sighted lived reality. Realising the shift the existent encounters pre-course relations with caution. Holistically the sociality of their project becomes salient. The order of confusion which relates to contamination is illustrated in Doris' growing sense of distance from her 'roots'.

...So you can tell I've gone one step up on a ladder and they're [local neighbourhood acquaintances and friends] still to me they still down.... The' not beneath me but I've gone one step up in a professional ladder. D'y understand what I mean. N [and] they're still down there and I think 'why don't you do something. Get a job or do a course. It's easy there's crèches and everything and I think of all the choices I've got. They've no focus and mine have come off. My blinkers've come off. D'y'know wha'a mean sort of thing. And I see they could do this and they could do that. But they don't and I can't understand that so I just keep away from 'em. It's not intellectual enough for me. It bores me basically. *That's awful that. It's awful. Can't believe I've just said that.*

Doris (p.14. Lines 6-15 my italics)

Whilst not believing what she has said there is no rescinding of her comments. She is now of greater status, yet this flies in the face of her 'sedimented beliefs', and the order

of confusion prevails. There is a disturbing fracture between her emergent self-identity and the socio-cultural background that gives her stability and security. This is the puzzle she is living and working through. A multiplicity, which she now has to handle.

So the shame of betrayal to old friends, the sorrow of their passing (this is essentially a death of the past – ‘and cannot come again’), the effrontery to the on-course self-identity when it is mocked during orbital contamination (e.g. the languaging of the on-course identity slips through in the pre-course orbit perhaps in the use of a theoretical term), all cumulate in a distancing of the psychological space between the existent and pre-course interlocutors.

..I know that I’m tryin’ ard to be me old self. Like in the pub and mixed company and things like that. I’m tryin’ to be like I’ve always been...cos that’s my personality. And on the other side... I’m determined to do this. So I’ve changed..

Tom (p.1. Lines 43-45)

This throws Tom into identity confusion. ‘I’m still meself I *think*.’ He attributes meaning through a diagrammatically vertical splitting - ‘a split personality thing. One half of me is doing this’ (study). He has to compartmentalise this self-identity into specific contexts. Yet still he feels a profound conflict. His on-course orbit can interact with his pre-course orbit. There is a confusion and a blurring of attempted bounding. He finds that he is a student out of congruent context in the pub with ‘old’ friends. To handle this he employs a series of humorous strategies. Craving the stability of his pre-course orbit in a rapidly changing universe, he ensures that he connects with this through ribald interchanges. As he explains,

..when I started I said ‘if I changed...pinch me’ and every now and agen I do get one (laughs). Basically I say that if I start talking bollocks (pretentious talk) pinch me ‘ard. So every now and agen [laughs] somebody will come and do that. Just things that.. because you’re changing.

Tom (p.3. lines 24-27)

Such a construction of his on-course identity in the pre-course orbit is related to the rapidity of change. The speed at which his 'improvisation of self' is taking place adds to the problem of identity confusion. This acceleration of biography and the need for stability through clinging to an 'old self' are immanent significations of Tom's transition.

Intimate relationships are particularly a source of distress when the shift becomes palpable. The existent either negotiates or tolerates - with an imagining of future separation and independence - to arrive at an internally constructed *modus vivendi* (e.g. 'I'll put up with things now and look around for potential partners for the future'). As Lilly illustrates,

[Announcing to her husband] 'I'm going out tonight George'. And that was it. Now I normally make apologies saying, 'I don't really want to go out', and I didn't I just said, 'I'm going out'... And then the following day I knew there was going to be a backlash from it, but it was like a total... There's been a total power shift. There was no backlash...

Lilly (p.1. Lines 39-45)

With this enhanced agency Lilly transcends the immediate and fantasises a future state of independence. The present is a launching phase, wherein she images herself as a spatially free agent, able to move into new areas without the bounds of previous guilt where she was the all-caring Lilly ready to place everyone's needs before her own. The time had arrived when she was to shed the expectations of family and the local sub-culture, and take full charge of her own destiny. 'It's like I'm preparing myself for a total change in the way my life is going to go' (p.2. Lines 27-8). This transcendence is picked up in a bodying forth to a future without her husband and with another man, even to the extent where future potential partners are sought and 'sized up' for a relationship. The practicalities of her striving for the future state (her overarching horizon is one of achieving this project) are steadily thought out within her expanding cognitive space. She plans the 'how' having keenly felt the 'why'. The latter is tinged with feelings of revenge for the perceived abuse of power by her husband and his financial superiority. It would be 'pay back' time. The embodiment of her imaged end result and the emotive features that go with it are acute.

The 'Ripple Effect' of On-Course Experiences

The new common ground occasions a voice in new arenas.

...since I've come here [the course] you know it's 'you can do it, there's....more to you than just sitting in the background' [pervasive messages from others including tutors]. I think I've realised since coming here that I can...stand up for myself. I do have a voice and....people do actually listen to me.

Yvonne (p.2. Lines 24-27)

Course experiences of a multifarious nature initiate an overarching horizon of 'easiness with people'. This entails a minimising of status differential between self and others. There is a 'ripple effect' in that the transition experienced in the space of their studies extends to other places.

I have gone over there and started being a Parent Governor. And it was yesterday afternoon we were at Awtry Hall, this buffet lunch and all sorts of things, the Mayoress and everything. And I thought two years ago I wouldn't have dreamt of being in this room and arguing with the people I am arguing with. I would not have argued...It is that sort of thing where now I do feel that I will be able to walk into a room full of people and not for one second consider what their social standing is. It wouldn't matter anymore.....Whereas two years ago I would have thought 'Oh God'....but now that's different.

Wendy (p.9/10. Lines 43-1)

In the 'ripple effect' then the existent feels empowered to speak in contexts where hitherto they would not have even entered (see 'Confidence and its Correlates' below).

7. CONFIDENCE AND ITS CORRELATES

The maintenance of confidence is above all else the immanent signification of the mature student's HE experience. Without it the existent is lost, completely debilitated to the extent that the world becomes a nightmarish place of psychological torture. One is unable to go on and the spectre of failure that haunts one is felt to be about to pounce and destroy. As described above confidence is subject to breakdown at any time. Even when things are going to plan and aspirations are high the spectre still threatens:

.....and definitely, I'm looking past three bed suburbia, definitely, but yes it's helped learning but then Graham, I could fail next semester, it's all a big leap of faith and it's still a crisis of confidence...

Maureen (p.12. Lines 39-42)

Typically crises are initiated when a challenge is set and if these are not readily confrontable and beatable such crises loom particularly large. 'This mature student thing, you are always doubting your own ability' (Maureen p.1. Lines 20-21).

Confidence is an extremely fragile quality that is under scrutiny at each and every stage; assessments, new course units, the start of each semester and year/level. The need to feel confident is a powerful facet of one's progression in this project. The risk of failure is so great that any notion that it may become a reality is met with feelings of impending doom.

...when it comes to September and I'm due to start again.. I get scared and I don't wanna start. Cos I keep thinking, 'this is the year you're going to fail Doris. This is the year where you're gonna fail. You will... you've done too well last year... you'll not do it for another year'. Y'know and then I'm petrified a [of] starting again.

Doris (p.9. Lines 14-17)

The confidence then to take on the tasks and challenges that are presented must be maintained.

Self-Improvisation

The most common task as related above is the everyday business of self-improvisation and, with the differentiated amounts of success in this experience, the existent oscillates between a state of confidence and confidencelessness. 'Speaking up in class' during the early stages is a particularly challenging task in this regard. Initially and at all subsequent times the existent here is employing language to speak as a different person and feels trepidation at this bold action in unknown territory. Confidence then is needed to support this action. The intersubjectivity of self and tutor and self and fellow students, however, is such that all actors enjoy an esprit de corps, which gives the confidence 'fix' to keep one going e.g. tutor encouragement in seminar discussion,

...It might be just a comment, if you are in a lecture and you make a really valid point in a Seminar - you make a really valid point, and it sparks a discussion, that makes me feel...it's great, or if a lecturer says 'That's a really good point, let's go on with that'...that was me..... go back 18 months and I wouldn't have known... yes, very much so, but you feel confident in it.

Maureen (p.9. Lines 29-33)

..or a chat with fellow students to inform self-assessment on how one is progressing.

Especially Maureen cos she seems to 'oh I don't think I can do this'.... worse than me.... you know and I say 'course y'can course y'can. You've got this far you're half way through now.' And that's what she says to me when I'm like it.

.....you need support and you're not sure you're going the right way and you want to be certain you need somebody you can go to and say 'look I'm doin' this what do you think?' you know and see what they say.

Olive (p.3. Lines 22-35)

Over time coherence of self-identity as a student is established and one's student behaviour reaches some level of normalisation (given Merleau-Ponty's caveat that it can never be entirely comprehensible). The existent feels greater comfort with doing what needs to be done.

....he (tutor) is sort of encouraging us to have our own opinions and challenge something... which as your confidence grows, like saying before, it's like dipping your toe in the water, tentatively, and then you get a bit further as your confidence grows and he doesn't shout you down, not that he would do that anyway, but you don't hit a brick wall and if that's encouraged, through facilitation.... I suppose, your confidence grows, definitely.

Maureen (p.9. Lines 35-41)

A correlate of this comfortable belongingness is the existent's level of critical awareness. This is a raising of one's awareness of the world in general as a freedom from being duped by the meaning constructions of others. It emanates from the experience of course content in all its manifestations; exposure to more different forms of being (e.g. other students, study of other forms of life etc.) and theoretical material (e.g. feminism, oppression etc.). It also points up two distinct confidence types. Firstly the confidence to tackle academic activity (contributing in seminars, writing assignments in a self-assured manner etc.) and secondly the confidence to handle oneself in the world at large, bolstered by one's sense of increased knowledge and skills. The 'ripple effect' introduced above pertains here also. There is an associated emotional shift with this effect. The existent feels a greater tolerance of others and an embracing of anything new which appears on the existential landscape. With a perceived enhancement of social skills one has the sense of presence and voice to connect with disparate others. Course content engenders a greater reflectiveness that drives such emotionality. This may be manifest in radical changes in parental styles such as a movement from an authoritarian approach to be more acceptant-democratic (see Rogers 1961). Essentially the existent 'feels' more. One feels a contagion of the course experiences with intimate others (close friends, own children) albeit with a realisation that they will not feel it unless they themselves actually do it. Nevertheless one feels it to the extent that one proudly lives it in interactions with them (the 'shifting common ground' notwithstanding). With children this is experienced as a role modelling of 'living purposefully' with the emotional fillip for one's project when this appears to happen. Lilly for example feels there is a greater candour and connectedness between herself and her children. Her on-course self-identity is seen as a positive

influence to be presented to her children as a model to be followed. Within this is an embodied pride - a position of 'look at me and what I am achieving – you can do this too'. Her pride then spans both orbits as a good mother displaying good mothering practice and as good mother modelling desirable behaviour for her children's positive development.

Critical awareness, increased tolerance of others and the established coherence of the student-on-course-self-identity co-exist with a sensed confidence to be able 'to do' academia. There is a palpable languaged declaration of this to the world as increasingly one not only speaks as a different person, but one *becomes* that different person. This realisation of transition can strike out in epiphanies. For example when one makes a particular contribution in a seminar ('did I really say that?', 'oh was that me?'), or one is altercast as the principal discussant.

... it was sort of.. we were the last group to sort of speak, and he went right 'your group' and I just sort of looked round and I thought 'well that'll be me that's speaking'. It was just assumed that I'd be the one. So I'm sort of stuck and I said 'does anyone else want to do it' and they went, 'no it's OK you can carry on'. So I just carried on and I never thought about it really. And afterwards I thought that was brilliant, that was great, that was just how I wanted it to be put and everything. And oh.. and I didn't really think about it that much. It was just assumed that by the people that I was with that I would be the one that talked about it.

Belinda (p.3. Lines 42-48)

This also identifies the intersubjectivity of experiences as Belinda's awareness of herself is experienced through the awareness of her fellow students being aware of her.

Realisation of Project

Accompanying this sense of transition and self-development is a realisation of the existent's project and in turn an internal celebration of this position. In contrast to the previous temporal dimension the existent now 'has something to say'. The 'joy of study' (see below) elates the existent such that the struggle with the socio-academic

milieu of the early course phase is cast off completely, and one enters into each task with great energy, feeling reinforced for every effort made.

Just a few weeks ago a lecture with BC [lecturer] and he was talking about nominalisation. And er he'd been talking about it but I'd read something all about it and I was just unsure on one point. And, er, and I said when you nominalise does it always omit agency? And I went out of the class and I said, 'I can't believe I just said that. Do I know what that means? Yes I do know what that means.' And somebody said you're just a swot aren't you? And I'm like 'ugh, yeah,' [laughs] you know it was one of those. I suppose that was quite a good moment, Cos it was all of a sudden I realised what I was talking about. It sounded good. It sounded like something I wouldn't have said. And then I could say it.

Belinda (p.19. lines 23-37)

Other examples include studying into the early hours or curtailing one's social life under the demands of preparatory reading or instating a personal training programme of intellectual development through a tightly prescribed work schedule.

..now I've gone right t't beginning, started reading [a set text] from page to page, every single night and I actually know what he's talking about. Y'know wha'a'mean and that made me feel fantastic. Cos I spent a week really really thinking and reading about what he's been saying, instead of just leavin' it. Y'know and that makes me feel a lot better as well. That's a new me. I'm changing all... I'm changing every week. I'm doing more like erm before... I'd drink three times a week now I'll have a drink on a Friday night only then read every single night. The more I read the more proud I feel I've read the night before... so it gives me that incentive to read again the following night d'y'know wha'a mean. And then I feel even more proud if I've read for three days running so I think I'll do it for another day and it keeps me going all t'time.

Doris (p.7. Lines 33-43)

This activity is also a manifestation of the overarching horizon of the fear of bad outcomes, but nevertheless the ‘joy of study’ is the alter ego of the spectre of failure – almost the angel of success!

There is then a synergy between sensed development with the joy of study, the acquisition of knowledge/critical awareness, and levels of confidence. The latter (and thereby the former two) is maintained and enhanced by peer evaluations (e.g. identified as a worthy student to act as discussant for fellows) and by tutor evaluations (e.g. positive responses to oral contributions, written feedback on assessed work). Cumulatively these act as an affirmation of one’s abilities, one’s personal success and achievement and as testimony to the change in self-identity.

..we’d just been talking about direct variations and we’d done about Creoles. Oh and I can remember talking to Helen, she’s the English student and I said ‘Oh we’d just done it in that last lecture.’ And I thought I know and I’d remembered. It’s just that you all of a sudden, things click. It was just the fact that I knew it. Certain things people talk about, I know about. You know a lecturer will say something and you remember something from a previous lecture and it’s nice that you know about these things. It is nice, it’s knowing that I can say post-structuralism and know the myth of post-structuralism and I know what it is. And you know when somebody talks about, like you know and I know what that means. And it’s just nice. All of a sudden this year things have started to click a bit more and it’s getting the confidence to join in.

Belinda (p.20. Lines 3-15)

A particular fateful moment is the first round of assessments when failure anxiety is particularly intense. Any weakness that is perceived in the existent’s performance knocks confidence with a resounding jolt. The esprit de corps is recruited in the servicing of self-worth. The intersubjectivity with study partners serves one well to make good the damage.

.....when you get on the phone to somebody, and they say ‘No, you can do it’, you sort of like.... [they say] ‘your essay plan, that’s really good, you

know what you're doing, you're on the right track , just do it', [Maureen thinks to herself] 'I can do this, yes' the confidence is an exchange, definitely.

Maureen (p.10. Lines 42-45)

This is the 'confidence fix' that is needed and the challenge is overcome: the essay is written, the presentation is presented, the exam is survived.

The Zenith of Failure Anxiety – The Formal, Assessed Seminar Presentation

There is one particular evaluative experience that is critical to the existent's confidence and psychological wellbeing. This is the zenith of failure anxiety – the formal, assessed (and therefore video taped), seminar presentation. This embodies many facets of earlier 'existential discomfort'. The glare of others as one publicly demonstrates one's abilities and skills (or lack of). The possibility of failure both in formal assessment and in the more subtle realms of losing face in the public arena (not being able to play 'academic student'). The cumulative affect of feeling out of place. The self-identity then so carefully carved out up to that point is particularly under threat, as the existent plays out the business of languaging an identity hitherto unknown and unknowable, until it is brought into being in the doing of the presentation. One has to identify with someone that one is not at that moment. 'Normally my hands would be shaking but they weren't. And I thought I can stand up and speak' (Lilly).

The implication of not succeeding in this acutely public self-improvisation is seen as potentially devastating. The presentation is a crisis point. The result, movement forward or move out and an end to the existent's identity project, with the terrible thought of the return to the past to face one's detractors and admit failure. The elation then following success is further testament to one's emergent self-identity and one's emotional positioning as an existential pioneer willing to go into unknown areas. Also confidence has been given an immovable prop to be retained and to support one through future crisis points.

...also these presentations. We had so much work to do and you know you've got to know your stuff. Like it's got to be right so... That's helped

so much. So much. It's horrible. I hate doing them but I'm really glad I've done them. Really glad. I think they've helped an awful lot.

Belinda (p.19. Lines 37-41)

8. CONCLUSION: EXISTENTIAL PIONEERISM

Man (sic) is a self-reflecting animal in that he alone has the ability to objectify himself, to stand apart from himself, as it were, and to consider the type of being he is, and what it is that he wants to do and become.

(Dobzhansky 1967:52)

Successful Self-Identity Construction

Existential phenomenology emphasises the transcendence of the human existent. This is to point out that at any moment the individual is going beyond what they are at that moment. This process has been evidenced in the lifeworld of mature students in higher education. There is an experienced *acceleration* of self-identity construction. This is to say that although the phenomenological position is that the I is an impermanent construct: we continually construct and reconstruct our selves, the essence of the experience is that these constructions are more quickly driven by the pace at which self-improvisations are invoked in the lifeworld of the higher education mature student. Yvonne's accelerated 'reinvention of self' has been reflected in her self-presentation ('I've completely changed the way I look' [whilst attending college]) as this non-verbal behaviour speaks to her college surroundings, and she now bodies forth to the future temporal dimension as a teacher, writer or journalist. The speed of the transition is further signified as she intends her pre-course orbit and the aspirations of that space and time.

...18 months ago I wouldn't have said anything [very shy in public].
I...were planning a job in a shop or I'm never going to get any better.
Erm....now all of a sudden I seem to have a future.

Yvonne (p.4. Lines 35-37)

In a relatively short period of their life the existent has rapidly encountered a legion of hitherto unknown experiences: engagement with academics and academic discourse, division into home and college self-identities, epiphanies of self development, and shifts in relationships. A new but inchoate self-identity is perceived through a range of novel encounters with people and ideas.

G:So where's that focus now? Where is Lilly now? Where is she?

L: ...it used to be getting old and perhaps having grandchildren but now I've got a career to look forward to. And it's exciting and I don't know what's going to happen. What different opportunities are going to come up. It's empowering as I was always reliant on Chris [her husband] whereas I'm no longer and I think he realises that now as well.

Lilly (p.2. lines 46-50 and p.3 lines 1-3)

This evolution then is an extremely optimistic state of affairs with new horizons opening up and a capacity to take on a new project of self-development beyond the boundaries of home and husband. There is a new overarching horizon of personal development and spatially a boundarilessness for her life that was unknown when the overarching horizon of family and home was experienced. This embryonic stage of a new self-identity is characterised by new knowledge and skills, a sense of confidence and empowerment, hitherto unknown aspirations, successes and status.

For Belinda there is a distinct correlation between the acquisition of academic knowledge and confidence. The latter is manifest in increased feelings of presence and voice. In seminar discussions the nascent on-course academic identity of before is realised in greater depth. As she explains when discussing speaking up in class,

...what I mean about the confidence you sort of gaining it and it sort of gets to a level and it's just that you've got it and you don't think about it anymore. It's not... it's not a conscious issue. It's just something that you've... got

Belinda (p.3. Lines 26-28)

Overall there is a perspectival shift in world view and self within it. As a result the existent is caught up in a maelstrom of theoretical and academic activity, and has to find a way through the ensuing uncertainty of self-adjustment.

Self-identity is successfully constructed however. The existent is not in the end constrained by the traditional expectations of what is sub-culturally held as right and proper. One does break away from traditional roles and wishes to develop, commensurate with the 'culture of constant readjustment' (Giddens 1999). This is with particular reference to the notion of transition from one way of being to another. This can be conceptualised as a change in self-identity as articulated above. Certainly change is *perceived* as taking place, and the influence of multifarious programme experiences is perceived by the existent as being intimately implicated in that change. Part of this transition is the discourse that can be demonstrated in the living through of the on-course orbit. The language employed calls into being an academic identity through a range of self-improvisations. For example there has been a particular 'fateful moment' in this appropriation of new aspects to self within Maureen's counselling work with prisoners. She languages a self-identity of therapist and this is accepted and celebrated by her counsellee and subsequently by herself. The terms to live the situation are not just concepts explored in class, they now work as an aspect of her self within her existence as 'Maureen-the-academic-destined-for-professional-counselling-work.' She can do therapy armed with her course knowledge. She can *become* a therapist.

Courage and Authenticity

Yeah, my friend, she's very unhappy in her job and she keeps saying 'oh, God I'm fed up' and I say you've got to be your own god, you've got to make it happen.

Lilly (p.4. Lines 8-10)

Metaphorically then we can refer to 'mature students' as existential pioneers, because of their bold actions in innovative self-creation and in entering territory beyond their

own, with potential terrors at every turn. One participant summed it up in echoing an old maxim:

If man (sic) is to discover new lands he must first have the courage to lose sight of the shore.

Anon (quoted by 'Maureen' during fieldwork)

This courage for the existent taking on the higher education experience refers to taking and following the decision to live authentically. 'If I were gonna do it, I were gonna do it and that were that' (Olive p.6. Line 10). This points up the level of resolve that Olive generated about her project. It would happen despite the barriers which may come her way. This resolve entails a psychological separating of self from local tradition and sub-cultural norms, and entering the world described herein. Tracey expresses it as her independence returning 'with a vengeance'. Overcoming the perceived stigma of lone parenthood and the associated status she has now assumed a position of pride and the capacity to declare this publicly, secure in her new found knowledge, independence, confidence and the at-one-ness of her nascent new self- identity. She refers to her response to a reference made by an acquaintance on her single parenthood.

T: ..Not everything's bad just cos' I've got divorced. It's fantastic, it's better than it's ever been.' And she said, 'Oh I'm really sorry.' I didn't let her put me down and become just a single parent. You know, 'oh pity her.'

G: Was it anything to do with the fact that you are a student?

T: Yeah. It was yeah. I could just stand there and boast. I'm doing a degree and I'm in my second year. The attitude I get has been a really big thing for me in becoming a single parent. It was a big stigma for me. I've always had to deal with this thing that they're above you. It's this labelling thing and being quite paranoid and conscious about it, but I'm quite proud now. I think that's to do with education.

Tracey (p.7. Lines 13-24)

Her course and the totality of experience it presents have made a difference. She is ensanguined by the perceived achievement of status, and the fantasised future of greater status with the attendant pride – the realisation of her project. The vicissitudes of life have had an impact on Tracey, but for her, studying for a degree, has been immanently significant with regard to project, temporality and identity.

Within this world there is a project of self-discovery through encounters with other people (and including intersubjectivity and self-awareness through others), their experiences and biographies, and a body of knowledge hitherto inaccessible. The space is found to exercise a preferred self ('I'm finding out who I am at college' Tracey p.6. Lines 1-2) which was internally and partially conceptualised in the early fantasising to the future, when the project entered the existential landscape. There is as a result an opening up to new horizons and a sensed boundarilessness to enter psychological spaces and social arenas previously forbidden.

I would say one [significant aspect of her course experiences] is the academic ability and the confidence that gives you. That would be a massive one. I don't even mean just... meeting someone down at the pub anymore that... doesn't even come into it. Just the fact that I know I can speak to someone... who is even... someone who is more qualified than me if you like... that I won't sound... there's no ways that you're going to sound totally silly cos it's not going to come out as really silly. It's going to actually have something to say.

Belinda (p.4. Lines 24-29)

The consistent self-improvisations in the journey of discovery ('oh is that me!') have led to continual adjustment of self and the present position of self-creation. The existent has moved from 'trying' to 'doing' in that initially one was *trying* to cope with this new world in a state of 'unattunement' and having battled one's way through (continuing 'to take arms against a sea of troubles') has arrived at a state of 'attunement' and thereby 'in opposing end them' (i.e. 'the troubles').

...one of the Seminars we were talking about integrity and I've always considered myself as a.. 'trier', I've always thought, 'I've tried to do this,

I've tried to do that', and I've always thought I try my best, and the...guy actually said 'forget try, come on stand up Hattie, show me a try, you can't, it's impossible' I'm thinking [laugh] 'where's he coming from now', so I thought, and I thought, 'you can't, you can't show a try, it's impossible'...and then it dawned on me and I actually thought, 'I am doing it, I am not trying, I am doing it, I am studying, I'm getting my grades, I'm working, I'm paying my mortgage, I'm bringing up the girls, I am doing it.' And it was like 'Wow'....it was...quite inspiring...
.....it was actually 'Eureka', I thought 'Blimey, I'm not trying, I'm succeeding, I'm doing'....it's a big difference.

Hattie (p.3. Lines 17-34)

The movement from 'trierhood' to 'doerhood' however has been a perilous and frightening journey. From the earlier 'dipping one's toe in the water' (e.g. employing discourse which entails trying out the being of a different person), through the calling into being of a different identity as the situation demands (e.g. formal seminar presentations), and onto living as a different person (through a different discourse) the existent now has a firm sense of intellectual development and an overarching horizon of 'achieving status'. In the present there exists as Csikszentmihalyi (2002) would have it a 'control of consciousness' which engenders the experience of 'flow' in 'optimal experiencing'.

...this may sound really basic, but I think...'happy' has a different meaning now. Cos it contains more elements than what it did before... to be happy. It's not just to feel good inside and to have security, it's other things there as well.

Lucy (p.10. Lines 8-11)

In this position the existent experiences incoming information as congruent with goals (e.g. a coherence of self-identity and purposeful living - 'flow'), and that all one's relevant skills are needed to cope with the challenges of a situation, such that one is completely absorbed by the activity.

Now I would say that now I use my lectures especially post modernism I love anything to do with post modernism. And I think that's great and I go places and I see things a different way than I would've done which I'm liking doing and I'm loving doing my dissertation. I love what I've chosen to do.

Belinda, follow-up interview. (p.1. Lines12-16)

The Joy of Study

Belinda's feelings are also declared in the 'joy of study'. Predominantly this joy refers to the realisation of the existent's project in the celebrated successes. Tracey Illustrates this position: 'This September (start of second year)...didn't think anything about it....just took over the rest of the seminars'. (p.3. Lines 34-35). She now sees herself with a firm sense of place; bolstered with increasing confidence she displays her 'proud-and-achieving-person' self-identity. The 'joy of study' is to be tested and to win through in all the battles that present themselves. A correlate of this is an embodied feeling of expansion. This joy is felt so strongly that Belinda would wish it on as many as would benefit, to the extent that the process should become her *raison d'être*. She wishes to work with adults because;

...I would love it [her future career] to be something to do with getting people into education or.. just helping to educate people. I think that'd be fantastic.....I always see myself as when I was at my lowest... *higher education came along and it lifted me up and it gave me so much potential and so much help*. And it helped me accept myself and the situation I was in and everything. It just sort of gave me so much~that if people could see that... and if people could try that then they would see there's other ways of living their lives as well.

Belinda follow-up interview(p.6. Lines 7-17)

Interpersonally one is bigger and more dominant than before.

...Being able to say what I think I suppose. To be able to do what I want to do and.. also if I feel that other people try to stop me standing me ground.

Try to stop me doing what I want to do... it's being able to argue what I think is right.

Olive (p.2-3. Lines 45-2)

The joy of study is also manifest in the on-going revelatory experiences of being made to think and after a great deal of cognitive wrestling reaching an understanding. Here the existent has reached out and through one's own efforts has grasped something that has a vitality unknown before. ('Yes now I get it!'). Such an experience is emotionally charging, energising – 'fantastic'. One experiences a busy-ness of being, embedded in one's project to the extent that all other matters are non-existent at that moment. The atmosphere of the lecture room when the session begins.

...it's like 'Oh right here we are then. We're on! We're doin' it!' and that's what it is. And our Robert, he plays football and a lot of what he says comes across and he'll say you know, 'we get there on a Saturday and we're all hanging about waitin' and whatever. And Gav comes, who's the trainer and he says as soon as Gav comes and unzips his coat I think 'we're on!' and it's that sort a... 'we're on this is it' and it's the buzz.

Wendy, follow up interview (p.5. Lines 25-30)

The wrestling with the subsequent content and the surprise when an inkling of another personal discovery occurs ('ah that's what it's all about!'). The existential pioneer presses on in earnest – the boring sessions when nothing happens notwithstanding! This is the 'buzz' which the existent feels, and which they dread losing as they temporalise to a future without it. In sum, there is an overarching horizon of 'flow'.

Psychological Toughness

Living as an existential pioneer however is tough. There is a constant feeling of trepidation as the existent takes on each stage in the journey. The spectre of failure has an unsettling presence below the surface with the constant threat of the devastating loss of face should one falter. The adversarial perspective however leads one to take on this world with great energy, desperate to prove oneself and simultaneously to prove others wrong.

It's as though it's [her course experience] given me the opportunity to do everything I thought I'd missed. And now I know that I can move on from here and I never feel that I've missed out on something. And I always know that I actually.. I actually did it. I did it at a different time, but I still did it.

Belinda (p.4. Lines 33-35)

There is almost a sense of revenge in this 'sea of troubles'. The existent temporalises to other moments in their biography, when they were a different person, and how they suffered under an empowered other (e.g. teacher, partner, colleague).

G: how do you feel yourself about the degree when it says Lilly Jones BA?

L: very proud. You know it's a great achievement. It's something I've always wanted to do and I've done it. And I've done it amid turmoil and you know.. four children and a pain in the arse to deal with [i.e. her husband]. You know and if I can do that I can do anything.

Lilly (p.3-4. Lines 49-3)

This moment is now theirs and it will be payback time. They will forge a way through this present embattled existence and emerge as a person with presence and voice, proud in their achievements.

L: I think doing the degree's the best thing I ever did. And I was speaking to a young girl on Saturday evening. Her husband's locked up [in prison] and she was considering doing Higher Education. And I said to her it would change her life cos that's.. that's how I feel. You know it's changed me as a person for the good.

G: if you could pick on one thing that's changed you for the good. What would it be?

L: [very long pause] Erm.. Just the ability to see things from a different light...[long pause. Lilly begins to cry quietly] and have.. [pause] hope.

Lilly (p.6-7 Lines 43-2)

A Concluding Thought

I conclude this chapter with a poignant illustration of much of the above.

Graham

You asked us to write about what we had gained from our three years. For reasons which will be obvious I do not want to enter a competition, but for many like me this course has been, without I hope sounding too dramatic, a lifesaver.

Anxious, nervous seriously intent,
I needed to know what life really meant
why did I come here what did I know?
Nothing of Freud, Durkheim, & Co
To be ditched at the start, can be quite bad,
But nearing the end it seemed seriously sad.
To be told you're not wanted not needed you've nothing to give
He wanted a child and your second didn't live.
He'd got what he wanted, so now you could go
She's like you were at twenty didn't you know.

But once I was here, he needed me back.
To work for him, she just couldn't hack.
But Freud, Durkheim and Co,
I felt I just couldn't let go.
So I tried to do both, cos I felt that I must
Which was really more than slightly unjust
Because now there was so much more I wanted to give,
And there's only a few hours in a day in which you can live

So what have I gained from just being here,

My sanity, for one, a thing I hold dear,
A respect for Freud, Durkheim and Co,
With so many theories, and in some many ways
there (sic) all so obvious on different days.
That the more you learn the less you know,
So a thirst for more, that has to grow.

To say it's been the best three years sounds trite,
There's been occasions I wanted to fight.
To be told commonsense is no good.
It shook the ground on which I stood.
But to unlearn when you're older
perhaps makes you braver, bolder.
Perhaps makes others just like me
stop and think who was she.
That young idealist, who thought that life,
was being a mother, and a good wife
Who always believed what others said,
Thank you, I can remember I'm not yet dead.

Note left for the Author by an anonymous mature student, Social Sciences.

CONCLUSION: LATE STUDENTSHIP; EXPERIENCING PERSONAL GROWTH
AND ACADEMIC ASPIRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE
IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

This final chapter explores the findings which the research has revealed and discusses their implications for the educational enterprise. It is important at the outset to underline the shift in methodology between the phenomenological description of the experience – within the epochē – and the concerns of policy. Within the latter this chapter attempts to find correlations between facts in reality (e.g. curriculum design) and aspects of the experience. By doing this the latter become ‘variables’ of the real world rather than within the research praxis per se of taking subjectively phenomena *in their appearing*. Therefore a non-phenomenological methodology is taken to address the concerns of policy and practice. It is asserted however that, notwithstanding this methodological shift, the study of policy, to be sound, must rest on the findings of existential phenomenological psychology if the truth of *experience* is to be addressed. In this way phenomenology is a truly radical methodology, and one proper use is to describe with full weight the experience of the mature student, taking as the existential baseline that of the disempowered malcontent (see chapter 6. for a full exposition of this baseline).

The findings are to some extent referenced in the research foci, although there have been some significant modifications to them throughout the research praxis, along with the deletion of related issues as the research journey unfolded. This concluding discussion aims to summarise what has been learnt about mature studentship in higher education and how any principles can be formulated as a result of that enterprise. This will mainly involve suggestions and implications for the conduct of higher education within the widening participation agenda, specifically in how it relates to mature students. The research foci emphasise the notion of self-transformation with regard to identity transition, which has been carried through in chapter 6. with the detailed

description of how such a process is experienced. There is however the related issue of the notion of postmodernity, and whether the mature student is touched in any way by the processes which postmodern commentators refer to. This issue can only really be addressed by reference to the lived reality of participants, and also by certain conjectures that can be made on their living through higher education in the contemporary world (postmodern, late modern or something else). The application of findings within a context that can be described as postmodern however is a different matter. Such an application is made with regard to the commodification of education and the image construction of postmodern identity, as discussed at length in chapter 2.

The findings in several ways dovetail with the existent research literature and it is asserted that they add to the substantive area in a not entirely insignificant manner. This assertion is based on two major features. Firstly the epistemic framework has been significantly underplayed in researching into mature studentship in HE. Secondly the current state of knowledge within the substantive area has been supplemented with findings using the hitherto underplayed epistemic framework. The literature has often sought to explicate mature studentship with regard to revealing issues which relate to the articulation of government directives to the educational enterprise, particularly those that refer to the movement from an elite to a mass system of higher education. These have been very revealing but have tended to err toward an 'atomistic' structure, i.e. isolating variables or constellations of variables that reveal the reality of mature studentship (often linked with issues of inequality and social background). Such work, for example, underlines a series of barriers to the realisation of widening participation, e.g. material circumstances, practical support mechanisms, lack of appropriate role models to sensitise potential recruits to HE. This study attempts to redress the balance by adding to such a research corpus with an approach that examines the holistic experience of the mature student, and as an alternative to atomistic reporting, presents findings which reveal the complex interweaving webs of meaning and the contours of the lived reality of mature studentship. These points conclude this chapter with a statement on the contribution to knowledge that this thesis has made.

2. THE MATURE STUDENT EXPERIENCE.

The overriding feature of the findings in this research is that it demonstrates the principle that has recently been acknowledged in the recent literature - successful widening participation starts with and does not end with the *entry* to higher education. This section then traces the mature student experience from the point of entry through the existent's journey. There are however two related issues which need examining before this summary. The first relates to how this journey has been revealed and secondly the factors which led to embarkation.

The Framework of the Research and its Relationship to Other Research

The approach of this thesis is existential phenomenological psychology. The mature student within this framework is seen as an embodied being with a consciousness-spanning temporality who grasps the world bestowing meaning upon it and self in a co-constituting manner. Further the existent creates a network of relationships with others, the world and self, along with spatial, temporal and value relationships. The study of the mature student within the framework of existential phenomenological psychology operates through revealing the lifeworld and its fragments. This is done through a lived relationship between the participants and myself in the everyday reality of life. A significant part of this relationship was the conversational interview, which formed the main enactment of the research praxis. As a result of this approach the depth of engagement with the experience of mature students is different to other approaches that adopt alternative epistemic frameworks. It is therefore asserted that this thesis augments existent research by adopting existential phenomenological psychology and applying it to this substantive area.

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The Movement toward Higher Education.

The research literature details how widening participation in higher education is impeded through differentiated access opportunities. Yet mature students do enter higher education. A focus for this thesis emerged in relation to why they do so. We can conjecture on postmodern and late modern commentaries and how these relate to participants herein. The 'irritant' and 'initiating event' referred to in chapter 6. as a

composite descriptor of the movement toward higher education may refer to the condition described by commentators on identity. Within the milieu of bombarding information that impacts upon self in the contemporary world the existent comes to perceive themselves as shallow (a process which Gergen refers to as the ‘expansion of inadequacy’ – see chapter 2.) and existents turn to ‘identity projects’ to address the perceived inadequacy – ‘there must be something else’. The ‘question of being’ (Heidegger 1962 – see chapter 3.) is upon them. As Wendy outlined,

I have four children, I have got a car, I have got a house, I have got a job, but then when I started I thought ‘Oh, is that really all there is, or is there more?’ and I think that was the reason for starting the Course... that I had convinced myself that there must be something more. [temporality and selfhood are implicated here]

With the breakdown of meta-narratives such as religion and parochial truths (e.g. expectations/rules on who one should be) there is a ‘value gap’ (Baumeister 1991 – see chapter 2.) which is filled by the self and self-creation as a value base. Self-identity then becomes a major issue and its development an existential concern. The acceleration of the future and its ‘colonisation’ (Giddens 1999 – see chapters 1, 2, and 5.) become major foci in the lifeworld. Part of this colonisation is to ‘reskill’. This means to not only shift gear in one’s market capacity, but also to institute personal change on an existential level – one needs to become a different person to keep up with the pace of change and to prepare for what is to come. More so than ever before our acts in the present are rooted in the future. As Lilly declares her course has given her ‘the ability to see things from a different light and have... *hope*’. And more pragmatically;

The future.... well I want to do what I want to do. Before I would just be trudging along whereas now I’m heading somewhere. Don’t really know where yet, but I’m more excited about the future. [spatiality, temporality and project come together here]

To locate these messages and to isolate them is difficult, but according to postmodern and/or late modern commentators they are there, and participants in this study reflected

at least in part their influence and the process they are alleged to initiate. As I have suggested elsewhere mature studentship may not entail the experience of ‘multiphrenia’ – the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self investments’ (Gergen 1991:73) described as characterising life in the contemporary world. There is however a kind of ‘polyphrenia’ – that self-identity has many competing influences and salencies which may problemise its (desired) coherent construction (Stevens 2003). They could re-invent themselves and the ‘expert system’ of higher education and the widening participation agenda was available to help them do just that.

Entry into Higher Education

The ‘fateful moment’ (Giddens 1999 - see chapters 1., 2. and 5.) when the decision is taken to move toward higher education and actually resolve to do the course is bound up with notions of risk. The existential baseline of the disempowered malcontent (see chapter 6.) who takes up the invite to become a different person wrestles with ‘authenticity’ and ‘bad faith’ (see chapter 3.). What they propose doing is counter to sub-cultural expectations and notions of the life one is supposed and destined to live. As Maureen points out;

...I would never have dreamed, if you’d had said to me 4 years ago you’re going to be looking in the Guardian at a job based in Europe I would have said ‘bollocks’ it’s just not going to happen, you know, it’s not, but now...
[temporality, project and selfhood are connected here]

Doris was also a victim of her project when she was summarily dismissed by a would-be suitor who was in conflict with her positioning as an empowered woman and thus running counter to the local ‘rules of engagement’. As her interlocutor openly admitted ‘I don’t like women who use big words’. (The fragments of sociality, selfhood and project are connected here.) The existent then is to break the rules to differing degrees. Also the protective cocoon and the self-identity one has been altercast into and that one has allowed others to cast one into – and thereby *one has cast oneself into* are at risk. Feelings of ‘ontological insecurity’ (Giddens 1999 - see chapters 2. and 5.) abound. Here we see embodiment, sociality and spatiality bound together in the lifeworld. ‘But to actually walk into a classroom full of people I had no idea of anything like that at all.

How are they going to look at you, you know. That was scary' (Tracey). And as Wendy tells of her early course experiences;

Um, It's not me, this is not me, this is not where I should be right now, right down to at certain times through the day thinking 'I'm not doing this now if I wasn't here, I would be doing whatever... I shouldn't be here.' [spatiality, selfhood]

This is therefore a big step. There are also material risks involved such as reduction in income, change in lifestyle work patterns etc., (see chapter 1.), but these are nothing compared with the risk of failure and the prospect of returning to the fold as a failure. The level of ridicule, opprobrium and loss of face would be excruciating, devastating (particularly in relation to sociality, temporality and embodiment). 'People wanted me to fall [fail generally]... wanted to see me fall and laugh' (Doris). But for those who take the step the spirit of 'existential pioneerism' prevails and the avoidance of 'bad faith' is secured. Maureen battles against her ongoing crisis of confidence and 'looks past three bed suburbia'. The previous hurdles to the envisaged self-creation – the effects of the system (e.g. being 'cooled out' of compulsory schooling with the attendant ascription of and experience of a 'spoiled identity', influence of the subculture, parental attitudes etc.) are to be cast aside and one moves forward into the unknown. Yvonne who was 'kept in the shadows' at school and was 'planning a job in a shop' declares 'now all of a sudden I seem to have a [fulfilling] future'. (Here we see the connections of temporality, project and selfhood.)

The risk to relationships has been well documented in the literature and this study supports many of the conclusions that are drawn. Bi-orbital existence (see chapter 6.) entails the living in two distinct spaces wherein contamination ensues. This is a metaphorical descriptor that refers to the toxicity of one area of experience for the other, especially as it applies to relationships. The ongoing negotiation of relationships is made more arduous as the existent (re) constructs self-identity. Lilly declares that she 'can't get away from [her] ideas now' and relates the impact and strain on her relationship with her partner – 'a pain in the arse to deal with' (sociality and selfhood and project are interrelated here along with intersubjectivity). The 'art of loving' in Fromm's (1957) terms is plunged into crises of differing degrees for sexual romantic

relationships and echoing previous findings in the literature these intimate relationships can corrode. This is often related to asymmetrical power relationships in the domestic scene and the mature student's attempt to bring about greater symmetry. Also social relationships are at risk as the existent experiences conflict between their inchoate on-course identity and with pre-course friends. Maureen for example experiences the mocking of her project by friends from her pre-course orbit and Doris feels frustrated at the inertia of her pre-course friends (sociality, temporality, project, spatiality, embodiment and selfhood come together in this regard as the existent feels a distancing from previous closeness with such friends as self transition is felt through the awareness of others). A finding which particularly supports the important work of Wakeford (1994 – see chapter 1.). The 'false permanence' (Baumeister 1991 – see chapter 2) of self and relationships is particularly resonant for the existent as they increasingly experience 'heightened temporal transcendence' and the vertigo of rapid change. Tom is particularly touched by the level of rapidity in the onset of change and exemplifies 'inertial drag' as a comfort in the tempestuous present – 'complete change in lifestyle... everything I know... it seems to be flying by... just changing your whole life'. (The fragments of temporality and selfhood are particularly salient here).

The Nature of Widening Participation for the Existent

In the early stages the existent is thrown into an alien world. It is here that the true nature of widening participation becomes a reality. To some extent this concurs with the research corpus that reports similar experiences. This is with particular regard to the point that the academic milieu can not only be experienced as alien, but also as *alienating* (George et al 2004). The language/terminology, the behavioural expectations are all puzzling and simultaneously anxiety provoking, even frightening. This new place is 'daunting', 'scary' a place where one is out of place (selfhood and spatiality are particularly significant in this 'existential discomfort'). As Doris remembers;

I were frightened to death... at first I thought... I were petrified... because I thought... I had this... image in my head that doing a degree was you know these hierarchy people who were specially picked to do you know further and higher education and I would have no chance of being picked you know

and I thought that when I came here I wouldn't know what I was doing and everybody else would.

There is a powerful biographical fissure in the mature student's lifeworld in these formative stages of their journey. The breakdown of the protective cocoon is such that there is an overarching horizon of 'strangerhood'. The world is full of puzzles demanding to be solved in order for self-identity to be sustained through keeping the narrative of oneself going. As Lucy recounts in the way her actions are to fit with her project;

...it's part of a bigger journey really. When I split up wi' t'kid's dad that I were now going to have to look after myself and do it all for myself and I weren't prepared to go and work in some sodding chicken factory so it were education... for my way out... so it's just part of this... I am going to look after me and my children.

This existential void is filled by the process of self-improvisation ('existential discomfort' in chapter 6. details this experience in full). Consistent with reports in the literature the mature is expected to 'fit in' with the existing world and accommodate the demands placed upon them wherever necessary. There is no negotiation of learner needs established from a learner perspective. The organisational life is set for its clientele to which they must adjust and not vice versa. In Weil's (1989) terms there is a 'disjunctive' rather than an 'integrative' experience at the interface of the pre-course orbit and the on-course orbit which is one of distress in varying degrees. Hattie describes these early feelings and experiences which point up the significance of embodiment and spatiality.

yes, and then I would find myself going home and I'd be thinking this is not what it's about, this is not how I want to feel, I don't want to feel like this, um... I felt bad about myself felt as if erm... I wasn't going to achieve my goal, as if I couldn't cope, as if I was doomed to failure, um... not very confident.

This was also the conclusion of Bamber and Tett (2001) who argue that this experience is not only part of the initial stages of the mature student's journey, but also is a pervasive experience of the whole socio-academic milieu (e.g. teaching and learning methods, ways of relating, organisational norms etc.).

The enormity of the mature student's task then becomes evident and for the participants in this study their resolve was to become embattled and take on the task with vigour, despite the ongoing failure anxiety and threats to self-identity. 'When it comes to September and I'm due to start again... I get scared and I don't want to start... this is the year you're gonna fail Doris' (Doris here demonstrates the fragments of temporality and embodiment). Self-improvisation is a constant. The trying out and then *the becoming of* a different person is an everyday event (especially with regard to engaging with the academic milieu through speaking up and playing academic student and the discourse to live the situation) and the pace of transition is exhausting to the extent that the comfort blanket of the pre-course is sought when the confidence to continue their battles is weakened. 'Inertial drag' is a form of ameliorative temporalising (often through discourse – the languaging of the pre-course self) which helps the existent cope with the thrust toward an unsure future state that, whilst exciting, is filled with a sense of trepidation. The 'existential pioneer' presses on however in earnest, keeping at bay the 'spectre of failure' and the condition of 'confidencelessness' (see chapter 6.). The latter echoes the existing literature on shyness and confidence, especially with regard to the early stages when 'speaking up in class' entails courage and acutely skilful self-improvisation. As Doris explains with regard to discourse, selfhood, project, embodiment and temporality (a significant experience indeed);

I were absolutely petrified. My hands were wet through. I were sweating and er but that's what I've learned to do now and if I had another presentation I'd do the same again... I'd think y'know whereas as before I'd a thought 'oh god I'm really scared' I'd just shrug my shoulders n that's it. I'll go for it. It's made me more brave y'know wha'a mean gave me more courage to do... to do things like that.

The *esprit de corps* enjoyed with other students is the main support mechanism to guide them through this turbulent stage in their biography. This points up the fragments

of sociality and selfhood as the existent becomes aware of self through the awareness of others' awareness of self – they come to realise their potentialities.

The description of the lifeworld in its appearing for mature studentship points up the processual nature of self-identity and consistent with research into learner identities (see chapter 1.) participants herein are continually constructing and reconstructing themselves. Yvonne captures a moment in this process (signifying temporality, project, selfhood and discourse).

...like the other day there was something that was being analysed. The tutor said, 'aw I can't really give a meaning'. And I said 'oh I think it means that and I can relate it to that' and started using all t'terminology and after I'd finished I sat down and thought, 'I don't believe I've just said that!'

The emotional and cognitive energy that abounds in their journey points up Heidegger's (1962) notion of 'being unto death'. They exist always within a relationship to death in their project of everyday living, itself bound up with their personalised 'identity project' (Harré 1983). Maureen calls into being 'the-academic-destined-for-professional-counselling-work' through the discourse she employs in living through work with offenders as part of her criminology course. Her project here is also bound up with temporality as she declares 'you don't have time to fritter [as a *mature* student] – you don't have the time to piss around cos the clock is always ticking.' This is manifest in their search for meaningfulness as they temporalise to a future of status and fulfilment and also the preciousness of time as it is felt to be slipping away. Their efforts to succeed are intensified, but paradoxically 'being unto death' simultaneously increases 'failure anxiety' as there is no spare time for the mature to rectify any shortcomings. 'It's not 'if this fails I'll try something else'... you don't have that luxury' (Maureen on temporality and project). The vigour of garnering handouts at all costs – any and all information can potentially ease 'failure anxiety' as it may in some way add to the cause - also indicates the 'one and only chance' positioning of this *one* life.

Following a legion of existential dilemmas, epiphanic self-realisations, fateful moments and hard work in all its manifestations, a position is finally reached wherein the mature is congruent with their academic world and at last feels at home. There is however identity confusion in their position as inertial drag to the past makes self-definition in the present a difficult task. Feelings that one has changed yet worried about the implications of those changes for one's personal sense of home – is it on-course or is it pre-course? Corroding intimate relationships and a distancing from old social networks creates an instability that is difficult to handle. Again this echoes the research literature with regard to relationships.

Feeling at home with an 'academic set' (see chapter 6.) however has several uplifting correlates. For example the 'joy of study' as the existent becomes aware of their achievements and becomes buoyant with the ever-increasing consciousness of matters previously beyond their ken. The confidence which ripples throughout the lifeworld and empowers one to enter spaces previously forbidden is felt with some astonishment and a great deal of celebration. 'I can stand up and speak' (Lilly relating her new found ability to cope with the individuated position of public speaking and for this to operate in many arenas). 'I know I can speak to someone... who is even... more qualified than me... it's not going to come out as silly... it's going to actually have something to say' (Belinda). The future before them, whilst frightening in its existential freedom, and tinged with some regret for the passing of a past self, is embraced with optimism. Whether their journey will really take them to the place they want to go is another matter. The existential dilemmas that are thrown up in the transition thus far may be simply a blip in the life span compared with those to come. As Bufton has shown, if a death of the past is to ensue this is likely to have profound implications for the existent's long term maintenance of the 'protective cocoon' and ultimately their future happiness; '...a sense of cultural betrayal [to one's working class background] and in some cases of moving on but having nowhere to go – of being in 'limbo'' (2003:232).

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS THESIS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

What does this research suggest for future enquiry? How can the research journey of which this thesis is part be continued? What further questions may be asked as a result

of the findings presented here? These questions I would suggest could be addressed with reference to five main areas, themselves related to features of this research;

1. Further research into higher education employing existential phenomenological approaches.
2. The deployment of this research praxis in looking at biographical shifts.
3. Research into the experiences of individuals confronted with institutional forms
4. In-depth idiographic research into the engagement with expert systems.
5. Continuing the research corpus into the dilemmas of living in the contemporary world.

Further Research into Higher Education Employing Existential Phenomenological Approaches.

This may include research that takes different samples of students and investigates the potential existential dilemmas that may be experienced in the living through of higher education – such an approach to be a focus not a hypothesis. For example within the widening participation agenda there is a planned increase in the amount of working class, ‘traditional entry’ students experiencing higher education. Many students in these forthcoming cohorts will be the first in their extended family (as known and engaged with and perceived as relatives) to enter higher education. Given the findings with regard to sociality and temporality herein, there may be a fruitful line of enquiry into the lifeworlds of these students (with beneficence for these new cohorts as a positive outcome). The impact of their higher education experience on the fragments of the lifeworld could be explored, together with the distance travelled from their previous life to that within the socio-academic milieu. This may inform learning and teaching strategies for the changing landscape of higher education. Furthermore there are increasing markets for international students within our higher education system. The cultural differences may point up a series of interesting issues by applying existential phenomenological concepts to issues of belongingness. This would refer then to not only educational contexts, but also those contexts in a different society. The experience of students may also have some level of subject specificity. It would be possible to investigate the lives of students who are inducted into different subject worlds e.g. to research through maximum variation the experiences of engineering students as contrasted with art and design students. A final suggestion would refer to the

deployment of existential phenomenological methods to reveal the experience of any specified group of educational clientele. This would encompass all tiers of education, but as the focus is that of the lifeworld, adult education may be particularly apposite. The recent cuts in funding for traditional adult evening classes and the impact this may have upon the lifeworlds of such adult learners may be revealing, especially when one considers the gregarious culture of such courses, and the potential meaningfulness they may constitute for many individuals.

The Deployment of this Research Praxis in Looking at Biographical Shifts.

This research points up the levels of accelerated biographical construction that takes place in the lifeworld of the mature HE student. Such radical shifts in one's life may not be simply restricted to the epiphanic self-realisation and transition that is referred to as part of mature studentship. Severe shift in one's ongoing existence extends to many other contexts, commensurate with the common and familiar vicissitudes of life. The identity confusion of retirement when one *was* an organisational member of some status to be cast abruptly into identity-less existence may be one example of such a shift. I would suggest that lifeworld existential phenomenology would be well suited to understanding such experiences. Similarly the shift experienced when one is promoted and moves into a position hitherto unknown, with all the attendant needs for self-improvisation could be investigated by utilising the in-depth approach employed here. Promotion may not be the nirvana that many expect it to be as stress levels may indicate amongst senior organisational personnel. Much may be learnt from detailed description of their lives following upward mobility. The whole issue of social mobility and its false promise is widely reported (Csikszentmihalyi 2002 amongst them) yet 'get rich quick' is a pursuit of many, as the popularity of the national lottery shows. For those who do experience abrupt upward mobility, transition may be far more than a jump in demonstrable wealth. Existential phenomenology could be well placed to reveal the problems of this phenomenon investigating the lives of lottery winners, inheritors of wealth, pop stars, footballers etc.

Research into the Experiences of Individuals Confronted with Institutional 'Forms'

This has been done extensively by such authors as Hagan (1986) and Wertz (1983) in researching such things as individuals' engagement with health services, and

victimhood and the ensuing encounters with the police respectively. Such work classically employed phenomenological research methods. In this thesis strangerhood is a particularly salient feature of the mature student engaging with the education institution. Investigations into the individual's experience of institutions and the normative behaviour that holds them together, sometimes at the cost of recognising a person's humanity, could profitably employ the research praxis followed here. The clients/service users of the large housing associations are an interesting example of this phenomenon I believe. Why for example do people continue to live on the streets when there is (in some notable cases) available accommodation to be had? Does personal agency happen to be a major issue for the street dweller? Agency within selfhood may be something that is denied when taking up offers of shelter. The 'external moment of self-identification' would be of particular interest here (see chapter 2) and the power of institutional others who attempt to make individuals submit to their will with regard to the type of person they wish those individuals to be.

In-depth Idiographic Research into the Engagement with 'Expert Systems'.

The increasing engagement by individuals with 'expert systems' as part of either a conscious or unconscious identity project, according to Giddens (1999) is a feature of living in late modernity. This thesis refers to this process through individuals entering the 'expert system' of higher education and the self-transition that ensues. There are however other such engagements which could be approached in the same manner. I refer here to the expert systems that many engage with in order to initiate changes in selfhood. The need for counselling and its response to this need through the development of a structured business approach is a significant part of this contemporary phenomenon. Counselling however is not the only enterprise in self-transition and/or intervention into people's lives. Training in assertiveness, confidence building and so on, all feature in the contemporary world as aids for self-definition and self-creation. How are these received and experienced by the client? The deployment of the praxis used herein and relating the research to late modern and postmodern commentaries of the self and identity may be a revealing line of enquiry. This again may inform practice for these kinds of intervention and/or inform our understanding of contemporary industrialised living.

Continuing the Research Corpus into the Dilemmas of Living in the Contemporary World.

This is related to the preceding area of research. There are concerns within health psychology where the kinds of existential dilemmas reported in the work of Gergen (1991), Giddens (1999) and Csikszentmihalyi (2002) are correlated with a range of health issues e.g. alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental health, depression, suicide etc. The framework adopted here would provide a rich source of data, which could take the study of human existence with regard to such issues as meaningfulness, choice and happiness significantly further. Such an enterprise could be related to the health issues identified above through the choice of sample. I refer to the principle of maximum variation here also, in that it is not just the self-confessed alcoholic that could contribute, but also the individual who deems that he is contented yet still suffers a sense of uneasiness about his life. The list is clearly extensive and experts within the different fields to which I so elliptically refer here would be far better positioned to judge the viability of some of these suggestions. Nevertheless I would again point to the issues salient in the existential and late/post modern literature and their significance for all of us, but particularly significant for those charged with a professional responsibility for understanding them further.

4. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR A HIGHER EDUCATION PRAXIS.

This section explores the implications of this research and its relationship to other research in a composite application to the conduct of successful widening participation in higher education for mature students. The level of intervention attempted by the process of widening participation for all groups hitherto excluded is impeded by several factors identified in chapter 1. A significant issue amongst these is the lack of role models available to the target group in raising aspirations and thereby effecting greater inclusion. The importance of widening participation to increase the inclusion of mature students is therefore twofold. Firstly by getting working class mature students into higher education one widens participation and secondly mature students tend also to be parents and therefore they can influence their own children and others within their social and familial network to consider and perhaps aspire to and finally enter higher education. In a society committed to lifelong learning and equality of educational

opportunity this is clearly a positive notion. The problem is that as this study and others suggest there are pitfalls surrounding the whole enterprise. Whilst these problems relate often to university settings this study shows that similar problems may be experienced in Mixed Economy Group colleges. The following discussion explores the nature of these problems and offers some suggestions that may be useful to individual tutors and teaching teams who conduct this kind of provision.

Student Support.

A recurrent theme in the research literature on mature students is that they are far from a homogenous group and the species approach to understanding their experience is sometimes unhelpful. There is a multiplicity of issues that the study of mature students identifies, and certain studies have attempted to cluster these in order to relate a clear picture of the reality of mature studentship (e.g. Woodley and Wilson 2002, Osborne 2004 – see chapter 1.). There is however one commonality that can hold together the whole research enterprise and that is to view mature students as reflexive constructors of self-identity (see ‘learner identities’ in chapter 1.). By tracing this construction at an idiographic level the researcher can reveal the issues that touch their lives and then relate this to other research conducted at the ‘species’ level. This is the approach adopted here. The dovetailing of previous research with findings herein point to the crucial issue of student support for successful widening participation. The question is what the nature of such support should be.

Firstly tutors may wish to consider support at the individual level commensurate with general findings on the multiplicity of experiential issues associated with this client group. There is a strong argument to support the need for personal tutors with a responsibility for guiding mature students through their tempestuous journey. The early emotions associated with existential discomfort need to be explored in full. This could be done through regular counselling sessions or small study group-tutorials which allow students to share anxieties associated with the biographical fissure they experience. Sensations of betrayal, shame and alienation can be discussed at length and tutors can provide the necessary encouragement to help them through this difficult existential dilemma of struggling with identity confusion and ontological insecurity. As the mature student’s journey develops this strategy can continue when the pace of change needs to

be supported. Johnson and Watson (2004) recommend the use of 'interview narratives' as a practical aid in keeping mature students on track. This can be documented and the mature student will have an experiential record of their emotional (and cognitive) journey to help keep things in perspective. Such in-depth sessions can deal with the myriad of problems which occur, particularly with regard to the pre-course orbit; domestic commitments, relationship distress, changing perceptions of their past life and reflections on their present position within their biographical journey as a whole, a general exploration of the lifeworld to secure a contented perspective despite the present stressors. Failure anxiety and confidencelessness can also be within this agenda where the tutor can provide on-going feedback on progress and explain fully the nature of such things as marked feedback. 'Shyness' (see Crozier and Jones 1996) and the associated 'speaking up in class' and seminar presentations loom large in the existent's world order of 'the fear of bad outcomes' (see chapter 6.). The expectations of the course can be fully explained to the student with regard to these tasks and any particular acute anxiety can be relayed to the appropriate tutors. Greater interaction with other students further into their journey would also be of great assistance in this regard. This can be embedded into course structures to foster interaction and/or the use of a 'buddy' system similar to the suggestions of Crozier and Jones (1996) and Shanahan (2000).

Teaching and Learning Strategies

These latter issues also relate to teaching and learning sessions and the highly public nature of course enactment. As Bamber and Tett (1997) point out there is a need to build supportive structures for non-traditional entrants, as part of a course culture and this can be most acutely felt at the point of course delivery. Many institutions are currently, as part of the HEFCE initiative to raise standards of teaching and learning (the funding of CETL; Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning), exploring many different delivery modes. Whatever mode is employed by the provider, there is one basic principle which seems to apply to mature students. This is to provide a learning experience which is 'integrative' rather than 'disjunctive', and this would suggest that tutors might profitably critically examine existent practices with a view to making radical changes. This can refer to a demystifying of the arcane nature of some of the curriculum and a gauged introduction into the academic culture through language

use. Links with prior experience in the delivery of the curriculum can be made by dedicating space for the mature to embrace their past life through being able to existentially evidence ‘yes I’ve been there and done that’. The suggestion here is that the level of biographical fissure that students herein experience can be markedly reduced by teaching and learning strategies that take greater account of the nature of the clientele; their needs, anxieties, past experiences, and the kind of existential dilemmas reported herein (Bamber and Tett 2001 – see chapter 1.). A clear example of this is the level of ‘failure anxiety’ and risk that this journey of the mature presents and the need for tutors to be fully aware of this (see also Wray 1996 chapter 1.)

It is asserted that tutors need to be aware that before them is a human being suffering a range of emotions with a previous history that is rich in its vicissitudes, and which have resulted in this co-joining presence. The intersubjectivity is such that the tutor’s position in the lifeworld of the student is immanently significant. It is not too strong to suggest that the tutor *is their future* and therefore every utterance, every nuance that can be interpreted, bears immense import. The tutor then is in a position of emotional power to make or break both confidence and ‘failure anxiety’. If the experience is integrative she or he will make the former and break the latter. One way of possibly ensuring that the learning experience is integrative is for session content to be aligned with conducive teaching and learning styles in order to accommodate the nature of the clientele. There is however a clear tension here between making content more accessible to the non-traditional HE learner and the need to maintain academic standards. It is not within this thesis brief to suggest how (or indeed whether) this could be done, but the assertion is that a sensitivity to the issues raised here can at least make the initial stages of the course more accommodating, not only at an emotional level, but also at a cognitive and behavioural level.

Feedback on Progress

The anxiety that is provoked by the question of whether the existent has made the right choice and that they are indeed capable of succeeding in their project can be extremely debilitating (see chapter 6 on ‘confidencelessness’). For the mature student the ‘spectre of failure’ must be kept at bay at all costs. Feedback then in all its forms is particularly significant in doing this. In conjunction with tutorials then feedback can be given

ensuring that written comments on marked work are full understood and are both constructed and accepted in the spirit of academic progression – there are clear indicators of where improvement is needed together with encouragement wherever it can be given. This is of course seen as good practice in all institutions, however it may be of particular significance when supporting non-traditional mature learners. Feedback on one's performance in all arenas however is significant. To reiterate the above, the response from a tutor to a mature student's contribution in seminar discussion can be particularly crucial in the maintenance of confidence and the reduction of failure anxiety. This is also supported by a range of other studies (e.g. Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998 – see chapter 1.).

Support with Perceived Change

This research then suggests that student support needs to be addressed holistically with a course and delivery culture that acknowledges the nature of the non-traditional mature learner in HE. There are however further strategies which are implied by the research literature in conjunction with the findings in this study. In order to assist the negotiation of relationships as the mature student experiences self-transition, Wray (1997) suggests that induction sessions should also include students' intimate partners so that they can be more integrated into the process of widening participation. This research suggests that this trend could beneficially continue throughout the learning experience. This would entail a planning for the future, whilst embracing the past for both partners. Narrative interviews could be made with both partners to forewarn of the oncoming tensions and to give practical pre-warning on ways to keep one's sense of 'wholeness', whilst one undergoes the changes described here. There are several incidences on the manner in which the inchoate on-course self-identity is embraced with a little too much energy that simultaneously dismisses the past (often, but not exclusively, by engaging in sexual romantic assignations). Perhaps many links can be maintained – negotiated without the air of finality that appears to go with the perception. Reflection in personal tutorials and/or narrative interviews may help to at least clarify the existent's position and maintain some stability.

5. AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY FOR MATURE STUDENTSHIP

This penultimate section proffers a suggested underpinning philosophy for higher education for mature students in similar provision by building on the above suggestions, the findings in both the individual and general psychological structures, and the model of the learner based on the existentialist view of personhood. This philosophy is presented in the spirit of sharing with fellow practitioners. It *suggests principles* which may be useful for colleagues working with mature students in higher education, particularly where the findings in chapter 6 have resonance.

In the widest sense, ‘e-ducation’ is the work of bringing a person out into his possibilities. To educate means no less than to let someone exist, to stand out or transcend into existential space as the unique person that he [or she] is.

Macquarrie 1973:207

Consistent with this principle the mature student is seen as a being capable of realising their *own* envisioned possibilities and for the provider to facilitate that process. The responsibility for the learner is to have ownership of their educational experience and for it to be meaningfully disclosed within their diachronic project of being (Broudy 1961). For the generator of the learning experience there should be recognition of this capacity - for the learner to be empowered to transcend what he or she is, to become something that he or she is not (Huebner 1973). The curriculum then is designed with this temporal transcendence in view, while the teacher is visualised as the enabler of the process of self-transcendence. However to refer again to Rollo May’s (1958) observation ‘what an individual seeks *to become* determines what he remembers of his *has been*’. The past then is existentially significant. As providers attempting to widen participation the recognition of the existent as they are and their personal history which has brought them to that point appears to be significant. To reiterate Grumet’s metaphor in chapter 3., we can try to blend the objectivity of the curriculum (and the discipline it transmits) with the unique subjectivity of the person – an integrative rather than disjunctive learning experience.

The position of identifying the development of the individual as the starting point of the educational enterprise, whilst stressing the responsibility of that individual, is in harmony with the 'Delors' report on lifelong learning (UNESCO 1996). It calls for lifelong learning (of which the widening participation initiative is an integral part) to go beyond an instrumental view of education, which emphasises the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of other types of learning, and aim to enable everyone to discover, unearth and enrich their creative potential and become a more complete person. However the report clearly identifies the major problem with such an ideal – the tension between allowing individuals to transcend themselves whilst adhering to the economic realities in which an educational system exists and the need for subject knowledge and skills. The two however need not be irreconcilable. This study above all other things has shown that the acquisition of knowledge and skills as part of an objective curriculum has great potential for the transcendence and development of the person. We might wish to bear this in mind as we engage with the 'widening participation' agenda.

What may be irreconcilable is the increase in the reported commodification of education (e.g. Field 1994, Edwards 1996). This can be linked with postmodern commentaries on self-identity. If higher education is simply a commodity that can be bought to add to the flagging sense of self-identity as with any other purchasable item this would do violence to the teaching and learning process described above. The learner's responsibility within such a contract ends when the financial transaction is complete – when they have paid their fees. The 'joy of study' may give way to base credentialism (Jansen and Wildemeersch 1996). This issue extends into many current debates of the purpose and conduct of education however and is beyond the parameters of this discussion.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE.

I now turn to an exposition of how this thesis makes a contribution to the relevant substantive area of knowledge. In keeping with the phenomenological perspective this thesis is very much 'work in progress', of itself, and in that it contributes to the opening up of many possible routes that the study of mature students can take. The findings then

are to be taken as representing the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher.

Notwithstanding this qualification, this research has made *a contribution* to the study of mature learners in higher education through the application of existential-phenomenological psychology, which augments other kinds of study in the literature. It also adds to the general experiential study of students in a non-traditional higher education experience (small course in a mixed economy group (MEG) college as opposed to a large course in a large institution e.g. mainstream psychology degree in a 'standard' university). This contextualisation is made in more detail in the literature review (Chapter 1.). Furthermore this research contributes to the increasing corpus of knowledge acquired through the phenomenological and qualitative route generally and thereby to some small degree the expanding scope of qualitative methodologies. The conversational interview approach then has been given some attention and support and the research in toto has generated 'objective knowledge of a conversational world' (Kvale 1996:298). In this way the construction of knowledge (the epistemological position taken herein) is not completed with the interaction of myself as researcher and my participants, nor with my interpretations and descriptions in the psychological structures, but continues by engaging, through this thesis, in conversations with other researchers about their findings.

In addition it is claimed that this research makes a more specific empirical contribution to the study of mature students in higher education in the following ways. Firstly it traces how mature students, or more specifically students who enter higher education with a self-perception of limited agency, presence and voice *experience* transitions of selfhood. Secondly it reveals the nature of the experiences they encounter in their metaphorical journey (characterised by such things as 'existential pioneerism'). Thirdly to augment these generic experiences it describes the essences of the higher education experience for this specified group of people with the possibility of *extrapolation* from their context to other similar specified contexts. This point is encapsulated by the suggestions for an educational praxis and philosophy to underpin higher education for non-traditional mature learners.

What then are these essences? These are explicated with regard to the lifeworld 'fragments' developed in phenomenological psychology by various authors, most notably Ashworth (1999, 2003a) and Kvale (1996). Briefly the essences include the following. First, differentiated life contexts between the 'on-course' and the 'pre-course'. Second, the increased intensity of self-improvisation in everyday existence. Third, heightened temporal transcendence. Fourth, acceleration of 'identity project'. Fifth, existential discomfort (e.g. confidencelessness, strangerhood, risk and threat to selfhood, general anxiety) and the palliatives to ease this discomfort (e.g. inertial drag). Sixth, shifts in relationships. Seventh, 'existential pioneerism' characterised by the 'joy of study', courage in the face of formidable challenge and 'psychological toughness'. These essences are to be considered in a holistic fashion as constituting an existential configuration and are fully described in the 'General Psychological Structure'. This 'essence' of the higher education experience of mature studentship can then be traced to the notions of the self in Late Modernity (e.g. Giddens 1999, Kellner 1993) and the Postmodern Self (e.g. Gergen 1991, Frosh 1991).

It is further claimed that the research makes a contribution to current theory. This has entailed the deployment of the existential phenomenological position on selfhood with regard to the late modern or postmodern era (see chapter 2.) and the existent's engagement with expert systems – in this case education. It supports, to some degree, the postmodern commentaries on self-identity in that greater choice of who one can be and become impacts on the individual, affecting their relationships and accelerating their process of self-creation. Following Giddens (1999:143) this new kind of engagement with expert systems could be linked to the notion of the new self consciousness.

.....contradiction, fluidity, multiplicity...the real turmoil in the outside world is mirrored internally, as it must be if there is any link between the two orders. If the self is constructed through relations with stable objects and dependable people, then it must be unsettled when these objects keep disappearing, to be replaced by new, exciting but equally disposable alternatives...Postmodernism...denies that there is any depth of significance in these processes, but nevertheless celebrates the merry go round excitements of perpetual plurality....modern states of mind and

forms of selfhood, then, are forged in the context of instability of a cataclysmic kind....opening the way to pathologically defensive states and to a fluid and generative creativity...certainties of self can slip away...closing down may bring a sense of security and knowing who one is but at the price of continuously having to ward off the assaults of the new...(Postmodernism) is characterised by uncertainty, rapidity of change and kaleidoscopic juxtapositions of objects, people and events....finding our uncertain way through these uncertainties is a prime task for contemporary existence..

Frosh 1991:6-7

As the participants move through this process of widening participation, it does seem clear that stable objects associated with their previous lives do keep disappearing (relationship shifts, previous perspectives and self perceptions - especially the pre-confidence, 'unknowing' self, prior levels of aspiration etc.), and that perpetual plurality (as greater 'populating of the self' ensues, through their engagement with different kinds of people and existences and the resultant acquisition of multiple and disparate potentials for being) does characterise their life – *to some extent*. This I would suggest is not the 'multiphrenic' existence to which postmodern commentators such as Gergen (1991) refer. The instability experienced is not of the cataclysmic proportions that Frosh identifies above. It is however a *form* of multiplicity and fluidity, an opening up to new ways of being, an experienced acceleration of self-identity construction. In a relatively short period of their life they have rapidly encountered a legion of hitherto unknown experiences: engagement with academics and academic discourse, division into home and college self-identities, epiphanies of self development, and shifts in relationships. A new but inchoate self-identity is perceived through a range of novel encounters with people and ideas. This embryonic stage of a new self-identity is characterised by new knowledge and skills, a sense of confidence and empowerment, hitherto unknown aspirations, successes and status. Overall there is a perspectival shift in their view of the world and themselves within it. In Lilly's terms they now have hope.

In conclusion then this thesis makes an empirical contribution to knowledge by providing an in-depth examination of the mature student experience of higher education

that augments other research in the substantive area. It also adds to the theory of self-identity construction in the linkage with the self-transformation experienced by people in their engagement with the expert system of education and the resultant uncertainties and rapidity of change in the lifeworld.

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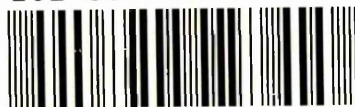
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IDENTITY CHANGE AND MATURE LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

VOLUME TWO

Graham Neil Stevens

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Appendices

INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

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TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS: following Silverman (2000:298)

_____	<u>what's up?</u>	Underscoring indicates some form stress via pitch and or amplitude	
WORD	I've got WORRIES	Capitals indicate especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk	
[]	[desired school]	Square brackets incate my clarifications and/or linked paralanguage e.g. [laughs]
<i>italics</i>	<i>now I can</i>	Words in italics indicate my emphasis to illustrate a point made in the discussion	
...	I think...	Ellipsis indicates pause or exclusion of some talk	
(references)	(p.4. Lines 8-10)	References in brackets refer to original transcript	

“BELINDA”

Factual Background

Belinda is a mature student in her late 20s, and now lives with her parents and her young son from her first and only marriage. She lives in a middle class area of town and commutes to college on most days. She married early and took on low status employment (shop work) in order to be able to live with her boyfriend, whom she subsequently married. The job was seen as a necessary evil in order to accomplish the aim of being with her chosen partner. This was viewed as inconsistent with the family history in higher education as many of her extended family and her sister had been to university. The marriage lasted around 2 years and shortly after her divorce she enrolled for an Access to HE course, which led to her present position. She is currently studying for an English Language and Literature Degree. At the time of the interview she was about half way through her first semester of level 2, and therefore had been on the course for about 15 months.

Individual Psychological Structure

Utilisation of an existential baseline: Starting to reconstruct.

As Belinda relives the past in the present she experiences again her previous orbit: the pre-course orbit which had two distinct temporal dimensions. The time with her husband and the project of settling down with a family and the time following her separation and subsequent divorce. These periods were characterised by two distinct self-identities; her “married-with-child” self-identity and her “lone-parent-reconstructing” self-identity. Together these present an existential baseline, which signifies the temporal movement from a previous way of being to the nowness of her on-course orbit and lived, current self-identity.

Starting to reconstruct 1. : “married-with-child”

Her marriage and the need to care for her new son presented an overarching horizon of entrapment. She looked beyond the confines of her position and saw a vibrant social life being lived by others from which she was excluded. “Going out” (socialising, going to pubs and clubs etc.) was and is an existential necessity for Belinda. It is where life is to be lived. It is inextricably linked to the business of her temporal and spatial being – a young woman in an urban location. It is the space in which she can be herself and have a coherent identity. Without it she is radically unsatisfied – out of place with no sense of presence. Doing the “dutiful housewife” was stifling, almost smothering.

Incrementally she withdrew from the outside world, brooding within her caged existence and losing her sense of the Belinda she wanted to be. She bodied forth out there with the crowd, as a lively, effervescent character laughing and drinking and smoking, all dressed up in the latest fashion. Over time “going out” became impossible – she had somehow lost her sense of presence and voice as a sexually desirable and “fun to be with” female.

Eventually this distress extended to all forays outside her “cage”. She found great difficulty in simply leaving the house. She “couldn’t do it at all”. This refers to an incapability to “do society”, to engage with others out there in the world. Sociality was fully dominated by her overarching horizon of entrapment. The world became an “out there”, whilst she was “in here”, in her cage. She “hated going out”. The “out there” world became a frightening place which initiated panic. It had become so alien she could find no place for herself in it. Belinda put it plainly, “I stopped being me”. She saw herself as without identity, without a link to the “out there” world. She had become “a blob”, an unidentifiable amorphous mass, without shape or form, something which did not fit within the “out there” world.

Cut off from the space where she could construct her preferred self, trapped within her cage, her partner became her sole focus. Already finding great difficulty in constructing a distinct sense of individuality, Belinda felt herself subsumed by her partner. It was almost as if she had become him.

..when it came to applying for jobs and things like that, it was me that wrote the letters, it was me that went through what he’d say in the

interview. Just, he would ask for my help and it was... if he ever had presentations to do it was me that was always doing the flipcharts and all this sort of thing and I was doing it for him. But I sort of... got lost somewhere. I just became... him if you like. I wasn't... me anymore. I just got lost.

(p.4. Lines 40-46)

Unable to enact Fromm's (1952) notion that the art of loving (within sexual romantic intersubjectivity) is to become a couple without losing the sense of individuality, Belinda now sees the cause of her problem as not paying enough attention to her own project. Constantly supporting her partner, trapped within her cage, unable to access the space where the self-identity she craved could be constructed and energetically exercised, the cumulative effect was a fundamentally unhappy, distressed semi-recluse. Even recourse to medical aid did not relieve the situation.

Although this temporal dimension of Belinda's biography appears to not connect with any reconstructive process, it is the ground on which her reconstruction began. That her existential freedom was situated in such a way was a driving force for the abrupt change in situated freedom and her lived reality, as described in the next temporal dimension below.

Starting to Reconstruct 2. : The Process of Reconstruction

When Belinda's marriage ended abruptly her life positioning dramatically changed. The overarching horizon of entrapment rapidly dissipated and she felt free to move on to a new project. To emerge and improvise the construction of a new self-identity, correlated with a past self-identity before marriage, and a fantasised self-identity. (The latter had been an immanent object in her imaging and fantasising of her lifeworld within her previous temporal dimension of entrapment). As she explains,

But all of a sudden within a month [after the separation] I was me again. It was unbelievable. I would go out and I was bubbly again, I had a personality and could talk to people, and I could pull [attract men sexually]. It was just fantastic! It was great. I was just me again. I was just full of energy, full of life.

(p.5. Lines 8-15)

This was an immediate reaction to the new-found freedom, but Belinda really sought something more substantial. Her project was something far more profound. The “bubbly” Belinda at this stage was something of pretence, yet it was the spark that set in train a redefinition of self. Over time Belinda had felt inadequate and unfulfilled. She felt some family pressure to do some form of high status education – many family members including siblings had degrees, and also she felt a sense of under achievement when confronted with the academic accomplishments of her school peers. To work in a shop then did not feel right. There was a sense of spoiled identity here.

Her experiences on the Access to Higher Education course were a step toward making good the perceived shortfall of qualifications, which family and friends had achieved and expected of her. It was also a significant factor in her social rejuvenation. She could resurrect her social life and begin to incrementally reconstruct the identity that had been denied her. A catalyst in this process was another male student whose attention bolstered her confidence, through a confirmation of her sexual attractiveness. In sum the access course provided the space to exercise the preferred self-identity Belinda had craved within the cage. Here was a secure place in which to rehabilitate herself both socially and intellectually. She now had a strong sense of sexual and social presence. She mattered. She was geographically congruent – in the right place. The result was an enormous boost to self-confidence. Belinda now could begin to embrace social life with gusto, striving forward in the realisation of her new project and empowered to take her studies on to degree level.

The On-Course Orbit

For Belinda the early stages of her degree course were characterised by the insecurity of not knowing what to expect. There was an existential void that was puzzling. How to act? Who to be? These were immanent concerns within this unknown social environment. Course content largely overcame this, as her chosen degree, English, is the source of immense satisfaction. It is emotionally charging and energising. Above all else it is the driving force behind her project. Her puzzling dilemma was resolved by becoming an “English student” who exists for her love of her subject – English. Encountering academics was unproblematic, as her access course experience had demystified the academic world to some extent when mixing socially with course tutors

and there was also the history of academia within her family. The bonding with another student of similar background was extremely helpful in handling the early stages. This was a source of intersubjectivity and a boon to her reconstructive endeavours.

As her course progressed her confidence grew steadily. She could now enjoy “going out”, as confidence is integral to sociality. Others had been integral to that confidence by relating to her as a worthy person. There was a symbiotic relationship between her developing confidence doing the degree and her confidence in interpersonal encounters everywhere. One reciprocally fed the other. On course confidence was closely related to the acquisition of knowledge (“having confidence in what I know”) and the grasp of the new territory she was exploring; new skills (especially interpersonal), course content etc. “Going out” was and is the pinnacle of life’s events. When Belinda “goes out” everything comes together in a presentation of self that exudes the new confidence. For Belinda in the pre-course orbit, within the overarching horizon of entrapment, the quality referred to as confidence was not present. As her studies progressed so confidence emerged. From a position where she couldn’t “talk” she had “learned to talk again”. This gave a presentification of immense joy and celebratory mood. There was a boundarilessness in regard to the places she could go to. She was now empowered to go on in all areas of everyday life, to engage with others, to attract others to her, to connect with others, to have a sense of agency and project, to be the person she wanted to be. She could be “in there with blokes” – an ability to be at the heart of sexually charged social interaction. The result was a vast expansion of self-identity, connectivity, and in sum, her social life. There was, with this resurgent capacity, a feeling of contentment that she was setting the record straight with herself and others, as the following illustrates.

..I’d say it [doing the course] gave me more confidence. I’d always been so down about not doing any qualifications. I was really down on myself for that I feel that not my mum and dad or my sister but my aunties and uncles and things everyone in our family had gone and done a degree I was the only one who had got married young. I got married when I was 19 so I did everything sort of wrong and at that point there it seemed as if I was making things right so my confidence came with that.

(p.11. Lines 6-12)

As study progressed there was an expansion of horizons beyond the parochial. Local issues were seen from a more global perspective (e.g. attitudes to women). There was a capacity to see the world in a more analytical fashion and to be critical of local belief systems (e.g. small town prejudices, racism, intolerance of difference etc.). The acquisition of more knowledge and skills empowered Belinda to be part of conversations on many topics with an ability to language complex ideas. Within this form of self-expression there was full rein given to the act of self-improvisation (see Merleau-Ponty 1962) as she manifests presence and voice in her project of self-identity construction. This was reflected in the confidence to take an elevated position when faced with patriarchal attitudes from men. This involved a capacity to deflect men's attempts to impress in the social arena by displaying superior language, knowledge, social skill and demeanour (the embodiment of her lived self-identity). In sum she experiences her transition as the personal agency to transcend the socio-cultural and enter space hitherto inaccessible.

Relationships

There was a distinct change in relationships with others from the past. Belinda's account of speaking to her ex-husband's partner captures this clearly.

....I had time to think, is it me putting on all these defences? You know, I don't really love him because he hurt me? But now, nothing. And she [ex-husband's partner] was dead nice. And nothing, so, so I suppose that was a good thing.

G: Do you think doing HE has anything to do with that?

B: Yeah, 'cos I've moved on. I feel like I've moved on. I'm progressing, and I'm growing erm, and I feel like he's not as well. So that's quite nice.

(p.20. Lines 27-39)

Her construction of a new self-identity within a new orbit has enabled a distancing of her psychological space from that of her previous existence and her (ex) husband. She has moved to a different (and perceived superordinate) place. In this distancing Belinda is greatly comforted, and through a comparison of her two distinct orbits she senses an immanent realisation of her project.

Study colleagues from the Access course were no longer identified with. Indeed she had “fallen out” (ended the friendship) with many of them. Acquaintances from previous places of work reacted very differently to her. For Belinda the common ground on which these relationships were played out had disappeared. She was now in a different place.

Belinda was also very much aware of her image and needed to totally shed the “mother-at-home-unable-to-enter- the- ‘out there’-world” identity and construct her new “sexually-available-and-a-force-to-be-reckoned-with” identity. The embodiment of the latter was reflected in her presentation of self; clothes, hair and a pervasive projection of her sexual being. There was however some tension here, as Belinda is also a mother who sensed the sub-cultural expectations of what that label suggests. She found comfort within this position by being a devoted mother to her son, attending to his needs even though she pursued her social life. Living with her parents was some reassuring evidence of this devotion. She had foregone her independence, thereby ensuring that her son had a pleasant and secure environment in the home of her own parents. By following this course of action she effectively could turn back time. To play out a self-identity which could have existed years before. Before the birth of her son, before the marriage, before she took the job in the shop. She was now a degree student who could “go out” and get drunk, have “flings” (brief sexual relationships) secure in her presentation of self and the substance of confidence and knowledge supporting it.

Distance Travelled.

Belinda recognises the distance she has travelled, most notably in the pre reflective living of the course and the moments she encounters. This is particularly salient in what she can “say” as presentation of who she *now has become*, as opposed to what she could “not say” before and as the person she *was before* the course. To be able to “say” things is to have a sense of self-efficacy. To declare to other people that you are someone who matters and that you belong in this or that company. She has a feeling of ensanguined agency through having a voice in this previously puzzling place where she had not felt comfortable. Belinda has achieved the position where she is “attuned to the stock of knowledge” (Schutz 1967) of degree study and can say the things she

needs to say to declare this attunement to others within the group. There is one poignant expression of this transition.

Just a few weeks ago a lecture with BC [lecturer] and he was talking about nominalisation. And er he'd been talking about it but I'd read something all about it and I was just unsure on one point. And, er, and I said when you nominalise does it always emit agency? And I went out of the class and I said, "I can't believe I just said that. Do I know what that means? Yes I do know what that means." And somebody said you're just a swot aren't you? And I'm like "ugh, yeah," you know it was one of those. I suppose that was quite a good moment, Cos it was all of a sudden I realised what I was talking about. It sounded good. It sounded like something I wouldn't have said. And then I could say it.

(p.19. Lines 23-37)

Merleau-Ponty (1962) has pointed out how in language use there is always an act of self-improvisation in which we borrow from the world, from others and from our own past efforts. Belinda here clearly expresses herself in a way of trying out the living of a particular discourse and thereby being a particular kind of person. She emerges from this experience as a different person, albeit in a small way. "It sounded like something I wouldn't have said. And then I could say it". She *can* now say it and be it – a different person. The difference points up the distance travelled in her project, the on-course orbit and the related self-identity.

Assessed presentations (presenting a paper to a seminar group) were particularly significant with regard to this transition. They were challenging and anxiety provoking yet despite this they were viewed positively with regard to self-development. This was due to the amount of preparatory work necessary and the learning outcomes and perceived personal growth. As Belinda expresses it;

...also these presentations. We had so much work to do and you know you've got to know your stuff. Like it's got to be right so. That's helped so much. So much. It's horrible. I hate doing them but I'm really glad I've done them. Really glad. I think they've helped an awful lot.

(p.19. Lines 37-41)

A presentation is again a mode of self-improvisation. One has to stand up and present oneself as an academic professional. This is to identify with someone that one is not (at that moment). Afterwards such an identification is perhaps just a little less distant and a little more within one's grasp. For Belinda this is the nature of the "help" that the presentations have contributed to her project of self-identity construction.

Further, Belinda has reached the stage where she sees the multifarious elements of degree study coming together in some kind of pattern – an emerging gestalt. The puzzles of the past are more located in that temporal dimension. This nascent solution to those puzzles is now apparent and she feels great inner comfort, settled and attuned to this on-course orbit.

..we'd just been talking about direct variations and we'd done about Creoles. Oh and I can remember talking to Helen, she's the English student and I said "Oh we'd just done it in that last lecture." And I thought I know and I'd remembered. It's just that you all of a sudden, things click. It was just the fact that I knew it. Certain things people talk about, I know about. You know a lecturer will say something and you remember something from a previous lecture and it's nice that you know about these things. It is nice, it's knowing that I can say post-structuralism and know the myth of post-structuralism and I know what it is. And you know when somebody talks about, like you know and I know what that means. And it's just nice. All of a sudden this year things have started to click a bit more and it's getting the confidence to join in.

(p.20. Lines 3 – 15)

The cumulative effect for Belinda is further bolstering of the on-course self-identity. This "knowing" and confidence pervades life generally in an empowering of Belinda to handle life in all arenas. With this empowerment comes a more relaxed Belinda, who is less defensive about life's vicissitudes, more reflective, and now more at one with herself.

Identity and Temporality.

Belinda has travelled a perceivable distance in a relatively short space of time. She has moved from the overarching horizon of entrapment within her domestic “cage”, wherein she became lost with regard to coherent identity, to a present as an “English-degree-student-who-loves-English” and a fantasised future of being an English teacher or professional within management. She temporalises on the transition and perceives that she is now content in her established self-identity. It has however been a difficult journey. There has been a series of on-course experiences, which have been immanently significant in her transition and these have at times been anxious. The epitome of these has been the seminar presentations where identity was particularly under threat as she played out the business of languaging an identity hitherto unknown and unknowable until it was brought into being in the doing of the presentations. Each similar experience has cumulatively been significant in her project of reconstruction. The “I” as phenomenally experienced has emerged transformed.

Belinda now has realised the nascent state of her future self-identity. She has presence and voice in an increasing array of situations with a power to transcend the local sub-cultural. This is related to the sense of increased confidence and its correlates, knowing and understanding. These are directly related to her self-creative work in her on-course orbit. With these empowering features she can “do society” as she wishes, playing the intellectual, the sexually desirable female, the mother etc. This supplants the semi-recluse of years before.

Temporal Transcendence

Following further data collection in a follow up interview (see appendix “Belinda Interview 2”) during Belinda’s last semester (approximately 18 months after the first interview) I identified a development of the transition which is delineated above. This was another present where Belinda was invited to transcend the nowness of the situation and look back through her biography (in relation to her higher education experience) and forward to her fantasised life trajectory.

The Realisation of an Academic Identity.

As Belinda traces her development and temporalises her journey from the “blob” of domestic entrapment to the present, she relives the changes that have taken place in her self-identity. In the present she feels a security in the solidity of an academic identity within an academic, collegiate orbit. The pre-course orbit and the attendant identity has all but faded, with only a lived reality of a person that *was* firmly in the past and not in the present. Her feeling of joy within the business of study energises this academic identity. She has a place within the academic community as a student of English with a particular penchant for post-modern literature and she is immanently engrossed with the pinnacle of her course experience – her dissertation. This activity enthralls, uplifts and presents her with a firm sense of place within her on-course orbit. There is, as a result, a new orbit opening out to her as her present actions are rooted in the future. She bodies forth to feelings of academic significance within postgraduate study linked to her current study. She experiences a heightened sense of analysis of objects within her world as a cumulative result of her self-improvisations brought on through the lived reality of doing higher education. Her increasing use of theoretical discourse facilitates a living that is qualitatively different with each new analysis she attempts. The realisation of her own individual reality (as a theoretical construct) opens up a greater sense of agency. This also implies an expansion of her psychological spatiality in that her theoretical understanding of social construction aids her to enter areas of thought that were previously inaccessible. She can for example identify the political rhetoric and manipulation of public information, advertising etc. This opening up of cognitive boundaries is a particularly joyful and empowering feeling as she continues to construct and reconstruct her self-identity.

The Realisation of Greater Presence and Voice.

For Belinda there is a distinct correlation between the acquisition of academic knowledge and confidence. The latter is manifest in increased feelings of presence and voice. In seminar discussions the nascent on-course academic identity of before is realised in greater depth. As she explains when discussing speaking up in class.

..what I mean about the confidence you sort of gaining it and it sort of gets to a level and it's just that you've got it and you don't think about it

anymore. It's not.. it's not a conscious issue. It's just something that you've.. got
(p.3. Lines 26-28)

Thus playing the role of discussant takes on a new "level" which is something that ceases to be a significant issue, but one that is entered into without concern. The confidence that it takes is a quality which she possesses and slips out of conscious anxiety. Further she is empowered to develop this role and take centre stage as the situation allows. She has called into being an aspect of her academic identity which is Belinda-as-lead-discussant, which she embraces with gusto, and internally celebrates this incrementally developing sense of presence.

... it was sort of.. we were the last group to sort of speak, and he went right "your group" and I just sort of looked round and I thought "well that'll be me that's speaking". It was just assumed that I'd be the one. So I'm sort of stuck and I said "does anyone else want to do it" and they went, "no it's OK you can carry on". So I just carried on and I never thought about it really. And afterwards I thought that was brilliant, that was great, that was just how I wanted it to be put and everything. And oh... and I didn't really think about it that much. It was just assumed that by the people that I was with that I would be the one that talked about it.

(p.3. Lines 42-48)

This identifies the intersubjectivity of her experiences as the awareness of herself is experienced through the awareness of her fellow students being aware of her. The great sense of pride Belinda feels is embodied in her relating of these experiences. She exudes excitement and ebullience through the reliving of these episodes.

The realisation of these developments is brought into consciousness by Belinda temporalising into the past. She relives the nascent state of her academic identity construction through her positioning as one who made the occasional contribution to discussion, and beyond at school where she made minimal ventures into public self presentation/speaking. The contrast is evident in the emotional effort that is involved in speaking out.

But I'm definitely more one to debate now, whereas I wasn't before. And it's not something I consciously think about like I did before. I don't have to sit and work myself up to say something.

(p.4. Lines 13-15)

Also as Belinda temporalises toward her future life trajectory she not only sees herself as entering a new orbit of academia (a masters course) but also empowered to take on life in a more fulfilling fashion armed with the underpinning "knowledge" which facilitates the confident Belinda in the social world. There is a perceived social hierarchy in which she has raised her level in that any perceived status difference is nullified through her "academic ability".

I would say one [significant aspect of her course experiences] is the academic ability and the confidence that gives you. That would be a massive one. I don't even mean just.. meeting someone down at the pub anymore that... doesn't even come into it. Just the fact that I know I can speak to someone... who is even... someone who is more qualified than me if you like... that I won't sound... there's no ways that you're going to sound totally silly cos it's not going to come out as really silly. It's going to actually have something to say.

(p.4. Lines 24-29)

Academic ability and its correlate confidence then pervades her lifeworld, giving her voice in an array of social situations and relationships which was previously absent. With this boost to agency there is the overarching horizon of self-efficacy and boundarilessness. She matters to others in her lifeworld and can move into space from which she felt previously barred. Of the projects that animate her lifeworld and make it hers, academic identity construction has been central. Part of this project has been her reinstatement of the social and sexual Belinda – a process begun following her separation and continued with great energy within her on-course orbit. There is a sense of restitution of a biographical stage that was missed. She has been the architect of her own rescue from earlier bounds and now can move on, into an exciting future.

It's as though it's [her course experience] given me the opportunity to do everything I thought I'd missed. And now I know that I can move on from here and I never feel that I've missed out on something. And I always know that I actually... I actually did it. I did it at a different time, but I still did it.

(p.4. Lines 33-35)

The Past Comes to Life Again

The reliving of Belinda's biography throws into relief several immanent significations that impact upon her life in the present. Ricoeur's (1986) concept of "narrative identity", whereby the self comes into being through the telling of a life-story, in particular identifies how Belinda's past life constitutes her current life as she experiences her narrative identity as an holistic entity. That although there is an identifiable past-Belinda, this past can live on in the present, although what she makes of that past self-identity is continually novel. In the nowness of the interview it was evident that her past experiences have an immanent influence upon her living through of the present and her trajectory into the future.

Despite her increasing sense of empowerment and spatial expansion her past experience of the world of work, and the proposition of taking a senior or responsible role, as opposed to earlier menial roles, creates a severe test to the confidence generated by her academic development. Her bodily self-identity is of a young sexually attractive woman, which she feels does not strike any clear congruence with that of her foreseeable professional role. The Belinda who was "in there with blokes" and could "pull" does not fit well with a managerial identity of super-ordination over others who are older than her. However secure she feels at present within her on-course orbit (where previously she had been insecure) the past speaks in the present with an attendant feeling of foreboding for the move into the next existential orbit.

The Joy of Transcendence

What has Belinda experienced as the existent who has realised her capacity to transcend what she was and is, to become what she is not at any moment? How has her living through of doing higher education impacted upon her biography? She sees the whole experience as a saviour and a facilitator of joyous transition. A journey which

has led her to become a satisfied and forward moving individual. An existential pioneer in readiness to continue her transcendence of each moment with a courage to take up new, multifarious challenges and with a vision of the world as a place of wondrous stimulation. This joy is felt so strongly that Belinda would wish it on as many as would benefit, to the extent that the process should become her *raison d'être*. She wishes to work with adults because;

...I would love it [her future career] to be something to do with getting people into education or... just helping to educate people. I think that'd be fantastic.....I always see myself as when I was at my lowest... higher education came along and it lifted me up and it gave me so much potential and so much help. And it helped me accept myself and the situation I was in and everything. It just sort of gave me so much that if people could see that and if people could try that then they would see there's other ways of living their lives as well.

(p.6. Lines 7-17)

“DORIS”

Factual Background

Doris is a 29-year-old divorcee who lives locally with her 2 children from a previous and now ended long-term relationship. She has worked in manual jobs for local firms and returned to education through an AS psychology course, and then an “Access to HE course”. She has been a single parent for about 4 years, and has had several relationships that have failed to last (she refers to them as her “Exes”). The father of her children is still in contact with her, although this has proved very stressful, as he can be intimidating. He has a criminal record for drug offences. She is studying for an Applied Social Sciences degree and the interview was conducted during her fourth semester, just over halfway through her course.

Individual Psychological Structure.

Utilisation of an Existential Baseline: Working Class Roots

Roots are stuck deep into the ground and ensure the survival of the tree. If it becomes uprooted it ceases to exist! This is very much the perspective that Doris has on her degree as she temporalises from the present into her past life and sees it as a form of embedded security. She is, was, and will be working class and all the values and personal features (“me nature”) which go with it. Her working class roots *enable* her project, but simultaneously this presents a conflict as the self-development, immanently significant in her studies, draw her away from those roots.

So what are the dimensions of her life prior to returning to education and to finally studying in HE? This pre-course orbit had an overarching horizon of powerless, striving-to-cope inertia.

...there were nothing I did that were interesting apart from change nappies. That were interesting [sardonic tone]. That's all I did. Watch television....So y'know I could have thought "great here's a bloke who's earnin' some money. Oo we'll ave a bit more money" and relied on 'im... Could easily have done that. That's what would've happened. I would have done that three years ago.

(p.5. Lines 41-46)

Movement was perceived as possible, but within the largesse of others. Meanwhile one should continue with routine and hope. There was no way to take control of life, Doris was beholden to life's vicissitudes as they arose, and the world was a place where she was at the behest of others. Existence was generally boring. There was no challenge or opportunity to pursue challenge. Uninteresting "entropy" (see Csikszentmihalyi 1992) was the order of her existence.

Entering the On-Course Orbit: "Petrifaction"

Early experiences were characterised by intense fear. Doris was thrown into a world of hierarchical status in which she was at the bottom. Her expectations were full of images of gorgon-like others whose gaze would "petrify" her. This was to be a scary world of knowledge and intellectualism, which was far above her, intensely threatening to her psychological well being and self-worth. She was a small weakling surrounded by intellectual heavyweights, who would intimidate and humiliate her. Within this horizon Doris was surprised and comforted by the revelation that in fact there were people who had less than she did in the capacity to take on this new challenge. She came to see herself as "average", that many were like her, with the same fears and the same capabilities. She however desperately needed to feel a sense of place, and was deeply disturbed by the prospect that she would not be liked. She had to belong – to be in the right place, for without this fear ensued. "I were scared.. I just wanted people to like me."

Entering this new world was also a shock to her regime of her pre-course life. There were now greater demands placed before Doris and this created a tormenting anxiety, which was driven by the prospect of failure. Her project was one of self-reliance. She had to show that she could be independent without the services of previous support

personnel. They in fact were the enemy to be proved wrong. She felt that they wanted her to fail.

Because I think that when I first started then people wanted me to fall [fail]. Expected me to fall. Wanted to see me fall and laugh.... they really did because they thought “you’ll never do it” you know wha’a mean “she’ll never do it. She’s got enough on wi’ two children and work. She’s got enough on. She’ll not do it”.

(p.4. Lines 23-26)

...you get... exes [ex-partners] who say “that degree’s doin’ nothin’ for you”. There just dying erm... there’s one particular ex who’s dying for me to fall... and I’m not... and he’s getting really fed up about that. And getting really nasty and vindictive... because I’m not falling. Y’know and because I’m not asking for his advice and because I’m not asking him to help me with essays am [I’m] doin’ it meself.

(p.6. Lines 4-9)

To save face and avoid shame then is paramount. Her project has to be realised. The stakes are very high as failure, and the prospect of being seen to fail, is acutely intolerable, if not devastating. This underlying fear of failure does not go away. There is in the present a strong feeling of misplacement. That she is in the wrong place. That she doesn’t belong and she will be found out. The on-course self-identity is extremely brittle, illustrated by her fantasising future failure as she re-enters the course at the start of the academic year.

...when it comes to September and I’m due to start again... I get scared and I don’t wanna start. Cos I keep thinking, “this is the year you’re going to fail Doris. This is the year where you’re gonna fail. You will... you’ve done too well last year... you’ll not do it for another year”. Y’know and then I’m petrified a [of] starting again.

(p.9. Lines 14-17)

Gradually however, but not without a great deal of distress and the resultant resolve, Doris became “attuned to the stock of knowledge at hand” (Schutz), and established a *modus vivendi* with her new tasks and duties. She enthusiastically embraced the need to read and prepare for her college life, whilst maintaining her household role. She was feeling more of an insider to the college social milieu, and could take on her project with pride and energy.

Embodiment: Emotions and Fateful Moments.

How does Doris experience herself in the present as opposed to her past self and her past existence? How has she changed as she relives her past in the here and now?

“Fateful moments” (see Giddens 1991) are felt to have experientially impacted upon her and led to emergent feelings about self, which point up a perceived transition of self-identity in the lived reality of the present. Doris now feels more empowered and thereby more self-reliant and independent. There is an incremental realisation of her project. This feeling of greater self-efficacy and agency has several correlates. The most prominent are pride, strength, expansion and courage.

Doris feels more proud. She can live conspicuously. No longer does she remain silent in discussion. There is still fear of falling short of the required behavioural norm when she speaks out, but she can now declare to the world that she matters through demonstrating her sense of voice.

....in seminars yeah when I... think of a point. When I first started I wouldn't say it in case it sounded really stupid. Y'know and er nine times out of ten somebody else'd think of it and say it and everyone would say “oo yeah”. And I'd think “oh I should have said that” you know it dunt [doesn't] sound stupid. But I were that scared that it might sound stupid I never said anything... so I'd stay quiet, whereas now I'd say it anyway.

(p.6. Lines 23-28)

A “fateful moment” which typifies other similar occasions and which Doris feels is implicated in her feelings of pride and to live proudly was her living through of a particularly important seminar presentation. (It was assessed and video-taped). This embodied many facets of earlier “petrification”. The glare of others as she publicly

demonstrated her abilities and skills (or lack of). The possibility of failure both in formal assessment and in the more subtle realms of losing face in the public arena (not being able to play “academic student”). The cumulative affect of feeling out of place. The implications of not bettering these facets would be devastating. The presentation was a crisis point. The result, movement forward or move out and an end to her identity project.

This position of embattlement with her fear of failure and the potential hurt she could feel at the actions of others is a driving force within her lifeworld. She has won many battles and this not only fills her with pride, but she also feels stronger. The lived reality of studying has been a self-invoked “training programme” to strengthen her resolve and add to her sense of agency. As she explains,

...now I've gone right t't beginning, started reading [a set text] from page to page, every single night and I actually know what he's talking about. Y'know wha'a'mean and that made me feel fantastic. Cos I spent a week really really thinking and reading about what he's been saying, instead of just leavin' it. Y'know and that makes me feel a lot better as well. That's a new me. I'm changing all... I'm changing every week. I'm doing more like erm before... I'd drink three times a week now I'll have a drink on a Friday night only then read every single night. The more I read the more proud I feel I've read the night before... so it gives me that incentive to read again the following night d'y'know wha'a mean. And then I feel even more proud if I've read for three days running so I think I'll do it for another day and it keeps me going all t'time.

(p.7. Lines 33-43)

Her present condition is set against her past self-identity and she feels “stronger” as a result of her string of trials and successful outcomes. -

...strong yeah. I feel I can do anything. Whereas before I thought I could do nothing. When people used to say to me that you can do anything if you put your mind to it I didn't believe 'em and now I believe 'em.

(p.8. Lines 1-3)

The “training programme” of intellectual development that she has instituted has consisted of a series of fateful moments where she has moved further forward to the realisation of her project. This has led to an intellectual expansion. She feels intellectually “bigger”, (“the more I learn I can sort of feel my brain expanding”). This is a joyous position of learning to learn and a capacity to grasp hitherto difficult and unfathomable ideas.

The battles have taken a good deal of courage and this has cumulatively emboldened her to take on further and at least equally frightening challenges. The presentation however remains as most central to Doris’ transition and looms large in the multifarious experiences that have contributed to it. As she explains,

..I were absolutely petrified. My hands were wet through. I were sweating and er but that’s what I’ve learned to do now and if I had another presentation I’d do the same again... I’d think y’know whereas as before I’d a thought “oh god I’m really scared” I’d just shrug my shoulders n that’s it. I’ll go for it. It’s made me more brave y’know wha’a mean gave me more courage to do... to do things like that.

(p.3. Lines 13-18)

Self-Identity Confusion.

Despite her perceived transition and acquisition of skills, capabilities and characteristics she hitherto would not have dreamed of possessing (and perceiving as features of her self-identity), Doris is in a state of confusion regarding her self-identity and how she relates to the world around her. Whilst taking on the business of study and the associated implications for self adjustment, there is a reticence to fully embrace her emergent new self-identity. She experiences a kind of magnetic pull between the two discernible orbits: pre-course and on-course. She is attracted to the new Doris, reading each night, foregoing drinking in the pub with friends, feeling the joy of engagement with academic ideas, and revelling in the feelings of pride, strength, courage and expansion. She is also striving for security and a sense of place and belonging. This is to be found in the pre-course Doris, which is lived out in the discourse she uses. The

presentation of self through her language use is rooted in the pre-course orbit. “I can’t use big words, it’s not in me nature”. This sentiment is counterpoised by her joy of study and her emergent abilities to engage with academia. Yet there is an order of confusion in her lifeworld. She defers to her pre-course orbit, desperately refusing to distance her self from her “roots”. And “rooted” in this orbit she improvises her self within the on-course orbit. Declaring that she has changed and feeling a sense of pride in her successes, both formal (e.g. assessed work) and informal (e.g. making contributions in seminar discussion), yet adhering to her everyday discourse which thereby spans both orbits. She lives on-course as she lives pre-course.

...we were talking about this yesterday you mean convergence and divergence. Yeah I’ve wrote it down.

(p.10. Lines 21-22)

The grammatically incorrect, “I’ve wrote it down” is from her local vernacular, yet it is co-joined with a point on socio-linguistic theory. The conflict is minimised through the rationale that she is in “professional mode” at college and “me at home”. She effectively switches identities. But how does this switch operate? Even when she espouses on the “professional me” it is lived through within the security of the “me at home”.

..I think that now I’m finding I can be more meself [myself] on the professional side [laughs] because am [I’m] used to it now. I’m used to getting education aren’t a [I]. Am used to it now.

(p.12. Lines 47-48)

Paradoxically she links strongly here with “me at home” discourse, despite consciously exploring “the professional side”. The exposition of being professional is referred to as “on the professional side” which is an expression located in the local vernacular. A local may say “on the plus side” (expressing an advantage) or “it’s a bit on the boring side” (it tends to be boring). The stress in amplitude on “used” and the repetition of the phrase “am used to it now” is also a particularistic technique to create emphasis and thus make a point. The reference to her course work (“getting education aren’t a”) is also firmly located in the local particularistic discourse. She does not refer to the

process as “studying” or higher education” or “working at degree level”. Education, consistent with her particularistic perspective, is something that one “gets”, and not something that one “does”. She ensures that her self-expression has the safety of her “roots”, her pre-course life, her pre-course orbit and self-identity. This discourse is prevalent throughout the interview, despite her interlocutor being a tutor, a member of the academic world. She chooses to diverge rather than converge (even displaying an understanding of this phenomenon), as for her, divergence is safer, even though accommodation to the interlocutor is the usual option (see “Accommodation Theory”, in Bourhis and Giles 1977). The “big words” and the emergent academic, on-course self-identity are disturbing and confusing. In Spinnelli’s (1989) terms she clings on to “sedimented beliefs and view points” (lived through, and lived by, reference to her particularistic discourse) for security, yet conversely she has an “openness to experience” as she strives for change in her project of self-reliance. Ironically this project incrementally leads to identity confusion and feelings of misplacement and insecurity. This confusion has important implications for sociality.

Relationships

Where can Doris be a higher education student? She senses progress toward her project, but is uncomfortable in demonstrating this to the world. The “comfort zone” has been explored above. It is firmly within her pre-course orbit and pre-course self-identity. She can leave the “comfort zone”, but this is fraught with risk. Declaring that she has the project at all is seen to spoil relationships with others out of college. Potential sexual-romantic relationships with out of college suitors are often terminated prematurely when they are made aware of her project, which she finds extremely hurtful. She is deeply defensive of her nascent academic self-identity when present others are pre-course friends and acquaintances. She feels ignored by some and courts the conviviality of others by actively playing down the enormity of the task. She fears being branded a “show off” and therefore consciously plays archetypal, indigenous “broad Yorkshire” (accentuated local dialect and accent) in social interaction. She feels antipathy towards those within her lifeworld who she sees as having abused their power and status and this drives her to “never forget where me roots are”. The order of confusion within the lifeworld however is illustrated in her growing sense of distance from these “roots”.

...So you can tell I've gone one step up on a ladder and there still to me they still down the not beneath me but I've gone one step up in a professional ladder. D'y understand what I mean. N [and] they're still down there and I think "why don't you do something. Get a job or do a course. It's easy there's crèches and everything and I think of all the choices I've got. They've no focus and mine have come off. My blinkers've come off. D'y know wha'a mean sort of thing. And I see they could do this and they could do that. But they don't and I can't understand that so I just keep away from 'em. It's not intellectual enough for me. It bores me basically. That's awful that. It's awful. Can't believe I've just said that.

(p.14. Lines 6-15)

Whilst not believing what she has said there is no rescinding of her comments. She is now of greater status, yet this flies in the face of her "sedimented beliefs", and the order of confusion prevails. There is a disturbing fracture between her emergent self-identity and the socio-cultural background that gives her stability and security. This is the puzzle she is living and working through. A multiplicity, which she now has to handle.

Temporality and Identity

Doris' project is one of self-reliance. She strives to have a sense of agency such that she is not dependent upon others and does not have the need to follow local socio-cultural expectations of a woman in her position. Her past however speaks to her in the present through a stability and sense of security in her "roots" – the socio-cultural milieu she knows as home. Her present trajectory of being and becoming however draws her incrementally away from her "roots" and this presents a disturbing, conflictual, confusion. She lives through her course experiences with a retarding pre-course discourse, which holds her to her "roots" and provides existential comfort. This is counterpoised by a sense of growth – becoming stronger, prouder (having greater voice and presence), more courageous and intellectually more adept. She fantasises to a future when her present actions are fulfilled in the self-reliance within a well-paid, professional job.

Within relationships this disturbance is realised in a distancing between herself and her pre-course friends and acquaintances, and a fracture between her nascent, academic self-identity and her “roots”.

The contradictory nature of her identity confusion is illuminated by her reaction to the respect accorded to her academic self-identity by others.

....they treat me with more respect... they're more respectful. They're praising you up all the time because of what you're doin' and you think “well I am me and if I weren't working I'd still be t'same person” well I would be in a way I'd still be me wunt [wouldn't] a [I]?

(p.11. Lines 43-46)

She is doing a degree but is uncomfortable with the status it brings, yet celebrates the transition she experiences. Who then is Doris? There are signs that she is solving the puzzle.

..me mind's more active and that's what I'm used to now. And when me mind's active in education y'see it's active and I can feel meself more. I don't feel meself any more with... just being me cos I'd be so bored if I were just me. D'y'get worra mean. And am used to it now. So does it sound as if I've just contradicted meself?

(p.13. Lines 3-7)

“I don't feel myself any more with just being me”. “Just being me” is the past Doris. There is a diminutive within this expression of self (just). The past Doris was metaphorically smaller on many dimensions (especially “strength, pride, courage and expanse”). Doris does not feel that this “me” is her any more. She is now more intellectually active and she is becoming more settled with the transition to a new self-identity.

..I [speaks slowly] feel better at college. A feel meself more at college now. D'y'get worra mean. So if I'm at home. Am not saying I don't like

being meself at home I do but I 'ave to keep busy. I need to keep reading.
Am dragging college into me home life.

G: so there's great change there isn't there?

D: yeah but phew it's that SUBTLE I can't get it across to yer. I don't feel
as if I've changed but now I'm tellin' yer now I think I 'ave.

(p.13. Lines 35-43).

“HATTIE”

Factual Background

Hattie is a recently divorced single woman in her early forties with 2 teenage daughters. In the past she has worked as a manager in industry. She has recently moved to the local area prior to her divorce and is having some difficulty in coping financially with her present position. She has taken work at the local pub to both ease her financial situation and also in an attempt to integrate into the local community. She has also taken part time work with a young offenders’ agency, again for financial reasons, but also because this fits with her criminology degree studies. Prior to starting the course she did an Access to HE course. The interview took place shortly after she began the fourth semester, just over half way through her degree course.

Hattie was not the most forthcoming of interviewees and her style was indicative of her positioning that is described here. She was often reticent and unable to really explore her perspective and feelings so I had to do a good deal of reflecting of feeling and clarifying. This sometimes led me into the trap of leading the flow of conversation and therefore some areas were not as fully delineated as they might have been should I have exercised more skill and patience.

Individual Psychological Structure

Utilisation of an Existential Baseline: Daddy’s Girl

From Hattie’s temporal position in the present the past speaks to her. Its significance, which appears in the present, is characterised by the change she perceives in her perspective on the world. That is, in reliving the past in the present, she experiences a great contrast in her being-in-the-world. Hattie’s perspectival shift is typified in the transition from her time when she had implicit trust and belief in her father’s influence over her thoughts and deeds and the present. This movement clearly points up her

perceived changes in self-identity. As “Daddy’s Girl” there was a distinct powerlessness and lack of agency in general matters of everyday living. Once her father was the wise and wonderful figure who was all knowing and the guide on things worldly. Similarly others were seen in this trusting light to be believed and to be non-confrontable. Others were a “knowing generalised other” whilst Hattie was an unknowing passenger in the world to be taken along by the generalised other’s greater and more robust knowledge of the world. She had very little voice in most scenarios. Within this perceived ignorance Hattie was plagued by self-doubt, unsure of what is and is not to be taken as true, without any means of establishing her own distinct view of an issue. From this existential baseline Hattie has made perceivable transitions. Immanent significations of this are in her approach to the world, which is more inquiring and logically sceptical. There is now a reasoning Hattie who has far more conviction in her own worldview and a far greater sense of voice. As she illustrates.

This is a really silly example - my Dad, my Dad’s an absolutely wonderful, wonderful fella.....and if he would tell me that the moon was square, I would have believed it was square...‘cos he’s my Dad, your Dad knows everything doesn’t he? But now, I find myself listening to him, I have to sort of stop myself, and I think he doesn’t know what he’s talking about, he’s talking rubbish, type of thing, and I find myself questioning him and saying “just a minute, that’s not right!”, and I question more, I ask more, whereas before I would have....just took somebody else’s word for the gospel, type of thing, if you understand what I mean.

(p.5. Lines 7-14)

This intimate relationship with her father and the characteristic change in her view of him reflects Hattie’s shift in her relationship with her social world. There has been in sum a dramatic change in her view of herself in the world, which is characterised by an increased feeling of being able to speak from knowledge i.e. a more informed Hattie whose intellectual growth is recognised as she intends others and the world in general.

Initiating Authentic Change.

Again from her position in the present she experiences her recent past biography as a change process initiated by her own authenticity and stoic pragmatism. Finding herself

with a demanding financial situation (two girls, a mortgage etc.), without a partner, without a career or skill of any distinction to fall back on, she decided to try higher education. She surprised herself with her ability to cope with the academic level and how she found it to be an enjoyable experience. Yet self-doubt still prevailed as Hattie was still subject to the immanent signification within her existence that others were the knowing ones, and she was really playing “catch up”, even at the embryonic stage of her transition. Although there was an immanent feeling of increased voice and presence, she was always to be slightly behind, despite her efforts, and others were the guides in life’s journey, whose opinion counted, as opposed to her without an opinion of any credo. She saw herself at this embryonic stage, when transition was becoming palpable, as “a trier”. This is someone who does her best, although it may fall short of what is required. Someone who attempts to achieve, yet doesn’t quite make it. As the transition developed, and her consciousness had taken on increasing levels of self-reflection, this self-positioning vis a vis others changed. This was through a realisation that in fact, far from being a passenger or follower of others, trying to make the grade, she was in fact not “trying” but “doing”. She was not “playing catch up”. She had in effect caught up. Her best was a credible and perfectly acceptable level. Daddy’s girl had now become her own girl. There was one dramatic description of this realisation.

...one of the Seminars we were talking about integrity and I’ve always considered myself as a..“trier”, I’ve always thought, “I’ve tried to do this, I’ve tried to do that”, and I’ve always thought I try my best, and the...guy actually said “forget try, come on stand up Hattie, show me a try, you can’t, it’s impossible” I’m thinking [laugh] “where’s he coming from now”, so I thought, and I thought, “you can’t, you can’t show a try, it’s impossible”...and then it dawned on me and I actually thought, “I am doing it, I am not trying, I am doing it, I am studying, I’m getting my grades, I’m working, I’m paying my mortgage, I’m bringing up the girls, I am doing it.” And it was like “Wow”....it was...quite inspiring...

.....it was actually “Eureka”, I thought “Blimey, I’m not trying, I’m succeeding, I’m doing”....it’s a big difference.

(p.3. Lines 17-34)

The epiphany-like nature of this fateful moment illustrates the redefinition of self that Hattie experiences in the present. She now (in the present) reconstructs the past and thus redefines herself. She feels altogether more intellectually and behaviourally efficacious. She is no longer the “does-her-best-and-may-just-succeed” Hattie. She is now the “doing-it-and-succeeding” Hattie. This redefinition however is tinged with regret. She does, to some degree, hanker after the “past” Hattie and the daddy’s girl. There has been a cost to the change. There has been a part of her that she has “lost”. On balance however she sees her transition as positive.

....I am definitely not the Hattie I used to be, I am definitely a different Hattie and a better Hattie and I feel a lot better for it in terms of confidence and such self-development. I feel a lot better for it, but I also...I also know that I’ve lost part of me as well, you know.
(p.4. Lines 29-32)

Hattie “Doing it”

For Hattie the positioning of herself as a “doer” rather than a “trier” represents an empowerment of being able to grasp her destiny, rather than be swept along by others. She is sanguine within her increasing sense of agency The realisation of the nature of her father’s perspective and that of others opens up a new claim to status for her as one who is part of the “knowing generalised other”. A significant correlate of this is confidence. For Hattie this is the capacity to “do”. For example the capacity to “do” exams. To be able to walk in the exam room, and whereas before, feeling she couldn’t do them, she has moved to the position that she has done them and so now “must be able to do them” (p. 4 line 43). The “I” as phenomenologically experienced emerges out of an experience and is intended differently, as she continues to improvise the “doer” rather than “trier”. She now feels able to question things, armed with knowledge and the ability to “do”. In general terms this confidence extends to social interaction and the ability to disengage when others “are talking rubbish”. Spatially she is elsewhere when she experiences such discourse. This is contrasted with the existential baseline of the before when she would have been part of the “talking rubbish”.

This new found confidence and positioning is not however a problem-free reality. There is often tension between the newly experienced self-identity of the “doer” and

the unknowing passenger of pre-transition. This can lead to Hattie having a dual conversation with out of college acquaintances. One overtly expressed and one which is internal only. This is related to a perceived increase in critical analysis of issues and being critical of others who do not embrace such critical analysis. She sees acquaintances thereby in a different light. They have become the unknowing “passenger” types of which she was once one. This signifies her existential baseline of a before period when she was “brain dead” (p. 6 line 45). Two distinct spatial orbits of her life have gradually emerged. The pre-course orbit signifying her as the “unknowing passenger” in the world, and the on-course orbit signifying her as the succeeding “doer” with a strong sense of voice, instigated by her confidence and new knowledge. Paradoxically however, although she can be critical, this is tempered by a new-found tolerance of others, which is implicated in her interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Relationships

Hattie has noticed a significant change in her parenting style associated with her own self-identity transition. Previous rigidity and traditional role-playing has been supplanted by a much more democratic approach. A greater understanding of her children’s worlds and an empathy with their views is now prevalent above the previous domineering approach that Hattie associates with her father. There is a distinct link between this aspect of transition and course content. As Hattie remembers:

I remember sitting in counselling psychology and...I’d be sitting there and I’d be thinking, or there’d be certain things that would be going off and I’d listen to (the tutor) giving examples of erm...certain scenarios and I could see myself and I would think “gosh, that’s me”, you know and I would consciously go home and be completely opposite and the girls would take a step back and think, you know... “is this my Mum? [laughs]. What’s happened?”... you know.

(p.7. Lines 28-33)

This initially was a cosmetic change, but over time and alongside other cosmetic (and conscious) changes the composite affect was one of fundamental change and radical

perspectival shift. A new discourse was available to her and thereby she could language being a different kind of person, self-improvising a contrasting parenting style as part of her self-improvisation of her on-course self-identity. Hattie particularly perceives this in her languaging of reason when she makes demands on her children. The strict “do as I say” discourse has been supplanted by a more rational and “adult ego state” (Berne 1961) style in transactions. There is a palpable shift in her lived reality of parenthood.

Hattie also feels that her confidence in general social interaction has induced a tolerance of others and the capacity to engage and connect with more people. Course content and its attendant experiences have heavily influenced sociality. To feel empathy for reticent others and to induct them into conversations. This is particularly the case with fellow students who need assistance in engaging in academic discussions in seminars. The intersubjectivity in her life world has expanded due to the increased horizons presented by experiencing others; their lives, their knowledge, their hopes and fears. The awareness of herself has been influenced through the awareness of a wider social catchment of others being aware of her. This has happened through the doing of her degree course and by increasingly becoming a “doer”.

Hattie “Doing Degree Student.”

What are the specific dimensions of transition within Hattie’s student life? In her early stages of study Hattie reinvented her perspective of school to make sense of her situation. This included the attribution of the teacher/pupil roles to her self as student and staff as tutors. Yet there was tension here as she was not a school pupil of school age but “a fully mature woman” (p. 10 line 18). This was manifest in Hattie’s feelings of personal criticism when getting academic feedback. It could be particularly distressing given her early low levels of confidence and her positioning as a “trier”.

.....then I would find myself going home and I’d be thinking this is not what it’s about, this is not how I want to feel, I don’t want to feel like this, um....I felt bad about myself felt as if erm... I wasn’t going to achieve my goal, as if I couldn’t cope, as if I was doomed to failure, um... not very confident.

(p.11. Lines 2-5)

There was a powerful feeling of alienation when reading about her efforts in the academic arena. Criticism of her attempts was personally felt. Internally it hurt as she felt that she did not belong. It initiated an overarching horizon of strangerhood with a severe sense of foreboding in that she would forever be as such. Her efforts were all in vain and she was “doomed” – fated to be a “trier” that failed. However Hattie’s pragmatism and authenticity (she was to be in charge of the way her life was to be experienced and these feelings were going to change) won through and these feelings of personal attack became less, until eventually she felt better able to cope with them and finally she “just left them behind” (p. 11 line 36). They were part of the previous Hattie. The new Hattie encourages feedback. The previous Hattie saw “negative” feedback as just that, “negative”, in that anything which is not complementary is negative and the response would typically be (as “trier”) “well that’s it then, I’ll quit, I can’t do it” (p. 12. Line 18). The present Hattie sees feedback as formative and informative following a “fateful” moment when she sought oral feedback from a tutor on an exam result. This meant actioning her emerging sense of heightened agency and overtly asking the tutor for an explanation of her grade. The experience again had transitional implications as this was not seen as a normal process within the learning experience and took a great deal of resolve on Hattie’s part. As a result her independence of thought and action were boosted and she began to engage with the academic feedback process with greater comfort and benefit.

Identity and Temporality

Hattie is not the Hattie she used to be. This is her vivid self-perception of transition. She has become a “Doer” from a “Trier”. From being-in-the-world as someone who was reliant on others’ opinions, as hers were not of any substance, she has moved to being-in-the-world as someone who has the capacity to state an opinion, based on her own reasoning. With this movement there has been the demonstrable correlate of confidence and the minimising of self-doubt. Hattie is *succeeding* not simply *trying* to succeed. It is this revelation which resonates around her life world and generates confidence. Her level of agency is palpably heightened. She feels a greater sense of voice in many situations, and as a correlate being able to display her “doing” and “succeeding” self-identity. The new Hattie can handle feedback however negative from

tutors. The previous Hattie could not. She feels altogether intellectually more secure and emotionally stronger when she experiences criticism of her efforts.

In relationships there is greater tolerance of others particularly with her two girls. Her greater levels of critical analysis, increased confidence and decrease in self-doubt facilitate this. She has made a distinct movement from Daddy's girl to being her own girl. She has become a member of the "knowing generalised other" rather than an unknowing passenger guided by others. This has increased the space she can move within and towards. New areas of life are gradually opening up to her as she continues to improvise her being-in-the-world in an increasing array of social arenas. Within her academic work she was always "playing catch up". Now she feels she has caught up. Her degree studies are experienced as immanently implicated in the transition and her journey continues. Her biographical trajectory has a greater range and potential progression as she bodies forth to a more fulfilling and prosperous future.

“LILLY”

Factual Background

Lilly has been with her partner for 16 years and they have been married for about 12 years. She has 4 children including a ten-year old boy Leon. Other than for a short time in hairdressing most of her working life has been as a mother and housewife. She is currently taking a Criminological Studies Degree and although in her second year as a full time student, she has been studying for about three and a half years having taken HE “taster” courses (30 hours at level 4. i.e. 10 credits of the first level of a degree) prior to commencing her degree. She began study in order to institute a change in her life although she was very unsure of the nature of change she wished to pursue. Study suggested some kind of development with the possibility of beginning a professional career. The interview took place at the beginning of her second semester of her second year as a full time student.

Individual Psychological Structure.

Utilisation of an existential baseline: A Settled life and a Set Script.

In order to describe the progressive perspectival shift which Lilly experiences, reference to her perception of life’s horizons, before her present immanent significations of existence – her life prior to entering Higher education - is necessary. There are two distinct orbits of her life that can be identified: the pre-course orbit and the on-course orbit. The former is characterised as being “settled” - predictable and preordained. Consequently the living through of this existence had a set script to be followed. It was a regimen of daily similarity and ordinariness - an existence that seemed to be repetitious and mirrored by the lives of many others in Lilly’s lifeworld.

The starting point for this is to focus on the embodiment of her existence and her regard for health and “being unto death”. That is the notion of finiteness and the notion of

meaningfulness. Lilly makes a statement that is rich in its implications for her “settled life”.

One big thing [with regard to change] I think is that I didn't used to bother about my health. I wasn't really happy. I used to smoke a lot for example but now I've cut back. I must admit that now I've got a future I'm much more bothered about my health. I'd always had my future mapped out... thought I've got the kids and I must see they're OK and get them out... and once that's done then that's it... I wouldn't be bothered about dying.

(p.6. Lines 26-31)

Life then had a set script “mapped out” with an end point to its meaning. The overarching horizon of the pre-course orbit was that of the family. Children were to be guided through their formative stage to adulthood and independence and then closure to life: its meaning and its physicality - as and when it came about. Physical health then was not really important, as the chances of survival to see the children through to adulthood were relatively good. This was represented in Lilly's attitude to smoking. Lilly acknowledges that it is inimical to health but only the relatively long-term state of personal health. And it is this long term that had little significance as it is at a time when life would have little meaning, as her children would be gone from the home into adulthood and be able to cope as such. Once that was done all could end satisfactorily. Except things weren't satisfactory. Lilly was not entirely contented with such an existence. There was a distinct sense of powerlessness. She looked to her future trajectory and realised an emptiness. A children-less world and thereby an identity-less world of purposelessness. Her current state could not influence such a future. She had to take steps to colonise that forthcoming epoch of her life.

A main player in the settled life and the set script, and who was the perpetrator of its predictability, was her husband. This predictability lay in the signification that he was the more powerful due to Lilly's financial dependency upon him, and that this power was manifest in the attention that Lilly felt she had to devote to him. Their relationship had always been unstable to varying extents and when it was particularly distressed her husband had taken to drinking which in turn had brought a castigating reaction from Lilly as it was an unsettling influence on the home and family. This was a further

source of attention for her husband. The level of power imbalance was such that for Lilly her husband could threaten to leave her and make demands upon her where and when the attention was likely to diminish due to outside pressures such as work. Lilly felt that these demands when unmet initiated attempts to jeopardise her progress when she began studying. Lilly also saw this kind of behaviour as typical of their relationship and as such was “the way that things are”. “It never dawned on me then” (p. 2 lines 3-4), points up the perspective that her husband was the powerful centre of her universe who could make demands, which were non-confrontable and non-contentious, to be handled as well as possible in order to continue the set script and the settled life. There was no escape it seemed from the castrating boundaries of husband and home. This is where she had to stay and cope. This was the way her life was to be. A major role within this script was the “professional cleaner” (p.2 line 40). Lilly’s “whole life centred around keeping the house clean and (her) kids clean” (p. 2 lines 37-38). The self-identity she called into being here was the traditional house proud house wife who focussed on the practicalities of domestic life: the predictable and the “easy to follow” script with no deflections from the expected course. An existence planned out by local socio-cultural expectations. The smacking of her children, which was subjected to a subsequent radical perspectival shift within her on-course orbit, is a clear example of following such expectations and the role that consumed her lived experience. As she looks back to the past, to the Lilly who often followed the herd unquestioningly, she finds that the thought of striking her children is, in the present, an anathema to her.

Part of her socio-cultural understanding of role expectations was a perceived hierarchy in which she was of low status and had to defer appropriately to those in superordinate positions. She saw her elder sibling as a source of sound advice to be unquestionably followed. She was “very shy and especially with people in authority” (p.1 lines 42-43), and in a more general way felt she had little voice in the social arena, particularly with men and also with other women. Any opinion she held was kept in check and the opinion of others was complied with. A tacit acceptance of socio-cultural expectations of the role she lived through as the housewife of low status. This was her level of personal agency within the settled life and the set script –bounded by the socio-cultural and her place within it.

Despite the pre-ordained focus of the settled life and the set script the life lived through by Lilly was not without unsettling thoughts. Lilly found this almost unidirectional life “worrying”. In this gesture we find a suggestion of an escapist notion. That the set script is all very well but “there must be something to life other than this”. Her bounded existence then was perhaps not as concretised within her life’s trajectory as she had always perceived it to be. The escapist notion was bolstered by Lilly taking the initiative and joining the HE “taster” courses. The colonisation of the future was after all a distinct possibility. The bodying forth to a children-less future existence, where identity construction would be a disturbing puzzle and existential isolation and ontological insecurity a perceivable feeling – loneliness on a grand scale, was paradoxically a developmental driver. This positioning for Lilly was the beginning of a new type of script.

A New Horizon: an evolving lived reality.

We understand Lilly’s present perspective with regard to a disposal of the set script and the embryonic creation of an open-ended one. One which involves a journey into the unknown. One that is exciting in contrast to the script where the ending is known and the plot is mundane and predictable.

The future... well I want to do what I want to do. Before I would just be trudging along whereas now I’m heading somewhere. Don’t really know where yet, but I’m more excited about the future.

(p.7. Lines 2-5)

The motif thus far employed has been that of script. In Goffmanesque terms we may even think of Lilly’s pre-course orbit as a closed script with its perceived tight and reified nature. When we consider the perceived change in Lilly’s lived reality we see that the notion of script takes on a different nature. Now we have a script that is not to be slavishly followed, but one which is to be written *by her*. One that is to evolve as she increasingly takes responsibility for its creation and breaks away from her previous constraints. There is now a sense of agency with Lilly firmly holding the reins.

G:So where’s that focus now? Where is Lilly now? Where is she?

L: ...it used to be getting old and perhaps having grandchildren but now I've got a career to look forward to. And it's exciting and I don't know what's going to happen. What different opportunities are going to come up. It's empowering as I was always reliant on Chris [husband] whereas I'm no longer and I think he realises that now as well.

(p.2. Lines 46-50 and p.3. Lines 1-3)

This evolution then is an extremely optimistic state of affairs with new horizons opening up and a capacity to take on a new project of self-development beyond the boundaries of home and husband. There is a new overarching horizon of personal development and spatially a boundarilessness for her life, unknown when the overarching horizon of family and home was experienced. Lilly however does not see these latter significations as moribund, but to be embraced in the new script in a positive way. There has been a noticeable change in style with parenting, especially in the aforementioned use of smacking. This practice has now stopped as a result of her course experiences and the perspectival shift that characterises her on-course orbit and emergent on-course self-identity. There is more of the Rogerian empathic parenting style adopted through the prompting of ideas within course content. Lilly has noticed a distinct change in the approach of her eldest child towards her. The relationship is more “acceptant democratic”, with a greater candour and connectedness between herself and her children. Her on-course self-identity is seen as a positive influence to be presented to her children as a model to be followed. Within this is an embodied pride - a position of “look at me and what I am achieving – you can do this too”. Her pride then spans both orbits as a good mother displaying good mothering practice and as good mother modelling desirable behaviour for her children's positive development.

Lilly's College Self-identity and On-course Orbit

The notion of evolution can now be directly applied to the construction of Lilly's college self-identity. How has she brought her new type of script into being? We can trace this chronologically.

Her previous being-in-the-world was immanently signified by husband, children and home with an underlying escapist notion to want to grow beyond her present state. Her escape came through the HE “taster” courses. This heralded a train of events that led to

her entering the full time degree course. The growth tendency here is represented by Lilly's sense of authenticity.

L: Yeah, my friend, she's very unhappy in her job and she keeps saying "oh, God I'm fed up" and I say you've got to be your own god, you've got to make it happen.

(p.4. Lines 8-10)

This constituent of Lilly's lifeworld relates overwhelming to the whole. There has been an epiphany within her lifeworld that can be described as a discovery of personal agency. A self generated power to make desirable things happen. To actualise a future trajectory in which she can be who she wishes to be. She is now prepared to take responsibility for her own life and follow the course that she sees as the happiest for herself and for her children. There is a distinct contrast here between the dependence of Lilly operating within the set script, and the stark independence of living within an evolving one. She describes this as "thinking differently", as influenced by various aspects of study. Feminist thought is singled out as being particularly influential on her perspective on the portrayal of women in the media. Her role as mother has shifted from "professional cleaner" to intimate confidante prepared to spend more time and talk with her children. The social significance of her course experiences has some salience in the evolution of the present self-identity. Meeting lots of people, especially men, has featured in an opening out of horizons beyond the unifocus of one man – her husband. Previous shyness in interpersonal encounters has given way to a new assertiveness. She can challenge and confront others, including those in authority. She now has a voice in places where before she would not.

The ongoing construction of the on-course self-identity has been punctuated with various puzzles and challenges which are remembered as particular critical moments of movement toward the evolving script. Early struggles to establish what was required when putting an essay together. The introduction to theory, which challenged Lilly's worldview, had to be reflected on and this eventually instituted perspectival shift. Struggling to grasp theoretical concepts until, through discussion with fellow students, the joy of understanding was reached. The pinnacle of this series of life changing events however was the ordeal of doing a formally assessed presentation to other

students. Lilly was particularly reticent when contributing in a public forum because of her doubt in her ability to perform the task of public speaking credibly. The experience however was something of an epiphany in the scripting of the college self.

L: In my presentation... That was petrifying because I hate doing that. You know I thought Linda (fellow student) was much more confident at doing it than me. And when I went in I was hanging on to papers and normally my hands would be shaking but they weren't. And I thought I can stand up and speak.

(p.4. Lines 44-48)

The reflection on the experience evolved the college self by one more step in a series of steps, many of which have left only a fleeting memory, yet cumulatively have instituted significant change. Lilly is caught up in the process of self-improvisation here. It is an enactment of trying out being a different person. This is particularly the case in public speaking and displaying a self-identity of academic/professional presenter/speaker. This experience is immanently significant for her self-creation and illustrates the phenomenological position of the "I" as an impermanent construct. The on-course Lilly has supplanted the pre-course Lilly and this is experienced in Lilly's lived reality of her relationships.

Relationships

Her husband had previously been at the centre of her life, but in the evolving lived reality he pales into insignificance, with a new focus having taken centre stage. Lilly is no longer the shy, dependent mother-housewife. She now projects to a future of a professional career, currently in a nascent state in her voluntary work with young offenders. This aspect of the new horizon is particularly repelled by her husband. Yet should Lilly want to retract to a former state she finds that this is now not possible or desirable. She "can't get away from (her) ideas now" (p. 4 lines 37-38). New forms of discourse entail living her situation at home and out-of-college in a different way. Her elder sibling who once was a source of good advice is now perceived as a restricted, yet homely elderly relative, to be treated with respect for their home spun wisdom, but nothing beyond this. Worldly issues beyond parochial proximity are treated with caution and delicacy as Lilly is now the one who knows and her elder sister now the

unknowing. This caution is also present in relationships with old friends as Lilly feels that they see her as superior and she fears that she will be ridiculed should she give way to the on-course self-identity with too much vigour. Caution is counterpoised however with a new feeling of inner confidence in relationships with others, especially in the capacity to resist domination by them. Lilly feels able to disagree and yet has the vision to temper this with tolerance and understanding.

Identity and Temporality.

Lilly has lived through a perceivable transition of self. She perceives who she is now in relation to who she was before. Her present lived reality is understood in terms of how she used to be. The existential baseline of the set script and how this has given way to a new script that evolves with each critical moment to be reflected upon is discernible. The present self-identity is contoured by the world in which she has left behind – a past Lilly helps define the present Lilly. She was shy, she now is assertive and confident with a greater sense of agency. She was a mother-house-wife with very little voice in many situations, she now is a student looking toward a professional future. Her life was pre-ordained, fixed; it is now open-ended, evolving. There is a great excitement in this pioneering of self. There is now a boundarilessness in contrast to the castrating experience of being locked into the role of mother-housewife. She can go to places that she hitherto did not know existed, and she has a preparedness to take on the exploration of current unknowns. The lived experience of doing her higher education course is perceived as immanently implicated in this transition. This is through certain fateful moments such as presentations and public self-improvisations (especially public speaking in all its forms), and through the variegated series of improvisations in the day to day living through of her course, which have culminated in the construction of her, still emerging, on-course self-identity.

Temporal Transcendence

Following further data collection in a follow up interview (see appendix “Lilly Interview 2”) during Lilly’s last semester (approximately 14 months after the first interview) I identified a development of the transition which is delineated above. This was another present where Lilly was invited to transcend the nowness of the situation and look back through her biography (in relation to her higher education experience)

and forward to her fantasised life trajectory. The overriding development was one of increased agency experienced through her relationship with her partner and those in seniority/authority. There was however a distressing significant event within her family life. Her sister in law was terminally ill and along with the emotional upset that this clearly invoked Lilly also experienced this as a temporary set back in her project. There was the expectation that when the sad event finally happened, this would be a fateful moment when she would be able to escape the entrapment that she felt as mother-housewife, and move toward a situation of independence, facilitated by her newly acquired knowledge and (academic) status. The trajectory of her present project is the achievement of graduating and then to move into well paid (comparative to her past earning potential) employment, thus circumventing the financial dependence on her husband, which had suppressed her for so long.

Moving Toward Greater Agency

The living through of Lilly's relationship with her husband has taken on discernible changes. Lilly has incrementally improvised an assertiveness that she hitherto had not initiated to find that the balance of power within their negotiated domesticity has been tipped distinctively toward her. As she explains.

[Announcing to her husband] "I'm going out tonight George". And that was it. Now I normally make apologies saying, "I don't really want to go out", and I didn't I just said, "I'm going out". And that was that and he stopped at his mother's that night. And then the following day I knew there was going to be a backlash from it, but it was like a total.. There's been a total power shift. There was no backlash as such that I expected so.. I feel now that he is hanging on by the skin of his teeth to this relationship.

(p.1. Lines 39-45)

With this enhanced agency Lilly transcends the immediate and fantasises a future state of independence. The present is a launching phase, wherein she images herself as a spatially free agent, able to move into new areas without the bounds of previous guilt where she was the all-caring Lilly ready to place everyone's needs before her own. The time had arrived when she was to shed the expectations of family and the local sub-culture, and take full charge of her own destiny. "It's like I'm preparing myself for a

total change in the way my life is going to go” (p 2 lines 27-8). This transcendence is picked up in a bodying forth to a future without her husband and with another man, even to the extent where future potential partners are sought and “sized up” for a relationship. The practicalities of her striving for the future state (her overarching horizon is one of achieving this project) are steadily thought out within her expanding cognitive space. She plans the “how” having keenly felt the “why”. The latter is tinged with feelings of revenge for the perceived abuse of power by her husband and his financial superiority. It would be “pay back” time. The embodiment of her imaged end result and the emotive features that go with it are acute.

G: how do you feel yourself about the degree when it says Lilly Jones BA?

L: very proud. You know it’s a great achievement. It’s something I’ve always wanted to do and I’ve done it. And I’ve done it amid turmoil and you know.. four children and a pain in the arse to deal with. You know and if I can do that I can do anything.

(p.3-4. Lines 49-3)

The correlates of study and increase agency are manifest in her dealings with others outside her family. With authority figures, such as her son’s school headteacher, she keenly feels a stronger sense of presence and voice in her dealings with him. There are direct improvisations of her course self-identity, which enter into her presentation of self in such encounters. The discourse which she uses facilitate her living the situation on a far more equal footing as she will argue theoretical points, which raise her psychological strength. In effect she is as large as the headteacher in their interaction and no longer the housewife-mother to be fobbed off by the well-practised demeanour of superiority which she perceives in her interlocutor.

The self-improvisation continues into other arenas where she plays out and tunes her developing skills. She languages a self that within the relationship with her partner initiates tension (“he calls it college crap”), but in contrast expands her social standing when she proudly speaks to a congregation of mourners about the deceased. Here she finds that not only can she cope with the heightened level of self-awareness and individuation which such a situation presents, but also is empowered by her increased

skills in discourse and vocabulary to deliver an appropriately gauged message in tribute to the deceased. Lilly temporalises to a past self when such a prospect would be “petrifying”. She has ultimately joined a perceived “set” who are characterised by their agency through language use – “key words” which declare membership of an educated superordinate class above her past self-identity. This presentation of self-identity is contrasted with the past when Lilly temporalises to a time when agency was minimal, when the world was an oppressive place – particularly at school when she was reserved and “picked on” (bullied). Her emergent on-course self-identity within her on-course orbit is a source of great comfort. This is her space. The place where she at last “fits in”.

Distinct Orbits

Lilly has now reached a position where the 2 orbits of pre-course and on-course have an experiential distinction. Whereas before her transcendence to the pre-course lived reality and the nowness of her on-course reality presented a sense of development Lilly has in the present an experience of her on-course self identity as a completed project. The epiphanies of the past, which pointed up change and shifts, are now distinctinctly in that temporal dimension. She has now moved on to be Lilly-as-degree-student with self-improvisation of this identity being an everyday occurrence. As a result there is a separating out of the 2 orbits, with the pre-course belonging distinctly to the past and the on-course orbit being the place where she is in the present, and with a trajectory to a future where this is to be her. She is a degree student who will get her degree and move into professional work, together with the languaging of the self-identity that goes with it – the mother-housewife and “professional cleaner” belonging to a different epoch entirely.

With this distinction Lilly has developed a more clearly defined biographical trajectory, which is lived out through the planning of the practicalities of possible separation and the need to instate the necessary features of her future happiness within this professional self-identity. This embraces both physical and socio-emotional features such as how to leave the marital home, where to live and who to live with – the seeking out of potential partners has moved to the psychological foreground. These cognitions are indicative of Lilly’s boundarilessness of her lifeworld in relation to her on-course self-identity.

The Relief and Potential Comfort of Transcendence.

As Lilly transcends the present to a future of professional work and escape from the entrapments of her current situation there is a feeling of relief. Things are now very different, and they can become even more different from her pre-course position. The multifarious instances of self-improvisation and the impact upon her self-identity initiate a bodying forth to a conflict free existence, where she can leave behind the tensions and constraints within her present life, and move on to an engaging and fulfilling existence where she “fits in”. Already she has insights into such a positioning in her current experiences of empowerment, when she can call into being the presentation of self that exudes poise and interactional skill. As she temporalises to the future such expectations are an immense source of comfort. As she explains

I think doing the degree's the best thing I ever did. And I was speaking to a young girl on Saturday evening. Her husband's locked up [in prison] and she was considering doing Higher Education. And I said to her it would change her life cos that's... that's how I feel. You know it's changed me as a person for the good.

G: if you could pick on one thing that's changed you for the good. What would it be?

L: [very long pause] Erm... Just the ability to see things from a different light... [long pause. Lilly begins to cry quietly] and have... [pause] hope.
(p.6-7. Lines 43-2)

“LUCY”

Factual Background

Lucy is divorced from her first and only husband and lives with her two children, who are both of school age. She has separated from her second partner shortly after starting the course. The split was acrimonious and is detailed in the analysis. Presently she is largely financially dependent upon her parents in that they own her house and she only has her student loan and state financial support for her children. Lucy is in her mid thirties and is studying for a degree in Applied Social Studies. Before entering the course she had completed an Access to HE course concentrating on psychology and sociology. She describes her pre degree life as being a mother and doing very little else. The interview was conducted in the early stages of her final year (semester 5).

Individual Psychological Structure.

Utilisation of an Existential Baseline: “Useless”

Lucy’s lived reality prior to entering the orbit of academia (the “on course orbit”) was characterised by feelings of powerlessness and banality. She was “useless”. This is the meaning she now attributes to her previous pre-course existence. Apart from being a mother she was of no use. She was unable and insignificant with no direction or sense of self-efficacy. She had no worthy capacity in anything and as such was superficial and disengaged from any sense of purpose beyond being a mother. And this activity was itself uninteresting and mundane. The role was associated with “being at home all’t time doin’nuthing” (p 7 line 35). Her sociality similarly centred on things superficial: daytime TV, chatting over coffee, routinized daily activities such as collecting the kids from school. The cumulative affect was a lifeworld of easiness, comfort and inactivity, following a regimen of predictability from which there was no conceivable escape. This was the life of the mother: powerless with little voice in any arena save that with other mothers talking about TV and gossiping about things unimportant. Lucy now locates

this as distinctly part of her past biography. This is what she was and her on-course self-identity has supplanted it. As she looks back from her position of over two years in higher education she wonders how she could have tolerated it. Yet tolerate it she did as at the time she was content and happy. It is only now that such an existence can be experienced as the way described. Lucy's sense of what happiness means for her has changed. As she explains,

...this may sound really basic, but I think... 'happy' has a different meaning now. Cos it contains more elements than what it did before... to be happy. It's not just to feel good inside and to have security, it's other things there as well.

(p.10. Lines 8-11)

These other things are the new dimensions to Lucy's life, associated with her lived reality of the present on-course orbit. TV is largely perceived as "crap". TV was once a major feature of her life as the "useless" mother, insignificant and superficial. Other activities have come to the fore, which make more demands upon her beyond the comfort zone of passive TV watching and the like.

Despite the place in which Lucy found herself pre-course i.e. a mothering comfort zone defined by a discourse on "nappies and kids and that's it", there was a resolve to establish a life project when this lived reality was thrown into disarray. The split with her children's father initiated this. The disempowered yet comfortable existence was now at an end. An action plan was needed and Lucy fantasised a trajectory of development for herself and her children in which education was to play a central part. This plan was seen as part of a life project, wherein Lucy bodies forth to a "better" existence than that usually expected for someone in her position.

...it's part of a bigger journey really. When I split up wi' t'kid's dad that I were now going to have to look after myself and do it all for myself and I weren't prepared to go and work in some sodding chicken factory so it were education...for my way out... so it's just part of this.... I am going to look after me and my children and we're going to have everything that we need cos I provide it and this is part of that, whether it's going to be there

at the end or not waiting for me to find I don't know, but it's part of the bigger thing cos I want more not just for me but for them. Like I lived in Balby another part of the thing with Simon was that he was way out of Balby [undesirable area of residence]. I look back now it was a way out - a ticket out of Balby and I wanted Alison in Ridgewood [desired secondary school] y'see where I went...well we live in Sprotbrough [desirable area of residence in the catchment area of desired school] now and she's definitely going to Ridgewood, but I think if I'm honest that were part of it as well.

(p.4. Lines 10-21)

With this defining phase in her life, Lucy shed her disempowered self-identity and with a greater sense of agency and voice took control of her destiny, which was going to culminate in a better life style for herself and her children. This was to happen through her endeavours within education – a ticket to self and life improvement, and through her new relationship with Simon – a ticket for material gain to impact upon the lived reality of herself and her family by opening up new potentialities of school and geographical area (and the associated stereotyping of its residents). She was in effect to not be a mother from “working class” Balby, but a self-actualiser in “middle class” Sprotbrough with its attendant superior life style.

The On-course Orbit: “Learning the Game.”

Lucy's perception of her self when entering the course is of someone who was of extremely limited intellectual ability (“thick”) and as someone who was notionless on how higher education operated. The latter was experienced as someone who did not know the game in play; its skills, its rules, its strategies for success. She perceives herself at this point as being innocent and reticent, “over-awed” by the whole socio-academic milieu. The process since then has been to be inducted into the game and be able to finally play it. There is some threat to self-identity experienced here which presenting the process in a simple and almost trivial way exposes. Lucy at times dismisses academic discourse as “flannel” (pretentious with an aggrandisement of terms which is unnecessary) yet she takes on aspects of academic discourse in her current presentation of self. Her life world is an integration of her past self, seeing academic discourse as “flannel”, and her on-course self-identity, which feels there is

substance to her academic experiences. Her own version of this integration is manifest in her discourse. At one time she speaks in the local vernacular and at other times links in to more universalistic discourse (and the appropriate pronunciation).

(vernacular/particularistic)

...they don't turn up not in any o' t'lectures but they can produce the goods at t'end of it and when't essays 'ave got to be in

(universalistic)

...I'm really aware now, really aware that I do try to *compensate*.

.. I think from what we've learned and what I've seen... I now *aspire* to middle class than (whispers) working class. Not just the *material things*...but I want that...*status*.

...my grandma reads t'Sun. (vernacular/particularistic) I find that *most disconcerting* (universalistic)...

With this oscillation from one form of discourse to another she locks into two alternating self-identities. The local vernacular is the past speaking in the present and this is the pre-course identity, which is being lived in the present. The universalistic discourse is self-improvisation in expressing the emerging self-identity of the on-course orbit. The switch is also manifest in Lucy's paradoxical exploration of what the course has meant for her. On the one hand academia, as outlined above, is just a game. Something to be played out by following the rules and entering the appropriate discourse and responding as directed. There is anxiety here as the trivialising of her project is something of a disclaimer. She holds the position that, study is all very well but in the end there is no real substance to it. No substance to it that is, should she fail. On the other hand she enthuses on how she, as a result of her studies, can now "understand people" (have some psychological insight) and "see the bigger picture" (give a more thorough analysis of various issues e.g. a macro-perspective on political matters).

Relationships

This tension in switching of identities is signified in her relationships. Self worth is immanently signified in Lucy's hierarchical notion of status vis a vis others around her. Her status is marked by her present position as generally "knowing more", and specifically her knowledge gained from course content. Being able to "see the bigger picture" ascribes status above those that can only see the "little picture that affects them". This positioning, whilst giving a sense of increased agency, particularly with regard to voice, is achieved with a price. Lucy feels "arrogant.. a bit patronising", which for her is distasteful, and a betrayal of her past self-identity and those which constituted it in the "internal-external dialectic of identification" (Jenkins 1996). This is to say that she not only betrays those who were her friends, who co-constituted who she was, but also the person she has become, who is constituted by a biography of which her past identity is part. This is borne out in unusual circumstances wherein she oscillates between identities and (through different discourses) different intersubjectivities.

...but it makes me feel a bit (whispers) arrogant ...a bit patronising. To talk about things that they...it's like tonight... we've got football...and we're stood there, and either I have a conversation with Jo (on-course friend), and I have a conversation with Tracey (pre-course friend), but they're totally different. We're all engaged in conversations... it's like I've separate identi... [laughs] ...ties – with people in different situations...
....it's like a step up and a step down...talk differently...to Jo than what I do to Tracey.

(p.2. Lines 7-13 & 23-24)

The step up is to the higher status, on-course identity to engage with the higher status Jo. The step down is to the lower status identity with the lower status Tracey. This tension is further experienced with her recent "moments of identification" (Jenkins 1996) when she encounters pre-course friends. This is when she is most aware of her transition. She has embarked on a journey and they have been left behind. As she explains,

...yeah I suppose it is like a journey. You set off and you learn. Your horizons widen. I see...I see things differently. I have trouble identifying with...[an old friend].
(p.2. Lines33-35)

The interweaving of Lucy and this old friend then is rendered difficult and this again is an unsettling experience. As the old friend had supported Lucy through difficult times in the past again a sense of betrayal prevails upon her. The tension is attributed to Lucy's perspectival shift, which is related to her "journey" of learning, and the increased vision of the world beyond the parochial. Lucy has now a radically different "trajectory of being and becoming" (Giddens 1991) within which there is very little room for the sociality presented by her old friend and her pre-course orbit and identity.

Increasingly however there is a greater sense of agency and voice within Lucy's lived reality. In her first constructions of her relationship with her most recent partner she reluctantly took on a very subservient role ("I were gonna be a doormat"). There was an inner resistance to this positioning, which she increasingly felt empowered to actualise by her perceived rise in status and self-efficacy through her studies. She sees her self in the "doormat" stages as being "so stupid". This refers to an ignorance and an accepting position to tolerate her partner's oppressive behaviour. When she attempted to end the relationship this was through a strategy of bodily repulsion. She intentionally became overweight and unattractive in order to repel her partner both sexually and socially thus actioning a separation. Her level of agency remained embodied, within her. The boundaries of her control were at an interface of body and world. Beyond her body there was very little agency. Within her body lay her territory, her jurisdiction to do with as she may. External to it was largely under the control of others, especially her partner. Whereas when she finally ended the relationship she was empowered to do so by what she had learnt from the course and the strength that she now possessed through her on-course experiences. Her jurisdiction of territory now extended beyond her body and into the world in greater measure. The living through of doing the course had accelerated ("a catalyst") the emergence and action of her inner resistance, and she was now beginning to realise a configuration of a self-identity she had fantasised about in the past.

Lucy feels that the quality of her relationships with parents and children has changed. Through her studies she now is more disposed to think through her actions with her children. She looks to the future, particularly her children's future, and her actions in the present are rooted there.

...personally... I'm much more reflective about how I treat the kids, things that I say and that I do. It's just being more aware, and know that things that I can do can affect them forever so I'm really careful. [whispers] I try to be anyway.

(p.6. Lines 3-6)

With this reflection Lucy now has the capacity to empathise with her children and she experiences a much stronger sense of self awareness of her own behaviour towards them. This is a source of comfort for Lucy and although she is not fully content with her role of mother she feels that she now has greater insight, which can have a very positive influence on her future relationship with her children.

There is a greater intimacy with her mother also. The course has imbued in Lucy an interest in worldly matters, which presents an intersubjectivity for her and her mother to enjoy. Their discourse is now more congruent, facilitating a relationship construction that had hitherto not been known. It is now more close and attuned as they converse on "political and cultural things as opposed to everyday crap".

Identity and Temporality.

The "ecstatic character" of Lucy's Lifeworld can be expressed in the immanent significations of her past "useless" self-identity and her bodied forth trajectory to doing post-graduate study and/or professional work. Part of this present action with regard to future states is interrelated with pragmatic notions of financial security. Her current acts are going to be a ticket to a better life for her and her children. Her senses of presence and voice in many contexts are now more definable in that she feels more capable of taking control of her destiny. She has made some significant steps in the "colonisation of the future" (Giddens 1991) by being able to "play the (academic) game" and achieved satisfactory grades which for her have some predictive validity of future achievement and greater self belief. This however is by no means finalised. There are

still many variables within her life world which Lucy finds anxiety provoking. She still may not make good her “identity project” (Harre 1983). To handle this the stability of her past biography is there to help her defend her self from this eventuality. Study as a “game” is trivialised, academic terms and concepts are pretentious. The difficulties she encounters then are not insurmountable as one only needs to look at it as a sham and follow the rules in play. This perspective alternates with another perspective that acknowledges the substance of her achievements and transition. Currently then there is an oscillation between the pre-course identity and on-course identity, depending on the context of the space in which she perceives herself to be. Her interlocutor often drives this, but not always so, as the movement between different expressions of self-identity in languaging indicates. This alternation is prevalent in her relationships that are indexically significant of her transition when she feels it necessary to “switch identities” in a hierarchically structured manner. Her emergent on-course identity however is most significant in her relationships with her close family members in which she has a new found sharing of the world.

Lucy now aspires to a higher status but this aspiration can be assaulted by others who are materially better endowed. The “bigger picture” perspective” does not prevail in all contexts and Lucy’s previous self-identity continues to be lived out in the present as an inhibitor of the “identity project” she has set herself. This project was initiated by a radical change in life circumstances. The ensuing transition was in a nascent state before course influence was experienced, and although Lucy has experienced change in many ways in regard to the common vicissitudes of life, much of her presently emergent self-identity she feels has been accelerated by her academic work and on-course lived reality.

“MAUREEN”

Factual Background

Maureen is a single woman in her early thirties. Since leaving school, where she only had moderate success, she made steady progression in a sales career, but ultimately found the job unrewarding, and further progress difficult, due to the male dominated culture. Following the end of a three and a half year relationship, and motivated by a long held wish to study, she enrolled as a mature student on a GCSE psychology course. Finding this extremely enjoyable she decided to do take matters further and considered doing a degree. Maureen lives some distance from the college in Hull and as there was no provision that could meet her needs locally, she enrolled at the college for a Criminological Studies Degree and commutes from home. The interview took place at the beginning of her fourth semester, around halfway through her course.

Individual Psychological Structure.

Utilisation of an existential baseline: an Educational Outsider.

Looking back from the present temporal dimension Maureen relives the past orbit of being an “educational outsider”. This was due to a generally dissatisfying experience of education up to entering her course, which had led her away from activities such as intellectualising and toward a preoccupation with the imagery and presentation of self that characterises the sales world. This preoccupation was paramount - the stylised dress and discourse, the unreflective pursuance of sales figures etc. It was in effect not viewed as a “career”, but as a necessary series of time-filling activities to maintain her standard of living. There was a psychological distance from her sense of career project at this time, with financial necessity rather than any intrinsic satisfaction driving her. She experienced a truncation of her career trajectory in that she could make little if any further progress within the sales world. Her sense of unfulfillment in such a form of life was countered by her efforts of always trying to keep her sense of intellectuality by reading and updating herself on matters beyond the parameters of her job. She had

made a foray back into the educational process by successfully doing a GCSE in psychology, and this had to some extent reassured her of the enjoyment that study can present. There was within her an attraction to the academic world of ideas. From her position in the present she perceives the break up of her long-term relationship as a prompt to change course and follow a new project. She had not therefore come cold to this project of doing a degree, and had craved the intellectual stimulation of challenging ideas, feeling frustrated at her unfulfilled promise at school. To this end she “had always read...had always stimulated (her) mind” (p. 3 lines 14-15). Memories of school and the notion of her as an educational outsider however still pertain as she encounters the first experiences of degree level study.

Daunting, first day at school, do you remember, well I remember Sunday nights as a kid, going back to school... It wasn't quite that extreme but it felt like that.

(p.4. Lines 17-20)

There was then the feeling of the same lack of agency and voice as when one is new at school. There was the composite confrontation of strangerhood and an unknown institutional edifice with all its related unknowns: norms, language, roles etc. So college was almost school, a place she had failed. The immanent signification of educational failure and the possibility of further failure relate to the whole of Maureen's lifeworld, throughout her entire lived experience of doing the degree course. The project then is strongly characterised by risk and a journey into the unknown. “I didn't know if I was going to get past the first week” (p.3 line 49). What is unknown? We refer here to not only the world of academic ideas, but also what Maureen expects to find out about herself as she travels through it. It is for her a continual “leap of faith”. Insecurity overwhelms her imaginings throughout. “Am I going to be able to do it?” is a question which resonates throughout her lived reality, and this self doubt is always at the edge of her consciousness when entering into any college related task. Maureen feels residual expressions of school life where her potential was never fulfilled, and

attributes this to being “cooled out”¹ (Goffman 1962) of the system due to her social background. This perspective of “outsider” was particularly prevalent in the early stages of college life.

Yet Maureen has a great motivation to become an insider to the education world as she finds the whole business exhilarating despite the risk, the self-doubt and the insecurity. The busy lecture theatre, the terminology (“like a foreign language”), and the lecturers all presented and continue to present a frightening yet thrilling prospect. The new project was seen as a salvation from her previous existence of educational outsider and the intellectual stimulation as a panacea for the frustration of “wanting to know”, a feeling which has been with her since school. Her frustration was paradoxically exacerbated with her pre-degree study experience and the realization that there is so much to know.

“Attunement to the stock of knowledge”: becoming an Educational Insider

Early experiences of studying at degree level were characterised then by feelings of strangerhood. Maureen felt that all prior knowledge was largely irrelevant and that she in effect barely knew anything. The whole academic edifice before her was “daunting”. She was in awe of academic staff (“like demi-gods) who were the personification of the academic/educational world she so much wished to become part of. There was also a frisson of intimidation that went with this living through of her early days. She felt a “bit of a dunce” when exposed to concepts that she had heard of but not really understood. Her identity was threatened as the “educational outsider” was in a foreign land, but like a true pioneer she was prepared to respond to such feelings with an approach that attack is the best form of defence. She was not to be forced out of this territory. Indeed she was going to make it hers. Feelings of strangerhood were not going to win through. She found this new world too much of a prize to let it completely overawe and alienate her. That despite the sense of threat and risk the experience was holistically enthralling and she had to become part of it.

¹ Goffman refers to a social-psychological process where individuals are conned into believing that failure is their fault. This has been applied to schooling systems where children from certain social backgrounds fail in school and perceive it to be their fault thus perpetuating the system. The process is extremely subtle and here Maureen only reflects upon her school career in this way as a result of her course experience and knowledge and deep reflection upon her past.

M: (the early stages were) Scary, but exciting and exhilarating, it was like “Wow”, this is great”, loved it, still do, learning new things and that’s how it felt, it was frightening but it was exciting at the same time.
(p.5. Lines 39-41)

She thereby resolved to “get on with it, learn, read and do whatever you can” (p.5. Lines 27-28). This was consistent with her need to succeed in response to previous educational failure and the frustration that ensued. At the time she felt some degree of displacement yet this was not insurmountable. She strongly felt that she could enter the space of academia and make a place for herself.

This resolve was also supported by her notion that there was a need for constancy in her life at that time. Study provided a focus for her when domestic life was unstable. The recent end to her relationship meant that her new course was a source of continuity and purpose.

To become “attuned to the stock of knowledge at hand” (Schutz 1967) there were a number of puzzles to solve. Knowledge of other contexts was largely declared moribund when trying to make sense of her new world. She couldn’t make out “how it (higher education) worked”. Not only was the language foreign and needed to be understood (or in the first instance at least assimilated), but the protocols which held things together had to be learnt. Maureen found herself in a social void where many things were unsure. How to respond in seminars? How to address the staff/demi-gods? How to relate to fellow students? Testing out tentative hypotheses on how to behave was a strategy she adopted with some success. Eventually she managed to clarify the social norms that prevailed and she successfully began to engage with the course: her fellow students, tutors and course content. She was becoming that educational insider she wished to be. There was a steady process of self-improvisation instated as she tried out being the educational insider by taking forward her “dipping one’s toe in the water” strategy and venturing ever deeper. This meant the languaging of a new facet of self, in effect a new identity by taking on the terminology and forms of speech and life which she perceived as characteristic of the educational insider – the “academic” Maureen.

The “leap of faith” and the Crisis of Confidence.

As Maureen became more attuned to the social context and she found that she gradually could engage with this new world of academic ideas, she felt more confident and more assured throughout her lifeworld. She feels that there are several factors that contribute to the sense of confidence and assuredness.

(i) Social and Tutor recognition

For Maureen the doing of the course in the social context is a particularly sensitive and significant process. This is enacted in full seminar discussions where one’s public face and self-identity is under threat. The languaging of a contribution to discussion is an important task to be carried out with poise and skill. One needs to be relevant and to reflect understanding with perhaps an element of original thought. Maureen has found that she has become adept at this process and when she makes a contribution, it is a great boost to self-confidence. In this way her educational insider identity is incrementally realised as she socially enacts her self-improvisation and she senses a shift in her interactions with course content and with tutors in academic discussion. When Maureen experiences progress with her educational insider project, not only is it a great boon to self-confidence, but it is also a bolstering of her sense of agency and voice. The daunted educational outsider of before is becoming a not insignificant part of the collegiate world. As she explains,

M: It might be just a comment, if you are in a lecture and you make a really valid point in a Seminar - you make a really valid point, and it sparks a discussion, that makes me feel...it’s great, or if a lecturer says “That’s a really good point, let’s go on with that”...that was me... go back 18 months and I wouldn’t have known... yes, very much so, but you feel confident in it.

(p.9. Lines 29-33)

Feeling at home in this way is an immensely joyous experience and thereby tutor feedback through this explicit social embracing of Maureen’s emergent educational insider identity in the social domain of discussion is crucial to confidence building. The fragility of confidence is reflected in the sense of risk that is associated with contributing in discussion, and the resultant tutor feedback/response. Great care is

needed as one makes progress from the shallow water of initial contributions to progressing deeper. As Maureen expresses it:

....he [tutor] is sort of encouraging us to have our own opinions and challenge something... which as your confidence grows, like saying before, it's like dipping your toe in the water, tentatively, and then you get a bit further as your confidence grows and he doesn't shout you down, not that he would do that anyway, but you don't hit a brick wall and if that's encouraged, through facilitation... I suppose, your confidence grows, definitely.

(p.9 lines 35-41)

(ii) Written Feedback and Temporality

Positive and/or supportive comments on marked work and the mark itself are highly significant in the building and maintenance of confidence. To do well is simultaneously joyous and motivating. "It fires you up". Any delay in feedback is concerning as the passage of time is a particular issue for Maureen as a mature student. "You've less time to prove yourself than a 20 year old". This temporal issue points up the ecstatic character of Maureen's experience as a mature student. It echoes the Heideggerian "being unto death" (see Boss 1979), and the vitality of this moment in Maureen's biography. Looking to the future suggests that this is likely to be the one and only substantial chance at fulfillment for her.

The passing of time is itself a source of confidence because as it passes and one is still on the course, one's presence for any unit of time passed means one is, with regard to time, a step nearer to completion of the project. Maureen sums up how feedback and time passing builds a sense of confidence:

...as each assignment goes in, as each lecture comes round, as each little point that you make is given some sort of consideration, on appraisal, your confidence builds..

(p.12. Lines 38-39)

And as confidence builds the academic educational insider identity is symbiotically being constructed. Maureen is conscious of growth as she exercises her increasingly adept academic discourse, which is reinforced by the completion of work and its written feedback

(iii) Fellow Students and Intersubjectivity

The maintenance of confidence with the possibility of a slippage in self-belief is a constant and continual task. For Maureen the possibility of failure resounds in each moment of challenge. The sharing of a world with fellow students however is a major source of confidence maintenance. This is a resonant intersubjectivity, as she experiences the awareness of herself through her awareness of others being aware of her. There is an esprit de corps between members of her study group that gives solid reciprocal support at times when confidence and the student identity is threatened. Maureen relates an illustration of this:

...when you get on the phone to somebody, and they say “No, you can do it”, you sort of like... [they say] “your essay plan, that’s really good, you know what you’re doing, you’re on the right track , just do it”, [Maureen thinks to herself] “I can do this, yes” the confidence is an exchange, definitely.

(p.10. Lines 42-45)

Despite these powerful sources of confidence maintenance, confidence itself remains a fragile quality. For Maureen the spectre of failure is ever present on the rim of consciousness. She intends her new academic world with elements of the educational outsider always threatening her project. There is the ever-present feeling of self doubt waiting dormant to suddenly rise up and consume her. The past speaks again in the present. Even when things are going to plan and aspirations are high the spectre still threatens:

...and definitely, I’m looking past three bed suburbia, definitely, but yes it’s helped learning but then Graham, I could fail next semester, it’s all a big leap of faith and it’s still a crisis of confidence...

(p.12. Lines 39-42)

Typically crises are initiated when challenge is set before her and if these are not readily confrontable and beatable these crises loom particularly large. “This mature student thing, you are always doubting your own ability, I think”. It is at these times when the fellow student esprit de corps is recruited to maximum effect. A telephone call can provide the “confidence fix” that’s needed and the challenge is overcome: the essay is written, the presentation is presented, the exam is survived. Unfortunately fellow students can themselves initiate crises as Maureen compares herself to their accomplishments. They are “yardsticks” to her own capabilities and when she falls short of what she perceives as “doing really, really well”, whilst initiating anxiety, they are also motivating for her to do well herself.

Aspirations and Motivations

The initial stages of Maureen’s higher education experience were centred on survival, which she found difficult. The “need to do well” however bolstered her resolve. There was much to lose and failure could have only been tolerated if there was a major crisis such as ill health or bereavement. Despite her feelings of strangerhood and “being daunted” these drawbacks could be overcome. Maureen logically thought through her position that with the right amount of investment of time and money (“and hope”) she would prevail. She bodies forth to a more fulfilled and fulfilling future. Having established her educational insider identity other factors came into view: the doing of the course, the garnering of good marks, the preparation for seminars. Above all, her main motivation was the intrinsic joy of study. She “loved it” and continues to love it, and it is this love which stands out amongst all other motivations. The overarching horizon of the joy of study supercedes any motivation driven by the threat of failure. The “cut and thrust” of academic debate and the quantitative feedback on marked work are examples of the motivation that floods her existence. She is elevated and elated as she engages with the issues and debates set before her and as she wrestles with the task of creating meaning out of initially difficult and challenging conceptual course content.

This is not to say that aspiration is not a motivating factor. The thought of the future is a powerful driver. Her present action is rooted in the future on how far she can go with regard to how far she has come. She even indulges in some of her own ipsative assessment. Her life position is on a road to be traveled with increasing confidence.

...I would never have dreamed, if you'd had said to me 4 years ago you're going to be looking in the Guardian at a job based in Europe I would have said "bollocks" it's just not going to happen, you know, it's not, but now...

(p.12. Lines 34 – 37)

Spatially, her boundaries have therefore opened out to encompass a great many more possibilities of what Maureen can aspire to. The previous boundaries have been pushed back by the confidence and the ability she has gained on her degree. Where previously she would have felt intimidated by certain social environments she feels now she can more than cope. This new found skill empowers her to move into new territories, armed with certain qualities to claim her place. This is particularly manifest in her experience of relationships.

Friendship and Relationships

In interpersonal encounters Maureen now feels that she has more voice. With confidence bolstered by her degree experiences she has acquired a perspective of "not-to-be-daunted". She is now an educational insider, although this is not to be equated with membership of some select group, rather it is knowing that the world she previously did not know anything of has been naturalised within her frame of reference. "Everybody's just human beings...we're much of a muchness, so that's grown, that's changed [the ability to have voice in previously daunting situations]". A part of her sense of greater voice is the ability to support assertions with evidence. In sum to possess greater skill in argument and debate. Accompanying this she has great compassion for her close friends, wishing she could somehow transfer this "degree-ness" with its intrinsic joy over to them. She clearly realises however the deep personal nature of her project.

...she [close friend] felt she had no power or anything in her life and I wanted it to be contagious in her life... but of course you can't do that, it's [the degree course] not tangible until you start doing it.

(p.16. Lines 32-34)

With some acquaintances however there is a need to play down the student “educational insider” identity due to perceived mocking by others when it is displayed (“you don’t want to sound like a big egghead”. P.7. Lines 31-32). This conversely is a source of significant sadness for Maureen, whose love of her project remains unrecognised by others. There is then a reinforcement of the separating out of the two orbits; pre-course and on-course.

There is also some fear involved in what she has become and is becoming, and how this impacts on her lifeworld in pervasive terms. How she knows herself within her new world.

G: And, there’s been a shift [in long term friendships] there?

M: I wanted to ask my friend actually last week, she’d been my friend since I was 16, ...she’s married and she works in a shop....and has never done anything like this, and I wanted to ask her, and I thought, “Would I really want to know the answer?” ... that’s the other scary thing I don’t know if I’m changing or if anyone else knows because of it, for the worse, I don’t think I have.

(p.8. Lines14-21)

Change then whilst thrilling is also anxiety ridden. Her existence stands out into a not entirely psychologically secure future. This she experiences through her old relationships, from her pre-course orbit, where she is never quite at one with herself. For example; where will the journey end? It may be quite possible that she arrives at a position in which she eventually feels less at home than before, less settled, less happy. This is especially the case if valued relationships may begin to disappear. Her strategy to deal with this potential anguish is to simplify things by avoiding any uncomfortable questions where answers may raise ontological insecurities.

Identity and Temporality.

Maureen perceives herself as having traveled a significant distance in her project of discovery. Her early lived reality of strangerhood in the world of academia has given way to her reality of feeling naturalised in her new surroundings. There is great love

and joy of this new environment. She is excited and thrilled by the new challenges and experiences that are presented before her. She has solved the many puzzles that this hitherto unknown world had for her and has become “attuned to the stock of knowledge at hand”. All of this is far removed from her “educational outsider” self-identity. Yet this remains an existential baseline as she sees the confidence, which is an immanent signification of her present being-in-the-world, as a brittle, fragile quality, which can be subjected to any crisis at any time. There is thereby a constant “leap of faith” to be made.

Her acts are rooted in the future in how she now perceives her life trajectory within professional/academic work with a newly discovered sense of boundarilessness. This however has a price, as there is a sensed risk to valued relationships and an unknown dimension to her journey’s end.

Temporal Transcendence

In a follow up interview (see appendix “Maureen Interview 2”), conducted 14 months after the initial interview, the transition described thus far was again highlighted.

Maureen was once again invited to transcend the immediate and look to the past and future temporal dimensions in the exploration of her lifeworld, with particular reference to her course experiences.

Orbital Differentiation and Ontological Security

There has been a normalisation of Maureen’s position as student from her earlier feelings of abnormality as an “educational outsider” striving to become an “educational insider”. That she is now an academic with a trajectory towards an academic related professional future is a settled issue within her lifeworld. Spatially she is congruent with her surroundings, safe in the knowledge that she has made the transition, and has the grades on assignments to declare this. With this sense of security she has developed a *modus vivendi* with friends, who are located in each of the two orbits; pre-course and on-course. She now neatly differentiates between the two and this acts as a useful technique in order to ensure her ontological security. This is to say that her earlier concerns about where she is headed (career, friendship networks etc.) and what she may be leaving behind (old friends and all other secure objects within her lifeworld that are entwined with her history) are now largely extinguished. Her project is more

discernible and her pre-course life continues in the present (albeit adjusted) through her orbital differentiation.

The Realisation of an Academic Identity

The realisation of her educational insider identity has taken a step further to Maureen seeing herself as an academic, with an understanding of theory and an ability to apply this in a comfortable manner. “Comfortable” in that she sits easily with her on-course identity, secure with her knowledge acquisition in an analytical positioning and “insider” feeling when academic/theoretical matters arise. She is no longer the raw student studying concepts de novo, equally eager and anxious to grasp the necessary understanding. She now commands an expertise that allows her to think about the world in a different way – an academic way. As she explains,

He was on Dimbleby [TV programme]. And he was talking about broken windows theory, and er routine activity theory by Ron Clarke and I was like... “I know all this... I’m not just looking at this as a viewer. I’m looking at this cos I know all about this theory”. And I was finding myself in my living room on a Sunday afternoon on my own... thinking that if I was in the audience I would want to put like displacement theory. Y’know and about the prison population and that was great. Cos it was stuff that I knew about.

(p.4. Lines 11-17)

Part of this self-identity is the discourse that she now demonstrates in the living through of her on-course orbit. The language she employs calls into being the academic identity through a range of self-improvisations. There has been a particular “fateful moment” in this appropriation of new aspects to self within her counseling work with prisoners. She languages a self-identity of therapist and this is accepted and celebrated by her counselee and subsequently by herself. The terms to live the situation are not just concepts explored in class they now work as an aspect of her self within her existence as “Maureen-the-academic-destined-for-professional-counseling-work.” She can do therapy armed with her course knowledge. She can become a therapist.

The Experience of Time

Throughout Maureen's lifeworld there is the overarching horizon of the finiteness of her time. This was an issue before (see above (ii) "Written Feedback and Temporality") but now as she transcends to the future ("I can see.. faint glimmer at the end of the tunnel now") the passage of time takes on ever greater immanent significance. The vicissitudes of her student life are constantly with her as she relives the difficult and ecstatic times, but the general theme of her experience is the finality of this opportunity. Whether the experience is good or bad she must win through as this is the last chance – an increasingly evident "fact" as she transcends to a future state. Maureen perceives this as typifying mature studenthood, using younger students as a comparator. As she explains.

...the whole process of being a student throughout the three years you're just on a curve. And an up and a down and an up and a down, but I think overall,.. the thing about being a student and being a mature student is that you don't have the time to fritter and you don't have the time to piss around.... because the clock is forever ticking. You know... you don't get a second chance when you get over 30 to do it again cos you don't have the time if you want to start a career and everything else.

(p.6. Lines 6-12)

I think when you're a mature student as I say you're more realistic about ... life.... It's not "if this fails I'll try something else". Cos you don't have that luxury.

(p.6. Lines 22-24)

On Becoming a Different Person and the Handling of Change

The existential phenomenological position holds that we are in the state of ever becoming a different person. For Maureen however there are markers within her lived reality of her student experience, which highlight the extent of change that has ensued from her self-improvisations. Markers are often in moments of self-reflection or in the pre-reflective as she lives through situations where her past pre-course orbit interfaces with her current on-course self-identity. The latter are often manifest in her interactions with past friends and partners where the extent of change is highlighted. At these times

she feels she has “moved on” significantly, which again calls for “orbital differentiation”, but this is resisted in that authentically she celebrates her transition, and declares openly the difference, and then invites the negotiation of this difference with her interlocutor. The subtext is “look I have become a different person and you need to work with me to handle this or this social arrangement is off – that’s the deal!” A correlate of this positioning is her increased sense of independence and security in her self-identity. This is manifest in heightened feelings of agency and voice. As she points out.

..and I think I’ve become erm... more secure in my own independence. I was... in a long term relationship which then broke down. You know you have to re.. re-assert your life. What you want. Make your own boundaries. Your own decisions. And that’s... that takes some growing again. And I think I’m back on track again with that. Yeah I determine where I’m going I determine what I’m going to do and what I don’t want to do.

(p.1. Lines 37-42)

There is furthermore a heightened sense of consistency. Maureen no longer flounders with her biographical fissure of salesperson to academic student. Her project is more clearly defined. Academic on-course self-identity can move into future professional identity with a trajectory that has a congruence and a developmental theme. Her studies and the self-improvisations associated with them have a clear progression route

G: like a gelling? [of present experience and career aspirations]

M: yeah it all coming together.

(p.3. Lines 24-26)

This sensed consistency is immensely uplifting, as Maureen is filled with great optimism for her future in contrast to the difficult days at the start of her course when her personal life was in turmoil. Her study and her personal being are seen as interrelated (“one feeds off the other”). Again the issue of confidence is significant in this interrelationship. Success and the ensuing confidence in her studies generate confidence everywhere. Her boundarilessness is thus continually emphasised.

Confidence however is experienced as a very fragile entity even at this much later stage in her studies. She has not graduated yet and there are still assessments to cope with. Despite her increased sense of agency the outstanding tests (especially her dissertation) are still to be overcome, and the threat of failure still pertains. The academic self-identity then is not yet concretised, although Maureen continues to self-construct in these terms with regard to her self-improvisations in the present and her transcendence to the future. Nevertheless her lifeworld is bound up with optimism as she temporalises to a fulfilling future rather than an unhappy past.

“NANCY”

Factual Background

Nancy is in her late twenties, single and in a long-term relationship of 9 years. She has 4 ‘A’ levels, and for the last few years prior to entering the course she was travelling with her partner in the far east. During this time she was employed as an English language teacher, having done a TEFL qualification before leaving the UK. She came back home specifically to do an English Language and Literature degree and enrolled for this at the college. Her partner is doing a similar course at Sheffield University. Due to financial constraints she cannot live full time with her partner and therefore lives with her parents. She enjoys a positive relationship with them, despite the difficult circumstances. There are several family members involved in education, including her father and her boyfriend's mother who are lecturers. As well as following her course at the college, she is also employed by the college as a part-time language tutor. The interview was conducted shortly after the commencement of her final year, having completed 4 semesters.

Individual Psychological Structure.

Utilisation of an Existential Baseline: The Return of the Expectant Adventurer

Nancy's pre-course orbit was one of great adventure. She had given full vent to her enterprising perspective and had travelled the world to return home and “do her degree”. This is something she has always expected to do having had academic success at school. Her expectations of stimulating academic study, and the prospect of new friends, formed an overarching horizon within her lifeworld. She had a trajectory of further success and exciting experiences within this new phase of her life. Confident that she could take on this new challenge, and socially skilled with “new people”, she entered the course, ensanguined by the thought of the new road ahead. She was “really looking forward to getting stuck in (enthusiastically involved) to studying again”. She

was uplifted by an overwhelming feeling of self-efficacy. Buoyant with the experiences of her travels, she could now take on her next journey, her next project, with presence and voice in the tackling of new tasks.

Disappointment and Loss of Agency.

Despite her “polymorphic-mindedness” (Koestler 1984) about her “identity project” (Harre 1983), Nancy was increasingly disappointed and deflated by her on-course lived reality. Initially she was shocked by the reluctance of others, especially fellow students, to accept her. Her experiences travelling formed a large part of her self-identity. She was that traveller who had seen the world. She did have a trans-national perspective and phenomenologically she was not simply in an urban location in the north of England, but everywhere she had been, all at once, and yet also on this course, with these other students, who were at the same location - and it seemed *only* at this location. She felt an outsider unattuned to the surrounding social world. Out of step in time and space.

...I was more confident when I was away travelling and meeting lots of people all the time... and then suddenly I find myself back home with my parents and I came down with a bang I think... and like I say I had these high expectations and I felt really upset for a long time really like crying upset thinking “oh god I’m not going to fit in here”. No one wanted to know about my... experiences and things... and that’s all I knew...

(p.2. Lines 19 – 24)

Added to her sense of lost agency was the dramatically increased dependence upon others, especially her parents. Although she was not at odds with them the business of resurrecting her positioning as a child at home was disturbingly disempowering. The independent traveller had been pinned down, and with this constraint to self-efficacy came a severe diminishment of her previous confidence.

Movement into the Academic World

Although Nancy’s movement into the structure of an academic course was characterised by a closing down of many horizons, as opposed to the contrasting previous existence of ever-increasing, new horizons, intellectually the move was a

smooth transition. Finding herself as intellectually adept as before she was comfortable in the world of academia. This spatial comfort was also felt in her relationship with her tutors. They were an extension of her intersubjectivity with her father, his colleagues, her boyfriend's mother and various significant others involved in adult and higher education, with whom she had continual contact. Simultaneously however, she was now tied down to the routine of study and this felt mildly smothering. Conversely she now finds that course content has initiated development and progress. This transition however is strictly within intellectual parameters, and in respect of present action being rooted in the future.

...I mean I'm probably more knowledgeable on the literature side of things now and I'm probably better at writing as well... But I think more confident in a group when we're talking about something on literature [laughs] I suppose. The only other impact that it's [her course] got is that at the end of it I'll have a degree and that'll help me to move forward then. So in that respect I'm happy that I'm doing it.

(p.4. Lines 29-34)

Nancy bodies forth to a future working as a qualified schoolteacher, and as she is presently working part-time in teaching, this is seen as a natural flow of events. The only discomfort that Nancy experiences in higher education is the lack of connectivity with others. She experiences the situation as "lonely" in that there is very little true sharing of the world with fellow students. Conversely the pragmatic issues of her project are being fulfilled. She is filled with anticipation of future success and does experience self-development on an intellectual level. The transition however is minimal when she temporalises her biography and remembers her vast array of experiences when travelling – the independence, the people, the places. To cope with this she has shut down her previous self-identity and managed to live the situation in pragmatic terms. Do the exams, get the results, move on.

Identity and Temporality.

Nancy's biography up to entering her studies was an exciting and efficacious journey into many forms of life as she travelled the world. She had been filled with enriching experiences of places and people and had returned back to the UK with an intense

feeling of agency and pride in her adventurous and courageous project. In the present she experiences the pre-course orbit of her life as immensely challenging and rewarding. She had grown a great deal in her time abroad through multifarious activities and experiences. On returning home however she experienced a retrograding of her personal development. There was a severe lack of presence and voice experienced through her situated dependence at her parents' home, and the perceived rejection by other students of her "experienced traveller" identity. Struggling to fit in with the culture of the course, she had to quickly readjust, closing down her pre-course identity and taking on a "pragmatic student" identity. This was oriented to the bald terms of garnering good marks and getting the degree. The journey itself was co-incidental.

Intellectually there was a seamless progression between her pre-course orbit and on-course orbit. She felt comfortable in the academic world both with tutors and the educational demands. Within this ambit she experienced self-development. Her overarching horizon however was one of deceleration. Coming home to do her degree had slowed down the pace of her identity project. She now fantasies to the future as a schoolteacher whereby she can establish an occupational identity, which will give her passage back to her previous life in the Far East. It is here where spatially she lives much of her life, whilst physically studying in an urban location in England.

“OLIVE”

Factual Background

Olive has two children by her first marriage and is currently living with her long-term partner who is studying with the Open University. She is in her mid-thirties and prior to entering higher education she had what she describes as a good job which was “never going to go anywhere”. Her financial situation is relatively comfortable in that she has strategically planned for the economic reality of at least three years on low income. There is a significant history of HE experience in her family. She is studying for a Criminological Studies Degree and the interview was conducted around half way through her course. During the interview Olive had a very pragmatic perspective to the whole exercise. Her responses were always generally directed to the practical realities of her situation and she really had relatively little to say about her psychological reality. Nevertheless the bracketing of presuppositions of transition in identity still facilitated a useful outcome, as the analysis outlines.

Individual Psychological Structure

Utilisation of an Existential Baseline: “Not Going Anywhere”

To establish Olive’s living through of doing the degree course it is useful to examine the lived reality before she began her studies. Within this pre-course orbit of existence Olive pragmatically and strategically accepted her position in a life, which through her job, was “never going to go anywhere”. She had family and financial commitments and thus had to press on regardless to fulfil them. The project of studying for a degree however had been within her for some years. She had looked to a future state and found it totally unacceptable to remain in her current place. She had to move forward to somewhere with more stimulation and challenge. She was prompted by those around her who had experienced HE successfully; sister, aunts, new partner, but she had been

held back largely due to childcare. The chance was then presented to her when childcare was greatly reduced. The time was then right when she could pursue her studies with full commitment and vigour, “if I were gonna do it I were gonna do it and that were that”. She was the agent of her own actions and the project was to be tackled properly. This represents the perspective that once committed there was no going back. The project was set in train to be completed and embraced wholeheartedly. If this was not to be the case then the whole deal was off. This was also the road to happiness. Olive’s philosophy is that if you are not happy then change things so that you are. And the degree study was the way forward. Staying in the comfortable position of satisficing in a job where self-development or growth is not possible was acceptable in the short term, but perceptibly abhorrent in the long term. Happiness to Olive involved an element of challenge, and hence her desire to move into the world of academia and potentially greater status. Despite Olive’s commitment to the practicalities of any position she takes (staying in a job to fulfil external commitment, taking on a degree with the vigour it demanded) she has a phlegmatic perspective on her life generally. Planning is not a particularly good idea as things often get in the way and the result is disappointment. In contrast, there is a great commitment to the here and now. If the present situation is one of unhappiness, then work to change it as “life is really short”. Olive always sensed a distance between herself and others in regard to this philosophy and the level of agency that accompanies it; that one has the power to achieve a happy state of affairs. This sense of agency however is one of control within the parameters set by things beyond your control – “if you try and plan things something allus [always] comes up” [i.e. frustrates the plan]. This approach led to her entering higher education, but with a resolve that the notion of limited agency belies. Her sense of agency is strong yet guarded.

Entering the On-course Orbit.

G: What was it like?

O: daunting. All these young ones who had done essays... I hadn’t done anything for 10 years. All these young ones around. I mean I thought “ I can’t write anymore”.

(p.2. Lines 7-10)

Initial experience of her studies was anxiety ridden. There was a big contrast to her previous social environment of similar age and background. Olive felt her identity under threat and generally disempowered by the whole process. Young and paradoxically more experienced (in the academic world) people prevailed. They knew what was going on. They were already engaged in this business of writing and in comparison Olive felt old and disabled. Even the few students of similar age with whom she could identify were engaged with the process, having done recent study. However all was not lost. There was no need to run away. Olive still had a sense of being able to cope despite these assaults on her sense of who she was (“in the back of my mind I thought I can do this”).

A significant phase was the end of the first semester when Olive received feedback from her first round of assessments. It was at this stage when she began to take on the student identity and simultaneously there was both a re-evaluation of her self and also an affirmation of what she always thought she could become (“I’m not as daft as I thought I was”). This affirmation was concretised in the form of the results she achieved (“... “oh I’m a student aren’t I” [laughs] I got something to show for it”).

The anxiety about the capacity to cope however never really goes away. There is a continual and increasingly difficult set of tasks to tackle. The anxiety with regard to comparison with other students however is relinquished. Olive’s immanent significations of doing the course are related to the intellectual demands being made of her. Sociality with regard to the threatening notions of early experiences fade into insignificance as the work per se takes the foreground in her perceptive field. The success that she continues to enjoy is the mainstay of her identity and the correlate of confidence in what she is doing and what she is. Yet this is in constant need of maintenance as each new stage of development presents itself in the form of “starting over with new stuff”. The fear of not coping is ever present as the course “seems to have upped a gear”. Despite this constant threat there is also an emergent sense of increasing control. Feedback on successful work engenders this control and a coherence of self-identity in that Olive can cope with the “new stuff” as tutor feedback testifies. Olive sees herself as moving forward from an earlier state to a present and onto a future of increasing intellectual prowess.

Natural Progress Accelerated

Olive feels that “life’s just changing (her) all the time” and that in the movement from the pre course orbit to the on-course orbit there have been a number of vicissitudes and experiences that have impacted upon her self-identity and she perceives a number of important aspects that have developed. She attributes these changes to be *accelerated* by her course experiences. That there has been an enhancement of the process of reaching those potentialities that were latent, awaiting development. The most salient of these is confidence with the correlate of awareness raising. Together they have produced a formidable level of empowerment. This is the capacity to see important issues related to the everyday world, such as sexism and the portrayal of women in the media and women’s position in society. Together these qualities give her an enhanced sense of agency that is manifested in the capacity to stand one’s ground in an argument, dispute, debate or conflict. This can be in many scenarios from everyday living to academic debate. Her presence in the world is to be in a position that counts and is heard by others. The capacity allows Olive to “do”.

...Being able to say what I think I suppose. To be able to do what I want to do and... also if I feel that other people try to stop me standing me ground. Try to stop me doing what I want to do... it’s being able to argue what I think is right.

(p.2-3. Lines 45-2)

She has become someone who is in greater control of her destiny and able to declare this to the world. This control is language and thereby palpable. The development of this capacity is a gradual process. A great source of confidence is the feedback that Olive receives on marked work. She refers to “constructive criticism” on which she can formulate the next piece of work. Tutor comments then are significant to her sense of self worth especially if she can conclude that she’s pleased with the results. The esprit de corps, which she enjoys with her fellow students in a study group, generates a forceful support mechanism. This is particularly significant when confidence is waning and self doubt begins to creep in. There is a reciprocal arrangement to help each other out and bolster each other should any perceived lack of confidence arise. The sounding

out of ideas between members of the group also serves to generate confidence when there is lack of confidence in the substance of those ideas.

Especially M cos she seems to “oh I don’t think I can do this”... worse than me... you know and I say “course y’can course y’can. You’ve got this far you’re half way through now.” And that’s what she says to me when I’m like it.

.....you need support and you’re not sure you’re going the right way and you want to be certain you need somebody you can go to and say “look I’m doin’ this what do you think?” You know and see what they say.

(p.3. Lines 22-35).

Olive’s relationship with her fellow students is crucial to her project and bolsters the self-identity of “successful student”. In temporal terms she sees who she is by how far she has come. She (and her fellow students) are half way through their journey and can see the project’s end in sight. There is a closeness and connectivity such that Olive can be reassured in what she is doing. A reassurance again that is crucial to confidence and maintenance of self-identity. The need for this suggests that reassurance does not come from elsewhere e.g. tutors. Olive is left in a void of understanding and expectation. “What is the right way?” This is a question that constantly puzzles and solutions are difficult to obtain. But when the puzzle is solved and the work is returned with positive (and identity bolstering) feedback, confidence flourishes and personal development is deeply felt.

We can therefore distinguish between two related confidence types. Firstly Olive gains confidence for her work through the support of others and the general esprit de corps, which relate to “academic confidence”. This confidence is also fed by tutor feedback especially when she is pleased with the result of a marked piece of work. Secondly Olive carries this confidence into her everyday life empowered by the notion of greater awareness and capacity to be analytical. She can “stand her own ground” and is able to challenge when others impinge upon her actions. The former then feeds the latter.

The Joy of Study

There is one overriding theme that pervades the whole experience of doing the course. This is the immense joy that is felt in living through the business of study and of sensing formative growth. Olive is realising her philosophy of “do what makes you happy” through being challenged and stimulated. She struggles to fully language this, but there are two points that do signify the happiness she experiences.

...it expands me mind if you like. It's challenging. It's something that....stimulates me intelligence and brain and makes me think about things. It's something that I find... hard work but enjoyable.

(p.6. Lines 21-23)

...cos it pushes me I suppose. You have to think about things. It's something. I've always wanted to do and now I'm doing it.

(p.1. Lines 13-14)

Olive has reached a long awaited position, something that has been yearned for which is now realised. In the past she has bodied forth to this position and is now feeling the enjoyment of being caught up in this scenario of challenge. There is an expansion of self to embrace many things, which were previously beyond her. There is a fulfilment of her capacity to “think”. To mull things over and have to intellectualise at a different level in order to win through. To take on the challenge, to be tested and come out on top. This takes great effort yet the respondent sense of fulfilment and development is well worth it. The “thinking about things” is experienced in a new capacity to analyse the world. This is the basis of her feelings of expansion. That there are many dimensions to objects around her, which are in need of full consideration.

...it's just er... like a growing awareness and all of a sudden... I started analysing him can't remember what film it was from and it suddenly dawned on me you know that I do that now all the time [laughs]

(p.5. Lines 7-9)

This “growing awareness” is a correlate of the “expansion” of Olive. She is intellectually bigger with more capacity to understand. The course content has nurtured

this capacity. Olive's perspectival shift is typified in her response to the media and the portrayal of gender. Her sense of agency is greatly enhanced as she can see through the constructions of others and the manner in which issues are framed.

...I look at things. I analyse things. I watch television programmes and I'm thinking "where are they coming from" and I'm like analysing behaviour and "whose written this?" [laughs]
(p.4. Lines 40-42)

Relationships

There is a felt sharing of the world between Olive and her partner in that both are studying in higher education and both share the same anxieties and have similar needs which are expressed in the same discourse. With reciprocal empathy Olive enjoys the support throughout of her partner. There has been an increasing closeness both psychologically and physically as they have begun living together post-entry into higher education and its demands.

With friends from pre-course days there is a feeling of increasing distance. There is decreasing common ground on which to operate. Olive's world and theirs are gradually becoming disparate. Olive has a perspectival shift that cannot be shared by these friends and she has become frustrated at their lack of insight into wider issues such as politics. This is highlighted by one relationship in particular.

...it's [politics] not what they want to hear. It's not what we talk about really. I save that for people who are doin' t'course...stuff like that. But I don't know the relationship [with an old pre-course friend] has altered. I find sometimes that I'm thinking... "Oh get a life!" which when we're talking but I think that's really hard for them but I never say anything to 'em....it has altered...changed...funny thing is, as well she's got her own partner and he's done his degree and sometimes when I go over he totally dominates t'conversation and I find myself more talking to 'im than I do talking to 'er. I feel a bit guilty. She's sat there.....trying to get a word in.
(p.4. Lines 19-26)

Olive then wrestles with her two orbits of experience: pre- course and on-course. This is represented in the two discourses that can be lived through. To handle this distinction Olive presents two self-identities: pre-course and on-course. Olive separates out the two, according to her interlocutor. This can initiate guilt when Olive feels she betrays friends of the pre-course orbit and self-identity in favour of interlocutors of the on-course orbit and self-identity. This is generally the case with many pre-course acquaintances but is particularly felt with close friends of many years with whom she has a history and who are part of her biography. The change in her biography (becoming a higher education student) is then highlighted when she speaks the on-course discourse and brings her on-course student identity into being.

Identity and Temporality

Olive's movement from her pre-course orbit to her on-course orbit is characterised by perceived changes in her self-identity. She now has greater confidence in the world generally through a capacity to see things differently. This is an "expansion" of her self and this leads to greater agency and empowerment in her lifeworld. She sees it as "to be able to do what I want to do" irrespective of barriers or meaning constructions of others.

She attributes this transition to be related to her course experiences through an accelerated manifestation of a latent capacity she already possessed. These experiences include being put to the test and prevailing, support of fellow students and tutors (especially feedback on work submitted) and the joy of study. The new "student Olive" supplants the previous Olive of the pre-course orbit.

“TOM”

Factual Background

Tom is a 43-year-old divorcee who lives with his current partner. His children are now grown and have left home. He left school at the first opportunity with no formal qualifications, and up to entering the course had worked in the construction industry as a labourer. He also ran a part time DJ business, which continues on an ad hoc basis. He has a large group of friends, whom he has accumulated through his main pastime of drinking in pubs. Following his divorce pub drinking was the focus of his life. He has a criminal record for violent behaviour associated with football hooliganism. An injury sustained at work prompted him to re-evaluate his position in the job market with regard to his age and led to him enrolling on an Applied Social Studies degree course. The interview was conducted during his fourth semester just over half-way through his course.

Individual Psychological Structure

Utilisation of an Existential Baseline: “Drifting”

To examine the temporality of Tom’s lifeworld it is useful to explore his life prior to entering the course (pre-course orbit). The meaning of life within Tom’s pre-course orbit is reconstructed from his position within the on-course orbit. From this moment in his biography the period up to his decision to enter the course is looked back upon and characterised as “drifting”. Tom had the independence to do as he pleased. To take a labouring job or stay drinking in the pub. In toto he could follow any course of action within certain limits, but such limitations were perfectly acceptable to him. Drinking and socialising with his entourage of friends and acquaintances were the central foci of life, with the adequate income from his labouring jobs to finance these activities. It was an enjoyable existence in its aimlessness. To “cruise along” (live a carefree existence,

steadily downing beer and soaking up the pub culture) as “an idle get” (lazy, work-shy oaf of bad reputation) was an anxiety free and comfortable reality. The immanent significations of such an existence were the pleasant support of familiar surroundings and people, and participating in activities that were predictably doable and easily managed. Any challenge was to be avoided. Offers of responsibility at work were declined. The place to be was in the comfort zone of the status quo. Cruise in calm waters and everything will be fine.

There was however an irritant in this smooth direction-less voyage. Tom felt that he was capable of much more than his existence was demanding and did hanker after some self-development (“part of a stalemate, just plodding along. Quite enjoying it, but maybe just searching for something”). He did fantasise about returning to education and changing his status in some definition-less manner (“I’ve always been gonna do this but it’s always been a pipe dream”). He was also in a steady supportive relationship, and this initiated transcendence to future states (“had visions of being a counsellor and things like that”). Settled in a new domesticity the irritant within his “stalemate” came to the fore. With this foundational support he could think about how to address this inner desire of self-development. He simultaneously accepted that there are no guarantees and despite claims that the “colonisation of the future” is achievable (Giddens 1991), Tom saw this relational stability as possible impermanent (“as long as these things can be”). He also had problems attuning his self-perception with that of the institutionalised study world. He was at great odds with matching his current identity with that of student - one who sits in class and “studies”. This was an affront to his agency as an independent working class male. The world of textbooks and new technology was an anathema to him. Similarly the prospect of an occupation of “a sissy (effeminate man) who’d end up in an office with paperwork and a computer” assaulted his sense of maleness, which was located in the world of honest toil with other men. He was a drifter, beholden only to himself and his whimsical actions. He was a free agent and his perception of movement into such a structure was of a disempowered experience, wherein others had control over his actions. Also he persuaded himself that pragmatically such a move was difficult due to financial constraints. Finally however he was prompted into a movement toward academia due to an injury at work, rendering him temporarily unemployable, and his general discontentment with working for others, having had self-employed status. Again this

was done with Tom exercising his independence in that his approach was a continuation of whimsical “cruising along”. He was going to try it and see what happens. If things don’t work out then it’s back to the pub and building site. His application for a place on the course was done with drifting in mind. He would drift in, probably not be accepted due to lack of qualifications, and drift back out again and on to the next whim. Such an approach is extremely potent for Tom as he can at once accept refusal of admission as something that is a minor issue – he didn’t expect to get in and was fine where he was, and/or accept an offer of a place, knowing that he still had his psychological “get out clause” of drifting back to where he was, should he wish to.

Temporalising: “Amazing Change.”

As Boss (1979) and others have pointed out, dwelling in the world means extending ourselves into the three temporal dimensions. As Tom lives in the present he is amazed at the change he perceives in himself from the drifter of two years ago, and how he can “body forth” to an existence within professional work, perhaps as a teacher. The life, which was once repellent to him, is now one that is desired. The technophobe that was once within him for example is now expelled as he embraces the role of student.

...I’m finding it so strange that I can just sit down and... spend all night on a computer is one thing. It’s just amazing to me cos just in 2 years that whole thing’s just changed. I’m on a computer...nearly every night. Just 2 years ago I’d ave never dreamed... in fact I were anti-computers. I used to say they stopped people from thinking...

(p.2. Lines 40-44)

The present lifeworld is one of greater structure and focus. The drifter has been left behind, and Tom now has a greater sense of purpose. In Baumeister’s (1991) terms he now embraces a “high level” as opposed to a “low level of meaning”, which extends beyond “everyday planning” to “life planning”. The central focus of the pub culture, so immanently significant in the pre-course orbit, is now declared moribund - “boring”. With regard to the pre-course orbit and the pre-course self-identity, having a sense of direction and purpose is “completely alien”. Tom experiences a strange conflict within himself here. His present actions and project are an intense contrast to the aimless

drifting of before. His favourite occupation of “staring into space” has been replaced by feelings of duty to his nascent on-course self-identity, wherein he should not waste time and apply himself to his recently acquired work ethic. He expresses this purposefulness as “more focussed on what I want to do and what I feel”. The trajectory of being and becoming has transcended from significations such as “which pub and which group of friends tonight?” to a wider constellation of potentialities. Tom feels he has a much clearer picture of how his biography will now pan out.

...I accept things aren't possible and things are possible a lot more. Don't know if that makes sense. I'm putting things into compartments. More than when I were young thinking I can do anything.

(p,4/5. Lines 50 –2)

Tom's lifeworld then is characterised by a new realism. He feels that he can now see his freedom as more situated with a more tangible grasp of what he can do with his life.

Confidence Crisis: “A Fateful Moment” (Giddens 1999)

Shortly after beginning his studies Tom was shocked by the impact of a life which was not about the predictably doable. That a good deal of effort was required and that the world was not as controllable as his previous existence had presented. To Tom this lack of agency, in sharp contrast to his previous life as a free agent, was disturbing. Within the place of academia he couldn't continue to construct his previous self-identity. The drifter was cruising in uncharted waters where danger lurked. Tom's ontological security (Giddens 1991) was under threat. His first assignment was a revelatory experience in that he was accosted with something that wasn't readily doable. It also exemplified the expectations that were to be placed upon him in living through the course and he was unsure about the outcome. Unpredictability was immanent in this world, and this was a frightening experience. As opposed to an existence in which he could “do” now he was in a possibly dependent position of not being able to “do”. As he explains,

...it were er... hard to explain. It were like er... going back to doin' things I could do, subconsciously if you know what I mean. Doing things I've always done. Y'know like Deejaing [working as a “disc jockey”] I don't

take to be a problem. Some people do. I just turn up and I do it because I can. I don't particularly enjoy it. I do it cos I can. I've done it for a long time. So it's like working on sites. I do it because I can, and I have. Suddenly then it weren't so clear cut as that. That I were doin' this cos I can.. it were... you've got to kick yourself up the arse a bit [motivate yourself] and do it and I weren't sure whether... [pause]... I knew I wanted to do it.

(p.6. Lines 31-38)

A decision was needed then; should he go back to the doable and predictable world - a place where he "can", or should he move forward into this different world of challenge and exploration – a place where maybe he "can't". To go back to the place where he has presence and voice or go forward to a place where presence and voice have to be established in territory where he has to claim a place for himself from scratch. His dependence in this new place, the on-course orbit, was confirmed when he sought help from tutors. The affirmations of his inner feelings that he *was* capable led to his fateful decision to move forward. His on-course identity was beginning to emerge in this acknowledgement of dependence.

Inner Conflict: "Split Personality"

Despite the developmental character of Tom's on-course existence and the emergent self-identity the "ecstatic" (Heidegger 1962) nature of his lifeworld is signified in the way the past speaks in the present. The pre-course identity is still needed in order for Tom to engage with aspects of his world, particularly those outside of the on-course orbit. There is a necessity to cling on to the "old self" in order to establish some stability in a rapidly changing existence. Tom finds that he consciously has to play out and language his old self according to context. Ironically this points up the transition he is experiencing.

...I know that I'm tryin' ard to be me old self. Like in the pub and mixed company and things like that. I'm tryin' to be like I've always been... cos that's my personality. And on the other side... I'm determined to do this. So I've changed...

(p.1. Lines 43-45)

This throws Tom into identity confusion. “I’m still me I *think*.” He attributes meaning through a diagrammatically vertical splitting - “a split personality thing. One half of me is doing this” (study). Where then can Tom be a student? He has to compartmentalise this self-identity into specific contexts. Yet still he feels a profound conflict. His on-course orbit can interact with his pre-course orbit. There is a confusion and a blurring of attempted bounding. He finds that he is a student out of congruent context in the pub with “old” friends. To handle this he employs a series of humorous strategies. Craving the stability of his pre-course orbit in a rapidly changing universe, he ensures that he connects with this through ribald interchanges. As he explains,

...when I started I said “if I changed... pinch me” and every now and agen I do get one [laughs]. Basically I say that if I start talking bollocks [pretentious talk] pinch me ‘ard. So every now and agen [laughs] somebody will come and do that. Just things that... because you’re changing.

(p.3. Lines 24-27)

Such a construction of his on-course identity in the pre-course orbit is related to the rapidity of change. The speed at which his “improvisation of self” is taking place adds to the problem of identity confusion. This acceleration of biography and the need for stability through clinging to an “old self” are immanent significations of Tom’s transition.

...Well it were just a completely change in lifestyle. Because everything I know it’s...it seems to be flyin’ by. That first term seemed so compact with everything in and so much to do. Just changing. Just changing your whole life. Like we were sayin’ earlier. Your whole attitude is changing. Everything were changin’ but deep down inside I were tryin’ to make out that it weren’t if you know what I mean yeah? Like I say earlier when we mentioned it. “Have I changed?” You’d ave to ask somebody else I think. Cos I refuse to believe I have, but I probably have. I probably have.

(p.5. Lines 43-50)

The unsettling presence of the past in the present, where Tom feels a sense of rapid and holistic change, means that he is confronted by many questions such as how to act? Who to be? To establish stability in this heady mixture and to maintain “the core of accomplished normalcy” – the “Umwelt” (Giddens 1991) Tom languages his on-course experience through his “old” self. He refers to his own work as “a crock of shit” to be self-effacing with other students. His early experiences of engaging with academic perspectives are recalled as, “these arseholes actually believe what they are saying and it’s a load o’arse.” This pre-course discourse helps cope with the confusion. It comforts Tom in the confusing present. He similarly makes light of course content, maintaining his pre-course attitudes when confronted by conflicting evidence. Academic knowledge is viewed as divorced from real life (“it’s not like it says in t’book”).

Despite the coping mechanisms Tom does acknowledge personal transition as attributed to his experiences on the course. His prior independence with regard to being empowered to resist interdependence has altered. He now feels more tolerant of others and their perspective. Having to work with others was particularly significant.

...working with somebody else on something like that. That were an eye opener [a revelation]. I did have to change me own ways. I did have to change an ‘ell of a lot.

(p.8. Lines 29-30)

Relationships

In establishing presence and voice Tom has constructed an avuncular relationship with his fellow students. In the “moments of identification” (see Jenkins 1996) with others Tom feels his age, especially in relation to the younger students. He has become a source of advice and counsel. Partly this has been altercast and partly taken on and fostered by Tom himself. This again is a comfort in the identity confusion, which signifies his on-course lived reality. He has a presence and a voice with his fellow students within this framework.

Although personal confidence is declared as unproblematic in life generally, Tom feels more bolstered in verbal encounters as a result of his course experiences (“hold me own

in little arguments”). This is part of a wider issue that Tom now feels more comfortable when interacting with others of a perceived higher status.

Identity and Temporality

Tom experiences “an amazing change” in himself from his pre-course orbit to his on-course orbit. He is no longer the drifter, cruising along aimlessly. He now has a more focussed purpose and a clearly definable project. The recognisable and familiar has now given way to the problematic. The readily and easily doable is now *potentially* doable and therefore *potentially* undoable. The change is signified in his actions. He can now debate in argument at a more analytical level. He now embraces new technology. He now has a dutiful work ethic where “staring into space” is unacceptable. He “bodies forth” to a future in professional work, whereas in his past existence the future would have been the same as the present, and his acts within the present would have reflected this. The rapidity of change however has been disturbing. Tom has felt insecure in this voyage of discovery as opposed to the plain sailing of his pre-course orbit. He establishes some stability through a return to the past, yet he struggles to resolve the conflict between the perceived change with its disturbing lack of normalcy, and the constancy of his working class, male pre-course self-identity.

“TRACEY”

Factual Background

Tracey is a single parent in her mid twenties taking the social psychology pathway of an Applied Social Sciences Degree. She has a son of pre-school age by her first and only husband from whom she is now divorced. She is now a lone parent living with her son in rented accommodation. Prior to entering HE she had a job that was dissatisfying in that there was no expected development, and she felt isolated in a predominantly male environment. In order to institute change in this personal and professional inertia Tracey studied for ‘A’ levels at an open learning centre. Following some success in study, she decided to apply for her present degree course. The interview was conducted mid-way through her second year.

Individual Psychological Structure.

Utilisation of an “existential baseline”: The “before course” Tracey (the pre-course orbit).

As her husband had been particularly controlling, her marriage had been an almost castrating experience as personal agency and a sense of coherent identity were rendered difficult. This however was not totally distressing, as she had managed to ensure that she kept some inner psychological control by reflecting on her lived reality. She maintained some autonomy through having “inner voice”. A clandestine form of self-expression, which checked the castrating influence of her partner and ensured a grasp of individuality. As her sense of coherent identity was being eroded – being coerced into becoming a person she did not want to be - the mere possession of someone else – she initiated a resistance to the process. This was done largely through the possession of her son that fulfilled a sense of meaning and purpose; “I’ve got something. I’ve got something else here. Somebody else. Somebody to live for” (p.1. lines 20,21). This embodiment of “motherliness” gave her a sense of project that relieved the onslaught of

her husband's disempowering actions. The castration was resisted such that a sense of individuality and agency remained until the break up of the marriage. She had managed "to cling on to herself". Once the separation happened it initiated a tremendous blossoming of freedom. The world presented a set of challenges that she was to take on resolutely with her son beside her to bolster her efforts and to add to her sense of purposefulness. A formidable twosome to embattle whatever was before them. This fresh start coincided with her relinquishing her position with her employers for whom she had worked for some time, and who also employed her estranged husband. The job had been enjoyable although she felt some level of isolation, inertia and oppression as a woman working on a male dominated shop floor. The situation was made worse with the presence of her ex husband who worked within physical proximity. A radical change in direction was thereby initiated. A new project was perceived as she bodied forth to a more secure, independent and empowered future.

Penetration of implicit horizons: the world as a battlefield.

As a lone parent and estranged from her husband and beyond the realms of financial security Tracey's new world was a battlefield of threatening challenges. The threat was experienced as an assault upon her sense of self. She had to win through and be able to hold her head up proudly before the world and those who were aware of her position. Being a lone parent was (and is) an immanent signification in Tracey's lifeworld, and this meant that she was of low status on a perceived hierarchy of personal respectability. She now had to fight to ascertain a sense of pride, which is so important for her sense of self-worth and preferred (and coherent) identity. This new fight with the world was performed as a set of new projects. One was financial independence, which was actioned by setting up in small businesses; battling away deep into the night, sewing garments for sale in the market and suchlike. The most significant project however was the move toward education. This was a growth exercise with the goal to be empowered again. To count and "be proud." The overarching horizon then was "achieving status"

The on-course orbit: new challenges, new battles.

As Tracey began to experience her on-course orbit she increasingly felt that "achieving status" is to be found in movement away from her previous spatial existence. Her previous identity of being a wife and mother became more distant as she moved into

the space of education and ideas. Immanent within the new horizon and project was the rejection of the single parent stereotype which others, especially one boyfriend (subsequently dispensed with), would apply to her.

This new revelatory on-course orbit was a further challenge to be met head on. The order of “unknown territory” was a constant theme here with threats to identity everywhere and the need to call into being an identity as each challenge, each potential pitfall presented itself. Walking into a classroom was previously a straightforward everyday experience, but now as a mature woman it was a daunting prospect. There was expectant anxiety aroused by feelings of potential strangerhood. What were the others in the class to be like with her? Would they see her as strange or worse a stranger? What would they think of her? How would they look at her? They were after all much younger and brighter than her, having recently left school. Who was she to be? How would she cope with this existential void? How could she make herself *fit*? It was all very scary.

It is noteworthy that the prospect of *studying* at degree level presented no identifiable anxiety for Tracey. The anxiety was centred on intersubjectivity and identity. Her voicelessness of initial lived reality within the on-course orbit was immanently significant. Her project of growth and “being proud” within the overarching horizon of “achieving status” was severely challenged. It was more than starting from scratch on identity creation and the correlates of presence and voice. If she had been starting from scratch (as perhaps in a new job) this would have identified a benchmark for her – a discernible point of *where* she was. This point needed to be located so she could move forward in her chosen trajectory of being. This puzzle needed to be solved and gradually through sharing with others, especially one study partner and friend, a *modus vivendi* was achieved. With this important intersubjectivity she gradually began to acquire a sense of agency within the on-course orbit. The question of “who to be?” was incrementally being answered. She began to feel more settled, more comfortable, more attuned to her new social environment.

Revelations of Self

Early experiences of course content were characterised by reflection. Here was a space where Tracey could transcend the everyday fraught life of coping with domestic and

financial stresses (albeit in many cases only briefly), and begin to shift perspective. This was often a bi-product of course content. Some ideas she found difficult to cope with, as there was an integral challenge to deep-seated beliefs and thereby a threat to her local sub-cultural identity. It was disturbing to have long held truths be declared as untrue. Some experiences presented very tangible revelations about her own feelings and positioning. Immanent significations of anger came to Tracey in a revelatory way through a self-reflection exercise in a psychology class. She came to see herself as an angry person and then even more angry with herself for being angry. Tracey spent a great deal of time and effort in reflecting about herself when confronted with introspective thought. However painful such self-understanding was, paradoxically it was also felt to be a very positive experience and a boost to feelings of independence. This independence is related to a strong will and determination, a readiness to take up the battle. Her independence whilst never subsiding had taken a battering during her marriage, but it was “back with a vengeance” (p.3 lines 21, 22) through her course experiences and an emergent realisation of a new identity. This is strongly felt in relation to her ex husband who Tracey feels had closely controlled her. There were vestiges of this control left in her interactions with him, although she firmly feels that he no longer knows her as she has moved on to a place where he cannot go, nor begin to comprehend. This “independence back with a vengeance” means that psychological ties with him are completely broken. Tracey and her son are free to create their future. It is very important to Tracey for that future to be a happy comfortable one. She bodies forth to a future condition. That her son will be proud of her and that she will be proud of herself. That she will achieve status beyond the stereotype of lone parent leading an impoverished existence. There is now the horizon of “achieving status” beyond the domestic imperatives. As Tracey stands out temporally into the past she relives her trajectory of that moment: Tracey is going to be somebody, and her son will look up to her, and they will take great pride in their joint achievement of material comfort and status. It will be a battle, but they will get there in the end.

The new horizon: the new Tracey

There is nothing new in her level of strong will and determination but now, through the world of education and ideas, there is the latitude to give full vent to these in the project which Tracey has set herself. Tracey is energised by the demands that her project presents. Her life has to be kept full and the multifaceted project in play addresses this

need comprehensively. She feels congruent within the place that she dwells. Plenty of challenge, plenty of action, plenty to do and be. The correlates of confidence, the gaining of knowledge, including self knowledge, and the empowerment felt through a sense of independence are coterminous within her overarching horizon of “achieving status”. Confidence is related to the gaining of knowledge as she has a better understanding of objects in the world. The construction of new facets to identity lead to a more contented state.

The reinforcing properties of “literally buzzing” after a lecture, when understanding is experienced due to preparatory reading, leads to feelings of elevation and joy. She exits the room proudly displaying the embodiment of her emergent self-identity. She now knows more and her project has taken one more important step toward realisation. Seminar content is grasped, taken into her ever-increasing repository of new knowledge and understanding. Notably this was not an immediate process but happened after her first year on the course. Prior to this, engagement with the process of “doing the course” was almost peripheral, with the odd contribution in seminars to present some notion of self-efficacy. A ritual to say that “look I am on this course” and “I am taking part”. This was *at that time* comforting in that her sense of presence and voice were enhanced. In the present she temporalises on this development of identity. From the existential puzzle of the initial stages, to the establishment of her spatial being by taking on an enabling identity (with the support of others, especially her friend/study partner referred to above), she moved to a position where voicelessness was left behind, and the inchoate self-identify of “proud-and-achieving-person-of-status” was emerging. In the present there is a further radical change. Tracey has called into being through her actions a further stage in her identity project. “This September (start of second year)...didn’t think anything about it.....just took over the rest of the seminars”. (p.3.lines 34,35). She now sees herself with a firm sense of place; bolstered with increasing confidence she displays her “proud-and-achieving-person” self-identity. She is empowered to take centre stage in a previously scary and threatening place. There is a congruence with context. She can language her emergent self-identity through an act of self improvisation – a further step in her trajectory of becoming. Present action is rooted in the future as she lives the overarching horizon of “achieving status”.

There is an inner psychological experience to this process. Discussion in seminars leads to revelatory experiences as ideas are explored and finally understood. This acquisition of knowledge and understanding feels “fantastic” and leads to critical moments where self-development is suddenly realised; “oh is that me?” (p.3. line 17). This is the positioning of self as “I know what this is about and I can display it”. This points up the nascent realisation of Tracey’s project. “oh is that me?” stands out as a question of who she has become. She is a student in a seminar exploring ideas, reflecting on self. The overarching horizon of “achieving status” is opened out to her through an expansion of “knowing”. She is becoming that person of status, and leaving behind the simple lone parent, existing on benefits, stereotypically labelled. There is tangible synergy between this emerging knowledge, self-understanding, self-identity construction and confidence. Tracey’s project is being fulfilled through present action.

Relationships

The new Tracey experiences an “at-one-ness”, a contentment with her self, and this is gradually given expression in a confidence in the world at large, beyond the boundaries of academic debate. Outside of her course she feels empowered by a perspectival shift “you know exactly what’s going on” (p.7. lines 25,26) particularly during social interaction. This is a power to be able to rationalise and repel threats to identity when the issue of her lone parenthood arises with others. There is a feeling of shame and degradation associated with her position as a single mother (p.7. lines 21 – 23) and when this is felt Tracey is empowered to deflect such feelings and assert herself to a position of pride and status through her degree studies and her self-satisfaction in successfully bringing up a child.

In sexual romantic relationships Tracey now has a greater sense of control. She contrasts her new self-identity with the old and experiences a new found assertiveness to not yield to others perceived dominant position. The “dominant other” which drove much of her earlier styles of relating, within the orbit of not “achieving status” has now been replaced by the “challengeable” other. Perturbed by the imbalance in a particular relationship she had the power to say “no” where previously she would have yielded to the will of the “dominant other”. Finally she took the initiative and ended the relationship secure in her own position, independence and coherent identity.

.another example of another person wanting me to be something that I'm not. I'm not going to be that somebody else. So it gave me the confidence to just keep saying 'no'
(p.4. Lines 20-22).

This is also manifest in a capacity to ask questions when before there was tacit acceptance of the world. Her knowledge of the instability of truth and the consequent power to challenge any thing which is perceived as disputable - "I won't be palmed off" (p.3.Lines 45-46) - refers to an assertiveness to challenge any attempts at deceit or partial representations of the truth. Before Tracey would have been far more malleable and deferring to the "dominant other". With this contrast Tracey experiences the biographical changes before her. This opens up the places she can go to. Armed with knowledge and understanding and the correlate of confidence her lifeworld has a boundarilessness unknown before. The anxiety of expected strangerhood is behind her and she can enter a seemingly infinite array of social contexts, secure in her achieved and achieving status.

Identity and Temporality

"I'm finding out who I am when I'm at college. When I'm studying and things." (p.6. lines 1,2). Emerging out of a past self-identity is a new self-identity, the *pace* of change is not identifiable. It is a blur. It is only through critical moments of recognition of self-development that change can be discerned. The accomplishment of new skills and the grasp of new ideas incrementally constitute a construction of a new Tracey. The challenges that are presented and overcome and the battles that are won add to this process.

The elation of independence is however tempered by the realisation of singleness and isolation. Tracey is on her own and despite her sense of confident boundarilessness, she has to project herself into the world. She feels responsible for her own motivation, and so true to her battle ethic she presses ahead to meet the existential challenges particularly with regard to sociality.

Well when you're on your own it's difficult but I find that I'm gaining in confidence. Like when I'm out on my own I have to push myself. I have to

strike up conversations with strangers. You know when you're at home on your own on a night, you are literally on your own and you can't talk to anybody. You can't have any interactions with anybody. You're stuck there so you grasp little things when you're out. Any opportunity and you strike up a conversation.

(p.6. Lines 30 – 36)

That this is experienced as a challenge, a difficult task to be accomplished echoes the Tracey of old when the “dominant other” prevailed, when she was disempowered, castrated. Now however she takes up the challenge and wins through, bolstered by her new sense of independence and emergent self-identity of one who “knows what’s going on”. She brings into being that self she wishes to be. “Here it’s up to you. It’s your motivation.” (P.6. line 16). Her battle ethic was there from the start of her course, and she identifies the genesis of this new form of embattlement.

You come into college and you’ve got to start chatting. So coming in here, although it was scary and I didn’t know anybody... you know that first morning I thought “right I’ve just got to go in and talk. I’ll do what I do”, you know and that’s what I did.

(p.6. Lines 40-43)

Since that time she has overcome the perceived stigma of lone parenthood to a position of pride and the capacity to declare this publicly, secure in her new found knowledge, independence, confidence and the at-one-ness of her nascent new self- identity.

T: ...not everything’s bad just cos’ I’ve got divorced. It’s fantastic, it’s better than it’s ever been.” And she said, “Oh I’m really sorry.” I didn’t let her put me down and become just a single parent. You know, “oh pity her.”

G: Was it anything to do with the fact that you are a student?

T: Yeah. It was yeah. I could just stand there and boast. I’m doing a degree and I’m in my second year. The attitude I get has been a really big thing

for me in becoming a single parent. It was a big stigma for me. I've always had to deal with this thing that they're above you. It's this labelling thing and being quite paranoid and conscious about it, but I'm quite proud now. I think that's to do with education.

(p.7. Lines 13-24)

Her course and the totality of experience it presents have made a difference. She is ensanguined by the perceived achievement of status, and the fantasised future of greater status with the attendant pride – the realisation of her project. The vicissitudes of life have had an impact on Tracey, but for her, studying for a degree, has been immanently significant with regard to project, temporality and identity.

“WENDY”

Factual Background

Wendy is in her late thirties, married with 4 children. She came into the course with no prior qualification and typifies the course’s marketing approach and value added philosophy of “no prior knowledge assumed”. She lives in a local working class area, and her husband is a manual worker. She had previously been in part time work, but her main occupation prior to entering higher education was that of housewife. Her sister had recently completed the course and it was through this link that she had decided to attempt the same project. The interview took place around half way through her course at the end of the first semester of her second year. She is doing a Criminological Studies Degree.

Individual Psychological Structure

Use of an Existential Baseline: Local Traditional Role-Playing

From Wendy’s temporal position in the present she can existentially live in the past and thus perceives 2 distinct experiential orbits; the pre-course and the on-course. These are specified as her life outside her current studenthood and life within her current studenthood respectively. However, initially these were far from distinctive. There was a blurring of the boundaries between the two, as the perceived distinctiveness did not arise until the two orbits were themselves constructed and identified within Wendy’s lifeworld. This blurring or overlap meant that in the early stages the pre-course orbit contaminated her experiences within the initial stages of her on-course orbit. This contamination is experienced as an inner conflict in Wendy’s lifeworld as a mature student entering the world of academia.

Wendy's lived reality before entering the course and at the beginning of her studies was pervaded by thoughts of what is acceptable within local socio-cultural terms of reference. Her world up to that point had centred around the practical tasks of supporting four children and a husband, always within the parameters of local expectations on what a woman like her should do: cooking, cleaning, "being there" for her family. These implicit horizons were steadily and increasingly being penetrated, as she became aware of the implications of her project. What kind of life should she be leading as a working class mother of four children? This is a question that resonated within her consciousness as she waded deeper into her project. She refers to the course as "the marriage wrecker"; aware of its reputation for influencing long term relationships amongst mature students. When she was doing her course she couldn't "be there" for her family. The concept of womanhood within local tradition severely influenced her sense of place. She remembers some early thoughts whilst in the seminar room:

W: Um, It's not me, this is not me, this is not where I should be right now, right down to at certain times through the day thinking "I'm not doing this now if I wasn't here, I would be doing whatever... I shouldn't be here."
(p.7. Lines 41-43)

The contaminating overlap and blurring of the edges between the 2 orbits created some degree of spatial confusion. Within Wendy's perspective she experienced a significant paradox at this time. If she shouldn't be on the course why was she physically there at all? There was great discomfort in attempting to resolve this question. On the one hand she was extremely insecure of her place within higher education. This was not for a woman like her. She did not fit. For her it was ridiculous that a working class woman of four with a perfectly good lifestyle should contemplate a return to education. There was also guilt. She had responsibilities; the lives of four young people, the implicit support for her husband of many years. On the other hand there had been an immanent craving for some kind of change or movement from her current position.

[Thinking to herself] "I have four children, I have got a car, I have got a house, I have got a job", but then when I started I thought... "Oh, is that really all there is, or is there more?" And I think that was the reason for

starting the course... that I had convinced myself that there must be something more, but that's not to belittle what I had already got.

(p.6. Lines 10-12)

The striving within Wendy's projective presence – to move forward - was directed by her sister's experience of studenthood. This was a prompt that ensanguined her projections to fulfil indistinctive aspirations. She had to do something and to follow her sister's successful path was to do something.

Establishing the Student Identity

The striving for movement, albeit undefined, brought her to enter into this new project, however contradictory it may be to her sense of role expectations. Her lived reality as a student was peopled by many others from diverse backgrounds, which came to Wendy as revealing of a wider world and led to an expansion of her own horizons past those of her pre-college peers. The space of her lifeworld was beginning to expand. Of particular significance were the members of staff who, in the early stages, were seen as almost deified. The business of consulting with a tutor was an unthinkable act. Within Wendy's perceived level of agency a lowly student could not possibly engage with a tutor. She felt therefore that she had to pick her way through this myriad of information and multifarious processes without contemplating that tutors would concern themselves with attending to the needs of a student. As Wendy called her student identity into being however these deifications were gradually "mortalised". "He (a tutor) has got a brain that's amazing, but he is just another person". Her on-course orbit began to become naturalised in her lived reality. There was one particular fateful moment that reveals this:

Then came a moment... and I was thinking "This is it!" "This is where I should be, this is what I enjoy and this is what I should be doing, this is what it's all about", and from then I have never once questioned whether..

[this was the right thing to do]

(p.8. Lines 6-9).

Suddenly the notion of her studying for a degree was not so ridiculous. There had been movement from housewife to mature student and this seemed perfectly acceptable,

despite notions of local social expectations and the associated guilt. Yet despite the epiphany-like nature of this fateful moment Wendy has integrated into the student self-identity without any dramatic process taking place. As she explains,

The course itself, has made me think... “is it me? Is it what I want?”... and without actually forcing myself – yes, it’s what I want and it has turned into what I want – very hard to explain, it’s turned into what I want without me actually trying to make it do that.

(p.6. Lines 19-22)

So Wendy now experiences a belongingness, a sense of comfort within the on-course orbit. She feels more at home, more settled. The anxieties of guilt and sub-cultural expectations of the early stages have waned. So her being-in-the-world from a position in which the student identity was potentially incongruent to her self (“is it me?”) and thereby unwanted, the college experience can be embraced willingly in the nascent creation of a new Wendy – Wendy the degree student.

Living the Student Identity: Wendy the Degree Student

That Wendy perceives change seems to be largely unequivocal. There are however two particular themes which are immanently signified in her lifeworld. These are interconnected in that there is both synergy and reciprocity between them. They are firstly a sense of greater self worth and the concomitant confidence, and secondly a shift in interpersonal relationships. As she feels greater self worth and confidence this manifests itself in her behaviour with others, and as she mixes with others this gives her a greater sense of self worth and confidence as she calls her new self-identity into being.

(i) Confidence and Self Worth

Wendy feels that confidence for her is to be more relaxed and calm in interpersonal encounters. She has “an easiness with people” that she didn’t have before embarking on her project. She can engage in debate with others that hitherto were beyond her horizons. Internal conceptualisations of social status can be debunked with this new “easiness”.

I have gone over there and started being a Parent Governor. And it was yesterday afternoon we were at Awtry Hall, this buffet lunch and all sorts of things, the Mayoress and everything. And I thought two years ago I wouldn't have dreamt of being in this room and arguing with the people I am arguing with. I would not have argued...It is that sort of thing where now I do feel that I will be able to walk into a room full of people and not for one second consider what their social standing is. It wouldn't matter anymore... Whereas two years ago I would have thought "Oh God"... but now that's different.

(p.9/10. Lines 43-1)

This ability to go on in everyday life is steadily eroding perceived social boundaries and is correlated with a sense of spiraling self worth. Wendy has more self-understanding and can locate herself and her world in a more global framework, beyond the confines of the local socio-cultural, such that although there are "clever" persons around her they "are just another human being". As such they are similar to her and any status differential is minimised. The "clever" people are worthy, but equally so is she. In sum she has a changing relationship with the social world in which she feels a greater sense of agency, presence and voice.

(ii) Interpersonal Relationships

Wendy's intersubjectivity with other students is a profound source of self worth and confidence. This is manifested in her rapport with study partners through humour and shared meaning systems.

[Wendy relates a tale told by her study partner of a long description of a shopping item by a friend] ...And M said "Well, that's brilliant, where is it?" "Oh, well, that's the thing, I can't remember!" [Laughter] Oh dear – so all this explanation, so that, now if we're in a lecture and this... we can be in a lecture and he can go on and on and we think we are getting it, and then there will be a point at which M and I look at each other and we just know it's gone completely 3 miles over the top of our head and M will go "it's gone."

(p.5. Lines 28-34)

Such implicit joking represents an in-group of which Wendy feels an integral part and this warmth and security within an academic environment dissipates the earlier notions of alienation. Couched within this discourse and context Wendy continues to construct her on-course identity. The awareness of this collegiate aspect of self is called into being through her awareness of her fellow students being aware of her. She is part of an academic community and the student identity becomes more concretised within her lifeworld.

Further there is a different understanding of the student identity vis-à-vis tutors. Initial conceptions of school-type power relations give way to a more democratised framework which Wendy finds empowering.

...you become conscious that it is not anybody who's looking down on you and saying 'Oh yes, you are a student and you will do things our way', that people (tutors and support staff) are there to facilitate what you are doing.

(p.8/9. Lines 50-3)

There is now an overarching horizon of equality with others, which deeply influences her sense of agency and a boundarilessness that steadily increases.

Shifts in Relationships

There are distinct changes in friendship circles. The salience of pre-course friends and acquaintances has significantly diminished, whereas those on-course have come to the fore. Non-college friends who share an academic interest, such as those who are doing similar study, are particularly salient, as Wendy seeks to celebrate her new student identity. Non-college friends who are outside her academic circle are increasingly difficult to engage with. The two orbits are taking on a more defined distinctiveness. Should she display too much enthusiasm on an issue within the pre-course orbit she has to "consciously slow it down and go back into easy mode" (p.12 line 35). Wendy perceives her capacity for greater analysis of social issues as a cause of irresolvable friction between herself and some friends. In sum she attributes shifts in interpersonal

relationships to her college experiences and her student on-course identity in all its manifestations.

Within Wendy's lifeworld husband and children remain largely the same as she can pursue her studies with support and positive regard from her family. Despite conflict over practical matters Wendy sees the situation as generally supportive. There is some perception of an insecurity felt by her husband that once she graduates she will move on, leave him and his world. However she feels that "the essence (of her) has not changed." There have been additions to self-identity, but there are some constants that remain, such as to be seen in a good light by her children. Home life then has been embraced in her self-creation, and within this context the 2 orbits are not irreconcilable.

Identity and Temporality.

From the archetypal housewife of local cultural expectations Wendy has moved into the world of student life and called into being a student identity which, whilst embracing home life, has changed the nature of her interpersonal relationships. Pre- course friends and acquaintances, who are not within her collegiate perspective, present some interactional difficulties. On-course friends and others, whom she can engage with on collegiate terms, are a source of self worth and confidence, in which she can celebrate her nascent academic/student self-identity. The self worth and confidence has empowered her to move in social environments with increasing poise and skill, which again Wendy feels is immanently significant of transition from one lived reality to another. The transition has not been easy. Early feelings of alienation and guilt resonated around her early lived reality of doing her course. The transition was facilitated by the support of other students through membership of an in-group that provided warmth, security, and intersubjectivity. Course content has also played its part. Wendy feels she has a more analytical perspective on life that again impacts on her being-in-the-world in her approach to status and her position within perceived hierarchies.

Temporal Transcendence

In a follow up interview (see appendix "Wendy Interview 2"), conducted 15 months after the initial interview, the further construction of "Wendy-the-degree-student" was emphasised. Wendy was once again invited to transcend the present and look to the

past and future temporal dimensions in the exploration of her lifeworld, with particular reference to her course experiences. As she did this it became evident that the nascent characteristics of her on-course self-identity had taken a step further to become more stable, more entrenched with her self-improvisations and in sum more normalised. She now was a student of social science and was a mother and wife. How this was lived through is described below.

Orbital Differentiation

Wendy has established a comfortable *modus vivendi* with her pre-course friends and acquaintances by neatly differentiating between the two orbits (pre-course and on-course), and relating to these others in ways she sees as appropriate. This propensity of conducting her life is a correlate of her greater security in her educational project. Earlier sensitivity and conflict between her lived realities of student and member of the local sub-culture (and its expectations on how Wendy should behave – see “Use of an Existential Baseline: Local Traditional Role-Playing” above) have largely dissipated. She has successfully constructed a self-identity that handles the fissure between the local tradition (and her earlier feelings of guilt and shame) and the project she has embarked upon. Through orbital differentiation she successfully constructs her relationships, albeit modified, from those of the past. There have been tangible shifts, but these have now been largely negotiated and sociality is restored. The negotiations are to some degree correlated with Wendy’s heightened sense of voice and agency. She feels greater psychological strength throughout her lifeworld and this is manifest in her interactional skills, wherein she feels empowered to declare her own worldview and a greater strength of resolve within her decision-making. As she illustrates in her negotiated relationship with a pre-course friend,

There was a time when it had changed and we weren’t comfortable... I think... maybe but I’m not sure, but maybe Tina thought... ‘college’ and maybe I thought... ‘Tina doesn’t talk’. Whatever... and we’ve got over that. And it’s a different sort of ... Tina and Wendy... but I think that goes across into everything and that now more so than then and this is probably a change since then I’m a lot happier with sayin’ “this is what I’m doin’” and... because... I’m not sayin’ ‘I wonder if it will be alright if I do this..?’

(p.1. Lines 20-26)

Heightened Feelings of Agency

Together with greater decisiveness about general everyday matters, Wendy has established within her on-course orbit an increased sense of responsibility for her own destiny. A correlate of this ensanguining authenticity is the increased levels of assertive strength in her relationship with her family. She now feels and demonstrates far greater resolve in her directives to her children and husband in comparison to the past when she was just “floating along”. Her approach to study is conducted in much the same way, where she takes outright responsibility for what she studies, including interests and foci. Her agency has reached such a point where she feels comfortable with only making lecture notes on foci she chooses, and to even absent herself from teaching sessions, taking decisions on the most effective use of her time. She temporalises to a past Wendy who noted everything and attended everything, unsure of the actual nature of her project.

Despite the prevalence of her feelings of self-determination the “inertial drag” of her past often haunts her. Siblings remind her of her pre-course self-identity, of the bounded Wendy, caged in by a set of sub-cultural norms that had so plagued her early experiences as a student. The subtext she perceives from her encounters echoes her earlier thoughts that she has gone far beyond the allowed scope for someone such as her. Being a student is not what is expected of a working class woman with four children. However, consistent with her sense of voice, which she attributes directly to her course experiences, she presses on undeterred, save for occasional existential discomfort.

The Joy of Study and its Roots in the Future.

The overarching horizon of Wendy’s lived reality of her student self-identity is the immense joy of study. As she temporalises to the past, and the intense dislike of education at school, the present “buzz” (profoundly feelings of purposefulness and challenge) of her college education is a complete contrast. The daily routine of taking on the intellectualising of new material is always the central feature of student existence. There is excitement, industry and optimism in equal measure as each session is entered into with a spirit of intrigue and discovery. The joy is such that as she temporalises to the future there is great concern on what is to replace the “buzz” once

she graduates. She bodies forth to this future, with a sense of discomfort at the lack of industry, and resolves to perhaps become a permanent student of something or indeed anything!

These current actions and the associated pleasure are rooted in the future as Wendy temporalises to a career in teaching or training and being part of the “buzz” in a more permanent way. Sociality is part of this heightened sense of purposefulness as she experiences the contagious nature of her joy. As a mother studying she feels great optimism in her influence upon her children, who have shown distinct attitudinal change toward education. She feels her joy of study has impacted upon her children as they now show greater interest and application in school.

Wendy attributes her transition totally to the influence of her course in all its manifestations. Her current lifeworld significantly contrasts with her lifeworld before entering the course. She experiences boundarilessness, self-determination and optimism unknown before and looks to the future with a greater sense of authenticity and purposefulness.

“YVONNE”

Factual Background

Yvonne is a 20-year-old who lives at home with her parents and a younger brother. She enrolled on the course directly from school sixth form where she gained 4 “A” levels. She has a current boyfriend who has one young daughter, and he is very supportive of Yvonne’s academic work. She had a negative experience of school in that she struggled with self-esteem (attributed to school staff – see analysis) and as a result almost declined the opportunity to enter higher education. She is doing a literature degree and the interview was conducted just over halfway through her course. She is what is often referred to as a “traditional” entry student, having matriculated at “A” level and then gone straight into higher education, and this gives a useful variation in the analysis of the general psychological structure.

Individual Psychological Structure

Utilisation of an Existential Baseline: Striving for Agency

Yvonne’s experienced memories of her past self in the present are very much characterised by her school’s impact upon her overarching horizon. The immanent signification was one of structure. This refers to the routinised set of directives that made up her lifeworld. She remembers the process as follows.

[Mimicking her school teachers] ‘This is what you must learn this week, go away er oh er this is what you need to know... write it all down... that’s all you need to know’.

(p.1. Lines 13-15)

The set timetable, which was slavishly adhered to by all, epitomised the pre-occupation with form and ritual that was her lived reality of school life.

Within this framework of existence Yvonne's sense of agency was stifled. She had very little voice in all contexts wherein teachers dominated her actions, facilitated by the framework. As she explains,

...when I was at 6th form and at school I was constantly put down by quite a few people... and that kind of kept me in the shadows really.

(p.2. Lines 23 –24)

This existence “in the shadows” left Yvonne feeling extremely insignificant and depressed. In comparison to others who were viewed by staff as achievers she felt excluded. Someone who did not count in the school's priorities. Someone who was to be ignored and “cooled out”² (Goffman), whilst others were the important people to be ascribed status and given the attention, as they were destined for greater things than she was. The existential phenomenological perspective of the teacher as an enabler of self-transcendence was absent. She was not subject to this process. Instead she experienced school as a form of self-inertia – not going anywhere, not becoming anything new. There was an inner frustration with this lack of perceivable growth as Yvonne had inklings that, despite the negative messages received from teachers, she was in fact quite a capable student.

The positioning of existing “in the shadows” extended to other contexts. She was “very timid” and “very nervous about everything”. In circumstances where her individuality was emphasised she would deindividuate, almost denying her presence and voice. As Yvonne illustrates,

...before I came to college, if I went out with my family or anything. If we went out to a restaurant everyone else had to order my food. I was always too nervous to speak up for myself and now I get a real kick out of

² Goffman refers to a social-psychological process where individuals are conned into believing that failure is their fault. This has been applied to schooling systems where children from certain social backgrounds fail in school and perceive it to be their fault, thus perpetuating the system.

ordering mine and ordering my brothers and if anyone's too shy to ask for it I ask for theirs as well.

(p.2. Lines 13-17)

A joyous contrast is experienced here between the two temporal orbits, pre-course and on-course. Yvonne fervently celebrates her newly discovered feelings of presence and voice. She has emerged out of the shadows and into the limelight. The mundane task of ordering food and presenting self in everyday life has a frisson of fun and extroversion. Yvonne is filled with feelings of self-emergence as she publicly manifests her nascent on-course self-identity.

The genesis of the experienced transition appeared following a steady bombardment of negative messages about her capabilities, when she surprised herself and others by the grades she finally achieved. Bolstered by this success, she set about proving her detractors wrong, and applied successfully for her present course.

The On-course Orbit: "Learning is a Lot Different"

...whether you've come direct from education or not It's a brand new experience. It's a completely different way of doing everything.

(p.7. Lines 40-41)

In contrast to the structured existence at school Yvonne experiences a much more fluid and open-ended lived reality in her studying. There is no predetermined *modus operandi*, but a flexible framework in which to operate. The freedom however is tinged with feelings of insecurity. In this new environment one has to claim one's individuality. In the pre-course orbit others ascribed her presence and voice (even if this was at a comparatively minuscule level "in the shadows", it was at least the preserve and responsibility of others outside herself, and this was some source of security). She was therefore cast into an operational void. How to act? Who to be? These were puzzles with no immediate solution.

In order to solve the puzzle during her early experiences her pre-course identity predominated. Being late for class in college was lived as if she were still at school. She

would be frightened to enter. Her overarching horizon was one of fear. She feared she would not meet expectations and normative standards. Fears which are still with her in the present. In seminar discussion she would be frightened to speak up with what she knew to be the correct response, for fear of “if it’s wrong I’ll feel a fool”. Yet she would feel deflated when others did so, disappointed at her lack of courage to move into the foreground and to remain, as before, “in the shadows”.

The presence of older students and the expectation that they would have greater voice and presence – more emboldened to voice and opinion, more experienced, more dominant - was a frightening prospect. Yvonne was a timid youngster by comparison, without any experience to draw on. Older students would have “a view of things” (a worthy, demonstrable point to make) and Yvonne was without a view. She was only an opinion-less, inert and empty schoolgirl, still very much “in the shadows” and there was little chance of ever having “a view of things”. In sum she was in the wrong place and this was a source of frightening insecurity.

The immanent signification of fear still remains with Yvonne into the present although she has to some extent been able to come “out of the shadows”. This is related to the position of needing to understand everything almost immediately and feeling that when she falls short of this, when she feels out of touch with discussion, a panic of personal misplacement ensues. Others understand and she is failing to understand, therefore she is in the wrong place. She doesn’t belong. Others can reassure her that they themselves are failing to understand and this relieves the pressure somewhat until a similar situation reoccurs. This insecurity of place is most particularly felt during exam time. She oscillates from a confident position of knowing what she’s doing, confident of her place, to a state of panic of “oh no I’ve done it all wrong” and “I haven’t got a clue.. what am I doing here?”. Her pre-course self-identity is echoed during the insecure phase and her inchoate on-course self-identity prevails in the confident phase. The former is experienced as out of place, the latter as in place: not belonging and belonging. However the resolve of proving her detractors wrong in her pre-course orbit is strong enough for her to continue the identity project of successful student. And as “learning is a lot different” (than school) she has sensed personal development. She temporalises from those early days on the course when her pre-course self-identity prevailed to her present confident on-course self identity – when she can take the

limelight in social encounters (her odd regressions to her pre-course identity notwithstanding).

Her nascent on-course, confident, in-the-right-place, self-identity is attributed to the constructions of her “moments of identification” with others (particularly tutors) in the “internal-external dialectic of identification” (Jenkins 1996). As she explains,

...since I've come here you know it's "you can do it, there's... more to you than just sitting in the background" [pervasive messages from others including tutors]. I think I've realised since coming here that I can... stand up for meself. I do have a voice and... people do actually listen to me.
(p.2. Lines 24-27)

Feeling “a fool” in seminar discussion is (mostly) left behind and a future life of success is opened out before her. The receipt of her first grades was a particular “fateful moment” (Giddens 1991).

I'd done up to t'end of t'first semester I still felt “oh well this is a waste of time really, I'm not going to get anywhere.” When I got my first lot of grades I thought, ‘actually I'm not doing too badly, I'm quite impressed with meself’ and it kinda makes me think... where I could go and what I could do.
(p.4. Lines 41-45)

The notion that ‘learning is a lot different’ extends to the sociality of sharing the trials and tribulations of the course with others. The intersubjectivity that her lived reality has presented has been acutely germane. Sharing the world of academia with others has given her “a new aspect on everything”.

...if I hadn't met all these people I wouldn't have understood all the different things to do with all the different areas.
(p.6. Lines 28-30)

One particular relationship with a fellow student has been a saving lifeline for her project. For Yvonne this has been a crucial source of support during her times of frightening insecurity. This significant other has been a prime constructing agent in the on-course self-identity. A mentor and counsellor to reassure her that she is in the right place and she is capable of achieving her identity project.

Feeling the Transition: Reinventing Yourself

As Yvonne senses her transition in moments of identification, such as having voice and manifesting her sense of presence throughout her lifeworld, she begins to embrace her identity project with gusto. The immanent signification of fear, whilst still rumbling in the background, gives way to a perspectival shift, which correlates with all aspects of her lived reality. The shift extends to her presentation of self and her desire to declare the joy of her progress to others.

...I think the fact that I'm here, like I said before it's... given me a whole new perspective on everything. Erm... there's something about being in a college that makes you want to change everything about yourself... Not in a bad way but in a trying to reinvent yourself...

...before it was 'this is what I am. I'm happy to be this. I'll do me work while I've got to. And I suppose I'll force meself to do this'. Since I've been here I've been like, 'actually I'm enjoying this and I show the world how much I'm enjoying this.' And I've completely changed the way I look in the last 18 months.

(p.6. Lines 35-45)

As her self-development is embodied in this way she adds to her security and sense of place. Image change is a correlate of feeling that she belongs. She takes an important step here in realising her identity project and further constructs her on-course identity, through the internal-external dialectic of identification. As she explains,

...it seems to have an affect that makes you feel less like a child in school and more like someone who is interested in knowledge that wants to find out more about the world and... yet outer image... our outer image seems to portray this as well.

(p.7. Lines 15-17)

Merleau-Ponty (1962) has argued that a person's self-presentation speaks to that person's continued relationship to his or her surroundings. For Yvonne she is co-constituted by a world in which she has a voice and presence and can move into the foreground, confident (for much of the time) that she belongs in this world. She no longer ponders outside a classroom when late. She enters with confident aplomb and an authentic embodiment of the message, "it's me I'm late it's my problem". In seminar discussion her on-course self-identity can be manifest with great joy and wonderment,

...like the other day there was something that was being analysed. The tutor said, 'aw I can't really give a meaning'. And I said 'oh I think it means that and I can relate it to that' and started using all t' terminology and after I'd finished I sat down and thought, 'I don't believe I've just said that!'

(p.2. Lines 36-39)

The transition is complete in that her whole lifeworld is now linked to her progression as a college student. Her overarching horizon is college; "everything I do now is somehow linked to college life". The transition however does not include a fully confident Yvonne striving purposely forward toward the fulfilment of her project. There are still significant lapses in her improvisation of a confident student and young woman. The horizon of fear of bad outcomes – failure, public humiliation ("feeling a fool"), losing a sense of place etc., still looms, despite Yvonne's perceived progress.

...it's never... it never feels. I'm never completely confident in what I'm doing but... I'm more than I were... I get that less now than I did at first and I seem to understand a lot more of what goes off. I'm a lot less... scared of what the possible outcome is if I sit there and say 'oh I haven't got a clue'.

(p.5. Lines 22-25)

Yvonne then is more confident as she temporalises comparatively to her previous behaviour, and scared, but less scared, then she used to feel as she extends herself into the past dimension.

Transition and Relationships.

Her perceived transition has had a significant impact upon her relationships with her pre-course friends. There has been a space opened up between her and them, which is now impossible to traverse. She is “completely detached” her on-course orbit is “like a different world”. She is immersed in the world of college and academia such that her phenomenal field has no common ground with that of her “old” friends.

Conversely there has been a new closeness with her parents, which has been constituted by her academic progress and a significant shift in her relationship with her brother. She was victim to his bullying whereas now there has been a switch of places in the socio-emotional hierarchy between them. He could upset her in a superordinately powerful position, now she feels he has greater respect for her academic prowess and she dominates as he defers to her greater wisdom and worldliness.

Temporality and Identity

Yvonne’s dwelling in her present world extends to her past and future. She experiences her present self as co-constituted by teachers who hurt her and brought about a resolve to prove them wrong in their derogatory labelling of her, and thereby healing the hurt. The past is lived in the present as the pre-course self “in the shadows” gradually entered the limelight with a confidence and sense of belonging - the on-course self-identity. This lived through transition is correlated with her intersubjectivities with other students and tutors, wherein she found “a voice and people do actually..listen”. “I think I’ve realised since coming here (college) that I can stand up for myself.” This illustrates the embodied feelings of strength and courage to be dominant when the occasion calls for it. This has impacted positively on her relationships with family members. She feels that they now see her in a different light – a student in higher education, achieving success and worthy of respect and pride. She now inhabits a different world to that of her pre-course friends outside of higher education and the separation is total.

Her ‘reinvention of self’ has been reflected in her self-presentation (‘I’ve completely changed the way I look’) as this non-verbal behaviour speaks to her college surroundings, and she now bodies forth to the future temporal dimension as a teacher,

writer or journalist. The transition is further signified as she intends her pre-course orbit and the aspirations of that space and time.

...18 months ago I wouldn't have said anything. I... were planning a job in a shop or I'm never going to get any better. Erm... now all of a sudden I seem to have a future.

G: and you'd attribute this to the course?

Y: yeah... Very much so. Even up to the point where I'd done up to t'end of t'first semester I still felt 'oh well this is a waste of time really, I'm not going to get anywhere.'

(p.4. Lines 35-43)

On the contrary, clearly she has.